How is Leadership Understood and Enacted within the Field of Early Childhood Education and Care?

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Key Words

Leadership, early childhood education and care, symbolic interactionism, standpoint feminist theory, interpreted professional identity, agency, hesitancy, interpreted leadership capacity, horizontal violence.
Abstract

The field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) traditionally encompasses care and education for children aged from birth to eight years. In this study, the focus is specifically on the field that provides services for children in prior to school settings, that being the birth to five sector. This sector is highly feminised and has emerged over the last century from philanthropic roots. Despite considerable work into leadership in other areas, until recent times, attention to aspects of leadership has been limited within the ECEC field and much of the research undertaken has focused heavily on centre-based leadership. This study investigated how personnel, from a range of services, understand and enact leadership. In terms of data analysis it draws heavily on symbolic interactionism as a methodological tool and engages standpoint feminist theory to inform the analytical process.

Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews with twenty-six participants who also identified artefacts, which they considered influenced and supported their understandings of leadership. In addition, two focus groups were conducted to explore themes emerging from early analysis of the data. Findings indicate two categories, which emerge as relevant to how leadership is understood and enacted by participants. The first of these is the concept of interpreted professional identity, which reflects participants’ interpretations of who they are as early childhood professionals informed by their own views and the views of others. How individuals interpret their sense of self (manifest in their professional identity) is influential in the secondary category, which is interpreted leadership capacity. This category reflects participants’ leadership activity or inactivity.

The analysis reflects a complex interplay between how participants interpret their professional sense of self (interpreted professional identity) and their capacity and willingness to enact leadership (interpreted leadership capacity). Individuals in the formation of their professional identity interpret factors, both internal to the ECEC field and external (through social expectations). The culture of the ECEC field (internal factors) includes competing elements such as a discourse of niceness juxtaposed against examples of horizontal violence. Factors external to the field suggest there are lingering social associations between heroic male images and
leadership, which make women as leaders problematic. Within a highly feminised field such as ECEC, this study brings new perspectives to understandings of leadership and its enactment.
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A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care
NSW: New South Wales
Int: Interview
SI: Symbolic Interactionism
Statement of original authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: __________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________
Acknowledgements

The decision to undertake a higher degree and in particular a doctorate, is not something one takes on lightly. By its very nature such a decision will result in considerable impost for those closely associated with the candidate be it emotional, social and sometimes physical. Throughout this journey, I have been supported by a number of people who have encouraged me and sustained my energy.

Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation to all the participants who willingly gave of their time and so keenly engaged in the interviews and focus groups. These people were all busy practitioners in some form or other committed to the ECEC field and eager to share their thoughts and experiences in terms of leadership.

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Louise Hard
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CHAPTER ONE

HOW THE KEY RESEARCH QUESTION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

The general context of the study
The notion of leadership continues to be a frequently investigated and much discussed topic. Numerous recent publications attest to its currency and its relevance to a wide variety of fields and professions (Adair & Nelson, 2004; Bean, 2004; Belgard, 2004; Clayton, 2004; Hayward, 2004; Lindsey, Roberts, & Franklin, 2005; McCaffery, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2005). Leadership has been aligned with the success or failure of corporations and organisations, yet a definition of what leadership is remains fluid, and somewhat contentious (Robbins, Millett, & Waters-Marsh, 2004). Despite widespread work in leadership, only recently has there been much attention focused on the notion of leadership in the field of early childhood education and care (hereafter referred to as ECEC) (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Recently the ECEC field has begun to reflect the attention to leadership demonstrated elsewhere in disciplines such as nursing and business and this is evidenced in the increased publications focusing on the topic (Boardman, 2003; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Geoghegan, Petriwskyj, Bower, & Geoghegan, 2003; Nupponen, 2001).

The specific context of this research
My own story as an early childhood educator and my professional experiences inform the focus of this study. Some explanation of my circumstances will provide what Gusfield (1990), refers to as “personal realities” (p. 104) that are often hidden in the research process (as cited in Woods, 1996). Like Woods (1996), I feel that, while providing a personal context may appear somewhat self-indulgent, such background situates the study and illustrates my belief that it is through knowing the self that one comes to know the world.

My choice to become an early childhood educator was more pragmatic than an altruistic desire to improve outcomes for children and families. My decision to undertake a Diploma of Education (Early Childhood), (to qualify for the role of service director), was the result of my interest in the nature of the day-to-day work in
preschools and the autonomy afforded the director of a service. Graduation with a diploma and subsequent employment led me into further study in my second year of teaching. My initial position provided many opportunities that I had envisioned as part of my choice to enter the field, such as considerable independence, the opportunity to work with a staff team and a focus on community needs. I had autonomy as the director and managed the centre much along the lines I had expected. My subsequent employment in a kindergarten for Indigenous children, in my second year of teaching, confronted me with the sharp reality of a set of social, cultural and economical circumstances that were far below those assumed to be the norm in Australia at large. Any perceived illusions I may have had about the altruism of the field or the government (in relation to early childhood) were quickly dispelled. Despite the description of this service as the worst in the state, and the evident inadequacies of the physical environment, the kindergarten provided a service that was highly valued within the Aboriginal community. The teaching was challenging and yet rewarding, but the threat of closure due to eviction sounded the death knell for the service. There was no real support from the relevant government departments who appeared somewhat satisfied to be finally rid of a service that had been allowed to exist, but was so evidently inadequate, as to make a mockery of their regulations. The relevant government department secured alternative premises only when the staff and I harnessed community support and threatened media attention; thus the service survived. This had been a battle fought by the parents and me with no real support from others. The autonomy I had desired was most evident and yet what I really needed was leadership and support from the wider ECEC field.

Subsequent teaching positions provided rewards and challenges yet little in terms of a sense of collegiality, support or leadership. The threats to reduce funding for ECEC services in Victoria in the early 1990s aroused my sense of activism as I felt that there was no real voice for the ECEC field. At this time, I took a tertiary teaching position and, in a sense, abdicated my practitioner frustrations. I have had this role for twelve years and have focused on the development of teachers who can participate critically and articulately in the field. I have been conscious of the need for practitioners who can deal with the frustrations and give voice to matters of policy and provision.
My Masters research project was underpinned by a poststructuralist perspective, which informed my action research project with local practitioners (Hard, 1998). This study influenced me as a researcher and subsequently my work remains informed by these perspectives. I came to this doctoral study informed by additional concepts as I sought to utilise symbolic interactionism as the major methodological tool in a study underpinned by the broad field of feminist theory and in particular standpoint feminism.

Late in 2001, I accepted a leadership and management position within a university and this brought into focus the need for sophisticated leadership skills. I currently teach a leadership and management subject to third year Bachelor of Education (EC) students. In this subject, I introduce them to theories and historical aspects of leadership and discuss how these are relevant to the ECEC field. I continue to reflect on the frustrations I experienced in the field as I sought out leadership support and found it lacking. I am a construction of my experiences to date and acknowledge that my undertaking of research may be, in part, the desire to discover more about myself (Woods, 1996). I have now focused my own lingering questions about leadership on understanding the current state of ECEC leadership. This will assist me to prepare preservice teachers more effectively for their future in ECEC.

The aims of the research
This study aims to determine how practitioners, academics and preservice teachers in ECEC understand the concept of leadership. It seeks to explore how these individuals interpret the notion of leadership and see leadership enacted in the field.

The principle research question:
How do ECEC personnel understand leadership and its enactment within the field of Early Childhood Education and Care?

Specific sub questions that articulate key aspects of the principle research question
• What characteristics of leadership do the ECEC personnel identify?
• How do ECEC personnel describe leadership and its enactment at a service, local and national level?
• What implications do these accounts of leadership have for leadership in ECEC?

The significance of the research
The significance of this research study is that it focuses attention on the notion of leadership in the field of ECEC. This field is highly feminised and while some studies in ECEC have researched leadership, many have been with a localised context or issue in mind (Boardman, 2003; Nupponen, 2001; Waniganayake, Morda, & Kapsalakis, 2000). This study aimed to gain the perspectives of a range of ECEC personnel in relation to their own leadership activities and their broader understandings of leadership in the field. Participants were in the main, drawn from a regional area. The research explored their interpretations of leadership in ECEC at the local level and in the broader national context.

THIS STUDY AS AN EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE

In this study, I investigate the concept of leadership in the field of early childhood education and care. Moreover, I speak as a practitioner since I am in a leadership position in my employment context. This involves both providing professional direction to preservice teachers and working with a staff of thirteen in an academic unit.

The Educational Doctorate connects the university culture that values basic research and theoretical knowledge to a professional culture of schooling that holds in high esteem applied research (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Maxwell, Shanahan, & Green, 2001). The contextual nature of research in professional doctorates demands attention be paid to a third research player, that being the organisational site of the research. Consequently, the practitioner is researcher and this presents challenges in terms of the epistemological notions of what counts as valid knowledge. Anderson and Herr (1999) make this problematic when they suggest that

Academics tend to be comfortable with practitioner research as a form

of local knowledge that leads to change within the practice setting

itself. However, they are less comfortable when it is presented as
The requirement for the professional doctorate is to make both a useful and significant contribution to knowledge and or professional practice (Shanahan & Maxwell, 2000). This study involves the intersection of the site of study, that being Queensland University of Technology, my workplace, and the field of ECEC. According to Lee (2000), the doctorate involves a hybrid curriculum, which takes into account the three-way interaction of the university, the organisation in which the study will be undertaken and new forms of knowledge and ways of producing knowledge (Lee, Green, & Brennan, 2000). This is somewhat different to traditional notions of the PhD and, as such, challenges what counts as research and the structures in which such work has traditionally been undertaken. This research study reflects a three-way interaction: self as a researching practitioner, the field of ECEC and the workplace through undergraduate students and local practitioner involvement. As such, this study offers new ways to produce and understand knowledge of leadership within the ECEC field and to have an impact on the teaching of leadership issues to preservice teachers.

**Overview of chapters**

The first chapter provides the general context of the study. Here I include details of my career in ECEC in order to situate my interest and experiences relevant to leadership in the field. I outline the research questions and relate these to the significance of the study. The chapter then contextualizes the educational doctorate and explains the relationship between the participants, those being the researcher, the supervisor and the workplace. Finally, there is an overview of each of the chapters.

In Chapter Two I provide a literature review with an historical account of leadership research and theory. This illustrates the breadth and diversity of writing that informs evolving notions of leadership. It is particularly evident that research into leadership traits, behaviours and context continues to have resonance in current leadership literature. I discuss the delineation between management and leadership and a focus on contemporary leadership strategies. Discussion of transformational and
transactional leadership, as well as visionary and charismatic leadership are included and provide evidence of leadership theory development. Subsequently, an analysis is made of the maleness of leadership with considerable attention focused on the work of Sinclair (1998) and Blackmore (1999). These works were substantial influences in defining the context for this study given the highly feminised nature of the ECEC field. They underscore the need for investigating leadership in ECEC being mindful of the heavily heroic, masculinist constructs that have traditionally dominated leadership literature. Woven throughout this chapter is a critical appraisal of the research design and methodological and analytical approaches employed by various leadership research studies.

In the review of literature I attend briefly to leadership in education however, the focus shifts to ECEC and in particular the birth to five sector. This part of the chapter explores a range of issues relating to leadership in ECEC. Here, I raise questions about: the need for more leadership and advocacy (Jensen & Hannibal, 2000); leadership profiles, leadership training (Catron & Groves, 1999); and who is leading the field (Stonehouse, 1994). Further factors are outlined that have inhibited leadership in the field including: images of women (Hayden, 1996); the incongruence between the characteristics assumed for ECEC and leadership (Grieshaber, 2001); and lingering tensions between care and education (Rodd, 1998). Aspects of isolation (Walker, 2004), inequity of remuneration (Quinn, 2000), workplace climate (Boyd & Schneider, 1997), and wellbeing of staff (Carter & Curtis, 1998) are also pertinent to leadership activity. Contemporary approaches to leadership in ECEC are explored, particularly the visionary framework devised by Carter and Curtis (1998).

Chapter Three begins with a methodological overview of the conceptual and theoretical influences informing this study. It situates the study within a qualitative paradigm and explores the applicability of symbolic interactionism as an appropriate methodological tool. Symbolic interactionism is a pertinent tool for analysis given its attention to individuals’ definitions of situations and how they construct their actions in relation to others (Zietlin, 1973). The attention to individual interpretations is relevant given the study aims to explore how personnel understand and enact leadership. Address is given to aspects of symbolic interactionism including the
notions of self and the elements of the I and Me and how these may be pertinent to this study.

Feminist theory plays a secondary role to that of symbolic interactionism but is used to provide a theoretical perspective to inform analysis. This contributes insights that were helpful in understanding participants’ interpretations and the nature of the ECEC field. In this study, standpoint feminism (Harding, 1993) is the perspective adopted. There is acknowledgement of the contested nature of this feminist position given later, perhaps more sophisticated interpretations (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). The final part of this chapter attends to the nexus of symbolic interactionism and feminist theory. There is recognition that some may challenge the idea of symbolic interactionism being placed in any analytical relationship with feminist theory. However, this notion is contested and considerable contemporary work is provided to illustrate the successful combination of the two (Charmaz & Lofland, 2003). The discussion highlights the effective combination of symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminist theory and suggests that such a relationship may afford new understandings by drawing on these two valuable tools for analysis.

The Fourth Chapter provides an account of the data collection methods employed in this study. The stages of data collection are defined. The application of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and the use of artefacts, provide the data required to address the research question. The works of Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Silverman (2001) and Wellington (2000) contribute to a discussion of ethical issues and trustworthiness as well as define the data collection and analysis process. In the latter section of this chapter the interpretive framework is outlined and the concepts of interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity are articulated. These categories reflect how participants understand their professional identity and how this relates to their ability to undertake leadership. This discussion provides an overlay for the three subsequent data chapters.

Chapter Five begins the discussion of analysis and findings. A range of issues come to light specifically related to the first research question. These are explored and considered within the construct of professional identity. This illustrates a complex interplay of elements within the ECEC field in terms of understanding leadership.
Chapter Six further develops the analysis and findings. It builds on the initial categories and explores the second research question by addressing participants’ interpretations of how leadership is enacted. Here, the category of interpreted leadership capacity is at the forefront of discussion of factors that impact on leadership action or inaction. These factors include aspects of workplace culture, acceptable leadership behaviour, structural barriers and knowledge of leadership. What becomes evident is that these factors contribute to participants’ agency or hesitancy in the enactment of leadership.

Chapter Seven highlights the stories of two particular participants illustrating key elements from the analysis. These chosen participants demonstrate differing understandings and enactments of leadership but highlight and reinforce the interplay of professional identity and the capacity for leadership defined in Chapters Five and Six. The stories of Chantelle (an interview participant) and Gloria (a focus group participant) provide rich descriptions of their professional lives and the leadership activities and opportunities afforded. Through the use of symbolic interactionism, their stories demonstrate that interpretations of professional identity are tightly entwined with an individual’s interpreted leadership capacity. In these cases, leadership activity is linked to individual robustness or strong sense of professional identity, (remaining cognizant of the multiple contextual factors both internal and external to the field) and a focus on particular leadership issues. In the cases of Chantelle and Gloria, I demonstrate that their leadership enactment is based on their individual professional identity which enables considerable leadership capacity.

The final Chapter provides what Silverman (2000) defines as “a stimulating but critical review of the overall implications” of the research (p. 252). It seeks not to provide a summary but rather to explain the relationship between the work conducted and the research questions. It restates and discusses the research questions and explores the implications of the study in some depth. In particular, it highlights the methodological value of the study and the implications of professional identity. A diagrammatical representation is provided to illustrate the numerous and interrelated aspects of the findings. It also outlines the implications for preservice education and the potential for engagement with other leadership research. There is also attention
to potential policy and practice implications, the limitations of the work and possible further research.

Summary

The notion of leadership is both contentious and evolving. Although there is an increasing focus on the issue of leadership, how it is understood and enacted in the field of ECEC has not been extensively explored to date. The rationale for this study reflects my own professional and scholarly experiences. The design of the study attempts to dissolve traditional divisions between research and practice, as I am in the confronting and complex position of researching the practices of leadership in ECEC while also enacting leadership in the field. An account is given of the literature related to this area, the research undertaken, and analysis and discussion of the findings of this study. This enables a new appreciation of leadership understandings and enactment in ECEC.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to contextualise the concept of ECEC leadership it is necessary to review material in the broader literature and to provide some historical background. This is pertinent since many contemporary discussions of leadership incorporate earlier conceptualizations, particularly in relation to traits, behaviours and context. In doing so, this aspect of the literature review reflects a sense of leadership within an organizational context with positional leadership dominating early leadership understandings. Such materials reflect literature from the area of business and they provide an exploration of contemporary issues and critical perspectives of leadership. There is supplementation by attention to educational leadership and then more specifically leadership work in the area of ECEC.

A broad discussion of leadership is important to the field of early childhood education and care in that it situates leadership in a wider theoretical context. It also illustrates the evolution of the leadership discussion, the contestable nature of this discourse and suggests that the social perception of what constitutes a leader have some bearing upon possible leadership candidature. The traditional models of leadership, (which have been heroic and masculinist), and often of a top-down approach (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Limerick & Cranston, 1998), have been less than appealing to potential female leaders. Thus, some redefinition of leadership is desirable since dominant notions of leadership have inhibited dialogue about alternative leadership approaches in the field of ECEC (Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000).

The concept of leadership is both fluid and contentious. Definitions of what constitutes leadership are numerous and yet despite over fifty years of steady work in this area, the picture remains incomplete (Robbins et al., 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992). The identification of any one leadership approach, to suit all circumstances, appears problematic (Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996). Definitions of the term usually involve
concepts such as individual traits, influence over other people, role relationships, situational characteristics and the notion of the follower (Lingard, Hayes, Mills, & Christie, 2003; Northcraft & Neale, 1994; Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Other factors such as meeting people’s needs, mobilizing power, negotiating agreements and becoming political (Sergiovanni, 1990) are also included in definitions of leadership. In the corporate world, there is significant research and documentation that dissects the term (Northcraft & Neale, 1994; Robbins et al., 2004; Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996; Schultz & Schultz, 1998), and adjudicates on the level of effectiveness of leadership approaches (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). The essence of the term seems to revolve around the concept of creating positive change in organisations.

The terms ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ emerge as interrelated and a clear separation of the two areas is neither necessarily possible nor desirable. Management is said to involve the creation of consistency and the achievement of results through processes that are orderly and predictable (Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996). Similarly, management can be “the orchestration of tasks and establishing of systems to attain a vision” (Jorde-Bloom, 2003, p. 3). In contrast, leaders can go beyond this to create ideas, stimulate and motivate people (Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996). According to Lingard et al. (2003), leadership in schools “involves the exercise of influence over others, and thus, unlike management, can take place outside as well as inside of formal organizations” (p. 52). In other cases, the terms leadership and management are used interchangeably (Blackmore, 1999) as it seems that a leader is often involved in both leadership and management behaviour but, elsewhere, the terms are more clearly delineated (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). In some cases, management is viewed as teachable while leadership is almost something indefinable (Geneen, 1998). Due to the various definitions of management and leadership in this discussion, management positions shall be considered as having leadership opportunities. Such an interpretation is pertinent to the ECEC field as many positional leadership roles, for example, directors of long day and preschool services have both management and leadership responsibilities (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). This however, is not to suggest that leadership opportunities are absent from non-managerial positions.
When one explores the considerable literature related to notions of leadership, it becomes evident that not only is it voluminous, but that there continues to be debate as to what constitutes effective leadership (Black & Porter, 2000; Channer & Hope, 2001; Lingard et al., 2003; Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996). These theoretical discussions illustrate changing and evolving perceptions of what constitutes leadership (Channer & Hope, 2001; Geneen, 1998; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Three schools of thought dominate understandings of leadership. These are: the influence of individual traits (Black & Porter, 2000; Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996); the behaviour of leaders (Black & Porter, 2000; Northcraft & Neale, 1994); and the context of leadership (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2001; Schultz & Schultz, 1998). However, it seems that leadership is more of an interplay of these aspects dependent upon the needs of the organisation (Black & Porter, 2000; Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996). In commenting on the complexity of leadership, Northcraft and Neale (1994) state that,

at best, what we can say about leadership is that it is a complex phenomenon that involves exercising influence in an organisation and that involves the interplay of many different organisational actors and issues. (p. 344)

MacBeath (2004) provides another perspective that illustrates the elusive nature of what stands for leadership.

It is a term full of ambiguity and has a range of interpretations. It is a ‘humpty-dumpty’ word that can mean ‘just what we want it to be’

(from Humpty Dumpty, in Alice in Wonderland). (p. 4)

It has been suggested that the fluid and evolving nature of leadership demands that it is best examined with attention to the context (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey et al., 2001) although this approach too has its detractors (Lingard et al., 2003).

LEADERSHIP HISTORY

Appreciating how understandings of leadership have evolved helps to contextualise the current study and illustrates the changing images and expectations associated
with leadership. Early in the twentieth century, discussions about leadership were based around the notion of increasing worker productivity. The leader viewed the worker as purely an extension of the machine that they operated (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). This view is termed scientific management, and was designed to direct workers who were viewed as unable to direct themselves effectively (Black & Porter, 2000; Schultz & Schultz, 1998). This approach to management was in the context of research being conducted in the US around general levels of intelligence in the community. It was predicated on the assumption that those with low intelligence, required direction from those of higher intelligence (Broad & Wade, 1982). Such a perception of the relationship between the worker and the leader did not achieve a comprehensive picture of the situation but rather reflects positivist assumptions about how to explore the nature of leadership and the role of the worker.

In contrast, the human relations approach arose in the 1920s and 1930s and reflected a consideration to the treatment of workers as human beings allowing them to set their own production pace and form social groups (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). This emerged indirectly from experiments at the Western Electric’s Chicago Hawthorne Plant in 1923 (Shoemaker, 2000). This experimental research indicates quite clearly an objectivist perception of reality made evident in the use of a positivist theoretical perspective. This experiment became known later as the Hawthorne Effect in which a seemingly innocuous experiment produced striking human behaviors (Shoemaker, 2000). This research focused on the effects of changed lighting conditions to worker output. It utilised a control group and an experimental group to ascertain the influence of changed lighting conditions. Unexpectedly, the results indicated a productivity increase for both groups. This result suggested that it was the attention that the workers had received from the management rather than the changed lighting conditions that had altered their production levels (Northcraft & Neale, 1994; Shoemaker, 2000). This outcome proposed that, unlike the view held in the scientific management theory, workers were influenced by the input of management. While the Hawthorne study remains somewhat contentious, it did suggest that new ways of viewing the worker and leader/manager required attention. The nature of the research took little account of the effects on production of social arrangements and behaviour (Cuff, Payne, Francis, Hastler, & Sharrock, 1984). In addition it has had an ongoing influence in research studies and, in particular, behavioural studies, since
it elucidated how participants can be influenced by the research process. This study illustrates what Cuff et al., (1994) define as functionalist analysis in that the investigation illuminated unintended and unrecognised consequences of social behaviour.

Indications emerged that research into the area of leadership was taking a less objectivist approach as a reflection of changing research paradigms and the acknowledgement that quantifiable methods may not best address a topic of this nature. The scientific management theory and the human relations approach (as discussed above) were later reflected in McGregor’s definition of Theory Y and Theory X, which classified leadership style according to how the individual leader viewed the worker (McGregor, 1960). In Theory X, the leader assumes that the worker is not only lazy, but lacks ambition, avoids responsibility and cannot work effectively without autocratic direction. This view sees effective leadership involving leading and directing the worker (Black & Porter, 2000; Schultz & Schultz, 1998). The limitations of this approach include the lack of trust between leader and worker, and the need for constant surveillance in order to keep the suspect workers on task.

In contrast, Theory Y is based on the human relations approach, which, by the very term, indicates an alternative view of the worker and of the relationship that exists between the two parties (i.e., the leader and the worker). This view sees workers as inherently seeking “inner satisfaction and fulfilment from their work” (Schultz & Schultz, 1998 p. 205). Here the leader provides the workers with opportunity and responsibility, while encouraging them to pursue personal and organisational goals. Leadership along the lines of Theory Y is more evident in contemporary leadership discussion, as it is compatible with more democratic leadership styles (Black & Porter, 2000).

These theories had a significant impact on management thinking in North America. As a result of the Hawthorne studies and McGregor’s theories, perceptions of how to manage workers changed and resulted in a new research focus. This emerging area was studying the behaviours of leaders, which acknowledges a more creative and self-determining role for the participants and some evidence of an emerging constructionist view.
The adoption of either Theory X or Theory Y indicates a personal preference by leaders and reveals their assumptions about the nature of humans in terms of whether workers should be pushed or led. These theories have important implications since they influence broader social views of what leadership is about and how it is conducted and consequently, these still have relevance today. Whole organisations can be biased towards one theory of leadership and structure practices accordingly. For example, a Theory X dominated organisation would implement monitoring systems and detail worker activities. In contrast, a Theory Y organisation involves workers in decision-making processes and allows some autonomy (Black & Porter, 2000). If the dominant view of leadership in a field is predicated on the Theory X approach, then in contexts where interpersonal relations are highly valued, the adoption of this leadership approach may not be appealing.

Leadership has also been discussed in terms of formality and informality. The formal leader is one who is in an appointed leadership position (i.e., having positional leadership) (Black & Porter, 2000; Northcraft & Neale, 1994). The informal leader is one who demonstrates leadership qualities such as the use of relevant skills and commitment to achieve group goals, and high visibility via discussion and contributions from a non-defined leadership position (Northcraft & Neale, 1994). The notion of more than positional leaders being able to lead is supported by Blackmore (1999) who views the usual conceptions of leadership as problematic since they involve top down images of leadership. In contrast, she sees educational leadership in particular as “worked on from the bottom up” (p. 2). The distinction between formal and informal leadership is an important one in that it illustrates the potential for there to be more than one leader in an organisation and that leadership is not purely positional.

**Leadership traits**

Early approaches to leadership tended to focus on the traits of individuals in order to determine their suitability for leadership roles. This approach has influenced social perceptions of what constitutes an effective leader as well as creating the image of the leader as predetermined by personal characteristics (Black & Porter, 2000; Lingard et al., 2003; Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996). This view is termed the
**universalist trait approach** and focuses on identifying characteristics such as self-confidence, originality in problem solving and a desire for task completion (Northcraft & Neale). Other characteristics include dominance, achievement orientation, dependability, tolerance of ambiguity, and social agreeableness (Black & Porter, 2000). According to trait theories, leaders are concerned with the big picture and, as such, are often inspirational rather than concerned with the process. They are leaders who inspire and motivate their workers with a somewhat magical and charismatic appeal (Black & Porter, 2000; Northcraft & Neale, 1994). They provide their followers with individual consideration and intellectual stimulation (Schultz & Schultz, 1998) and are frequently aligned with the “great person” notion of leadership (Northcraft & Neale, 1994). Particular traits do not determine leadership effectiveness but they can be indicative of it (Black & Porter, 2000). According to Robbins et al., (2004) some traits “increase the likelihood of success as a leader, but none of the traits guarantee success” (p. 339). While research has sought to identify the specific characteristics of leaders, the search for a universal trait perspective of leadership has proven problematic. It is seen as somewhat limited, antiquated (Lingard et al., 2003) and confined to research on men (Black & Porter, 2000).

Consideration of the influence of traits continued to be evident in leadership discussions in the latter part of the twentieth century. Somers Hill and Ragland (1995) consider that social perceptions about leadership have not progressed far from “assuming that the tallest man would naturally be the best leader” (p. 9), which reflects a belief that physical characteristics are sufficient for leadership. What the search for specific leadership traits has elucidated is a relationship between certain characteristics and whom it is believed could be a leader. Lingard et al., (2003) have recently suggested that personal traits should not be dismissed or devalued. They assert that the trait/attribution/ego theories persist in spite of their apparent limitations due to the fact that commonly people find that “the person of the leader does make a difference” (p. 55). It may not be wise to dismiss personal characteristics entirely from the leadership equation. Rather, they may continue to have some currency but not be the central feature (Lingard et al., 2003). Perceptions of leaders as requiring predetermined characteristics remains part of contemporary leadership discourse.
Leadership behaviours

According to Black and Porter (2000), traits were useful only when converted into behaviours. As a result, two distinct categories of leadership behaviours were identified. The first category refers to task or production-orientated leadership, also termed initiating structure. The second is people or socio-emotional orientated leadership, also referred to as relationship orientated (Black & Porter, 2000).

Task or production orientated leadership focuses on behaviours such as planning work schedules, performance standards and production design (Black & Porter, 2000). The second category, (relationship orientated leadership) involves people and a more socio-emotional leadership approach. This engages relationship behaviours such as support, cooperation, displaying trust and confidence in workers as well as recognition of their achievements and a concern for their welfare (Black & Porter, 2000). Although it could be assumed that effective leadership would necessarily involve high levels of performance in both categories, this has not been strongly supported by the research. It appears that effective leaders demonstrate only moderate levels of both behaviours and that subordinates are more satisfied by leaders with high socio-emotional behaviours (Black & Porter, 2000). This has implications for feminised leadership, which is often aligned with strong socio-emotional skills. However, this implication remains contentious (Black & Porter, 2000) and shall be explored in more depth later in this thesis. It does appear however, that effective leadership behaviour involves both the engagement of task and people orientated aspects.

Leadership in context

Another perspective considered determinative of effective leadership is the influence of the situation or context. It became evident that no one leadership approach would suit all circumstances and so, early in the 1960s, contingency theories began to emerge. These theories described combinations of variables required for effective leadership (Black & Porter, 2000). Fiedler (1967) explored the concept and developed a contingency model of leadership based on the interaction of the leaders’ personal characteristics and aspects of the situation. In this model, decisions are based on a range of procedures from highly autocratic to highly participative. The leader needs to determine the procedure to best suit the circumstance to achieve the
most effective decision (Black & Porter, 2000). This leader is dependent upon the context, the response of the subordinates and the particular circumstance requiring attention. According to Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (2001) situational approaches to leadership examine the interplay among variables such as the leader, the follower and the situation, which they see as the main components of the leadership process. This approach suggests flexibility of leadership behaviour from autocratic to participative (Fiedler, 1967), in response to variables of the situation (Black & Porter, 2000; Hersey, et al., 2001). Fiedler saw leadership as trait determined and thus sought to match the individual to the situation that best suited their own characteristics (Fiedler, 1967). While this appears to be a predetermined outcome, Fiedler did define strategies that would assist leaders to improve their fit with their context (Northcraft & Neale, 1994).

Research by Fiedler resulted in the development of the Least Preferred Coworker Scale (LPC) (Fiedler, 1967; Norcorth & Neale, 1994; Robbins et al., 2004). This scale measured leader behaviour for task orientation and relationship orientated behaviour. Leaders whose score was low focused on tasks at the expense of interpersonal relationships. However, the task-orientated leader was more effective in both favourable and very unfavourable situations, while the person-orientated leader achieved more success in moderately favourable circumstances (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Recent critique by Lingard et al., (2003) suggests that contingency models may over emphasise technique to the disadvantage of substance, which could result in behaviour which is manipulative (i.e., more prescriptive than principled). As others state, perhaps the focus becomes one of doing the right thing rather than doing things right (Limerick & Cranston, 1998). Despite recent evaluations, contingency and situational awareness has proven useful in making prominent the value of context.

Contemporary leadership approaches
Not only are organisational structures themselves constitutive of leadership practice, they also define and redefine the organisation (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). This proposes that the context of which the leader is a part, in some way determines their leadership style as well as redefining the organisation itself. According to Spillane et al., “school leadership is best understood as a distributed
practice, stretched over the school’s social and situational contexts’ (2001, p. 23). Such a view of leadership is broader and reduces preoccupation with individual perceptions of what leadership strategy works, preferring to see the effectiveness of the leadership in context. This longitudinal research involved qualitative data collection methods such as in-depth observations and interviews with both formal and informal leaders and a social network analysis in Chicago schools. It sought to make transparent the disguised aspects of leadership by an in-depth analysis of existing leadership practice (Spillane, et al., 2001). To date, these researchers acknowledge that leadership practices including thinking and activity emerge from the interactions of leaders, followers and the situation. In terms of intervening in leadership practice, the researchers propose that a rich theoretical knowledge be developed from practice and that it be context sensitive and task specific (Spillane et al., 2001). In addition, this research offers what the researchers see as a tool for leaders to use to think about and reflect on their actions rather than a prescriptive and abstract blueprint for practice (Spillane, et al., 2001, p 27). It would appear that the early work on situational leadership continues to be further developed and reflects a shift in theoretical perspective to a more interpretativist approach utilizing qualitative data collection methods that take more account of the interactive nature of the individual. It is this approach that shall be utilised in the present study.

This notion of distributed leadership is elaborated by Lingard et al., (2003) who prefer the term “dispersed leadership” (p.54) to describe formal leaders enabling leadership across the school setting and rejecting “a zero-sum conception of power and in recognition of power as practice involving relationships and operating in diffuse ways” (p. 54). Notions of leadership across organizations can however, be misleading and possibly rhetoric rather than reality. This happens if there is an intensification of work, ‘busy work’, which is not the same as dispersed leadership (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 54). In such circumstances, the so-called dispersed leaders may in fact have increased daily demands and consequently reduced time available for leadership activity. The intention of dispersed leadership may be lost as those encouraged to undertake leadership activities, in non-positional leadership roles, are subsumed by increased managerial and administrative duties.
Downton (1973) and Burns (1978) first defined the concept of transformational leadership in the 1970s. A number of factors including charisma, inspiration/motivation, intellectual stimulation and the individualised consideration of the worker are aligned with the transformational leader (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leaders aim to inspire their followers. They seek to empower and coach their subordinates to achieve at high levels for the organisation. Their style is often charismatic (Black & Porter, 2000). They have a vision, and are confident and sensitive to people’s needs. They are thoughtful risk takers and see themselves as agents of change, which is usually major (Black & Porter, 2000; Channer & Hope, 2001). Transformational leaders “are able to excite, arouse and inspire followers to put out extra effort to achieve group goals” (Robbins et al., p. 369). This leadership style in some ways aligns with the characteristics of the “great man” or “great person” (Northcraft & Neale, 1994, p. 349) leader since it involves big picture issues, charismatic appeal, and the inspiration of others. This combination of traits and transformational leadership behaviour provides a powerful image of leadership and one that has been influential in social perceptions of what stands for leadership.

In contrast, although not mutually exclusive, is the transactional leader (Robbins et al., 2004; Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Transformational and transactional leaders are not opposed but rather the former builds onto transactional leadership (Robbins et al., 2004). This type of leader rewards their workers for their achievements. Such leaders are concerned with improving working conditions and benefits as well as providing less mundane work and developing teams and shared decision-making procedures. This leader uses rewards and coercive power and their success is very much dependent on the follower’s perception of the leader’s ability (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). In many ways, this style of leader is more managerial in terms of being able to get things done—particularly routine changes (Black & Porter, 2000). Despite this leader being more pragmatic than the transformational leader, both have a role to play.

The need for a leader to be visionary is an integral aspect of contemporary leadership discussion, and is identified by several authors (Hadley, 1999; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Nanus, 1992; Nanus & Dobbs, 1999; Newman, 2000; Rodd, 1998; Washington, 1996). According to Nanus (1992), vision is essential to leadership
effectiveness and a powerful force in organisational change. He considers that the 

**visionary leader** is able to

adopt challenging new visions of what is both possible and desirable,

communicate their visions, and persuade others to become so 

committed to these new directions that they are eager to lend their 

resources and energies to make them happen. (1992, p. 4)

This view encapsulates forward thinking and engaging images of leadership that are somewhat contrary to more idealised, heroic and masculinist models of the past (e.g., the “great person” view and theory X approach) (Lingard et al., 2003). This visionary aspect sits within what Morgan (1997b) defines as transformational leadership, which sees leaders as change agents and visionaries. This leadership is value driven, strong, persuasive, and involves team building. The emphasis is not on the traits of the leader in order to be effective (as in the universalist trait approach) but rather the actions of the leader in creating a vision for the organisation. It views leadership more as an art than a science (Robbins et al., 2004; Schultz & Schultz, 1998). This seductive aspect of leadership is increasingly affecting what society perceives as part of required leadership characteristics. Yet, the concept has its critics. A visionary leader can be seen as problematic since it implies a top-down approach with the leader as the instigator of the vision which others must follow (Blackmore, 1999). Alternatively, the development of a shared vision involving many in the organisation may be more egalitarian and yet retain some of the initial conceptual value.

**Charismatic leadership** is another contemporary approach to leadership. This style is used by transformational leaders and relates to visionary leadership in terms of creating a common goal (MacBeath, 2004; Robbins et al., 2004). It also involves creating opportunity and strengthening workers’ control over their destinies (Northcraft & Neale, 1994). According to MacBeath (2004), the charismatic leader is closely related to the heroic leader and relies on qualities that are larger than life and so seductive that it attracts followers. This aspect coincides with the Theory Y approach in valuing worker opportunity and responsibility. Charismatic leadership is linked to the trait view of leadership in terms of the leader’s desire for power, high levels of self-confidence and a strong belief in their own ideas (Black & Porter,
In relation to behaviours, the charismatic leader models desired behaviour, communicates high expectations and ideals and is concerned and influenced by others (Black & Porter, 2000). The value of the charismatic leader lies in the leader’s ability to inspire and influence. Its disadvantage is that it can work effectively for unworthy outcomes and, given its significant persuasive power, this can be problematic (for example, the seductive but inhumane outcomes of Hitler’s leadership).

The maleness of leadership

In addition to the theoretical aspects of leadership discussed so far, there are emerging factors gaining voice. More recently, research in the area of leadership has begun to examine the male dominance of leadership and the whole notion of it in terms of this concept being a male construct. This work reflects some structuralist gender notions of society being an entity that impacts on the behaviour of individuals. Work by authors such as Cox (1996), Still (1990, 1993), Sinclair (1998) and Blackmore (1999) has drawn attention to this notion and focused increased research in this area. Cox (1996) suggests that in order to achieve a truly civil society, leadership must be reviewed to take account of the contribution that women can make. Her work is not based on empirical research as such but is rather an amalgam of life experiences and reflections offering an alternative view to the issues of leadership than those provided in research-based accounts. Her work provides a richness of experience and a connection to the notion of social capital not offered elsewhere.

In contrast, the work of Still (1990) has researched Australian women in leadership and reports on her use of case histories with 54 women. The participants were organisational managers, entrepreneurs, social reformers and a politician. Still drew on the oral history method to provide details on environmental issues, problems and general attitudes encountered by the women. These issues could not be achieved through questionnaires (Still, 1990). This method seeks to achieve a view of the real world of the organisational women, rather than stereotypic images elicited by questionnaire methods. The potential limitations of this methodology include, possibly presenting an uneven picture of women’s careers, the possibility of a poor sample and poor representation and cross sectional rather than longitudinal design.
The anecdotal nature of the study could be seen to lack the precision and objectivity of more formalised research methodologies (Still, 1990). This acknowledgement by the author is an indication of the pervasive power of traditional research methodologies that continue to make it essential to justify a well-recognised data collection method such as the oral history used here. However a symbolic interactionist perspective (Woods, 1983) would see this approach as providing the opportunity for getting close to the interpretations individuals make in their leadership activities and thus achieve a greater sense of meaning and understanding.

Sinclair’s (1998) work in leadership is based in the corporate world. She suggests a need to reconstruct leadership, and argues that understandings of leadership have excluded much of the population. This is because the dominant male notion of leadership has perpetuated stereotypic images that have prevented a real opportunity to “grapple with the dark origins of our hunger for leaders” (Sinclair 1998, p viii). Her research reported in Doing Leadership Differently is based on interviews with twelve senior executive women in addition to the eleven male senior executives she had interviewed previously for her book Trials at the Top (1994). Sinclair acknowledges that it was not possible to achieve participation from women in comparable companies to the male sample since there are so few women at senior levels of corporations. Thus participants were selected from small to medium size companies and half were chief executives and the other working within the top two to three layers of the corporation. The male sample was chosen for their influence in the business community and for their innovation, while the females were chosen for their ability to be reflective about their own leadership and about issues facing other women (Sinclair, 1998). Despite the discrepancy in selection criteria, the female population was quite diverse including women aged from mid thirties to fifties, some with children and some without, some in relationships and some not. Whether these factors were relevant in the male sample is not made clear. Sinclair provides the interview questions for the female participants and these were open-ended and included the following:

- The women’s experience of the executive environment
- Her perceptions of her career and leadership role
- Questions about her background in terms of family and schooling.

(Sinclair 1998, p 10).
Participants were encouraged to use storytelling or narrative and many chose to
discuss critical incidents, which appeared to be a smoother pathway to begin
discussion for some. All interviews were transcribed. Sinclair acknowledges the
small sample size and suggests that her book be a stimulus to “breath new life into
that otherwise sadly debilitated construct of leadership” (1998, p 11). The rationale
for the research is based on her seeking to understand how women who lead do so
within the established leadership category and what compromises they make to
achieve this. She suggests that societies actively and collectively recognise and
reproduce leadership and that, as a society, we need to appraise these notions and
actively determine how we want leadership to be in the future. This work contributes
a perspective to the evolving leadership discussion that challenges the traditional
male dominance of leadership and how it marginalises minority groups and inhibits
ways of doing leadership differently.

Earlier research into gender and leadership has evolved into more, complex and
considered work that seeks new understandings beyond gender differences.
Wajcman (1999) provides such exploration of the issues of gender and leadership.
This research involved both questionnaires and interview data collection methods
and sought to explore how high technology companies implemented their
sophisticated equal opportunity policies (Wajcman, 1999). Use of a
questionnaire/survey methodology was supplemented by data derived from in-depth
interviews conducted with twenty women in a company used as a case study. The
questionnaire was large with 439 surveys mailed out and notable for a 74% response
rate, which the author attributes to the level of interest in the topic. The findings
indicate that while sex equality policies themselves have not been transformative,
they have “been crucial in making more transparent the established gender order in
organisations” (Wajcman, 1999, p 9).

Increasingly, feminist perspectives are being brought to bear on notions of leadership
(Blackmore, 1989; Blackmore, 1993; Blackmore, 1995; Blackmore, 1999; Collinson
& Hearn, 2003; Eveline, 2004; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998) often questioning the
male valuing of rationality over emotions. This marginalises other ways of being
(Dillabough, 1999) and these authors question whether identification with this
dominant masculinist form is the only way to achieve leadership success. The following section of this chapter makes problematic the prevailing images of leadership.

The very nature of the corporate workplace and the relatively recent involvement of women in that sphere of employment have meant that traditional concepts of leadership have been defined in male terms (Collinson & Hearn, 2003; Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995). Such a definition has implications for how women perceive leadership. In many ways, the very language of management is masculine and the concept is culturally and historically associated with men (Cox 1996; Wajcman, 1999). According to Sinclair (1998), the concept of leadership is linked to male traits and, as such, marginalises females. She states that,

though these archetypes of corporate leadership derive from embedded cultural stories and icons, they continue to pervade the supposedly objective assessment of leadership potential in our organisations. And threaded through these archetypes are emblems of masculinity—rites of passage, in the language of combat and sport, in-jokes and assertions and demonstrations of sexual and physical prowess. (1998, p. 32)

Many gendered assumptions remain in the language of leadership and management. For example, Collinson and Hearn (2003) suggest that gendered assumptions about leadership were still prevalent in the 1990s evidenced in terms such as “penetrating markets” (p. 202), sexist jokes used as icebreakers and the extensive use of sporting metaphors to rationalise managerial decisions.

There are many implications for women seeking leadership roles if leadership is perceived and enacted as a male construct (Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995). If women adopt traditional heroic male leadership behaviour it can result in them being seen as something less than, or other than, leaders (Sinclair, 1998; Wajcman, 1999). This view is explored by Cox (1996) who asserts that, when women judge others based on rules that have not been devised by women (i.e., rules of leadership), women “act as agents of social control to restrict the activities of women” (p. 13). In this way, it
seems that playing the game according to predominately-male rules can leave women marginalised to differently constructed ways of being a leader and this can then create restrictions for other women. The stoic, sport-orientated, hard-working, heroic image of the leader is part of a model of leadership that is authoritarian, competitive and independent (Collinson & Hearn, 2003; Wajcman, 1999). More aligned with these characteristics is the universalist trait style of leadership, otherwise referred to as the “great person” or “great man” approach (Northeraft & Neale, 1994, p. 349) suggested earlier. Collinson and Hearn (2003) suggest a move away from viewing women as having distinctively different ways of managing and leading which has the potential to blame the victim. A more critical approach is needed towards gender and leadership given that there are few consistent differences between female and male managers. With leadership traditionally defined in male terms, the option of adopting leadership roles may be less than appealing for some women and, particularly, women in a highly feminised field such as early childhood education and care.

The dominance of heroic, masculinist and idealised leadership (Lingard et al., 2003) in many areas of society has not only marginalised females from leadership, but also engendered the dominance of male perspectives and a male agenda (Collinson & Hearn, 2003; Tanton, 1994). This dominant agenda holds in high esteem attributes such as competition, aggression, and self interest (Cox, 1996; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). It has so permeated the discourse of management, that any discussion of aspects such as emotion in management or the relationship between motherhood and management are frequently treated with scepticism (Eveline, 2004; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Sinclair, 2004; Tanton, 1994). This dominant discourse has prevented women from being the producers or subjects of knowledge (Tanton, 1994). Consequently, the male view is the accepted view for all. There is an assumption that women will adapt to the male style of leadership. However, both men and women frequently marginalise them when they exhibit so-called masculine, autocratic leadership characteristics (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). This focus on competition and aggression creates a valuing of individual achievement and responsibility and marginalises many women who have a wider range of familial, social and community responsibilities.
Many women in leadership roles are very committed to interpersonal relationships and view these as very significant. Research indicates that women are rated as more effective leaders in situations where they are required to cooperate and get along with others, while men were rated as more effective when direction and control of subordinates was required (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Northcraft & Neale, 1994). This conceptualisation is problematic, in that women are frequently limited to leadership in human resources and public relation areas as a result of their perceived strong interpersonal skills (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Many women have developed a leadership style that involves promoting interactions with colleagues, encouraging employee participation, and the sharing of information and power. A focus is on energising their colleagues and enhancing their sense of self-worth as well “holding teams together” (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000, p. 130). These objectives are somewhat distinctive from heroic masculinist leadership approaches, which some consider more transformational and in contrast to the more transactional leadership style of women (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). The transactional leader’s behaviour is very much dependent upon the perceptions their followers have of them (Schultz & Schultz, 1998) in contrast to the great person or universalist trait approach considered part of transformational leadership (Northcraft & Neale, 1994), a more masculinist construct. When women enter leadership roles, they face multiple challenges. They need to address the perception that females do not possess characteristics such as logic/reason and toughness, yet they also need to suggest that these characteristics are not the only ones valuable for effective leadership. They need to find ways to address the male dominated structures that are less than inviting for women (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000).

Women are said to practice leadership using a more democratic and participative style than men (Northcraft & Neale, 1994), which has resonance with relational orientated leadership discussed earlier (Black & Porter, 2000). Eveline (2004) in her work exploring leadership in universities, conceptualises a new type of leadership that being, companionate leadership (p. 35). This leadership emerges from collaborative networks that involve the notion of self-management and relational work. Ironically, others may not consider this leadership since it is mainly invisible, thus receiving limited recognition. As Eveline (2004) states, “it has gendered associations with the domesticated capacities expected of women” (p. 35 & 36) and
consequently receives limited kudos. Eveline (2004) also considers it is an attempt “to move to a post-heoric understanding of leadership” (p. 36). This construction further elaborates on relational style leadership (discussed previously) since Eveline’s concept may often be non-positional and involve self-management. These notions are in sharp contrast to traditional masculinist notions of leadership.

While the interrelated issue of gender and leadership is not a clear-cut dichotomy between the sexes, there appears to be preferences in leadership behaviours. Sinclair (1998) suggests that many women become bi-gendered. This means that women alter behaviours and tactics dependent on the context. Given the earlier discussion of the importance of leadership and context, this could prove an advantage for people assuming leadership roles with the ability to tailor their leadership behaviour to suit the particular setting.

Structural barriers to women and leadership include job selection criteria. These criteria, based on existing norms, often value some characteristics over others. Interview selection and assessment processes can be problematic in an environment dominated by one gender. For example, men typically ask for information rather than opinions, suggesting a predetermined value (Tanton, 1994). With fewer women in positional leadership roles, their perception (as a minority group) of their lower status and the reduced value of their contributions can add to structural barriers for female leadership candidates (Tanton, 1994). Additionally Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) provide a range of examples where women’s ability to participate in the work environment and achieve recognition and promotion are compromised. This is due to work cultures and practices that are incompatible with their familial responsibilities. Work with female dominant groups provides the reverse context to the male dominated situation discussed to date (Finnigan, 1982). In these contexts the males in a female dominant field were active contributors and their contributions highly valued by the female group members (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1994). This is incongruent with the reverse example of male dominant groups and exists because of the high social value attributed to males and realised by the dominant female group. There may be leadership implications for the highly feminised field of ECEC if female reactions to men, in the female dominant groups, are the result of dominant perceptions of how valuable men are. Alternatively, females may be using more
democratic and collaborative processes as a preferred style of group management thus giving men a voice in the group. Further research to clarify the nature of leadership by both men and women in a highly feminised field such as ECEC could elucidate such behaviours.

Given the emergence of more collaborative and contextual leadership approaches (such as visionary and distributed leadership); there may be increased opportunity for women to play a more active and socially accepted role in leadership. There is reference to management becoming more feminine in terms of increasing cooperation, communication, diplomacy and insight (Grant, 1997). Leaders are required who break stereotypical images of leadership, seek to foster the talents of others and are skilled at unification (Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995). This is in contrast to the existing attributes of competition, aggression, hierarchy and logic (Collinson & Hearn, 2003; Grant, 1997; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Yet this whole concept of gender and leadership remains problematic.

*Not all women*

The congregation of women into a paradigm of leadership that involves an ethic of care (Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995), or what is more commonly referred to as a “feminine style” of leadership (Wajcman, 1999, p. 56), is troublesome. It universalises the category of women and is strategically dangerous for the feminist position (Blackmore, 1999). It reinforces the notion that men and women are irreconcilably different rather than the idea that gender is fluid. As Blackmore (1999) states, “in the process of its popularization, however, the logic of the ‘women’s ways of leading’ discourse treats women as a homogeneous group without differences in race/class/gender or in beliefs” (p. 57). Such a polarization serves to reproduce gender stereotypes rather than direct attention to the discrimination present in organisations that make the adoption of leadership roles difficult for women (Wajcman, 1999). The dominant, heroic male leadership approach may also be excluding males who do not fit the accepted model of the male leader. Thus, defining leadership purely according to gender is problematic (Collinson & Hearn, 2003; Cox, 1996). Due to the diversity of women, caution is needed in the unquestioning embrace of a feminised leadership style. Problems could also arise if
this approach were popular and adopted at a certain time (Grant, 1997), but rejected outright if such a style were to become obsolete.

_Changing leadership_

Traditional leadership models are under scrutiny and there are moves to redefine leadership in the corporate world (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Increasingly there is discussion of collaboration and team building (Blake, Mouton & Allen, 1987), more democratic leadership strategies and even work to develop people’s balance between home and work (Clayton, 2004). According to Horner, (2003) leadership is moving towards a team-based environment where there is less focus on the leader and the follower and more on the process of leadership. These authors cite the work of Drath and Palus (1994) who “suggest studying the social process that happens with groups of people who are engaged in an activity together” (p. 35). Here leadership involves coordinating the efforts of the group in moving together, with all participants playing an active role. In such a leadership landscape, the process of supporting the team demands collaboration and openness in order to achieve a shared meaning that elicits commitment from group members. Hersey et al., (2001) discuss group and team leadership and highlight the need for goals, which are understood by all participants. “Common or at least harmonious goals or purposes are, therefore, not criteria of groups, but of effective groups” (p. 318). Blake, Mouton and Allen (1987) discuss the potential for team synergy when the interaction in a team transcends the contribution possible by individuals creating “spectacular teamwork” (p. 6). However, these authors acknowledge the need for vision and the consequence of its absence for a team can mean “it will drift from day to day in a survival mode” (p. 5). This approach has implications for later discussion of leadership understandings in ECEC. Discontinuities emerge between the team-based leadership literature and the interpretation of this notion by participants in this study.

Perhaps the ways of being a leader are changing and the social perceptions of what constitutes a leader are altering. In contrast to this view, it seems that some authors see the changes merely as rhetoric and that, in reality, the changes are minimal (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995; Wajcman, 1999). Illustrating this rhetoric, Maccoby (2000) suggests that the concept of the narcissistic leader is gaining credence and is what is required in the corporate world. These
leaders are gifted and creative strategists who see the big picture and find meaning in the risky challenge of changing the world and leaving behind a legacy (Maccoby, 2000). They have vision (as does the transformational leader) and have characteristics that are more autocratic than democratic. Their rhetoric often calls for teamwork but, in fact, what they want is people who agree with them, or “yes men” (Maccoby, 2000, p.73). The term narcissistic leader is itself telling, as are the all-male examples to which Maccoby refers. By implication, this suggests that narcissistic leaders are usually male and that the more democratic leadership or soft approaches are losing prevalence. Perhaps the notion of the narcissistic leader illustrates what Wajcman (1999) means when she states, “macho management is again on the ascendancy” (p. 71). This narcissistic style of leader shares features of the universalist trait approach and may emerge in troubled times when people are seeking direction and decision making from those in positions of responsibility (Maccoby, 2000). This re-emergence or backlash (Blackmore, 1999) may be due to economic need (Maccoby, 2000), uncertain political times or unchanging social perceptions of what a real leader is. This example illustrates the fluctuating debate and discussion associated with leadership and the ongoing contestable nature of what stands for leadership.

Leadership in education

There is increasing evidence that the issues of gender and leadership are under investigation in the sphere of education. Work in the 1980s by Shakeshaft suggested that literature on educational administration “could profit from increased methodological and conceptual rigor” (1987, p 11). This work was based on research over a seven-year period with women in administration in educational settings. Data collection methods included mail surveys, observational data collection and interview studies which were used to discover how women view their worlds (Shakeshaft, 1987). This suggests an interpretativist underpinning yet the methods of data collection employed include questionnaires that are identified as limited in a symbolic interactionist approach. Shakeshaft (1987) suggests that the picture available of women in educational administration is largely based on mail surveys reported on in dissertations and uses such data to construct a profile of the female administrator/leader. The use of the mixed methods and the longitudinal nature of the data collection, when combined with a review of dissertation work
provide quite a comprehensive investigation of the notion of women in educational leadership.

A 1994 publication *Women in Management* edited by Tanton (1994b) includes a chapter on why women leave senior management jobs by Marshall. Marshall (1994) utilises a qualitative approach in order to tell the stories of a dozen women in some depth. For her study, she invited women who had reached middle to senior level management with considerable levels of commitment to their career, but who had then decided to leave and pursue other options. These invitations were mailed to a wide range of people who might know suitable candidates. In addition, Marshall conversed with friends and contacts that also helped in identifying possible participants. These contacts were followed up by individual interviews which were to form the basis of a draft story that the participants would be invited to comment on and amend if necessary. Here the initial process of data collection is relevant in that it involves the identification of participants with particular life experiences. The methods used to identify and contact such people involved a mail out of an invitation to participate via personal contacts. Such an approach to gaining participants may be necessary due to the limited number of structurally defined leaders. However this approach could also be seen as problematic in terms of a representative sample, which was noted earlier by Still (1990) as a possible limitation of her study.

In 1995, Limerick and Lingard edited a book titled *Gender and Changing Educational Management*. This volume includes an eclectic range of chapters that address the issues of gender and leadership in education in a variety of ways. Shakeshaft provides a brief account of research conducted with Parry to investigate gender differences in the way supervisory conferences were conducted by principals (Shakeshaft, 1995). This data collection consisted of observations of male and female principals in conferences with later interviews held with principals and teachers in an effort to understand the meanings that they ascribed to the events. This approach allowed for recognition of differences in communication patterns between male and female principals. This was not just content but also difference in delivery (p 16). These findings illustrated a preference for women to have power with rather than power over others. The methodologies used here allowed for deconstruction of the events with the participants and an opportunity to seek mutual
understanding of what had occurred. In this way, participants play an active role in the research and the opportunity to reflect on their behaviour allows for the possibility of an impact on their future practice.

Specific to the literature on school education, leadership approaches are less concerned with individual traits and more concerned with context. These approaches see leadership opportunities beyond the role of the school principal and this creates the chance for the emergence of a variety of leaders in the school context (Blackmore, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Here there is the possibility of leadership from multiple sources and by various people in the school setting (Crowther, 1996; Lingard et al., 2003). This is congruent with the informal leadership and contingency perspectives discussed earlier, which indicates that the effectiveness of leadership is context related. Leadership can be an organisational-wide phenomenon and teachers’ leadership involves their potential to be community builders. This perspective is in line with the social context of leadership and the idea that leadership is better examined at the collective level rather than the level of the individual (Spillane et al., 2001). The notions of distributed leadership, as well as the concept of teachers as potential leaders (Crowther, 1996), contribute views of leadership in education that may be more engaging for potential leaders in terms of the shared leadership they offer.

In a review of literature on teachers as leaders, York-Barr and Duke (2004) provide a detailed summary of various studies and demonstrate significant attention to informal and dispersed leadership approaches by teachers. These authors suggest, “Teacher leadership is practiced through a variety of formal and informal positions, roles, and channels of communication in the daily work of schools” (p. 263). While there continues to be contestation in the literature over definitions of leadership, there is evidence of change. Initially, leadership was the domain of department heads whose main purpose was to improve the efficiency of the school operations. Teachers were then instructional experts, appointed as academic leaders to mentor and develop staff. Subsequently, teachers recultured the school to promote institutional improvements (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Accordingly, teacher leadership “reflects teacher agency through establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshalling resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve student’s educational experiences
and outcomes” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 263). However, despite the increased attention to informal ways of leading, these authors refer to a number of studies, which indicate that dominant forms of leadership reflect “more traditional, formal, one-person leadership” in practice (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p.265). This suggests that traditional notions of leadership continue to have currency despite the frequent discussion of dispersed and informal leadership approaches.

**Women, education and leadership**

The work of Somers Hill and Ragland (1995) discusses the relationship between women, education and leadership. These authors offer some insights to women and their choices to lead or not to lead in educational settings. This American study sought to address the notion of women in educational leadership and positioned this within a male construct of leadership. The research investigated the personal and professional lives of women to “candidly reveal their frustrations, insights and strategies for advancement” (Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. X). The interviews with thirty-five women (identified as exceptional) illustrated that structural barriers such as the male dominance of leadership positions, lack of mentoring and internal barriers and bias against women, inhibited the progression of women to leadership positions (Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995). On a personal level, women’s lack of mobility (due to their family commitments) was identified as an inhibiting factor and one with which men did not generally have to contend. Participants identified their own low professional expectations. Females felt they should not be a part of the dominant male culture of leadership (Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995). This study identifies a range of factors that can inhibit women’s careers.

**Specific to ECEC Leadership research**

In the field of ECEC, research has been undertaken in relation to leadership although it is considered that more research would be advantageous (Rodd, 1996). Research has involved seeking greater understanding of how and why people lead in early childhood and the identification of methods to improve leadership.

In the US, research in the area of leadership by Jorde-Bloom (1992) involved twenty-two participants in a 16-month early childhood leadership program. These participants were selected from a pool of 31 participants in the overall program
because they had immediate supervisory responsibilities for the quality of teaching practices in their centers or classrooms. This group of women was contrasted with a group of Head Start teachers who were not involved in the leadership program and a \( t \) test was applied to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between the groups. According to Jorde-Bloom (1992), no statistically significant differences were noted. A variety of means were used to determine the level of competence attained. The participants perceived level of competence was measured using the Training Needs Assessment Survey. This measures the perceived level of competence in 28 areas of knowledge and skill related to early childhood program leadership. In addition, a modified version of the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Scale was used to assess the developmental appropriateness of teaching practices in a particular classroom in terms of interactions among staff and children, curriculum, health, nutrition and safety and the physical environment. To measure the quality of work life in the centre the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey was used. This determines the organisational climate based on the collective perception of staff in ten dimensions (see Jorde Bloom 1992 for specific details). This survey also measures the staff level of desired decision making influence and how the current work environment differs from their ideal (Jorde-Bloom, 1992, p 582). Statistically significant differences were measured on all four sub-scales and on the overall classroom quality scores. This indicates that those involved in training had consistently higher scores than those without any training.

Case studies also were utilised to provide a more descriptive element to the participant’s experiences and to support and enhance the quantitative data. The combination of data collection methods and the length of the research period contribute to a rich view of the director’s experiences than may be achieved in a smaller one-method study. Jorde-Bloom acknowledges limitations to the study that include the volunteer selection of the comparison group and the intimate nature of the community in which the research took place that made the possibility of the control group remaining completely blind unlikely. Despite this, the qualitative and quantitative research methods indicate the value of training programs on directors and the subsequent changes in working environments and in teaching staff (Jorde Bloom, 1992). The use of two research approaches to investigate the value of
leadership training provides an interesting data collection approach and one not used frequently in leadership research.

Somers Hill and Ragland (1995) interviewed thirty-five women in order to determine the “gathered insights as well as their predictions for the future” in terms of leadership in education (Somers Hill and Ragland, 1995, p 1). The interviews sought to elucidate experiences from their personal and professional lives to reveal frustrations, insights and strategies for the future. From a small number of women recognised as exceptional in their positions, they nominated others to be interviewed (a snowball effect). A priority of this study was to have perspectives from a representative geographic sample and thus participants were drawn from 19 states and 2 provinces in the US. This study presents two elements of methodological interest in terms of the identification of participants by nomination of others and the desire for a geographical representative sample.

An alternative approach to examining leadership in ECEC was taken in Hawaii in 1998 (Taba, Castle, Vermeer, Hanchett, Flores & Caulfield, 1999). A symposium was held in order to explore “the kind of leadership needed for the twenty-first century (Taba, et al, 1998, p 173). Five types of leadership were examined and these included: advocacy, administration, community, conceptual and career development. These were drawn from Kagan and Bowman’s (1997) publication Leadership in Early Care and Education. A panel of distinguished leaders and experts shared their reflections and their development in each of the five areas. The findings indicated an urgent need for development of leadership in ECEC in the five areas mentioned previously (Taba et al., 1999). The procedures used were not a specific methodological research approach but rather a means to gather expertise to explore recent, relevant literature in order to achieve some future directions. This is an engaging means to increase dialogue in and with the field rather than to research in one context, report on it in the hope that some alteration to behaviours may result.

In Australia and, more recently, the UK, Rodd has researched and written about leadership in the early childhood field (1996, 1998). This work has involved a number of studies between 1993 and 1995, which were built upon earlier work by Rodd and Clyde (1990). The early studies involved questionnaires mailed to
respondents but this resulted in a poor response rate and limited depth in responses (Rodd, 1996). What the findings did indicate was a general lack of comfort by many in early childhood with their management roles. Rodd (1996) acknowledged the limitations of this research and recognised the need for a methodology that would elicit more elaborate and thoughtful responses. Later research utilised structured interviews on a one to one basis in the director’s own centre. Participants were invited from private, local government, community and work based services. This research resulted in the development of a typology of the early childhood leader that provides guidance for what personal characteristics need to be developed in order to effectively fulfil key leadership roles and responsibilities (Rodd, 1998). This typology, offers those in the ECEC field the possibility of utilising the outcomes of leadership research to further develop their leadership potential and effectiveness.

In 2000, a volume of the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* was entirely devoted to the topic of management and leadership. The seven articles provided a snap shot of the current work in this area in the field of ECEC in the Australian context. Fraser (2000) provides an account of research aimed at childcare policy decision making. This work involved two parts, the first being a questionnaire (40% response rate) to a randomly selected group of stakeholders such as licensees, early childhood organisations, service managers and advisors (Fraser, 2000). The second part involved the interview of five stakeholders not previously included “to explore participant perceptions of children’s services policy making” (Fraser, 2000, p 4). In the case of both sets of data, themes or focal points were considered and interpretation was sought from other information provided by participants. Questionnaire responses were used to confirm general trends that emerged from the interviews. All but two respondents were female with more than ten years experience. A significant aspect to the findings was that members of the profession working in the field think about children’s services on a practical level rather than a conceptual or visionary level “that may empower the field and provide further direction” (Fraser, 2000, p 5). The strengths of this study include the collection of data from a variety of service providers through questionnaires and the interviews to verify this data. The 40% response rate to the questionnaire does not indicate the same level of interest in the topic that Wajcman (1999) received but could be linked to the high level of practical demands noted by the researcher above.
Henderson Kelly and Pamphillon (2000) outline their research that emerged concurrently with the development and implementation of a management and leadership course for children’s service leaders in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). They utilised interviews, questionnaires, reflection and analysis. There were three participants who agreed to have their leadership styles mapped and compared for their relationship to current theory. What emerged was a need to integrate and balance the instrumental and emotional aspects to achieve an effective leadership style (Henderson Kelly and Pamphillon, 2000). This research involved a small sample but a variety of data collection methods.

Research by Waniganayake, Morda and Kapsalakis (2000) provides an account of staff perceptions of leadership and what this means in everyday work in childcare services. The difference of this research to other works is its focus on multiple voices from within the same organisational context (2000, p 13). This research sought to explore if leadership is a positional or situational phenomenon. Data collection methods included interviews with directors, teachers and assistants in three Melbourne childcare services (Waniganayake, Morda, & Kapsalakis, 2000). Questions were open-ended and participants were able to comment and reflect on leadership in a general sense and how it operates in that centre. The findings indicated that the position of director did not equate necessarily with that of a leader and that while responses indicated democratic governance ideals, the reality suggested a reliance on the positional authority (Waniganayake et, al, 2000, p 15). This may indicate that the respondents were eager to provide what they saw as the correct answers while their practice suggests otherwise. Such inconsistencies could indicate the need for observation of practice to ensure that there is reliability of data across collection methods.

Recent work by Nupponen (2001) involves examination of the nature and characteristics of effective leadership and management practices in centre based childcare (2001, p 1). The methodology used involved statements from eight childcare directors in Queensland and is based on interviews, collection of policy and centre documents and other materials to “authenticate evidence derived from the interviews” (Nupponen 2001, p 3). Data were coded according to emerging patterns
and or themes. Participants were able to review summaries of the transcribed data (Nupponen, 2001). Here Nupponen (2001) notes the limitation of the data collection methods by suggesting the potential value of observation of daily practice in order to “gain a holistic view of the director's leadership style” (p 16).

The discussion to date has provided an overview of research studies and the methodologies utilised in the area of leadership from the macro level to the micro level of leadership specific to ECEC in the Australian context. It is evident that a variety of approaches have been used to explore the existence and enactment of leadership. Methods have included both qualitative and quantitative approaches and, in many cases, more than one data collection method has been employed in order to verify findings (Jorde Bloom, 1992; Wajcman, 1999; Fraser, 2000; Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000). In particular, surveys and questionnaires have been used to provide general trends, (Rodd, 1996; Wajcman, 1999; Fraser, 2000; Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000). Interviews have been employed to attain more specific data, (Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995; Sinclair, 1998; Wajcman, 1999; Nupponen, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001) In some cases, this was the only form of data collection (Sinclair, 1998).

The use of case studies provided even greater depth (Jorde Bloom, 1992; Marshall, 1994) and supplemented existing knowledge. The work by Jorde Bloom (1992) provides a mixed method approach using an experimental design and case study data to explore the impact of training intervention to improve the leadership skills of early childhood professionals (Jorde Bloom, 1992). The use of an experimental design to compare the impact of specific training on a group of teachers with a control group is notable since this approach varies from most studies, which employ qualitative methods or some survey or questionnaire data collection.

The research undertaken in the area of leadership in early childhood education and care tends to be of a descriptive nature. One exception is the study by Taba et al (1998), who engaged in a symposium to explore the issues with teachers and experts in the area. Studies based on interviews, case studies and surveys offer individual participants some opportunity to reflect and articulate their experiences. They may offer the possibility of teachers accessing published reports of the work, which could
subsequently, impact on their practice. In some cases, the researchers may conduct professional development activities based on their work in order to influence practice. In the case of the research undertaken by Henderson Kelly et al. (2000), the outcomes could possibly be incorporated into the future training of teachers and service leaders in the ACT. However, it seems evident that the research in this area has had limited influence on practice to date. The use of action research to engage with leaders to explore and enhance leadership seems to have been largely ignored. Such a research approach would afford the opportunity to impact on practice directly in preference to providing descriptions of what does or does not exist.

**LEADING ECEC**

The next section of the literature review explores a variety of issues in the field of early childhood education and care that provide a rationale for increasing understandings of leadership. Stonehouse (1994), Hayden (1996) and Rodd (1998) are the key Australian writers in the area of leadership in ECEC. Recently there has been increasing attention focused in research in the ECEC field (Boardman, 2003; Boyd, 2001; Geoghegan et al., 2003; Nupponen, 2001; Stamopoulos, 2003; Waniganayake et al., 2000) and this may indicate a growing interest in understanding the nature of leadership in this context. Rodd (1998) acknowledges an aversion to leadership by those in the field and suggests that leadership will only be attractive to people in this field when redefined. For Rodd (1998) this concern is predicated upon the notion that ECEC personnel have yet to define what the capacities, abilities and competencies related to leadership are for the field and reflects the limited amount of work in the area of leadership in ECEC in the late 1990s. The redefinition Rodd discusses may be achieved when leadership is “the product of the endeavours of an interconnected group of individuals [and then] the possibility of shared or collaborative leadership is opened up” (Rodd, 1998, p. 3). Given the pervasive nature of heroic, masculinist (Sinclair, 1998) leadership and the highly feminised nature of ECEC, it may not be surprising that more women have not chosen to embrace more evident leadership roles.
Defining the field of early care and education

The term early childhood education and care in this study refers to the variety of services that cater for children in the 0-5-age range and their families. The New South Wales Curriculum Framework (2002) addresses numerous services available to families and includes long day care, occasional care centres, preschools, family day care homes, and mobile services. This study includes these service types in a definition of ECEC and reflects a range of services in the data collection process. Many authors (Bennett, Crawford, & Cartwright, 2003; Blackmore, 1989; Cranston, 2000; Crowther, 1996; Limerick & Cranston, 1998; Lingard et al., 2003; Sergiovanni, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2005; Somers Hill & Ragland, 1995; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) have examined educational leadership in school settings and the contribution of these works is valued by this study. However, the present focus is on leadership in the field of ECEC in the birth to five-age range, as there has been less reported research in this specific area.

The need for leadership

The development of the field of ECEC over the past century is testimony to the presence of some form of leadership. The need for leadership in ECEC is in essence two-fold. On one hand, it revolves around the notion of advocacy for children and childhood (Jensen & Hannibal, 2000). On the other, it relates to factors that contribute to the wellbeing of the field (Kagan, 1999). Unlike the corporate world, the necessity for effective leadership in ECEC is not related to increased productivity and financial outcomes. However, some in the corporate childcare industry may disagree. Outcomes are more often the desire to achieve improved circumstances for children, families and staff.

Advocacy on behalf of child welfare is an important responsibility of the field that requires leadership (Grieshaber, 2001). Advocacy for both the child and for staff involves a call to action within services and beyond in the political context. However, there has been a reluctance to engage in such political advocacy. Such inactivity could be attributed to a lack of understanding of the term by those in the field (Hayden, 1996), or it may be that such advocacy requires high levels of self-confidence and an assertive ability. These characteristics may be incongruent with characteristics that are perceived to be necessary to work with young children.
(Grieshaber, 2001). This notion is explored by Grieshaber (2001) who asserts that both the literature related to advocacy and the professional literature, are based on “psychological constructs that understand individuals in particular ways” (p. 60). She uses a poststructuralist perspective, to explore the pain and uncertainty integral to any decision to adopt alternative perspectives or challenge the taken for granted. Grieshaber (2001) suggests that practitioners can overcome this by understanding the notion of multiple identities. It is this tension between the expectations of the behaviour of ECEC practitioners as nurturing, caring, supportive and responsive to the needs of children (Grieshaber, 2001) in contrast to the perception of what a leadership role may entail (e.g., advocacy), that is a significant factor in this research study.

Low activity equals low profile
In effect, Rodd (1998) links the reluctance to become political, to the field retaining a low social profile. She also maintains that the lack of political advocacy contributes to a weak power base. This is similar to what Stonehouse (1994) suggests in her notion of the need for specific leadership from and for the field in order to influence and direct change. In this way, limited leadership, or the absence of it, is linked to limited political power and a low social profile and, in turn, limited and vulnerable funding.

Leadership training
In the ECEC field an absence of leadership training contributes to a paucity of leadership (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Leaders in ECEC ascend to such positions for a number of reasons not related directly to any leadership training, previous experience or even a particular desire to assume a leadership role (Carter & Curtis, 1998). The requirements for effective teaching are in some ways similar to those required for effective leadership. This could suggest that specific leadership training is not necessary. In drawing parallels between leadership and teaching both involve aspects such as being caring, the ability to nurture, model best practice and self-expression as well as valuing diversity and autonomy (Catron & Groves, 1999). These features are somewhat congruent with the contested notion of feminised ways of leading discussed earlier and those absent from more autocratic leadership styles (e.g., the narcissistic leader). This work is suggesting that effective teachers have an
inherent predisposition towards effective leadership, as there are certain qualities desirable in teachers that are valuable in leaders also (Catron & Groves, 1999). This concept remains contentious.

Beyond some similarities in qualities desirable for teachers and leaders, it would seem that good teaching does not guarantee administrative or leadership success (Anthony, 1998). Those in the field who are responsible for leadership are not well trained in contemporary leadership theory, and thus less than well equipped to advance the field (Carton & Groves 1999; Rodd, 1998). This negates the concept proposed earlier that the characteristics required for good teachers are required to ensure effective leaders. The lack of specific training for leadership roles has left the field less than well equipped for the higher order leadership activities such as advocacy and mentoring (Lam, 2000). While the training for ECEC practitioners prepares them to develop programs for children, they have little or no training for working as a leader of a team of adults (Kagan & Neuman, 1997; Rodd, 1998). As Kagan and Neuman (1997) state, there is little if any training in leadership for early care and education, “much less a course in conceptual leadership” (p. 63). This lack of training means that the field is not well versed in the means available for effective advocacy (Simoneau, 1998). Thus, effective advocacy becomes more a matter of chance than good management. This lack of preparation means that most directors are not equipped for the complexity of their role and do not have access to other types of assistance available in other industries (Hayden, 1996). Increased awareness of the evolving nature of leadership and the multiple ways of leading through specific training may illustrate models that are more appealing for potential candidates in ECEC and increase the confidence to undertake leadership roles and behaviours.

Who is leading the field?
Leadership from within the ECEC field for the field has the potential to improve the quality of care and education for children. Unlike other professions in which the members play a role in initiating and influencing changes (e.g., the medical profession), the ECEC field is frequently the recipient of leadership from other education levels and sectors of bureaucracy (Stonehouse, 1994). According to Stonehouse (1994), a call to leadership is necessary to guide changes in the field.
rather than “having to adjust to changes that we have not initiated” (p. 9). The field would be better served by having its own leaders in preference to leadership and direction emanating from other areas and disciplines such as psychology, which has traditionally been very influential (MacNaughton, 1995). Increased attention to leadership has a relationship to the quality of early childhood experiences (Ireland, 2004; Taba, Castle, Vermeer, Hanchett, Flores & Caufield, 1999). Nupponen (2000) and Jorde-Bloom (1992) support the concept that leadership is essential since it is “the director who sets the tone and the climate of concern that is the hallmark of a quality program” (p. 580). Effective leadership at the service level can thus affect the quality of the care and education for the children.

It seems apparent that a call to leadership has been part of the discourse of the field of care and education for more than a decade. This is with good reason. Although there is evidence of some dialogue with those in ECEC over issues related to leadership (Rodd, 1996; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003), there is room for further investigation. Contemporary literature suggests a need to increase the voice of those in the field in order to ascertain and clarify their perceptions and needs in relation to leadership (Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000; Waniganayake, Morda & Kapsalakis, 2000). Consequently, this study focuses on gaining an awareness of how those in ECEC understand and enact leadership.

**Factors that have inhibited the development of leadership in ECEC**

Literature indicates there is reticence by those in ECEC towards leadership (Rodd, 1998; Taba et al., 1999). This is, in part, due to the characteristics required to nurture children, which are somewhat incongruent to those required for advocacy leadership such as risk taking behaviours (Grieshaber, 2001). Espinosa (1997) recognises the nurturing attributes and emotional sensitivity in relationships (valued by those in ECEC) and maintains that these qualities contribute to a desire for harmony rather than to “subject oneself to the rigors and hardships of leadership” (p. 101). This construction implies that leadership is in fact hard and undesirable. In this way, the very nature and qualities required of the early childhood professional may be the factors that are inhibiting leadership aspirations and resulting in a paucity of leaders. To move beyond this, Espinosa (1997) proposes that all members of the field need to be prepared to accept the challenges and responsibility of leadership. This is a
concept congruent with informal and distributed leadership, indicating that more than positional leaders can lead and how the context can afford this opportunity (Crowther, 1996). However, the qualities mentioned by Espinosa (1997) and Grieshaber (2001) such as being nurturing, caring and supportive might be incongruent with those required by traditional masculinist, heroic leadership models. The limitation in leadership may then be the result of an antiquated perception of what a leader is and how to lead rather than incongruence between ECEC and effective leadership. If leadership involved democratic and collaborative models, then ECEC personnel may feel more positive about adopting leadership activities.

*Issues for leadership attention*

The following discussion draws in part on the work of Stonehouse (1994) and while this is now a dated document and more a social commentary than a research based account, participants in this study identified Stonehouse most frequently as an evident leader in the ECEC field. Consequently, her influence continues to have some currency and her (1994) work is supported in this discussion, by more recent publications.

The low status of the field, staff morale and the attraction of high achieving students to undergraduate training are issues that could benefit by the attention of effective leadership. The social status of a field that involves the care and education of children (Stonehouse, 1994) reflects the value society affords children and childhood. Stonehouse (1994) claimed that our society is not child-centred and that, in fact, the younger the child, the less status is afforded their carer. The image of children and childcare is considered negative and services provided for children not highly regarded (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003; Fraser, 2000). For example, Roberts, Robertson, Stevenson and Fleet (1997) present an account of contradictions in the contemporary images of children. These researchers collected images of children and asked participants to analyse the material in terms of “respectful” concepts of children. This represents a public acceptance of “cuteness” at the expense of respect for the child. While society may entertain a perception that childhood is valued, this research indicates that, in the Australian context, this is a superficial illusion. The lack of social value afforded the early childhood education and care field may therefore reflect a lack of genuine value for childhood in
Australian society. Effective leadership could promote the field and the value of childhood at the macro level and support increased self-efficacy by staff at the micro (service) level.

\textit{Attitudes of those in the field}

The attitudes of those in the field of early childhood education and care may contribute to perpetuating the limited social status of care and education. The behaviour of some practitioners actually compounds a poor view of the field (Stonehouse, 1994). Hayden (1996) refers to a small-scale research project undertaken with graduating early childhood students. Not one of her participants said they would use a childcare centre for the care of their young babies. Those about to work in the field have not perceived the situation as a desirable one for their own children. This response could be the result of a social perception that out-of-home care is a less desirable option and one to be avoided if possible (Hayden, 1996). Those in the field may have perpetuated social attitudes to the detriment of the field’s status. This is an issue requiring leadership attention.

Stonehouse (1994) adds another perception when she states that the ECEC field has a “smugness” about it and a tendency to expect others to know and understand the value of what it does. The field sees little justification for articulating its role to others and, in turn, this implies a passive acceptance of its value by the wider community. Two prominent ECEC authors, Hayden (1996) and Stonehouse (1994) draw attention to leadership and attitudinal factors influencing the field in the mid 1990s. The longevity of these factors into the new millennium appears to be evident mainly in issues of status, which will be a major focus of the forthcoming analysis and findings discussion. There is a need to ascertain what training (if any) practitioners have in order to feel comfortable articulating their practice and what leadership (if any) is nurturing this confidence. Work by Boyd (2001) suggests a need for increased professional development opportunities and undergraduate training to improve leadership skills. This is particularly necessary in the areas of boosting professional confidence and in the articulation and justification of early childhood philosophy (Boyd, 2001). Increasing understanding of issues related to leadership and training could possibly lead to a better match between leadership needs and leadership practices.
Images of women

The limited value afforded childhood is compounded by a predominantly female field which itself is not highly valued by society. This social perception requires the attention of effective and articulate leadership. The ideology of motherhood suggests implications for the status of the field that are more insidious than the social image of childhood (Hayden, 1996). Hayden (1996) proposes that there is a social ambivalence to government-assisted childcare because of the entrenched belief that the care of young children is inherently the responsibility of the mother. She sees this as a significant and ongoing “barrier to the development of a universal system of childcare” (p. 20). If this is the entrenched social view of mothers’ responsibility then provision of funded childcare facilities represents an abdication of a mother’s true and natural role. In this way, childcare services are inherently providing a poor substitute for the more preferable option of care at home by the mother. This does little to enhance the social status of the field of ECEC and could benefit by the attention of both formal and informal leadership to challenge and scrutinize such conceptions.

Care and education…uneasy bedfellows

In discussing the ECEC field, it is important to be mindful that the genesis of care and education were from somewhat different rationales and this dichotomy has remained more evident in some areas of Australia than others. Historically early childhood education focuses on the provision of educational facilities for children before they enter school and frequently takes the form of stand alone preschools or kindergartens (Walker, 2004). The provision of child care facilities emerged as a result of an increasing need to respond to the demands for women’s labour and the emergence of the women’s liberation movement (Brennan, 1999). The Child Care Act 1972, signified the beginning of large scale involvement in funding for child care by the Commonwealth government (Brennan, 1999). Child care was originally aligned with the provision of care facilities for children prior to school entry.

There continues to be a separation of care and education and this does little to enhance the social perception of a united field (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003; Rodd, 1998). This ongoing separation of the two aspects of ECEC presents a
divisive image of the field and makes it difficult to effectively articulate for the needs of children, staff and families. While some early childhood professional groups are seeking to address such issues (e.g., Early Childhood Australia and Children's Services Sub-Committee 2003), here again leadership is required to provide a means to address this ongoing division. According to Stonehouse (1994), the lack of resolution of this dichotomy has been a debilitating factor for the profession at all levels. Stonehouse (1994) maintains that this division weakens the unity of the field and suggests that alternatively the field should seek to focus on the commonality of issues that can promote unification rather than division. Even more significant are the claims that these divisions have resulted in deflecting attention away from the real issues facing the field and, in contrast, serve to maintain the status quo rather than to effect a change in policy or funding (Hayden, 1996). These concerns continue to be evident in recent documents such as the Children's Services Sub-Committee (2003).

Kagan (1989) suggests that while she sees the dichotomy as one of rhetoric, much legislation serves to support this division. This is consistent with the view of Fraser (2000) who contends that in Australia the fragmentation has the potential to weaken all groups as they attempt to influence policy (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003). Certainly the ongoing division of services in states such as Victoria promotes the separation of funding and a reluctance of four year trained staff (such as directors of kindergartens) to move between care settings and education settings (Walker, 2004). Such an unnecessary division requires leadership attention and surveillance to ensure that the issue is not used to the disadvantage of the field when outsiders are making strategic decisions.

With a view to addressing this issue of division, Stonehouse (1994) proactively proposes a more vigorous discussion of the issues relating to care and education. Like recent government reports (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003), Stonehouse also considers that the terms used, divide the field and contribute to maintaining the division in the eyes of the public. Kagan and Neuman (1997) also call for the unification of the profession and the need for structural supports. In addition, perhaps, there is a need to move on and embrace alternative terms such as “educare” (Stonehouse, 1994, p. 10). This is known by the American authors as
“early care and education” (Kagan & Bowman, 1997, p. xi) or as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) prefer, “early childhood education and care” (Press & Hayes, 2000, p. 6). This third term embraces both aspects of the previous two terms and is contemporary. For this reason, it is this descriptor of the field chosen for this current study. The maintenance of divisions in ECEC does little to further the image and unity of the field and needs leadership attention if social status is to be improved.

Isolation

Those in early childhood education and care are implicitly aware of the importance of leadership, but isolation has inhibited their ability to act on this (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003; Culkin, 2000; Walker, 2004). The fragmentation of the field is not purely an issue of nomenclature as in Australia; services are also physically isolated from one another. Rodd (1998) claims that the isolated nature of single purpose services separates practitioners from peers and colleagues and reduces the opportunities to engage in discussion of issues that involve professional judgment. Referring to early childhood education and care, Stonehouse (1994) confirms this idea when she attributes autonomy to the physical isolation of staff in single centres, but also acknowledges the costs. She claims, “our isolation has denied us visibility and to some extent credibility, as misconceptions persist about what we are and what we do” (1994, p. 28). Although this isolation may contribute to the autonomy of the leader, it does reduce collegiality and the direct support afforded professionals in other settings (e.g., schools) (Stonehouse, 1994).

In Victoria, the design and positioning of services (in particular, preschools) is frequently separate from school settings and usually they are not even in the same locality (Walker, 2004). This means that structures to support leadership are not evident and teachers need to seek contact with other education professionals in order to network. However, technology, (through E-mail, which is increasingly available in services) offers opportunities to alleviate the isolation. So too do initiatives such as the Child and Family Support Hubs in Queensland. These hubs are intended to provide shared community resources and increased integration between early childhood and care services for children and families (Queensland Government & Department of Communities, 2003). Reduced isolation would provide access to a
bigger picture of leadership in the field and structures that may support leadership in that domain.

*The inequity of financial remuneration*

As an issue, financial remuneration requires attention for two distinct reasons. In the first case, the ongoing inequity of financial remuneration deserves attention for effective leaders to be retained (Hayden, 1996; Jorde-Bloom, 1988; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Stonehouse, 1994). It is difficult to attract trained people to leadership roles when there is an inconsistency between the level of responsibility and the pay (Kronemann, 1998). Ironically, without leaders of a high calibre, there is limited potential to increase pay levels for other staff (which is the second aspect to the issue of remuneration). The second problem with financial remuneration is the poor pay and the subsequent high rate of staff turnover, which is a significant disadvantage to the conditions for children (Hayden, 1996). For graduates with a Bachelor of Education (EC) there is a discrepancy in Victoria between pay levels if they choose to work in schools or services catering for children under five years of age. This pay discrepancy may explain the choice of primary teaching over teaching in services catering for children aged birth to five years. Within the Bachelor of Education (EC) course at Charles Sturt University, it is apparent that graduates are avoiding employment in early childhood education and care for financial reasons, thus reducing the number of teachers available. According to Quinn (2000) commenting on the pay scales,

> it is not hard to understand why, in the climate of a chronic teacher shortage, an increasing number of early childhood teachers have left preschools and are now teaching in primary school. (¶ 7)

In addition, Kronemann (1998) notes the discrepancy between preschool teachers working in childcare services and those in stand-alone services. Those in childcare services receive approximately $20 less per week and receive four weeks (instead of ten if in school) paid leave and are required to work twice the number of teaching hours.
**Workplace climate**

Although financial rewards may contribute to the calibre and motivation of teachers to lead, it appears that improved workplace climate could also be a significant factor. Boyd and Schneider (1997) claim that it is not the pay that creates dissatisfaction in practitioners in birth to five settings and thus attrition of staff, but rather, other aspects of the workplace climate. This has implications for leaders in the field in that it is evident that practitioners are more often responsive to the climate of the workplace as an incentive to remain rather than a consideration of pay levels. Although it is important to achieve pay levels that more accurately reflect the qualifications and experience of staff uniformly across the country, attention to developing the workplace climate may also provide leaders with a means to effectively support and retain staff. A variety of factors have lead to high levels of burnout and this requires the attention of effective leadership in order to improve work conditions and support staff at both the service level and also at the political level.

**Wellbeing of staff**

The notion of nurturing the wellbeing of staff (Carter & Curtis, 1998) is another area demanding the attention of effective leaders. In some cases, the literature implies that improved staff wellbeing is aligned with improved work outcomes (Robbins et al., 2004; Schultz & Schultz, 1998), thus in line with the objectives of a Theory X leader. Other literature suggests nurturing staff with the view to self-fulfilment and even social reform (Carter & Curtis, 1998). Literature from the corporate world suggests that astute leaders are paying attention to the spiritual wellbeing of staff (Mitroff, 1999). This may seem radical in a climate of narcissistic leadership and economic rationality. However, when considered in terms of a possible prevention for staff burnout, proprietors may see it as a justifiable objective. Such a concept is not so radical given there is a link between positive staff wellbeing and positive outcomes for children, making the fostering of staff wellbeing a desirable and justifiable achievement in human terms (Whitebook, 1997). An effective leader can nurture the wellbeing of staff by a variety of practical and professional means and, as a result, achieve a positive and professional commitment by staff to the philosophy and goals of the service (Carter & Curtis, 1998). These examples illustrate the value
of effective leadership in ECEC, and there shall be elaboration of this the forthcoming discussion.

Public companies in the field

The corporatisation of many services across the country challenges the nature of the early childhood field. The emergence of public companies in the area of child-care undermines the traditional philanthropic foundations of the field. The new breed of companies such as ABC Learning Centres and Child Care Centres Australia are worth millions of dollars and have investors with considerable political clout and vast business connections (Leyden & Greenblat, 2002; Milburn, 2002). Services with such backing and such large networks of centres could potentially offer increased kudos to a field traditionally undervalued and underpaid. Alternatively they may herald “the crèche equivalent of retail chain stores” (Milburn, 2002). This changed playing field suggests a need for leadership attention by the field in order to be informed and active in the discourse of change.

New ways of being a leader in early childhood education and care

Researching ways of leading that are more appealing to a predominantly female field may encourage and make accessible leadership opportunities for those in ECEC. In this field, research is giving voice to practitioners and exploring new understandings of leadership. The work by Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) with leaders undertaking a management and leadership course in the A C T examined what they termed “generic leadership models” (p. 9) to determine to what extent they were applicable to the childcare context. Using a format developed by Belenky (1986) to understand how women used and developed knowledge, this group determined that mainstream management and leadership theory was not always relevant to children’s services (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Alternatively, they claim that these models were in fact “opposed to the cooperative strategies that the service leaders valued” (p. 9). Strategies in the traditional management models did not acknowledge issues such as family needs, which are prevalent for many women. In contrast, those involved in the research began to define a new leadership paradigm that focused on connectedness with others. The need or desire for connectedness illustrates a move away from the authoritarian leadership style of the past and the
dominant male paradigm to a new way of leading. This approach seeks a particular way of being a leader in early childhood education and care.

The participants in the Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon (2000) research identified four “wisdoms” (p. 10) as part of effective leadership. These are people wisdom, emotional wisdom, role wisdom and resource wisdom (2000). Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) combined these with Belenky’s five levels of leadership and achieved what they determine to be a balance between the emotional and instrumental dimensions of their role. This research suggests ways of leading beyond the traditional paradigms may well suit those in ECEC more effectively.

In the Australian ECEC context there has been research into leadership. Work by Waniganayake, Morda, Kapsalakis (2000) with directors, teachers and assistants in three Melbourne childcare centres explored the meaning and significance of leadership in preference to attributional dimensions of leadership growth (discussed earlier as leadership traits). This study aimed to include multiple voices from the same organisational context to determine if leadership in early childhood is a positional or situational phenomenon, or both. The findings indicate that while the participants articulated a valuing of democratic governance methods (e.g., shared direction, open communication), transcripts of their practice indicated they relied on traditional “line management” approaches. This suggests that while practitioners’ value alternative leadership models and strategies, they do not have the training or skills to implement these methods in practice. Recommendations include the recognition that more than one person can function as a leader in the same setting, consistent with Crowther’s (1996) claim earlier, and that such broad based leadership “offers increased vitality and strength to the whole organisation” (p. 18). The authors also recommend reflecting on one’s own beliefs and experiences in a given social setting and suggest that only then will it be possible to “reconceptualise, articulate, and implement leadership in early childhood in a meaningful way” (Waniganayake et al, 2000, p. 19). This understanding of leadership addresses the interdependence of the individual and the context, as discussed in contingency theory earlier. This work suggests that leadership needs to be understood in situ and it be considered in terms of context, in preference to a limited focus on the individual. This view allows for both positional and informal leaders, and leaders who are adept
at using different traits in different contexts. Thus, the focus is not on the leader but the leadership itself, allowing room for more than one leader in a setting (Crowther, 1996). These research studies illustrate factors affecting leadership in ECEC. There appears to be a need to explore these findings in the larger context to determine if they are broadly applicable or more contextually specific.

Leadership characteristics in early childhood education and care

Although there is limited research in the area of leadership in Australia, Rodd and Clyde (1990) provide additional perspectives worth considering. Rodd (1996) reports on a number of studies conducted between 1993 and 1995 that furthered the initial work undertaken by Rodd and Clyde in 1990. Data from survey responses found that very few participants were “comfortable with the management and supervisory roles of their employment” (Rodd, 1996, p. 120). Further interviews with one hundred experienced childcare coordinators in the Melbourne area linked increased experience to more comprehensive understandings of complex leadership issues and concerns. Participants identified characteristics that included being patient, kind and nurturant as well as characteristics as being goal orientated, assertive, proactive, professionally confident, visionary, influential and a mentor or guide. This indicates an eclectic mix of the leadership traits and behaviours attributable to various ways of leading discussed earlier. It includes characteristics similar to those of the narcissistic and visionary leader with reference to many characteristics related to the notion of feminised ways of leading. This suggests that these practitioners see leadership as a blend of traditional leadership traits and behaviours as well as values and behaviours more evident in the so-called feminised ways of leading.

Rodd’s (1998) typology of an early childhood leader (discussed earlier) may assist professionals to develop the characteristics of successful leadership. This work suggests that early childhood professionals “reflect, reconceptualise and reorganise” what they see as important for leadership (Rodd, 1998, p. 126). The typology seeks to identify personal characteristics, professional skills, roles and responsibilities relevant to effective leadership in early childhood education and care in order to avoid a trial and error approach to leadership in the field (Rodd, 1998). This work identifies a relationship between aspects of leadership and a practitioner’s career.
stage. There are similarities here with the work by Somers Hill and Ragland (1995) with women in educational leadership as discussed earlier. This research suggests gaining the perceptions and views of those in the field to recommend future action in terms of professional development needs and the enhancement of undergraduate training.

Leadership for ECEC may need to be more context related and focused on the needs of those involved in preference to a single predetermined leadership model. Morgan (1997) suggests that leadership for early childhood education and care needs to take account of the particular organisation’s structure and culture, meaning that it needs to accommodate contextual factors. Current trends in leadership are, according to Morgan (1997), moving from the heroic male to images of collaboration and shared leadership, although this too is problematic, as discussed earlier (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). In effect, this literature heralds a type of leadership more congruent with the values (such as cooperation, connectedness and concern for family needs) evident in the work of Waniganayake et al. (2000) and Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000). It would seem that early childhood education and care may be well served by the development of leaders who can facilitate change at the organisational level (including transformational and transactional elements) and at the social and political level (the conceptual leaders).

The visionary director

The concept of visionary leadership is deserving of consideration as there are characteristics of this approach to leadership that are compatible with existing early childhood education and care programs and the field on a larger scale (Carter & Curtis, 1998). According to Nanus (1992), visionary leadership offers organisations an opportunity to renew and redirect themselves. This prospect is a possibility when the vision is realistic, credible and attractive (Nanus, 1992) and developed by the whole organisation. One particularly appealing aspect of visionary leadership is the acknowledgment of the need to contribute to the well being of the members of the organisation and the larger society of which the organisation is a part. The director’s leadership is the primary influence in the development of quality ECEC programs, according to Carter and Curtis (1998). Carter and Curtis (1998) hope that their text The Visionary Director contributes to “the ability of directors to summon the
resources and skills to be visionary leaders of their programs” (p. 1). Rather than shy away from discussion of effective leadership due to the dominance of traditional heroic, masculinist paradigms, Carter and Curtis (1998) proactively assert a visionary approach to leadership in early care and education. This incorporates a transactional leadership style to building and nurturing staff confidence and morale at the centre level and transformational leadership, which seeks change on a broader social level. This dual approach aims to link effective early childhood education and care programs to the “reshaping of the communities where they reside” (Carter & Curtis, 1998, p. 2). This notion of visionary leadership fits well with the ECEC context and provides a means for proactive leadership.

Carter and Curtis (1998) offer a framework for thinking and organising work in childcare and educational contexts. This framework incorporates a variety of strategies including learning about balance, incorporating ideas from the business world and the utilisation of a triangular model for conceptualising leadership in care and education.

Each side of the triangular framework is equally important to the creation of the vision of early childhood education and care services as caring, learning communities (Carter & Curtis, 1998). The “Managing and Overseeing” side of the triangle involves attention to issues such as professional standards, salaries, staffing, training, meetings, effective communication and performance reviews and evaluations (Carter & Curtis, 1998, p. 52). The “Coaching and Mentoring” side incorporates creating coaching methods for diverse learning styles, providing opportunities for self-assessment, time to practice new skills, provide feedback and foster mentoring relationships (Carter & Curtis, p. 54). The side of “Building and

Figure 2.1. A triangle framework (Carter & Curtis, 1998, p.51).
Supporting” community involves designing environments that foster a sense of belonging, developing a shared vision, respecting individuals, helping people make connections and establish bonds with one another, establishing traditions and linking people in the program to the wider community (Carter & Curtis, 1998, p. 54). While all three sides relate to leadership, the first is aligned more with traditional management activities. The latter two more closely related to broader leadership responsibilities.

The view of visionary leadership offered by Carter and Curtis (1998) for early childhood education and care is both engaging and refreshing. It challenges dominant paradigms of traditional leadership by valuing and nurturing the wellbeing of staff and seeking social change. It embraces and utilises concepts of visionary leadership to provide a proactive approach to leadership in early childhood education and care contexts. In a sense, it addresses both leadership issues within services as well as leadership and advocacy in the broader social context.

Summary

Aspects of women and leadership have been explored by researchers in the corporate world (Sinclair, 1998; Sinclair, 2004; Still, 1993), and research has examined leadership in ECEC (Jorde Bloom, 1992; Fraser, 2000). However, there has been limited interrogation of how leadership is enacted in the highly feminised field of ECEC. Consequently, there is little information as to how effective leaders in a female-dominated field act in spheres beyond their familiar context where different leadership styles and practices may be used. As has been made apparent, the field of ECEC faces several challenges including financial remuneration, teacher numbers, staff morale, workplace climate and the corporatisation of services. It is possible to view these challenges in two ways. In one sense, they can compound a problematic situation in which it is a daily struggle to get the job done. Alternatively, the situation can challenge the director to promote visionary leadership and proactively create learning communities and spur others into action on behalf of social change in the world (Carter & Curtis, 1998). This view is consistent with the New South Wales Curriculum Framework, which also features the development of learning communities with the view to improving society (Office of Childcare, 2002).
The literature demonstrates considerable research into leadership in business, education and to an increasing degree ECEC, although there is limited exploration of understandings and enactment of leadership within the Australian ECEC context. Research could serve to identify what is required in ECEC to develop effective leadership at various levels and this may involve more than those in director roles (Crowther, 1996; Nupponen, 2001; Waniganayake et al., 2000). Such work could extend understandings already achieved by Rodd (1996), Waniganayake et al (2000), and Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000). This present study investigates leadership understandings and its enactment by practitioners from various areas of ECEC. It identifies a range of understandings and expectations of leadership enactment, in latter chapters.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

This chapter presents the research design and data collection procedures for the present study. There is an explanation of how the design is informed by understandings of symbolic interactionism, (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Woods, 1983; Woods, 1996) linked with feminist perspectives (cf. Oleson, 2001). This chapter then describes the research techniques employed; the analytic procedures; trustworthiness and the ethical issues relating to the study.

The nature of the research topic
This study draws on the principles of symbolic interactionism to investigate leadership in the field of ECEC. This approach values the active input of early childhood practitioners in the field as they articulate their practice and beliefs of leadership. The study investigates their understandings of leadership in the field and their descriptions of how they and others enact leadership. In many cases, these interpretations include commentary on both local and broader leadership in ECEC. The underlying assumption of this study is that the nature of reality is such that individuals construct their reality in social contexts (Benzies & Allen, 2001). An interpretivist methodology is employed to explore participants' understandings of leadership in ECEC. This approach affords the researcher the chance to come to see the situation from the perspective of the participant.

Towards a theoretical framework
In adopting an interpretivist perspective, one is ascribing to the view that all human practices are developed and transmitted in a social context. This view sees meaning not as discovered, as might a researcher adopting an objectivist stance, but rather as constructed. It is only when an individual consciously engages with objects in the world that meanings emerge. Consequently, different people may construct differing meanings in relation to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998).
The adoption of a constructionist perspective ascribes to an interpretive stance. Such a stance affords the researcher the opportunity to explore perceptions and shared meanings and develop insights into situations (Wellington, 2000). Consequently, this approach is appropriate for exploring how leadership is understood and enacted by those involved in ECEC. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that to understand a particular social action, the inquirer must grasp the meanings that make up the action. This view emerged as a contradiction to positivism and was an attempt to explain human and social reality. It seeks to achieve the culturally derived and historical interpretations of the social life world (Crotty, 1998). Weber, whose thoughts underlie much interpretivist theory, claimed that in the human sciences one needs to be concerned with understanding (verstehen) (Crotty, 1998). This has taken the form of three methodological approaches including hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Of these three approaches, I make a case for the employment of symbolic interactionism as the means to frame the research in this present study. Further, this study draws on contemporary understandings of symbolic interactionism and a standpoint feminist perspective.

*Symbolic interactionism*

Symbolic interactionism suits this particular research question (How do ECEC personnel understand leadership and its enactment in the field of ECEC?) because it attends to how individuals give situations meaning through their interactions with others. Symbolic interactionism involves the study of individuals in society and what impacts on their own subjective insights and feelings (Ashworth, 1979; Lovat, 1995). It holds that individuals structure the external world by their perceptions and interpretations of what they conceive the world to be (Benzies & Allen, 2001). George Herbet Mead is often considered to be the founder of symbolic interactionist thought (Crotty, 1998) although he is not the only source of interactionism (Ashworth, 1979). His work is “the most developed, consistent and insightful body of ideas from which the later interactionists trace their intellectual roots” (Ashworth, 1979, p. 7). Mead proposed that mental activity started with interaction and consequently society was to be regarded as prior to the individual’s development of mental processes (Ashworth, 1979).
Blumer (1969) developed the ideas of symbolic interactionism from the initial concepts of Mead and provided a “major conceptual frame around which a great deal of interpretive/ethnographic inquiry has been conducted over the past several decades” (Prus, 1996, p. 67). Blumer suggested that humans react to each other and also interpret and define such actions to construct and redefine their actions and their worlds (Zeitlin, 1973). Accordingly,

Symbolic interactionism involves interpretation, or ascertaining the meaning of the actions or remarks of the other person, and definition, or conveying indications to another person as to how he is to act.

Human association consists of a process of such interpretation and definition. Through this process, the participants fit their own acts to the ongoing acts of one another and guide others in doing so. (Blumer, 1969, p. 66)

Symbolic interactionism provides a methodological framework that allows an exploration of how leadership in early childhood education and care is understood and enacted by those involved and influenced by such leadership. It provides a means to explore the way individuals construct their notions of leadership and how these notions are influenced by the individual's social understandings. It also allows exploration of how these individual interpretations of leadership, influence leadership activity within and for the ECEC field. Later discussion will outline the methods of data collection derived from the basis of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism as an appropriate methodological tool

According to Mead (1934), every person is a social construction. The self is constructed by the generalised other, that is, shaped by social forces. Mead states that our ability to see the world,

is developed socially through ‘entering into the most highly organised logical, ethical, and aesthetic attitudes of the community’ and coming to recognise ‘the most extensive set of interwoven conditions that may
determine thought, practice, and our fixation and enjoyment of values’.
(Mead cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 62 & 63)

Mead indicates that it is the individual who modifies the social influences through interpretation of the particular context. This approach provides the opportunity to view how individuals in the ECEC field consider, not just the notion of leadership, but how social factors and the culture of the ECEC field influence such interpretations.

How individuals in ECEC interpret the notion of leadership in relation to the views of others is central to this study. The act of interpreting is attributed to individuals who are understood as active agents. This theoretical assumption underpins symbolic interactionism, which describes the individual as an active agent who is not one passively responding to dominant social forces (Blumer, 1969). According to Cuff, Sharrock and Francis (1998), Mead’s approach illustrated a difference between animal reaction and human conduct in that the latter requires the possession of a mind. In this way, the individual can undergo both the experience and be aware of this experience (i.e., reflexivity) (Cuff et al. 1998). Reflexivity involves how the individual interprets the actions of the world, and how the individual then organises their actions, based on their individual interpretation (Jesser, 1975). Language is a significant symbolic factor in that it allows humans to engage in meaningful communication with one another and this allows for awareness of others’ views and values (Ashworth, 1979; Prus, 1996). It is this awareness of others that allows group or collective action with the aligning of individual actions. This is a significant factor for this research study since it is the individual interpretations of the concept of leadership and the aligning of these interpretations with others in the field of ECEC that influences leadership behaviour in and for the field.

Symbolic interactionism sees the individual as active in constructing meaning of situations and subsequently their understanding of the world. According to Blumer, (1969) humans react not only to each other, but they also interpret and define these actions in order to construct and reconstruct their actions and their worlds. In contrast to some sociologists for example, symbolic interactionism does not construe society as an entity and is opposed to the notion of positioning factors and forces (Zeitlin, 1973). Jesser (1975) explores this further suggesting that sociologists
frequently study the structural categories such as culture, norms, values, status and positions to analyse human society and the social action within it. However, in so doing, such approaches can ignore the interpretive process by which humans build up their actions. Social factors may set the conditions for action but it is the individual interpreting the situation that determines the outcome (Jesser, 1975). Blumer makes problematic the conventional procedures of sociologists in terms of their methodological presuppositions. He claims that traditionally sociologists do three things. Firstly, they “identify human society (or some part of it) in terms of an established or organised form” (Blumer, 1969, p. 88). Secondly, they identify a factor or condition of change affecting this part of society and thirdly “they identify the new form assumed by the society” (Blumer, 1969, p. 88) because of the influence of the factor of change. What Blumer (1969) sees as problematic is the absence of attention to the interpretive behaviour of the acting units. Thus, the main aspects of symbolic interactionism are:

- people, individually and collectively, act on the basis of the meanings that they attach to situations;
- meaning arises in the process of interaction among individuals;
- and meanings are assigned and modified through an interpretive process that is ever changing subject to redefinition, relocation and realignments (Benzis & Allen, 2001, p. 545).

An example of this is the account by Brown and Minichiello (1994) of how individuals alter their attitudes to the use of condoms in the context of the sexual act. There will be discussion of this in more detail later in this section.

According to Mead, (1934) and Blumer (1969), the basis of symbolic interactionism is the notion “that human society is made up of individuals who have selves” (Blumer 1969, p. 82). Individual action is a construction of individual interpretations of situations; and subsequent group or collective actions are the result of individuals taking into account each other’s actions. Woods (1996) explores the three notions of self, situation and the concept of socialization as understood in symbolic interactionist terms. For Mead (1934) the self is an object to itself that is reflexive and can be both subject and object. “The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experiences” (Mead, 1934, p. 140). This framework provides a means to understand how ECEC practitioners, as
active agents, individually interpret notions of leadership through the conversations they have with themselves and how they act as a result of taking into account the actions of others.

The self
According to Woods (1983), it is the individual possession of the ‘self” that allows the construction of meaning. This notion involves the conversations we have with ourselves, and our ability to stand outside ourselves and see ourselves through the eyes of others. It is the self that constructs meanings and definitions of the situation and modifies them through reflection and engagement with prior experiences. This definition of self indicates that the individual is more than a response to social factors, with the individual actively constructing their own form (Woods, 1996). According to Blumer (1969), “In short, the possession of a self provides the human being with a mechanism of self-interaction with which to meet the world—a mechanism that is used in forming and guiding his conduct” (p. 62).

The situation
This research study sought to gain an awareness of how the individual understands the notion of leadership and the alignment or non-alignment of these understandings with the expectations of others and the definition of the ECEC situation. According to Woods (1993), the situation is not simply the site of the action. The situation has to do with how the actors interpret the situation and give it meaning. Different people may see situations differently and, ultimately, situations are what individuals make of them (Woods, 1983). It is the individual’s interpretation of the situation (in this case the understanding of leadership) that is the reality for that particular individual. According to Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood and Axford (1999),

The significance of this concept is that, where a situation is familiar and its configuration of meaning is known, individuals then organise their own conduct and their expectations of others in relation to its definition.

(p. 50)

This interpretation of the situation or context is frequently the focus for the researcher as he/she seeks to move beyond the taken for granted to achieve an understanding of how the situation is individually constructed. How then is the
situation of leadership understood and enacted by ECEC personnel? Are there common interpretations and definitions that then influence leadership behaviour in and for the ECEC field?

The role of socialization

The symbolic interactionist sees factors such as social class as setting a condition for action, but not determining an individual’s action (Blumer, 1969). Mead considers that “individuals see their own behaviour not only from the point of view of significant others but also in terms of generalised norms, values and beliefs” (as cited in Woods, 1996, p 34). The “generalised other” is the organised community or social group which gives to the individual unity of self (Mead, 1934). However, individuals do not act towards social class or systems as such: they act towards situations. These factors do not themselves determine what interpretation an individual will make but rather they inform this interpretive process and then the definition from which joint actions are formed (Blumer, 1969). What an individual determines as appropriate conduct is a result of the interactive and interpretive process in which they engage. This approach suggests individuals are active in interpreting the situation and in determining the actions that they see appropriate for that context. In this study, viewing leadership as an interpretive process offers the possibility of transcending the gender definitions of leadership in the literature and analysing the feminist interpretations of language and power considered so determinative of female leadership behaviour in existing work. This is possible since gendered interpretations of leadership (as a generalised other) are viewed as contributing to participants’ understanding of leadership but not determinative of it or subsequent actions.

The ‘I’ and the ‘Me’.

There are two complementary parts to the notion of self and Mead defines them as the I and the Me (Mead, 1934). “The “I” reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the “me” and we react to it as an “I”” (Mead, 1934, p. 174). These factors of self-interaction allow what Mead calls the community to enter into interaction between human beings (Blumer, 1969). “The creative I is the source of initiative, novelty and change; the Me is the agent of self-regulation and social control (Woods, 1996, p.
The Me is more objective and “the part of self as others might see it” (Woods, 1993, p. 2) and relates more to “the generalized other” (p. 2). The Me seeks to evaluate the innovations of the I from the perspective of society and discourage undesirable actions (Woods, 1996). Blumer sees this as enabling the individual to “conduct the norms of the perspectives of the group and thus guide himself in interaction with others by considerations which are not immediately present in the interaction” (p. 110). In this way, the Me acts as a moderator of behaviour reminding the individual of the collective aspects of the situation. In this study, this could relate to how individuals interpret leadership juxtaposed against the needs and demands of the children or parents in the ECEC service. Some individuals may suppress the I or the Me for the other but an active balance of the two is considered desirable for the effectiveness of the individual and society (Woods, 1996).

In this study, the notion of the I and the Me allows the exploration of how individuals engage with social expectations around leadership in order to understand how this affects their leadership activity. In other words, this study investigates the influence of the Me in moderating behaviour given constraints of others and social expectations. These factors may be derived from the broad social context (generalised other), particular factors or individuals (significant others) or, the ECEC culture. Analysis will consider how the interplay between these notions may affect individual leadership aspirations and behaviours.

An example of how symbolic interactionism can provide a framework for research designed to understand human behaviour is provided by the work of Brown and Micinchiello (1994, cited in Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood, & Axford, 1999). Browne and Micinchiello sought to understand condom usage, given that previous studies indicated that individuals had knowledge about the benefits of such usage yet sexual practices did not reflect the application of such knowledge. The framework of symbolic interactionism afforded the researchers the chance to explore how the interactive process of the sexual act and the perceived perceptions of one’s partner, influenced the decision to use or not to use a condom. If condom sex was perceived as “other sex” in comparison to “normal sex”, it set the scene for the individual to justify the non-use of a condom. The researchers concluded the importance of
understanding how people give meaning to “object”, in this case, condom sex (Browne & Minichiello, 1994).

According to Blumer (1969), Mead viewed the object as “anything that can be designated or referred to” (p. 680) and this can be physical or abstract in nature. In relation to the present study, this indicates a need to understand how the object of leadership is perceived through the interactive process of individuals and their situations, and the discourses of ECEC. How is one’s description of leadership, tempered by what others in the field may think, perceive or value (the Me)? How do these understandings influence the individual’s attitude to leadership and the adoption of particular leadership behaviours? Symbolic interactionism serves as a methodological tool to assist in the process of analysis and a standpoint feminist perspective complements this by providing a theoretical framework for the study. Following a critique of symbolic interactionism the next section will explain the feminist perspective underpinning this study and the way in which it can engage with symbolic interactionism to provide a framework for the analysis of the data.

Critiquing symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism has been critiqued for its lack of criticality (Crotty, 1998) and for its sentimentality for the underdog (or less privileged) (Cuff et al., 1984). Jesser (1975) notes a lack of consideration to the power plays by symbolic interactionism that determine whose interests receive voice and a whole neglect of power as a fact of life (Jesser, 1975; Zeitlin, 1973). Such criticisms are evident in the work of Denzin (1992 & 2000). While this study does not focus specifically on issues of equity and power, symbolic interactionism does afford a voice to those not often heard. The notion of power may be relevant to analysis of the data in terms of the interpretation individuals’ make of their power to enact and undertake leadership activity.

Another criticism of symbolic interactionism involves the attention paid to the dominance and coercion of socialisation. This may be inappropriate given the argument that humans will interpret the influence of coercive social pressures individually. The notion of sentimentality for the underdog (Cuff et al., 1984) provides some attention to the inequities in society. Accusing symbolic
interactionism of being too sympathetic to the plight of those at low levels of
organisations and structures and somewhat critical of those better placed may not in
fact be negative (Cuff et al., 1984). Given the inequities of power in various
organisations, attention to those areas traditionally described as marginalised (such as
women and children’s issues), may give voice to their condition. Cuff et al (1984)
provides an example of the popular image of the prisoner, which is usually the result
of many perspectives other than that of the criminal. In contrast, symbolic
interactionism might provide “a corrective by doing nothing more than by showing
that ‘deviants’ and ‘outcasts’ are in truth only ‘normal human beings’ in particular
kinds of circumstances” (Cuff, et al, 1984, p. 129). In terms of marginalised groups,
the discussion of women in ECEC leadership may provide a sound continuance to
the symbolic interactionist tradition of giving voice to the underdog. This study
provides the opportunity for ECEC practitioners to reflect and comment on the
nature of leadership in the field and to consider the relevance of these interpretations
to traditional notions of leadership discussed in the literature.

Why a feminist perspective?
The engagement with feminist theory in this study is predicated upon recognition of
the highly feminised nature of the ECEC field and that gender contributes to how
individuals situate themselves. This combined with the heroic, male dominance of
leadership literature provides a rationale for the application of feminist theory to
assist in unpacking some of the taken for granted aspects of the ECEC field and
traditional leadership literature. This section will explore the choice to use a feminist
theory and its value to the analysis of the data.

Leadership has a history of being a male construct in terms of the ways of being a
leader and the social perception of what constitutes a leader (Collinson & Hearn,
2003; Cox, 1996; Eveline, 2004; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Sinclair, 1998; Tanton,
1994). Management and leadership are historically and culturally associated with
men. “It is seen as intrinsically masculine, something that only men (can) do. The
very language of management is resolutely masculine” (Wajcman, 1999, p. 7). The
male as leader is the norm and in the leadership context, the woman is problematic.
This is consistent with the view that is so common as to be unconscious—that the
male order is natural to the point of needing no justification in the social order
(Dillabough, 1999). The biological differences between the sexes act as a natural justification of the socially constructed differences between the genders (Bourdieu, 2001). This ideological position ratifies the masculine domination of society and requires no real critique since it is natural and neutral. Therefore, women and leadership appear to present as an oxymoron and become problematic. Men have made such an imprint on the image of power and leadership that women who have made it in leadership have often been obliged to practice masculine leadership behaviour (Cox, 1996). In terms of women leading, they are thus unacceptable as women and unacceptable as leaders, as they fit neither archetype. This is consistent with the claims by Sinclair (1998) that the domination of male archetypes also has pervaded any objective assessment of leadership potential in organisations. This is important in that it acknowledges the marginalisation of females in leadership and the way that this domination inhibits the adoption of leadership behaviours. Blackmore (1999) and Wajcman (1999) contend that women as leaders are troublesome in that they endeavour to influence social change to achieve gender justice. In this way, female leaders potentially challenge the dominant discourse and this may be less than desirable for some who seek to preserve the status quo.

Linking symbolic interactionism and feminism

Within this strong male hierarchy of leadership, the application of a feminist perspective to this study allows for an unpacking of the constructions of leadership that have hitherto dominated leadership discussions. The application of feminist theory and symbolic interactionism to the analysis of data is not a new combination (Deegan & Hill, 1987) although, not a frequent occurrence. While one may be situated in a particular paradigm, there may be multiple positions from which to speak. Symbolic interactionism is not exclusive of other methodologies and in fact it shares some similar values (Charmaz & Lofland, 2003; Deegan & Hill, 1987; Denzin, 1992). Having already utilised a feminist poststructuralist perspective in previous work (Hard, 1998; Hard, Macmillan, & Ortlipp, 2000) I cannot remove these influences from my thinking and being. In this present study, the theoretical framework involves feminist theory and combines with symbolic interactionism used as a methodological tool. Historically, feminist theory has been aligned with critical methodologies such as post structuralism, and these approaches have emerged since the advent of symbolic interaction. As a result, one may ask if the combination of
symbolic interactionism and a critical perspective such as feminism is justifiable and achievable.

The question has been answered in a review of the role of symbolic interactionism in current sociology. Editors of the journal *Symbolic Interaction* invited recipients of the George Herbet Mead, Career Award from the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, to contribute to a special issue. The rationale for this was to “explore and celebrate the diversities of the symbolic interactionist (SI) perspective and to direct inquiry from our perspective for the twenty-first century” (Charmaz & Lofland, 2003, p. 1). This resulted in authors demonstrating some shared assumptions and language but also reference to varied sources of guidance and inspiration from “an array of literatures and theoretical ‘dispositions’” (Charmaz & Lofland, 2003, p. 2). This indicates the flexibility of symbolic interactionism to invite other thinkers, not specifically aligned with social psychology to the interactionist table (Charmaz & Lofland, 2003). It also creates an inviting climate for the evolution of symbolic interactionism and its possible combination with more critical methodologies.

Symbolic interactionism may have emerged from the works of Mead and Blumer early in the Twentieth Century but Denzin (1992) provides a summary of symbolic interactionism that reflects the evolution of the concept since that time. Interactionists study the intersection of interactions, biography and social structure in particular historical moments. “Interactional experience is assumed to be organised in terms of the motive and accounts that persons give themselves for acting” (Denzin, 1992, p. 20). In addition, Denzin suggests that interactionists are concerned with how people are constrained by the “constructions they build on and inherit from the past” (p. 23). Interactionists are interested in how people develop their own situated versions of society. This account of interactionism by Denzin (1992) suggests that there is no confluence with grand theories and he recognises the similarity here to that of poststructuralists and postmodern theories. Denzin (1992, cited by Schwandt, 1994) claims that symbolic interactionism should adopt insights from poststructural philosophy, in particular, cultural and feminist studies. This directs those using symbolic interactionism to critically appraise the individual’s lived experiences with the cultural representations of those experiences. Denzin’s
(1992) exploration of interactionism attempts to situate it amongst more contemporary theories and research processes such as postmodern ethnographic research, hermeneutic and phenomenological works and recent feminist critiques of positivism. Denzin (1992) explores the relevance of interactionism in light of these alternative views. It seems that the adoption of a methodological tool such as symbolic interactionism in a study such as this has confluence with elements of other paradigms (such as poststructuralism and feminist theories), rather than being mutually exclusive.

Other authors acknowledge this bridge between critical feminist perspectives and symbolic interactionism. For example, Deegan and Hill (1987) provide an account of women’s stories informed by symbolic interactionism and seek to link this to the “everyday, public actions of people with the hidden rules of social life” (Deegan & Hill, 1987, p. xi). Symbolic interaction is able to take the everyday experiences of participants and illustrate their underlying pattern of meaning:

Symbolic interaction unites our very different worldviews…because it articulates a positive view of human potential and gives us the tool to show how social custom, patterns, institutions, and patterns of interaction make the rhetoric of women’s equality compatible with our lived patterns of inequality. (Deegan & Hill, 1987, p. xi)

In connecting symbolic interaction and feminist studies, symbolic interactionism becomes a useful means to elucidate the incongruence between the rhetoric of equality and the reality of inequality. In this way, symbolic interactionism can be an effective tool to explore realities of ECEC leadership. It can help to elucidate the differences between the rhetoric of ECEC leadership and the realities as interpreted by individuals.

More recently, Olesen (2001) links symbolic interactionism and feminism. Olesen asserts her position with reference to Denzin’s work:

As a symbolic interactionist working primarily within the interactionist-social constructionist tradition (Denzin, 1992, p. 1-21), I am sympathetic with deconstructive currents in interactionism and
feminism that encourage provocative and productive unpacking of taken-for-granted ideas about women in specific material, historical, and cultural contexts. (Olesen, 2001, p. 215)

Here, symbolic interactionism and feminist studies are linked. Feminist inquiry can fuse different views to produce new syntheses that then become the ground for further research, praxis and policy (Olesen, 2001). Ustick (1998) utilised symbolic interactionism informed by critical social theory and feminist poststructuralist perspectives for both methodology and analysis. This study explored the work identity of academics and sought to affect change in a climate problematic for many academics (Ustick, 1998). By drawing on symbolic interactionism and feminist studies, it is possible to examine the lived experiences of individuals and elucidate those critical moments when a person’s sexuality and gender are called into question. The accommodation symbolic interaction can make to feminist issues means that the joining of these perspectives is achievable in this study.

*Clarifying the feminist standpoint in this study*

There are multiple ways to engage with feminist theory and to make useful such a theoretical lens to the nature of a study, the analysis of data and the reporting of the findings. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), provide a descriptive account of the issues facing those working from a feminist paradigm. These authors cite the work of Haraway (1991) who describes the feminist challenge as one of slipping on a greasy pole of methodological continua between the notion of absolute truth and the extremely opposed end of absolute relativism (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). There is pressure for feminists to locate their methodology on a continuum but it is impossible to make them adhere to one single way of thinking. As a result, there are discrepancies in and amongst feminists. Rather than succumb to a demand to position oneself on this continua, some feminists have developed the notion of a feminist standpoint which respects that knowledge and power have connections with the aim to make evident the hidden power relations of knowledge production and gender (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). The intention here is to uncover the relations of power and knowledge with the hope of “telling better stories about gendered lives” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 63). The nature of this study is
such that standpoint feminism, itself still shifting and fluid, provides a means to examine the nature of leadership in the highly feminised field of ECEC through attention to women’s experiences.

**Standpoint feminism**

Standpoint feminism emerged in response to mainstream epistemological views of a universal subject and aimed to overturn the notion of “perspectival hierarchies” where some views were more appropriate and acceptable than others (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 5). With its roots strongly linked to Marxist epistemology and critical theory, standpoint feminism aims to empower those oppressed with the view to improving their situation. Specifically it refers to “a “position” in society, a way of making sense that is affected by and can in turn help shape the structures of power, work, and wealth” (Hennessy, 1995, p. 1). Further, Hennessy (1995) asserts that feminist standpoint theorists have, “poised feminism as this sort of position, a way of conceptualizing reality from the vantage point of women’s lives” (p. 1).

Harding (1993) argues that the application of standpoint epistemology is likely to increase our ability to achieve objectivity rather than the reverse by examining the context, which has previously been considered non-rational and consequently exempt from analysis. Particularly relevant to this study is Harding’s assertion that science has a very real subject manifest in a group of dominant males. This subject has a standpoint involving values “based on the kind of activities that this group is involved in” (Harding, 1993, p. 6). The difficulty Harding identifies is that this standpoint remains unexamined by traditional science and consequently “impoverishes the objectivity that science could achieve” (1993, p. 6). Further, Harding (1993) suggests that when the dominant group is homogeneous, its shared assumptions have little chance of identification, and when this group benefits from the maintenance of such assumptions “there is even less chance that these assumptions will be critically interrogated” (p. 6). This perspective has resonance with the current study since the dominance of male assumptions and the homogeneous nature of leadership is such that the application of a standpoint feminist perspective will provide the opportunity to unmask the taken for granted.

The exploration of how ECEC personnel understand and enact leadership follows Harding’s (1993) advice to engage with the lives of those marginalised in order to
reveal the unexamined assumptions influencing leadership activity and to promulgate critical questions and less partial and distorted accounts (p. 6).

There emerge a number of characteristics associated with a feminist standpoint. These include,

1. The exploration of relations between knowledge and power;
2. A deconstruction of the ‘knowing feminist’;
3. A grounding however problematic in women’s experiences of emotions and embodiment;
4. An appreciation of the diversity of women’s experiences and the interconnecting power relations between women; and,
5. The appreciation that knowledge from a feminist standpoint is always partial. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 65)

The adoption of a feminist perspective raises a series of issues and dilemmas that can result in a sense of paralysis. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) provide an account of some of the challenges and critiques levelled at standpoint feminism and its link to a less sophisticated past. They acknowledge the limitations of this approach but appreciate the emergence of a hierarchical intellectual culture, which sees some versions of feminism as more valued and appropriate. This they see as an unfortunate side-effect of postmodern thought combined with a competitive academic work place which results in a view that “certain kinds of feminist thought are deemed worthy of respect, funding or promotion” (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002, p.166). The consequence of such divisions is the minimisation of feminism’s subversive power through fears of institutional marginalisation. According to Harding (cited in Hennessy 1995) women’s lives are necessarily multiple and contradictory and that feminists need to replace the desire for unity around women’s common experiences with political solidarity based on goals shared with other groups struggling against Western hegemony. The relevance for this study is that while there are multiple places from which to express feminist theory, (and one is aware that some places are more acceptable than others within the academy), there remains a desire to unpack the gender/knowledge/power relations within ECEC leadership. The application of a feminist standpoint perspective provides one means to undertake such a task.
Methodological implications of using symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminism

The methodological implication of using symbolic interactionism is that this approach captures the “interpretive process of interaction as it occurs in the experience of the human which uses it” (Zeitlin, 1973, p. 217). To achieve understanding (verstehen) of a situation, Weber considers it important to come to see the situation from the view of the participant (Crotty, 1998). In this way, the researcher needs to catch the process of interpretation through which individuals constitute their actions. However, this is not possible from observation of the product or the surrounding conditions. Rather, this requires the researcher taking the role of the other in order to see the process from the standpoint of the other (Jesser, 1975). Thus, if researchers remain aloof (as would an objectivist researcher), they could run the risk of the worst kind of subjectivism as they are likely to fill in the process of interpretation with their own surmises in place of the interpretation of those involved.

How women in early childhood education interpret leadership and define their actions I in relation to the actions of others Me is central to this research. The notions of constructionism and symbolic interactionism acknowledge the need for understanding from the perspective of the participants. Specifically, symbolic interactionism values the subjective insights and feelings of those involved since humans are able to participate and be aware of this participation (reflexivity). This capacity to interpret and subsequently redefine actions based on the actions of others Me makes symbolic interactionism relevant and appropriate as a methodology for this present study.

Summary
Symbolic interactionism seeks to understand human action based on the individual’s interpretation rather than on the impact of social conditions. It is how the individual Me tempers the initial I reaction to reflect the needs of others and social expectations that are of importance. As Jesser (1975) states, “there is no empirically observable activity in human society that does not spring from some acting unit (human action)” (p. 312). It is the action of the individual in terms of the interaction and subsequent interpretation that is the focus of the data collection process and the subsequent
analysis in this study. A standpoint feminist perspective affords the opportunity to “produce the best current understanding of how knowledge of gender is interrelated with women’s experiences and the realities of gender” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 61). The energetic use of symbolic interactionism and to a lesser degree standpoint feminist theory provides the potential to capture individual interpretations of leadership through various women’s experiences within ECEC and unpack lingering assumptions about women and leadership.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

This study explores how the notion of leadership is understood and enacted by individuals in the field of ECEC. I chose to use interviews and focus groups as data collection methods consistent with understandings of symbolic interactionism. In addition, monitoring and collection of documents relating to the area of leadership in ECEC was undertaken. The document collection method involved monitoring and collecting artefacts that participants identified as relevant to their understanding of leadership in ECEC. This process supplemented the interviews and focus groups. It offered a means to observe the field of ECEC and add an historical and contextual dimension to the interviews and focus groups (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

How the data were collected

There were three stages of data collection in this study. Each stage addressed a particular focus of the study and each of the stages is outlined in Table 1 and discussed in turn. In studies that employ a symbolic interactionist framework, the use of interviews is common. Deegan and Hill (1987) provide a volume containing at least thirteen accounts of research with such a framework in the area of gender studies. In eleven of the thirteen reports, interviews were the major, if not the only, form of data collection. In most cases, the number of individuals interviewed ranged between fifteen and fifty (Deegan & Hill, 1987).

Stage one: Semi-structured interviews

The interview offers the researcher the opportunity to investigate and prompt the things that we cannot see (Wellington, 2000). In other words, the interview offers the chance to learn about things that are not apparent and it is often referred to as a conversation with a purpose (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Berg, 1995). This study takes Wellington’s (2000) view that the interview gives a person a voice and a platform to make their views known and ultimately read.
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<th>Method</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage One</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with:</td>
<td>How is leadership understood and enacted in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care?</td>
<td>Early analysis of interview data by the researcher.</td>
<td>Transcription of audiotaped interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January to</td>
<td>• EC students (6)</td>
<td>* Sub questions that contribute and respond to the principal research question</td>
<td>Emerging themes identified and used to formulate the topics for focus groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2003</td>
<td>• academics (6)</td>
<td>• <em>What does the term leadership mean to you?</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• preschool directors (5)</td>
<td>• <em>How do you see ECEC leadership being enacted at a service, local and national level?</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• family day care coordinators (2)</td>
<td>• <em>Are there any issues in the field of ECEC that you think require leadership attention?</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>and family day care – carers (groups)</td>
<td>• <em>What factors do you believe impact on the adoption or rejection of leadership in ECEC?</em></td>
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<td>• child care directors (3) and</td>
<td>• <em>What implications do these understandings have for leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care?</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• personnel in allied organisations (4)</td>
<td>• <em>What literature/publications etc. influence your notions of leadership?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Two</td>
<td>Two focus groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emerging themes from the interviews used as the basis for focus group discussion.</td>
<td>Transcription of audiotaped focus groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Preschool teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Students undertaking a B.Ed (EC)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Three</td>
<td>Document collection</td>
<td>What material in the professional journals etc reflect leadership in ECEC?</td>
<td>Ongoing throughout the data collection phase.</td>
<td>Publications, etc. that reflect leadership in ECEC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews are relevant within a symbolic interactionist methodology. Berg (1995) makes a clear link between symbolic interactionism and interviews. He proposes the notion of a dramaturgical model to address the encounter and performance elements of the interview. As drama is a symbolic action in which some humans act symbolically for others to watch symbolically. What transpires between the actor and the audience (in this case the researcher) is the social performance. Given this, the use of interviews in this study sits comfortably with the symbolic interactionism.

The semi-structured interview form used in this study afforded the possibility to deviate from the set questions, thus providing more flexibility than the structured interview (Wellington, 2000). Unlike the unstructured interview, the semi-structured interview affords the researcher the chance to provide some concepts for consideration by the interviewee. The semi-structured or semi-standardised interview involves many elements evident in effective focus groups (discussed later in this chapter). For example, it requires some form of interview guide or checklist, effective and considered questions and their application (Wellington, 2000). There are also many similarities between the moderator in the focus group and the interviewer. In this study, the interview questions were made available to the participants in advance, along with an overview of the intentions of the study.

The researcher needs to be aware of a number of factors when preparing for the interview process. Interviewers need to build rapport with the interviewee. According to Berg (1995), appearance and demeanour impact on the way the interviewer is perceived. To elaborate on the interview repertoire, Berg (1995) provides the following ten recommendations.

2. Remember the purpose and have questions nearby or memorised.
3. Present a natural front and appear relaxed, affirmative and as natural as possible.
4. Demonstrate aware hearing and offer the subject appropriate non-verbal responses.
5. Dress appropriately. This will depend on the context.
6. Conduct the interview in a comfortable place and ensure confidentiality.
7. Don’t be satisfied with monosyllabic responses…even silence might yield additional information.

8. Be respectful of participants, as they are integral to your research.

9. Practice to improve interview technique.

10. Be cordial and appreciative (Berg, 1995).

Consideration was given to these factors in preparing for the undertaking of the interviews in this study.

In all, twenty-six semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of participants in the ECEC field (see Table 2). The participants were located in various states of Australia including Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania. An attendee at my presentation conducted at the Australian Research in Early Childhood Education Conference in January 2003, suggested the addition of a group for people working in organisations that support ECEC services but not directly involved in work with children. This person was interested in participating in the research study but did not fit into any of the groups that I had planned. After discussion with my supervisors and notification to the ethics committee, this addition was included. The interview participants’ details are in Table 2.

Table 2 Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Pre school Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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In addition, I attended playgroups with family day care providers in New South Wales and Victoria.

The participants were indirectly invited to be involved in the research study. Third and fourth year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) students, at a university in New South Wales, were invited to participate. They were asked to approach me for the information pack (Appendix A) if they were interested and could then choose to return the consent form to me if they wished to be interviewed (Appendix D). Preschool teachers and long day care directors in a major regional centre were also invited to participate in either an interview or focus group and received this invitation via a posted information pack (Appendix B). Consent forms (Appendix D) were attached. The reason for the choice of these two groups was the belief that it would
be too difficult to access academics or people working in services supporting ECEC services in a focus group situation. This initial mail out was followed up with another small mail out to a wider region to ensure a greater number of interview and focus group participants. This subsequent mail out elicited a greater response for the preschool group, making a focus group viable but resulted in only three long day care directors. It became evident that a focus group, as planned initially for this group, would not be viable. Two family day care coordinators were willing interviewees. They offered to do so after there was no response for interviews from the family day care providers they supervised. Although the coordinators had received the information pack, had discussed, and distributed it to their carers, there was no response for interview. In discussion with the coordinators, it was their view that the information pack and associated ethics details were somewhat daunting, as was the notion of participating in an interview. I decided to attend a playgroup for carers where I could engage with them about the topic in an informal and less threatening environment. I did this by attending a playgroup in New South Wales and another in Victoria and found the carers to be considerate and forthcoming in their responses to my questions. The coordinators’ recognition of the imposing nature of the materials was verified during my playgroup visits. In one visit, a carer asked if I was in fact a “validator” indicating her belief that I may be there for some purpose other than my stated intention.

Academics were invited to participate during a conference presentation I conducted at the Australian Research in Early Childhood Education Conference, in Melbourne in January 2003. This was a form of opportunistic sampling (Burns, 1994) used because the context provided a national ECEC audience mixed with academics, practitioners and others related to the ECEC field, thus the potential for a more geographically diverse group of participants. Those who expressed interest were later mailed an information pack (Appendix C) and invited to return the consent form (Appendix D). All (of those people) who initially expressed interest returned the consent form and subsequently participated in an interview. At this conference, and after the suggestion to have an additional interview group, two other participants agreed to be involved and later another person fitting this category expressed interest. Information packs were posted to participants with the request they return the consent form, and later participate in interviews.
Stage two: Focus groups
Exploring of notions of leadership in a group setting has the potential to elicit different perspectives to those provided in a one on one encounter. The second stage of the data collection involved the use of two focus groups.

Those preschool teachers and students who chose the focus group as their preferred option for participation determined the composition of the focus groups. Insufficient long day care personnel responded making a focus group not possible. It was decided to hold only two focus groups and to conduct additional interviews where possible. These groups were conducted at times and places that were suitable for the participants. One preschool teacher did not attend as planned. In both cases, the discussions lasted over two hours with participants eager and forthcoming. The value of focus groups in this study was that they offered a means to witness how the group interactions affected the individual expression of their understandings of leadership. Are these understandings, tempered by the Me to accommodate the dominant discourses of the group? In this way, focus groups and symbolic interactionism afforded an opportunity to see the impact of the group (of ECEC) on the individual.

Commonly, reference is made to focus groups as group interviews and they are increasingly applied to data collection in the social sciences. This data collection method offers a device that is confluent with the theoretical tenets of symbolic interactionism. Focus groups allow for collective human interaction (Madriz, 2000). This is valuable for two reasons. They afford the participants an opportunity to engage in interactive dialogue, secondly it allows the researcher to witness this interaction, and the subsequent “interpretive interactionism” discussed by Denzin (1989) and cited in Berg (1995) and Madriz (2000). In focus groups, the climate should be developed to facilitate an active and dynamic sharing that facilitates the individual construction of meaning in the social context (Madriz, 2000). This process is of importance to the symbolic interactionist approach.

Focus groups can offer the participants the opportunity for interaction with others as a valuable and desirable activity (Greenbaum, 2000; Madriz, 2000; Morgan, 1997).
According to Madriz (2000), focus groups offer those involved free expression and the chance to speak up. This “plurality of actors” makes the process more dynamic and contributes to the development of shared stocks of knowledge (Madriz, 2000, p. 831). Greenhaum (2000) considers that the focus group encourages participants to interact with each other so the quality of the output is enhanced. Likewise Berg (1995) considers that, when focus groups are correctly facilitated, they are dynamic and can produce a synergistic group effect when people react to the comments of others stimulating further discussion (Morgan, 1997a). This allows participants to draw from others and to brainstorm collectively with others in the group (Berg, 1995). While this is generally a positive aspect of focus groups, it can be negative if participants are compliant to dominant viewpoints. Morgan (1997a) uses the phrase “group think” (p. 50) to highlight the potential for participants to suppress their dissent in favour of maintaining consensus. In such a case the Me aspect of the self would be dominant over the I. Here the role of the moderator is important in ensuring that there is the capacity and opportunity for all participants to have their say.

Focus groups are considered conducive to actualising the voices of women. Madriz (2000) suggests that focus groups are particularly suited to uncovering the daily experiences of women through the,

- collective stories and resistance narratives that are filled with cultural symbols, words, signs and ideological representations that reflect the different dimensions of power and domination that frame women’s quotidian experiences. (p. 69)

In this way, the use of focus groups is well suited to eliciting responses from the highly feminised field of early childhood education and care.

Resistant respondents and overly talkative respondents can prove challenging (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) and the moderator needs to monitor participant involvement to afford all parties opportunities to contribute. In relation to the interviewer, ambiguous or leading questions can also be problematic as they can lead to bias (Wellington, 2000). In addition, an overly ambitious schedule can result in fatigue. In this study, each focus group was allocated two-hours. This provided
sufficient time for the group to arrive, settle, and discuss some informal introductory questions. This process then lead to more specific questions by using the funnel technique. This approach begins with less direction and free discussion moving towards more structured engagement with specific questions (Morgan, 1997a). In the case of each focus group, the two-hour time allocation was exceeded. Participants were very much engaged in the discussions and somewhat reluctant to leave.

In pragmatic terms, focus groups are considered both time and cost effective (Madriz, 2000) although a number of issues need to be addressed to ensure quality. These include attention to the environment, the role of the moderator and the development of the discussion guide. The environment should be one that is non-threatening, private and has an ambience (Krueger, 1993). This was achieved in these focus groups by the provision of a quiet, secure meeting room with tea and coffee facilities. The discussion guide prepared in advance should list the questions that will channel the discussion while avoiding directing the group into a predetermined role (Morgan, 1997a). The initial questions should be quite general making participant responses easy. This beginning can lead to more substantive questions. In this study, participants were forwarded possible focus group questions to provide some contextual focus for participants (Appendix B). However, there was not a sequential use of these and they were only a guide for discussion.

This study sought a compromise between high and low moderator directed focus groups. This involved a funnel strategy with the initial questions being less structured allowing for free discussion and then, moving to a more structured discussion of specific issues. It is possible to have high moderator directed focus groups, or alternatively, groups that have low moderator direction (Morgan, 1997a). High moderator directed encounters can provide for some comparability of various groups if the same discussion guide is used. Low moderator groups use what Morgan (1997a) terms “key topics” (p. 53) to steer the group members if the group do not spontaneously explore them. In low moderator directed groups, the aim is to:

- legitimise the members’ responsibility to manage the discussion,
- provide clues as to how to manage common problems,
- encourage as many diverse perspectives as possible,
have the participants use questions to direct the flow of the interaction,
value participants’ experiences,
and stress that all experiences are equally valuable to the researcher. (Morgan, 1997a)
The role of moderator involves establishing and maintaining rapport with the participants and demonstrating sincerity, humour, flexibility and a keen memory (Krueger, 1993).

Ethically, focus groups suffer as all participants are privy to the contributions of others in the group (Morgan, 1997a). However, this limits the kinds of topics possible for exploration in focus group situations. However, this situation can in part be addressed by having all members of the group sign a statement of confidentiality (Berg, 1995). In this study, it is not anticipated that the topic of leadership is so sensitive as to inhibit a free interchange between participants however, the issue of awareness of others’ comments and views remains. The researcher asked participants to refrain from sharing or reinterpreting the issues and comments made by particular individuals with people outside the focus group.

Stage three: Collection of documents
This study uses the acquisition of documents to provide corroboration for interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Analysing the content of the documents may raise questions about emerging hunches and provide new directions for observations and interviews. Documents also can provide information unavailable from other sources (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Artefacts
In this study, interview participants were asked to identify any literary materials that they found particularly useful in terms of leadership. These responses were noted and those available were accessed. In the main, these responses included reference to journals and newsletters that the researcher already had access to but there was also reference to some general concepts and various books. These were sourced and provided some contextual background to the data analysis. For example, two participants identified the recently published book by Giuliani (2002), as influential to their understanding and enactment of leadership. This book provides a somewhat
traditional view of leadership as both positional and male dominant (Giuliani, 2002). This is evident in the author’s interpretation of his role as the mayor of New York and his identification with other great, mostly male leaders (2002, p. 295 & 296). Pragmatically, Giuliani constantly uses the male pronoun “he” in references to leaders indicating his inherent belief in the maleness of leadership. Work by Robbins et al., (2004) suggests that Giuliani was until September 11 considered an “arrogant, self-serving” combatant style leader. Because of the tragedy, he emerged as a hard-nosed administrator and a caring and emotional leader. This illustrates the influence of context, which was, for the New York community, dominated by a fear and uncertainty that apparently required an alternative leadership style, which these authors suggest Giuliani provided. If as suggested, this work is influential to these ECEC personnel it is providing traditional and gendered notions of leadership. Many participants identified work by Rodd (1998) as having influenced their views of leadership. This publication reflects various leadership literatures with an adaptation of these to the ECEC context. Despite subsequent research projects in the area of leadership in ECEC this work by Rodd remains seminal.

Articles and journals identified by participants included a wide range of materials from both ECEC sources and beyond. Amy (an academic) referred to spirituality and Buddhism in particular, as influential to her understanding of leadership. She considers this material relevant in terms of its attention to compassion in leadership and in avoiding leadership driven by ego. She elaborates on this stating that “you have to be a highly developed person to be able to have those skills as a good leader…” and this involves attention to others. “I know someone in a business sense who has a new manager who is not a leader. I was thinking well why isn’t this person a leader…because he’s bloody selfish…because he’s a selfish, egocentric…” (Int. P. p. 21). She links Buddhism with compassion and reiterated that understanding of other people is integral to good leadership. This participant is drawing on material beyond the ECEC field to inform her understandings of leadership and chooses to access material separate to traditional leadership literature.

*Dealing with the data*

Each interview and the two focus group discussions were taped and later transcribed. Transcription involved the word processing of the entire interaction between the
interviewer and the participants (except where the quality of the tape prevented exact transcription). Ongoing transcription allowed for early consideration of the data and this meant that some of the material from the interviews was available prior to the undertaking of the focus groups. For each focus group, the interview material from the related interview participant group was reviewed and the emerging themes identified. This was shared with the focus group for consideration and discussion. Due to the size of the transcripts it was prohibitive to include them as appendices in this document however; copies of all transcripts are kept in printed and electronic versions.

Field diary
Throughout the data collection phase of the study I maintained a field diary in which I recorded the organisation details of the data collection process along with my interpretations of the mood, interests and body language noted in the participants. Field notes afford the researcher the vehicle to make reflections, define hunches and identify emerging themes (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I made notes in this diary at the conclusion of interviews and focus groups and recorded aspects that were pertinent to the study and elaborated upon the participants’ comments. This diary provided the chance for me to reflect on the contextual aspects of the interviews and focus groups, adding another dimension to the data gathering process. For example, it allowed me to record the enthusiasm with which participants engaged in the discussion. The following extract provides an example of my diary entry after an interview with a participant I had not met previously.

Interview with Chantelle, Saturday 24 May 2003

I met with Chantelle at her home where she generously provided me with some lunch. I met her at 12:30pm and left around 3pm. She was very generous with her time and feelings, passionately talking about her involvement in the ECEC field in Victoria over the past 10-15 years. Her work is mainly in the area of in-service with teachers and her focus is diversity and equity of which she spoke enthusiastically.

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1 Transcription was completed by a paid assistant funded through a Charles Sturt University Education Faculty Seed Grant.
Chantelle was relaxed but focused and accidentally developed an analogy of two styles of leadership. ‘Microwave leadership’ is intense, forthright, confident and assertive. The ‘slow cook oven’ is more the quite, persistent and less obtrusive approach—over a longer period for a more collaborative impact and change. She saw both of these approaches as valid dependent upon the context. Chantelle was thoughtful; developing her ideas and expanding her ideas as the discussion proceeded. She explained some of her leadership activity but did not refer to these as such…or not in such terms. We covered the questions but in quite an unstructured way with the discussion covering approximately 1.5 taped hours. Chantelle has a real passion for ECEC and I was quite astounded about her generosity in sharing her thoughts and feelings on such a wide range of issues.

This diary entry provides some contextual information, particularly in terms of the participant’s passion for the topic, and her willingness to give of her time and ideas. This adds richness to the data not plainly evident through transcriptions alone. The value of this diary content to the study lies mainly in helping me to revisit the interview context “to visualise the moment, the person, the setting, the day” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 47). At the time, it served as a useful means to keep track of the organisation of interviews, my reflections on the process and details of the participants’ non-verbal language.

Trustworthiness of the data
Guba and Lincoln (1985, as cited in Wellington, 2000) devised the notion of trustworthiness as an alternative to the established concepts of validity and reliability. The notions of reliability and validity remain contested in the qualitative paradigm where authors attest to their value irrespective of one’s theoretical orientation or data collection methods (Silverman, 2001). According to Silverman (2001), reliability requires standardised methods in writing field notes in the
preparation of transcripts and it would seem prudent to ensure that data are dealt with
in an organised and systematic manner. It can also require comparing analysis of the
same data by several researchers. This avoids the tendency of researchers to select
their data to fit their preconception of the phenomenon or the possibility of selection
based on the exotic nature of the material rather than more indicative material
(Silverman, 2001). In this study, some data collected in the early stages was shared
with ECEC personnel through a conference presentation at the Australian Early
presenting unanalysed data at seminars is valuable. This afforded the opportunity to
compare early analysis of the data with others, as suggested by Silverman (2001).

In this study symbolic interactionism highlights the perceptions of participants as
paramount. In terms of validity, Silverman (2001) discusses the notions of
triangulation and respondent validation. Triangulation is commonly viewed as a
combination of techniques to collect data to increase trustworthiness (Glesne &
Peshkin, 1992). Validation refers to participants reading transcripts and confirming
the content as consistent with their intended meaning. Silverman (2001) suggests
that both triangulation and validation are problematic in qualitative research.
Triangulation ignores the “context-bound and skilful character of social interaction
and assumes that members are ‘cultural dopes’ who need a social scientist to dispel
their illusions” (Silverman, 2001, p. 235). In relation to respondent validation,
Silverman (2001) suggests that this too should not be adopted without an awareness
of the limitations. While this can provide more data, it assumes that the respondents
can and are interested in the report, and that their comments are more privileged than
those of the researcher. Subsequently, this method serves more as a source of
additional data collection rather than a method of validation. In contrast, Silverman
(2001) suggests that validating qualitative studies should attend to analytic induction;
the constant comparative method; deviant-case analysis; comprehensive data
treatment and the appropriate use of tabulations (p. 236). In this study, participants
were not asked to validate their transcripts since direct transcription of the tapes were
made and the problematic nature of this activity as suggested by Silverman (2001)
above, was evident. However, the two participants Chantelle and Gloria whose
stories constitute the case studies in Chapter Eight were contacted to seek their
approval to use their material in this more specific way. In both cases, they were agreeable with the use of the material and made no suggestions for any change.

In this present study, the methods of data collection were varied (including interviews, focus groups and the identification of artefacts) and involved a range of participants within the field of ECEC. This provided the possibility for some corroboration of the findings between groups. Consideration of one’s biases is important in achieving trustworthiness (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this study, I am aware of my role as a leader in the local ECEC community and in the university setting. I realise this could be perceived as inherently pro-active leadership and a method of leading I would promote. The literature suggests that ECEC leadership is more complex than access to positional leadership roles and the nature of the field may reflect a deviant style of leadership to that in traditional leadership literature. Thus, my own position is relevant but not biased.

In early analysis of data and in the latter stages of data collection, I searched for examples that illustrated alternatives to the emerging themes. This satisfies the search for deviant cases in order to attend to trustworthiness (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In addition, the sharing of work with colleagues, friends and respondents contributes to establishing the trustworthiness of the research. Glesne and Peshkin (1992), also see the researcher’s recognition of the limitations of the study, as contributing to trustworthiness of the research.

**ETHICAL ISSUES**

The Australian Code of Ethics for Research in Education (Bibby, 1997) provides a sound underpinning to my ethical perspective in this study. I support the notion that ethics should support and not harm human flourishing (Bibby, 1997). In the Australian education context, there are four basic principles:

1. Research must enhance the general welfare.
2. Researchers must recognise that educational research is an ethical matter and its purpose should be the development of human good.
3. That there is no risk of harm to an individual.
4. Recognition of the dignity and worth of persons shall take precedence over self-interest of researchers, employers, clients, colleagues or groups (Bibby, 1997).

I consider it necessary and part of my ethical commitment to attend to the prevention of harm, the acquisition of consent, the possibility of deception or secrecy, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and considerations in reporting and publication (Bibby, 1997). Wellington (2000) further suggests that the main criterion for educational research is that it be ethical and that this should override all other considerations. To avoid ethical pitfalls, Wellington (2000) defines eight rules:

1. No participants should be involved without their prior knowledge or permission and informed consent, i.e. they know what they are letting themselves in for and where your ‘findings’ might be publicised.
2. No attempt should be made to force people to do anything unsafe, or do something unwillingly, e.g. have their voice tape-recorded.
3. Relevant information about the nature and purpose of the research should always be given.
4. No attempt should be made to deceive the participants.
5. Avoid invading participants’ privacy or taking too much of their time.
6. Benefits should not be withheld from some participants (e.g. in a control group) or disadvantages imposed upon others (e.g. in a control or experimental group). All participants should be treated fairly, with consideration, with respect and with honesty.
7. Confidentiality and anonymity should be maintained at every stage, especially in publication. (Wellington, 2000, p. 57)

As a researcher, I consider it my personal and professional responsibility to conduct this study in an ethical manner. This is not an externally driven requirement, but rather by a belief that accessing others’ attitudes and perspectives carries with it a responsibility to respect their contribution. According to Newman (2000) the responsibility for ethical research rests with the individual researcher’s own moral code as the strongest defence against unethical behaviour. It is the integrity and values of the individual that are the focus. According to others, it is an overriding sense of honesty and openness that should prevail (Wellington, 2000). Evolving discussions in the area of ethics reflect a poststructuralist perspective, which suggests
that ethics exist without a foundational ethical code that is seen to provide certain and universal answers (Moss, 2001). This view is reflective of Foucault’s notion that ethics are an intellectual freedom rather than an abstract normative code, suggesting, “we are our own moral agents” (Moss, 2001, p. 1). This implies an individual responsibility on the part of the researcher to determine and define ethical research practice.

**Ethical issues raised by the research problem and design**

It would seem prudent to consider both the Code of Ethics for Research in Education and the debate around the responsibility of the individual researcher in determining what aspects of the research problem and design require particular ethical attention. In terms of Wellington’s (2000) ‘rules’, all participants in the present study were over eighteen years of age and included only after they had signed and returned an informed consent form. Participants were provided details pertaining to the study in an information letter (see Appendix A, B & C, for consent forms see Appendix D). This information provided a brief explanation of the area of investigation, the institutional ethical clearance and the ability of participants to withdraw from the study at any time. It was acknowledged that the interviews would be audiotaped and reference was made to the way that confidentiality of participants would be addressed. This has relevance given the size of the ECEC field and the possibility that participants could be identifiable by others, particularly if locations were noted. These letters were provided to the QUT University Human Research Ethics Committee as part of the ethics application. Ethical approval to undertake data collection was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee on 25 February 2003.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Initially the process of data analysis can appear nebulous and some authors even suggest it is somewhat mysterious, ambiguous (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), and debateable (Gibbs, 2002). In some cases the correct or incorrect ways to undertake the activity are not clearly defined (Wellington, 2000) resulting in the utilisation of a variety of strategies amongst researchers. Despite its somewhat obscure nature, the process is said to involve “bringing meaning to raw, inexpressive data” (Marshall &
Rossman, 1999). Analysis involves the description of phenomena, its classification and the identification of interconnecting elements (Dey, 1993) from a particular methodological position, or positions. Analysis brings meaning to data and illustrates how what is said relates to the experiences and lives of those participants involved in the research (Silverman, 2001). Qualitative data analysis is descriptive and generally emphasises theory generation (Tesch, 1990). Usually, qualitative researchers are about finding what the problem is in preference to providing an answer (Dey, 1993). This is particularly relevant to the present study since the question of leadership in ECEC and how it is enacted is exploratory, rather than aimed at finding solutions. In accordance with the interpretivist framework of this study, qualitative data analysis offers a holistic view of the research and affords an understanding of how participants are giving meaning to the worlds in which they live.

In this study, the methods of data collection include interviews, focus groups and document analysis. As a result, data takes the form of text generated from transcriptions of the interviews and focus groups, note taking and some artefacts in the form of journals and book titles. These data underwent some early analysis. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), early analysis is important in order to adjust observation strategies, ensure experiences that facilitate understanding and exercise control over emerging ideas by checking or testing of these ideas during subsequent data collection. It is also important that the researcher organise data so that it is easily manipulated and retrievable (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Gibbs (2002) considers the prerequisite for effective data analysis to be the efficient, systematic and consistent management of data.

Data analysis was guided by Wellington’s (2000) stages and outlined below.

*Stage one: Immersion.* This involves reading the transcripts and getting a real feel for participants' comments around the notion of leadership in ECEC. Such a reading explores potential themes and topics, but with a degree of discipline and direction (Dey, 1993). In this study, this immersion took place prior to the focus groups and then again when all the transcripts were complete. This involved keeping the field diary, which informed the planning, and implementation of both the interviews and
the focus groups. I endeavoured to refine my interview style to maximise its effectiveness through reflection on the previous interviews. Reading the transcripts helped me to provide a summary of the emerging themes for the focus group participants, which then formed the basis of those discussions. Careful reading of the complete set of transcripts at the conclusion of the data collection phase allowed me the chance to consider carefully the emerging issues.

Stage two: Reflection. This stage involves standing back from the data in order to remove oneself from the intimacy of the collection process. This requires a space to think and contemplate the data by talking with colleagues and having specified study time to allow for consideration of the data in an uninterrupted space. Fortunately, time for reflection was possible in this study by the securing of six months leave from work to focus on my study. This allowed me time to stand back from the data and to contemplate it in consultation with my supervisors and peers. This was important in that it afforded me the chance to share and debate my interpretations of the data with others. Writing for publication during this stage (Hard, 2001; Hard, Tayler, & Danby, 2004; Hard, 2004; Hard, 2005) assisted me in clarifying my application of the theoretical framework to the data and sharing emerging themes with colleagues and peers.

Stage three: Taking apart/analysing. In this stage, data are considered, and categories are developed and then coded. The establishment of categories allows the researcher to go beyond interpretation and create conceptual tools to classify and compare the important features of what is being studied (Dey, 1993). Creating categories involves “a process of abstracting from the immense detail and complexity of our data those features which are most salient for our purpose” (Dey, 1993, p. 94). This involves the grouping of data that are similar or related to others. Dey (1993) considers it important to devise criteria for each category in order to illustrate how one category is distinguishable from others.

How categories are defined requires the identification of salient themes, recurring ideas (or language) and patterns (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Dey (1993) defines the generation of categories as involving four elements: forming inferences from the data; considering the initial or emergent research questions; attention to substantive
policy or theoretical issues; the use of imagination, intuition and previous knowledge (Dey, 1993, p. 101). In this way, the researcher identifies issues that emerge from the data and relate these to the initial research question, previous study or literature in the area.

To deal with the data in this study, I developed a codebook in which I noted the issues that emerged throughout the very careful reading of the interview transcripts. A record was made of each issue, with a notation of the interview group from which it emerged and the specific page number and interview noted. A sample of this coding is included in Appendix E. This process allowed identification of emerging themes from the data and in a manner that provided quick visual reference to those more frequently emerging issues. It also provided very specific details in the form of the page number and the interview to facilitate easy access. Appendix F provides a summary of the issues that emerged from this analysis of the data. After the initial identification of issues and the formation of the table (Appendix F) there was further refinement with some issues being combined due to their similarities. In some cases, the words used to define the issues were verbalised by the participants, as in the case of “vision” and “microwave leadership”. In other cases, where concepts were discussed in varied ways, I labelled the issue. This is evident in the case of “horizontal violence” which refers to covert and overt hostility in the workplace, and is “the symptom of the dynamics around oppression and a sense of powerlessness” (Hastie, 2003, p. 2). When participants raised issues that had resonance with this concept, I used the term “horizontal violence” to define the issue.

Another, more refined table was produced to clarify the range of participants (within each participant group) that referred to each issue, (see Appendix G). This table indicates the issue in the left-hand column and then the number of individual participants within each participant group that referred to that particular issue. The value of this further refinement is that it illustrates how well spread the issues were across the participant groups. For example, in terms of salary issues, the academic group mentioned this on eight occasions but the participant column indicates that only six individuals referred to it within that participant group. The issue of training was mentioned on ten occasions but by only three participants within the allied
organisation group. Thus, the concentration of issues according to participants is evident.

These data tables (Appendix F & G) indicate the breadth of issues that arose in the interviews. Similarly, the focus group data were categorised according to issues that arose during the discussions and the page numbers noted according to each focus group (see Appendix H & I). These appendices illustrate issues that share similarities to the issues raised in the interviews but also raise others not previously identified. For example, there was reference in both interviews and the preschool focus group to the issue of “time”. In contrast, the preschool focus group spoke frequently about committees of management, which received a mention on only four occasions during the interviews. The student focus group made frequent mention of the notion of professional recognition, which is in the same vein as the interview participants referred to when they mentioned the status of the field. In contrast to the interview issues, the student focus group referred to the concept of leadership with children. These examples illustrate both congruence and incongruence between the interviewee responses and the focus groups. In subsequent discussion, the focus group material adds depth and clarity to issues from the interviews.

These appendices serve to organise the data but they do not at this point organise the data into groups of issues that pertain to the research questions. To achieve further refinement of the data and to allow for analysis and comparison of meanings within categories, particular issues were grouped together (Burns, 1994). This is consistent with what Burns (1994) defines as content analysis. This includes identifying themes, concepts and meanings. These can be counted numerically as in the case of the appendices and then examined for meaning. The categories are refined and explanation provided as to why certain foci are chosen rather than others (Burns, 1994, p. 288). Two broad categories were identified and these related directly to the research questions. The issues from Appendix G, which are the focus of analysis, have been divided into two categories. The first of these are issues related to the research question in terms of how ECEC personnel understand the notion of leadership and the second group relates to how the participants see leadership being enacted. Chapter Four will address the issues related to the understanding of leadership and Chapter Five will deal with the enactment of leadership. The
rationale for the identification of these issues lies in the interpretation that these issues are most relevant to the largest number of participants. However, this categorisation does not intend to diminish the relevance of other issues raised less frequently.

Stage four: Recombining and synthesising data. Here the researcher searches for patterns, themes and regularities in the data and this process is the constant comparative method (Wellington, 2000). Similar categories may be merged or others divided. This constant refinement allows for finding new patterns and relationships.

To manage the bulk of the data in this study, I decided to concentrate the analysis on the issues that were mentioned on twenty or more occasions (Appendix G). These issues are contained in the shaded area of the table. This decision is pragmatic since it is impossible, given the constraints of this document, to explore all issues in depth. However, some of the issues mentioned less than twenty times specifically were linked to other issues and consequently do receive analytic attention. For example, the term “nice ladies” was mentioned specifically on sixteen occasions but it emerges frequently in the discussions around horizontal violence, culture of conformity and status of the field, each of which were mentioned twenty times or more. Attention to the issues in the shaded area involves the application of symbolic interactionism as a methodological tool to help elucidate how individuals give meaning to their situations through their interactions with others (Blumer, 1969). Based on my understandings of symbolic interactionism and the role of standpoint feminist theory to this process of analysis, I have developed the following framework to apply to the data.

```
The Self influenced by interpretations of the I and Me  
\[\downarrow\]
Intersecting with standpoint feminist theory through the Me (Generalised Other)  
\[\downarrow\]
Understanding of leadership  
\[\downarrow\]
Enactment of Leadership
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Figure 4.1. Framework for analysis
This framework demonstrates the relationship between the key elements of symbolic interactionism, (those being interaction, interpretation, meaning and actions) to the meaning made and the subsequent actions undertaken by individuals (Blumer, 1969). It recognises the role of the *Self* and the elements of the *I* and *Me* in the process of interpretation. It also recognises the influence of standpoint feminist theory as an ingredient in this interpretive process. This framework applies to each issue to help elucidate how the individual makes meaning through their interactions and interpretations of those interactions and then how this is manifested in action. It is in the interpretive process that I consider how one’s gendered identity and other contextual factors, influence the individual. Therefore, this is where standpoint feminist theory intersects with symbolic interactionism since the socialised nature of women’s understandings of the world help to define their understanding of life experiences. Further elucidation of the relationship between the methodological approaches and the analysis of the data is provided in the latter part of this chapter.

*Stage five: Relating and locating data.* The researcher seeks to compare and contrast the categories with the existing literature to reflect and make sense of it. Wellington (2000) suggests exploring how categories compare or contrast with others in the literature. This defines the strengths and weaknesses of the data and methods compared to other studies, explains how and why theories have been applied to other inquiries and whether they should be applied to this study. In this stage, the researcher also comes to the point of knowing that the categories and themes are recurring, indicating that little gain can be made by further data collection.

*Stage six: Presenting data.* The researcher presents the data and analysis with the aim of being fair, clear, coherent and making it as attractive as possible. There should be particular consideration to how the voice of participants is included to represent them accurately in the study. In the present study, the participants’ voices are integrated into the text. This is to ensure the text flows and reflects the context of participants’ comments. After each quote the interview and page number are noted (for example, Int. A, p. 12).
Dissemination of findings

According to Wellington (2000), the sharing of data at seminars can assist researchers to conceptualise and make sense of the material. It can contribute also to the trustworthiness and reliability of the data (Wellington, 2000). Early emerging themes from this study were shared with colleagues through presentations at the Australian Early Childhood Association 2003 conference, the Australian Research in Early Childhood Education conference in 2003 and 2004 and the Queensland University of Technology 2001 and 2003 Post Graduate Conferences. In addition, a number of published papers have made the study accessible to various audiences throughout the research process (Hard, 2001; Hard et al., 2004; Hard, 2004; Hard, 2005). These publications (and associated conference presentations) have made the study accessible to the ECEC community providing readers and participants with the opportunity to comment on and analyse its validity and relevance. Various national and international requests for these papers have been forthcoming.

INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

In reading through the transcripts, coding issues emerging from the data and being mindful of the standpoint feminist theoretical stance discussed in Chapter Three, I have become increasingly aware (embedded within symbolic interactionism) of the emergence of two interconnecting categories. These I have defined as interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity.

Figure 5.1. Interconnecting categories

These mutually informing categories have emerged from the data and form the basis of the findings in this study. They emerged as participants discussed their
understandings of leadership and the ECEC field. These data indicate that a professional sense of self is influenced by the individual’s interpretation of various circumstances and interactions with others; hence, the term interpreted professional identity. The individual’s interpretation of their professional identity influences their sense of hesitancy or agency to conduct leadership and hence the definition of interpreted leadership capacity. In other words, their individual sense of professional identity is reflected in the ability to undertake leadership both within the ECEC field and for the field. Interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity are mutually influential factors, reinforced and compounded through the interactions and subsequent interpretations of ECEC personnel both within and beyond the field. They constitute a means to understand and discuss the variety of fluid and multi-layered understandings of leadership illustrated by participants.

Symbolic interactionism provides a methodological tool to inform the process of data analysis and, rather than being a theory to which a researcher must subscribe, it is more a methodological position actualised in the analysis of the data. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism is not only a philosophical doctrine but also “an approach designed to yield verifiable knowledge of human group life and human conduct” (p. 21). The use of concepts such as the Self and the I and Me act as tools in analysis. In this way, symbolic interactionism serves both a philosophical and methodological purpose to elucidate how individuals actively interpret situations in terms of their constructions of interpreted professional identity, and the relationship this has to individual’s interpreted leadership capacity.

Feminist theory and symbolic interactionism in action
Initial coding of the interview transcripts highlighted a range of issues and demonstrated the frequency of comments. However, this level of analysis does not illustrate the application of symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminist theory. There are parallels drawn between symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminist theory in terms of the Self and the role of discourse in influencing individuals. Blumer (1969) considers that reflexive processes can yield and constitute self in which the concepts of the I and Me engage in contestation over the interpretation of various interactions. Similarly, Blackmore (1999) with a feminist perspective and in reference to identity formation considers discourses in society not determinative of a
“unitary self” but contributory in terms of agency, reflexivity and contradiction. Consequently, “individuals can feel both powerful and powerless in different discursive spaces” (Blackmore, 1999, p. 17). This suggests that individuals reflexively constitute their identities or sense of self within a context. Additionally this context can be an influential factor in such identity construction. This is very much by a process of self-interaction (Blumer, 1969).

This discussion has resonance with the concept of agency, since the reflexivity referred to in both symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminist theory in this study involves the individual as active in interpreting their circumstances.

**Interpreted professional identity**

The initial category identified from the data is termed *interpreted professional identity* (see Figure 5.1, p. 113) and this shall be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. This category emerged as participants raised a range of issues that related to the notion of who they are as professionals and various factors that contribute to their identities. In Chapter Six the category of *interpreted leadership capacity* will be explored.

In many cases, the participants referred to aspects of their professional lives that involved uncertainty with their status, salary and respect within the community. This is not a new finding in education. Others such as Fullan (1994) state, “teaching remains a weak profession in the eyes of the public and for many teachers themselves” (p. 241). In the ECEC field, Stonehouse (1994) relates the value society affords children and childhood as directly linked to the social status of the field. Hayden (1996) clearly links government support for children’s services with entrenched views of care and education as inherently being the role of the mother. Similarly, Blackmore (1993) identified the cult of domesticity where the work of women was naturally based within the home and subsequently had little value outside that context. Such external perceptions of women and their communal responsibilities appear to be influential in identity formation for ECEC personnel. For example, all participant groups and all participants except one mentioned the

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2According to Mead (cited in Blumer, 1969) “the process of self-interaction puts the human being over against his world instead of merely in it, [and] requires him to meet and handle his world through a defining process instead of merely responding to it and forces him to construct his action instead of merely releasing it” (p. 63 & 64).
issue of status, evident through the perceptions of others (beyond the ECEC field). The frequency of reference (see Appendix G) illustrates that those in the field interpret these perceptions in order to make meaning of their own identity as professionals.

In symbolic interactionist terms “the development of a generalized other by the individual is really the internalization of society as the individual has come to know it” (Charon, 1995, p. 72). In this study, the generalized other includes a breadth of social influences that inform participants’ notions of the ECEC field and its value. Here symbolic interactionism helps to illustrate that it is the influence of the generalized other that is affecting how ECEC professionals make meaning of their own professional identity and consequent actions. This attention to a profession has frequently been the interest of symbolic interactionists (Cuff et al., 1984) as such researchers seek to understand the relationship between the Self and consequent self esteem in relation to one’s profession (Cuff et al., 1984). Goffman’s work with restaurant personnel elicited the notion of “‘front’ and ‘back’ regions” (1959, p. 107) to explore how the persona adopted by waiters, as they serve the public, contrasted with their attitude while back of house. This work illustrated that the performance provided for the client, by the waiters, reflected an attitude not actually held by the staff. “The staff, then, mount a collaborative performance to project themselves as the capable and committed deliverers of that service; they play back the clients’ own self-conceptions as the well-regarded, gratefully and gracefully serviced clients” (Cuff et al., p. 141). In ‘back of house’, the staff is able to vent their alternative persona reversing the relationship of servility and reinforce their sense of self. This example illustrates symbolic interactionist concerns about how people involved in work that has a low or negative social esteem, maintain their sense of self worth “in a society which told them they were worthless individuals” (Cuff et al., p. 140). In this study, ECEC personnel interpret a negative sense of their social value and this influences their own professional identity.

The category, interpreted professional identity, does not imply that all ECEC personnel take up a particular identity. In contrast, it identifies the diverse and problematic nature of ECEC professional identity and the way ECEC personnel view their role within their field (Larbalestier, 1998, p. 157). This category identifies a
struggle that participants in this study engage in as they interpret who they are as ECEC professionals influenced by the views, values and expectations of people both within and outside their field (Me). The Me is informed by traditional notions of leadership based on gender specific expectations, which feminist literature reports as inhibiting to many potential female leaders (Blackmore, 1999). This knowing of oneself, in terms of professional identity, has a relationship to how ECEC personnel understand and enact leadership. I will now explore professional identity from a standpoint feminist perspective and later consider the relationship to leadership.

Feminist notions of identity
Concepts of identity are part of feminist discussion and debate. Understanding this perspective helps to situate the highly feminised field of ECEC in a broader social context. For feminists, the notions of identity and difference are problematic (Jindy Pettman, 1998). Group identity can result in discrimination and gender specific violence. Jindy Pettman (1998) considers that defensive, revitalist and “aggressive identity politics reinscribe women as possessions, in ways that threaten actual women’s subjeckhood” (p. 334 & 335). This is problematic in that women are enmeshed in identity politics as symbols of difference, as markers of the community boundary, as reproducers, and as cultural transmitters of the group. A number of feminist authors point out that it is important to take difference seriously (Jindy Pettman, 1998; Larbalestier, 1998). According to Jindy Pettman (1998), this challenges feminists “to recognise and work with difference while resisting masculinist and exclusivist identity politics that use difference to trap women within or outside the boundary lines” (p. 336). With these cautioned understandings of women and identity, symbolic interactionism helps to illustrate the interactive nature of women in various contexts choosing to adopt or reject socially constructed and reinforced issues of identity.

The ability of women to interpret their interactions with others and the relationship this has to identity is not new to feminists. For example, Cox (1996) refers to the work of de Beauvoir (1949) in her discussion of how women construct their identities as wives, mothers, and their relationships with men. de Beauvoir asserts that women see themselves primarily through the eyes of others and it is others’ criteria, which establish to what women aspire and value (de Beauvoeur, 1972). In
other words, de Beauvoir is asserting that identity can be construed through the woman’s interpretation of how others see her. Here a confluence emerges between the symbolic interactionist ideas of individuals as active agents through the interaction of the I and Me with the Me being frequently dominant. Consequently, identity is influenced by the views of others, as suggested by Cox (1996) and de Beauvoir (1972), but only through the active interpretation of individuals who decide to what extent they will be influenced and how they will act as a result. In this study, I illustrate the interpretation of social attitudes and values by ECEC personnel and how this relates to the construction of professional identity and their enactment of leadership. If professional identity is strongly influenced by others (Me) as I suggest, it could facilitate a vulnerability that has the potential to support or diminish leadership aspirations and behaviour. In exploring the data, there were many instances where participants interpreted external influences which converted into limited confidence and motivation for leadership enactment in the field.

**Interpreted leadership capacity**

The second category relates to what I have identified as interpreted leadership capacity (see Figure 5.1, p 112). As a category, it reflects a range of issues and uncertainties expressed by participants in terms of leadership. It demonstrates a tension between confidence (and lack of it) to undertake leadership activity—in a sense a tension between leadership agency and hesitancy. This notion involves understandings of leadership that become troublesome between contexts when women step outside traditional gender roles/boundaries. Such uncertainty diminishes confidence to enact leadership beyond the service level and in some cases, impacts on leadership for the field. Participants illustrate a tension between leadership in ECEC where they feel some sense of agency and beyond in other contexts where there is a greater degree of hesitancy evident. Participants strongly highlight a team-based approach to leadership within the ECEC field but this approach did not appear to foster confidence when speaking about leadership beyond the field. Is this about isolation and insulation? The paucity of knowledge in terms of leadership theory demonstrated by participants and the lack of clarity in terms of articulating what it is that is done in ECEC, contributes to an individual’s interpreted leadership capacity. This supports work by Boyd (2001) who linked professional confidence with the ability to articulate and justify early childhood philosophy. Data analysis suggests
that leadership in ECEC is a complex interplay of confidence to act (agency) in more localised contexts tinged with hesitancy to engage in leadership activity in broader areas. This discussion suggests that such empowerment to act, or one’s interpreted leadership capacity, links to one’s interpreted professional identity, which I am proposing in ECEC remains contentious.

The most frequently mentioned issue for participants in this study was the absence of mentors and models within and beyond the field. This suggests a number of factors, (which shall be explored in Chapter Six), but indicates a desire to identify with or relate to others as leaders. It has relevance to the individual’s interpreted leadership capacity since models and mentors provide images of leadership in action. Such a finding has strong resonance with Sinclair (1998), who, in a study of women in leadership, found that all her interview participants volunteered the importance of female role models as catalysts for individual agency. “These role models show it can be done, that women can have influence on the world” (Sinclair, 1998, p. 85). Such identification relates to a sense of agency that leadership in ECEC is achievable and provides an image of how it can be manifested. How do ECEC personnel undertake leadership when their interpretations of identity are heavily influenced by external views of the value of women? This is a particularly pertinent question if women’s work and the conduct of women as carers and nurturers are not high status activities.

Symbolic interactionism helps to elucidate how some practitioners interpret their notions of leadership with confidence and a subsequent sense of agency and others feel a lower sense of self-efficacy. While feminist theory may illustrate the social discourses and practices that “tend to be more repressive than emancipatory for women” (Blackmore, 1999, p. 5), symbolic interactionism provides the vehicle to illustrate how individuals make their own interpretations of such discourses. For example, one practitioner near retirement has the confidence to speak up now she is no longer concerned about the need to conform to what she sees as expectations within and beyond the field, demonstrating a latent onset of agency. She illustrates the influence of the Me, when she states, “it’s often now older women, because they’re people like me where we’re at a point where we are saying, ‘I don’t care now. I’m going to say it because this is important and whether people like it or not I’m going to say it’” (Int. T, p. 22). This participant clearly relates her ability to
speak out to confidence—confidence to speak outside of the field and within it, overcoming the hesitancy that has previously determined her behaviour. This illustrates how complex is the notion of interpreted leadership capacity when individuals feel that only on their exit from the field can they truly speak their mind. Here there is evidence in ECEC of a strong discourse of what is acceptable and credible and who can speak for the field. In light of this, an individuals’ interpreted leadership capacity appears to be constrained. This manifests in a hesitancy to enact leadership for the ECEC field.

These categories of interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity will be the basis of the subsequent discussions in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. They are the result of the categorisation of the issues from the data in order to illustrate the diverse and multi-layered aspects to leadership in ECEC. Subsequent to their identification from the issues, they have become the analytical tools that have guided the analysis of the data through their strong alignment with feminist perspectives. These categories provide a feminist focus on the data with the view to achieving greater understanding of issues for both individual ECEC educators and women as a group in this female dominant field. As Devault (1999) suggests, feminists believe that women have been subordinated through men’s greater power, and are committed to women’s lives and concerns and strive to improve the status of women. More specifically, a feminist standpoint “…means being able to produce the best current understanding of how knowledge of gender is interrelated with women’s experiences and the realities of gender” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 60). Such values and intentions underpin this study. The categories determine the aspects of the data that symbolic interactionism helps to illuminate, generating the interpretive understandings that individuals make of leadership in ECEC. In summary, the conceptualisation of these categories affords me, as a researcher, a means to manage the data, to analyse it informed by symbolic interactionism and to interpret it through a lens of standpoint feminist theory.

Summary
The highly feminised nature of the ECEC field requires attention be paid to issues of gender and its influence on the way leadership is understood and enacted. With an epistemological foundation in constructionism, and a theoretical framework of
interpretivism, symbolic interactionism was adopted as a methodological tool. It is noted however, that feminist theory is not an equal partner to symbolic interactionism in the analytical process but rather plays complementary and informing role.

Early research work into leadership focused on qualitative methods underpinned by positivist assumptions however, more contemporary work has included qualitative approaches. The methods of data collection used in this study included individual interviews, focus groups and document collection which are consistent with the methodological tool of symbolic interactionism. These methods were designed for the researcher to understand individual interpretations of leadership and how meanings are related to personal leadership action. This chapter also explored the ethical considerations pertinent to this study and the process of analysis adopted. The final section provided an interpretive framework contextualising the analysis (for the forthcoming chapters) by using symbolic interactionism as a methodological tool complemented by standpoint feminist theory.
CHAPTER FIVE

UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP. THE RHETORIC OF LEADERSHIP

Introduction
This chapter is the first of three data chapters and includes both analysis and discussion of the data with a focus on how participants understand the notion of leadership. This discussion draws heavily on symbolic interactionism and to some degree standpoint feminist theory to provide the interpretive framework for the subsequent discussion of data and analysis. The interpretive framework (outlined in the later stages of Chapter Four) sits across this and the following two chapters. The voices of participants are incorporated by including references to the interview code and page number each time there is a quote. Details pertaining to the code, pseudonym and workplace of the participants are included in Appendix J.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND UNDERSTANDING ECEC LEADERSHIP
To analyse the data I draw on accounts from the interviews and the focus groups. These accounts are framed within the categories of interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity to illustrate how individuals see themselves and their leadership activity. The manner in which the participants understand the notion of leadership reflects multiple influences and contextual applications. There emerges an amalgam of understandings that reflect contemporary and popular leadership literature, general social perceptions of what constitutes leadership and understandings specific to the field of ECEC. These understandings are not always clearly defined or categorised and, in many cases, were difficult for participants to articulate. As leadership literature suggests, definitions of leadership are fluid and ill-defined often with competing paradigms and this is despite years of investigation (Robbins et al., 2004), and in this study participants’ responses reflect this.
Views of the field

How ECEC personnel understand leadership appears linked to the way in which ECEC personnel view their own field. Interpretations of the field’s value emerged across all participant groups as a major factor. While not directly related to leadership as such, the discussions of external perceptions of the field were frequent, detailed and often passionate. In many cases, participants interpret their own professional identity based on the external views of the field or the views of others. This was previously identified by Hayden (1996) and discussed in Chapter Two. She suggests that social attitudes demand mothers take responsibility for child rearing making the provision of childcare facilities an abdication of this responsibility. Interactions in society are indicative to many participants that the field of ECEC does not enjoy high esteem. Consequently, their own sense of who they are as professionals is similarly limited. Here the notion of self is constructing meaning from the influences of the broader society. The influence of the Me over the I is to the extent that individual beliefs of the inherit value of ECEC are abdicated for the discourses in society. Danielle, a coordinator of a number of ECEC services, suggests that ECEC personnel recognise that there is an undervaluing of their work and that they subsequently take on a profile of what they think the community or government expects. “Sometimes I think that they participate or they project this profile that really isn’t them…they take on more of a martyrism type of thing” (Int. J, p. 3). This is an example of how one participant views ECEC personnel interpreting their sense of professional identity through the eyes of others and using this as the basis for their behaviour. It has resonance with the work of Goffman discussed earlier (Cuff et al., 1984) where the waiters interpret their professional standing based on the views of their clients, which in turn influences their behaviour.

Heidi, a preschool teacher, discusses how she perceives the ECEC field as valued by families in contact with services but that this proves to be rhetoric not matched by funding. Another preschool teacher, Jodie, reflexively discusses the problem for her of wanting to be more a professional but not lose the caring and nurturing aspects. For Jodie, the tension is her desire for recognition against what she sees as the discourse of low status. She recounted her days as a student where others asked if she was in fact studying “advanced nappy changing” (Int. B, p. 8). According to Jodie, this situation remains for students today and that “we seem to be at the bottom of the
chain” (Int. B, p. 8). There is further evidence of this in Daryl’s comments as an early childhood student, when he expresses his hope for a higher public profile and value. “I think that we need to be out in the community a lot more and more vocal about our qualifications and what we are actually doing with children and why” (Int. Z, p. 4). This he considers necessary since “some people do consider it just baby-sitting” (Int. Z, p. 6). For Sarah a preschool teacher, there is a “desperate need for greater advocacy for our profession” (Int. C, p. 14). Sarah thinks that this may lead to greater status for the field but she acknowledges that she does not know how to go about achieving this herself. Jodie provides a clear example of the tensions that exist between her perceptions of the value of the field and those of others. She states that “it is such a deserving industry that we are just crying out for more recognition” (Int. J, p. 23) but where and how this can be achieved is unclear. There are links here to the work of Espinosa (1997) and Grieshaber (2001) discussed earlier, who appreciate the tension between the qualities required for early childhood personnel and those associated with leadership.

Josie is one of the two family day care coordinators. She discussed the status and social value of ECEC and provided the following account to illustrate what she sees as the low value afforded ECEC.

I mean, I can give an example. My daughter, years ago, commented at fifteen that she went and looked after a child after school each night because his mother [was] a school teacher—an educated person and when they went away she looked after the dog each night and they paid her more to feed the dog. What is this telling us? (Int. N, p. 5)

This quote illustrates Josie’s belief that the ECEC field is not particularly valuable or as deserving of the same pay as people who care for animals and she provides this example to illustrate the low social status of the ECEC field. In terms of leadership and ECEC personnel, a long day care centre director Danielle thinks “….it’s just not in their character makeup to actually be a leader” (Int. J, p. 24). Where does such a conclusion lead the ECEC field in terms of status and community profile?
Incongruence between contexts

Participants demonstrate tensions in how they understand leadership in the ECEC field and leadership beyond, in other contexts. For example, Maryanne, an early childhood student, describes a leader as being confident, supportive, approachable, and able to bring about new ideas and directions. She defined a difference between leadership in industry and leadership in ECEC when she states, “When I think of a company leader I think of a boss, but in early childhood I would not consider a leader a boss as such” (Int. V, p. 2). For Maryanne there were tensions between leadership in other contexts and leadership in ECEC. She defined aspects of nurturance and care as relevant to leadership but said that she would not expect that these would be so evident in leaders outside the ECEC field. This reflects Hayden’s (1996) work discussed earlier which explored the social expectations of women and mothers. For Maryanne, leadership in ECEC involves some reflection of how staff would be with children. Here she seeks to define leadership in ECEC as different to other leadership since there should be congruence with the work with children. Thus for Maryanne, the leader in ECEC is different to conventional understandings of leadership because of the particular context in which it is enacted. This perspective was supported by Lesley, a project officer, who asserted that leadership is about recognising the talents of individuals and supporting people in where they are going. Reflexively, Lesley commented that, “I mean this sounds like a very early childhood kind of perspective,” (Int. L, p. 4) reiterating a link between the nature of the field and the way leadership is understood within that context. Other early childhood students viewed the context of the ECEC environment as inherently linked to the way people work with the children. For example, Richard said that leadership in ECEC should be like the work with the kids, “otherwise it sort of seems that do as I say and not as I do” (Int. X, p. 2). These examples illustrate a connection between the way ECEC personnel interact with children and the way that leadership is understood within the field. Participants’ understandings of ECEC leadership are within a discourse somewhat different to that of leadership outside of the field and reflect a situational leadership approach.

For one participant, her ability to identify a leader is useful but does not diminish her anxiety about her own enactment of leadership. In describing a leader she admires in the field, Lucy defined leadership characteristics as being attentive to detail and
caring towards people. Lucy says that she is learning to speak up because of the influence of this leader but tempers this with “I hope I did it fairly kindly” (Int. Q, p. 5). Lucy struggles as she endeavours to adopt behaviours of a leader with whom she identifies but is uncertain about her application. For Lucy there appears to be incongruence in demonstrating leadership behaviour and in retaining kindness. Can one be a leader and demonstrate kindness or are they mutually exclusive?

**Where are the leaders?**

Participants perceive that there are limited leadership examples for those in the field and this has the consequence of limiting varied understandings of leadership. Understandings of leadership are not heavily influenced by images from within the ECEC field. There appears to be diversity in whom participants identify as leaders within the ECEC field and in many cases, participants noted a dearth of leaders that they were aware of or could identify with. For Danielle, who coordinates a range of services, the leaders are out there “…probably hidden away…” (Int. J. p. 9). This was particularly evident among the early childhood students who provided some accounts of teachers with whom they had experiences, professional experience placements and, in some cases, lecturing staff—but there was an absence of leaders with prominence. This is consistent with Sinclair’s (1998) work where she discusses the reluctance of many women to “label themselves as leaders” (p. 95). Sinclair suggests that the “conventional discourse of leadership is one with which many women in senior positions do not readily connect” (p. 96). According to Daryl (an early childhood student), “…I’m not sure about anyone I could positively identify with on a national level…” (Int. Z, p. 8). As one student states “I think that the nature of the field [is such that] you shouldn’t need to have an evident leader but it’s also possible that to have to get things done you do need a representative” (Int. X, p. 8).

This interpretation of leadership within the field by these participants demonstrates some strong similarities to Horner’s (2003) discussion of leadership (as per Chapter Two) where leaders are not seen as “in charge of followers but as members of a community of practice” (p. 35). This notion is developed by Darth and Palus (cited by Horner, 2003) who indicate a need for the study of “the social process that happens with groups of people who are engaged in an activity together” (p. 35).
When groups of ECEC personnel are engaged in activities it appears that participants in this study feel leaders are not evident. Factors relating to this are further explored in the forthcoming discussion.

Acceptable rationales for leadership

Participants’ understandings of leadership indicate that undertaking leadership activity in ECEC requires a certain egalitarian rationale. When discussing leaders at a prominent level, participants suggest that leadership should be underpinned by certain values. For Jodie (a preschool teacher), two people who demonstrate such leadership came to mind. One is a woman in a senior government department whom Jodie considers is vocal but also someone she admires. For Jodie there is some tension with the fact that this person is vocal because Jodie feels that often those that are vocal do not represent the views of others “because they are not collaborative” (Int. B, p. 9). However, this person has Jodie’s respect because “she seems to me to have walked that line of being vocal but still having…ah she still cares about her profession, she’s not just there to beat her drum” (Int. B, p. 9). Georgina reiterated this rationale for leadership based on egalitarian values, in her description of a male leader in a regional area. From Georgina’s perspective, this person was a leader since he is “very strong, very good, very dedicated and devoted. I don’t believe that he has an agenda of any sort except for the promotion of early childhood services” (Int. D, p. 4). However, there are tensions within this egalitarian rationale as Jodie sees the need to “blow our own trumpet more” (Int. B, p. 11) but apparently only within a rationale that is based on the collective ECEC good. Similarly, Blackmore and Sachs (2001) quote a participant in their study of women and leadership in academia who states “…women are not very good at blowing their own trumpets…” (p. 57); as an example of the ability of women to articulate their worth. According to Georgina, a leader in ECEC needs to be someone “that doesn’t have their own agenda” (Int. O, p. 1) and who does not seek achievement for themselves. April, a senior academic considers that people are prepared to advocate motivated by a desire to go beyond themselves to consider the needs of others. April sees this leadership behaviour as based not on what they as individuals can get out of the activity for themselves. This implies that enacting leadership for any other reason than the good of the field is not justifiable. In Georgina’s case, the male leader is valued in her
eyes for many qualities associated with traditional leadership indicating her views that this approach is needed at an advocacy level.

The need to have a rationale for leadership that has an egalitarian basis has resonance with Sinclair’s (1998) work. According to Sinclair many women express an ambivalence about having the “top job” with their focus being more on “the wider contribution they make to an industry or field” (1998, p. 114). Again in the work of Eveline (2004) there is evidence of what she terms “companionate leadership” which is highly collaborative and often practiced by women who find it appealing because “the effort they put in is shrouded from view” (p. 36). Clearly here, there is a link to a sense of self and the choice to attend to the good of others in preference to what might be of benefit to the individual. In ECEC, it appears that the rationale for leadership be based on the contribution that leaders can make to the collective good of the field.

Niceness as a leadership inhibitor

The notion of niceness has links to a perception in ECEC that the field attracts and retains people who desire to be nice to others. This idiomatic construction of niceness has its genesis in Stonehouse’s 1994 publication titled “Not Just Nice Ladies” where she explored the image of the ECEC professional and the status of the ECEC field. The enduring nature of this concept of “niceness” permeates many participants’ understandings of the characteristics of their colleagues in the ECEC field, although what it specifically signifies remains ill defined. In terms of the ECEC field, Lucy thinks, “we’re the soft option for being a teacher…I still think we’re those nice ladies in pearls” (Int. Q, p. 9) which may be more benevolence rather than kindness. There appears to be some perceived conflict between the notion of niceness and the interpretation and understanding of what leadership requires. According to Juliet, leadership involves an array of characteristics including imagination, drive, vision (but without personal agenda), appreciation of social justice, encouraging others, not being afraid of speaking up and a preparedness to accept criticism. In unpacking this definition, Juliet discusses her perception of those within the ECEC field and reflects that nice ladies are attracted to the field and they like to “work from within, push from behind and not draw a lot of attention to themselves” (Int. E, p. 8) and often follow one another. Others expressed this
interpretation even when their initial definitions of leadership were couched in contrasting views. Jo, the director of a long day care centre, considered that a leader needed to be brave, resilient, passionate, and have a belief in what they are doing. Having a vision, the ability to plan and keep on track was also required of the effective leader. However, these characteristics were demanding for what Jo terms the “nice women looking after babies and children” (Int. F, p. 6) considering they are in a field with low status and have little or no training for leadership. These data suggest that participants recognise incongruence between the traits of those working in ECEC and their perception of leadership requirements.

For Cassandra there is a tension when she suggests that staff do not think that niceness and leadership can go together. Here is an example of the dominance of traditional notions of leadership as critiqued by Blackmore (1999) and Sinclair (1998) as incongruent with the characteristics evident within the ECEC field. The interpretation of leadership in contrast to the culture of niceness was evident in the responses of many participants. Amy (an academic) acknowledges the culture of niceness and views it as a factor inhibiting the development of leadership within ECEC. This is evident when she states.

…what I probably see as the biggest problem for good leadership or effective leadership is that people like if there's a director of a centre or they’re in a leadership role, they like to be seen as one of the team players or one of the gang and if there are any privileges or anything that stands them out separately they quickly adjust and pretend they are one of the workers again. (Int. P, p. 1)

Here is an example that, in ECEC, leadership requires conformity to a dominant discourse to be appropriate and illustrates a tension between the I and Me in the construction of the director. This discourse of niceness becomes problematic when participants interpret niceness as incongruent with often highly dominant and socially accepted (trait related) understandings of leadership. How often is niceness a trait demonstrated by leaders? In contrast, leadership in ECEC may require a less individual leadership focus similar to Eveline’s companionate style (2004) mentioned previously.
The notion of niceness appears to encompass more than a need for a particular leadership style. It implies a compliance that has expression in Amy’s suggestion that conformity to a dominant discourse limits the field as a profession. “There's niceness there indirectly, directly it’s there and in a way you're swayed into being you know nice, nice, nice. I reckon it's at odds with us as a profession” (Int. P, p. 11). Amy considers this the result of two factors. The first she sees as related to the field being highly feminised and the other to do with how those in the field perceive themselves. “I don’t think that we are very good at putting ourselves forward and being competent. It’s almost like it’s a dirty word leadership. It is just something that people see as containing too much ego” (Int. P, p. 1). Amy discusses the discourse of niceness, which is characterised more by a sense of hesitancy to act rather than particular acts of pleasantness, care and fastidiousness as the word’s definition implies. She suggests that leadership might involve getting tough, getting your hands dirty (idiomatically speaking—not within the centre) and showing initiative. Within a context dominated by notions of niceness, Amy recognises an intolerance of debate and difference which can pervert into behaviour which she describes as “running off to a room and saying ‘she said this and she said that and I disagree with that and really we’ve got to get over that and work together” (Int. P, p. 12). Amy suggests that the implications of this are that difference is important if leadership is to grow and that leadership should not all look the same. Additionally she perceives that a leader should be a person with a “healthy sense of themselves…they’re not driven by ego” (Int. P, p. 20). Consequently, Amy defies many of the participants’ views of the perceived benefits of an egalitarian-based leadership approach since it promotes conformity, rather than difference when a robust sense of self or “highly developed person” (Int. P, p. 21) is more pertinent to leadership. Again, in Amy’s discussion, the notion of niceness emerges as a strong ironic discourse in the ECEC field since it is highly influential in determining acceptable behaviour.

The notion of niceness has strong links to social expectations of women in society and the continued influence of this concept in ECEC illustrates the interpretation of a professional identity through the eyes of the generalised other. ECEC personnel appear to be identifying a difficulty with aligning the demands to be nice (as
colloquially constructed) with their understandings of leadership, constructed from external traditional and hierarchical influences. In the review of leadership studies conducted by York-Barr and Duke (1994) there is reference to a study by Griffin (1995) in which the prevalence of “politesse” is noted as one factor explaining the lack of effect of teacher participation in decision-making. Teachers would not “…call attention to the shortcomings of other teachers lest such attention would be generalized to the entire group” (Griffin, 1995, p. 44 as cited in York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The summation by York-Barr and Duke (2004) is that such behaviours are part of a school culture, which can be a significant factor in preventing positive effects of teachers as decision makers or informal leaders. Evidently, other researchers have noted a negative relationship between leadership behaviours in a culture that encourages niceness or politeness.

It is apparent that understandings of leadership in ECEC involve tensions. Aspects of culture, field credibility and gender impact upon how those in the field understand leadership. The notion of niceness emerges as an ironic category. It superficially suggests deference to, and care for others but subversively demands adherence to an ECEC culture of compliance.

A highly feminised field

For many participants, their understandings of leadership are informed by male-dominant, trait related leadership styles and in a highly feminised field such as ECEC, this contributes to a paucity of leaders. Terri, the coordinator of a number of early childhood services, demonstrates her interpretation of leadership through the following comment.

I think the other thing that is problematic with early childhood is that it is predominately female based…women don’t generally get up on their soapbox and rant and rave and try to force people to think about things. People that are generally attracted to the early childhood profession are fairly gentle people… (Int. I, p. 7)

Here Terri interprets a lack of fit between the characteristics of those in the ECEC field and positional style leadership. This suggests a valuing of companionate
leadership (Eveline, 2004) with early childhood personnel avoiding individual prominence. Lesley attributes the lack of status of the ECEC field to a low valuing of women and their role in society, stating, “I think that ongoing thought that it’s primarily women’s work” (Int, L, p. 11). She acknowledges the attention paid to the field by the 2003 Australian of the Year, Fiona Stanley and others but notes that their advocacy is more valued because they are involved in the area of health, which she considers has a higher status. This conceptualisation of gender and leadership emerges from April who asserted that,

> there are some characteristics in terms of the way you enact leadership that would be less appropriate in a female dominated profession than they would be in a male dominated profession…but it’s not the qualities—it’s simply the enactment or the way in which you present or communicate—it’s a style thing. (Int. T, p. 3).

Here again issues of status, gender and the ECEC profession are entwined. Participants’ interpretations of leadership imply that leadership has been male dominant and women, and particularly those in ECEC, do not comfortably fit this understanding of leadership.

Participants demonstrate mixed understandings related to leadership behaviour. There is recognition of traditional leadership behaviour juxtaposed against recognition of cultural aspects of the ECEC field such as team-based leadership. Deidre’s interview makes this evident when she presents a profile of leadership as involving vision, big picture ideas, the ability to inspire, being positive and combining the talents of the group. This, according to Deidre, needs to happen as a team and the leader need not be the one who is constantly in the lead. Reflexively, Deidre asks herself how effective such leaders can be if they are not a visible force when she states the following.

> I don’t know that there are a lot of them [leaders], or whether there are some and I don’t know them—which makes me wonder how they are then at being good leaders if they’re not a visual force that automatically comes to mind. (Int. H, p. 3)
This indicates a tension between leadership at the service level and leadership on a broader scale for the field or for advocacy. On further reflection, Deidre ponders on the effectiveness of advocacy within the field. She states that “if we actually advocated properly then people’s perception of us as an industry and a profession—well we wouldn’t be part of the Liquor and Miscellaneous Workers’ Union—that in itself is the ultimate irony” (Int. H, p. 6). Consequently, Deidre suggests that the nature of the people drawn to the field is not those who would “get up at meetings and be the speaker” (Int. H, p. 6) since they do not seek recognition for themselves or are unsure of what to say. This illustrates an interpreted professional identity as construed from external sources and the interplay of traditional notions of leadership in tension with the culture of the ECEC field. For this participant, leaders are not transformational (Morgan, 1997b) but more transactional by their attention to the needs of others (Schultz & Schultz, 1998).

Team-based leadership: Not too much the boss...
Participant understandings about leadership in the ECEC context relate strongly to the notion of a team-based leadership approach. It appears that being a leader in ECEC is not about being the boss. This was expressed by many participants (see Appendix G, number 2) and means that ECEC leadership is not about behaving in ways traditionally associated with positional leadership. Participants across all groups understood the role of the ECEC leader as non-hierarchical and being part of the team was paramount. For Lucy, an academic, her initial definitions of broad leadership involved “someone that really takes the lead…power comes to mind a bit more than in the ECEC context” (Int. Q, p. 2). This tension was reiterated by many participants, who identified aspects of leadership beyond the ECEC field, as different to leadership within the field. Lucy explains this when she states,

In early childhood I don’t think we think like that—not so much and I think that we don’t want to be seen as it, but we want to be seen as the coordinator of the team a little bit more than the powerful one that makes all the ultimate decisions. (Int. Q, p. 2)

This conceptualisation of leadership in ECEC was reiterated by a preschool teacher who suggested a leader needs to have a vision and be able to communicate it but that you “don’t have to be the top dog” (Int. C, p. 1). For Jodie, a preschool teacher, her
role as a leader is one in which “you don’t want to be too much of the person in charge” (Int. B, p. 1) in case she “puts them [her staff] off” (Int. B, p. 1). This has resonance with Sinclair’s (1998) work, which suggests that many women are “loath to describe themselves as leaders” (p. 94).

For Jodie a preschool teacher, there is delineation between the leadership roles that are clear-cut, for example a Prime Minister, while in ECEC she sees leadership as more team-based. This team focus involves respect for others’ ideas since other members of the team will frequently be required to take over from Jodie. This is particularly evident in Jodie’s context where she chooses to work in a job share situation and consequently the positional role of director has less definition.

I think the way early childhood works it needs to be like that because it is such a collaborative process. We need the input of our co-workers because we work with them everyday and we rely upon them for feedback for observations of children and information from parents etc. (Int. B, p. 2)

The director of a long day care centre articulates this team-based approach when she states the following.

I think as a leader you have to be part of the team as well. Where you sort of put all of your skill base in a pot and depending on whichever situation, it doesn’t necessarily have to be the one person who leads constantly at the head of the ship or helm or whatever it might be. It’s a matter of the needs base. (Int. J, p. 2)

For this leader, it is about identifying who in the team has the skills and abilities to best address the task at hand. It is all about “…amalgamating their skill into your leadership role” (Int, J, p. 2). This was also evident in the interview with Danielle who is responsible for a range of ECEC services. For Danielle, effective leadership on her part was the result of harnessing her staff into teams where they worked on topics, reported and subsequently built their leadership capacity.
What I’ve been trying to do is have like sub-groups working on key initiatives that staff have come up with and having leaders saying ok you’re responsible for this to happen. What I get them to do is come back and present…and you can see leaders emerging out of that. (Int, J, p. 7)

For Cassandra, the director of a long day care centre, this team-based approach involves listening to staff viewpoints, respecting them for their knowledge and skills and involving everyone in decisions. This example suggests connections to distributed leadership as articulated by Spillane, (et al., 2001) who examine leadership at the collective level. It also has links to the literature around team and group leadership (Blake et al., 1987; Hersey, et al., 2001) although participant accounts focus more on an egalitarian rationale than on strategic vision for the group.

According to Hendra, leadership is very much a team affair. “One of the biggest roles in leadership I feel is really getting that team feeling like they are coordinating, encouraging a team—they’re connected and they’re being heard” (Int. M, p. 1). This, according to Hendra, involves cooperation where everyone’s views are considered. She does note that it is the role of the leader to digest the input of others and then determine the final decision irrespective of the popularity of that decision. Consequently, it appears that under this interpretation the leader abdicates their team role by being the final decision-maker, which implies a contradiction to a genuine team approach. This team-based approach is articulated by the other family day care coordinator who considered that “the old dominating and subservient is not successful” (Int. N, p.6). What participants indicate by the reference to team-based leadership appears somewhat contrary to the literature discussed earlier (Blake et al., 1987; Hersey et al., 2001). Unlike the clear definition of effective groups involving a shared and clearly articulated vision or team goal (Hersey, 2001) these interpretations are more aligned with non-hierarchical leadership. Danielle alludes to engaging group members in a shared activity but participants do not generally acknowledge the team as a group sharing common, clearly articulated and accepted goals. Hence, there is incongruence between these leadership understandings and those promulgated in the leadership literature. Notions of team-based leadership are
complex, fluid and somewhat problematic, yet emerge as central to participants’ understanding of leadership in ECEC.

**Sources for leadership knowledge**
Rather than draw upon leadership education received in undergraduate training, participants identified a range of materials they use to inform their knowledge and understandings of leadership. Participants demonstrate limited understandings or references to formal leadership theory. Leadership in ECEC appears to be a complex and multifaceted role according to Sarah a preschool teacher. Her description of what is required demonstrates qualities and abilities in excess of most theoretical definitions. For example, Sarah suggests the ECEC leader requires vision, good communication skills, flexibility, delegation, trust, inclusivity, prioritising, caring and nurturing, and the ability to develop a team culture. In addition, the leader should be motivating, able to empower others, help staff to feel valued, have their ideas supported, and be hard working and fair. This definition demands multiple leadership approaches including transactional (Morgan, 1997b), visionary (Nanus, 1992), and companionate (Eveline, 2004). Georgina adds that leaders need to be knowledgeable about regulations and legislation. This describes an extensive array of leadership expectations not aligned with any particular leadership theory but rather reflecting an amalgam of traits, behaviours and context specific attributes. Such expectations may be inherently daunting to many in ECEC personnel who see themselves as lacking specific leadership training or structural supports for leadership activity. Women may interpret an expectation that leadership requires them to do everything (Eveline, 2004; Sinclair, 1998).

In terms of particular artefacts that inform their understandings of leadership, participants frequently mentioned publications by Rodd (Rodd, 1994; Rodd, 1998). While these publications have been the main reference point for Australian ECEC leadership discussion, participants did little more than mention their awareness of these materials. The influence or relevance of this work to their understandings of ECEC leadership was not made evident. Additionally, participants noted a diverse range of materials that they did feel were relevant. For example, Jodie referred to her reading of teenage novels and their value in informing her ideas of where young people are heading. Jodie also draws upon a range of publications including
newsletters to avoid “becoming a bit narrow” (Int. B, p. 18). She suggests that viewing movies provides real messages that are pertinent to her professional work. Jodie elaborates this point discussing a recent movie, which she felt helped her to understand the complexities facing some parents. For other participants, there were influences such as Buddhism, which provided a source of inspiration and support for leadership ideas. According to Amy, you have to be a highly developed person to be able to have all the skills of a good leader “and Buddhist literature defines a highly developed person” (Int. P, p. 21). This literature offers a means to understand compassion, which Amy sees as important to effective leadership. For several participants, the 2002 publication by Rudi Giuliani, the former mayor of New York, provides a source of leadership inspiration. For Danielle this book was useful since, “the principles, by which he ran, I suppose his office and his community, really inspired me and I actually took away some key things that I’ve actually implemented in my daily work” (Int, J, p. 23). For another participant books by Michael J Fox and Lance Armstrong were her influences.

I think the other reason why we perhaps look to other literature is that there is so much reading in the field that we do without a lot of time to do it; that at night time when we want to be reading we prefer to be reading the Michael J Fox or the bibliography or the Lance Armstrong as opposed to more work related material. (Int. C, p. 12)

For this teacher, accessing inspiration for leadership is important but at a time and in a form that is digestible and appealing. Consequently, understandings of leadership are not significantly informed by knowledge of leadership through texts and undergraduate training but rather by an eclectic mix of influences. Perhaps this relates to the non-traditional manner in which leadership is understood in ECEC. This has allowed the versatility to develop a so called team-based approach unconstrained by dominant theoretical influences although reflective of many of the leadership approaches described in Chapter Two.

**IMPLICATIONS**

A range of influences emerged when discussing understandings of leadership. The interpretations of the field through the eyes of others could provide a vulnerability to
others’ notions of what is valuable and worthwhile. This could have the effect of constraining leadership behaviour in ECEC due to the expectation that such a field is not worthy of leadership attention. What are the rewards for undertaking leadership in a low status field? The recognition that the ECEC field enacts leadership supposedly in a team-based style is somewhat different to other contexts and is an interpretation that has consequences for advocacy. Team-based leadership may be the dominant understanding of leadership within ECEC, but it reflects a more non-hierarchical approach rather than a team or group strategy with set goals and vision as defined in leadership literature (Blake et al., 1987; Hersey et al., 2001). Is this interpretation of leadership effective in the broader political arena where personnel are required to articulate the needs of children, staff and families? Leadership theory and contemporary developments may infer a move to more team-based approaches (Bennett et al., 2003) but the reality is such that these approaches do not dominate the leadership discourse in the other contexts where advocacy occurs. Consequently, ECEC leaders familiar with enacting a non-hierarchical leadership approach may remain poorly prepared to engage in leadership in arenas still dominated by the traditional heroic masculinist discourse.

The paucity of identifiable leaders for participants emerges as a tension, since acting as a leader requires a particular kind of rationale based on helping others. This is illustrated through many participant responses which suggested that to be a prominent leader in ECEC you need to make evident your agenda for undertaking leadership and that it should be of an altruistic nature. This demand requires leaders to be in their role for reasons beyond their own career aspirations, not motivated by self-interest. This rationale could inhibit leadership by those who are self-motivated, have particular interests or skills or are looking for a career pathway. As a result, the ECEC field may be missing opportunities for alternative leaders who, in undertaking a positional leadership role, may well serve their own personal agendas in addition to those required in their work role. In other words, an altruistic rationale is not exclusive of personal career aspirations and such agendas could be mutually beneficial.

In this context of niceness, team-based leadership comes forth as a consistent actualisation of how leadership is acceptable in ECEC. This approach demands a
non-hierarchical focus valuing the many voices within the ECEC service. Participants see team-based leadership as not accepting the evident, prominent or positional leader as this is an abdication of their team role. Team-based leadership requires collaboration, listening to others and various requirements that respect and acknowledge those within the team. This approach illustrates an alternative style of leadership to that in the heroic, masculinist style evident in much traditional leadership literature more consistent with distributed leadership (Spillane, et al., 2001). Team-based leadership reflects many of the values underpinning ECEC teaching and presents a coherent means to lead and manage at the service level. However, this has the effect of demanding positional leaders to be a team player as well as take final responsibility. The egalitarian foundations may be applaudable but without strategic team goals and vision the effectiveness of the group will remain limited (Hersey, et al., 2001). This team-based leadership style may provide limited opportunity to develop in individuals the skills, interest and abilities to engage in advocacy in the broader political context where such egalitarian leadership is not the dominant approach.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that participants own sense of self is influenced by the competing elements of the I and Me and in many cases the Me can dominate in the construction of individuals’ interpreted professional identity. The influence of the Me is informed by participants’ interpretation of traditional leadership models and gender specific expectations, which constrain leadership confidence. Participants suggest that the ECEC field suffers from low social kudos, which appears to undermine their own professional identity. Mixed understandings of what stands for leadership both within and beyond the field are evident but there is a strong implication that traditional models of leadership are not pertinent to ECEC with leadership defined as a team-based approach. Images of leaders within the field are minimal and the rationales for leaders need be altruistic in intent. A discourse of niceness surfaces, which participants suggest, demands a degree of conformity and compliance. Some participants recognise this as a leadership inhibitor. Participants appear to draw upon an eclectic mix of materials and sources to inform their leadership understandings with little significance afforded undergraduate training. Such are the reflected understandings of leadership by those involved in this study. Some of the themes that
inform these understandings such as niceness, team-based leadership and images of leaders will be explored in more depth in the coming chapters since they traverse both understandings and enactment of leadership. The argument, as articulated early in this chapter, that there is a fundamental relationship between an individual’s interpreted professional identity and their interpreted leadership capacity will be further explored in the coming chapters.
CHAPTER SIX

ENACTMENT OF LEADERSHIP: THE REALITIES

Introduction

This chapter discusses the second aspect of the research question, that being how leadership is enacted in ECEC. What factors contribute to this action or inaction and what factors particularly inhibit or constrain leadership behaviour? In this discussion one needs to remain mindful of the interaction of the categories of interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity as diagrammatically represented and discussed in Chapter Five (Figure 5.1, p. 112). The interplay of these elements emerges as central to understandings and enactment of leadership in ECEC (as interpreted by participants in this study).

Participants raised a range of issues that affect leadership activity in terms of the culture of ECEC; aspects of knowledge; structural barriers to leadership; what it is to act as a leader in ECEC; significant leaders and the role of mentors and models (see Appendix G). As was highlighted in the previous chapter, applying the key ideas from symbolic interactionism helps to illustrate participants’ interpreted leadership capacity, strongly influenced by others’ notions of what and how ECEC leadership should be. Such influences are not always from outside the field (as discussed in the notion of professional identity in the previous chapter). Interactions with others within ECEC are interpreted and appropriate behaviours identified for leadership in the ECEC context. Using symbolic interactionism illustrates the interplay of the I and Me as individuals determine how they see and act as leaders. Ashworth (1979) suggests that Mead viewed the self as an engagement between the I which reflects the “…initial impulse to act, the unorganised tendency of the person” and the Me as the “incorporated other within the individual”, the “organised set of attitudes and definitions, understandings and expectations-or simply meanings-common to the group” (Meltzer, 1964, p. 10 cited in Ashworth, 1979, p. 93). This chapter outlines how individuals interpret their sense of self through an interplay or “internal conversation of significant gestures” (Ashworth, 1979, p. 93), those being their own impulse to act, tempered by others’ expectations and definitions. Such interpretations
affect variously on individuals’ agency to enact leadership. Feminist theory affords attention to how many female participants understand their role and their ability to act as leaders. The contemporary work of Sinclair (2004) indicates a social expectation that leadership requires characteristics and behaviours not often associated or attributed to women. As Sinclair (2004) states,

In the Australian case, the archetype is of the lone frontier settler who is stoic but resolute in the face of hardship. Such an image renders improbable a garrulous, emotionally expressive or more collectively orientated leader—women and many migrants from more group-based societies instantly struggle to earn respect in this context. (p. 9)

Sinclair (2004) provides a poignant account of her failure to ascribe to such an archetype and the incongruence between women and leadership when her male students said “she reminded me of my mother” and “she was like a kindergarten teacher” (p. 9). Consequently, they dismissed her as a real leadership model. For this study, such perspectives illustrate the continuing social expectations of would-be leaders and the incompatibility of such an archetype to women. This was particularly evident in Chapter Five with external perceptions interpreted by participants as influential in their understandings of leadership. In this chapter, the analysis of the data reveals that the participants see the enactment of leadership as influenced by the culture of the field, which prefers a team-based leadership approach, and the recognition of prominent leaders who many participants believe should have an altruistic rationale. Consequently, participants are evaluating their ability to enact leadership through the interplay of their interpretations, influenced by factors both external and internal to the ECEC field.

*The culture of ECEC*

Analysis of the data indicates there is a relationship between the culture of the ECEC field and the enactment of leadership. As a symbolic interactionist, Woods (1983) argues that perspectives derive from cultures. Cultures are imbued with distinctive forms of talk and speech patterns, rules, codes, values, beliefs and arguments that may or may not be formally regulated “but are heavily implicit” (p. 8). Within these cultures there are tricks of the trade, hierarchies, ways of getting by, discovering
what others do, pecking orders, appropriate topics of conversation, and areas which are considered taboo (Woods, 1983). These factors can have the affect of creating homogeneity and limited variation if opposing views are interpreted as unnatural. Literature in the area of school teachers and leadership also identifies a problematic relationship between school culture and the enactment of leadership. York-Barr and Duke (2004) provide an overview of literature on teachers which suggests that when teachers act as leaders and their work becomes more hierarchical rather than horizontal their relationship with their peers changes. These changed “relationships violate egalitarian norms” (p. 283) and can threaten the teacher leader’s capacity to lead as well as diminish their desire to lead. These authors conclude that “overall the research on teacher leadership effects on colleagues and their classroom and school-level practices suggests that school culture is a considerable obstacle to be overcome if the potential positive effects are to be realised” (p. 285). The perceived changed relationship between teachers can prove a disincentive to potential leadership in school settings.

The participants in this study identified various factors that affect the enactment of leadership and these relate to the culture of the ECEC field. As was discussed in the previous chapter, participants understand leadership in ECEC to be enacted within a group with a focus on team-based leadership with individual prominence not encouraged. Participants discuss situations where they have encountered others in the ECEC field who are intolerant of difference and see change as unwelcome. In addition, participants identify what they see as a degree of complacency and a level of acceptance that avoids critical assessment of issues within the field or what is coded as a culture of conformity (see Appendix G). Academics and people working in allied organisations were particularly forthcoming in this regard. This has parallels with Woods (1983) definition of the influence of cultures from a symbolic interactionist view where perspectives derive from the culture in which one finds oneself. It is questionable in an ECEC culture (as understood by these participants), if leadership can exist only within a band of acceptable behaviour and ambition.

This notion of culture and leadership has resonance with the work of Griffin (1995) (as cited by York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 285) noted earlier. Griffin (1994), in a study of five teachers over a three year period, attributed the culture of the school
with a reduction in the positive effects of teachers enacting leadership. The inhibiting culture was one “of isolation that perpetuates a lack of individual or collective inquiry around practice…” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 284). This was identified as one of a number of factors that reduced the positive effects of teachers acting as leaders. York-Barr and Duke (2004) cite the work of other researchers in the area of teacher leadership such as Hart (1994) and Talbert and McLaughlin (1994) who noted the negative impact certain cultural aspects have on leadership.

It emerges that long standing norms of the teaching profession are challenges to the potential of teachers as leaders (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Succinctly these authors state, “…one of the most prevailing norms in the teaching profession is egalitarianism, which fosters the view that teachers who step up to leadership roles are stepping out of line” (York-Barr, 2004, p. 272). The interpretation by participants, that leadership in ECEC is team-based, reflects this egalitarian rationale but does not suggest the shared vision and clearly articulated goals the leadership literature attributes to effective team or group leadership (Hersey, et al., 2001). Such a circumstance can have a negative effect according to Blake et al., (1987).

Absence of vision exacerbates the feelings of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and helplessness to effect the needed changes.

A feeling of them-ism emerges: others get the blame and become a source of unrest and an excuse for inaction. (Blake, et al., 1987, p. 6)

Without goals and vision the notion of team-based leadership is a misinterpretation with the potential to have negative effects. Subsequent discussion will illustrate some of these outcomes evident in participant accounts of leadership enactment in ECEC.

This chapter will now discuss a number of aspects related to the culture ECEC, highlighted by the participants. These factors relate to the enactment of leadership and include conformity; acceptable behaviour within the field; fear of change; reticence; structural barriers; knowledge about leadership and the need for field credibility. It emerges that how participants interpret these aspects within the ECEC culture can be influential in their agency or hesitancy to enact leadership.
Conformity

All participant groups except preschool teachers perceive the culture they function in to demand certain attitudes and behaviours, which, in many cases, is contrary to leadership activity. Amy, an academic discusses the enactment of leadership in ECEC and in doing so enunciates her view of the culture surrounding potential leadership behaviour. She states, “I see that they [ECEC services] are little environments of conformity and of course like minded ideas group together”. Her comment on this is that some ECEC contexts “are very suffocating and some are more suffocating than others…and if there’s any difference again you’re not accepted”. Amy recounts a situation from her own teaching career to illustrate this requirement for conformity.

I did enter a childcare centre years ago and had a lot of confidence knocked out of me. If there was anything that was a bit different, which I did have some different practices, people would sort of, not tall poppy syndrome but—people would try and pull you apart because I wasn’t part of the normal culture. For example, you know taking inside toys like dinosaurs outside, got to be the big issue and I really basically I resigned over that. I worked for a city council not really very far from here and um the collective were very different to me and if the director of the centre was, a little bit more visionary she could actually see where I was coming from and that differences are a good thing you know. She could have helped me out but she didn’t she was a lousy leader—she basically humiliated someone like myself who wanted to do things a bit differently—like simple things like bring all the drawing and all the painting materials and everything to the children’s level just really basic things—everything was a big issue. (Int. P, p. 5)

Here a career influencing decision is a response to an inability or resistance to conform to the perceived culture. For Amy this adherence to cultural expectations is
a very constraining factor and she relates this to her peers. “I think your peers are the ones that…hold you back the most” (Int. P, p.16). She sees that leaders have the potential to extend you beyond your peers and “take you down a different track” whereas peers “can be very judgmental because they do the same or similar to what you do, so they have an opinion about what they do and it might not be the same as what you do” (Int. P, p. 16). On its own, this interpretation of culture may remain inconsequential however; another participant considers the ability and opportunity to embrace difference as central to leadership. “Because difference isn’t allowed to prevail and difference is really important for leadership to grow and to happen…leadership is never going to look the same and it shouldn’t look the same” (Int. P, p. 18). A connection between the need to tolerate and embrace difference allows leadership to flourish and a leadership that can in itself be diverse. The interpretation and subsequent adherence to dominant views within the ECEC culture (the generalized other) is potentially constraining the enactment of leadership.

When participants raised or alluded to this notion of conformity, I introduced the concept of horizontal violence. This concept has its roots in the nursing profession and relates to,

psychological harassment, which creates hostility, as opposed to physical aggression. This harassment involves verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, humiliation, excessive criticism, innuendo, exclusion, denial of access to opportunity, disinterest, discouragement and the withholding of information. (McKenna, Smith, Poole, & Coverdale, 2003, p. 92)

Work by Farrell (2001) suggests that horizontal violence is an attempt to explain staff conflict. She further claims that it is not only structural barriers and dominant groups that support horizontal violence but nurses do so themselves through “their everyday work and interpersonal interactions, [they] act as insidious gatekeepers to an iniquitous status quo” (p. 1). This notion of horizontal violence emerges in a considerable number of nursing publications (Chan, 2002; Webb, 2002; McKenna, Smith, Poole, & Coverdale, 2003; Randle, 2003). There is a parallel with the field of early childhood in terms of both professions being highly feminised. In nursing this
activity impacts on the culture of the field (Randle, 2003) and the self concept
development of staff particularly in terms of self-confidence and self-esteem
(McKenna et al., 2003). It appears paradoxical that horizontal violence is a
significant issue in a caring field such as nursing (McKenna et al., 2003).

McKenna et al., (2003) investigated neophyte nurses experiences of horizontal
violence and reported that in the main, interpersonal conflict involved being
undervalued by peers, having learning opportunities blocked and feeling neglected
and distressed by the conflict between others. Randle (2003) makes a link between
the effects of horizontal violence and self-esteem. Randel’s study linked the
construction of different ‘selves’ to the social interaction people undertake and the
feedback they receive. While Randle (2003) does not refer here to symbolic
interactionism, there is a connection with the present study. The nursing literature
supports a relationship between workplace culture, self-concept and confidence and
this is relevant to the suggestion that professional identity has links to ECEC
leadership capacity. In addition, the notion suggested by Randle (2003) that self-
esteeem is a major predictor of behaviour, provides support for the notion that cultural
aspects of the field can influence self-concept and consequently contribute to an
individual’s interpreted leadership capacity.

Specific to teachers, Duke (1994) refers to the prevailing norms of the culture of
teaching that constrain leadership behaviour. Metaphorically Duke (1994) describes
the way teachers act to keep each other in line as “crab bucket cultures” (p. 269).
Anyone who has gone crabbing knows that it is unnecessary to cap a

    crab bucket because as soon as one crab tries to scuttle out, the others
drag it back down. Some faculties function in the same way, actively
resisting the efforts of any member to press beyond normal practice.

    Teacher leadership can hardly thrive in such circumstances. (p. 269-
270)

This description by Duke (1994) correlates with the notion of horizontal violence
defined in nursing. It suggests that in education, cultures exist to constrain
leadership by requirements for personnel to conform to accepted expectations. An
abdication of these can apparently marginalise individuals, making leadership enactment problematic and potentially unattractive.

Participants who raised aspects of compliance and conformity were asked if they felt that horizontal violence had resonance with what they were alluding to in their comments of the ECEC culture. Horizontal violence was mentioned only when a participant highlighted matters related to conflict within the ECEC field. Chantelle, who works in a support organization, felt that horizontal violence did have some relevance to ECEC. She referred to state organisations where people do a lot of “watching the person next to you to make sure they’re not getting too up themselves you know” (Int, K, p.12). Another participant working in a support organisation discusses workers in ECEC, suggesting, “if someone is getting a little too confident um there is this you get back in your box because that’s not you position, that’s not your role” facetiously adding “we can’t have that happening” (Int, J, p. 18). These are examples of the crab bucket mentality in action.

Jo a childcare centre director provides a poignant account of a new staff member joining her team as an illustration of horizontal violence in action. Here she describes actions that go beyond thinking about keeping someone in line to actually creating disadvantage for that individual.

I actually think I saw that kind of thing happening in our centre when I first got there with our new preschool teacher. Now she’s an outsider in a sense because she’s got different training to everyone else and there was a lot of things that other staff did, in you know, quite subtle ways that you know made her uncomfortable and kind of kept her from expressing things or even attempting new things that she wanted to. Some people were quite nasty to her which I found out later but you know just in like derogatory comments or not including her in any social thing that was being organised for all the staff or you know just those things really. Some of them were quite overt but some of them were quite subtle things or just ignoring what she might have had to
say or even just saying something about her program—and it is really
where people don’t want someone to be a bit different. (Int. F, p. 27)

This example illustrates an implementation of horizontal violence in ECEC used to marginalise a staff member who had different training and subsequently different ideas to other staff in the service. This participant acted in her leadership role to subvert this activity by supporting the staff member who subsequently stayed in the position for two and a half years. On reflection, this director refers to the way “some people were quite nasty to her” and “who have got particular points of view and get together and yeah create their own little culture and they expect everyone else to be the same—it’s worrying actually isn’t it?” (Int. F, p. 27). In this study, there is resonance between the ECEC participants and nursing literature in terms of horizontal violence and ways in which this affects the culture of the field. This appears relevant to the formation of an individual’s interpreted professional identity based on expectations prevalent within the field. In terms of leadership, this culture demands compliance and similarity, viewing behaviours that distinguish individuals outside of this paradigm as problematic, as is evident in the “crab bucket cultures” (Duke, 1994, p. 269). The need to conform is such that non-adherence results in marginalization and the capacity to enact leadership is constrained or rendered ineffective.

An academic recounts her engagement with a student to provide an example of a culture of conformity and the effect it has on constraining leadership aspirations and behaviour. This student is articulate and questioning and for the academic, demonstrates many of the attributes of a potential leader. However, “she doesn’t want to be the one that [sic] stands out, she doesn’t want to be that one that they point to and say she’s the leader. She doesn’t want to be that person; she wants to be part of the crowd, not even part of the team, part of the crowd” (Int. Q, p. 13). For undergraduate students such as this one, the messages of cultural compliance, team aspirations and conformity are already obvious enough to inhibit them demonstrating overt leadership behaviour.

According to participants, it is not sufficient to be nice (as discussed in Chapter Five) but the culture of ECEC requires a leader to demonstrate humility and an aversion to
attention. Trudy is an academic and her understandings of leadership are initially described through the eyes of others. She sees others’ interpretation of leaders as “the person on the top of the heap” (Int. R, p. 2). In contrast, she later considers leadership in ECEC as not just one person. However she is cognizant of the culture of ECEC and implies the “crab bucket mentality” when she discusses those in ECEC as, nice ladies looking after children who don’t blow their own trumpet.

So if you say you’re a leader that might be misconstrued as you having said something good about yourself and I don’t think that we do that well. (Int. R, p. 2)

The culture of compliance, as articulated by participants in this study, could provide barriers to leadership activity. Trudy considers that, in the field there is limited praise for good work. “Something else we don’t do well is praise each other” (Int. R, p. 3). Through these reflective comments, Trudy continues to explore the nature of the ECEC context suggesting that many people in the field are easily “knocked down” (Int. R, p. 3). She raises the issue of competition between staff when she states “We don’t like to think someone’s out there and doing really well and that we might actually support that” (Int. R, p. 3). “You couldn’t have someone who’s better than someone else—who gathers praise, or—you know there is a sense of control” (Int. R, p. 3). “I don’t think there are structures that allow us to think that there is someone who is the grand poobah of early childhood” (Int. R, p. 7). Leadership continues to appear complex in Trudy’s responses when she reflexively discusses two young teachers. One she considers is a “young thing” and “she’s not wise enough yet you know…she hasn’t had enough time to be wise enough to be a leader” (Int. R, p. 9). Despite the manifest need for age and experience in this case, Trudy then discusses another young teacher who is demonstrating leadership and ponders on her achievement despite her age and experience. This poses some tensions for Trudy. In the case of Mary (who is an academic), there is a similar uncertainty with ECEC personnel and their level of experience. Mary expresses her doubt that a teacher appointed to a consultancy position would have the level of experience required to do the job successfully.

Through Trudy and Mary’s reflective comments, it becomes apparent that their interpretation is of a very complex ECEC culture. It includes a discourse of niceness
that constrains the adoption of certain leadership behaviours. Through the words of Trudy, there is recognition of a complex interplay between niceness and a requirement to conform to the group (i.e., the generalised other). In Trudy’s determination of the leadership role of young teachers, there is evidence of her own application of an expectation that they conform to expected norms e.g., “enough time to be a wise leader” (Int. R, p. 9). These reflections illustrate the complexity of the ECEC culture, which on one level engages in a discourse of niceness (tinged with elements of horizontal violence and the crab bucket mentality) and on another level perpetuates an expectation of age, time and experience for potential leaders. It also illustrates a desire for ECEC personnel to conform and an aversion to giving praise, which would single out individuals and be contrary to the notion of team-based leadership.

For some individuals, the interpretation of a culture that exudes some aspects of horizontal violence and a discourse of niceness is problematic. There are similarities here to the work of Goffman (cited by Cuff, 1994) as discussed in Chapter Five. Goffman’s work with waiting staff illustrates a difference between the behaviour exhibited with customers and that demonstrated while back of house. Goffman links the back of house behaviour to an opportunity for staff to express the reactions they have restrained. This behaviour allows staff to “express and mutually sustain feelings of disdain for their clients, thereby reinforcing their sense of themselves as being more and other than they must appear to be in the front region” (Cuff, 1994, p. 141). It is possible that the horizontal violence acknowledged by many participants in this study, is a demonstration of the frustration felt by ECEC personnel when they are required to conform to a discourse of niceness and its constraining expectations. Those investigating horizontal violence link such behaviour to oppressed groups who lack power and consequently “attack one another in order to vent their frustration and anger with the system they find themselves in” (Randle, 2003, p. 399). This behaviour is particularly relevant given Goffman’s assertion that the back of house behaviour is a means to reinforce a sense of self in a profession that has a low social standing (Cuff et al., 1984). The linking of horizontal violence and Goffman’s work, as a symbolic interactionist, has the potential to provide new insights into the complex nature of the ECEC culture and its relationship to leadership.
Acceptable leadership behaviour

Sachs and Blackmore (1998) critically explore what it is to be an acceptable leader. These authors investigated the enactment of leadership by women in leadership positions in Queensland primary and secondary schools. For their participants, the culture of their leadership activity demanded “managing emotions and making emotions invisible” (Sachs & Blackmore, 1998, p. 267). This interpretation suggests that leaders are rational in their behaviour and they are unacceptable when demonstrating passion and feeling. Such contextual demands are viewed by Sachs and Blackmore as “discourses of rationality” and consequently “subtle technologies of control” (p. 267). In this present study, participants interpret an internal climate or culture of ECEC that requires conformity to acceptable behaviours and consequently can be an inhibiting factor to the enactment of leadership. In addition to this internal culture, participants interpret external influences (Me) as having an inhibiting effect on leadership behaviour.

An academic from Tasmania illustrates the influence of social expectations. She suggested that the Tasmanian Infant Mistress Association (from the early part of the Twentieth Century) was disbanded because the group employed a forthright approach to political advocacy. “They were biting at the heels of politicians, the Minister for Education and the Director of Education...they were fighting for everything” (Int. S, p. 9). They were dismantled because they were too powerful and “that isn’t appropriate for early childhood” (Int. S, p. 9). Evidently, at that time, those in the Department of Education expected women to function in certain socially approved ways and such leadership behaviour was an abdication of these acceptable norms. Here is evidence of the notion of the “generalised other” as construed in symbolic interactionism. It is through the interpretations of the values of others (Me) that these ECEC practitioners were made to feel inappropriate as leaders. Charon (1995) considers it is possible for an individual self to be influenced by others to the point that it influences their actions or relations to others. There is a relationship here to the work of Sachs and Blackmore (1998) and the constraining nature of others’ views, which determine certain behaviours as incongruent with leadership activity and in this, case women as leaders. The consequences were serious for the Tasmanian advocates when it resulted in a cessation of advocacy when the department “actually set out to dismantle [them], yes because they were so powerful”
(Int. S, p. 9). It is evident here that the interpretation of women’s socially defined roles can strongly constrain leadership behaviour as has been suggested by feminist authors exploring women in leadership (Cox, 1996; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Sinclair, 1998). The story of the Infant Mistress Association demonstrates how forces external to the ECEC field are influential in how advocacy is undertaken by and for the ECEC field. It provides a historical message of compliance to others’ expectations and demonstrates the disempowering effect of non-compliance. In this context and with such consequences, it may not be wise to enact leadership in ways not consistent with the expectations of others. Moreover, an individual’s interpreted leadership capacity could be constrained.

Fear of change
In further defining an ECEC culture, many participants refer to change, as something not embraced with enthusiasm. The student participants perhaps made this most evident. However, an academic makes a clear link between fear of change and the threat change poses when she states the following.

There are certainly those people who are resistant to change and resistant to what that means and the threat of doing things differently. I mean we all know of those people that [sic] have not changed their programming for the last twenty years. (Int. Q, p. 7)

A student recounted examples where he encountered resistance to change when they were on professional experience placement. Richard, a third year student, refers to the many mature people within the field but laments, “they have been there for a long time, a lot of years and they don’t want to move and they don’t want to change and they don’t want to adapt at all” (Int, Y, p. 14). This situation was in contrast to the university culture students experienced which promoted the notion of change. Richard stated,

You know for four years or so at uni we’re told you’re the future …you’re the ones who are going to make change, bla, bla, and as soon as we get out you just have to take a step back and go, wow, these guys are not really ready for change yet. (Int, Y, p. 14)
According to one student, this perceived resistance to change demands compliance in the field through a failure to acknowledge other ways of doing things or what they called “being open in your views” (Int., Z, p. 6). Richard articulated this as an expectation of an apprentice model. “They might see it more as a younger person being the apprentice...they should do their own time...learn from me and then when I think you are ready you can take the reins” (Int. Y, p. 15). It appears that for some participants, certain practices are required within the ECEC culture. A resistance to change is apparent to students who bring alternative views and ideas into a non-receptive culture.

Reticence

Juliet, a preschool teacher, considers ECEC people are reticent to embrace new ideas and to put themselves forward. This is congruent with the work of Sinclair (1998) who asserts that women prefer to submerge ego. In terms of being prominent, which is frequently a requirement of traditional leadership expectations, “a lot of them would go backwards rather than stand out the front of something” (Int. E, p. 8). This preschool teacher Juliet, suggests that ECEC personnel have been increasingly accountable and that they are somewhat overpowered by systems, regulations and accreditation. This demand for accountability was reinforced by Terri who claims, “we’re asking teachers to document almost every bloody move” (Int. I, p. 11). She does not see this as reflecting the provision of a good quality program. She suggests that those people who are determining such requirements are often not qualified and the expectation results in teachers feeling inadequate and further undervalued. Here, via participant accounts, there is evidence of ECEC personnel interpreting the views and expectations of others (Me) in determining leadership action or inaction. The combination of external forces and traditional notions of leadership (Me) can amount to hesitancy to enact leadership and be powerful in an individual’s interpreted leadership capacity.

Chantelle identified a further passive reticence to leadership action on the part of ECEC personnel when she spoke about her perception that the field is awaiting a leader. She explains this below and its implications for the behaviour of other personnel.
When I talk with people, they’re waiting for somebody. You know waiting for some leader to come along…well like a messiah…so people will just trudge through their daily things until the messiah arrives to make all the changes.

This comment illustrates a relinquishing of personal responsibility to undertake leadership. Combined reticence to act and deferral of attention to oneself creates a potential leadership void.

**Structural barriers**

Literature in the area of teacher leadership identifies practical and physical aspects that inhibit or make problematic the enactment of leadership. York-Barr and Duke (2004) refer to a number of studies into teacher leadership that discuss how the design of buildings perpetuates isolation and autonomy for teachers. In addition, issues related to time and the nature of the work prevent sufficient attention to leadership activity (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this present study, participants identify similar factors as constraining their leadership potential.

The nature of ECEC in Australia is such that in many practical ways the field is isolated and fragmented (Walker, 2004), contributing to limited opportunity for communication between services. Leadership roles are often centre-focused around the role of the centre director. For example, Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) provide a five level hierarchy of competencies for early childhood managers. Of the five levels, three specifically relate to centre-based activity and the fourth is such that it functionally sits within a centre. Participants in the current study identify this isolation as problematic to leadership particularly in terms of services where people untrained in ECEC achieve management positions

A number of service directors discussed a lack of clarity and an ambiguity over leadership roles when they are accountable to a committee of positional parental leaders. While not undermining the inherent value attributed to the involvement of parents in early childhood services, participants did present a critically reflective evaluation of this management arrangement. For example, in Victoria and New South Wales the parent committee is often responsible for the budget of the service,
wages and the hiring of staff (Walker, 2004). “Families and teachers are confused by the range of organisational structures and management systems for preschools in Victoria” (Walker, 2004, p. 28). According to Lucy, a New South Wales academic, such a management relationship is problematic in terms of leadership since the committees often have considerable power over staff and yet the director is the positional leader. This is not so much about accountability as confusion over leadership roles illustrated when Lynda states, “there is an ambiguity about actually who is in charge” (Int. Q, p. 3). In accordance with this, Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) state,

> With a group of parents acting as a committee, the lines of authority and communication as employers and employees may not always be clear and may increase confusion about roles and responsibilities between the parents and the professionals at the centre. (p. 92 & 93)

Walker (2004) quotes a submission from a preschool teacher which further illustrates this issue.

> I don’t know who I work for anymore, who I am answerable to, who is there to support me, what roles each of the different players have and who to send parents in need to. This hotchpotch arrangement only inhibits our abilities to provide high quality programs and to ensure some consistency across the state. (p. 29)

According to participants in the present study, this management relationship makes defining and enacting leadership by ECEC personnel, who are in positional leadership roles, problematic. Given the deference to the generalized other discussed previously, such a management arrangement provides a strong influence to the actions of ECEC personnel.

According to Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) the management relationship in ECEC frequently involves a situation where those with the qualifications are often managed by parent committees with little if any early childhood experience creating a “knowledge imbalance” (p. 93). Such a situation appears to create tensions as illustrated in the following example. Jodie (the director) recounted a situation where
a committee member wanted to instigate a change within the service. This posed problems for the staff since “he didn’t want our knowledge—he had an outsider’s view of how the organisation worked and he wanted to change it with that view in mind” (Int. B, p. 6). The staff chose to deal with this situation by avoiding confrontation and justified this action in light of the committee member being the parent of a child in the service. For the staff this created a professional dilemma as they sought to avoid confrontation with the ideas they felt were inappropriate so as not to alienate or affect the child and the parent. This situation is compounded by parents’ voluntary role that allows them the opportunity to express considerable comment on the professional role of qualified ECEC personnel. It illustrates the professional challenges faced by these ECEC staff as they navigate a relationship between variously qualified staff and parent committees who also hold a wide variety of qualifications—sometimes not unrelated to childhood development and ECEC.

The director of a preschool in New South Wales illustrates the tensions in this relationship with management committees when she states.

Working with a parent committee too, the way it’s administered is very hard because you’re community based so you have the responsibility of everything but you are still answerable to a parent committee…often a group of people who are very well meaning…but don’t have the time to learn all the new things that they need to learn and you can’t expect then to know because there’s just so much to learn for a twelve month period. Sometimes you get people on a parent committee who have their own agenda as well, and that can make it very difficult and so yeah, it’s too hard, it is really very hard, it’s very tiring. (Int. D, p. 8)

This example illustrates a tension for this director. She is beholden to the parent committee, often constituted by parents with limited experience in this context, and who function in this role for only a short period. The frequent interpretation of others’ views by ECEC personnel in determining action is exacerbated in a management structure that muddies the knowledge and power relations of the
director’s role. The ambiguous nature of the relationship between trained director and mainly voluntary parent committees makes the enactment of leadership for these participants troublesome and unclear.

No time to lead

Participants raised additional barriers to enacting leadership. These included lack of time and the very practical nature of the work. Only those working in family day care did not highlight these as problems. These factors contributed to limited time for leadership activities such as vision. One academic recounted her early teaching experience where she described the nature of the work as so demanding as to prevent leadership activity.

I actually started two centres and I was there for a total of five years and I used to always say if I could achieve one or two tasks a day I would be doing well you know. And I actually timed it. I was interrupted when I tried to do a task every seven minutes. (Int. O, p. 4)

These demands were such that her experience in childcare led her to believe that enacting leadership is “very hard to achieve” (Int. O, p. 4). Another academic empathetically commented that “you know, you give people a minute and they think it’s a big silence because they’re not used to having time to think” (Int. R, p. 11). In practical terms, this was supported by the director of a long day care centre who suggested that staffs are often “surviving the day” (Int. F, p. 14). This survival inhibits reading, which this practitioner sees as limiting ECEC personnel’s ability to articulate effectively what it is they do. A number of participants interpret the practical nature of the field as one that demands attention to day-to-day issues and provides little time for contemplative, visionary actions associated with leadership enactment. Sharon an academic stated, “I think for leaders to grow they have to have time for some reflection and some debate” (Int. O, p. 9). According to all participant groups aside from the family day care coordinators, time seems preciously limited in the ECEC context.

Literature in the area of leadership in ECEC suggests that the role of managers and leadership are inherently linked and interwoven (Rodd, 1998). This conceptualisation in the context of the present study provides an expectation that ECEC personnel are
managers and leaders, yet participants indicate this as problematic. The interpretation of participants that there is limited time for leadership activity reflects an adherence to others’ expectations of field credibility, limited leadership training, and uncertainty about the enactment of leadership. Again, an imbalance between the I and Me results in deference to others and reduces individuals interpreted leadership capacity.

Knowing leaders

Every participant group except long day care directors referred to knowing a range of things as important to the enactment of leadership. This “knowing” included reference to qualifications within the field and what value academic qualifications may have in relation to practical knowing. It also referred to what it is to know what you do in ECEC and the ability to articulate this effectively. Knowledge was identified frequently as a prerequisite for effective leaders. In terms of knowledge of leadership theory and formal training for leadership activity, participants noted a dearth in preparation. These aspects will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Such perceptions are somewhat consistent with the findings of previous studies reported by York-Barr and Duke (2004). In their review of teacher leadership literature a theme emerged related to increased formal preparation and support for teachers as leaders. It appeared that insufficient preparation and a reliance on intuitive knowledge links to the “quick retreat” of teachers from leadership roles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 277). Attention to preparation emerges as a significant factor in teachers’ interpreted leadership capacity and in leadership retention.

In the Australian context, the 2003 Australian Government report on the childcare workforce highlighted the problematic nature of qualifications within ECEC. Unlike the school setting, many staff enter the ECEC field without any qualifications (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003) and consequently no formal preparation for leadership. The limited nature of pre-entry training amplifies the lack of preparedness many in the ECEC field have for leadership roles and illustrates a social ambivalence to qualifications for staff who work with young children. It is possible that an individual’s interpreted leadership capacity, is potentially compromised, by lack of qualifications and subsequent limited confidence and knowledge to act.
The value of qualifications

The relevance of qualifications to the field of ECEC remains problematic and underexplored (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003; Ireland, 2004). This issue was raised by every participant group and was mentioned on many occasions, particularly by academics and those working in allied organisation (see Appendix G). In terms of leadership, participants made links between a lack of knowledge and leadership. The ECEC field has historically involved both qualified and unqualified personnel. Qualifications take multiple forms but in the main are two-year TAFE diplomas and four-year university degrees. Many unqualified staff have been working in services for numerous years, most frequently in subordinate roles to those with qualifications (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003). Given the so called team-focused approach to leadership in ECEC (as discussed in Chapter Five), the value of qualifications appears problematic and in some ways ill defined. According to Jodie, despite unqualified staff being actively involved in the service they are reluctant to be vocal. They see the director as having the training. “They still can’t get past that training” (Int. B, p. 14). Unqualified staffs are frequently involved in many aspects of the service and have the experience to take on many responsibilities however; it appears that Jodie’s staffs recognise a line over which they are not prepared to step. Jodie expressed concern over the role of qualifications when she acknowledged that some unqualified staff is “knowledgeable about children and parents” while some qualified staff “become bound by theory” (Int. B, p. 15). This tension about the value of qualifications in ECEC demands attention and debate within the field. In particular, a focus should be on the inequitable power knowledge relations evident and maintained by a low social valuing of the ECEC field. Participant accounts illustrate the continuing inaccessibility to leadership knowledge, which diminishes confidence to enact leadership.

Participants illustrate the complex relationship between qualified and unqualified staff. Jodie provides the following account to illustrate how formally qualified staff and unqualified staff work together.

I mean just last week I was having a lot of trouble with a very young group that’s got a lot of children with communication concerns and
they were just—I was starting to lose it and Anne was there with me—one of my assistants and she just said; oh a couple of sentences and it was a different person talking, she took a different tone and she got them. I thought it was great and I could start again and that’s something I didn’t have to tell her. (Int. B, p. 4)

This example demonstrates the inter-relationship and inter-dependency between untrained and trained ECEC staff where the untrained staff member deals successfully with a problematic situation, which the trained staff member was unable to resolve. What knowledge is valued and successful in ECEC? Perhaps the relationship is similar to that described by Eveline (2004) who defines “companionate” leadership as collaborative networks “focusing on everyday acts through which people manage changing work practices” (p. 35).

For one academic near retirement, this issue of qualifications is particularly problematic. April feels that there are people who are good at what they do but “they have to understand why they’re doing it”. April equates this knowledge to credibility when she states the following.

If you don’t have a depth of knowledge, you’re a good practitioner but you don’t know why it is you do that stuff. It makes it harder to be credible because you’ll sound fluffy—there’s no advantage to early childhood practitioners sounding fluffy. It’s the nice ladies thing of the past, where you maybe were doing beautiful work but, you sounded like someone in a pink cardigan and pearls. You sounded like a women who could not really present a firm position. (Int. T, p. 19)

For April, a sound philosophical and theoretical underpinning is required by ECEC personnel, particularly those with a university qualification to “give some guts to what they’re saying” (Int. T, p. 19). This example illustrates the leadership disadvantage that results from inadequate knowledge and or limited ability to articulate the knowledge that informs ECEC practice. Practitioners limited ability to
articulate what it is they do could compromise their capacity to advocate effectively for the field.

Preparation for leadership

Leadership training emerges as a significant absence in many practitioners' preparation for their leadership responsibilities. With limited requirements for professional development beyond commencing qualifications, the training received at an undergraduate level is sometimes the only training ECEC personnel will encounter. Lack of preparation can have the affect of inhibiting the adoption of leadership positions and behaviour. According to Lucy, she became the director of a centre without any leadership training. “Back in my day at college we didn’t even have a subject called leadership and management” (Int. Q, p.21). She sees this shortfall as requiring directors to take a trial and error approach to develop their own style. A younger participant recounted her undergraduate training as not including reference to “…the fact that we had to work with co-workers” (Int. K, p. 7). She adds that when there are discussions in ECEC many of the conversations never get beyond discussing leadership for children to any discussion of leadership for staff and parents. Jo, a long day care director, frankly stated that “I had no training in management or leadership in my course whatsoever that I can think of—we didn’t even do any real administration” (Int. F, p. 4). She continues, suggesting that, in enacting leadership ECEC personnel have to rely on their life experiences, their personality and their commitment, “I learnt on the run, it was sink or swim” (Int. F, p. 4). Here there are similarities with the reliance on intuition rather than preparation noted by York-Barr and Duke (2004) earlier in this chapter.

Preparation for leadership in undergraduate courses appears to be somewhat limited and erratic according to participants in this study. Jodie recounts how she emerged from her initial teacher training quite naive to many of the realities of the workplace. She recognises she was not prepared for the number of stakeholders involved in the service. She also feels that it was only through experience that she came to appreciate the importance of co-workers and now seeks to make this evident to the early childhood student she has in her service. “I try to say to our students—give them a little bit of background about how the committee works and I always tell our students how important you know your co-workers are” (Int. B, p. 4). For Chantelle,
the minimal training to be a leader is an oversight since “surprise, surprise, everyone is going to have to do it” (Int. K, p. 9), because “even if you’re a two year qualified childcare worker, working in a room—often you’re called a team leader” (Int. K, p. 9). It appears that many participants feel their formal leadership training in undergraduate programs has been limited and left them ill prepared for later leadership responsibilities.

The relationship between knowledge and power is highlighted by standpoint feminism and this theory provides a means to understand the implicit and explicit power relations related to gender (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). With this perspective applied to the present study it is possible to illustrate the gendered power relations that imbue many socially dominate and heroic masculinist notions of leadership. These notions pervade generalized conceptualizations of leadership to the point that alternative enactments of leadership are construed not as leadership at all (Eveline, 2004). Standpoint feminism helps to explore the diverse experiences of women in the highly feminised field of ECEC and to illustrate the gendered power relations that contribute to the interpreted leadership capacity of personnel within the field. The traditional notion of ECEC as a field of nurtuance and care is juxtaposed against the traditional heroic male notions of leadership which are woven into the social understandings of what stands for leadership (Eveline, 2004). Knowledge of leadership has for the ECEC field been limited in the formal sense of preservice preparation and much leadership activity is founded on an intuitive and communicative basis (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This has resulted in the emergence of a style of leadership based on egalitarian notions of a team rather than traditional hierarchical conceptualizations. The problematic nature of in this interpretation was discussed earlier. When participants’ understandings of team-based leadership do not include strategic vision the result can be ineffective teams (Blake, 1987). Lack of access to leadership knowledge through pre service training emerges for the participants as a significant factor in their sense of agency or hesitancy to enact leadership. This lack of access to leadership knowledge provides a power inequity for ECEC personnel and continues to silence alternative leadership approaches.
Post graduate study

The potential for postgraduate study to provide additional knowledge was highlighted by some participants although they are keenly aware of the challenges this presents. According to Chantelle, a participant from an organisation associated with the provision of services for young children, further education has a positive affect. She articulates this in the following way. “The more knowledge I have, I feel stronger, I feel more able to articulate it, I feel better…my advocacy is better, my potential leadership I suppose is better” (Int. K, p. 26). This participant illustrates the relationship between access to knowledge and the empowering effect this can have on leadership agency.

Chantelle was keenly aware of the difficulties associated with undertaking a higher degree in terms of lack of support in both time and money.

   I feel like a nutter sometimes, you know, you think what are you doing that for you know and like other people in other fields just think you’re a mad women you know and my mother said to me one day, you know that you’re not going to get any more money and you don’t get paid enough. (Int. K, p. 26)

For Chantelle the decision to undertake postgraduate study is a major financial and lifestyle commitment without any apparent fiscal or career rewards. She is cognizant of the limited social valuing of further qualifications for ECEC personnel but defies such external perceptions (Me) preferring to rely on her own interpretation (I) of the benefits it will afford her.

Standpoint feminism is considerate of the diversity of women’s experiences and the interconnecting power relations between women (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). This was apparent in earlier discussions of horizontal violence where power relations were evident in expectations of conformity and compliance to a dominant culture despite the rhetoric of niceness. In terms of knowledge and qualifications, participants identify a tension between those with university qualifications and those with TAFE certificates or those without formal qualifications. This tension has traditionally been a source of division and discussion within the ECEC field.
(Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003; Press & Hayes, 2000; Stonehouse, 1994). The Australian government report into the child care workforce claims that the distinction between qualification requirements in the ECEC sector reinforces the dichotomy between care and education (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003). One participant refers to this when she says, “it’s about acknowledging that we have a deep understanding of what it is we do with children and the outcomes” (Int. R, p. 11). She continued to explore this tension stating,

> You can say as many times as you like for the rights of children to have good quality of education—it’s the right for children to be cared for in a particular way but oh people’s ability to unpack what that really means is frightening. And if we wanted to unpack how an aeroplane works we’d have experts on it or if we unpack how some genetic thing works we get scientists on it, so why would we have untrained people and people with very basic knowledge unpacking that concept?” (Int. R, p. 11)

This reflection suggests that further qualifications are likely to make a positive contribution to more effective articulation of ECEC practice. This participant continued, qualifying her comments.

> I’m not saying that everyone who works in children’s services is dumb or something like that, it’s more that you need an environment where thinking about your practice is encouraged at a particular level and I just don’t think that that happens. (Int. R, p. 11)

This she attributes to the job being hard with poor conditions, limited financial remuneration and minimal time to think. Chantelle illustrates the problematic nature of qualifications and practice when she asks “how many PhD, doctors, the real McCoy doctor person are working with an actual child—you’d be hard pressed—I don’t even know one” (Int. K, P. 19). Consequently, it appears there are discontinuities over the value afforded further qualifications in a field that has significant practical demands and a high proportion of unqualified staff. In this context, participants refer to the need for open discussion and debate over this issue.
April suggests that there is a “need to talk about how we respect colleagues with lesser qualifications—it’s something we have to confront and discuss. We have to actually pull that one out and talk about it. Divisions will not necessarily destroy us” (Int. T, p. 11). This perspective is supported by recent government reports (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003). April reflects that such a discussion would “demand leadership from within the field” (Int. T, p. 11), since practitioners are too busy and lacking confidence themselves. Participants are suggesting that what counts for knowledge within the ECEC field is contentious, and the value afforded qualifications remains ill defined and contributes to poor articulation of ECEC practice. Standpoint feminism elucidates the knowledge/power relations in this situation where access to knowledge is limited by social expectations that ECEC personnel are carers and nurturers who apparently do not require leadership training or higher qualifications.

Experiences beyond ECEC
Participants indicate that further qualifications and varied work experiences have somewhat limited currency. In terms of seeking other experiences beyond the ECEC field, it seems that there is little professional support or incentive for such moves. According to a preschool teacher Heidi, who chose to work outside ECEC in related areas, she found that the structure does not support this, with lost increments, less pay and limited recognition. “I think that there is a problem with doing other things though. I don’t think that there is much encouragement to do other things or even to do further study” (Int. A, p. 2). After working outside of preschool for a number of years in special education, TESOL, and tertiary settings, Heidi encountered disadvantages for not having stayed in the same service type. “So my experience and my extra training didn’t count for anything. On some applications I have even left off some of my qualifications because it may have been a disadvantage” (Int. A, p. 2). Heidi reflexively considered the incongruence of this with other professions when she stated the following.

This sort of thing wouldn’t happen in other areas where people are encouraged to do other things and get promoted for it. Many other workplaces have clearly defined career paths. They are not clearly defined in early childhood. (Int. A, p. 2)
This lack of support to undertake other experiences and further study has implications. Heidi suggests the lack of career structures means that people stay in the one area and they are reluctant to change. “I think it makes them reluctant to change and sometimes I feel myself getting like that and I have to remind myself. I sort of try to think what might happen if it were another industry—how would we do things then?” (Int. A, p. 3). Heidi illustrates the complex nature of qualifications and their value in the ECEC field. She herself sees this as problematic and influential in discouraging ECEC personnel to extend themselves. “People are busy and tired and seem to have a sense of being undervalued by government. I don’t think that this encourages them to look to do other things” (Int. A, p. 3). Interpreting professional identity though the perceived social value \((Me)\) afforded ECEC limits the leadership aspirations of personnel. This, combined with a promotional structure and career path that does little to support diversity and risk taking, can reinforce existing practice. Within this context of limited value for diversity of experience or further qualification, leadership may not be a desirable option or something for which to strive.

Within a context defined by limited career opportunities and encouragement of diversity, it may be timely to consider the perspectives promulgated by Moss (2002). Moss (2002) questions the existing roles of ECEC workers and suggests an alternative pedagogy who may “work not only in early childhood but also with school-age children, young people and adults…” (p. 436). Drawing on recent conceptualisations from Scandinavia, Moss suggests a new qualification, which straddles services and schools with the teacher prepared to work with students from birth to nineteen years (Moss, 2002). In this way, Moss makes problematic traditional constructions of school and schooling preferring to see early childhood influential in a broader view of education. He also suggests that existing agendas in ECEC themselves require change to avoid entrenchment in liberal politics and domination by discipline perspectives such as psychology and economics. Such alternative constructions provide potential for ECEC to become part of a wider educational discourse, which may include greater career opportunities, and a celebration of diversity, which is not evident in many participants’ understandings of their field in this study. Therefore, individuals may have an enriched interpreted leadership capacity.
**Acting as the leader**

When it comes to acting as a leader, participants drew attention to various challenges and expectations. They refer to leadership within the service context and more broadly in advocacy roles. These two aspects shall be discussed below. As has been outlined in Chapter Five, leadership in ECEC is understood to involve a team-based approach in general. This is further evidenced in how participants see leadership enacted particularly at the service level; however, this leadership approach does not necessarily have a harmonious transition into advocacy. A number of factors were identified by participants that further demonstrate the interpretation of the *Me* over the *I* and subsequent effects on leadership capacity.

**Field credibility**

Team focused leadership emerges as central to how leadership is understood and enacted in ECEC. According to participants, to be a part of the team requires involvement in a wide range of activities. Lucy, an academic, illustrates this when she states, “what we try and teach in our course it’s very much that you are a part of a team and perhaps the structure of having teachers and untrained assistants having to work together” (Int. Q, p. 3). This rationale she attributes to the valuing of people as individuals rather than their position. In such a circumstance, the inevitable expectation is that leaders,

- get in there and wash bums and um wash floors, change dirty nappies
- and that sort of thing. That’s what we do, that’s the nature of our field
- and we’re all working towards focusing on the child and serving the child. (Int. Q, p. 3)

Lucy elaborates when she states, “we all do the work, we don’t want that them and us split” (Int. Q, p. 3). This is indicative of the dichotomy between staff with various qualifications discussed previously. However, it implies an absence of distinction between the actual works undertaken by variously qualified staff. This is almost a renouncement of any recognition of difference, which could mean that qualifications are indistinguishable.
A coordinator of ECEC services concurred with this but from the perspective of maintaining contact with her practitioner counterparts. Danielle considers it important that she is still seen to work in services on occasions to retain her relationship with her staff. “It’s an important factor for them because they see that you’re able to relate to them on an equal pegging” (Int. J, p. 5). April, an academic, reinforces this practical engagement when she states the following. “I like to get my hands-on work with children from time to time so that I stay in touch” (Int. T, p.1). Her rationale for this field engagement is premised upon her belief that it is important to understand what is happening to teachers to have authenticity as an academic. Like others, Cassandra the director of a long day care centre, sees the need to maintain field credibility to achieve respect from her staff. “I’m happy to work alongside the other girls in any area and things like that. I mop the floors and do everything else” (Int. G, p. 4).

The notion of field credibility is interpreted by some participants as a requirement for leaders and emerges as an expectation within the ECEC culture particularly by academics, students, and those participants working in long day care. Georgina states that leaders need to be “prepared to do everything that everyone else is asked to do” (Int. D, p. 2). This implies that a degree of field credibility is required if leaders are to be accepted by their colleagues. For Cassandra, a long day care director, this credibility extends to mopping the floors and everything that is involved in leading a room. She considers that this builds respect and rapport with staff and credibility as a leader through knowing what it is like for others. Accordingly, Deidre another long day care director suggested that as a leader she finds “it difficult to ask someone to do a task that I’m not prepared to do myself” (Int. H, p. 19). Consequently, leadership in ECEC is about not being seen to be in charge and having a field credibility to ordain your leadership role. Again, the perceptions of others are interpreted by participants as important in retaining their leadership credibility. They sense this requirement for field credibility from an ECEC cultural discourse, which reflects social expectations of women and their ability to do it all. This may provide a daunting image of what is required for ECEC leadership if the expectations of others (Me) do not balance with the individual’s interpretation (I) of what leadership requires.

Acting as a positional leader in ECEC appears for these participants, to require a range of attributes to make it acceptable and successful. In addition, participants
indicate that positional leadership has an alienating effect. April claims that this inherently means a demarcation between leaders and others, suggesting that team-based leadership has vulnerabilities. When discussing the adoption of positional leadership roles in ECEC April said that,

> It’s almost a bit like a family (many of the centres) they’ve [the new leader] almost been one of the siblings and suddenly they have to take on a parenting role and that’s a very difficult leap for them. (Int.), p. 3

Here there is a suggestion that positional leaders take on a role that inherently abdicates their team affiliation since others perceive them differently. This is similar to the crab bucket culture discussed earlier where the adoption and implementation of leadership activity can prove alienating and potentially off-putting for aspiring leaders (Duke, 1994). Is it possible to be a team player and a leader in ECEC or are the two mutually exclusive despite the strong rhetoric of team-based leadership? This proves to be challenging for Jo the director of a long day care centre, who suggests that leadership is very different and isolating unless you have a strong network. Otherwise, “you’ve actually got nothing, no one you could really talk over certain things with” (Int. F, p. 18). This illustrates the isolating effects of leadership where “you sort of feel like the meat in the sandwich” where you have the staff on one side and parents and children and “there’s all these factors and you’re juggling them all trying to keep as many people as happy as possible” (Int. F, p. 18). Other authors have noted the potential alienation when teachers adopt leadership roles. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004) when teachers take on positional leadership roles, they can find themselves in “…direct conflict with colleagues, which can result in a diminished affiliation with teaching peers” (p. 267). Apparently, the potential alienation from peers through the adoption of a leadership role may provide sufficient disincentive to undertake overt leadership activity.

### Positional leaders in action

Positional leaders perceive a range of activities they engage in, in order to support staff. In some cases, this support is provided to compensate for the poor pay and working conditions and is apparently transactional leadership in action. For example, Jo works towards keeping her staff happy “because the staff are so poorly paid that you feel you have to do something to make their working lives you know
something they’re going to enjoy, so you try to keep them as happy as possible” (Int. F, p. 19). Cassandra identifies the need to build the confidence of her staff as a prerequisite to taking on other responsibilities. To actualise this, Cassandra provides opportunities for her staff to step up into leadership roles for short periods to help staff see that they can do the job. As a result, she now finds that “I’ve got four staff at our centre that would make wonderful directors and it’s just the confidence to take that next step and have a go” (Int. G, p.16). Opportunity and confidence building emerge here as a major factor in building leadership potential. Cassandra also identifies the need to encourage her staff to undertake further study to build this confidence.

What I’ve tried to do since I’ve been at the service is to actually make sure, try to encourage then all to do a bit more study, because if I can do it anybody can do it. So we, you know all the girls now have diplomas. (Int. G, p. 17)

In addition, she subscribes to various journals to discuss new ideas and keep information coming in. Cassandra considers the value of this includes extending the thoughts of staff, stepping a bit further than their training and providing challenges.

Some positional leaders couch their leadership behaviour in gentle terms in preference to traditional leadership language. For example, practitioners describe their approaches in the following ways. “I’m a different leader…I’m not a confrontationalist” (Int. D, p. 3) and “I am learning to be more assertive but it is not an area I feel comfortable with” (Int. D, p. 3). Another participant suggests that the ECEC leadership approach is “…by pulling rather than pushing and that’s a key criteria for me” (Int. C, p. 2). Consequently, positional leaders engage in various activities through their awareness of their context and their interpretation of the need for a particular leadership style. This finding has strong links to Sinclair’s (1998) work where she defines the need for women to conform “to the ways of being” in a culture (p. 98). There is also a relationship to contingency theories of leadership where the nature of the workplace has a strong influence on the type of leadership required and that which will be effective (Robbins et al., 2004). Participants are cognizant their interpretations of how they enact leadership in ECEC is different to
leadership enactment in other contexts. Why this is the case and how to transfer these strategies to other leadership contexts remains ill defined.

Leadership for the field
The analysis of data in this study suggests ECEC requires team-based leadership, and this has interesting implications in terms of advocacy for the field. Many participants identify the need for advocacy. However, such leadership behaviour often requires individual spokes-people and this is problematic in a culture that requires individuals to be part of the team. Participants discuss advocacy for the ECEC field and in various ways refer to status of the field, the need for a higher profile and improved conditions. From students to academics there is a resounding voice calling for greater kudos. Andrew, an early childhood student, suggests that “I think that the nature of the field you shouldn’t need to have an evident leaders but it’s also possible that to have to get things done that you do need a representative” (Int. X, p. 8). Daryl another student, expanded on this notion suggesting that “I think that we need to be out there in the community a lot more and more vocal about our qualifications and what we are actually doing with the children and why” (Int. Z, p. 4). How this would be manifested remains unclear to these students. A call for increased status and suggestions to address this shortfall have been provided in a recent government report (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003). These recommendations promote mainly an external advertisement of the value of the field and changes to nomenclature to reflect care, learning and education in preference to service type. How effective such initiatives are remains to be seen. What may require more immediate attention is an increasing awareness of the need for greater balance between the competing elements of the I and Me to facilitate in individuals a more robust sense of self. Complementation of this could occur with increased awareness of the gendered nature of the discourse of leadership to facilitate strategic development of ECEC leadership capacity.

Slow-cooking theory
Chantelle provides a considered suggestion to address the dilemma of team-based leadership expectations and advocacy for the field. In my interactions with Chantelle, she developed a metaphor for leadership that defined two distinct leadership styles. She began by defining gentle leadership in contrast to energetic
leadership to describe the differences required for various leadership activities. Chantelle then developed this notion into what she called the “slow cooking theory” (Int. K, p. 15) which relates to leadership over long periods. To describe this, she tells the story of an ECEC practitioner she knows. “She worked really hard and it takes her a year or two to establish work with the parents who are finding it very difficult. She’s prepared to be patient in that sort of way” (Int. K, p. 15). In contrast, Chantelle defines “microwave” leadership activity, which is “obviously intense in bursts of big time energy, public you know energy expenditure” (Int. K, p. 20). For Chantelle, this metaphor describes how she perceives the leadership challenges that face ECEC personnel. Some leadership is required to be constrained and long term while an alternative approach requires short, sharp bursts of commitment and notoriety. In her role within the ECEC field, Chantelle has undertaken both kinds of leadership activity and she is currently very much a microwave leader. Her interpretations of leadership in ECEC will be the focus of discussion in Chapter Seven. She is keenly aware of the complexities of the field but chooses to interpret this context to act in overtly, assertive leadership ways demonstrating more balance between the I and Me.

Advocacy is viewed by April, a retiring academic, as a minefield for which one must have “serious self-confidence and a serious wish to do something for the field” (Int. T, p. 22). This is necessary to weather the possibility of having “your fingers rapped either within your organisation or in a wider sense you could be seen to be pushing your own perspective…” (Int. T, p. 21). Here there are connections with the concept of horizontal violence discussed previously and the confining affect this has on the enactment of leadership for ECEC. While unlike some of the more overt behaviours which inhibit self-confidence and self-esteem in the nursing profession (Randle, 2003) the hostility described by participants in this study was more covert and inhibiting. For example, April, being close to retirement affords her the opportunity to speak without constraint and in doing so; she laments the ECEC field’s inability to articulate to a wider audience. She maintains that ECEC personnel need to understand how leadership is seen in other places, to publish in wider leadership literature beyond ECEC publications to make the field visible. For example, April has found others beyond ECEC talking of non-positional leadership as novel and asking her to “tell me about what it is that you people do because we’re talking about
that and you’ve been doing that for thirty five years” (Int. T, p, 25). April sees the time as ripe for ECEC personnel to “both learn from and contribute to the bigger picture” (Int. T, p, 25). She sees a need to be able to understand how other contexts work when she states, “it’s about influence and the way influence works and also about the way learning can operate in a bigger professional community” (Int. T, p, 26). “If we’re going to be politically influential in teaching organisations and in the schooling sector, we’re going to have to understand how leadership is seen in other places” (Int. T, p. 8). It appears that while advocacy style leadership may be required for the field it demands attention to other contexts and an appreciation that there are various styles and approaches to leadership for differing purposes.

Internal cultural elements that require conformity and compliance in ECEC appear to be inhibiting the circulation and articulation of positive leadership strategies to wider audiences. ECEC personnel could identify and celebrate the valuable aspects of ECEC however; the challenge is to avoid tempering this I with deference to the generalized other Me resulting in limited professional confidence.

Modelling leadership
Participants interpret the major issue around leadership as a dearth of models and mentors. In fact, of all the issues mentioned by participants, it was the most frequent (Appendix G). These terms were often used interchangeably as discussed in Chapter Two however, they often manifest quite differently. For students, having someone to aspire to emerged as important. For Andrew, a model is useful since “if you’re trying to climb the ladder where you are and develop leadership attributes—if you can sort of follow in their path to success this it will make it a lot easier” (Int. X, p. 1). Other students find their mentors and models in their workplaces or professional experience placements. These people are often at the service or school level and in the main, this is the area of leadership with which the students identify (in preference to broader advocacy style leadership). In many cases, role models emerge as people with behaviours and characteristics, which others aim to emulate.
For example, Sharon, an academic, viewed women from Lady Gowrie as role models early in her teaching career. They were inspirational and, really had a big influence on me as a young teacher because they presented a role model for me that was based on something, which I could achieve, but was something higher, something I wanted to aspire to. I’m not certain that teachers have got anything these days to aspire to. (Int. O, p. 11)

For this academic, these role models presented as passionate, collaborative and inclusive women with critical minds. Sharon tempers her own enthusiasm for models when she appreciates the circumstances facing many people working in ECEC.

I don’t think we can expect Kylie who works in Sunshine…who is you know twenty years old and she’s just graduated and she’s got a group of twenty five children and you know she’s out there with one other unqualified person and she’s exhausted because she’s working eight hours a day and expect to come to a staff meeting. I don’t think we can expect Kylie to take that on. I think we must have others who have some inspiring measures. (Int. O, p. 15)

According to Mary an academic, and Harriet, a teacher, both from Tasmania, leadership models and mentoring are entwined providing both image and support. They should be “someone that you aspire to be like” (Int. S, p. 1) and that “their belief in me that I can actually do what I’m able to do—their belief that I can go forward and develop” (Int. S, p.2). This reference relates to the provision by significant others, of moral and emotional support since there are many teachers who “just haven’t got anyone to fight for them” (Int. S, p. 2). In terms of existing models,

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4 A suburb in Melbourne, Australia
participants felt there were such people around however; they expressed some concern about recognising them. According to one student, Maryanne,

I can’t really identify um…many, leaders, but I guess if the leaders are making changes within early childhood or um are the ones making the decisions I guess it would be important for us to know who these people are. (Int. V, p. 4)

This implies leaders in ECEC are not prominent and consequently role models are limited. Andrew, an early childhood student, expressed the need to relate to someone. He felt that “surely we should have some kind of advocate that we can recognise. I honestly can’t think of anyone that is out there for us” (Int. Y, p. 8). Again, this was expressed by another student Daryl who felt there was no one person with whom he could identify at a national level. Leadership literature attributes considerable value to models (Sinclair, 1998) and mentors (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003) in promoting and supporting women in leadership. In this study, participants provide evidence there is an expectation from within the field that there should be models and mentors. Sinclair (1998) suggests that many women avoid notoriety as leaders possibly derived from gendered notions of leadership and the “great man” concept (Northcraft & Neale, 1994, p. 349) to which they cannot relate. However, such avoidance of prominence limits demonstrations of leadership enactment to others and consequently impedes their interpreted leadership capacity.

**Mentoring**

It appears that mentors are people who demonstrate a belief in the ability and potential of another, and who support and nurture this in various ways. According to Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) in their discussion of ECEC leadership, mentoring is a concept built on relationships, focused on developing one’s knowledge and understanding of how to work with others. These authors analyse traditional one to one mentoring relationships for the perpetuation of traditional command and follow outcomes (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). In preference, they suggest a collective model of mentoring may be more suitable since it affords opportunities for alliances built within the group.
The role of mentor is more of an engagement than that of models that may remain unaware of their influence on others. Sharon, an academic, articulates her perception of mentors in ECEC when she states, “I think that we haven’t got any mentors that I can really say—that really lead us really skilfully in the early childhood field” (Int. O, p. 5). For April, an academic, mentors have been rare.

There’s been a desperate need for mentors in the field. I’ve only had one or two people in my whole professional career who’ve mentored me and that to me has been a serious problem. I’ve paddled my own canoe and lead out the front because I’ve had the passion. (Int. T, p. 20)

This participant suggests that the limited attention to mentoring in ECEC is problematic. “I think if we’re going to have serious capacity building in early childhood in Australia now, we need people to act as mentors, we need people who see it as their role to capacity build with others” (Int. T, p. 21). For Mary, an academic, the loss over recent times of what she terms the “instructional leader” (in Tasmania) has left teachers seeking moral and emotional support. “Mentors have provided a belief in the individual that I can actually do what I’m able to do—their belief that I can go forward and develop” (Int. S, p. 2). Perhaps mentors could promote less deference to others with a greater balance between the I and Me in individual’s sense of professional identity.

For Danielle who works extensively with ECEC personnel, there is a direct link between mentoring and leadership. “How do you create leaders in the field if you don’t have mentoring or coaching happening?” (Int. J, p. 16). She dismisses the notion that leaders are born but suggests that they require nurturing and are “created along the way” (Int. J, p. 16). For Trudy, in her role as an academic, there are many opportunities for taking on the “expert role” (Int. R, p. 13) but this is frequently adopted in preference to a more active mentoring role. “In fact what they need is mentoring and knowledge provided over a period of time—what’s one day of in-service going to do for you” (Int. R, p. 13)? Mentoring would provide opportunity to share stories, knowledge and to “have the opportunity to grow a bit more yourself”.

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In my interview with an academic and a senior teacher, the latter provided reasons why she perceived the academic to be a mentor. Harriet described Mary’s mentoring role in the following way. “She has the gift of being able to inspire these young people and I hope she stays in university for quite some time because I also see these students coming into the schools because I have students that come from Mary (Int. S, p. 13).” In another case, an academic describes her mentor as someone who, thinks about everything she does, she thinks about the whole field as a profession and she is always doing that and yet she has that attention to detail as well where she cares about you and she cares about each person and she cares about the course in detail, she cares about everything that she does in detail. (Int. Q, p. 5)

Evidently mentoring has differing implications for various individuals. It includes aspects of care, support, nurturance as well as specific expectations depending on the mentee's individual values and needs. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) provide a list of aspects for consideration in the selection of a mentor when ECEC personnel seek such a relationship. However, for many participants in this study, it appears that having a mentor is a serendipitous escapade with little strategic support. Mentors could offer the potential to address some of the imbalance between the competing elements of the I and Me ECEC personnel experience. Greater credence to individuals own innovative and creative perspectives could balance the views, values and expectations of others (Woods, 1983; Woods, 1996).

**IMPLICATIONS**

How participants in this study enact leadership or see leadership enacted within ECEC illustrates many factors that have implications for individuals’ identified leadership capacity. Participants indicate a culture that requires conformity, which can inhibit diversity and change. This has parallels with the term horizontal violence and indicates a requirement for participants to conform, avoid notoriety and adhere to acceptable ways of being an ECEC practitioner. Although the term horizontal violence may conjure up overt and aggressive actions, it appears that for these participants the ‘violence’ is of a more covert and subtle nature relating to
expectations of certain behaviours e.g., “crab bucket culture” (Duke, 1994). As Amy states “You can see that anyone who does things a little bit differently can be pulled down and I think in early childhood we are notorious for that” (Int. P, p. 6). Non-adherence to others’ expectations can have the consequence of more overt discrimination evidenced in a number of participant accounts. Participants continue to view niceness as part of their culture and part of the determining factors that define how to behave. Acceptable leadership involves adherence to rationales based on the needs of others. Self-interest is problematic. Therefore, aspiring leaders interpret a need to couch their ambition within a discourse of care for others. This has been recognised by previous researchers in the area of women and leadership (Sinclair, 1998; Blackmore, 1999). Could such an expectation prevent the identification of potential leaders with career aspirations because a personal interest and drive is not congruent with a rationale of care for others? This deference to the views of others (Me) has the potential to limit leadership activity and to deter would-be leaders from actualising their ambition, perhaps preferring another profession where this is more acceptable.

Some participants make problematic the inability and lack of eagerness of other personnel to embrace change. This, along with a reticence to undertake leadership and an expectation that someone else will take the lead, could contribute to a leadership void. Leadership can and perhaps should involve change and a culture that demotes such values does little to promote leadership activity. Allowing others to take the lead or ‘waiting for the messiah’ appears to renounce individual responsibility to play an active role in the field. If such acquiescence to others is widespread, there is the potential for influences outside of the ECEC field to be powerful, rather than the direction coming from within.

The physical location of services and their management is often isolated and directed by people not qualified or expert in ECEC (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003). This has a two-fold effect on leadership. It makes ambiguous the role of leaders since directors of services are frequently managed and led by others. The isolation makes access to others in the field difficult and consequently limits opportunities for engagement and support. In terms of advocacy, the isolation provides challenges to people interested and prepared to engage in advocacy activity
since distances and management structures, discussed previously, provide additional leadership challenges. Participants interpret a lack of time and the practical nature of the workplace as constraints to engaging in leadership activity and these are reflected in the troubled debate over delineating leadership, administration and management that continues in the literature (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). This combined with a requirement to maintain field credibility means that potential leaders need to be able to do it all—wash bottoms; mop floors; think, read and act as leaders. Such demands may be too much for aspiring leaders.

The role of preservice education in preparing ECEC personnel for leadership emerges for participants as problematic. It appears that this is an area fraught with absences. Limited understanding of leadership theory, its possible application to the ECEC field and beyond, as well as limited appreciation of the nature of leadership within the field, contributes to an impoverished leadership situation. Participants identify the role and value of qualifications as requiring attention. Why have qualifications if untrained staff can do the same job as those with a four-year degree? Qualifications add to the calibre of the field yet, overt discussion and celebration of this remains constrained despite recent reports that support the need for such conversations (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003).

Leadership can take various forms and appreciation of these can help to delineate the most suitable leadership behaviour for various circumstances. If the metaphor of slow cooking leadership (as described by Chantelle) is adopted for long haul projects such as centre leadership, it may be possible to educate and train for such activity. Awareness and appreciation of the microwave leadership style could alert ECEC personnel to alternative leadership activity for other more intense situations. These activities require different understandings and behaviours and mean that team-based leadership can serve the slow cooking purpose while alternative actions may be required for the microwave activities. Such approaches need not be interpreted as negative or incongruent with the culture or values of the ECEC field but rather supplementary in various circumstances. It is worth noting, the alienating effect that advocacy activity can result in for individuals who choose to pursue such activity. This alienation was made particularly evident by one participant Juliet (a preschool teacher), who referred to the work of a prominent playground advocate and how her
forthright behaviour resulted in threats to her safety and a marginalisation from the field. The effects of such marginalisation appear to limit and constrain leadership aspirations even by the most experienced practitioners.

The strong message from the participants is that they both require and desire models of leadership behaviour. In the context of the field, it is not surprising that such models are hidden. Who would put themselves forward and risk alienation from the team and professional isolation? However, models are necessary to illustrate how leadership is enacted and to show others that it is achievable. In this vein, the obvious absence of mentors is lamented by many personnel. Many participants wish for someone to identify their skills and ability and to promote and support them in leadership activity. Perhaps it is a limited number of recognisable mentors within the ECEC field that has prompted participants to seek mentors in other areas. For ECEC this illustrates a lack of strategic support for potential leaders both at the centre level and in advocacy. Such a situation creates a vulnerability to external influences, where people from other fields can take up leadership in this apparent void. This situation also does little to celebrate the expertise and energy for leadership that may exist within ECEC.

Conclusion
This chapter explored various aspects related to the enactment of leadership in ECEC. Participants’ accounts elucidate issues that demonstrate frequent acquiescence to others and thus an imbalance between the I and Me. Numerous contextual factors interplay to promote or inhibit an individual’s interpreted leadership capacity. It is increasingly evident, through participant accounts, that the culture of ECEC provides a strong influence on how individuals interpret their ability to undertake leadership. A degree of horizontal violence is active in some participants’ workplaces and this discourse can have an inhibiting effect on leadership agency. In some cases, individuals will determine their leadership action based on the perceived impression others will have of them (Woods, 1983). Structural aspects appear to play a role in the way leadership is enacted. Isolation and fragmentation of services are highlighted by participants as constraining elements to leadership. Limited time in the workday is another obstacle. Issues around knowledge suggest there is an infrequently expressed tension within the field
about qualifications. For many participants training for leadership activity has been minimal and this void creates a knowledge vacuum that feminists view as a power imbalance. According to participants, the field demands strong and consistent credibility to be a leader and these demands are such that leadership may appear daunting. Factors emerge for participants that present a dichotomy. For example, on one hand, leaders need to be team focused and yet participants lament the absence of leaders who will increase the kudos of the field and provide others with a model of leadership and mentoring support. These participant accounts of leadership enactment in ECEC suggest a complex interplay of individuals’ interpreted professional identity informed by others’ views, values and expectations (Woods, 1983; Woods, 1996). These factors affect interpreted leadership capacity.
CHAPTER SEVEN

LEADERS IN ACTION

Introduction
The previous two chapters provided accounts of participants’ interpretation of leadership. Chapter Five proposed that understandings of leadership in ECEC are entwined with participants’ interpreted professional identity and this influences their interpreted leadership capacity. I deduce that factors, both internal and external to the ECEC field impact on participants’ professional identity formation and subsequently, on individual’s agency or hesitancy to undertake leadership. Symbolic interactionism is significant in this study since it offers a means to determine what is occurring through understanding “what the actors themselves believe about their world” (Charon, 1995, p. 206). As Charon suggests, symbolic interactionism is “the study of human beings interacting symbolically with one another and with themselves, and in the process of that symbolic interaction making decisions and directing their streams of actions” (p. 149). It is through these interactions that ECEC personnel “take one another into account, communicate, and interpret one another as they go along” (Charon, 1995, p. 146). As discussed in previous chapters, for some participants, their professional identity is strongly informed by influences outside of the ECEC field and they interpret a message of low value for those who work with young children. In addition, factors within the culture of ECEC provide constraints to the enactment of leadership. It seems that when interpretations of self (in this case professional identity) are influenced by the generalised other (e.g., through the low status of the field) then the capacity of agency for leadership is impeded. This often contributes to hesitancy, rather than an agency to act as leaders. For other participants, their interpreted leadership capacity is less influenced by others’ views but reflects a balance between the I and Me.

This chapter explores the stories of two participants who demonstrate their interpreted leadership capacity both within and beyond the ECEC field. These stories assist in understanding how such agency is possible given the constraints documented in Chapters Five and Six. A particular focus on two personal accounts elaborates the key issues/concepts and is consistent with symbolic interactionist
methods used to “capture the perspectives of individual actors” (Charon, 1995, p. 207). From a standpoint feminist perspective these stories are examples of the varied experiences of women (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) and provide an opportunity for their voices to be clearly articulated, demonstrating their particular individual accounts of leadership in ECEC. These stories illustrate how two participants interact in the ECEC field and how they interpret these interactions in ways that make their leadership activity possible. It will become evident that their ability to enact leadership is based on their interpretation of their professional identity not overtly influenced by others. Their leadership agency emerges as motivated by particular issues, which ignite their agency and provide some immunity to the cultural constraints of the field (of which they are well aware). Consequently, these two cases illustrate that leadership agency is possible through a more balanced sense of self not dominated by the Me.

**CHANTELLE AND GLORIA AS ECEC “PLAYERS”**

There are leaders in the ECEC field and they function in various contexts. This emerges as possible despite the previous discussion of the interpretations of the generalised other (made evident in the Me). Following are two vignettes describing two participants’ experiences. These stories more fully illustrate the interplay of the participants’ interpreted professional identity and their interpreted leadership capacity. These stories provide rich accounts of the participants' leadership experiences. Both participants consider themselves leaders in the ECEC field but are keenly aware of a myriad of factors inherent in their leadership activity.

**Chantelle**

Chantelle works in an organisation associated with the provision of services for staff and children. Any further description of this organisation and her role may make her identity evident to others within the field. She is involved in leadership activity at both a state and national level and enacts this through various organisations. Chantelle demonstrates a range of leadership understandings and behaviours and a strong personal capacity to enact leadership. Through her experiences in the ECEC field Chantelle has come to appreciate a range of factors affecting leadership. Like other participants, she sees structural factors such as the lack of time and the isolation
of services as significant inhibitors to leadership aspirations. She is keenly aware of many issues raised by other participants and reflects on these however, they do not appear to inhibit her enactment of leadership. Conversely, Chantelle presents a more balanced relationship between the \( I \) and \( Me \) providing her a robustness to engage in leadership behaviour at a local and national level.

*Chantelle’s understandings of leadership in ECEC*

Chantelle identifies a range of factors she sees as influential to leadership. For example, she understands leadership to involve vision, inspiration and direction. She also thinks “it’s about knowing something—knowing more than me, you know that sort of idea—having someone who’s a bit further along the road than you are” (Int. K, p. 1). Here Chantelle recognises a relationship between knowledge and the power it can provide to leaders possibly through a mentoring relationship. In reflexively pondering the concept of leadership in ECEC, Chantelle considers there is little praise for leadership. She states,

> We don’t sing the song of the beautiful leaders that we do have. We don’t say to people, ‘Oh look this person is really doing some fantastic work’. Instead, what we do is concentrate on the people that don’t do it and there is lots of early childhood that’s guilty of that, not celebrating the success that we have and celebrating the energy that is put into some really great stuff. We spend too much time talking about how we don’t do it. (Int. K, p. 12)

Here Chantelle is illustrating a context where leadership is not overtly rewarded or celebrated which is consistent with the team-based leadership approach explored in earlier chapters. Recognition separates the individual from the team and consequently compromises a team-based leadership approach.

Like other participants, Chantelle refers to qualifications as a point of contention in ECEC. She sees little incentive for further qualifications as there is limited remuneration and career advantage. She applauds New Zealand for its approach to building on initial two-year training qualifications as the starting point to a career of further education. Preservice training, in Chantelle’s view, has done little to promote
leadership. She has limited memories of discussing leadership at all in her training reflecting, “I don’t think we talked about the fact that we had to work with co-workers” (Int. K, p. 7), suggesting a shortfall in her leadership preparation in her undergraduate education. In Chapter Six Chantelle described the advantages she perceived possible through higher education when she stated that more knowledge makes her feel more articulate and stronger and linked this to improved advocacy and potentially better leadership. Her questioning of the inequity of advantage when her brother has funding to undertake a higher degree while she needs to self-fund her masters indicates her capacity to recognise the social value afforded ECEC. This account illustrates the structural limitations many women face in the pursuit of leadership and the specific disadvantage afforded those in a field with low social status such as ECEC. Chantelle links the kudos afforded the field with the ability to attract quality staff. “It links into our perception of children and what we think about children in the community generally” (Int. K, p. 17). “We’re not perceived as important so therefore we can’t draw the best into early childhood education” (Int. K, p. 17).

Further structural barriers to leadership become evident in Chantelle’s descriptions of the ECEC field. Chantelle sees the pressures of ECEC work as such that they leave little time for leadership that involves advocacy. She notes that many in the field focus on “the immediate stuff because that’s the one I can do—I can’t do the other one—someone else has to take care of that because I simply don’t have the time” (Int. K, p. 6). She sees the isolation of ECEC services as having the effect of reducing collaboration between services and “keeping everyone at arms length” (Int. K, p. 6). This isolation impacts on leadership by preventing “time for people to meet together, and you know work together” because people are “certainly not in the same team” (Int. K, p. 6). These comments reflect the accounts provided by other participants who noted the practical demands of working with children such that there was limited time for leadership activities such as vision.

Chantelle’s understandings of leadership are also premised on her own experiences in under-resourced services where she felt compelled to articulate her needs to others. She quickly found that this involved “saying it until they thought ‘oh my god, here’s Chantelle on the telephone again ringing us up and asking us again’” (Int.
This led Chantelle to reflect that “if you wanted to make an effective change I had to give evidence at an inquiry about child care. You know I’d never done anything like that before, but you know that’s pretty ‘out there’. You know and the other early childhood services in the area, coordinators of childcare centres were going ‘oh no I couldn’t possibly do that’” (Int. K, p. 5). For Chantelle the reluctance by others to speak out is disappointing. “That point disappointed me I think. That there wasn’t [sic] more people who would put their money where their mouth is at this very public forum” (Int. K, p. 5 & 6). However, she acknowledges that she had no training or mentoring for such action and others may need support to enact leadership in a similar a manner. This account of Chantelle’s early experiences provides evidence of the balance between the I and Me in her sense of professional identity while cognizant of the challenges around her and the discourses of acceptable behaviour (Me). Chantelle chooses to exercise her own initiative and creative (I) response to circumstances.

Chantelle’s metaphor for leadership

Chantelle sought to provide a metaphor to describe her notions of leadership and this began with two types of leadership, one being gentle, and the other robust leadership. She uses these terms to articulate what she sees as the difference between leadership styles with gentle being a quiet, contemplative approach and robust being more vigorous and energetic. These two styles are not mutually exclusive but serve different contexts and purposes. She sees the gentle approach having the potential to engage a large number of people, to join people together and create unity rather than divisions. She explores how particular leaders such as Nelson Mandela use their passion “to lead people but not harass them into or berate them or punish them into moving forward but collectively, you know in a humane way lead people going forward” (Int. K, p. 3). Personally, she aspires to developing the leadership behaviours of quiet, contemplative people whom she sees as different to herself. She acknowledges her own passion but sees herself as loud and “fairly outspoken”. Chantelle considers both styles of leadership necessary in different contexts stating that

You have to be like that sometimes—in peoples’ faces and that the other leadership, not the gentle style but the other robust, vigorous,
energetic, no holes barred, don’t take no bull shit, keep going, because
there are some forums where you need to keep going like otherwise
you will not be heard at all. (Int. K, p. 3)

Microwave and slow cooker style leadership
Chantelle elaborates on her initial description of gentle and robust leadership to
define two clear types and these she labelled the “slow cooker style” and the
“microwave style”. The “slow cooker” style involves “a lot of energy, time and
commitment externally placed, you know like for other people. I think it is probably
a disincentive and most often of course it happens on top of the existing work that
you have” (Int. K, p. 20). This involves “working really slowly, carefully, nurturing
people’s energies” (Int. K, p. 22) The microwave level “obviously involves intense
bursts of big time energy, public you know energy expenditure” (Int. K, p. 20).

These behaviours demonstrate a more overt leadership approach than that evidenced
in earlier conceptualizations of team-based leadership. In these examples, Chantelle
is suggesting the need for individual activity that involves prominence and behaviour
contrary to the discourse of niceness made evident in the previous chapters. It would
seem there might be contexts and issues that require alternate forms of leadership to
that traditionally enacted by those in ECEC or considered acceptable by personnel in
a caring and nurturing role. These competing discourses do not appear to inhibit
Chantelle’s leadership agency as she adapts her style to suit the circumstances. This
approach has resonance with the contingency model of leadership (Fiedler, 1967)
discussed previously where leadership procedures are determined by the
interpretation of the best fit with the circumstance (Black & Porter, 2000). Similarly,
Sinclair’s (1998) work identifies the capacity of some women to alter their leadership
style to become “bi-gendered” (p. 128). This involves knowing and using an array of
tactics dependent upon the context and the people in the group. Chantelle appears
adept at aligning her leadership style and approach to suit the varied circumstances
she encounters.
Leadership activity is part of Chantelle’s professional life and she recognises these activities in others. She recounts engagements she has had with others who were enacting various leadership activities even though they may have been unaware of their leadership focus. Chantelle tells the story of how she witnessed the building of a relationship between a local librarian and an early childhood educator during the process of their community getting its first public library. The relationship was based on a shared desire to support bilingual literacy development and community literacy development engaging parents. For those involved, this did not appear to be leadership activity yet for Chantelle this is worthy of telling others. However, the ECEC practitioner responded to Chantelle’s suggestion that this process was worth articulating to others with, “Oh my god, no, no, no, I can never do that” (Int. K, p. 16). Chantelle lamented this limited ability to articulate such a positive activity and suggested that training and mentoring in ECEC could perhaps facilitate an empowering change. A story recounted by Chantelle of an ECEC practitioner in a low-income, ex-mining town in England provides another example of leadership. This person supports parents in the centre to undertake further study to a master’s degree level. This practitioner raised money by getting “dressed up as a rabbit and went round to all the pubs in the local area and said give me money” (Int. K, p. 25). The first account of the relationship between the librarian and the ECEC worker demonstrates Chantelle’s description of gentle leadership while her account of the rabbit fund raising activity aligns with her notion of robust leadership.

These accounts of others’ leadership activity demonstrate Chantelle’s eagerness to celebrate others’ successes. Unlike the cultural aspects of the ECEC field discussed in previous chapters, which highlighted a lack of recognition of success and even elements of horizontal violence, Chantelle does not adhere to these discourses. Her more balanced sense of self allows her the confidence to attribute success to others rather than a desire to diminish their achievements.

Leadership for a civil society

Chantelle’s own leadership activities are founded on a desire to use ECEC services to create a civil society. Her rationale is care for others and strongly egalitarian. However, this motivation comes from within (I) rather than from the expectations of others (Me) and therefore affords Chantelle a sense of leadership agency. “I’m
deeply attracted to the idea of early childhood services as forums of civil society. I love the whole idea of bringing parents and educators, politicians and local people all together to work towards, you know, the future” (Int, K, p. 27) This may involve staff and parents giving evidence at a senate inquiry together to advocate for children in circumstances beyond their “sunny middle-class centre” (Int. K, p. 28). This ethos appears to underpin Chantelle’s leadership activity, which covers a range of both her version of the “slow cooking oven” and “microwave leadership”. For Chantelle ECEC is political. She clarifies this when she states the following.

I mean talking about, you know, the current government's policies and stuff like that is extremely political and probably a whole lot of people don’t want to have a lot to do with it, thank you very much. We prefer to see them as just poor waifs that someone at World Vision can look after. We might give them money occasionally but any sort of advocacy and action sort of by early childhood professionals might be seen to be a bit too out there because we’re not—it’s too much of an assumption of a political role when in fact early childhood shouldn’t be political. Well you know wake up and smell the roses!” (Int. K, p. 29)

Here Chantelle is suggesting many individuals in ECEC see the field as apolitical, which she considers a fallacy. Rather than the political aspect inhibiting her leadership action, she embraces it to achieve her own self-determined objectives. She demonstrates vision and strategic goals.

For Chantelle, leadership is challenging and she is aware of various discourses within and beyond the field, which, at times, challenge her sense of self. She recounts an encounter with TAFE students where, while articulating her passion for a civil society, she faced hostility about refugees. “They absolutely attacked me as being way too confident, way too cocky and I was you know—how dare I come here and tell them about those children da, da, da” (Int. K, p. 29). This conflict disturbed Chantelle who feels confident about her knowledge and commitment (I) but, was still shocked by the anger demonstrated by these students and their assertion that issues related to
children in detention is not part of ECEC responsibilities (Me). The apolitical approach preferred by these students is in sharp contrast to Chantelle’s more overt political stance. There is evidence here of a struggle between the I and Me as Chantelle seeks to balance her sense of I with the competing elements expressed by these students.

Chantelle is aware of the many discourses in the ECEC field but chooses not to adhere to others’ views and values (Me) as much as seeking her own leadership rationale and practice (I). This enables her to act as both a “slow cooker” and “microwave” leader driven by her passion and her specific concerns for social justice—her vision. As she states “You know we’ve got to find something to enact. You know I couldn’t be a leader if I didn’t have anything to lead about” (Int. K, p. 38). This demonstrates Chantelle’s appreciation of the need for a vision or goal for leadership to be effective. Inadvertently she is highlighting the shortfall of ECEC team-based leadership. For Chantelle, a particular issue might require the microwave leadership approach and she illustrates this when she states the following. “The microwave stuff is going to heroic inquiry by standing in front of those students and you know putting your ass on the line. And the slow cook stuff is mailing every bloody poster to every service” (Int. K, p. 39). The “slowcooker” leadership appears to be more long term, possibly practically focused and not necessarily notorious but both approaches are underpinned by her vision for social justice.

Chantelle presents as a self-appointed leader who is keenly aware of the competing discourses that contribute to the complex nature of the ECEC field. Her appreciation of the culture of ECEC and factors external to the field do not result in hesitancy to enact leadership but rather agency. Through her account of her speech to the TAFE students, she is familiar with aspects of horizontal violence, which aims to achieve compliance and restrict her more overt political activity. However, her response to this situation illustrates her renewed resolve that ECEC has a political role when she states “I’m not backing off that whole rights conversation because

5 Chantelle is not in a formal leadership position by her employment but is a member of ECEC organisations and takes leadership opportunities for various associated causes.
that’s too namby, pamby for me you know” (Int. K, p. 33). Consequently, Chantelle emerges as a participant who, while well aware of the culture of ECEC, (and the social value afforded ECEC) actively enacts leadership in the face of overt opposition. She has a vision for social justice and this drives her leadership behaviour. Chantelle’s professional identity appears less informed by the generalised other (as was proffered earlier in Chapters Five and Six as creating hesitancy) and consequently is more able to demonstrate leadership agency. She demonstrates an active and balanced engagement of the I and Me in her interpreted professional identity and as a consequence, shows considerable interpreted leadership capacity.

**Gloria**

Gloria is a preschool teacher who works in an early childhood service in a regional town. She was a participant in one of the focus groups. Gloria has received considerable recognition for her teaching role, achieving a national teaching excellence award. This external affirmation extends further with her engagement with ECEC teachers in France. In France, Gloria found ECEC personnel highly valued by society, have good working conditions and requiring high qualifications. Gloria’s experiences of leadership are quite different to those of Chantelle but the accounts she provides illustrate a similarly robust sense of self demonstrated in her professional identity, which affords her leadership agency.

**Gloria’s understandings of leadership**

For Gloria, leadership in ECEC is something she stumbled across rather than expected or was prepared for. Initially her focus was on the children and she described this expectation when she states,

> I think that sometimes—when I came to early childhood we are so intent on the teaching and the day-to-day lives of our children and our families that unbeknown to us, we become the leaders without realising it and I sometimes think that it’s not given the priority it should have. (TFG, p. 3 & 4)

In this case, Gloria illustrates how she encountered leadership responsibility for which she was not well prepared or even expected. She too suggests the nature of ECEC is
such that the practical, nurturing and caring elements take precedence over leadership, which is not highly valued.

Gloria’s understandings of leadership are strongly based on the notion of relationships, which she views as central to effective leadership. This is similar to earlier participant comments where the forming of relationships with children is so central to ECEC work that they should transfer to relationships with staff, and then underpin leadership. According to Gloria, “I think that the central role of leadership for me is that whole relationship and we need a myriad of skills because we are working with parents, children and staff and the community” (TFG, p. 5). She encapsulates these ideas when she states. “So it’s really quite complex and I think that having that relationship and having a really good relationship is really the foundation of good leadership” (TFG, p. 5). For Gloria this relationship is a complex interplay of global aspects such as work with children and parents, having a vision, setting standards, your environment and input into the community. It also includes organisation and commitment and “you just have to be a leader to do all those other jobs without actually stopping to think of yourself as a leader” (TFG, p. 4). Here Gloria meanders through a range of leadership activities in ECEC but infers it happens in an informal manner perhaps without recognition or positional responsibility.

The value of ECEC
Gloria is aware of the complex nature of the ECEC field and some of the external perceptions attributed to those working in this area. She considers that families recognise the breadth of work involved in ECEC but “I think that there is a perception in the community, I don’t know whether community is the right word, maybe society, that we still are nice ladies who play with children—getting back to that lovely old quote” (TFG, p. 5). She provides an example to support this claim when she discusses the people who walk past the centre where she works. While in “the sandpit playing with the children, you know up to our armpits in water and hoses and buckets, and people will walk past and say ‘what a lovely job to be playing with children all day’” (TFG, p. 5). Gloria sees this engagement with children as the focus of her work but “it’s not the end of our work” (TFG, p. 5) which she sees as having many other facets.
For Gloria there is an incongruence between what she sees as her role as an ECEC educator \((I)\) and what society or others perceive that role to involve \((Me)\).

**External recognition**

Gloria is a recipient of a national award for teaching excellence, which was the result of a nomination by her committee of management. This was an involved process in which Gloria was required to take an active and forthright role. Gloria was required to provide her written vision, and to present to a panel and the other nominees to receive the award. After receiving the state award, Gloria was then required to write a 3,000-word paper articulating what she would do with an amount of professional development money if successful. Eventually, Gloria went to Canberra to receive the national award and the professional development grant. This enabled her to travel to Paris and spend time with ECEC teachers in France. The activity required achieving the award; meant Gloria had to persist through the various stages and to put herself forward after the initial nomination from the parents at her centre. Such activity occurred in a supportive environment however, Gloria admits it required considerable determination on her part to follow through in the face of the many practical demands of her teaching/director role. This process demanded a balance between the elements of the \(I\) and \(Me\) as Gloria demonstrated her high level of competence to others in order to achieve the award.

**Paris...**

Aside from the recognition and affirmation of the award, the time spent in Paris afforded Gloria an alternative view of ECEC. Here she saw teachers with the time and opportunity to engage in discussions of theory. Practitioners and were held in high esteem and rewarded in monetary terms. Teachers were in the main, concerned with teaching and “they get three weeks full time professional development per year” \((TFG, p. 16)\) relieved from their teaching duties by fourth year students preparing to enter the profession. Gloria viewed the esteem these teachers experienced in their country, as positive and motivating since it showed her “this is what it can be like” \((TFG, p. 27)\). The effect was such that, on her return to Australia, Gloria felt a real need to evaluate her practice and consider the best way to do things. “It was almost like this was a facet of my leadership that actually changed in some ways”. She felt it incumbent on her to return and “instil that enthusiasm” \((TFG, p. 27)\) in others given
her opportunity to experience such a positive environment as that in Paris. However, she qualified this enthusiasm with reference to funding in her State lamenting that “I can see all the things that we could possibly achieve if we had the funding at the level—let’s say as they do in Paris” (TFG, p. 27). Consequently, tempering some of her leadership enthusiasm are the fiscal constraints she perceives within the ECEC field in her State.

Gloria is an early childhood practitioner eager to enact leadership through her service by engagement with children, parents and her community. Similar to other participants’ data, Gloria’s interpretation of her professional identity relates to how others view and value her work however, unlike others this has in the main been positive and enabling. Because of her positive experiences evident in her award and her experiences in Paris, Gloria is motivated to lead others to experience similar possibilities. Gloria demonstrates a strong sense of self in her pursuit of the national teaching award. Despite the initial nomination, the award required considerable persistence on her part demonstrating her capacity to put herself forward and articulate her professional values (I). She is keenly aware of the fiscal and time constraints that effect ECEC professionals and their aspirations but demonstrates agency to act as a leader. Her sense of self demonstrates a balance between the influences of the generalised other (made evident in the Me), through the social and cultural expectations discussed previously.

**IMPLICATIONS**

These two stories illustrate that leadership in ECEC exists in various ways but demands an interpreted professional identity not overly influenced by the Me in preference to the I. Chantelle provides particular details of her struggle with the views of others (e.g., the TAFE students) and the culture of ECEC, which she sees as somewhat constraining. To balance these external factors (Me) she refers to what she sees as particular social issues that demand attention and leadership activity (I). Her agency demonstrates a balance between the I and the Me in providing a more robust sense of self not so vulnerable to the generalised other. Gloria demonstrates a persistence to achieve overt recognition through the teaching award. Rather than avoid prominence she sees it as a vehicle to share her experiences with others. Here
again her sense of self is informed more by a balance of the I and Me rather than a dominance of the views of the generalised other. As Woods (1996) suggests, a balance of the I and Me is desirable for the individual and society. These two participants illustrate that leadership agency is possible but that it demands a sense of self not dominated by the generalised other.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Introduction
This final chapter will outline the implications arising from this study. It will restate and revisit the research questions; illustrate the significance of the research; diagrammatically display the interconnected findings; acknowledge the limitations of the study and suggest further research. Given the focus of the study was to come to appreciate how leadership is understood and enacted within the field of ECEC it is not intended to provide a model for leadership but rather an appreciation of the multiple factors related to leadership in the field as understood by these participants.

The research questions
The research question in this study focused specifically on how ECEC personnel understand leadership and its enactment within the ECEC field. A qualitative research paradigm was adopted and symbolic interactionism provided a methodological tool to inform data analysis. Feminist theory acted as a secondary theoretical partner providing a lens through which to view the data and assist in the analytical process. Understanding participants’ interpretations of leadership emerged through the conceptualisation of a mutually informing cycle demonstrated in Figure 5.1 (p.112). This interpretive framework involves the concepts of interpreted professional identity, and interpreted leadership capacity and the interdependence of these to the enactment of leadership.

Figure 8.1. Diagramatic representation of findings
Figure 8.1 illustrates the key aspects to the interpretive framework and how these are created by influences both within and beyond the ECEC field. Increased understanding of how participants interpret their professional identity and see it interpreted by others is linked to their capacity to enact leadership. In addition enacting leadership involves running the gauntlet of a myriad of factors such as issues around qualifications, leadership preparation, field credibility, structural barriers and a dearth of models and mentors. On their own, each of these factors requires further exploration to appreciate contextual factors and consider future leadership possibilities.

The first sub question focuses on the characteristics of leadership identified by ECEC personnel. The nature of leadership emerges as strongly related to the concept of a team which translates into a team-based, non-hierarchical leadership approach. However, this interpretation of leadership is somewhat limited. Leadership literature (Blake, et al., 1987; Hersey, et al., 2001) suggests that teams without clearly articulated and acknowledged vision or goals are ineffective. Participants’ team-based understandings of leadership in ECEC are thus more related to non-positional leadership than team or group leadership as articulated in the literature. This understanding of leadership therefore leaves the field with few positional leaders and no real team focused goals or visions. Where does the notion of leadership fit in this context?

According to participants, undertaking positional style leadership outside or for the field requires an egalitarian rationale. For example, it is acceptable for prominent leaders to enact leadership if their intention is to improving outcomes for others. Taking on leadership for other reasons appeared less acceptable to participants. The characteristics of leadership involve collaboration—notoriety and prominence are not applauded. Knowledge of leadership theory, preparation via preservice education and further qualifications do not feature as major characteristics of ECEC leaders.

The second sub question explores how ECEC personnel describe leadership and its enactment at a service, local and national level. Participants identify a team-based leadership approach permeating the field. However, they identified problems with this both within and external to the ECEC field. For some participants, the culture of
the field demands compliance and conformity often couched within a discourse of
niceness. This manifests as a form of horizontal violence or crab bucket mentality
(Duke, 1994) where individuals exert pressure on others to conform. For participants,
these expectations are constraining to other ways of being and for some were in
conflict with what leadership requires. This dominant discourse collides with
leadership behaviours that promote change and reflection. Some participants felt the
expectations for compliance so strongly their leadership activity was inhibited. In
other words, the influence of others impacts on their interpreted professional identity
and as a consequence their interpreted leadership capacity is compromised.

Participants identify an absence of leadership models and mentors, particularly at the
state and national level. This results in limited ways for personnel to see leadership
enacted (in the case of models) and to have strategic support for their own leadership
aspirations (in the case of mentors). Leadership models are important in supporting
individuals’ interpreted professional identity since they provide images of how
leadership can be undertaken. This can then empower one’s own leadership
capacity. Mentors could provide specific support and guidance for individuals to
assist in navigating the culture of ECEC and gain increased awareness of how
leadership is enacted in other contexts. Such support would then enhance
individuals' interpreted leadership capacity.

The final sub question asks what the implications are for leadership within the ECEC
field given the accounts of leadership provide by ECEC personnel This question
elicited four major implications or contributions which include the methodological
value of combining symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminist theory.
Secondly, the significance of professional identity and its relationship to leadership
activity or inactivity and thirdly the implications of this research for preservice
teacher education. Finally, there is discussion of how this research into leadership in
ECEC intersects with other leadership research. There shall now be discussion of
how each of these four categories is significant to the ECEC field.

Methodological value
The combination of symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminist theory is not
new but the application of these two perspectives to the study of leadership in ECEC
is original. This study illustrates that combining key ideas from symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminism can result in a new account of participants’ interpretations of leadership. Feminist theory, and in particular standpoint feminism, assists in unpacking the taken for granted social expectations of a highly feminised field such as ECEC. Harding (1993) implies that in relation to male dominant, homogeneous groups, it is hard to identify let alone critically interrogate shared assumptions. Consequently, asking questions about the nature of leadership in a highly feminised field such as ECEC may elucidate aspects contrary to uncontested assumptions shared in a male dominated domain. There is evidence from feminist writers of the lingering expectations of women and mothers and the carry over of these images and subsequent expectations to the ECEC field. This perspective also makes problematic the traditional construction of leadership as the enclave of the heroic male. The works of Blackmore (1999) and Sinclair (1998) draw particular attention to leadership as having a tradition couched in images and behaviour foreign to the experience of many women and some men. Feminist theory also serves to remind me, the researcher, of the diversity of women’s experiences and the strong relationship between knowledge and power embedded in leadership activity. This study draws together symbolic interactionism and feminist theory enabling an analysis that deepens reflection on several taken for granted assumptions about leadership. It demonstrates the active agency of individuals but acknowledges the cultural and social contexts of these interpretations. Consequently, the achievement is a fuller picture of the notions of ECEC leadership by acknowledging individuals as self-determining but also as participants within their social and cultural worlds. This has the potential to lead to a collective insight into the impediments to leadership through understanding the ways ECEC personnel are oppressed and “sometimes oppress and exploit one another” (Hennessey, 1996), through activities such as horizontal violence.

Professional identity
The second category that has implications for the ECEC field is the notion of professional identity. As the interpretive framework suggests (Figure 5.1, p. 112), the concepts of interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity are interrelated. Professional identity and leadership enactment mediate through Mead’s construction of the self, informed by the concepts of the I and Me. When
perceptions (such as those mentioned by many participants about the status and value of the field) are interpreted as negative (interpreted professional identity), they contribute to a lessened sense of leadership self-efficacy (interpreted leadership capacity). A number of factors related to the culture of the ECEC field are potentially influential to the individual’s capacity to enact leadership (as depicted in Figure 8.1. p. 196). The strong rhetoric of team-based leadership is such that it dominates the discourses of the field, yet participants note a discontinuity between this and the reality of the workplace. There is tension between team-based leadership proffered by many participants and a workplace where aspects of horizontal violence emerge. The discourse of niceness continues to pervade participants’ interpretation of the ECEC culture yet the emergence of its antithesis in horizontal violence demands further debate and discussion. Without such a conversation, the consequence for some participants may continue to be an idealised view of leadership at the centre level and a dearth of leadership expertise at the political level. Attention to the factors influential in the formation of a sense of self (such as the I and Me) may serve as a starting point for individuals to achieve a more balanced interpretation of their professional identity.

In practical terms, the dissemination of this research through journal articles, both professional and academic, is one means to facilitate a conversation about professional identity. Other avenues include conference presentations and seminars, which will provide the potential to raise the concept of professional identity and support the exploration of alternative interpretations through an appreciation of the unique complexities of the ECEC field.

Preservice education

Issues around the preservice education of early childhood teachers are the third category that has implications for the ECEC field. Participants articulated concern about the lack of undergraduate exposure to leadership training. This requires consideration, since many participants felt ill prepared for the leadership roles they inherited or adopted. Universities involved in the preparation of preservice early childhood educators should take stock of the degree and complexity of the leadership components in their training courses and consider the current findings to better prepare graduates for entry to the field. In my own work with undergraduate early
childhood students, I will now be able to engage them in an exploration of the complexities associated with leadership in ECEC. This background will serve as the basis from which we can identify the challenges of leadership (such as interpreted professional identity) and then create strategies to enhance the individual’s interpreted leadership capacity. Postgraduate programs could potentially provide leadership training to complement and enhance workplace leadership experience. Such opportunities would assist current practitioners to access leadership knowledge, appreciate the cultural aspects of the field and feel increasingly prepared to enact leadership.

In terms of possible policy implications, it is difficult to suggest how changes can affect understandings that are entrenched and entwined in the ECEC field. Government initiatives to address the status of the field (Children's Services Sub-Committee, 2003) have been proposed but, they appear to address the symptoms of low status rather than clarifying and dealing with the causes. Changes to the perception of the ECEC field require attention to factors within the field. These include horizontal violence, limited leadership training, and the role and availability of models and mentors. Such factors are currently inhibiting leadership agency by the perpetuation of a culture where leadership enactment (beyond the team) can marginalise individuals; limited knowledge of leadership theory inhibits leadership power; and few images of leaders provide little evidence of leadership enactment. Dialogue within the field may elucidate some of these issues and be the impetus for strategic and supported leadership activity in policy arenas.

*Intersecting with other leadership research*

The study of leadership within the ECEC field may have some applicability to leadership research in other contexts. School-based leadership literature is increasingly attending to the concept of informal and dispersed leadership approaches particularly in school settings (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Business literature is drawing attention to leadership as a group activity (Clayton, 2004). In this present study, participants note a strong expectation of leadership within a team-based paradigm. However, they recognise that covert and overt workplace activities have the effect of demanding certain behaviours (such as compliance and conformity) which are not supportive of leadership aspirations. Given that traditional
heroic masculinist notions of leadership continue to dominate political arenas, a so-called team-based approach could prove to be ineffectual outside of ECEC. In addition, the recent leadership literature indicating increased recognition of leadership as a group activity, may not have considered the impact of group expectations when leadership moves from a positional to dispersed approach. I would recommend celebration of the ECEC notion of team-based leadership for its egalitarian rationale and for its potential to provide other discussions of leadership with a view to how this can happen in practice. However, I suggest caution in the uncritical embrace of a team-based approach without recourse to the complexities demonstrated in the discussions by participants in this study. Can team-based leadership demand a level of compliance and constrain ideas and attitudes such that personnel are unable to debate or question existing practice? This requires more exploration by those eager to adopt team-based approaches who need to be cognizant of such complexities.

This present study may offer new insights to other areas of leadership research given the established, although contested, nature of team-based leadership in ECEC. The highly feminised nature of the ECEC field provides a context to the leadership discussion not previously explored in this way and one that highlights a complex interplay of individual interpretations and cultural aspects. This may provide new contributions to leadership discussions particularly, given the male dominated contexts of much leadership research.

Limitations of the study

On reflection, there were some timing problems in the data collection phase of this study. The focus groups did not prove as effective as I had anticipated. This was due to the time at which they were conducted. The level of analysis undertaken prior to conducting the focus groups was not sufficient to elicit discussion of themes, which emerged in later analysis. If conducted later, the focus groups may have been able to explore the notions of interpreted professional identity and interpreted leadership capacity and their relationship to the enactment of leadership. This interpretive framework was not evident until later in the study although some discussion took place at the Australian Research in Early Childhood Conference 2004. Further work could ascertain practitioners’ perceptions of this interpretation.
Further research

This study focuses on exploring the understandings and enactment of leadership as interpreted by ECEC personnel from a range of service types. Of the issues coded from the data, the most frequently mentioned was the absence of models and mentors to provide images and support for potential leaders and this contributes to the individual’s interpreted leadership capacity. I would recommend further research be undertaken in the area of mentors and models within ECEC to clarify the potential these have for advancing leadership. Such research could explore what ECEC personnel hope or expect from leadership models and what they interpret by the term mentor. In understanding such expectations, it may become desirable to identify models within ECEC, and to develop mentors to support future leaders or leadership behaviour.

This study has focused attention on leadership understandings and enactment in the field of ECEC. Its value lies in the potential it provides for broader and deeper discussion of leadership in this highly feminised field. Such discussion could provide engagement with the contestable interpretation of ECEC leadership as team-based, particularly given the contradictions evident with leadership literature, which suggests team leadership requires specifically, articulated and agreed goals or vision. In addition, this team notion does not sit comfortably with aspects of horizontal violence evidenced in participant accounts. How can leadership be a team affair if individuals covertly seek to undermine or marginalise others? This study challenges many taken for granted and long held assumptions related to the culture of the ECEC field. Feminisim provides a vehical to oppose the “social arrangements hegemonic culture sustains” and thus challenge practices both internal and external to the field that have inhibited leadership activity (Hennessey, 1995, p. 12). It is timely to open debate about these aspects to allow ECEC personnel the opportunity to use this research as the basis for future strategic leadership planning.

Conclusion

Previous research into leadership in ECEC in Australia has in the main, focused on leadership studies attending to particular contexts (Nupponen, 2001; Stamopoulos, 2003; Waniganayake et al., 2000). This study has purposefully focused on gaining
an understanding of leadership in a broader context, deriving evidence mainly from one region of Australia but also including participants from various states. The interview questions allowed participants the chance to discuss their understandings of leadership in the ECEC field at both a local and national level. Participants have traversed multiple issues and as a result provided a strongly contextualised picture of leadership in ECEC. The application of symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminist theory to the analysis of data provides a previously unused lens to illustrate the complexities of such a feminised field. In this study, multiple factors inform understandings of leadership but the views of others, both within and beyond the ECEC field, are significant in leadership enactment. An individual’s interpreted leadership capacity is very much dependent on their own interpreted professional identity, influenced by their particular situation. This includes various factors external to the ECEC field as well as a raft of factors specific to the culture of ECEC.
21 February 2003

INFORMATION SHEET
Title of study: Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

Dear Early Childhood Student

I am undertaking a Doctor of Education through Queensland University of Technology and am researching leadership in early childhood education and care. I am approaching various services in the Albury/Wodonga region and surrounding areas and asking early childhood practitioners to participate in my research project.

The purpose of the research is to gain an increased understanding of how leadership is understood and enacted at a local and national level by those in the early childhood field. In order to do this I am approaching practitioners in the areas of pre-school, long day care and family day care as well as involving students from the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood).

If you choose to participate in the study you will be asked to attend one focus group (of two hours). This session will be audio recorded.

If you choose to participate you can be assured that your contributions shall remain anonymous in the study and in any publication resulting from the research unless individuals choose to be identified.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the process at any time without comment or penalty. Any concerns or complaints...
concerning the ethical conduct of the project can be directed to, The Secretary, QUT University Human Research Ethics Committee (0738642902). My supervisor for this project is Professor Collette Tayler.

I hope that you are interested in participating in the study and have attached a consent form for you to complete and return should you decide to be involved. If you have any queries relating to the research project or your possible participation in the project please feel free to contact me on 0260516981. Please find below some general questions that may be used in the focus groups.

I look forward to receiving your response in the near future

Louise Hard

Possible questions for focus groups:

- How is leadership being enacted at a service, local and national level?
- What issues require effective leadership?
- What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
- What factors impact on the adoption or rejection of leadership behaviours?
- What implications does this have for leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care?
- What literature/publications etc. influence you notions of leadership?
21 February 2003

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The purpose of the research is to gain an increased understanding of how leadership is understood and enacted at a local and national level by those in the early childhood field. In order to do this I am undertaking interviews to gather data from practitioners in the areas of pre-school, long day care and family day care, students from a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) course as well as academics and people working in organisations associated with early childhood.

If you choose to participate in this aspect of the study you will be involved in a semi-structured interview of approximately one-hour conducted in a location you nominate. This interview will be audio recorded.

If participating, you can be assured that your contributions shall remain anonymous in the study and in any publication resulting from the research unless individuals choose to be identified.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the process at any time with out comment or penalty. Feedback will be provided and papers generated as articles from the research will also be made available to you. Any concerns or complaints concerning the ethical conduct of the project can be
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Louise Hard
21 February 2003

INFORMATION SHEET

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To the Director

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If you choose to participate in the study you will be asked to attend one focus group (of two hours). This session will be audio recorded.

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I look forward to receiving your response in the near future

Louise Hard

Possible questions for interview include:

• How is leadership being enacted at a service, local and national level?
• What issues require effective leadership?
• What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
• What factors impact on the adoption or rejection of leadership behaviours?
• What implications does this have for leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care?
• What literature/publications etc. influence your notions of leadership?
18 March 2003

INFORMATION SHEET
Title of study: Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

To the Director

I am undertaking a Doctor of Education through Queensland University of Technology and am researching leadership in early childhood education and care.

The purpose of the research is to gain an increased understanding of how leadership is understood and enacted at a local and national level by those in the early childhood field. In order to do this I am undertaking interviews to gather data from practitioners in the areas of pre-school, long day care and family day care, students from a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) course as well as academics and people working in organisations associated with early childhood.

If you agree to participate in this project you can choose to be involved in either:

- a semi-structured interview of approximately one-hour conducted in a location you nominate. This interview will be audio recorded. Please see possible questions at the end of this letter.

  or

- one focus group (of two hours). This session will be conducted at CSU (Albury Campus) possibly in May. This focus group will be audio recorded and will discuss themes that have emerged from the semi structured interviews..

If participating, you can be assured that your contributions shall remain anonymous in the study and in any publication resulting from the research unless individuals choose to be identified.
Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the process at any time without comment or penalty. Feedback will be provided and papers generated as articles from the research will also be made available to you. Any concerns or complaints concerning the ethical conduct of the project can be directed to, The Secretary, QUT University Human Research Ethics Committee (0738642902). My supervisor for this project is Professor Collette Tayler.

I hope that you are interested in participating in the study and have attached a consent form for you to complete and return should you decide to be involved. If you have any queries relating to the research project or your possible participation in the project please feel free to contact me on 0260516981.

If I receive a signed consent form from you I will be in touch by phone to arrange a time for the interview or the focus group.

I look forward to receiving your response in the near future

Louise Hard

Possible questions for interview include:

- How is leadership being enacted at a service, local and national level?
- What issues require effective leadership?
- What are the characteristics of effective leadership?
- What factors impact on the adoption or rejection of leadership behaviours?
- What implications does this have for leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care?
- What literature/publications etc. influence you notions of leadership?
INFORMATION SHEET

Title of study: Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

Dear Colleague

I am undertaking a Doctor of Education through Queensland University of Technology and am researching leadership in early childhood education and care.

The purpose of the research is to gain an increased understanding of how leadership is understood and enacted at a local and national level by those in the early childhood field. In order to do this I am undertaking interviews to gather data from practitioners in the areas of pre-school, long day care and family day care, students from a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) course as well as academics and people working in organisations associated with early childhood.

If you choose to participate in this aspect of the study you will be involved in a semi-structured interview of approximately one-hour conducted in a location you nominate. This interview will be audio recorded.

If participating, you can be assured that your contributions shall remain anonymous in the study and in any publication resulting from the research unless individuals choose to be identified.
Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the process at any time without comment or penalty. Feedback will be provided and papers generated as articles from the research will also be made available to you. Any concerns or complaints concerning the ethical conduct of the project can be directed to, The Secretary, QUT University Human Research Ethics Committee (0738642902). My supervisor for this project is Professor Collette Tayler.

I hope that you are interested in participating in the study and have attached a consent form for you to complete and return should you decide to be involved. If you have any queries relating to the research project or your possible participation in the project please feel free to contact me on 0260516981.

I look forward to receiving your response in the near future

Louise Hard
21 February 2003

Dear Early Childhood Colleague

Thank you for agreeing at the ARECE conference to participate in the interview stage of my data collection. Please find the details pertaining to the study below. When you return the consent form I will be in touch by phone to arrange an interview time with you.

Thank you again for your interest in this project.

Louise Hard
Appendix D – Consent Forms

SPARE Generic

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

This research project is being conducted by Louise Hard as part of a Doctor of Education being undertaken through Queensland University of Technology.

Contact Details:
Louise Hard
46 Towong Rd CORRYONG
Victoria, 3707
Phone: 0260516981 (work) or 0260762121 (home)

Description:
This research aims to explore how leadership is understood and enacted in the field of early childhood education and care, both at a local and national level.

By signing below you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information letter about this project;
- Have had any concerns answered to your satisfaction;
- Understood that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher;
• Understand that you can contact the researcher if you have any questions about the project, or the QUT Secretary of the University Human Ethics Committee on 0738642902 if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and

• Agree to participate in the project.

Name: ___________________________ Signature: ________________________

Phone number: __________________ Service: ____________________________

Date: _____ / ______ / _________

Please return completed forms in the envelope provided to:

Louise Hard
Murray Education Unit, Charles Sturt University

PO Box 789, Albury 2640
Consent Form

**Project Title:** Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

This research project is being conducted by Louise Hard as part of a Doctor of Education being undertaken through Queensland University of Technology.

**Contact Details:**
Louise Hard  
46 Towong Rd CORRYONG  
Victoria, 3707  
Phone: 0260516981 (work) or 0260762121 (home)

**Description:**
This research aims to explore how leadership is understood and enacted in the field of early childhood education and care, both at a local and national level.

By signing below you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information letter about this project;
- Have had any concerns answered to your satisfaction;
- Understood that if you have any additional questions you can contact the researcher;
- Understand that you can contact the researcher if you have any questions about the project, or the QUT Secretary of the University Human Ethics Committee on 0738642902 if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
• Agree to participate in the project in either a;

  FOCUS GROUP ☐  Or  SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ☐

Please indicate your choice with a tick.

Name:_______________________________Signature:_______________________

Phone

number:____________________________Service:___________________________

Date: _______/ _________/ ____________

Please return completed forms in the envelope provided to:

Louise Hard
Murray Education Unit, Charles Sturt University

PO Box 789, Albury 2640
Consent Form

Project Title: Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

This research project is being conducted by Louise Hard as part of a Doctor of Education being undertaken through Queensland University of Technology.

Contact Details:
Louise Hard
46 Towong Rd CORRYONG
Victoria, 3707
Phone: 0260516981 (work) or 0260762121 (home)

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- Agree to participate in the INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW aspect of the project.

Name: ___________________________ Signature: _______________________

220
Phone number: __________________________ Service: __________________________

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Name:_______________________________ Signature:_______________________

Phone

number:___________________________ Service:___________________________

Date: _______/ _________/ ____________

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**PO Box 789, Albury 2640**
### Appendix E – Code Book

| Theme / Issue                                                                 | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |
| Low salaries of the field                                                    |   |   | 23 | 6 | 11 | 15 | 3,8,16,15 | 11 | 8 | 9 | 4,9 | 9,15 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| People want to work with children                                           |   |   | 7  |   | 7,9 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Improving leadership: People need to feel valued/supported; encouragement and |   |   | 3  |   | 1,2 | 4 | 3,12 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| leadership: collective focus                                                 | 2 | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Navbar & models, examples                                                    | 1 |   | 13 | 9,10 | 1,3 | 9,23 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Committees                                                                   |   |   | 5  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Times a constraint to leadership                                            | 2 |   | 8  | 9,16 | 12 | 18 | 6 | 12 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Leadership: pulling rather than pushing                                      |   |   | 1  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Need more leadership                                                        |   |   | 19 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Salary issues                                                               | 1 |   | 16 | 7  | 2,15 | 19 | 24,21 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| More demands or no                                                          |   |   | 4  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

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## Appendix F – Issues emerging from the data

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### Appendix G – Issues and participant responses

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## Appendix H – Preschool Focus Group

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### Appendix I – Student Focus Group

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### Appendix J – Participant Code, Pseudonyms and Work Environment.

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