An Inquiry into the Implementation of Critical Reflection in Early Childhood Education and Care

A Faith-based Case Study

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

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

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Date 19 November, 2020

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family, many friends and colleagues. A special feeling of gratitude to those who have provided words of encouragement and push for tenacity. I also dedicate this dissertation to my many friends and church family who have supported me throughout this process. I will always appreciate all they have done. Thank you too for those cheerleaders in the background. I also dedicate this work to my mother, Gloria, and late father, Maurice, who first taught me the value of education and critical thought. It is also dedicated to my two sons – Trevor and Dean – this work is because of you and for generations to come, dedicated to all our journeys to thrive.

ABSTRACT

The National Quality Standard (NQS) is the benchmark for quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) within Australia. The Australian Government positioned reflective practice at the core of the NQS (ACECQA, 2013) in order to raise standards and inform future planning and decision making (COAG, 2009; Kennedy, 2011). Critical reflection was identified as foundational to good practice with educators expected to engage in a "lively culture of professional inquiry" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13) with reflection ensuring a way of continued improvement to raise standards.

This study explores the impact and implementation of critical reflection in ECEC. Critical reflection is a Commonwealth legislative requirement (DEEWR, 2009) yet educators find it challenging to do as there is no set way or approach (ACECQA, 2017). This results in it being "tagged on, rather than constituting a way of working and learning" (Barton & Ryan, 2014, p. 4), with the concept of, and practices associated with, critical reflection not defined well operationally (Wilson, 2013). Educator understanding of the purpose of critical reflection is limited (Liu, 2015) with a lack of understanding at a conceptual level (Korthagen, 2017).

This study uses qualitative methodologies to investigate the impact of critical reflection in ECEC and respondent's knowledge and attitudes to critical reflection using the tools of grounded theory. Fook's (2017) notion of critical reflection was intentionally adopted and modified as an approach. Many positive impacts were documented from the use of critical reflection which was found to be a particular asset to the way in which the learning environment was impacted. Critical reflection was found to assist in the effective functioning of ECEC and a model for critical reflection in ECEC was developed to assist educators to form a sound conceptual understanding of how critical reflection works in ECEC centres. As many ECEC centres struggle to implement critical reflection, the SCHEMED (structured, collaborative, founded on trust built upon person-centredness and heart-openness, equipping, meaningfully mentored, empowering and distributed) implementation approach was developed from the data to inform practice and to help educators implement critical reflection in ECEC (ACECQA, 2018).

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following glossary outlines terms referred to in this paper and used in the National Quality Standard:

ACECQA: Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

Act: An Act and reference to a Regulation.

Carer: adult who provides daily care and support to family or friends who could not manage without this help due to illness, disability, mental ill-health or a substance misuse problem.

CCS: Child Care Subsidy.

Centre based: an education and care service providing long day care, preschool, kindergarten and outside school hours care. The service may operate from standalone or shared premises including those on school grounds.

Children: each baby, toddler, three to five-year-old and school age child both as an individual and a member of a group in the education and care setting.

COAG: Council of Australian Governments.

Collaboration: working together cooperatively towards common goals. Collaboration is achieved through information sharing, joint planning and the development of common understandings and objectives.

Community: a group of people, who have common characteristics. This can be defined by location, race, ethnicity, age, occupation, interest in particular issue, or other common bonds. In the education and care setting the term 'community' may include children, families, educators, staff, other professionals and volunteers. It may also include members of the wider community and particular groups or organisations in the local area.

Continuous Improvement: the process by which the service evaluates and seeks opportunities to improve its operations and daily practice. The goal for continuous improvement is enhanced outcomes for children.

Critical Reflection: involves examining and analysing events, experiences and practices from a range of perspectives to inform future planning and decision making.

Curriculum: everything that happens in the day including all the interactions, experiences, activities routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development.

Diversity: the differences among individuals. In an education and care setting this may include, but is not restricted to, differences in backgrounds, culture, customs, language, faith, religion, family structure, ability, gender, sexuality, child rearing practices and socio-economic status. Diversity is respected when difference is valued, and inclusive practices promoted and implemented.

Early Childhood: the period from birth to 8 years.

ECEC: childcare and/or stand-alone preschool for children between birth and 5 years of age. Services are delivered through the government or non-government sectors, where the latter includes community and private, for profit and not for profit providers.

Early Childhood Development: refers to all aspects of a child's growth, learning, development and transitions from pre-birth to school age, incorporating a holistic spectrum of policy interventions including the health, education and care.

ECT: is an early childhood teacher holding an approved qualification under the NQS or a qualification that has been assessed as equivalent.

Educator: a person who works directly with children and is included in the educator to child ratio.

Effective: achieving the desired outcome from a course of action.

Equity: fair and just treatment of all individuals.

Evaluation: measuring the effectiveness by analysing outcomes, strengths and weaknesses. Results of evaluation inform future planning and decision making.

EYLF: Early Years learning Framework; guides early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs. It describes broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning from birth to age 5 years, including their transition to school.

Experiences: the activities and routines provided for the children. Experiences may be planned or spontaneous and reflect children's needs, interests and abilities.

Family: the network of significant people involved in caring for the child outside the education and care service.

Financial Viability: the financial resources and stability of the provider and the extent to which a quality service can be sustained financially.

Hazards: items which have the potential to cause harm, illness or injury. In an education and care setting hazards can include cleaning products, garden chemicals, medications, pest control agents, broken or damaged toys, equipment or surfaces, electrical equipment, sharp objects, soiled materials, foreign objects, spiders and vermin and poisonous plants.

Hygiene: the clean and sanitary practices which maintain good health at the education and care service. The spread of infectious diseases is minimised when educators and staff use accepted hygiene practices during daily routines such as toileting, nappy changing and hand washing

Inclusion and support assistance: aim to develop the capacity of the education and care service to create inclusive environments for all children and their families, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those with ongoing high support needs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Induction: the planned process of introducing new staff, relief staff, students or volunteers to the education and care service for their role. An effective induction assists new staff members at the education and care service to understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from the service.

Leader: the suitably qualified and experienced educator who leads the development of the program and is a role model for other educators in the service.

Natural environments: includes natural materials such as grass, trees, rocks, plant materials, soil, sand, water, clay, bark, timber, seeds, shells and stones, and surfaces that have undergone little modification.

Long Day Care (LDC): a centre-based form of service in receipt of Child Care Subsidy. LDC services provide all day or part-time care for children aged birth to 6 who attend the centre on a regular basis. Care is generally provided in a building, or part of a building, that has been created or redeveloped specifically for use as a childcare centre, and children are usually grouped together in rooms according to age. Centres, in the majority of cases, operate between 7.30am and 6.00pm on normal working days for 48 weeks per year so that parents can manage both the care of their children and the demands of their employment.

National Law: Education and Care Services National Law.

National Regulation: Education and Care Services National Regulations.

NQA: National Quality Agenda: is the overarching name given to the quality reforms to Early Childhood Education and Care, which incorporate the National Quality Standard, including the Early Years Learning Framework, the rating system and the associated regulatory system.

NQS: National Quality Standard: is the national level standard for the provision of high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care across seven quality areas: educational program and practice; children's health and safety; physical environment; staffing arrangements (including ratios and qualifications); relationships with children; collaborative partnerships with families and communities; and leadership and service management.

NQF: National Quality Framework: refers to the overall National Quality Framework and its new National Quality Standard and ratings system.

Observation: the information obtained by watching, listening and interacting with children to identify their skills, interests, needs and abilities. This information helps educators ensure meaningful experiences are planned for children.

Orientation: the process designed to families' children and families with educators, staff, service operations and daily practices when they commence care. This supports children to adapt to new routines, educators and the education and acre service. Orientation also fosters an opportunity for the sharing of information between families and the education and care service about expectations, the child's specific individual needs and how the education and care service will meet them.

Parents: the natural or adoptive parent of the child and their spouse, a person who, under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tradition, is regarded as a parent of the child or the carer of the child under relevant legislation.

Partnership: cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship between those working together and sharing a responsibility to achieve a common goal, such as positive outcomes for children. Effective partnerships require good faith, mutual respect and common understanding from which decisions can be made.

Planning: educators making decisions regarding children considering relationships, interactions, routines, the environment, experiences for children and program delivery. Planning fosters effective management and administrative practices and systems to facilitate responsive service delivery to the needs of children, families and the community.

Policy: written statement of the Education and Care Services practices and procedures and reasons for them informed by current best practice guiding consistent application of service procedures.

Policies ensure all stakeholders have shared understanding and expectations.

Professional Development (PD): the process of maintaining and continuously improving current knowledge and skills in an area of expertise through formal and informal learning opportunities.

Professional Standards: the appropriate and expected behaviour or management, educators and staff used to guide ethical decision making and respectful relationships within the service.

Programs: spontaneous and planned experiences provided for children at the education and acre service facilitating learning.

Provider: the owner/operator of an education and care service.

Resources: toys, play equipment, books, writing materials and craft materials utilised for children in their play, learning experiences and physical activities. Resources need to be safe and appropriate to the age and skills of the children using them and should extend their interests and abilities.

Routines: structures, daily events that occur at regular intervals in the education and care environment. They include children's arrivals and departures, transitions, nappy changing and toileting, mealtimes, rest and sleep.

Service: the management, educators and staff of an education and care service.

Spontaneous: unplanned learning opportunities that emerge as children explore, discover, imagine and interact with educators and their peers.

Staff: members in an education and care service who are not included in the educator to child ratios, and/or perform another primary function such as a cook, administrator, gardener, or cleaner.

Statement of principles: the values and beliefs that are important to children, families, educators, staff and management which guide practice at the education and care service.

Supervision: the continuous and active observation of children and intervention to promote their wellbeing.

Active supervision promotes children's safety, minimises risks and ensures children are engaged in positive interactions and activity. Supervision requirements vary according to the age and number of children, the activity taking place, the environment and the needs of individual children.

Sustainability: meeting needs that do not impact on the quality of the environment or reduce the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs.

Teacher: an early childhood teacher holding an approved qualification under the NQS or a qualification that has been assessed as equivalent.

Transitions: the movement of children from one setting to another, from one group or room to another or the move from one activity to the next.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study was to look at the impact of implementing critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard (NQS) in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This study was framed by three research questions:

1. What is the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard in one faith-based Early Education and Care centre?
2. How do you effectively implement critical reflection in an ECEC centre?
3. How does critical reflection contribute to the effective functioning of an ECEC centre?

The reason this topic was chosen, and why it was deemed so important, is because the Australian Commonwealth Government introduced the NQS within ECEC in order to raise standards (ACECQA, 2012) and inform future planning and decision making (COAG, 2009; Kennedy, 2011). The Australian Commonwealth Government positioned reflective practice at the core of the National Quality Standard (ACECQA 2012) and mandated critical reflection in ECEC. In this way critical reflection is being used as a strategy to raise standards. However, there is little understanding of what critical reflection is, how it is to be implemented, and how it informs practice as required by the NQS.

This study set out to explore the professional practices of four early childhood educators, and my own professional journey, within the context of one faith-based ECEC centre. This involved a reflective process (King 2002; Branch & Paranjape, 2002) through which the answers to the research questions were considered (Byrne, 2001).

1.1 The Problem

This inquiry was initiated in a constantly dynamic and ever changing ECEC sector (Early Childhood Australia 2012) within which critical reflection was identified in the 'Guide to the National Quality Standard' (hereafter termed NQS), as "foundational to good practice" (p. 178). Critical reflection is a Commonwealth legislative requirement (DEEWR, 2009) through the NQS as defined in the approved learning framework for ECEC, the Early Years Learning Framework (hereafter termed EYLF):

> A lively culture of professional inquiry is established when early childhood educators and those with whom they work are all involved in an ongoing cycle of review through which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed, and new ideas generated (DEEWR, p. 13).

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2017) (hereafter termed ACECQA) affirms that the process of critical reflection is unique to each individual service context with no set way or approach. Educators, however, find critical reflection challenging to do, and, it is often "tagged on, rather than constituting a way of working and learning" (Barton & Ryan, 2014 p. 410). Given the focus outlined in the EYLF to engage in a “lively culture of professional inquiry” (p. 13), in such a way that educators “learn together, use collective knowledge, consider and implement changes” **(**p. 7) and “engage in questions of philosophy, ethics and practice” (p. 13) there is obviously a need to understand what critical reflection is, what impact does it have, and how it is driven. Additionally, there is a need to understand the components of critical reflection, what type of environment it fosters, and what type of environment may be engendered with its implementation.

1.2 Background to the Problem

In 2012, laws were enacted within Australia to implement a national system for the regulation of Early Childhood Education and Care services. This came about because of licensing and quality assurance arrangements for ECEC services that, prior to this, were fragmented and complex. Some services were not regulated for standards at all, while some other services were regulated by both state or territory and National authorities.

The introduction of the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2011) brought about minimum standards and quality rating under a single regulatory model. The NQF is underpinned by Early Childhood Education and Care Services National Law (the National Law), the Education and Care Services National Regulations (National Regulations), and the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011). The NQS was set as the benchmark for quality in ECEC centres and is the main regulatory tool for rating service quality and implementing continuous improvement. The NQS was linked to a nationally approved learning framework – ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Year’s Learning Framework for Australia’ (DEEWR, 2009). This learning framework sets out practices, principles and learning outcomes that provides, supports and promotes children’s learning and development.

Critical reflection was adopted as a strategy of the NQS and within the EYLF, identified as a necessary component of professionalism in the ECEC sector. The EYLF places a strong

emphasis on critical reflection and lists “ongoing learning and reflective practice” as one of the key principles of effective practice.

1.3 Rationale

The problem identified is that critical reflection is a Commonwealth legislative strategic requirement to raise ECEC standards, yet educators find critical reflection challenging, tagged on, and not understood at a conceptual level (Barton & Ryan, 2014, Wilson, 2013, Korthagen 2017). The background to this problem has described that good outcomes for children can only be supported by qualified and professional educators who regularly reflect individually and with others, engage in a “lively culture of professional inquiry” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13) and apply relevant research in their professional practice.

The rationale for this study is to try to understand if this strategic initiative put in place by the Commonwealth Government is gaining traction and making a difference in the quality of ECEC and educator practices. This is an important area of inquiry to be undertaken and is researched through investigating the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of Australian Commonwealth standards within one faith based ECEC centre.

The need for this study arises for three key reasons:

1.3.1 Lack of comprehensive research about the impact of critical reflection as a strategy to raise standards by the Australian Commonwealth Government, given requirements mandated by the Australian Commonwealth government for critical reflection.

1.3.2 Further, there is a need to assess the implementation of critical reflection as a strategy of the Australian Commonwealth Government through an analysis of how it happens in ECEC, and how it is driven within ECEC in its implementation. Critical reflection in ECEC is required to integrate theory and practice and its implementation as a part of the NQS. It is based on Schon's (1983) work but taken a step further through exploring multiple perspectives, linking theory and practice, and making a purposeful change to improve children's outcomes (Curtis & Carter, 2008). Amulya (2004) describes reflective practice as "creating a habit, structure or routine around examining practice” (p. 2) and suggests that reflection can arise from times of uncertainty or challenge as well as from breakthrough and success. The challenge for educators, however, is finding ways to do this. The literature shows that there

is no quick fix to encouraging critical reflection and within the literature it is shown at the conceptual level that it is yet to be followed by implementation in everyday practice (Korthagen, 2017).

1.3.3 Lack of comprehensive research on how critical reflection fits with the Christian ethos of a faith-based system. The NQS (ACECQA, 2010) mandates the development, articulation and review of an ECEC Centre philosophy which guides all aspects of service operations (p. 181) which starts with 'what we believe' and progresses to 'what does that mean in what we do?' (ECA, 2011). How an educator sees theory, questions, designs and ethics of inquiry (Kayan, 2010) is hence influenced. Therefore, it would seem that belief systems influence practice and form a cohesive platform upon which decisions are informed and reflected upon within the context. The Guide to the NQS (ACECQA, 2011) describes the importance of effective leaders of ECEC services being skilful to "set direction and establish values for the service that reflect its context and professionalism" (p. 172) to build an affirming organizational culture and empower others to drive continuous improvement. The faith-based research context in which this study is located offers an investigation of factors that affect and inform this research which is necessary due to the lack of research in this area.

1.4 Structure of this Thesis

The proposed structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter Two contains a review of the literature. Critical reflection is examined, and an important component of critical reflection is discussed as identified by Fook (2017). A background is provided of ECEC within both the global and national context with a definition of critical reflection put forward. The connection between critical reflection and frameworks, standards ethics and philosophy are described. The link between critical reflection in ECEC and theoretical perspectives is outlined along with an exploration of critical reflection and the concept of quality. A summary of the relationships between critical reflection and learning is described. Models, modes and methods of critical reflection are provided and the need for a model for critical reflection within ECEC is identified. The potential impact of critical reflection within ECEC is discussed within a faith based ECEC context.

Chapter Three explains the research methodology and design. In particular, the emergent design, which commenced with Fook's (2017) two stages but evolved into five distinct phases.

These were:

- Phase One: Director Provocations
- Phase Two: Delving into the research questions through a series of three semi-structured interviews with each of the participants
- Phase Three: Unpacking and Critiquing the provocations - Observations and Document Analysis
- Phase Four: Non-vested interest critique through a range of responses for different sources
- Phase Five: Framework Emergence

Chapter Four presents the findings. A demographic analysis is outlined along with the centre profile and profile of each of the participants. Director provocations are detailed along with the embedded critically reflective triangulation process of weekly critically reflective provocations and educator reflections. Data analysis and findings are presented from each of the three rounds of semi-structured interviews and the coding process is described along with the presentation of themes, sub-themes and tables of findings for each of the research questions.

Chapter Five contains the discussion and the implications of the findings. An implementation approach for critical reflection is outlined and the development of an operational model for ECEC educators is discussed.

Chapter Six provides a summary and recommendations with an overview of the study, major findings, the contribution of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Overview

This literature review commences with an overview of the development of the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011) from the international ECEC context to the Australian context. An analysis and synthesis of the literature relating to the implementation of the NQS specifically within the national context, within Australia then follows. Critical reflection is the focus of the study and is defined and 'unpacked' and an evaluation of the purpose and value of critical reflection follows. Integrated within the NQS are concepts of frameworks, standards, ethics and philosophy. Therefore, these concepts are examined within the critically reflective ECEC context out of which this thesis arose. As critical reflection forms a crucial part of professional practice in ECEC, it is vital to examine the positioning of critical reflection in ECEC learning along with the development of professional learning communities specific to ECEC. To understand critical reflection fully, it is vital to break down the existing models, modes and methods of critical reflection and examine what a model for critical reflection specific to ECEC may look like. The final section of the literature review addresses the research question/s, the context of this study and the requisite outcomes, in preparation for the data collection, and ultimately, the findings unearthed in Chapter Four.

2.2 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an analysis and synthesis of the literature relating to ECEC and the use of critical reflection. Within the Australian context, ECEC is governed by both the Commonwealth Government and State Regulatory Authorities. As part of this governance the National Quality Standard (NQS), has been set as the national benchmark (Guide to the NQS, ACECQA, 2017). The NQS (ACECQA, 2017) is the guiding quality instrument (upon which ECEC centres should be run (pp. 12-13). A pivotal aspect of the NQS is the requirement for critical reflection as "foundational" to good practice (ACECQA, 2011, p. 1).

The NQS came about in response to Australia's performance in the international context. Reports were tabled by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2008) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2008) which demonstrated significant barriers to the provision of nationally consistent rights-based high quality ECEC within Australia. Most notably, these reports identified these barriers as

inadequate funding, policy fragmentation, and lack of training and working conditions for staff. Moreover, Australia's approach to the regulation of ECEC, with differing state and territory licensing arrangements that work alongside a national accreditation system, had drawn widespread criticism for its inability to support quality standards and practices (Fenech, Sumsion and Goodfellow 2008).

In response to these short comings, and OECD (2006) recommendations, the Australian Government implemented a range of reforms that were intended to improve Australia's international standing and outcomes for young children by increasing ECEC quality and practices. Of note was the Council of the Australian Government's (2009b) national partnership agreement with the States in the Quality Agenda for Early Education and Care. Significantly, all states and territories agreed to develop and implement nationally consistent approaches in ECEC. These reforms included the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF) applicable to all approved ECEC services across the country (DEEWR, 2008). The NQF comprised a National Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF); a streamlining of existing varying licensing and accreditation systems; and the establishment of new nationally consistent quality standards - The National Quality Standard (NQS) - a quality rating system. The NQF became effective January 1, 2012 and was overseen by a new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Thus, the NQS was introduced to raise standards (ACECQA, 2012) and inform future planning and decision making (COAG, 2009; Kennedy, 2011) with reflective practice positioned at its core (ACECQA 2012).

Critical reflection within the approved learning framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, The Early Years Learning Framework, is defined (2009) as "closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives" (p. 13) and "reflective practices that focus on implications for equity and social justice" (p. 45). Further to this point, DEEWR (2009) suggests that these notions are directed by educator's professional judgments and require higher order thinking in order to prioritise ideas from a range of theoretical perspectives. In so doing, educators discover assumptions deriving from their own beliefs and values. DEEWR (2009) also suggests that educators need to critically reflect from a range of theoretical viewpoints, use their professional judgements, and engage in autonomous decision-making to apply theory to practice in meeting NQS standards. In this way they will meet the needs of children and families accessing the service. This facilitates quality improvement leading to the provision of enhanced quality care and increased workforce participation (ACECQA, 2013a; Bushe & Marshark, 2015; DEEWR, 2009).

Given prior poor performance by Australia in measurable standards relating to ECEC (OECD, 2008), the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy – Investing in the Early Years*, was endorsed by COAG in 2009, and expressed the commitment of all governments to the vision 'that by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation.' The strategy includes universal access and the National Quality Framework.

As critical reflection is foundational to the National Quality Standard, and as there is lack of understanding of the purpose of critical reflection (Liu, 2015), with a lack of understanding at a conceptual level (Korthagen, 2017), with the concept of, and practices associated with, critical reflection not defined well operationally (Wilson, 2013), along with consistently highlighted poor performance in the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS (ACECQA, 2018), this literature review analyses what critical reflection is, what is involved, how to do it and what the impact is. To commence this analysis, examination is required of the development of the NQS within the international and national landscapes, investigation of why critical reflection was positioned as its foundation and the current challenges with its implementation in ECEC.

2.3 Background

2.3.1 The Development of the NQS within the International ECEC Context

Advances in neuroscience research have led to a greater awareness of the importance of early years for children's learning (Goswami, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2001). This has resulted in acceptance that children begin learning from within the womb (Bhamani, 2017) with the nature and quality of early experiences impacting later life outcomes. Research now shows the link between ECEC and better lifelong outcomes for children, including economic and social benefits, better employment prospects, higher earning capacities and living standards, enhanced health outcomes, lower levels of incarceration and dependence on social and welfare services (Moore & McDonald, 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016); Steering Committee for the Review Government Service Provision (SCRGSP, 2015).

In conjunction with this increased understanding of the significance of the early years has been an increase in the number of young children enrolled in ECEC, due to the rise in women's workforce participation (Productivity Commission, 2014). The Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2014) reveals that the workforce participation rate for women with a child had grown from 57 to 67 percent over the period 1994-2014. Together, these factors have led to the need for

the Australian Government to take an increasing interest in ECEC as a social and economic policy imperative (UNESCO, 2017). Quality early childhood education is now considered an investment, not a cost, with investment in early childhood providing a strong return, with significant fiscal benefits flowing to both the Commonwealth and state and territory governments (Pascoe, 2017).

Along with this increasing international interest in ECEC as a government responsibility, has come greater pressure from international reports that have revealed Australia's poor performance on many measures regarding ECEC (Adamson, 2008; OECD, 2006; Press & Hayes, 2010). The OECD (2008) economic report summarised the situation as follows:

> Important challenges remain in all education sectors, especially early education and care. Reducing complexity and fragmentation in this area and tackling issues of under-supply and inequity in access are of major importance, given the beneficial impact of early education in later outcomes. Participation in pre-primary programmes remains low as is the government spending on such services. Many disadvantaged children miss out, though they are those with the highest payoff from early childhood education. (p. 6).

Australia ranked in the bottom three of OECD countries in measurable standards relating to ECEC (OECD 2008) and more recently has been ranked 39 out of 42 countries from the European Union and OECD in levels of quality and inclusion education for children (UNICEF, 2017).

In response to this growing international awareness of the early years, the Australian Government reforms to the Early Childhood sector were designed to promote a national approach to quality standards, inclusion, and a National Early Years Learning Framework. One important task in implementing reform was to rectify the disjoined nature of existing service provision. The creation of a single national standard that addressed both structural and process elements of quality was designed to overcome what was perceived as an unnecessarily burdensome regulatory and quality assurance system. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) introduced the NQS (ACECQA, 2013a; COAG, 2009) which defined quality standards for quality practice linked to each state and local government legislation (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCECDYA, 2013). ECEC services are periodically assessed by the state regulatory authority against these standards to ensure quality Education and Care provision. There are a number of levels of quality ratings and assessment within the NQS – provisional (a service that is yet to be assessed against the NQS); significant improvement required; working towards the NQS; meeting the NQS; exceeding the NQS and excellent. Quarterly reports (ACECQA, 2020) summarise quality rating outcomes for

16,144 approved Australian Early Education and Care Services (ACECQA, 2020) providing Education and Care for over 3.8 million children under the age of 12 years (Productivity Commission, 2014). ACECQA (2020) data shows 15,048 or 93% of services with a quality rating, 12,099 (80% with a quality rating of meeting the NQS or above) with 20% of services working towards the NQS (ACECQA, 2020). This data reveals that the highest proportion of services not meeting the standard is in Quality Area One, 'Educational Program and Practice', which encompasses critical reflection as a core component.

Furthermore, data provided in 'excellent' ratings from ACECQA reports reveals that only 42 assessed services nationwide have achieved this highest rating – 0.0026% of all services (ACECQA, 2020). The excellent rating is the highest rating an ECEC can achieve under the NQS and indicates a service is embracing continuous improvement and practice and are evolving over time to improve outcomes for children and families at the highest level. It also recognises providers who are champions of quality improvement, innovative leaders beyond the service, who are raising the bar on quality ECEC for Australian children. The excellent rating is awarded for up to three years if the service continues to meet the requirements. There is no fee to apply for the excellent rating as per application criteria and guidelines (https://www.acecqa.gov.au).

If services are challenged to meet the NQS, then we must reflect upon whether the benefits asserted for 'quality' ECEC for children, families and the broader society are being met (Brennan & Adamson, 2014). Given 'quality' ECEC impacts children's life-long outcomes and broader economic and societal gains (Australian Early Development Census (AEDC, 2013); Organisation for Economic Development Cooperation and Development; OECD, 2016) meeting the NQS is paramount.

2.3.2 The Implementation of the NQS within Australia

The NQF reforms acknowledge that good outcomes for children can only be supported by professional and qualified educators who regularly reflect on their own, and their colleagues' practice (ACECQA, 2017). There is an important distinction between critical reflection and reflective practice:

> Reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Its intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning (EYLF, p. 13)
>
> Critical reflection adds depth and breadth to the reflective practice. It involves closely examining all aspects of professional practice with children and families thinking

> honestly, deeply and critically about implications for equity and social justice (ACECQA, 2017, p. 1)

As such, critical reflection is a significant underlying foundation of the NQF. “Ongoing learning and reflective practice” one of the principles of the ELYF, and the Educators’ Guide to the NQF (EYLF, 2010, p. 13) features an entire chapter on “Reflective practice for improvement” (DEEWR, 2010). The NQS acknowledges that good outcomes for children can only be supported by qualified and professional educators who regularly reflect on their own - and their colleagues - practice. As with any profession, research and knowledge is always changing and being updated, so it is important for educators to discuss and analyse their work. The foundation of the NQS therefore requires educators to critically reflect on different theoretical perspectives in their pedagogical practice. In this way the needs of individual children and families engaged in the service can be met (DEEWR, 2009; Gredig, 2011). Challenging assumptions through discussion and debate of different theoretical positions relevant to the service context improves quality provision (Bae, 2009; Dall’Alba, 2009; Colmer, 2008; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2010).

Critical reflection is embedded as a core component within the NQS in ‘Educational Program and Practice’ assessment and planning with “educators to take planned and reflective approach to implementing the program for each child” (ACECQA, 2020, p. 129). Element 1.3.2 of Standard 1.3 in the NQS is designed to ensure that critical reflection on children’s learning, whether they are working as individuals or in groups, is regularly used to implement the program (ACECQA, 2020, p. 135). ‘Practice that is informed by critical reflection’ is also a theme which must be demonstrated in service practice to be rated ‘exceeding’ at the standard level (ACECQA, 2017).

When practice is informed by critical reflection, educators consider, question, analyse and re-evaluate planning and decision-making for that standard. This supports a culture of ongoing self-assessment that helps identify continuous improvement and improved outcomes for children, families and educators (ACECQA, 2017).

The EYLF also specifically acknowledges the importance of using critical reflection to challenge practice from a social justice perspective - for example, thinking about families within a service and prioritising celebrating Christmas in a faith-based service in Australia. This is done through engaging with questions of philosophy and ethics and unpacking practice to get a better understanding. In a faith-based service, prioritising Christmas links with the philosophy that underpins practice. Critical reflection adds depth and breadth to the practice by thinking deeply,

honesty and critically about implications of equity and social justice and prioritising appropriately.

Critical reflection within the NQS is a vehicle and catalyst for change within the ECEC sector in Australia. Each educator is accountable to analyse and reflect upon his or her practice with an emphasis on continuous improvement, the implementation of the program and ongoing learning. In guidance notes for authorised officers, ACECQA (2012, pp 1-2) states:

> The NQS and Guide to the NQS are not prescriptive on what forms critical reflection should take.
>
> The purpose of critical reflection is to help educators become increasingly thoughtful about their work and to motivate them to explore new ideas and approaches. Critical reflection and careful planning increase the value of children in education thereby ensuring that the educational program and practice responds to children's interests and scaffolds their learning. The intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision making about children's learning. Educators should use critical reflection as an opportunity to identify issues of equity, social justice and power relationships between people as factors that may have an impact on children's learning opportunities.
>
> Educators who critically reflect should be able to demonstrate how their practices and understandings impact the learning environment and children's opportunity to learn within that setting. This type of reflection generates questions for educators such as listed in the Early Years Learning Framework (Page 13). Critical reflection is about educators actively building and transforming their knowledge about learning and teaching.

The NQS requires a high level of critical thinking by educators to embed critical reflection in decision-making and professional judgments (ACECQA, 2013; DEEWR, 2009). This requires educators to engage in abstract thinking, embrace higher order notions and concepts, and maintain spontaneity and flexibility (Weinberg, 2015). However, it seems that critical reflection is an aspect of practice with which the ECEC sector struggles (ACECQA, 2017).

2.3.3 The Challenges of the Implementation of the NQS within Australia

ACECQA data (2020) shows that standard 1.3 within the 15 standards of the revised NQS, which includes element 1.3.2 encompassing critical reflection, is the standard that is most likely to be rated as "not met" of all elements within the standards, with 14% of all services not

meeting this standard. Of all services, 11.4% (ACECQA, 2020) have not met Element 1.3.2: "Critical reflection: Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation." ACECQA data (2018) similarly showed that standard 1.3 within the 15 standards, again comprising critical reflection, is the standard with which the ECEC sector has the most difficulty, evidencing consistent poor performance when compared with other elements and standards with Quality Area One – Educational program and practice the area nationally that services are "working towards" (ACECQA, 2018).

Possibly this may be due to a reaction to a lack of professional recognition of the important role of ECEC educators, as ECEC educators and their profession are poorly valued by society even though they constantly strive to be more than maternal carers and nurturers (Foster, 2014; Harwood et al., 2013; O'Connor, McGunnigle, Treasure & Davie, 2015; Yarrow, 2015a). There is still a way to go in our community in properly valuing ECEC and the role of educators. Working in ECEC is a physically and emotionally demanding job, requiring a daily and continual focus on the wellbeing of others rather than yourself. To discuss what needs improving to some can be overwhelming or seen as an attack on their work rather than a crucial part of ongoing professional development and learning (McNicholas, 2016) and recognition.

Critical reflection is a thinking activity, but it is not emotionally neutral as it is linked to our values and social identity (Benade, 2015). Viewing issues from different perspectives challenges assumptions and established patterns of behaviour and encourages the development of new ways of seeing. The more reflective and open to improvement we become, the better we become at our roles (Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE, 2010); Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF, 2017). This means better outcomes for children, families and communities and a greater understanding and valuing of our work (McNicholas, 2016). Critical reflection can be the foundation of professional development making sense of what has been learned to reveal the lived experiences of educators. Critical reflection gives voice to educators' in-depth perspectives to improve the quality of services within the ECEC sector to enhance outcomes for children, families and communities.

Challenges for the ECEC sector with the implementation of critical reflection maybe because there is no prescribed technique by which to undertake the practice of critical reflection. This is highlighted in the 'Guidance notes for authorised officers' (ACECQA, 2013, p. 1) which states:

> The NQS and the Guide to the NQS are not prescriptive on what forms critical reflection should take.

The process of critical reflection is identified by ACECQA (2017) as unique to each educator and service context with no set way or approach suggested. Guidelines in the research literature on how to determine, facilitate and assess critical reflection in practice are limited (Leijen, Leijen, Valtna & Pedaste, 2012; Smith, 2011). Wilson (2013) notes that the concept of, and practices associated with, critical reflection are not well defined operationally (p. 155). Furthermore, educator understanding of the purpose of critical reflection remains limited (Liu, 2015) with it being identified by Barton and Ryan (2014) as "tagged on, rather than constituting a way of working and learning" (p. 410). Additionally, as recently as 2017, Korthagen makes mention that there is a lack of understanding of critical reflection at the conceptual level. Therefore, it would appear the term is overused (Thompson & Pascal, 2012) without any real understanding and recognition of its value (Wilson, 2013), and "not defined well operationally" (p. 155). To provide for understanding of the meaning, value and purpose of critical reflection as a tool for informing practice and as a way of "working and learning" (Barton & Ryan, 2014, p. 410), a conceptual model of critical reflection is needed for ECEC.

2.4 Defining Critical Reflection

2.4.1 What is Critical Reflection?

It is important to understand what reflective practice is and the process of critical reflection as applied in ECEC. ACECQA (2018) explains that through deconstructing experiences and critically examining each aspect of the practice, educators can gather a wealth of information to guide their decisions about what should be repeated, extended or changed. In other words, critical reflection helps us learn by putting ourselves into an experience and developing personal and theoretical knowledge to understand such experiences through different perspectives.

Schon (1983) developed the term "reflective practice" and introduced the concepts of "reflection-in-action" (thinking on your feet) and "reflection-on-action" (thinking after the event). Schon focussed on five professional fields, including education and discussed the link between professionalism and reflective practice. Professionals face unique and challenging situations daily. He argued that the most effective professionals use their previous experiences to understand better how and why things happen. Schon's work has influenced practice around the

world by encouraging professionals to take responsibility for improvements in and on their practice (ACECQA, 2018).

Linked to Schon's work, MacNaughton (2003) describes reflective practice as an intellectually engaged activity geared to changing practices by transforming knowledge. Drawing on the work of Habermas (2008), MacNaughton makes the point that there are three main ways of thinking – technical, practical or critical. Technical reflection is based in the scientific method of rationale deductive thinking to generate empirical knowledge through rigorous means so that there is an assurance that work produced is based on scientific reasoning. Technical reflection, however, fails to give a sense of social, political, cultural, emotional or spiritual influences on practice (Taylor, 2001. Practical reflection leads to interpretation for description and explanation of human interaction in social existence (Taylor, 2004, p. 15). Practical reflection, however, lacks understanding of power relationships or influences (Plack & Driscoll, 2017). Critical reflection is the third way of thinking whereby educators' question what beliefs and values they bring to their practice, and critique practice considering their own assumptions about children's learning and development. This way of thinking is most likely to lead to transformed ways of thinking (Ryan, 2011; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Ossa Parra et al., 2014). Educators examine their knowledge and beliefs and then ask critical questions about whose needs are being met by applying their knowledge and beliefs. Importantly, critical reflection in ECEC relies on educators questioning and challenging their own assumptions (Clark & Creswell, 2011), backgrounds, values, beliefs, feelings and behaviour whilst also attending to the impact of the wider organisational, ideological and political contexts. According to Larrivee (2008), critical reflection has the "most consensus in the literature as a level of reflection examining ethical, social, and political consequences of one's practice" (p. 143) with its emphasis on examining and potentially confronting implications of one's practice.

Definitions of critical reflection are influenced by the process of reflection and by the reason that has prompted the reflection to take place (Chitpin & Simon, 2009; Colmer, 2008). A synthesis of the literature suggests that in education critically reflective practice is best described as a continuous process that involves educators assessing their practice and impact of their values on children's learning and development. Critical reflection is thereby a process of identifying, analysing and questioning assumptions underlying the way an educator sees his/her practice, both individually and collectively, in order to develop understanding and knowledge to enhance practice. Fook (2002) defines critical reflection as "a way of researching personal practice or experience to develop our understandings of ourselves as knowers or makers of knowledge" (p.

444). Fook explains that by understanding how our ideas, beliefs and assumptions are partially determined by our social contexts enables educators to make specific connections between ourselves as individuals and our broader social, cultural and structural environment. In this way, practice can be enhanced.

Russell (2009) states that "fostering reflective practice requires more than telling people to reflect and hoping for the best" (p. 203). Reflective practice is more than a shift in practice - it also requires a shift of the mind, will and heart (Scharmer, 2009). Educators need to use all their senses including watching, listening, feeling and thinking about what they do and work from a space of possibility (Macfarlane, Cartmel & Nolan, 2011). Within this, dialogue and professional conversations are essential, as through these educators comprehend new understandings about practice successfully, which foster what Mitchell (2008) terms "a critical consciousness" (p. 54). Such dialogue and conversations allow educators to combine action and reflection in practice with continuing self-awareness. Critical reflection is thereby at a higher level in challenging an educator than reflection alone (Harvey et al., 2010; Hatton & Smith, 1994) using critical theory to come to new understandings and depth in the inquiry. This involves discourse – discussion between educators - raising issues arising in practice and analysis of patterns and links between concepts, to enable transformative social action and change (Brown & Baltes 2017). Critical breadth to understanding is developed when knowledge is used critically to not accept a situation at 'face value' but used to examine what may influence it by looking beneath the surface. This ability to think critically is developed over time (Black, 2010).

Critical reflection can provide both the basis and motivation for further inquiry as a fuller understanding of experience is gained to be better equipped to manage similar situations (Thompson & Thompson, 2008). By critically reflecting on our own experiences, we can reconstruct our educational perspective through new knowledge gained and improved practice. Reflection on what is done, and why, and how this new knowledge can be used to improve educator practice serves as a guide to future behaviour to improve practice and ultimately outcomes for children (Colmer, 2008; DEECD, 2009, Siraj-Blatchford, 2008).

Dewey's research is foundational to Early Childhood education and he said that growth comes from such a "reconstruction of experience" (Dewey, 1933, p. 87). Dewey believed that a theory of experience is needed in order that education may be intelligently constructed upon the basis of experience. Furthermore, according to Dewey (1916), education is the continuous reconstruction of experience which converts the 'why' into the 'how'; "for if a theory makes no difference in

educational endeavours, it must be artificial" (p. 328). It is through personal experience that theory takes on meaning and individual capacities are developed. Dewey (1916) further states:

> An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating an amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory. It tends to become a mere verbal formula, a set of catchwords used to render thinking (p. 144).

For Dewey, knowledge that is separated from experience is not transferable to new experience. Dewey forewarned that the gap between experience and learning in education is a fundamental problem in an increasingly complex society. Hence, it is essential to integrate personal experience with academic learning. Experience, alone, according to Dewey does not result in learning. Personal experience helps to educate the learner when it encourages growth and develops critical thinking. These experiences lead to new understandings, perceptions and connections and the ability for the person to take informed actions. Dewey (1933) further notes that personal experience must be integrated into education in such a way that educators learn from their experience. Experience becomes 'educative' through reflection. Reflection is the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). According to Dewey, reflection begins in perplexity and consists of "turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive considerations" (p. 3). For Dewey (1916), reflection is progressive, in that it leads to new action and informed behaviour. Reflection is "different" from other types of cognitive exercise because reflection includes responsibility for future consequences which flow from the present action" (p. 146). Dewey (1933) identifies that the challenge is to construct a state of doubt that fosters reflective thinking, a "forked-road situation, a situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that proposes alternatives" (p. 14). The call to reflection requires that 'forked–road' situations be created and provide the structured learning activities that foster reflective thought (Hatcher & Bringle, 2010). Saltmarsh (1996) states that "without fostering reflective thought, learning cannot move beyond conditioning…and the connection between thought and action is dissipated" (p. 18).

Dewey regards scientific inquiry as knowledge development. Through such inquiry, knowledge can be applied and tested to solve problems. This is valuable as it fosters curiosity in educators, which is an essential dimension of learning. Dewey identifies four characteristics of an educative inquiry-based project (Giles & Eyler, 1994). First, it must generate interest. Second, it must be intrinsically worthwhile to the educator. Third, it must present problems that awaken new curiosity and create a demand for information, and lastly, it must cover a long-time span and be

capable of encouraging development over time. Inquiry based learning provides educators with the opportunity to apply theory to practice and critically question theory through lived experience as educators interact with real issues.

As educators become more aware of their own multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), including the development of emotional resilience within the ECEC social-emotional paradigm, values (Kelly, 2016), personal philosophies and individual belief systems, through the process of critical reflection, are more likely to challenge and change ineffective practice. This occurs as educators become facilitators and co-learners (Perry, Henderson & Meier, 2012) through talking with each other raising issues, analysing patterns and linking concepts. In so doing, educators learning is developed through critical reflection within the ECEC socio-emotional context founded upon relationships, hence providing positive outcomes to the children with whom they work (MacNaughton, 2003; Raban et al., 2007). Mezirow (1991) points out that "Precipitating and fostering critically self-reflective learning means a deliberate effort to foster resistance to technical assumptions, to thoughtlessness, to conformity, to impermeable meaning, experiences, to fear of change, to class basis and to egocentric values" (p. 360).

In practical terms, according to Fook and Askeland, (2006):

> A critically reflective perspective involves the idea that when dominant understandings or assumptions are exposed through a reflective process for the political or ideological functions that they perform the individual who holds those assumptions is given a choice. Once these hidden ideas are exposed, people who hold them are given the power to change them (pp. 40-53).

This is the start of the process within a reflective climate of an experience of what is referred to as a "critical incident" (Fook et al., 2011, p. 449). Fook (2001) defines this as an incident significant to professional practice. McAtleer et al (2010), states:

> A critical incident is one that challenges your own assumptions or makes you think effectively (p. 107).

Reflection then takes place in small groups using critical reflective questions, although it may take place in a number of other ways. McCormack (2009) describes facilitated reflective sessions as "psychologically safe places" (p. 3) that support practitioners to develop person-centred practices. Such safe places need to be safeguarded through effective facilitation. Bourner (2003) believes that the depth of reflection is demonstrated by the nature of questions and reflective thinking about an experience. Through this first stage assumptions are examined and unearthed. Further reflection in the next stage redevelops a theory of practice. Between stages, emotions and assumptions come together in the experience such that in stage two, as described by Fook (2017)

‘emotional scaffolding’ “goes to the heart of issues to allow people to re-engage with beliefs of fundamental importance, which provides a cohesive bedrock of all of life’s activities” (p. 23). In other words, critical reflection encourages deconstruction and analysis of both personal and professional experience. In this way educators are able to understand within their experience the different assumptions, perspectives, influences and relationships and how it affects their practice. As new understandings emerge, the individual is able to reconstruct the experience and develop new strategies to deal with a similar incident in the future. This is the transformative aspect of integrating past experiences into a sense of self. The process integrates personal and social dimensions and requires intention and structure based on a clear framework for interpreting experience based on ethical principles. Critical reflection in this way is dialogic in that it is an experience articulated through a dynamic interaction that becomes a shared representation. It engages educators in reflecting critically on the impact of their own background, assumptions, positioning, feelings and behaviour whilst attending to the impact of the wider organizational, philosophical and political context to meet compliance outcomes. As stated previously, there is a lack of understanding conceptually of why critical reflection is undertaken and how it is done (Korthagen, 2017). Critical reflection provides a strategic alignment between ideology, knowledge and practice so that when things are done, they are done for a reason not just haphazardly. This provides the much-needed conceptual understanding for critical reflection. As a dialogic process (Game & Metcalfe, 2009) in which one participates, critical reflection challenges participants enabling transformative social action and change. As an integrative process, it provides a framework for combining all aspects of a complex experience including emotions, beliefs, values, and actions through the articulation of its meaning in context. Critical reflection enables transformative change by leading to fundamental and empowering change at both personal and social levels (Mezirow, 1997). Through linking personal learning and research, critical reflection provides an understanding of personal experience in a social context and reaffirms the value of understanding educator experience through research (Miller, 2011).

A focus on professional practice and quality improvement require support for ongoing learning. Once you have identified a goal, you can consider what actions will help you to achieve it. This will usually involve some form of professional learning which will be most effective when educators reflect on, question, receive feedback and consciously improve their pedagogical practice to improve child outcomes. Professional practice, quality improvement and ongoing learning are hence facilitated through the process of critical reflection. Critical reflection is not a technique or a technology; rather, it is an approach (Rolfe et al., 2011) that can only take place in

a participatory climate within a safe, open and acceptable culture willing to expose professional vulnerabilities for the sake of learning, referred to by Fook and Kellehar (2010) as a climate of "critical acceptance" (p. 230). Pivotal to this role of critical reflection within learning is the concept of praxis (Knott & Scragg, 2016; Schon, 1987), whereby reflection provides an avenue for applying, contrasting and integrating theory to practice that is explored through an authentic experience. Such learning through critical reflection with this concept of praxis is achieved by articulating questions, confronting biases, examining causality and identifying systemic issues to help foster critical evaluation and knowledge transfer. Critical reflection thereby becomes the seed for thoughtfulness, intentionality and positive change (DEEWR, 2009; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2012; Marbina, 2010, Rosenberg, 2010).

Learning occurs through entering professional practice each day by listening, observing and thinking about how theory is translated into practice (Watstein & Mitchell, 2014) and how practice informs theory. This theory of knowledge (Hughes, 2014) consists of values, beliefs, practices and theories that are dynamic and dialectical (Hegel, 2016) providing new understandings and further questions. It is a complex process that leads to professional self-actualisation (Gibbs, 1988) in which educators move beyond who they are or have been, to whom they can become and discover that "far more is possible for individuals than is ordinarily recognized" (p. 5) and then action this within professional practice. According to Maslow (2015), self-actualisation represents the growth of an individual toward fulfilment of the highest needs - those for meaning in life. Maslow (2015) notes that self-actualisation occurs when an educator maximises his/her potential, doing the best he/she is capable of doing. Neto (2015) considers motivation and the relationship to the self-actualisation needs proposed by Maslow. Characteristics of self-actualization are described which include embracing the unknown, accepting oneself – including one's flaws; prioritising the journey – not the destination; having a purpose and being motivated by growth. McGuire and Gubbins (2010) describe it in a nurturing metaphor as "sower and seed" (p. 37), an educational approach that nurtures reflection to shape thinking and inform future action. In working towards a framework for critical reflection in ECEC, construction of the environment is a key component - socially, spiritually, structurally, cognitively, emotionally and physically with the facilitator 'sowing' reflection in a nurturing way to shape critical thinking. Construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1980) is a contextualised active process based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment. Learners continually test these hypotheses through social negotiation, with each educator bringing a different interpretation and construction of the knowledge process and past experiences.

Educators draw on many theoretical perspectives to inform and guide their practice. These provide different ways to interpret and gain insight. Critical reflection is a key component in a constructivist approach to learning as educators must explicitly link new knowledge to previous knowledge and critically assess the nature of such connections. Critical reflection is hence a way of researching personal practice or experience (Hickson, 2011) to develop our understandings of ourselves as knowers or makers of knowledge (Forrest, 2008). By making specific connections between ourselves as individuals and our broader social, cultural and structural environment (Cook-Sather & Abbot, 2016) we are enabled to build our understanding of how our ideas, beliefs and assumptions might be at least partially determined by our social contexts (Benade, 2015; Burke, 2009). The development of knowledge, through ongoing reflection on experience, is something that never stops in a committed practicing professional at any level (Fook, 2007; Hickson, 2011) with an onus on all educators to be aware of, and take responsibility for, the learning environment that is created. All educators need to ask how best a climate of critical reflection can be created and be prepared to question and change in fundamental ways to enhance practice through this process.

Reflection may be superficial (Bolton, 2014) or can be profoundly transformative (Mezirow, 2006) with deep levels of critical reflection, as the deepest form of reflection on professional behaviour resulting in behaviour change (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 2013; Ratelle et al., 2017). As a learning process, critical self-reflection and discourse characterised as transformative learning results in learners shifting their identity, beliefs, and/or actions (Dirks, 2012). Challenges to habits of mind lead to change in educators' worldviews, precursors for behaviour change (Burgess, 2012; Kelly & Barker, 2016; Lawrence et al., 2016; Leiberman, 2007 & Harvey et al., 2010). The reflective educator can identify ideologies, rules, habits and emotions that determine the frames of action and challenge them accordingly. Making meaning and shifting perspectives is transformative through learning and extending professional understanding. Critical reflection is a highly personal process requiring an educator to take daily experiences, internalise them, and turn them over in his/her mind and filter these new thoughts through previously lived experiences and personal values and beliefs, before deciding on how to proceed. The catalyst for this may be internal or external, spontaneous or deliberately planned.

Critical reflection deepens understanding and empowers educators to do better, this occurs through building an understanding of their own behaviour. As educators develop a greater understanding of their actions and theories, they determine the strategies that allow them to understand why they do what they do. Freire (2000) notes that critical reflection on practice is "a

requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes “blah, blah, and blah, and practice, pure activism” (p. 20) noting that educators need to critically reflect on their situational restrictions and become conscious of their socio-political existence – the social context; macro and micro components and the dynamics of power and relationships.

Critical reflection demands looking beyond immediate circumstances to what internal and external factors might influence the choices made and the actions taken. This requires reasoning and analysis of practices, processes and identities.

2.4.2 Critical Reflection and Reflective Practice

The approved learning framework for Early Education and Care in Australia, the Early Years Learning Framework, lists ‘ongoing learning and reflective practice’ as one of the key principles that provide a foundation for Early Education and Care (DEEWR, p. 13).

‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’ The Early Years Framework for Australia (p. 13) describes reflective practice as follows:

> Reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Its intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision making about children’s wellbeing and development. As professionals, educators examine what happens in their settings and reflect on what they might change.

This aligns with Element 1.2.3 of the National Quality Standard, which requires that ‘critical reflection on children’s learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the program.’ Reflective practice is the ability to reflect upon practice in an ongoing and systematic way (Fook, 2002) used to make professional practice more accountable through examining the principles upon which it is based.

‘Reflective practice’ emerges from Schon’s (1987) work which recognises a gap between theory and actual practice, and identified that reflective practice was a way of closing this gap by uncovering the actual theory in what professionals do, rather than what they say they do, hence a way of improving practice. Reflective practice is an expression of learning and development, engaging educators in their specific contexts in examining what happens within their service and considering what they might change, involving questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. The EYLF acknowledges the significance of implementing a culture of professional inquiry where all educators are involved in a culture of ongoing review, where practices are examined, outcomes reviewed, and new ideas produced. This allows issues relating to program quality, environment

design, equity and children's wellbeing to be raised and debated (EYLF, p. 13). As such, reflective practice is seen as a 'core activity' (Moss & Petrie, 2002) in Early Childhood Education and Care settings, and, within services, in which building relationships is fundamental to practice (Ruch, 2005). Four components are identified by Ruch (2005) in reflective practice, central to relationships. These are "enhanced understandings of the client, the personal and professional self, the social and organisations contexts of practice and the diverse 'knowledges' informing practice" (p. 112). Reflective practice thereby requires "far more than telling people to reflect and hoping for the best" (Russell, 2005, p. 203). Reflective practice is about creating new and shared understandings about principles and practices for achieving quality practice in Early Education and Care. It requires not only a shift in practice, it requires a shift of the mind, will and heart (Scharmer, 2009). This means educators work from a space of possibility (Macfarlane, Cartmel & Nolan, 2011). As Wheatley (2002, p. 90) notes:

> It is very difficult to give up on our certainties - our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. These helps define us; they lie at the heart of our personal identity. Yet I believe we will succeed in changing tis world only if we can think and work together in new ways. Curiosity is what we need, we don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes. We do need to acknowledge that their way of interpreting the world might be essential to our survival. A surprising but important element of conversation is a willingness to be disturbed, to allow our beliefs and ideas to be challenged by what others think. We have to be willing to let go of our certainty and be confused for a time.

Reflective practice must occur through dialogue to ensure understanding of new understandings about practice, even more so as working environments become more complex, with the uncertainty and riskiness that are inherent in some environments (Craft & Paige-Smith, 2011; Ruch 2005).

It is now necessary to unpack what makes reflection 'critical.' Fook and Askeland (2006a) make a distinction between reflection and critical reflection, identifying that critical reflection appears more associated with education (Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow, 1991) and highlighting that not all reflective practice will lead to critical reflection and fundamental change. 'Critical' reflection is the deepest type of reflection that best supports the professional learning of educators, subsequently improving practice in early education and care centres. and can be thought of as a subcategory of reflective practice, used to specifically improve professional practice. It involves the ability to unearth and unsettle assumptions (particularly about power) examining and changing deeply held or fundamental assumptions (Mezirow, 1991; Brookfield, 1995, p. 8). 'Critical' reflection is about the ability to be transformative, "to involve and lead some

fundamental change in perspective" (Cranton, 1996, pp. 79-80). Awareness of how assumptions between an individual educator and service context and structure function can provide a platform for transformative action (Fook, 2012; Kondrat, 1999) through focusing on how power operates and fundamental assumptions, and hence on how practice can change within the service context within which educators work.

The model of critical reflection put forward in this thesis is based on educators meeting together, a process educators also use to communicate with children (Macfarlane & Carmel, 2008) with 'shutting down the habit of judging based on our past experiences and opening up to genuine inquiry' (Macfarlane, Carmel & Nolan,2011). In this process, educators listen self- reflectively to 'hear ourselves through others ears' (Kahane, 2092, p. 4), engaging in talking and listening, building connectedness between the group, with recognition and respect for the diversity of values, ideas and opinions, actively discovering and exchanging knowledge and ideas, identifying capabilities and creating possibilities, and linking practice with understanding and new knowledge.

Critical reflection requires both analysis and change, underpinned by poststructuralist and postmodern theories which, according to Gardner (2009) enables the exposition of "missing perspectives, dominant discourses, examples of thinking and constructions of power" (p. 182), thereby encouraging the articulation and highlighting of values and beliefs and taken for granted assumptions and understandings. This is crucial in the process of critical reflection in order to work within and against (Lather, 1996) taken for granted beliefs, values, assumptions and constructions of power.

Educators need to research their own practice and develop their own practice theory directly from their own experience. This enables educators to evaluate and scrutinize their practice, learn from their own practice and create theory applicable to practice. The critical reflection process thereby encompasses a process of deconstruction and reconstruction with future action (Fook, 2012a).

Critical reflection requires a number of conditions to be in place to be enabled. First, a culture needs to be established that is safe, open and willing to be expose professional vulnerabilities for the sake of learning. (Fook et al., 2000, p. 230) describes this as a climate of 'critical acceptance'. Confidentiality, respect and acceptance need to be acknowledged, along with openness and non-judgmentalism acknowledging the purpose of critical reflection as helping to unearth assumptions. This occurs through two stages - analytical (exposing and examining

hidden assumptions through deconstruction) and reconstructive action (turning an awareness of these hidden assumptions into new ways of understanding, including the use of power and how educators might challenge and change their environments accordingly). Questioning is a key strategy for critical reflection to facilitate and enable a climate for diverse types of learners, adaptive to different service contexts, and educators, with flexibility for maximum effectiveness.

> Using the great goodness of many, and actively developing the critical thinking and relational skills that make us human, we intend to astonish the world with what becomes possible when we nourish and sustain the human spirit. (Wheatley, 2002, p. 1)

2.4.3 The Purpose and Value of Critical Reflection in ECEC

Critical reflection in ECEC underpins practice because if educators understand what they are doing, and why, they can improve what they do. Critical reflection is purposeful because of the value this brings. This value helps inform work and keeps educators accountable to improve their practice. Improvement depends on a commitment and belief that performance can be further improved; a clear understanding of what improvement may look like, a way of establishing current levels of performance as starting points for action; a familiarity with evidence-based, differentiated improvement strategies; and ongoing processes for monitoring progress and evaluating improvement (ACER, 2012).

Critical reflection also requires ECEC educators to look beyond their own immediate circumstances to what external factors that might influence the choices they make and the actions they take. This includes the social context (Fook, White & Gardner, 2006), and the broader context of the organisational culture and structure (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Where critical reflection is embedded and supported in the day-to-day operations of services, educators are encouraged to question not only their practice but that of their colleagues, including managers (Roberts, 2016) and so be equipped to be better able to understand and explore insights from skills, competencies and knowledge through relevant and meaningful learning. This assists educators to make sense of themselves and their learning experiences to provide positive outcomes for the children within their care (ACECQA, 2017; Tofade, 2013).

The significance of undertaking critical reflection in ECEC, as noted in the previous section, is because it is acknowledged that good outcomes for children can be supported by professional and qualified educators who regularly reflect on their own and their colleagues' practice (ACECQA). This is achieved through integrating theory and practice to enhance learning and professional self-actualization by applying, contrasting and integrating theory to the practice explored through an authentic experience (Patrick, et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2010). This occurs

through what is described by Ash, Clayton and Moses, (2009), as “articulating questions, confronting biases, examining causality and identifying systemic issues to help foster critical evaluation and knowledge transfer” (p. 27) to ponder our practices, processes and identities, ask questions and critique ways of behaving and thinking in engagement in workplace experiences. This is further described defined by Fook and Askland, (2006) as “an ability to recognise our own influence – and the influence of our contexts, the type of knowledge we create, and the way we create it” (p. 45). In other words, being reflexive requires constantly getting evidence about how effective or worthwhile our actions are, so we can change what we are doing according to the evidence of its value.

This builds an integrated knowledge base through an active approach to learning, linking new to existing knowledge. Taken together, these capabilities are intrinsic to the development of an educator who is self-aware and self-regulated. Through questioning and testing theories in their practice, educators become empowered and encouraged to become researchers, to try new ideas and test theories (Houser & Frymier, 2009). In so doing, reflective practice allows educators to develop a deeper awareness of their own prejudices, beliefs and values.

Values and beliefs identified through reflective practice uncover the structure and content of educators’ perspectives (Garvis & Prendergast, 2011) to enable practical application of their reported values to the ECEC learning environment. In reflection on and discussing such issues, critical reflection focusses on changing and improving practice (Fook 2000) and, as noted by Kessl, (2009), is “a process of thinking of, comparing and verifying the purpose of learning about and improving practice, developing practice-based theory, connecting theory to practice and imposing and changing practice” (p. 312).

Transforming beliefs and behaviours does not mean imposing a different set of beliefs and behaviours (Lovat, 2006), it does, however, mean challenging to see the beliefs and values educators bring with them (OECD, 2009). This is a concept about personal identity and spills over into practices action in what Habermas calls ‘praxis’ (2007). It is an action that comes from grounding in self-reflexivity, in self-identity, and values the integrity of being authentic, committed to establishing caring, trusting and fruitful relationships. Within ECEC, critical reflection is therefore a transformative process, actualised by reflection theoretically to create individual knowledge related to lived experience, deeply internalised and supported with feedback and collaborative reflection on experience.

Linked with this are notions of trust and care between educator quality and the values-laden nature of the environment (Rowe, 2004; Hattie, 2004). Dewey (1916, 1929) spoke of the cultivation of a mindset on the part of educators that was self-reflective and directed towards instilling reflective inquiry and a capacity for moral judiciousness. The task is to make explicit why an environment of respect, trust and acceptance is so vital. This is the curriculum aspect of values education with the essential focus the raising of critical and self-reflective questions. In an educational climate where it is all too easy to focus on content knowledge, it is important values support sound decision making in education (De Nobile & Hogan, 2014). Values and beliefs identified through reflective practice uncover the structure and content of educators' perspectives (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011) to enable practical application of their reported values to the ECEC learning environment.

Critically reflective practice enables educators to build upon deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in their roles and responsibilities, to develop understanding of their own practice to deliver the best outcomes for children through continually developing the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches (Blatchford et al., 2008; Child Australia, 2017; MacNaughton, 2005; Marbina et al., 2010; Summerville & Hokanson, 2013). This is described by Kessl (2009), "it also entails a more general orientation on the part of the professional to the role and responsibilities of the profession on contemporary societies" (p. 306). Part of these responsibilities is professional standards; hence, it is wise to critically reflect upon these standards in order to improve practice.

2.5 The Connection between Critical Reflection and ECEC Frameworks and Standards

2.5.1 Introduction

ECEC is a complex educational sector of which frameworks, standards, ethics and philosophy documents are foundational to compliance. Each is important and includes standards for professional practice. All of these documents also have implications for the quality of ECEC centres. The operation of an ECEC Centre requires attention to be paid to each of these documents, and their implementation, as they are all requirements of the NQS. As critical reflection is foundational to practice, it is also important that these documents are reflected upon. In other words, if critical reflection is foundational to practice and all of these compliance documents impinge on and underpin practice, they have to be considered and carefully reflected upon. Hence, ECEC educators need to be taking note of these documents which have a major

impact on the way educators go about their business with implications for an ECEC centre performance and how educators behave in specific ways, including how educators critically engage with each of these documents.

ECEC educators need to adopt a metacognitive approach (Petty & Brinol, 2008) where they monitor what they are doing and critically reflect to constantly evaluate ongoing improvement. The outcome of this process is a high level of quality as defined by the NQS in the 'Guide to the NQF' (ACECQA, 2018). Quality is a meta-characteristic as ECEC centres focus on quality in seven 'quality areas', including quality in professional practice. Critically reflecting on 'quality' within the seven 'quality areas' including professional practice is foundational to achieve the NQS outcomes. Reflecting on theoretical perspectives in pedagogical professional practice also leads to quality. Hence the relationship between critical reflection, theoretical perspectives, pedagogical practice and quality is worthy of investigation. To illustrate the importance of reflection, the following two examples of compliance documents will be discussed.

2.5.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The *United National Convention on the Rights of the Child (*UNCRC, 2006) is an important framework document for ECEC because it is underpinned by principles which are fundamental to all work undertaken with children. These principles also inform policy and practice, including the Australian ECEC national curriculum, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN General Assembly, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial that educators not only recognise the rights society gives to children, but also important to ECEC centres for educators to inform and enhance their practice in ECEC through listening to children and critically reflecting on the decisions they make that affect the wellbeing of children.

The implications of this document are such that educators need to reflect on, and adopt, flexible images of children and childhood, considering the role they play in children's lives (Bae, 2009; Dall'Alba, 2009). Furthermore, educators need to reflect on, and pose critical questions to understand how objective images of children are constructed (Appl & Yorde, 2005; MacNaughton, 2003; Smith, 2007). This is because when educators consider the power inequalities between themselves and children (ECA, 2016), educators can create real opportunities for children to express their own thoughts and feelings and actively influence what happens in children's lives. Therefore, we need to critically engage with this document so that "we can find more functional understanding - to create diversity, broaden our thinking and ask more complex questions" (Burke & Short, 2010, p. 1).

2.5.3 The Australian Early Childhood Code of Ethics

This Australian Early Childhood Code of Ethics, developed by the Australian professional body, Early Childhood Australia (ECA), provides a framework for educators to reflect on the complexities of their work and provides a guide for decision-making. In other words, this guide is a set of statements which also provides a documented framework for educator ethical responsibilities within ECEC including pedagogical practice and research. This set of practice principles clearly states the crucial role of reflective practice in the continuing development and professional identity of the ECEC profession and sets reflective practice as a key element in establishing an ECEC culture that engages in continuous review for improvement. The reason it does this is so educators can understand the professional and ethical dimensions of their work and shift from focussing on technical aspects of their work such as 'What works?' to reflectively inquiring 'Why' around questions of curriculum, pedagogy and the outcomes being delivered. This is why educators must critically engage with this document and critically reflect over whether professional practice is in accord with this document.

2.6 The Relationship between Critical Reflection, Theoretical Perspectives, and Pedagogically Professional Practice

In an ECEC centre it is important that there are high standards of pedagogical practice so that children engage in the teaching and learning environment. In a faith-based ECEC context it is also important that there are high levels of pastoral care. This is a topic that will be addressed in greater depth later in this thesis.

This relationship between critical reflection in ECEC and theoretical perspectives underpinning pedagogically professional practice is reflected in the NQS. The NQS talks about the importance of critical reflection as foundational to our pedagogical practice, underpinned by theoretical perspectives, leading to quality. The reason for this is that educators draw on many theories to inform and guide their practice, and like different lenses, these theories enable educators to see the world from different perspectives to make sense of and respond to, different circumstances and contexts. By adopting such a critical inquiry approach to pedagogical practice understanding is deepened and educators empowered to do better. Educators thereby become "more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional inquiry" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 14) as educators understand and apply the theoretical perspectives that underpin their practice to provide the foundation for understanding what is done and why.

In other words, critically reflecting on a theoretical perspective helps make implicit ideas become explicit. It is in realising one's strengths and potential that new opportunities emerge for continuous improvement, maximisation of outcomes and enhancement of workplace performance. If used effectively and purposefully, critical reflection therefore facilitates ongoing personal and professional learning, creating and developing educators capable of demonstrating their progression towards learning outcomes and required standards. Critical reflection can also provide a structure in which to make sense of learning, so that concepts and theories become embedded in practice. 'Critical' is about the ability to be transformative, 'to involve and lead to some fundamental change in perspective' (Cranton, 1996, pp. 79-80). This involves awareness of how power operates. This has been extended to encompass an awareness of how assumptions about the connection between oneself and the social context or situation can function in powerful ways, so that awareness of these assumptions can provide a platform for transformative action (Fook, 2012). Because critical reflection is about unearthing deep-seated assumptions, educators need to be resilient enough to expose their vulnerabilities in professional practice to detailed scrutiny and questioning (Fook & Askeland, 2006b) to contribute to articulating the evidence base of their practice. It takes courage to step outside individual interactions and experiences and explore the whys of beliefs, ideas and assumptions within an ECEC context to deepen understanding, grow and develop.

Having introduced the idea of the importance of quality in the introduction to this section, it is important to further explore quality ECEC. Within the NQS, quality is defined in principles, quality areas and standards. Other features of the NQF that regulate for quality include nationally consistent educator: child ratios and educators' qualification requirements to deliver a program based on the EYLF and engage in ongoing reflection, planning and programming to support high quality practice (ACECQA, 2018). Such regulation for quality, it is argued, endeavours to ensure that commonwealth, state and territory funds are invested to achieve the desired policy outcomes and that society obtains the maximum return (Laevers, 2007; DEEWR, 2009b). OECD work on the social outcomes of learning show that high quality ECEC brings social benefits which reflect the important positive influence of Early Childhood Education. The OECD offers three rationales for investing in high quality ECEC. First, it has significant economic and social payoffs. Second, it supports parents and boosts female employment. Third, it is part of society's responsibility to educate children, to combat child poverty, and to help children overcome educational disadvantage.

Quality is addressed in the literature as being of two types - structural and process (Howes et al., 2010; Ishimine, Taylor & Thorpe, 2009). Generally, structural quality refers to those components controlled by forces outside of ECEC and includes legislative thresholds such as educator: child ratios, group sizes, educator qualifications and service facilities and resources (Howes et al., 2010; Ishimine & Wilson, 2009; OECD, 2006). Process quality, however, looks at the nature of the interactions between the child and the educator, child and child, teacher/educator and parent, teacher and educator, educator and educator, as well as the nature of centre leadership and teacher pedagogical skills. It includes what happens through educator-educator, child-educator, child-child and children's educational programs (ECA, 2016). Critically reflective practice is hence a process component of quality which influences the everyday nature of ECEC and therefore is critical in any assessment of service quality (Howes et al., 2010; Mashburn et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2009: Zaslow, Tout & Martinez-Beck, 2010). Moss and Dahlberg (2013) define quality as a "search for improvement, a search to provide the best we can for young children, to put children at the forefront to give them the best start in life" (p. 2). Linked with this is the emphasis on lifelong learning and the amplified spotlight on education and a knowledge-based economy with higher qualifications associated with improved child outcomes, as educators are better able to involve children and use a range of strategies, inclusive of reflective practice to extend and support their learning (OECD, 2013).

2.6.1 Critical Reflection and Professional Learning

Critical reflection is a way to develop educators through professional development and is really important in professional learning. Educators need to reflect about their professional practice and experiences, think about them, evaluate them and critically reflect upon those experiences in learning.

When we think about professional learning, we need to think about how 'profession' is linked to 'knowledge' and about the application of this knowledge (NESA, 2020). Key features of a professional system such as ECEC is that there is a central regulatory body, ACECQA, to ensure the quality of performance of the profession and individual professional; a professional code of conduct (ECA, 2018) and an effective means of producing and managing the professional body of knowledge. This may be through academic research and sector debate; transferred through induction and professional development; or through reflective practice (Mathew, Prince & Peechatu (2017). The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) states that "reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Its intention is

to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning" (p. 13). The EYLF Educators Guide (DEEWR, 2010) notes that reflective practice helps educators to become more engaged in their work and look at new possibilities in practice and, if embedded in daily practice, achieve better outcomes for children. Leaders in ECEC need to lead and manage change not only from extrinsic origins but also from intrinsic pressure for the growth of knowledge itself. A fundamental need is the generation of an environment where the assumptions driving change are constantly examined (Abbas & Asqhar (2010). In such a climate, meaningful outcomes are produced from the planned change, with the process of critical reflection, learning and growth the basis of high quality ECEC. Meaningful contexts and continuous improvement are thereby created. In this way, critically reflective practice helps educators become increasingly thoughtful about their work and motivates them to explore new ideas and approaches (Anning & Edwards, 2006). Wheatley (2002, p. 1) notes:

> Without reflection we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful…. It is very difficult to give up on our certainties – our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. These help define us, they lie at the heart of our personal identity. Yet I believe we will succeed in changing this world only if we can think and work together in new ways. Curiosity is what we need. We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes. We do need to acknowledge that their way of interpreting the world might be essential for our survival.

In respect to critical reflection and learning, we need to distinguish between single loop and double loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Kantamara & Ractham, 2014). For the exercise of single loop learning, according to Schon (1987), it is possible that "by observing and reflecting on our own actions, to make a description of the tacit knowing implicit in them" (p. 25). However, double loop learning not only involves reflecting on one's actions but also exploring the assumptions and 'theories-in-use' which are embedded in those actions. This requires a more critical stance of the learner, and double loop learning makes known the things which single loop learning would leave "private and undiscussable" (p. 289). It is in this double loop learning that educators' underlying values and assumptions are examined and challenged, and thus opened to change.

Creating scheduled time and opportunities to reflect is essential for promoting critically reflective practice. Also, it is important to have access to a mentor for continuing professional development. The mentor must be someone who will challenge the educator's thinking and encourage them to look at things from multiple perspectives rather than going about things in the same way (Colmer, 2008). A mentor can bring a different perspective to the reflection and

encourage educators to think about what values they hold, why they hold them, and what works best for children and their learning. Where this is not possible, other strategies can include web-based professional development that provides on-line consultation and feedback focussed on teaching and learning which can effectively connect professionals with mentors (Pianta et al., 2008).

Critically reflective practice is also about educators making a commitment to ongoing learning and becoming a member of a professional learning community (ECA, 2018). These professional learning communities are groups of individuals that come together over time with a shared interest to engage in the process of collective, collaborative learning. These communities are grounded in a social constructivist approach to learning, recognising that individuals build knowledge through their interactions with others (Wenger, 1998). Such learning communities build trust with the facilitator evolving into the role of a "critical friend" (p. 16) who provokes new ideas, challenges educators' thinking and brings forward new perspectives that may not have been considered (Curtis et al., 2012). Through these learning communities, educators can embed critical reflection in all aspects of their work through questioning whose needs are being met in existing practice and the assumptions which influence their practice. This focusses on the learner, the curriculum and relationships with a shared focus on sustained improvement. Leadership commitment to reflective practice is also required with time set aside for educators to reflect, meet with mentors or attend local learning networks. Investment in professional learning opportunities where the benefits of critical reflection are explicitly presented and discussed enables professionals to become exposed to contemporary theory and research and understand how long-term change can be achieved.

Effective critical reflective practice needs to be a reflection in, on, and through practice (Schon, 1983; Asselin, 2011). Professional development requires a strategic collaborative approach built upon critically reflective practice with a facilitator required to 'sow' reflective seeds and enable critical thinking and conversations to inform action in, on and through practice. For in practice we find provocation and confrontation, curiosity, complexity, uncertainty, diversity, wonder, fun and meaning, and it is within this context where learning occurs through critical reflection in asking questions to which answers are not yet known (ACECQA, 2015). Larrivee (2008) describes the demand for teachers to develop the practice of critical reflection in order to fuse personal beliefs and values into a professional identity and avoid remaining confined in unexamined judgements, unconsidered interpretations and unexplored assumptions and expectations.

2.7 The Association between Critical Reflection and Philosophy

As we have seen, the Government provides a whole range of compliance standards and frameworks that those within the ECEC sector must adhere to. However, one of the most important things in this implementation is that the organisation or institution has to come to terms with the philosophy upon which it operates as this impacts practice. Reflecting over philosophy, therefore, is an important thing to do not only as it is a Commonwealth compliance requirement but because it indicates the ECEC Centre's values and guides practice in considering how educators are critically reflecting upon their practice.

2.7.1 What is a Philosophy?

As used originally by the ancient Greeks, the term 'philosophy' means the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and comprises all areas of thought including the arts, sciences and religion. At its simplest, therefore, philosophy is the study of knowledge, thinking about thinking, a discipline of questions about how one should live (ethics) and rational and critical inquiry into basic principles. As a result, thinking occurs about the fundamental nature of the world and the evaluation of human conduct. In an ECEC centre context, a philosophy is a statement of aims, beliefs and values which also lays the foundation and provides justification for the teaching and learning that takes place. A philosophy includes the personal values educator bring with them to their work, and their beliefs about 'children,' 'learning' and 'families' which impact on how they provide for, and respond to, all stakeholders. A philosophy enables teachers and educators to acquire a grasp of the conceptual field of education and provide a way to understand and navigate often contested views within that field. It also enables teachers and educators to understand the scope and limits of empirical research in education and the relationships between that research and conceptual issues in education (Winch, 2012). Snauwert (2012) argues that values and the imperatives of social justice are at the core of education and that these values and imperatives powerfully shape every dimension of educational theory, policy and practice. Philosophy, it is argued, constitutes a mode of inquiry and a discipline that enriches the capacity for reflection and rational deliberation, and hence it is essential for the practice of education (Snauwaert, 2012). Philosophy makes this contribution by providing frameworks for understanding and generating ideas, methods of reflection and analysis and exercises for the cultivation of the capacity of reflection and rational deliberation. Dewey (cited in Webster, 2005) argued that all people act and behave according to their beliefs. Therefore, the influence of observations and experiences is inextricably linked to philosophy. In education, there is a clearly

defined relationship between personal beliefs, pedagogy and classroom practice (Manning & Manning, 1994) where “experiences influence beliefs and beliefs influence practice” (Maynes, Allison & Julien-Schultz, 2012, p. 69). It is essentially how a teacher’s identity is developed and the last part of this process is actually putting values and beliefs into practice in the classroom (Churchill et al, 2011). Analytical and purposeful reflection on personal conceptions, decisions and teaching experiences, as well as reflection on service policies and ethos, is a critical component of teaching, as it empowers teachers to refine practice. It strengthens philosophy and thereby provides a concrete and thoughtful foundation to base pedagogy and classroom practice on. Reflection solidifies the development of a teacher’s beliefs, values and attitudes toward teaching and what is effective pedagogy (Sheriden & Moore, 2009). Purposeful perspectives on education enable teachers to critically give meaning to experiences an evaluate existing practices in order to better their own (Webster, 2005). Teachers and educators need to discern for themselves what constitutes quality teaching and pedagogy and the reflective process allows this to occur (Webster, 2005) with reflection filtering predispositions about students, the classroom and teaching (Mansfield & Violet, 2010). A philosophy comes from reflecting on teaching experiences (Ballard & McBroide, 2010), with action coupled with reflection resulting in learning (Whitton et al., 2010).

As stated, philosophy has important implications for practice. It is the foundation upon which teachers and educators should base their decisions about children, the classroom, the teaching and the service. A philosophy needs to be true to beliefs, values and experiences with reflection essential. A strong philosophy has its roots in thoughtful reflection on teaching and learning experiences which create teachers and educators who are strongly committed to the service of education. A statement of philosophy is an opportunity to acknowledge the values and beliefs held by key stakeholders within a service, showcasing commitment to quality outcomes for children, families and community. The philosophy is unique to a service; it underpins the policies and procedures, as well as the decisions and daily practices of those involved in planning, implementing and evaluating quality experiences. The philosophy also reflects a shared understanding of the role the service plays with regards to the children, families and community, reflect the principles of the National Law, the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (p. 175) and is informed by theoretical perspectives, research, community values and contexts, and the collective values, beliefs and diverse perspectives of the children, educators and families who attend the service.

All services must have a statement of philosophy in place which is available to educators and staff of the service, and parents of children attending (Element 7.2.1 of the National Quality Standard (NQS)). This statement of philosophy guides all aspects of the service's operations and outlines the purpose and principles under which the service operates. It should also reflect the guiding principles of the National Quality Framework (section 3(3) of the National Law), and the Approved Learning Frameworks (Element 1.1.1). A statement of philosophy is more than a mission statement. The philosophy is the 'why' behind work with children, families and each other. It is the combination of beliefs, values and hopes for the educational program that is provided and its outcomes. The service philosophy needs to be a 'living document' that reflects the values and beliefs of the current management, educators and families that belong to the service which not only guides every aspect of practice, but also reflects changing circumstances or new ideas. It should be revised annually to reflect those views and be put into active use to guide every aspect of operation, practice and curriculum in a setting. This provides the opportunity to stop, reflect, and rethink about what is done and why. It also enables any new developments and opportunities to be considered, such as new research to inform practice, changes in legislation, professional development opportunities, changes to policies and procedures, and conversations between educators, children and families.

ECEC services that have a clear, shared vision about what is important for children and families create a positive climate and clear, shared intentions that lead to quality outcomes. The philosophy statement needs to reflect the guiding principles underpinning the NQF and the NQS. The Guide to the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011, p. 7) requires that:

> In making decisions about operating education and care services and working to achieve the National Quality Standard to improve quality at services, the guiding principles of the National Quality Framework apply.

These principles are:

- The rights of the child are paramount.
- Children are successful, competent and capable learners.
- Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the framework.
- Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.
- The role of parents and families is respected and supported.
- Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.

The Guide states (element 7.2.1, p. 181) that:

> A written statement of philosophy outlines the principles under which the service operates. This philosophy reflects the principles of the National Law, the Early Years Learning Framework and/or the Framework for School Age Care (or other approved learning frameworks). It underpins the decisions, policies and daily practices of the approved provider, nominated supervisor, educators, co-ordinators and staff members and assists in planning, implementing and evaluating quality experiences for children. It reflects a shared understanding of the role of the service with children, families and the community. It is important to engage everyone in the revision process, as people who have been involved are more likely to understand the intent behind the reviewed statement of philosophy and use it to guide practice.

The Educators' Guide (DEEWR, 2010) reminds us that skilful educators are aware of their beliefs and knowledge. The Educators' Guide (p. 14) reminds us that the Principles and Practices of the Framework are founded on beliefs that:

- Children are capable and competent
- Children actively construct their own learning
- Learning is dynamic, complex and holistic
- Children have agency; that is, they have capacities and rights to initiate and lead learning and to be active participants and decision makers in matters affecting them.

Being familiar with the core elements of the EYLF assists in developing a shared statement of philosophy that is consistent with the Framework. It guides decision making about:

- How relationships are established and maintained with children and families (p. 12)
- How information is gathered and recorded about children (p. 17)
- How the curriculum is planned, the environment set up and equipment and resources chosen (p. 15)
- How teaching and learning strategies are identified and used (p. 17)
- How assessment of children's learning is carried out (p. 17)
- How professional reflection is undertaken (p. 13).

Philosophy, therefore, is inherent within the EYLF with values embodied in the principles that undermine practice inclusive of reflective practice. The Educators' Guide to the EYLF (p. 14) states:

> The beliefs of educators are a major factor in how a curriculum is planned, what goals are established, and how relationships and the learning environment and experiences are established.

Educators need to ask: How will we consult with children and families to gain their views about what they like about the service, what improvements they would like to see and the aspects they would like included in the statement of philosophy?

All those involved in the service have a voice in the development and review of the statement of philosophy. When the educational leader, nominated supervisor, co-ordinators and educators all contribute to the review of the statement of philosophy, they will have a better understanding of how the philosophy underpins everyday practices and decision-making, their involvement creates ownership and encourages commitment and willingness to put the philosophy into practice. Encouraging families, children, educators and key community stakeholders to be meaningfully involved may also be used to demonstrate how Quality Area 6 of the NQS is met with inviting children to be involved and incorporating their views to show how their ideas are respected and valued, further developing their sense of agency.

The EYLF, the NQF and the NQS hence provide educators with the opportunity to stop, reflect and think about what is done and why (ECA, 2016). Philosophy, therefore, is the rational investigation of being, knowledge and conduct and as such is a practice within ECEC which it is important to critically reflect upon.

2.7.2 What is a Faith-based Philosophy?

All ECEC centres have their own special character. In particular, when it comes to faith based ECEC centres they have a character which influences what it seeks to do. A faith-based centre has a particular philosophy of education, worldview, goals and practices which provide a distinctive character. In other words, faith based ECEC centres provide an example of how a philosophy influences practice as, within such a centre, there is an additional framework which provides an extra lens through which educators look at their professional practice. This is through the lens of a Christian world view in which educators' practice is viewed and within a framework which hold educators accountable to reflect over their practice within that context. Within a faith-based ECEC centre importance is placed on spirituality as an important aspect of life with one of the goals of a faith-based ECEC centre the development of the spirituality of young children with importance also placed on educators being spiritual. Let's now explore why faith based ECEC centres choose to put such an emphasis on the goal of developing the spiritual life of young children.

2.7.3 Faith-based ECEC Centres and Children's Holistic and Spiritual Development

The spiritual wellbeing of children is important for their overall wellbeing (NSW Department of Education, 2015) and ECEC services have a responsibility to provide a holistic education. They aim to develop more than just a child's academic ability is well supported (Burrows, 2006; Chittenden, 2003; Harris, 2016; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008; Smith & McSherry, 2004). It is also a recognition that there is strong evidence that children who are supported in all dimensions of wellbeing have higher academic achievement and better life outcomes in relation to health, employment, social inclusion and economic independence (Kimbel & Schellenberg, 2013; Noble et al., 2008) with a growing body of evidence on the positive relationship between spirituality and wellbeing (Ivtzan et al. 2013).

The approved learning framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), emphasises the need for educators to attend to children's spiritual development as part of a holistic approach (p. 9) and to consider, and provide for, the spiritual aspect of children's lives and learning (p. 14). The EYLF notes that by embracing a holistic approach to young children's learning, and the spiritual components of who children are, as well as the physical, personal, emotional and social aspects of learning (DEEWR, 2009, p. 14) educators recognise the connectedness of mind, body and spirit, and, taking a holistic approach, are encouraged to "pay attention to children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing" (p. 4) along with cognitive aspects of learning.

However, how this can be achieved is not clearly articulated in current policy or framework documents (Grajczonek, 2012a). Grajczonek (2012) notes that "The Early Years Learning Framework explicit inclusion of the spiritual is undoubtedly significant. It is a forward step to have this important aspect of children's lives both acknowledged and advocated in a national document of this calibre, however the ways on which this spirituality can be promoted by educators is not as clearly articulated" (p. 159). To enable educators to attend to children's spirituality with intentionality and explicitly promote this capacity requires both knowledge and acquisition of skills of critical reflection. As spiritual moments are often child initiated and spontaneous, educators must be able to use these skills to discern incidental moments within each child's day that are open to spiritual possibilities which truly value holistic and integrated practice.

Adams (2009) emphasised the need for educators themselves to have received spiritual formation if they are to nurture the spirituality of children. Educators, therefore, need to be knowledgeable about children's spirituality to be enabled to plan for children's spiritual opportunities intentionally and effectively. If educators are to attend to the spiritual capacity of children in the same way they attend to their cognitive or physical capacities, educators must first understand spirituality and recognise how to engage with it. When educators have the knowledge to understand the spiritual capacity as a dimension of the whole child, they can subsequently focus the development of professional skills to implement practices that promote children's spirituality.

Existing research on children's spirituality has focussed on middle childhood (Adams, Bull & Maine's, 2016), attempted to define spirituality (Hay & NYE, 1998) and to measure children's spiritual development (Moore, Gomez-Garibello, Bosacki & Talgarth, 2016; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). Scholarly and empirical literature provides practices for educators to assist children's spiritual development within the context of a school (Bone, 2005; Kessler, 2000) although there are few studies on educator practice on children in ECEC (Champagne, 2003: Goodiff, 2013) with educators often unfamiliar with the concept of spirituality and how to address the spiritual needs of their children (Hyde, 2016).

The EYLF reminds educators that children, from before birth, are connected to family, community, culture, and place. 'Culture;' encompasses dimensions of identity and the ways we live our lives defined as 'What we create beyond our biology, not given to us, but made by us" (Williams., in MacNaughton, 2003, p. 14). Using this definition, culture incorporates the scope of human diversity and ways of being, such as gender, ethnicity, class, religions, ability, age, and sexuality (DEEWR, 2010, p. 22). Culture, then, incorporates human diversity and reminds us to reflect critically about how our practice supports each child's developing identity and self-worth. The EYLF refers to the role in which individual families beliefs and spiritual dimensions may shape children, acknowledging that there are many ways of living, being and of knowing with children born belonging to a culture, not only influenced by traditional practices, heritage and ancestral knowledge, but also by the experiences, values and beliefs of individual families and communities. 'Spiritual' is defined in the EYLF as "a range of human experiences including a sense of awe and wonder, and an exploration of being and knowing." (p. 46). The EYLF encourages educators to welcome children and families sharing aspects of their culture and spiritual lives, nurturing children's spirituality, and noting that children's learning is dynamic, complex and holistic with physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning all intricately interwoven and interrelated. Literature clearly

articulates the need for spirituality to be awakened in childhood (Harris, 2013; King 2013), acknowledging spirituality to be innate with attention to be paid to spiritual capacity as a component of children's holistic development (Bellows & Csinos, 2009).

Scholarly literature on spirituality tends to refer to the qualities and characteristics of 'spirituality' which have emerged from a few small-scale studies (Giesenberg, 2007; Goodliff, 2013; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) and from the seminal works from that of Robinson (1983), Coles (1990) and Hay and Nye (1998). The empirical work of Robinson (1983) has been influential in understanding spirituality as a humanly innate capacity. Coles' (1990) findings supported those of Robinson (1983), concluding that children are naturally spiritual. In describing children as naturally spiritual, Coles (1990) explained that children are naturally curious about the meaning of life and have a natural inclination to wonder and to seek.

The work of Robinson (1983) and Coles (1990) has provided the platform for scholarly literature to further articulate the notion that spirituality is innate. Kim and Esquivel (2011) describe spirituality as an inherent component to being human and Hyde (2010) concurs, stating it "is ontological…a natural human pre-disposition, something that people are born with" (p. 506). Mueller (2010) suggests that children are 'spiritually competent' and in their natural state of being can provide demonstrations of what it means to be spiritual. Mueller (2010, p. 203) describes spirituality in general as "a deeply personal experience". The claim that spirituality is integral to the development of the whole person is also made by Baumgartner and Buchanan (2010) as they explain that "spirituality is a vital part of human nature" (p. 90). The notion of 'meaning making' is further drawn on by Gibson (2014) who explains the complexity of the term spirituality in that people's 'meaning making' is "shaped by personal agency interwoven with social, cultural, economic and, in many cases, religious life experiences" (p. 521).

The universality of spirituality is highlighted by The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (1989). The UNCRC (1989) identifies spirituality as a natural capacity within children. This natural capacity exists as distinct, yet complementary to the physical, mental, moral, and social domains. The UNCRC (1989), in acknowledging the spiritual innateness of the child, identifies the need for this capacity to be protected by listing it within four Articles of the Convention. Article 17 states that Government must recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of a child's social, spiritual, and moral well-being and physical and mental health. Further to this, Articles 23 states the need to incorporate children's cultural and spiritual

development in decision-making. Article 27 states, “the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” (UNCRC, 1989) and Article 32 (UNCRC, 1989) refers to the right of the child to be free from exploitation and hazards that may impact their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. The explicit mention of the spiritual capacity alongside the other human domains (physical, cognitive, emotional, and social) emphasises the view that spirituality is recognised in secular society as innately human. Literature makes frequent reference to the UNCRC (1989) convention when describing children as innate spiritual beings and calls for children to be viewed as “active participants in their own spirituality, instead of passive recipients…” (Ingersoll, 2014, p. 166). The perception of children as active agents in their own life and faith is reiterated in the work of Champagne (2008) who emphasises that adults must provide opportunities for children to participate actively in the “collective journey of spiritual interpretation” (p. 261) and that adults must listen to the richness and depth that childhood experiences of spirituality can offer.

Literature connects spiritual development with the concepts of identity development (Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; MacDonald, 2009; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012), positive wellbeing and the development of resilience (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery & Cowell, 2006; Ratcliff & May, 2004: Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012). The sense of connection to self, to a person’s sense of being, is recognised as a relational characteristic of spirituality, detailed by Hay and Nye (1998) as a raw ‘I-Self’ relationship. Literature on spirituality asserts that a strong sense of self is required if individuals are to flourish in their relationships with others (De Souza, 2016). Relationality with the self is an evolving process where an individual seeks to find answers to questions such as “Who am I?” Literature explains that when connectedness with self is expressed positively, the constructs of identity, self-awareness and self-esteem are also positively influenced leading to a strong sense of wellbeing (De Souza, 2016). It is only once a strong foundation is formed within the self that a sense of connectedness to ‘other’ can flourish, and, moreover, this unlocks the potential to experience the mystery of transcendence (De Souza, 2016). The theme of identity is clearly tied to the concept of belonging “knowing where and with whom you belong...Belonging acknowledges children’s interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 7). To belong involves the sharing of a person’s identity with others and therefore implies a social dimension that goes beyond the ‘I-Self” relationships to include ‘I-Other’. The process of an individual finding “their

place and purpose in the world" (Adams, 2009, p. 115) is one of meaning-making (Hay & Nye, 1998) that requires an inward search as well as an outward relationship with others.

The social dimension of having a sense of purpose that includes the impact or influence an individual has on another, is characteristic of spirituality (Adams, 2009; Eaude, 2009). The connection between spirituality with the positive development of wellbeing is documented in the work of Howell, Passmore and Buro (2013) and the connection between spirituality and happiness (Eaude, 2009; Howell, Passmore & Buro, 2013), with connection of spirituality and identity and the constructs of resilience and wellbeing (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery & Cowell, 2006; Ratcliff & May, 2004, Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) along with a search for meaning (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkepartain, 2012, Eaude, 2009). The development of a strong sense of wellbeing is facilitated by the ability to manage emotions and behaviours constructively. The development of positive dispositions, feelings of happiness and satisfaction all contribute to an individual's wellbeing, and construction of identity.

In relation to spirituality, literature asserts that spirituality can act as a protective factor due to its connection with the development of a positive self-concept and sense of self (Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) and to the intrinsic search for meaning and purpose in life (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkpartain, 2012). Identity is closely connected to the concepts or wellbeing and resilience, which overlap discourse on spirituality in the literature (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery & Cowell, 2006; Ratcliff & May, 2004; Sifers, Warren & Jackson, 2012) with identity involving the search for meaning in one's life and connection with spirituality (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkpartain, 2012; Eaude, 2009). MacDonald's (2009) emphasises the relationship between identity, spirituality, and religion in forming a 'spiritual identity' and can be related to the work of Hay and Nye (2006) described as a 'relational consciousness'. When spirituality is nurtured and developed, it "guides children to explore different ways of seeing and understanding, encouraging their personal awareness of social dimensions" (Harris, 2013, p. 283). Adams (2009) describes the spiritual domain engaging at a deeper level, "it raises issues of who a person really is, and their place and purpose in the world" (p. 115). Adams suggests identity can be expressed and developed through spiritual capacity through an innate capacity through which other characteristics of the self can be engaged.

Literature recognises that "religion and spirituality are closely related" (van de Zee & Tirri, 2009, p. 1). At times, literature uses these terms interchangeably, yet the two exist autonomously, explained by Tracy (2000):

> Religion and spirituality face each other as paradoxical twins. Without religion we have no organised way of communicating or expressing truth, rituals to bind individuals into living community. Yet without spirituality, we have no truth to celebrate and no contact with the living and no ongoing nature of divine revelation. We need both – form and substance. (p. 28)

Rossiter (2011) further describes the relationship between the spiritual and religious:

> The spiritual is the natural dimension to life that comprises thinking and feeling in relation to transcendence; a creator; a sense of meaning and purpose; love and care for self and others and the natural world. Being religious is to have directed one's spirituality in a particular way that is informed by the beliefs, practices of a particular religion, it includes a sense of transcendence and participation in a local religious community. The religious are immersed in ritual life, prayers, religious symbols and music. (p.59)

Contemporary perspectives on ECEC are informed by research which suggests educators must possess content and pedagogical knowledge as well as the skills to enact this knowledge (Kleickmann et al., 2013). Critical reflection needs to occur on opportunities afforded to children to feel calm, to become more self-aware, to look inward and to reflect on their actions and relationships, and, therefore, these opportunities assist children's overall sense of wellbeing (Barblett & Maloney, 2010). Imagination, creativity, wonder and awe are recognised as the fundamental ways in which spirituality is expressed in the early childhood years with Hart (2003) articulating that childhood wonder is core to children's developing understanding of the world and core to their sense of spiritual identity. Wonder, described as the basis of spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006), is referred to as reaching out in response to the world (Ratcliff & May 2004), facilitating the 'I-God' relationship as an individual seeks to go beyond the self. Coles (1990) comments that children's spirituality is "characterised by a sense of wonder and fascination, an acute awareness of present experiences and emotions, and the instinct to know when things are not as they should be or when the truth has not been told" (Zhang, 2012, p. 43). Wonder involves the contemplation of possibilities and mystery as well as offering opportunities for children to experience joy and express creativity (Harris, 2016).

2.7.4 The Role of an Educator in a Faith-based ECEC Centre

The role of the educator in nurturing and promoting children's spiritual development is identified in the literature in the need for children to be presented with examples and guidance to awaken their spirituality (King, 2013) with the spirituality of the child needing to be nurtured or it will be lost (Compton, 1998). Therefore, when every child is viewed as having the potentiality for spirituality (Hay & Nye, 1998) educators have a critical role to play (Harris, 2013) in providing opportunities and environments that are conducive to channelling the creativity that comes from

dreaming into the development of spiritual capacity. Attending to children's holistic development (DEEWR, 2009) "demands a level of education...that is anchored in cultural awareness and formation" (Sagberg, 2008, p. 366). When spirituality is nurtured and developed it "guides children to explore different ways of seeing and understanding, encouraging their personal awareness of social dimensions" (Harris, 2013, p. 283). King (2013) adds to this by emphasising that "to awaken spiritually, children need examples and guidance to motivate them to strive, to set them on fire, so that their spiritual awareness and imagination become awakened and ignited" (p. 14).

2.7.5 What is a Faith-based Institution?

A faith-based organisation is an organisation whose values are based on faith and/or beliefs, which has a mission based on social values of the particular faith, and which most often draws its leaders and staff from a particular faith group (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013).

Australian faith-based schools are broadly referred to as non-government schools and are more specifically categorised as Catholic, or independent, schools and the majority of independent schools have a religious affiliation (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2012). Faith-based schools have existed within Australia for over 150 years and since World War II this sector has significantly expanded its numbers and types of schools (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009; Symes & Gulson, 2008). As a result of the increase in faith-based schools, this sector plays an important role in Australia's education system (Striepe & Clarke, 2009). The latest national statistics reveal that 34.3 per cent of all full-time students are in non-government schools (ABS, 2019).

The distinct contexts of faith-based schools derive from their distinguishing purposes, characteristics and ethos that influence the school's aims and environments (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005; McGettrick, 2005). In addition, the purposes and ethos of faith-based schools are affected by factors such as the school's particular faith, its religious traditions and the processes the school uses to select students and hire staff (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005; McGettrick, 2005). It seems evident, therefore, that these distinctive contexts along with the values and beliefs of the school's faith may shape the ways in which educational leadership is understood and practised (McGettrick, 2005; Sacks, 2004).

Faith-based early education and care settings are distinctly positioned to effectively work similarly, with missions and educational leadership informed and motivated by their faith. Bush and Glover (2003) identify several factors as particularly important to understanding the cultural

and contextual nature of education settings. From a faith perspective, key considerations centre on the culture, including the values, beliefs, and customs. Governance and parental expectations are also likely to be important in considering the specific context of a faith-based setting. Each of these have a specific impact on leadership within the setting.

The first of these is the area of moral leadership, which is significant for leaders in faith-based contexts. Moral leadership assumes that the primary focus for leadership is on the values and ethics of leaders themselves (Bush and Glover, 2003). From this viewpoint, a key source of authority for leaders is the set of beliefs and values which guide their practice (Sergiovanni, 1992). There is evidence that for leaders of faith schools this dimension of moral leadership is often underpinned by strong religious beliefs - for example, Gurr et al (2005) found that gospel values were strongly evident in the leadership approaches in Catholic schools. The religious or spiritual values of an education setting, and its leader may also shape the leader's approach to a second key area, which can be characterised as transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is concerned with constructing a strong connection with leaders and followers, which in turn raises the motivation of the followers to achieve more than would have been otherwise anticipated (Northouse, 2007).

A third key area is succession planning and building the capacity of the service through recruitment retention and development of staff. Fincham (2010) concluded that it was incumbent upon leaders to identify future leaders and encourage them in their professional development. Related to this issue of succession planning is the role of continuing professional development for both current and potential faith service leaders with nurture and support for educators and staff in their spiritual development (Fincham, 2010).

Several themes emerge through the literature for faith-based education school settings that can be applied to Early Education and Care settings. The first is the distinctiveness as a faith-based service. This is described as follows:

> Distinctiveness is about more than organisational arrangements and designation as a school of religious character. It must include a wholehearted commitment to putting faith and spiritual development at the heart of the curriculum and ensuring that a Christian ethos permeates the whole educational experience *(*Archbishops' Council, 2012, p. 14).

In a series of workshop sessions held by the National College of School Leadership (2005), school leaders looked at what makes faith schools distinctive. Among the conclusions they came to were that faith schools are a way of integrating an authentic expression of faith in a context within which children are growing; have a distinctive understanding of individuals;

distinctiveness but not exclusion; the confidence to develop a distinctive curriculum for individuals; a need to develop spirituality – to find it and develop it, and to take that 'special bit' and run it throughout the curriculum; get their hands dirty with the difficult and marginalised with mission redefining the purpose of education. Sullivan (2006) suggests that faith schools need separate provision for school leadership development, arguing that in faith schools there is a need for greater emphasis on personal formation, on orientating the curriculum, on community-building, on coping with personal failings and vulnerabilities, and on the role of prayer and worship. Mautanmi (2019) identifies three major benefits of Christian education:

- Christian education seeks to foster in growing persons a consciousness of God as a reality in human experience and to foster a sense of personal relationship to Him.
- Christian education seeks to develop in growing persons an understanding and appreciation of the personality, life, and teachings of Jesus to lead them to better personal experience.
- Christian education seeks to develop in growing persons a progressive and continuous development of Christian character.

The need to maintain distinctiveness as a faith school or service includes retaining the school's religious character, sometimes challenging secular values and balancing the two priorities of educational attainment and moral and spiritual development; the need to manage the changing context of admissions, and increasingly provide for pupils of other faiths and of none alongside those of their own faith; the need to build the capacity of the school or service, including the recruitment, retention and development of school leaders and staff. This has to be achieved in the context of balancing the importance of having staff who actively practise the faith of the school with the need to maximise staff quality and the need to maintain and develop a range of partnerships, within the faith community and beyond and the need to fulfil the expectations of the wider community and contribute to social cohesion, sometimes taking a community leadership role.

2.7.6 Why Distinctiveness is Important

Literature suggests that distinctiveness is important for faith-based education settings for several reasons including the distinctive ethos of faith-based education settings viewed as supporting both academic success and positive behaviour. This has led to faith-based education settings being encouraged and promoted by successive governments, and the belief that faith-based education settings should offer a different, more spiritual, and values-based approach to

education. To some, this means that faith-based education settings are viewed as playing a role in providing a challenge and alternative to secular values. Social cohesion between home and education settings is likely to produce a high degree of social harmony and of educational purpose in the school community, leading to high levels of academic effectiveness and productivity which can provide a particularly supportive environment for high academic attainment, especially by socially disadvantaged pupils.

The second theme is leadership and context. Sullivan (2006a) claims that leadership cannot be divorced from its context, as leadership is "intimately and inextricably interlinked with a particular way of life, one that is both personal and part of a living tradition" (p. 76). This perspective shows how understanding of educational leadership associated practices can be derived from either "an ethic of care, faith and morality" (Dantley, 2005, p. 18), or a "spiritual core" (Bolman & Deal, 2002, n. p.). In sum, these perspectives demonstrate how leadership is not derived from bureaucratic agencies but rather the combined ethos of personal faith and school's affiliated faith or a "sacred authority" (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 12).

The third theme is partnerships. Some of the existing and potential partnerships of faith-based schools and services include partnerships between churches and their local service/school, and the individual relationships between service leaders and faith leaders and opportunities for faith services to work with a diverse range of partners.

The fourth theme is the impact values have which is demonstrated in the way in which leadership is understood and practised and can be connected to moral purpose. Consequently, it is needed for faith-based leaders to include time for educators to identify their values and examine the extent to which those values influence their understandings and practice in order to address the particular needs of leading in a faith-based school (Lawson, 2005). Within Early Education and Care, this is actioned through critical reflection on philosophy providing the foundation for pedagogy and practice.

2.8 Models, Modes, Methods and of Critical Reflection as applied in ECEC

There are different ways of doing critical reflection, however, there are none that are unique to ECEC and that is why we need to review existing models and move towards one for ECEC. This is all the more important as a model shapes how we go about critical reflection, and guides how to do it, what is involved, and how it happens. There are also different modes (such as planned meetings) and methods (which include whiteboards and journals) which are explored in this section.

2.8.1 Models of Critical Reflection as applied in ECEC

Models, sometimes known as frameworks for critical reflection, encourage a structured process to guide the act of reflection. They are to be thought of as tools, not as a mirror. To analyse effectively one must be thoroughly familiar with the subject matter and include a structure using a reflective model (Bell & Mladenovic, 2013). A structured approach helps inquiry and understanding of content knowledge (Blachard et al., 2010) and, furthermore, structured and guided inquiry prevents a 'waste of time' (Zion & Mendelovici 2012). Structured inquiry alone, however, is not sufficient for developing critical thinking and appropriate dispositions and attitudes within a framework are required (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012). An educator's inquiry approach encompasses many levels of inquiry. Conceptually, critical reflection is a transformative process actualised by reflecting theoretically and creating individual knowledge related to lived experience. It is an interpersonal process initiated and supported through feedback and collaborative reflection on experience. The critical reflection process is continuous, inseparable from the transfer of theoretical knowledge in practice by acting individually and in interactions with others. By reflecting upon what is known and what is projected it becomes an endless loop process through retrospective assessment by reflecting in, on and through practice on content, process, activity and action with application to continuously improve with acquired new understanding. Integrating theory and practice through reflective inquiry and questioning as a learning activity fosters continuous improvement (Fook, 2015). A structure of possessed knowledge and understanding has interrelated interdependent dimensions which include the coordination of practical educator experience and theoretical knowledge; environmental conditions for reflection; interaction and engagement in reflection and the professional identity of an educator (Argote, 2011). This structure is supported through a framework which encourages understanding to guide the act of learning through reflection and is more effective than reflection alone (Taylor, 2010). Numerous models of critical reflection are revealed through the literature, although none are unique to ECEC. As one of the purposes of critical reflection is to continuously improve practice a model needs to look forward as well as back. Ghaye and Lillyman (2014) provide analysis of several models used by health care professionals. While these critiques offer differing perspectives, all provide a framework for practitioners to explore and learn from their experiences. However, as stated, there is no model that has been developed specifically for ECEC to conceptually frame understanding of critical reflection within the specific ECEC context, nor by educators themselves, within a faith-based ECEC context. Furthermore, there is no model identified which provides evidence of resultant transformation of

practice. The ECEC context has a focus on relationships, continuous improvement and underpinnings of philosophy, values and beliefs. A model may be a great start to reflection as it provides a starting point, a structure provides an assessment of all levels of the situation and enables knowing when the process is complete. A model also supports reflecting on theoretical and practical knowledge by analysing experience and identifying what has been learned. As a continuous process reflective practice in ECEC has distinct situations for which analytical reflection must be applied (Bassot, 2016) in order to provide meaning in filtering what has been learned.

2.8.2 A Review of Existing Models of Critical Reflection

As stated previously, there are several models used by health care professionals (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2014). A total of eleven models revealed in the literature will now be reviewed.

The first of these is an experiential learning model developed by Kolb (1984). Kolb's model begins with a learning experience. The practitioner then reflects on this and develops a theory of learning, drawing conclusions from experience. This results in trying out new ways for working to provide further opportunity to reflect. Kolb (1984) defines his model as "fundamental to develop one's knowledge and learning achieved through a cyclical process of identification, review, questioning and reconstruction through experience" (p. 27). As stated previously, one of the purposes of critical reflection is to continuously look forward as well as retrospectively. Kolb's model, however, looks retrospectively only and does not provide for moving forwards.

The second model is developed by Gibbs (1998). Gibb's model is based upon each stage in Kolb's experiential cycle. Gibbs is an iterative model in which a practitioner answers a series of ordered questions with each answer leading to the next stage in the reflective cycle. Gibbs suggests that a full structured analysis could take place using prompt questions at each stage. Gibb's model, however, has been criticised for lack of referral to critical thinking, analysis and assumptions, lack of number and depth of probing questions and inability to view from different perspectives (Atkins & Murphy, 1993).

The third model is developed by Schon (1983). Schon describes reflection-in-action (in the moment) and reflection-on-action (after the fact) to increase professional confidence. Being aware of feelings or thoughts that may be uncomfortable, or challenging and evaluating new perspectives derived from analysis, is suggested by Schon (1983) to "bring to the forefront of thinking one's existing knowledge so that it can be considered and improved through the process of reflection" (p. 67). This model, however, is not a sequential or cyclical model, nor is extensive

guidance provided for its implementation. It also omits reflection that occurs ‘through’ the context.

The fourth model, Driscoll’s model (2000), uses three cued questions - “What?”, “So what?” and “Now what?” This model, however, does not provide for deep reflection as it reflects only on the surface of a situation.

The fifth model, proposed by Rolfe (2001), is based on three levels - descriptive, theoretical and action oriented - with increasingly deeper reflection at each level. Rolph’s model, though, has been criticised for being too complicated.

The sixth model is John’s reflective framework model (2009). John’s model examines situations in the context of the environment and bases his model on Carper’s (1978) patterns of knowing model. Carper’s model offers four ways of knowing - empirical, personal, ethical and aesthetic. John’s adds reflexivity to his model in connection with previous experiences. However, the questions in John’s model show an absence of structure. This absence means it is time consuming and leads to confusion.

The seventh model has been developed by Atkin’s and Murphy (1993). Their model is built on reflection based on previous experience. While this model encourages reflective practice on assumptions, it does not provide for ‘on the go’ reflections.

The eighth model is Brookfield’s model (2005). Brookfield’s model is a personal development model that provides analysis of situations from different perspectives. It does this through four different lenses - self, students (or patients), colleagues and research. While it offers reflection leading back to personal self-reflection, it does not provide for analysis in depth from a particular perspective.

The ninth model is Mezirow’s model of transformative learning. Mezirow’s model is a personal development model which was first developed in 1981 with revision and increasing complexity to 1997. Mezirow (1997) explains that reflection requires critiquing the assumptions on which our beliefs and values have developed. Mezirow further notes that reflection is only helpful if it leads to transformation in self. Mezirow’s model, however, does not provide for emotional learning. Hence, it is only suitable for self-motivation. This means it requires time to integrate the learning from using this model into individual behaviours and plans.

The tenth model is that of Smyth (1993). This framework looks at critical reflection on practice to affect emancipatory change. This model has its origins in critical social theory. Reflection occurs through questioning practice at a socio-political level. Four stages are encompassed

within this. The first stage is a description of what was done. The second is informed by looking for patterns. The third stage is confronting historical, social and cultural contexts. The final stage is reconstruction with consideration of alternate views and generation of goals for future action. The difficulty with this model is that it only focuses on reflection in action.

The last model to be reviewed is that developed by Cartmel et al. (2014). Similar to that of Smyth, Cartmel's model describes four stages. The first stage is that of deconstruction of an event. In this stage, practitioners listen to understand the perspectives that exist. In the second stage of confronting, practitioners conform to the ideas that are accepted, yet rarely questioned. In the third stage, theorise, practitioners consider the source of their ideas. In the final stage, think, a position is considered, a solution or idea while endeavouring to bring a change in practice. The problem with this model, similar to that of Smyth, is that it only focuses on reflection in action and is based on isolated experiences. Therefore, this model does not foster a dialogic relationship integral to a reflective framework to challenge assumptions and transform perspectives. It is also to be noted that explicit knowledge is found in databases, memos, notes, documents, etc. whereas tacit knowledge is often context dependent and deeply rooted in action, commitment and involvement (Nonaka et al., 2000; Nonaka, 1994).

2.8.3 Towards a Model of Critical Reflection for ECEC

As stated, there is no model for critical reflection that has been specifically developed for ECEC. We need to move towards a model specifically for five reasons.

The first reason for working towards a model of critical reflection for ECEC is to make learning explicit. Ash, Clayton and Moses (2009) point out:

> Generating learning through articulating questions, confronting bias, examining causality, contrasting theory with practice and pointing to systemic issues. It deepens learning through challenging simplistic conclusions, inviting alternative perspectives and asking "why" questions. It documents learning through producing tangible expressions of new understanding for evaluation (p. 27).

Savaya and Gardner (2012)) note that "critical reflection is a process by which one may identify the assumptions governing one's actions, question them, and develop alternative behaviours" (p. 145). Critical reflection provides an idea how the organisational culture is shaped. It also helps inform future organisational change.

The second reason for working towards a model of critical reflection in ECEC is that critical reflection makes sense of experiences. Mezirow (1990) notes that:

> To make meaning means to make sense of an experience; we make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision making or action, then making meaning becomes learning…. critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built (p. 1).

The third reason for working towards a model of critical reflection in ECEC is that critical reflection becomes a vehicle for problem solving and inquiry. It does this by addressing the challenges that arise and provides both theory and processes to make this making and remaking of knowledge happen. Professional growth and social change are thereby supported in developing a culture that welcomes questions, actions, reasons and views in a genuinely authentic way to support emotional self-regulation in inquiry. It focuses on belief in collaborating through a range of voices and ideas in a community of learners to shape process quality with effective strategies to deliver best outcomes now and into the future. It is then that reflective practice fulfils its potential within ECEC to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and offer us what is described by Ghaye (2000) in Finlay (2008, p. 1) as the "courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos" (p. 7). Kemmis (2010) echoes this by defining practical wisdom as "the disposition to act wisely in uncertain situations" (p. 422).

The fourth reason for working towards a model of critical reflection in ECEC is that critical reflection provides an idea of how the organisational culture is shaped and helps inform future organisational change. Cohen (2013) notes how a school climate drives improvement that provides for resilience, student learning and positive development. Organisational culture acts as a set of rules to help guide and empower decision making. Culture drives strategy. Values represent the guiding principles of an organisation's culture, including what guides priorities and actions within an organisation. Values are important in strategic planning as they drive the intent and direction of the organisation's leadership. The workforce must be clear about the culture – the values and behaviours expected of them – and hold themselves and others to account. Whilst the purpose and values of an organisation rarely change, behaviours are refined over time as the culture evolves. Educators need to know how to translate the values into expectations of what to do and how to do it. Critical reflection enables educators to explore what the behaviours and values really mean in daily practice to hold themselves to account.

The fifth reason for working towards a model of critical reflection for ECEC is that an ECEC framework for critical reflection would enable educators to manage issues more effectively through informing behavioural intervention and providing an effective tool for the objective handling of sensitive issues (Hollis, 2014) This is because as a qualitative study, a critical

reflective framework is emergent and draws out the key concepts, iterations and the focus is on both the content and the inter-relationships between various elements.. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that a conceptual model "explains either graphically, or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – key factors, concepts or variables and the presumed relationships among them"(p. 18) and in a broader sense, is the actual ideas and beliefs about the phenomenon and the theory constructed which consists of the system of concepts assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform this research – key to the design (Robson, 2011).

What we know is that a spiral model of reflection supports continuous improvement, in helping to look retrospectively as well as forwards (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2014) which may facilitate an educator to plan, observe, reflect and consider a revised plan. Larrivee (2008) emphasises the importance of both critical inquiry and self-reflection as necessary to become a critically reflective practitioner in recommending three components. The first is keeping a journal and setting aside time for reflection. The second is to become a peripheral problem solver and bring new insights and perspectives to enable re-evaluation and consideration. Lastly, Larrivee recommends questioning the status quo and being open to examining the assumptions which underlie practice. Larrivee believes that "critical reflection can be transformed through reflective practice and maintains that critical reflection is not only a way of approaching teaching, it is a way of life" (p. 306).

It is important to note that any proposed model of reflection should assist educators to learn from experience and assess the best fit to a situation. A model needs to be applied purposefully, flexibly and judiciously. The deepest level of reflection is one of change - how you see yourself, how you see others, your values, your views and/or opinions. The optimal model provides a structure for educators to intentionally critically reflect within their practice and provides a structure that supports educators to reflect on their experience, deconstruct assumptions and understand what happens and why, as a way for educators to develop new knowledge and learn from their experience.

2.8.4 Fook and Gardner's Approach

In reviewing the organisational structure professional development literature, with a focus on the research intent, the model developed by Fook and Gardner (2007) was studied. Their approach uses the idea that critical reflection involves the identification of personal and deep-seated assumptions and aims to bring about improvements in professional practice (Fook, 2017) and hence this approach was the best fit with the research intent as it provides a framework to

explore and learn from individual educator experiences. The viewpoint of this approach is personal and professional experience is deconstructed and analysed through critical reflection to understand the different assumptions, relationships and influences within it and how it affects practice. The 'incident' is reconstructed by the individual to develop new techniques to deal with a similar incident in the future as new understandings emerge.

Fook and Gardner's (2013) approach "involves the unsettling and examination of hidden assumptions to rework ideas and professional actions. The model draws upon reflective practice; reflexivity; postmodernism and critical perspectives" (p. 21). Fook takes particular interest in the language used during reflective sessions within a social work setting and highlights that the way words are used to describe a situation, or an emotion can be linked to issues of knowledge and power. Through this critically reflective process, an analysis of power within the workplace or relationships can be explored. It is claimed this leads to transformative change as participants are empowered to act on his or her own free will. Fook et al. (2010) suggest that by working in this way, the centre of an issue can be established, which includes emotional aspects. This thereby acknowledges the fundamental importance of power dynamics, the broader organisational and social impacts and considers how emotions affect our attitudes and experiences.

Fook and Gardner's (2007) approach has two stages. During the first stage, led by a facilitator, participants in a group are asked non-judgmental open style questions to gain information about a 'critical' incident being explored and draw upon hidden assumptions and theories. Through this process, Fook and Gardner (2007) argue, the participant can make sense of feelings involved by uncovering assumptions and personal biases.

Unearthing such fundamental, implicit assumptions (primarily those that have to do with power and connections between the individual and the social context) enables participants to examine those assumptions for better scrutiny of blind spots or discrepancies. This initial process usually enables participants to recognise values and beliefs that are fundamentally important to them. In the second stage, the individual, with the support of the group, is helped to come to an awareness of deeper, hidden assumptions and review their learning from the first stage. This is achieved through the facilitator reflecting upon their assumptions and reasons for their thinking on their own learning from the first stage. By doing this, Fook argues, the participant who has presented and explored their 'critical' incident is now able to identify how their personal theory and practice might need to be adapted (Fook & Gardner, 2007).

In stage two (Fook & Gardner, 2007), the new awareness created can be used to devise new approaches to practice. These new approaches may align with the person's value system and be more responsive to the social environment of practice. Once ideas can be articulated, participants are invited to reconstruct their 'theory of practice'. This 'theory of practice' helps educators identify and link basic theoretical principles and possible strategies. In doing this they develop a new framework from which to further develop their practice. It is important that this 'theory of practice' uses language that is meaningful to the participants and manages to capture what is the essence of their experience and fundamental beliefs. In the overall process participants often incorporate other critical experiences and rework their understanding of them to arrive at a perspective that allows integration of these other experiences with their world view. This may often include strong emotions as an important aspect of experience, which can include significant values or beliefs. Participants may unearth many different fundamental assumptions and at different levels but are usually able to find a fundamental level that helps integrate these other levels.

Inclusive practice requires that we put into action a balance between theory and practice and thinking and doing. This foundation for effective teaching and learning considers values, which are integral to transforming educational practice (Kline, 2009; Vakil, Welton, O'Connor & Kline, 2009). Experienced educators think deeply about the theories that influence their work. As stated previously, the Guide to the NQS (ACECQA, 2018) identifies that all educators are expected to use critical reflection to deepen their understanding about what they do in their practice and why they do it. When educators seek to understand the theoretical perspectives that underpin their practice, they are engaging in the "lively culture of professional inquiry" that the 'Guide to the NQS' (ACECQA, 2013, p. 119, p. 171) states is required to meet the NQS. Such a dynamic way of working responsively in the context of each setting through professional inquiry is established when educators and their colleagues are all involved in an ongoing cycle of review through which their current practice is examined, outcomes reviewed, and new ideas generated. In such a climate, issues related to program quality, environment design, staffing arrangements, equity, and children's well-being can be raised and debated. Critical reflection is about creating a mindset that is process oriented. This is central to developing and maintaining competency across a professional practitioner's lifetime. Utilising questions in a structured approach as a tool for critical reflective inquiry enables exploration of linkages to develop critical thought. This is based on the idea that critical reflection involves analysis of assumptions to bring about improvements in professional practice (Fook & Askeland, 2006). Giving a voice to the educator

experience fills a gap in the literature about the educator experience of critical reflection as a tool for learning and practice. As such, critical reflective inquiry illuminates the hearts of educators and who they beat for. For it is a life lived which happens, a life experienced which consists of the thoughts and meanings of the educator experiencing it, and a life told which is the account reflecting the ECEC culture, stakeholders and context.

2.8.5 Modes of Critical Reflection as applied in ECEC

To understand the complexity of critical reflection, the literature reveals four modes of reflection with each building upon one another (Danielson, 2008a). Existing within this hierarchy, lower level reflection is utilised for directed practice to higher level critical reflection needed for complex situations. Proficient educators adapt the mode of reflection to the decision making and level of thought required. These four modes are:

1. Technological – this mode is based on pre-packaged knowledge from an external source. It relies on practices that have proven to be efficient and effective and involves applying policies, procedures and practices in a formulaic way to direct, but not inform, practice.
2. Situational – this mode of reflection is critical reflection. Situational reflection (Daudelin, 1996) takes place in the context (Schon, 1983), on the context (Schon, 1983), and through the context (Asselin, 2011). In the context includes observation, analysis, listening and problem-solving at the moment, often intuitively and spontaneously. On the context involves stepping back from the situation, after the situation has occurred, requiring a time commitment. Through the context utilises critical reflection as a reasoning process. It involves challenges in stepping back and examining our practice by asking questions about experiences, interactions and interpretations that occur in everyday practice.
3. Intentional – this mode of reflection occurs through purposefully seeking more information than the immediate context, it includes a review of theories, pedagogical practice, legislative frameworks, current research and involves dialogue with other educators and professional bodies.
4. Analytical – analytical reflection is dialectical and transformative. This mode builds on purposeful reflection to gain an understanding of a situation and generate solutions. Such a mode is characterised by how an educator conceptualises a practice which results in implementing changes to transform current practice and

> thereby gives rise to the new practice. Within ECEC, however, as Korthagen (2017) has identified, this mode is yet to be understood at the conceptual level and followed through by implementation in daily practice. Therefore, in working towards any framework specifically for critical reflection within ECEC there needs to be intentionality in a structure to enable understanding of critical reflection at a conceptual level to facilitate transformative change.

Critical reflection as a collaborative critical thinking process involves cognitive and affective interactions in synergy with relationship building as a core process for continuous improvement (Yukawa, 2006). Modes of collaborative reflection in practice (Croon & Woerkom, 2008) include scheduled, concurrent and spontaneous types of reflection. An example of scheduled reflection is a planned meeting; an example of concurrent reflection is continuous reflection throughout the day, and an example of spontaneous reflection is educator dialogue after experiencing a specific event. Linking this to critical reflection will be collaborative reflection undertaken to question what is working well, what can be improved, what action is needed and why there was a reaction in a particular way.

To make collaborative critical reflection work, there is required to be a dialogue about the experience and outcomes. The term collaborative reflection is used to describe reflection that is accompanied and enabled by communication between educators who can contribute based on their own experience. During collaborative reflection, educators combine existing knowledge with the construction of new knowledge that emerges through communicating about work practices and accompanying challenges and hence provides an important foundation for ECEC. Scaffolding and guidance can be used to support the reflection process and converge reflection into outcomes (Knipfer, Prilla, Cress, Degeling & Herrmann, 2011) with modes of reflection applied to support these outcomes (Prilla, et al., 2011). For reflection to be productive, it must take a collaborative approach (Prilla, 2012) and if used effectively and purposefully, collaborative reflection engages educators in personal and professional learning and facilitates their progression towards learning outcomes and required standards. Collaborative reflection can also provide a structure in which to make sense of learning so that concepts and theories become embedded in practice, and foster constant thought and innovation (Helyer, 2015).

Collaborative critical reflection must occur in manifold forms within ECEC to integrate analytical reflection, scheduled, concurrent and spontaneous reflection (Prilla, et al., 2011). Through utilising collaborative critical reflection in returning to experiences, re-evaluating them and learning from this process for future behaviour, a decisive mechanism for learning in the

workplace is established to enhance productivity with changes to enhance personal engagement and meaning in work. Connecting theory to practice, as well as sharing and considering multiple perspectives, provides a deeper understanding of practice and provides a platform for problem-solving. Collaborative critical reflection supports higher levels of reflection compared to when educators reflect individually (Fong, Nor & Nolan, 2018). Supported guidance, however, needs to be provided for the collaborative reflective process within the ECEC context to support educator understanding to lead to sustained outcomes through the various methods of critical reflection addressed in the next section.

2.8.6 Methods of Critical Reflection as applied in ECEC

A method is a particular procedure for accomplishing a systematic approach to critical reflection. Many tools and techniques for reflection have been written about in the literature. Asking questions is natural and intuitive. Therefore, utilising questions in a structured approach can be used as an effective tool for reflective inquiry. This can provoke educators to explore linkages fundamental to developing critical thought. This is based on the idea that critical reflection involves analysis of assumptions to bring about improvements in professional practice (Fook & Askeland, 2006). Asking questions such as 'What are we doing?', 'Why are we doing it?' How can we do it better?' support such inquiry and makes professionals more accountable through the scrutiny of the principles upon which it is based.

Structured guided inquiry through questioning supports learning and educator knowledge in a constructivist approach. Such inquiry creates a learning community of educators that is crucial for the success of the collaborative inquiry process with results not known. As such, it is led by educators investigating questions, working collaboratively, deciding the solutions to be targeted and the processes to be followed. A framework is, therefore, crucial for such inquiry (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012).

Other methods, tools and techniques of critical reflection include:

1. A 'Critical Incident'. As stated previously, (Fook, 2002) a 'critical incident' (p. 2) is defined as an incident significant to professional practice.
2. Journaling (Raterink, 2016). This includes reflective journals, reading response journals, double entry journals, interactive journals, dialogue journals and narrative journals.
3. On-line discussions (Ribas & Perine, 2016) and web-based tools such as blogs or video reflection.

4. Case studies, reflective or critical conversations (Brandt, 2008).
5. Narratives and stories (Landau, Meier & Keefer, 2010), poems, (Woods, 2014), fiction and metaphors (Davies et al., 2014) and 'jotter wallets' (Longenecker, 2002).
6. Data, naturally occurring case records and reports, or transcripts of meetings. These are useful for the interrogation of taken for granted assumptions (Kunda, 2013).
7. Mentoring with educator colleagues as mentors pose questions to lead the reflective process; coaching and modelling (Edlund, et al., 2019). According to Strauss, Johnson, Marquez and Feldman (2013), effective mentors offer career guidance, emotional support and a perspective on work/life balance.
8. Artefacts such as photographs or reflective comments from parents, peers, and educator colleagues Artefact prompted reflection is a deliberate approach with wide applicability to a range of disciplines (Ryan, 2011).
9. Collective reflection is a pedagogical approach to support reflection.
10. Self-reflection – critical self-reflection is a process that educators must learn and implement through practice (Jacoby, 2010).
11. Guided self–assessment provides educators with a focus for reflection with an opportunity to become alive in their own awareness of who they are as ECEC professionals, identify what they want to achieve and how they propose to set about this (Dall'Alba, 2009). Guided self-assessment encourages reflective discussions on everyday practice, to gain insights and reflect on who was involved and why. Further, guided self-assessment examines areas of improvement through exploring the purpose and strengths identified from assessment and reflection, quality areas needing improvement and strategies, or actions planned and/or implemented to address areas for improvement (ECA, 2016).
12. Scaffolded support. Reflection can be learned and taught through scaffolding to effectively incorporate reflection through experience-based curriculum contributing to learning through experience (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). Scaffolded support helps develop individual and group reflective capacity through sharing and discussion, which enables joint construction of knowledge and meaning through which educators learn to reflect in ways to transform practice.

Developing an awareness of how educators come to hold their assumptions and reflecting on how this informs, and shapes, practice are one of the first steps in the reflective process. The

most important aspect of the method of reflection is the idea that the essence of learning reflects the experience because any learning activity loses its meaning if it is applied mechanically, without reflection on past accumulated experiences and interpretations (Danielson, 2008b). The method of reflection offers a deep understanding of the process of reflection, application of tasks and activities. Reflecting on how the service philosophy, the approved learning framework, the NQS, relevant theory and contemporary research are achieved in practice and the process of reflection allows educators to consider how focussed they are on achieving the desired outcomes for children, families and communities.

A large part of reflecting is reviewing internal structures, such as policies, programs, orientations, inductions, team meetings, communications, business, strategic and quality improvement plans and community engagement to ensure they are in line with the service philosophy and expectations. Critical reflection holistically aligns policy, infrastructure and practice and, as noted by Harvey et al. (2010) supports academic learning, skills development and lifelong learning (p. 143). In the ECEC context, critical reflection builds a cognitive bridge between theory and practice (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Dalgarno, Kennedy & Merritt's 2014; Reason & Kimball, 2012). Critical reflection thereby supports educator capacity for learning through critical analysis of what has been done, why, and how new knowledge can be used to improve practice.

2.9 Conclusion

To help consolidate and provide an overview of the content in this literature review, a summary is provided.

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 provided an overview of the development of the NQS within the international ECEC context. These sections provided insight into Australia's performance in ECEC as identified by the OECD and UNICEF. Recommendations adopted by the Australian Commonwealth Government to lift ECEC quality and practices to improve Australian international standing and outcomes for young children were outlined.

Section 2.3 presented a background to both the development of the NQS within the international context and the challenges of the implementation of the NQS within Australia. These challenges identified that critical reflection is an aspect of practice with which the ECEC sector struggles. This is due in part because there is no prescribed technique by which to undertake the practice of critical reflection (ACECQA, 2017) with a lack of understanding of critical reflection at the conceptual level (Korthagen, 2017) with the concept of, and practices associated with critical

reflection not well defined operationally (Wilson, 2013). The need for a conceptual model for critical reflection for ECEC was highlighted in order to generate understanding for authentic change.

The next section, 2.4, moved to a definition of critical reflection and the provision of understanding of reflective practice and the process of critical reflection as applied to ECEC. Theoretical perspectives were reviewed to provide for informing, guiding and understanding critical reflection in practice. Having provided an understanding of critical reflection, the purpose and value of critical reflection in ECEC was unpacked. Critical reflection is purposeful because of the value this brings. This value helps inform our work and keeps us accountable to improve our practice.

Section 2.5 explored the importance of key documents, requirements of the NQS, which ECEC educators should be critically engaging with, and which should have a major impact on the way educators undertake their daily practice

Section 2.6 reviewed the impact of critical reflection as foundational to our pedagogical practice, underpinned by theoretical perspectives. Educators draw on many theories to inform and guide their practice, which enables educators to see the world from different perspectives, to make sense of, and respond to, different circumstances and contexts. Educators become “more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional inquiry” (DEEWR, EYLF, 2009, p. 14) as they understand the theoretical perspectives that underpin their practice to provide the foundation for understanding what is done and why. The section extended with critical reflection on how we develop our staff to be engaged in ongoing learning.

Section 2.7 looked at the association between critical reflection and philosophy. As an organisation or institution comes to terms with the philosophy upon which it operates the special character of an ECEC centre is unearthed which influences what it seeks to do. Reflecting over philosophy is an important thing to do both as a Commonwealth compliance requirement but also as it indicates an ECEC Centre’s values to guide practice. An example of how a philosophy influences practice is a faith-based ECEC centre, in which an additional framework provides educators with an opportunity to look at their professional practice.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This is a case study approach based in one ECEC centre throughout the period 2014-2018. This study adopted a qualitative orientation that used methods of document analysis, observation, narrative, and semi-structured interviews as a bricolage to answer the research questions. The tools of grounded theory were used to analyse the data. Three rounds of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with each of the educators. This enabled each participant to talk about a range of aspects that were deemed important within the framework provided.

This chapter outlines the data sources, data collection and the data analysis. The codes and themes used for the analysis are discussed including the semi-structured interviews, participant observation, educator discussion, document analysis, external analysis and a weekly embedded critically reflective inquiry process. Quality criteria and ethical considerations are discussed that supported this study with the theoretical integration of ideas and findings reported in Chapter Four.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Methodological Construction

This section commences by consideration of the distinction between method and methodology. Mills (2014) describes methods as procedures and techniques employed in the study, while methodology provides a higher order perspective from which the researcher views and makes decisions about the study. Put simply; the method is the tool used to answer the research question and how one goes about collecting the data. The method includes the tools, processes, or ways by which the researcher obtains data (Cram, 2013). The methodology, by contrast, is the rationale for the research approach, the lens through which the analysis occurs. In other words, the methodology describes the general research strategy that outlines the way in which the research is to be undertaken (Howell, 2013). The methodology impacts the selection of the method for the research study.

As described by McMGregor and Murname (2010):

> The word methodology comprises two nouns: method and ology, which means a branch of knowledge; hence, the methodology is a branch of knowledge that deals with the

> general principles or axioms of the generation of new knowledge. It refers to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie any natural, social or human science study, whether articulated or not. Simply put, methodology refers to how each of logic, reality, values and what counts as knowledge inform research (p. 2).

Methodology therefore as a combination of 'ology' and 'method' is essentially a study of methods that could be used to answer the research question (Cram, 2013). Methodology and method, hence, although related, are not synonymous but intertwined with the researcher's personal beliefs concerning human nature, the formation of knowledge, and how reality is experienced or formed. Although their meanings are different, they are interwoven, and it is this foundation upon which this chapter is set.

As with much research, methodology emerges throughout the process. This concept of emergent research, in contrast to more structured approaches, welcomes unanticipated information, often adding to the richness of the data. An emergent approach to qualitative research is embedded, and an important part of grounded theory. The researcher takes cues from the data, process, or conclusions, and the whole study reflects varying levels of emergent characteristics within the research process (Pailthorpe, 2017).

Critical reflection upon prior experiences, contexts, situations, background and education can lead to what Giddens, in Jones and Karston (2008), calls 'knowledgeability', potentially leading to empowered and transformative action. In this study, understanding of the research topic grew through both critical reflections of the researcher's own experience as well as the sharing of the critical reflections of respondents. An unexpected and unintended outcome was an increased understanding of how the research process can empower and enable both the researcher and respondents. When beginning this research, the researcher did not fully appreciate the impact of the choice of paradigm. However, on reflection, this choice of paradigm allowed for the development of a dialectical partnership between the researcher and respondents, which led to the collection of rich data.

3.2.2 Methodological Approach

The research approach to conducting this qualitative journey is best described as a research inquiry process of understanding founded on distinct methodological traditions of research processes that explores a social or human problem to build a complex, holistic picture, with analysis of words, reports, detailed views of participants and conduct of the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012). The rationale for adopting a qualitative approach to this study, namely a grounded theory approach, was influenced by the research topic and the aims of this study. As

Strauss and Corbin (2015) note, the approach should be taken based on methods best suited to the context of the research situation. The exploratory nature of the research, and the open ended, flexible research questions lend themselves to both a qualitative approach and a classic grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2008).

As stated, this qualitative study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) was aimed to work towards a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) of reflective practice in one faith-based ECEC Centre. This was deemed to be the most appropriate and, had a goodness of fit with the use of a qualitative paradigm (Patton, 2014). It was holistic, congruent with the ECEC setting in which this journey took place and given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available was the best fit. To reiterate, the qualitative paradigm was actioned through the investigation of both the educators' perspectives and the researcher's own experience.

Qualitative research is driven by questions focused on the need to provide an understanding of social behavior by exploring people's accounts of social life. Data analysis within qualitative research interrogates words, language, and their meanings. Grounded theory is particularly suited to studies that are concerned with interactions (Parker & Myrick, 2011), and seeks to develop theory that will explain the dominant process in the social area being investigated. According to Creswell (2009), grounded theory is "an inquiry in which the researcher drives a qualitative strategy of general, abstract theory of process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study" (p. 13 & 29).

Qualitative methods of research have been noted as being particularly useful when exploring topics about which little research has been conducted and has been used as a good method for examining phenomena about which little is known. As little research has been carried out in the area under study, and there is no clear theory to apply, creating a theory is clearly an appropriate step. Strauss and Corbin (2015) point out that this can help by making this research relevant in this particular field by offering a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviour. A grounded theory study allows for the construction of emergent theory, grounded in the available data and as such, matched the aims of this particular study.

This study is qualitative in that it is focussed on the natural setting (Corbin & Strauss, 2009; 2015), in which the researcher posed questions throughout the research process (Patton, 2014) which kick-started the initial research process (p. 42). These questions focused on ECEC sector requirements which require in-depth understanding of reflection in practice. Studying the group

in its natural setting was naturalistic, holistic and formed questions throughout the research process (Patton, 2014) designed to capture stakeholders' feelings, values beliefs and attitudes about the impact of critical reflection as part of the NQS in one faith-based ECEC centre. The focus was on understanding, interpretation, and personal experience (Carson et al. 2015). As such, it involved the collection of qualitative data from interviews and collecting multiple forms of qualitative evidence. In this way it involved the intentional collection of qualitative data to answer the research question.

Identification of previously unknown processes and an explanation of why and how phenomena occur and the range of their effects (Pasick et al., 2009) were enabled. Furthermore, qualitative data was intentionally gathered to answer the research questions while at the same time ensuring quality (Guba & Lincoln, 2013). An inductive (Creswell, 2012) journey of discovery evolved in this study in that the researcher had no a priori notions to prove or disprove. As part of this story, educators shared different perspectives about practices that emerged through the emergent research design with the reflective process embedded within the research process (Anderson, Charmaz, Josselson, McMullen, McSpadden & Wertz, 2011). Thus, the study became collaborative, with mutually constructive stories merged of the personal and professional lives of both educators and the researcher, which arose out of the data (Clandinin et al., 2010). Capturing the full range of feelings, values, beliefs and attitudes about the research questions provided a definitive focus on meanings, perspectives and understandings (Woods, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2011; Thornberg, 2011, Thornberg, 2012) which enabled the study to "document the culture, the perspectives and practices of the people in these settings to 'get inside' the way each group sees the world" (Hammersley, 1985, p. 152).

3.2.3 Insider Research

Insider studies are common in work-integrated learning research, as staff members are well positioned to gain in-depth understanding of the program situated within organisations where they are actively involved and currently employed. This type of research is described as endogenous research (Trowler, 2011) or the more commonly used term, insider research. Insider research is characterised as research which is undertaken within an organisation, group or community where the researcher is also a member (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Hellawell, 2006; Hockey, 1993; Mercer, 2007; Trowler, 2011). However, it has been argued that this definition is too narrow and insider research can be undertaken by someone that has 'a priori' intimate or familiar knowledge of the group and may not necessarily be a member of that group (Hellawell,

2006; Merton, 1972). Contending with methodological issues of identity and situated knowledge possessed as a result of position, however, it is also argued that "the insider-outsider distinction is a false dichotomy" (Chavez, 2008, p. 474).

Insider research is said to exist on a continuum that is deepened on the closeness of the researcher to the aspect being researched (Mercer, 2007; Trowler, 2011). A researcher may be investigating parts of the organisation unknown to them and collecting data from complete strangers, even though they are members of the same organisation. The other end of the continuum, where many researchers, including myself, are situated, is where the researcher is collecting data from their close colleagues or examining their own practice. The boundaries along the continuum are often blurred and the positioning of the researcher depends on "the aspects of an insider researcher's self or identity which is aligned or shared with participants" (Chavez, 2008., p. 475). The position of the researcher may not be static, and in some situations, it is possible for the researcher to move along the continuum during the course of their research (Hellawell, 2006). The researcher may become more familiar with the organisation or group they are researching, they may research different aspects of the group that they are more or less familiar with, or their roles within the organisation may change during the course of the study.

Merton (1972) justifies the position of insider research by arguing the limitations inherent in external research are namely that an outsider:

> "Has a structurally imposed incapacity to comprehend alien groups, statuses, cultures and societies. Unlike the Insider, the Outsider has neither been socialised in the group nor has engaged in the run of experiences that makes up its life, and therefore cannot have the direct, intuitive sensitivity that alone makes empathetic understanding possible." (p. 15)

Insider research has historically been undertaken in ethnographic studies in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Hellawell, 2006). However, in education as more researchers have engaged in examining their own practice, insider research methodologies have become more common (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Mercer, 2007). A range of methodologies can be used for insider researcher, including, but not limited to, case studies, action research and ethnography. The insider position of the researcher will often determine the research design, the type of data collected and the way the data is analysed.

Insider research in this thesis involved the researcher who was "immersed, embedded and strongly connected with both the setting and those being 'researched' in a shared setting where they operate together on an ongoing basis" (Smyth & Holman, 2008., p. 34). Insider research was adopted to attempt to improve practice through understanding and influencing others to

enable contribution to knowledge, meaning and understanding that is directly related and relevant to practice. A key advantage of insider research in this instance was the 'pre-understandings' the researcher brought to the design of the study (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). With knowledge of the present situation, insider research helped develop research questions based on understandings of the issues needing investigation, and those directly related to improving practice within the ECEC sector context, providing information about what the service is really like and what is significant. Such insights would not be as easy to uncover by an external researcher or 'outsider' (Smyth & Holian, 2008).

Mindful of 'researcher bias,' when the researcher's personal values and experiences influence the research questions, design and data collection procedures (Chavez, 2008), steps were taken to minimise this potential bias at different stages of the research process. The first of these was rigor and transparency in the methods of data collection in the research design. The second was to adopt strategies to establish the 'trustworthiness' in the research design. The third was to include triangulation of methodologies within the overarching method, data sources, and data analyses. The aim of these steps was to address inherent subjectivity associated with this researcher being positioned within the service and having knowledge about the service which could be perceived as 'contaminating' (Mercer, 2007) the research.

3.2.3.1 Trustworthiness

Insider research is often open to criticism and subject to scrutiny, so it is extremely important to establish 'trustworthiness' in the research design. Trustworthiness parallels the concepts of validity, reliability, and objectivity (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight that trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth and involves establishing:

- Credibility - confidence in the 'truth' of the findings.
- Transferability - showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts.
- Dependability - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated.
- Confirmability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest

Techniques used to establish credibility include prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Through direct involvement in the service, this researcher built a rapport with the participants over time, with a deep understanding of contextual factors and influences.

The researcher also made use of her own research journal during the observation and interview data collection phase which was used in discussion with participants, in an attempt to avoid preconceptions and bias influencing the process. Transferability applies the findings to a different context and was enhanced through the researcher presenting detailed, descriptive data, "in such a way that others reading the results can understand and draw their own interpretations" (Patton, 1990, p. 375). Dependability refers to establishing that the "process of the research be logical, traceable and documented" (Patton, 1990, p. 294). To enhance dependability, this researcher fully acknowledged and described her position as an insider researcher situated within the context of the study. Then, the procedures that were engaged for data collection and data analysis were documented, therefore providing an audit trail. Finally, the confirmability was enhanced by including the participants in both the data collection and data analysis process and obtaining feedback from others within the ECEC sector.

3.2.3.2 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods, multiple data sources and multiple data analysis techniques to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). Typically, "triangulation" aligns with how the "quality" or "validity" of a study might be assured (Tracy, 2010). Pelto (2017, p. 241) presents a history of triangulation which sources the concept from trigonometry, by way of surveying and mapping, through its use by quantitative researchers, to its redefinition and application in qualitative inquiry. Pelto describes how researchers began to use "triangulation" (defined as using more than one research method) as "an approach to assessing the validity and reliability of data-gathering methods in the social and behavioural sciences" (p. 242). Denzin (1978) argues for an approach to naturalistic inquiry that examines research problems from multiple perspectives – including those of "multiple observers, theories, methods, and data sources", with the intent of overcoming the "intrinsic bias that comes from single-method, single-observer, single-theory studies" (p. 307). Denzin further argues:

> Multiple methods should be used in every investigation, since no method is ever free of rival causal factors (and thus leads to completely sound causal propositions), can ever completely satisfy the demands of interaction theory, or can ever completely reveal all the relevant features of empirical reality necessary for testing or developing a theory. (p. 28)

Denzin outlined the ways in which qualitative researchers can use "triangulation" of method, investigator, theory, and data in naturalistic inquiry (p. 294) and asserted that researchers could use *multiple forms of triangulation in a study*. These include: Data triangulation of (1) time, (2)

space, and (3) person, with person analysis of multiple levels: (a) aggregate, (b) interactive, and (c) collectively (p. 295). By triangulating data sources, researchers "go to as many concrete situations as possible in forming the observational base" (p. 101). Denzin notes that "theoretical sampling" is an example of data triangulation (p. 295).

Methodological triangulation, or the use of multiple methods (both "within-method" and "between-method" p. 295) in order to "better unravel the processes under study" (p. 102). Theory or perspective triangulation refers to the ways in which researchers might compare participants' own accounts with "alternative theoretical schemes" (p. 102) in order to use multiple, rather than single perspectives to examine a topic. According to Denzin, "the goal is to form a theory that rings true at the subjects' level, while conforming with accepted sociological rules concerning how a theory should be grounded" (p. 102). Investigator triangulation, in which involvement of multiple observers was used to attempt "to secure as many differing views as possible on the behaviour in question" (p. 102).

Within this case study of an ECEC centre a researcher and a participant orientation were adopted and both critical reflection of the centre's process and formal analysis of these processes was undertaken. Data collection triangulation was employed by collecting data across time, by collecting data from multiple sources: observations, interviews and participants reflections and by including data from multiple observers. Data analysis included comparing data outcomes to appropriate ECEC documents, critical analysis of data and the use of the general principles of grounded theory research data analysis techniques. Additionally, in the process of coding within the data analysis phase, comparisons of themes were made by the researcher over time which assists reliability (Scherier, 2012).

3.2.3.3 Ethical Considerations

All research needs to be conducted in an ethical manner. Insider research has some key ethical issues that need to be considered that are different for those faced when the researcher is an outsider. The relationships and activities, which are normal to the everyday functioning of an education and care service, when part of a formalised research process, may take on different perspectives. As an insider researcher, I needed to be aware of and manage, the inherent risks of a researcher in a role of either formal or informal power. The perception of implicit coercion during recruitment was addressed where power relationships exist with strategies implemented of using systems that do not involve the researcher directly in this process. A human resources business partner was established with recruitment facilitated through this work role with the

nominated supervisor. The researcher was also sensitive towards colleagues that were not invited or eligible to participate, and those that chose to participate in the study, such that all parties were comfortable in their current and further roles within the service.

As an insider, I was able to gain more through having a rapport with the participants being comfortable to 'open up' so that there may be greater depth to the data gathered (Dwyer & Buckel, 2009), and as the researcher was able to 'see more' due to relationships and observations within the service setting whilst at all times applying the ethical principles of informed consent. In methodologies where the insider research is also a participant, the participants and researchers are working closely together as co-participants in mutually beneficial relationships, which are the foundations for the methodology (Parsell, Abler & Jacenyik-Trawoger, 2014). Continuous monitoring of these relationships by the participant researcher and the co-participants by regular research process meetings throughout the research process ensured there was a continual focus on ethical practices and commitments to the research project were maintained.

Another ethical challenge relates to privacy and confidentiality. In insider research it is often easy to make the connection to where the research is undertaken (Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Smyth & Holman, 2008). In addition, there may be issues relating to maintaining institutional anonymity where citing information from an organisation's reports or including the full reference for such documents (Trowler, 2011). These issues need to be acknowledged and the impact on privacy and confidentiality considered. However, not all insider research studies require instructional anonymity, as disclosing the organisation may be relevant to the research approach and justified within the ethics approval process. Individuals also need to have their identity protected as they would in any research methodology. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants. In addition, demographics and the context of the study did not enable the participants to be identified (Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Trowler, 2011).

An insider researcher may have access to privileged information (some of which may be incidental) which may not necessarily be available to an outsider. Therefore, it is critical confidentiality is maintained and, unlike outsiders, insiders consider whether it is ethical to use their 'insider knowledge' for research purposes or not (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). In research conducted by an outsider, once the research has been completed and published "ethical concerns fade naturally into the background" (Floyd & Arthur, 2012, p. 174). However, in insider research where the researcher and participants continue to work for the same organisation or remain members of the same group, challenges can occur which require the researcher to consider the impact of the implications of the research beyond the life of the study.

In summary, the unique perspective of this researcher of the history and culture of the service was the most significant advantage, enabling a deep understanding and interpretation. I was conscious of the need to recognise and manage the risks, challenges, and tensions during the research process to ensure ethical and trustworthy insider research was conducted to achieve the desired outcomes. Key challenges involved minimising the potential for implicit coercion of the participants, acknowledging the desire for positive outcomes, and awareness of the potential conflict of interest being a director and researcher within the same context. Strategies to minimise the challenges as outlined were adopted in order to provide a valuable contribution of the theory and practice of critical reflection in early education and care within a faith-based context from a perspective of being deeply embedded and involved.

3.2.3.4 Reflections on My Experience as an Insider Researcher

Consistent with my own constructivist view of learning, the insider research approach aligned with the notion of knowledge being socially constructed and situated within the specific context of the faith-based ECEC centre in which I was positioned. Knowing insider research exists on a continuum considered dependent on the relationship of researcher to the aspect being researched (Merce, 2007), I identified this insider research to be positioned near the full involvement end of the continuum, since I as the researcher, already had direct relationships with the participants and was deeply embedded within the service and within this case study organisation.

Advantages of undertaking insider research were having access to the participants that I already had a relationship with, the ability to draw on understanding and experience when asking questions or probing in interviews and had access to insider knowledge. This pre-existing understanding assisted in analysis and interpretation of data, and the knowledge understandings generated from this study would be useful and relevant to the researcher's own practice, and the ECEC sector kept this research project focussed. A further key advantage of being an insider was the understanding of the cultural environment in which the research was conducted. I also had valuable insights, formed over time, into the operation of the organisation and important historical background knowledge. My knowledge of historical as well as current practice enabled the development of specific research questions which could be directly applied, and beneficial to colleagues, this organisation, the ECEC sector and beyond.

Reflecting on the experience as an insider researcher it must be acknowledged that it had its challenges. Key challenges include minimising the potential of implicit coercion of participants, privacy and confidentiality issues, identifying potential biases, ensuring a high degree of

transparency and rigor, acknowledging preconceived ideas and the desire for positive outcomes, ensuing tacit patterns and regularities were not taken for granted and examined more closely. Then there was the issue of being aware of the potential of professional conflicts in the dual roles of being a director and researcher within the same context. These issues needed to be addressed to ensure credible and trustworthy research was achieved that would make a valuable contribution towards advancing the theory and practice in Early Education and Care.

Initially one of the challenges was to ensure the research design was rigorous and to minimise any likely criticism of being biased. I was reassured by the argument made by Smyth and Holman (2008), that there is no real pure objective observation of practice in the context of any organisation regardless of whether the research is conducted by an 'outsider' or not. In response to concerns around inherent subjectivity, a key strategy is for insider researchers to identify who they are. In my thesis, I clearly explain my experience and history which shared my positioning as an insider researcher.

A major challenge of being an insider researcher was the potential for implicit or perceived coercion during the recruitment of participants for my research. As a director at this time, it could be perceived that the participants lacked power relative to me and that there was a power imbalance. Gaining access to participants then became an issue to be addressed. Within the organisational structure, there was established a human resources division and business partner to ensure I was not involved with recruitment or staffing issues, and operational matters relating to the research were directed to the Chief Financial Officer and academic supervisors, as detailed on the participant information sheets.

All data was externally transcribed as recommended by the ethics committee in conducting the study. Whilst maintaining anonymity of the participants, just reading a transcript did not allow me to get a feel for the body language and tone in the conversations and as a result the external transcriptions included comments such as laughs and pauses. In contrast a real advantage of being an insider researcher was during the analysis and interpretation of the data. Undertaking case study methodology, I was familiar with the various roles and responsibilities of teachers and educators and the specific acronyms used. My knowledge of the Early Education and Care sector enabled me to interpret what participants said in relation to the situated context of their individual experiences. It was less likely that what they said was misunderstood or taken out of context. An outsider researcher is at risk of not noticing interesting data because of a lack of understanding of the specific context that the comments are related to.

In the analysis and interpretation of the data, it was important not to be biased in preconceived ideas with the desire to produce positive results. This was minimised through critique and feedback as part of the supervision process. It was a valuable experience being able to introduce and explain the intricacies within the model of critical reflection which evolved with my supervisor and share with him something I am so passionate about.

Brannick and Coughlan (2007) raise the concern of 'role duality' of insider researchers. When a researcher is an outsider, they have a clearly defined role, often tightly confined to the scope of the project. As an insider, I have past, present, as well as future roles deeply intertwined with my doctoral research, through the personal and professional relationships with the staff and Early Educator and Care sector. This enabled me to develop useful reflexive techniques throughout the data collection process and dual roles had a positive influence on my motivation to complete the research as the outcomes had mutual benefits.

Although doing insider research can be challenging, it enabled me, as a novice researcher, to learn useful reflexive techniques which were not only pertinent but critical to my research journey. However, it would not be possible to learn these skills without having experienced the issues of being an insider with knowledge, entanglement, and dual roles. As a result, this experience enabled me to become reflexive in terms of understanding the issues associated with being the researcher and that of the participants. These techniques moreover enabled me to address the influence of my own subjectivity and enhance the trustworthiness of my research endeavour.

These reflections presented in this study affirm that conducting insider research although not without some challenges provided a valuable and potentially uniquely different perspective on the research findings than may have been obtained by an outsider.

3.2.4 Journey

Every true journey is a spiritual journey (Souza, Bone & Watson, 2016). In this study, the researcher set out to discover an answer to questions raised by the gap in the literature associated with the use of critical reflection in ECEC (as outlined in Chapter One). Such a journey becomes an endeavour that constitutes a person's growth in the development of new knowledge. As a participant observer in this study, let me share with you a little about myself to give you a context and background understanding as to why I am interested in this topic. This problem started with my own professional journey (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2010) in which I identified a problem that needed to be tackled in the ECEC sector.

During a thirty-seven-year journey as a practitioner in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, of which twenty-four years were positioned in a faith-based ECEC context, this study evolved and changed direction, grew and evolved backward and forwards, in an iterative process, from tacit to propositional. It utilised an emergent design (Charmaz, 2006) that included observations, reflections, perspectives of, and relationships with, educators. A developing understanding of how educators work culminated in intent to develop an operational model for ECEC and implementation approach for critical reflection in Early Childhood Education and Care. Through this study, I came to realise the critical importance of negotiated understandings with educators about how they work in a faith-based ECEC centre. The outcome of this naturalistic journey (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Chase, 2005; Patton, 2001) and emergent design (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2017) meant that the answer to the research question was iteratively found.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) advocate that the research design be continuously refined and extended as the need arises. In this study, the design unfolded as the study progresses. Guba and Lincoln further uphold that *"*as each sample is selected, each datum recorded, and each element of the joint construction devised, the design itself became more focussed" (p. 180). As the design became more focussed, I became more informed, more knowledgeable, more aware and more directed. As the data analysis process became more structured, the construction of findings took shape. I chose this design involving data collection and analysis procedures that could evolve throughout the study in response to what was learned in the earlier parts of the study - a key feature of grounded theory (Taber & Venes, 2013). As Charmaz (2006) states: "We can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles – while we gather data. The flexibility of qualitative research permits you to follow leads that emerge" (p. 25).

The process of undertaking this research study was similar to a journey. It had a beginning and an end, knowing and unknowing, meaningfulness, disorientation and displacement, change and review, which are both epistemological and ontological (Batchelor & Di Napoli, 2006). When a journey is being recounted, all of the travellers involved will have a slightly different story to tell based on their different perspectives evidenced in multiple or possible diverse constructions of reality (Patton, 2002; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). What follows traces the conjoint journey of the researcher and educators who have different perspectives and different constructions of reality. The researcher, to some extent, is the travel guide but also travels her own journey parallel to that of educators who are the travellers. Through the journey experience, there are changes in who you are as well as what you know. The outcome of this is being, and becoming, as a person,

as well as, what Batchelor and Di Napoli (2006) refer to as your "voice for knowing" (p. 13-14). For when you reach your destination, you are different because you have grown through your journey of knowing something you did not know before.

As this research journey shows, the benefits and immeasurable value of travelling as much as possible are highlighted, along with directing the destination one reaches, and the roads taken to get there. The most memorable travel experiences involve experiences that are often unexpected, with the greatest discoveries those that you make yourself (Wilson & Nebesky, 2001). The most successful journeys can be life-changing and mind-changing (Mackenzie & Ling, 2009). A unique journey may be experienced differently by the researcher and respondents. A journey can also be challenging, coming to dead ends, or different alleyways with a need to retrace steps. As Cortazzi (2001) states, "There is increasing recognition of the importance and usefulness of narrative analysis" as the narratives that individuals tell "give researchers access to tellers' understandings of the meanings of key events in their lives, communities or cultural contexts" (p. 384). Narrative, as described by Connelly and Clandinin, (1990), describes lives and write "narratives of experiences" (p. 2). Building on Dewey's understanding of experiences, Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) reminds us that each point in an individual's story "has an experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (p. 2) allowing a researcher to hear about events, experiences and feelings in the context of the whole story and retain contextual meaning. A narrative provides holistic insight into a culture, time and place. As Paglia (1992) writes, "All objects, all phases of culture are alive. They have voices. They speak of history and interrelatedness. Moreover, they are all talking at once!" (p. 116). The research journey in this study is a memorable, unique, life-changing, mind-changing and successful one both for the travel guide and the travellers. It also whets our appetite for further research and in this way, travellers become sensitive to other research opportunities within the world of research and the many destinations and directions of what that can involve.

3.2.5 Emic and Etic Perspectives

Achieving a balanced, honest understanding of a concept, in this case, outcomes of the impact and implementation of the application of critical reflection as part of the NQS, warranted differing viewpoints described by the terms 'emic' and 'etic' which pertain to divergent ways to research human beings. 'Emic' and 'Etic' terminology has a history in the fields of linguistics and anthropology, which was extended by researchers in other fields and disciplines, including education. An 'emic' perspective at times is cited as "inside", "inductive" or 'bottom up" and

starts with the views and dialogue of the participants. An ‘Emic’ perspective arises from within the group and is regarded as meaningful and appropriate to the participating members of the population whose beliefs are being studied. In adopting an ‘emic’ outlook a researcher tries to set aside pre-existent theories and inferences to be conducive to facilitate participants’ full expression of their views. This enables the data to foster the emergence of themes, patterns and concepts to become apparent through the negotiation of meaning. This position is the essence of grounded theory. Some of its strength is its appreciation of the content investigated through respect for local frames of reference, and potential to reveal unforeseen discoveries. Emic knowledge and perceptions are those current inside a culture that is determined by local custom, meaning and belief (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) and best exemplified by a native of the culture. Although the emic can differ between cultures, as this study was conducted with educators in one faith-based ECEC centre it is reasonable to assume that issues of (a) the NQS (b) ECEC and (c) Christian context would produce some depth of commonality.

The ‘etic’ approach considers the perspectives of the respondents that have not yet been articulated (Yin, 2014). The research process is a negotiation with the etic understanding using theories, hypotheses, perspectives and concepts of the respondents. As Yin (2014), Merriam (2009) and Patton (2014) describe it, the negotiated constructs are accounts, descriptions and analyses manifested by theories and systems of the body of scientific observers. The main force of the negotiated standpoint is that it considers comparisons beyond context and population, for the advancement of more widespread cross-cultural concepts (Agar, 2011; Patton, 2014; Yin, 2014). This approach describes the perspective of an ‘outsider’ negotiated with the ‘insider’ (Hoare, Buetow, Mills & Francis, 2012). Frequently research has explored cross-cultural examples (Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez & Gibson, 2011) to gain an etic perspective. In this study, the researcher provided an etic perspective. Negotiation of the emic and the etic perspectives are always included to produce a richer, more authentic viewpoint. In this study, this was accomplished by combining the voices of the educators themselves (emic) as they talked about their values, beliefs, practices and underlying reasons for these, together with the voice of the researcher who brought an etic perspective through questioning, challenge and exploration to the investigation.

In summary, the research stance in this constructivist story included both the insider and outsider, which enabled both an emic and etic perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Emic and etic perspectives were included to produce a richer more authentic point of view and were accomplished in this study by combining the voices of the educators themselves (emic) as they

talked about their practice, together with the voice of the researcher, who initiated an etic perspective through questioning, challenge and exploration. Interpretations of the descriptions of these experiences and relationships within the culture occurred at many different levels. Educators as individuals possess pedagogical knowledge. As a constructivist study, the wisdom of their practice provided important and insightful information (Gaea, 1990). Together with educators, combined insights shed greater light on the culture than either of us could have achieved alone and through this what I discovered was the comparability and complementarity of components of a case study and narrative approach.

3.2.6 Drilling into the Journey of Knowing: The Choice and Process of the Hermeneutic-Dialectic

This study uses a hermeneutic-dialectic (Fagerstrom, 2009). This term, 'hermeneutic,' originates from the Greek word '*ernhneuein (*hermeneuein) meaning *to* 'interpret' and its derivative *ermhneia* (hermeneia) meaning 'interpretation'. The word dialectical comes from the Greek root meaning 'conversation' and 'debate'.'Hermeneia', in the fifteenth century referred to a broad range process of interpretation, understanding and the meaning of biblical texts. Later with modern philosophy, the content of the term expanded to cover interpretations of any written text and speech. In the twentieth century, 'Hermeneia' was used within the context of sociology to cover understanding. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) relate the term as "an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudice shape the interpretive process" (p. 16). Stringer (2013) describes the term as constructions that "are created realities that exist as integrated, systematic, sense-making representations and are the stuff of which people's social lives are built" (p. 28). The aim of inquiry is to reveal the different authentic perspectives, truths and realities - constructions - held by different individuals and groups - the changing nature of reality created through people's experience – an evolving reality in which the researcher and researched are mutually interactive and inseparable (Phillips, 1988b). Individuals will interpret the same facts or information differently based on their experiences, world views and cultural backgrounds. Thistleton (2009) has stated that reflection is inclusive of "the nature of human actions or other aspects of life"(p. 3). Thiselton (2009) further puts forward the proposition that:

> Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation and an art – as a science it enunciates principles and classifies the facts and results. As an art, it teaches what application these principles should have. It entails critical reflection on the basis, nature and goals of reading, interpreting and understanding communicative acts and processes. This characteristically concerns the understanding of texts (especially biblical or literary texts)

> but also includes reflection on the nature of human actions, sign-systems, visual data, institutions, artefacts or other aspects of life (p. 3).

Knowledge is produced in hermeneutic inquiry as reported by Schwann (2004) through coming to an understanding through critical reflection in contexts of human realities, in a dialogic process in which one participates (p. 38). It is noted by Schrieber and Asher-Self, (2011) as "a process of understanding the constructions of reality that stakeholders have and examining them for similarities and differences"(p. 317) which within this study started with the dialogue of educators.

The hermeneutic-dialectic (Fagerstorm, 2009; Guba & Lincoln 1989) was chosen as a to and fro, or iterative, circular process with a goodness of fit with narrative and case study using the tools of grounded theory in this conjoint journey which provided deep rich insider knowledge of the participants. As Gadamer (1976) explains, “It is a circular relationship, the anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine this whole” (p. 117).

There is an expectation of meaning from the context of what has gone before. Gadamer (1976) notes the movement of understanding “is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole”(p. 117). Over time, through analysis of the data, the researcher’s etic journey and the journey of others coming alongside forged a joint construction. This was grounded in this construction(Guba & Lincoln, 1989) derived through a component of hermeneutic-dialectic inquiry. In this study, the process of a hermeneutic-dialectic was used between researcher and respondents with a reference to understanding the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS in one faith-based ECEC Centre.

This study utilised a constructivist methodology coupled with the hermeneutic approach and ‘dialectic’ to reveal the reciprocal dialogue inherent in this study. The hermeneutic aspect consisted in depicting individual constructions as accurately as possible while the dialectic aspect consisted of comparing these existing individual (including the researcher’s) constructing so that each respondent confronted the constructions of others in order to come to terms with them (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers, Charmaz & Clarke, 2011; Charmaz, 2017; Oktay, 2012). This hermeneutical interpretation provided a deep, meaningful understanding.

Fagerstrom (2009) described the hermeneutic interpretation process as:

> a spiral movement characterized by dialectic oscillations between the parts and the whole, between explaining and understanding, between the concrete and the abstract, between the inner reality and the external context (p. 624).

According to Beekes (2009), the word hermeneutics, derived from the Greek 'hermeneuin', basically means to bring understanding which may follow three directions: to express – expression, to translate – translation, and to interpret – interpretation. The recorded interviews were transcribed word for word. The process of interpretation in this investigation was dialectic as it moved in the form of a spiral, striving for openness and awareness of understanding. The process of interpretation consisted of explanations and interpretations, which deepened the understanding of respondents' accounts. Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) describe hermeneutic-dialecticism as "A process of understanding the constructions of reality that stakeholders have and examining them for similarities and differences" (p. 317). It is this in-depth understanding of the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS in one faith-based ECEC centre from educators' perspectives that this study sought to explore.

3.2.7 A Bricolage

The French word *bricoleur* describes a handyperson who makes use of the available tools to complete a task. The term 'bricolage' is used in educational research to denote the use of multi-perspectival research methods employed in a broader critical theoretical pedagogical context to lay the foundation for a transformative mode of multi methodological inquiry. Bricolage attempts to present research findings in a way that challenges its audience to see its subject matter in an unexpected, irregular or offbeat way and connect the theoretical to the lived world to enact new forms of knowledge (Wibberley, 2017). Using such multiple frameworks and methodologies in this study, the researcher aims to produce rigorous insights into the educational phenomena being studied.

The methodology that emerged was a bricolage of narrative, case study and multiple sources using the tools of grounded theory which described the journey of the respondents and the researcher as they engaged in the performative aspects of research. Performativity is understood as a theoretical concept that underpins the methodological approach and the focus of interest (Sommerfield, Caine & Molzahn, 2014) and refers to the performance, or 'doing' of the research, along with the norms or prescriptions that guide the research. Performative methods depend upon the *doing* of the research for insights and understandings to emerge. In this sense, performative research may be considered a process of discovery through which the researcher must, according to Barone and Eisner, (2012) "be willing to be educated – indeed to be transformed – in that

process" (p. 134). Knowledge discovered through these processes enlarges, deepens, enriches, complexities, or challenges knowledge generated through traditional modes of analysis. In short, performative processes have the potential to result in unique insights into human experience and social issues (Douglas & Carless, 2013). 'Lived experience' refers to a representation of the experiences of given individuals and choices of a given person, and the knowledge that they gain from these experiences and choices (Given, 2008; van Manen, 2016). In this journey lived experience provided the reader with a meaningful expression of human experience.

Within the qualitative paradigm, this was a bricolage (Charmaz, 2014) of both method and methodology (Patton, 2014) and a bricolage of both researcher and educator experiences and practices captured through multiple sources (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). This bricolage transformed the emic-etic negotiations from tacit to propositional knowledge in a to and fro process. Guba and Lincoln (1989) define tacit knowledge as "all that we know minus all that we can say - the latter - is propositional knowledge" (p. 176). Lincoln and Guba (1985) further state that:

> Tacit knowledge becomes the base on which the human instrument builds many of the insights and hypotheses that will eventually develop (and that will be cast as propositional knowledge) the tacit knowledge must be converted to propositional knowledge so that the inquirer can both think about it explicitly and communicate it to others (p. 198).

The bricolage of methodology utilised in this study encompassed elements of the case study and narrative inquiry using multiple sources and the tools of grounded theory (Figure 3.1).

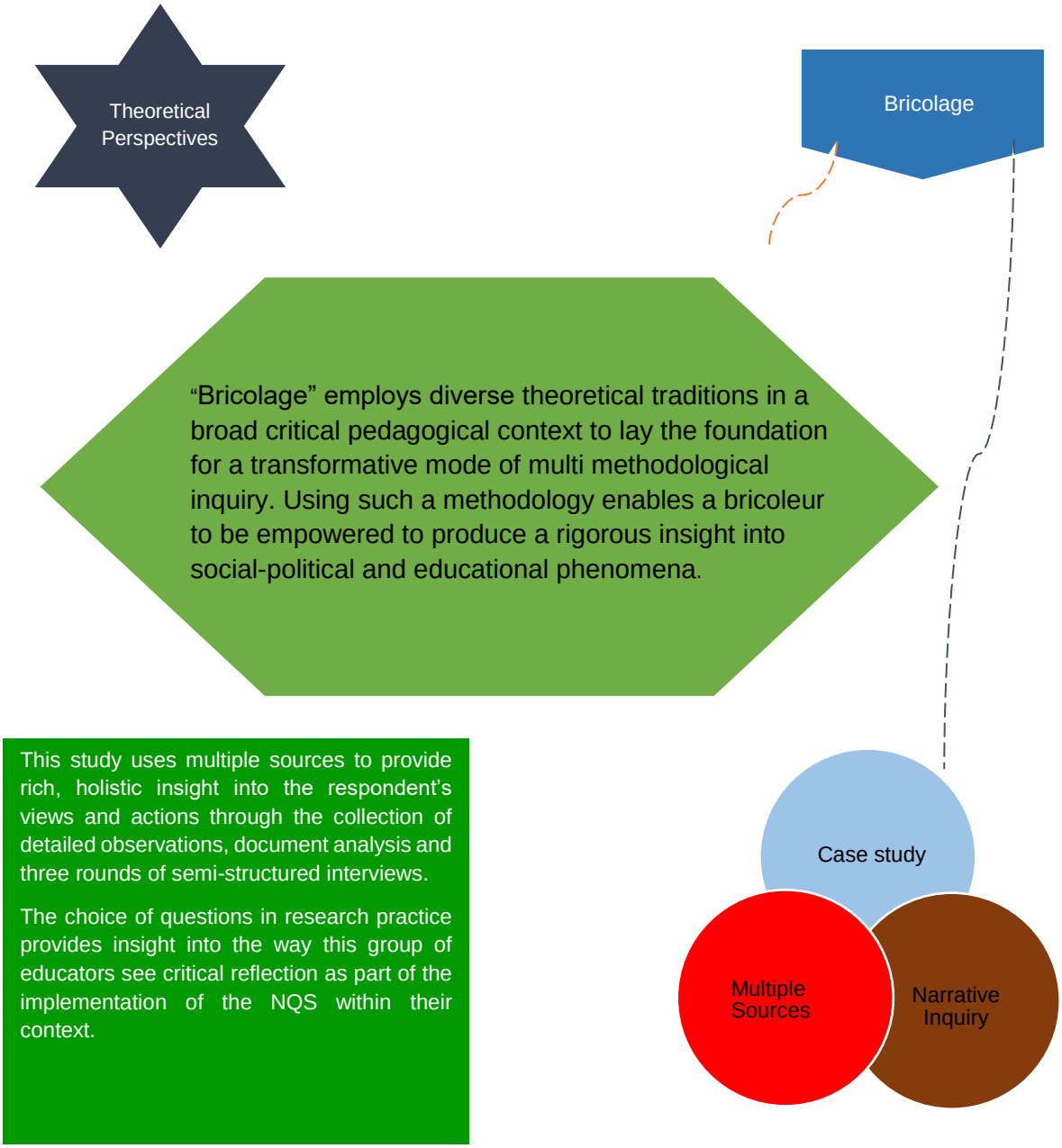

Figure 3. 1 *Bricolage of Methodology*

The narrative aspect of the methodology fitted with the case study approach because it emerged from ongoing conversations and narratives of separate yet overlapping journeys with the identification of common themes (Figure 3.2). The metaphor of a journey provided the framework and language.

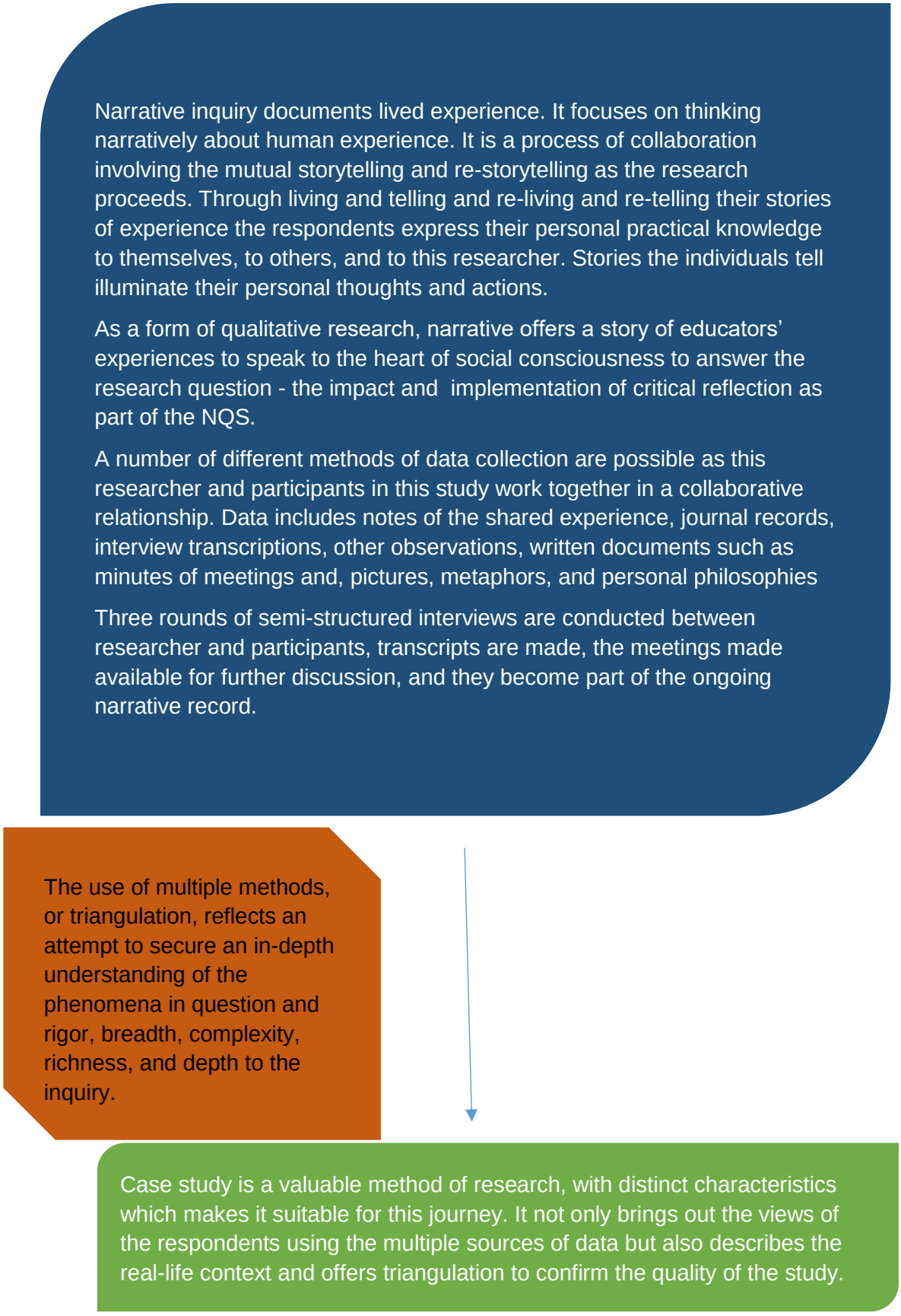

Figure 3. 2 *Data Collection Tools*

As a case study and narrative bricolage, this journey involved the search for patterns in the lived human experiences of the group (Angrosino, 2007). Together, educators went on a journey and, as we travelled through various stages within each stage of the study, the analysis of the research process became clearer. This bricolage included data collection techniques of participant observation, document analysis and semi-structured interviews with triangulation of data collection methods to strengthen quality (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Central to these were the semi-structured interviews, which, as noted by Heyl (2001), offered "a way of shedding light on the personal experiences, interpersonal dynamics of cultural participants in their social works" (p. 372), providing the results of conversations between the researcher and the participants (Kvale, 1996). The knowledge that was produced from the interviews was a product of that interaction. Semi-structured interviews through a storying process enabled us to experience the individual lives of educators.

3.2.8 Narrative Inquiry

Through narrative, one's own and others' actions, can be understood. It helps to organise events and objects into a meaningful whole and connect and see the consequences of actions and events over time. As such, it is a way to develop one's own voice as others' voices and realities are constructed. Narrative inquiry is situated in the matrix of qualitative research, designed to document lived experience with a focus on the experience and of lives of the respondents. Understanding a previous experience allows the researcher to get an 'insider view' and hence a deeper understanding of the issues that arise in the relationship between participants and researcher.

Narrative inquiry offers a way of caring about the how knowledge is produced and the importance of this relationship between researcher and participants and can be used by the researcher in collaboration with participants to develop knowledge to improve individual practices and engage in shared learning (Wang & Geale, 2015). Narrative inquiry amplifies voices that may otherwise remain silent (Trahar, 2013), focussed on thinking narratively about human experience through mutual storytelling and re-storytelling as the research proceeds. Through living and telling, and re-living and re-telling, respondent stories of experience express personal practical knowledge to themselves, to others and to the researcher. The narrative approach acknowledges human experience as a dynamic entity that is in a constant state of flux (Wang, Andre & Greenwood, 2015) within which the researcher asks questions that will help interpret and experience the world of the participant (Wang & Geale, 2015). Chou (2013) states

that “Story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the uninformed formed, and the confusing clear” (p. 7).

Wang and Geale (2015), Trahar (2013), Creswell (2005), Charmaz (2014), Lakoff and Johnson (2003), Clandinin (2007) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000), show that stories provide a means by which those truths which cannot be otherwise told are discovered in educational experience. Clough (2002) notes that narrative offers a researcher the opportunity to import fragments of data from various real-life events in order to speak to a heart of social consciousness – thus providing the protection of anonymity to the research participants without stopping away the rawness of real happenings (p. 8). The situation needs to be considered when analysing a story as the researcher looks for a specific location in the storyteller’s landscape that gives meaning to the narrative, such as the storyteller’s physical location and how the activities occurring in that place affect his/her experience.

In narrative inquiry, a number of different methods of data collection are possible as the researcher and respondents work together in a collaborative relationship. These can be in the form of field notes of the shared experience, journal records, interview transcriptions, respondent observations, storytelling, letter writing, auto bibliographical writing, documents such as newsletters and writing such as rules principles, pictures, metaphors and personal philosophies (Clandinin, et al., 2006). Narratives, as described by Cashman (2012) have "held a central place” (p. 182). Cortazzi (2001) writes: “There is increasing recognition of the importance and usefulness of narrative analysis”, the narratives that individuals told "Give researchers access to tellers and understandings of the meanings of key events in their lives, communities or cultural contexts" (p. 384).

As shown in Chapter 4, this study uses narrative storyboarding. Narrative is both phenomenon, and method, and the means through which data emerged in specific terms was through the ‘hermeneutic-dialectic’ process. Narrative inquiry captures personal experience and reveals human dimensions of that experience over time. It takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It identifies the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, and, as reported by Connelly and Clandinin, (1990) narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience (p. 2). Building on John Dewey's understanding of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us that each point in a person's story "has an experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (p. 2). This allows a researcher to hear about events,

incidents and feelings in the context of the whole story and to retain their contextual meanings in a way that snapshots of experience cannot. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) view narrative inquiry in stating, “It brings theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear in educational experience as lived" (p. 134). Throughout the writing of this thesis, the researcher came to learn that narrative inquiry can break down the dichotomy between theory and practice and between voice, the present and the past, it allowed the researcher to include educators on a very personal journey towards understanding perspectives, values and beliefs. Polkinghorne (1995) refers to this as a reflective narrative, as the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. Narrative inquiry is concerned with critical analysis of the stories we hear, read and tell one personal level, as well as the larger societal narratives embedded in our social interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). Giving voice to educators in this study means that the researcher can value the experiences related by them - their beliefs, views, perspectives, and opinions - and take them seriously (Hatchell & Adelina, 2008). Reflective analysis enables the researcher to situate each narrative of experience and gives voice to the researcher’s perspective (Schratz, 1993; Gall & Borg, 2003). Observing, listening to, working with and reflecting with educators enables the researcher to understand what educators are experiencing thus guiding and shaping practice, but it also, in keeping with Nodding (2004) “induces us to reflect in all we do and all we are asked to do" (p. 154).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted between researcher and participants, transcripts were made, and meetings made available for further discussion as they became part of the ongoing narrative record. To remove any bias, an external party was engaged for transcription purposes.

3.2.9 Case Study

Case study research as a strategy for methodological exploration, according to Flyvbjerg (2011) "has been around as long as recorded history" (p. 302). Contemporary case study research is said to have its origins in qualitative approaches to research in the disciplines of anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology (Steward, 2014). With the advent of grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 2006) inductive methodology has resulted that uses detailed systematic procedures to analyse data. Like other forms of qualitative research, through the use of a case study the researcher will investigate, analyse and understand the participants' perspectives within their natural setting (Creswell, 2013). This form of research requires

interaction between the participants and the researcher to generate data and connects the researcher to the study through being immersed in the field.

A case study, as such, is a valuable method of research, with distinctive characteristics that make it ideal for this investigation. This is due to the case study being designed to bring out details from respondents' viewpoints as a triangulation research strategy. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes (Yin, 2014).

A case study model was applied to the study to bring out the perspectives of the individual educators. A case study was a good fit as described by Yin (2003) as an empirical inquiry investigating a current experience in its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between experience and context are not clearly defined. A case study is most useful in situations when the contextual conditions of events being studied are critical and where the researcher has no control over what happens as events unfold.

Yin (2014) highlighted case study through multiple sources of data and cites how case studies can be used to collect six sources of evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participation in observations, and physical artefacts. Yin further cites four stages of the methodology of case study – design of the case study, conduct of the case study, analysis of the case study and development of the conclusions, recommendations and implications. In this study, these stages occurred in the context of one ECEC faith-based centre.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Overview

Having discussed different methodological considerations, attention is now turned to the research design. The research process, in this study, was carried out across two phases. The first phase emphasised the understanding and practice of critical reflection. This was initiated and driven by the Centre Director who was also the researcher. This ensured that the centre educators at this ECEC centre were able to more effectively critically reflect on the impact of critical reflection. The second phase collected data relating to the research questions with a particular emphasis on a series of semi-structured interviews. The data collected canvases the ECEC centre educators' reflections on the research questions.

It also canvases the ECEC centre educators' reflections on any additional questions that emerged from the initial analysis of the data. Even though these phases were initially sequential there were periods of time throughout the research when aspects of critical reflection were revisited.

3.3.2 Phase 1: Fook's Model of Critical Reflection

As stated, the overarching paradigm employed in this research was qualitative with the choice to employ a bricolage based on the nature of the emergent design. The research was informed by Fook's (Fook & Gardner, 2013) notion of critical reflection. Fook's work employs critical reflection to help social workers deliver responsive practice and argues that critical reflection can be transformative. Deconstruction and analysis of both personal and professional experience happens through critical reflection to understand different assumptions, relationships and influences and how it affects our practice. As new understandings emerge, the individual can reconstruct this experience and develop new techniques to deal with a similar incident in the future.

This study evolved from a question to become a statement of intent to develop a grounded theory of critical reflection which emerged from the requirement of critical reflection as foundational to the NQS in ECEC. As seen in Chapter Two, while the literature reveals several models of critical reflection, the model developed by Jan Fook provided the best fit for the present study. Together with Fiona Gardner, Jan Fook (Fook & Gardner, 2013), developed a model that "involves the unsettling and examination of hidden assumptions in order to rework ideas and professional actions. The model draws upon reflective practice; reflexivity; postmodernism and critical perspectives" (p. 21). Fook is particularly interested in the use of language during reflective sessions with social work students and highlights that the way words are used to describe a situation, or an emotion can be linked to issues of knowledge and power. Through the critically reflective process, an analysis of power within the workplace or in relationships can be explored which it is claimed leads to transformative change. Fook's model relies on unearthing buried and strong perspectives and enables participants to make choices. Fook (2010) suggests that by working in this way, she can get to the centre of an issue, including emotional aspects. This model hence acknowledges the fundamental importance of power dynamics, the broader organisational and social impacts along with how emotions affect our attitudes and experiences.

Fook's model has two distinct stages. During the first stage, led by a facilitator, participants in a group are asked non-judgmental open style questions in order to gain factual information about a critical incident being explored and draw upon hidden assumptions and theories. Through this process, Fook argues, the participant can make sense of these feelings by uncovering their assumptions and personal biases. Fundamental assumptions are unearthed (primarily those that are to do with power and connections between the individual and the social context) that are implicit in the participants' story. Examining these assumptions reveals blind spots and

discrepancies. This initial process encourages participants to identify values or beliefs that are important to them. In the second stage of the process, the participant is supported by their colleagues to come to an awareness of their assumptions and review their learning from the first stage. Through the facilitator reflecting on their learning in the first stage, reflection occurs upon their assumptions and reasons for their thinking. By doing this, Fook argues, the participant who has presented and explored their critical incident is now in a position to be able to identify how their personal theory and practice might need to be adapted (Fook & Gardner, 2007). In stage two, new awareness can be used to construct new approaches to practice linking with a person's value system and responsiveness to the social environment of practice. Once they can articulate ideas, they reconstruct their 'theory of practice'. They have a new framework from which to further develop their practice. Such a 'theory of practice' needs to use language that is meaningful to the participants, yet also capture what they see as the essence of their experience and fundamental beliefs. During this process, people often include other important experiences and reformulate their understanding of them in order to arrive at a perspective that allows integration of these other experiences with their world view. They can also incorporate fundamental values and a sense of themselves. They may often include strong emotions as an important aspect of the experience, which can indicate significant values or beliefs. They may unearth many different perspectives, and at different levels, but are usually able to find ways to integrate all of the levels.

3.3.3 Phase 1: Director Provocations

The study began in its first phase by the Director presenting a story of her experience through structured weekly provocations, which she believed crucial to educator learning about professional practice, quality improvement and ongoing learning. The table of contents from the booklet created by the researcher containing the provocations implemented in the ECEC centre is contained in Figure 3.3 and 3.4

Table of Contents

	Understanding the faith based context of Early Education and Care	Page No:
Reflection One	Reflection: Why is it important and how to do it.	6
Reflect on Two	What is 'Praxis'?	8
Reflect on Three	What is Critical Thinking?	10
Reflect on Four	What is Quality?	11
Reflect on Five	What is Embedded Practice?	14
Reflect on Six	Describe your Role as an Educational Practitioner in this faith based service. What aspects of your role inspire you? What challenges you?	15
Reflect on Seven	How do you think the NQS intersects with the theory and practice of this Christian Child Care Centre?	20
Reflect on Eight	What is the heart of what you do?	33
Reflect on Nine	Describe your Practice.	39
Reflect on Ten	How are you contributing to build a culture of Professional Practice and Inquiry?	41
Reflect on Eleven	How do you see Centre Practices in this faith based service align with Christian principles? What does this look like for you individually? For you in relation to your colleagues? In relation to the service? In relation to families? Community? Other stakeholders?	42
Reflect on Twelve	How do you support the team to ensure standards are met to high standards?	46
Reflect on Thirteen	What makes Excellence?	48
Reflect on Fourteen	What are you reflecting on this week?	55
Reflect on Fifteen	What are your values and beliefs/ Values? How do these influence your practice?	58
Reflect on Sixteen	How do you put research into practice?	60
Reflect on Seventeen	What is your focus in the service?	66
Reflect on Eighteen	How do you honour others?	67
Reflect on Nineteen	Is everyone nurtured to flourish? How would an observer know?	68
Reflect on Twenty	What are you documenting? Is there evidence of children's outcomes? Are they coherent to EYLF outcomes? If so, how?	69
Reflect on Twenty One	How do you instil professional practice in your context? How important is collaborative planning and taking individual responsibility?	92
Reflect on Twenty Two	What documents do you use to guide your practice?	97
Reflect on Twenty Three	What values do you see reflected in the Centre and in your practice?	126
Reflect on Twenty Four	Describe the 'Christian' aspect of your role in this Centre.	132
Reflect on Twenty Five	How do you create opportunities for professional conversations?	138
Reflect on Twenty Six	Describe your personal and professional highlight.	144
Reflect on Twenty Seven	How are collaborative partnerships fostered by the team to improve outcomes for children and families?	145
Reflect on Twenty Eight	How do you instil in the Centre a positive workplace organisational culture to improve outcomes for children?	146
Reflect on Twenty Nine	What have you learned over the last week?	148
Reflect on Thirty	What is the theory and practice in our Centre?	149
Reflect on Thirty One	What is our mission?	158
Reflect on Thirty Two	Why am I doing what I am doing	159
Reflect on Thirty Three	What are you willing to do?	160
Reflect on Thirty Four	Why do you want excellence?	167
Reflect on Thirty Five	What do you need?	181
Reflect on Thirty Six	What's the cost?	185
Reflect on Thirty Seven	Why do you want excellence? Conclusion	189

Figure 3. 3 *Table of Contents of Weekly Provocations created by the Centre Director/Researcher*

	Understanding the faith based context of Early Education and Care	Page No:
Appendix One	Ways of Reflection	170
Appendix Two	Critical Inquiry Questions & Reflective Provocations for Embedded Critical Reflective Practice (Initial)	176
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Appendix Sixteen	Constant Comparison Round Two Educator Interviews	260
Appendix Seventeen	Enhancing Practice – Beyond the Hugs – A Narrative	261
Appendix Eighteen	Embedded Critical Reflection Cycle of Inquiry – Weekly Reflection Questions	265
Appendix Nineteen	Coding Round Three Interview	266

Figure 3. 4 *Table of Contents of Weekly Provocations created by the Centre Director/Researcher (continued)*

This was done as Fook identified that the leader is pivotal to the process. With the leader on his/her own journey and becoming the facilitator who leads the process, the provocations were used as a stimulus for critical thinking with weekly questions being explored. An embedded critical reflective triangulation process was established through weekly critical reflective provocations and educator reflection as seen in Figures 3.9 and 3.10. This documents the embedded inquiry process over the research study period of 34 weeks which was further continued over an additional 26-week period. Throughout this period, educators contemplated, reflected on practice, shared ideas, collaborated, chewed over, deliberated, considered, thought about and engaged in discussion and research on theory and practice through this embedded critical reflective inquiry.

3.3.4 Phase 1: Unpacking and critiquing the Provocations, Observations and Document Analysis

With the leader facilitating a small group of educators as identified by Fook, critical reflection took place on a series of provocations (Appendix E). This occurred over a 60-week continuous period and was documented by the leader. Each week, the issue for reflection was written on the whiteboard by the director and each educator added their comments during group discussions throughout the week. These discussions were recorded, and the discussion data was analysed and linked to the whiteboard comments (see exemplars in Appendix E).

The provocation questions were designed by the researcher to explore educator perspectives and practices that emerged with a focus on the research questions. These included questions on the national quality standard, and reflective practice, encompassing questions on such areas as professional standards, inclusive practice, roles and responsibilities, embedded practice, exploration of behaviours and attitudes, operations, qualifications, experience, leadership, theory, quality, excellence, inquiry, research, teamwork, professional collaboration and documentation. Educators' perceptions of the 'Christian' context and the impact and implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS were investigated through the use of reflective questions. Time was allowed for participants to provide additional comments following each question to expand on their thoughts they had given to ensure their intention was understood. These specifically emergent, reflective questions were designed to set the scene for the three rounds of semi-structured interviews by providing information about the participants' perceptions of their role, their Christian context and the impact and implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS,

3.3.5 Phase 2: Semi-structured Interviews

A series of three semi structured interviews were held with participants to delve into specific focus questions to explore their understandings, building on the Director provocations, in further stages. Participants were a group of four educators with at least five years' experience and a minimum diploma level qualification. Educators shared values, beliefs and significant areas of practice which were recorded, transcribed and analysed.

As stated, semi-structured interviews were held on three occasions on a one on one basis which provided an effective tool to create an environment where participants could speak openly and frankly (Flick, 2007). One-to-one interviewing encourages personal thought, attentiveness to questions, and the ability of the interviewer to observe non-verbal feedback (Patton, 2014). This

consisted of recording the experiences of participants through the one-to-one interviews, which resulted in the collection of rich, in-depth and informative data. These in-depth interviews provided a method that permitted direct observation of the participants involved in the process and the ability to listen to what they had to say. The participants were encouraged to reveal 'real life' situations, including discussing and evaluating their specific experiences about the research question. Interviews facilitated participants' expression of how they felt or thought about the research question and so enabled participants' rich words to be captured, offering many different perspectives on the topic investigated and provided a detailed picture of the situation. General comments from the interviews were summarised into key areas and variables.

The semi structured interviews were conducted on the basis of a loose structure made up of open-ended questions defining the area being explored (Patton, 2014). These occurred within the context of ongoing observations and collection of artefacts and were grounded in what was occurring in the local context. The goal was to elicit rich, detailed material that could be used in the analysis. Interviews also included life histories as illustrative case studies which looked at the participants' experiences and lives in the ECEC centre setting in its wider context. This illustrated progression through the study and how broader social change affected the lived experience of the respondents. The specific circumstances of this context, which made in-depth semi-structured interviews useful, included the complex subject matter, the detailed information sought and the busy lives of respondents (Patton, 2014). The semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed and raw data coded for preliminary and final codes. This was followed by an analysis of major themes and sub-themes that emerged.

3.3.6 Phase 2: Additional Data Types

Data was collected for the study during the provocation sessions and through the use of semi-structured interviews as described above. In addition, there were several other types of data collected. Another method was participant observations, utilised in affiliation with interviewing to collect data in the participant's words (DeWalt, 2011) to triangulate (Carlson, 2010; Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013) the information from both document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The observations involved the researcher observing firsthand the ECEC respondents during their normal working days and referring to onsite documents relevant to the study in conjunction with document analysis from the embedded critical reflective inquiry process over the continuous 60-week cycle.

Qualitative data builds a theory with the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflecting an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question. The combination of multiple methodological practices adds vigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to an inquiry within a bricolage of narrative, case study and multiple sources using the tools of grounded theory which has been used.

Multiple sources of evidence were used to construct and inform (Yin, 2014). The use of multiple methods to collect and analyse data provide a more synergistic and comprehensive view of the issue being studied (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). These included the embedded critically reflective cycle of inquiry, semi-structured interviews, documentation analysis (emails, minutes of meetings and NQS files) and participant observation. In addition, reflections were made by the researcher following each of the interviews.

Qualitative research incorporates a substantive relationship between the researcher and research participants (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). As Patton (2014) notes, to maximise the level of participation, and obtain the most meaningful data about the program, the participants, and participant interactions, and the context of the program all need to be considered. Observation blends with natural activity provide access to the context, individuals and events as the subjects, provides access to documents, facilitates the use of technology such as cameras and provides the first-hand experience hence heightened understanding to make a worthwhile contribution. Informal conversations also provided a way of accessing what is important to the respondents and how they thought about the research questions (Patton 2014). The descriptive data collected enabled an understanding of what happened and how it happened. Such observational data was also very useful in overcoming any discrepancies between what people said and what they actually do and help uncover behaviour of which the participants themselves may not be aware.

The literature review outlined in the preceding chapter identifies that knowledge of policy reports, regulations and legal documents provides essential background to the study. Documents included handbooks, minutes of meetings, planning papers, notes, memos, workbooks, registers, reflective journals, diaries, and other key documents used to help reconstruct events and give information about social relationships. The more data provided enhances and/or challenges data gained in other ways. Visual images and representations were also utilised to depict participants' perspectives including webbing, concept maps, diagrams and mind maps.

Triangulation seeks convergence, corroboration, and the coalition of results of different methods. It involved integrating qualitative approaches to generating new knowledge and it involved

concurrent or sequential use of these two classes of methods to follow a line of inquiry (Carter et al., 2014; Charmaz, 2014). After analysing one round of participant interviews, it was evident that further interviews would provide additional understanding of the research questions. This second round of interviews of educators' perceptions was then 'triangulated' with the data collected from first round interviews and then the third round. Checking accounts for differences led to closer interrogation of data and more accurate development of theory. Triangulation took place through the use of several methods including three rounds of semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis to increase depth and accuracy. This included the embedded cycle of critical reflective inquiry actioned through a reflective cycle over a continuous 60-week period initiated by weekly Director Provocations. Educator whiteboard reflections were continuously mapped over the period, and educator's written responses recorded throughout the identified five stages of the study.

There were some important things to consider during the study. These were concepts of ethical considerations, confidentiality, quality, fairness and authenticity. These concepts will be examined in greater depth in the following pages.

3.3.7 Phase 2: Quality

Quality is a key component in the research methodology, which powerfully addresses issues of context and perspective. The quality (rigor) criteria for this inquiry through a hermeneutic/dialectic methodology, and thus of the outcome of constructivist inquiry, is determined by bringing to bear authenticity criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 2013). This search for authenticity in methodology is required for qualitative inquiry. Regardless of disciplines or approaches, authenticity is a key element in social research qualitative design. Criteria for authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2013) are appropriate for judging qualitative research which places a strong emphasis on the perspectives of different stakeholders within program evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 2013). Accommodating different perspectives challenges the notion that any one group can hold the whole truth about a situation (Kelly, 1996, p. 226).

The five categories of authenticity include fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity. Each of these criteria will now be discussed. Fairness is "determined by an assessment of the extent to which all competing constructions have been accessed, exposed, deconstructed, and considered in shaping the inquiry product, that is, the emergent reconstruction(s)" (Guba & Lincoln, 2013, p. 70). In this study this has been demonstrated through informed consent procedures; prolonged engagement and persistent observation by the

researcher; prior analysis of the researcher's etic position; individual and group member checking; and use of a peer de-briefer and supervisor/s by the researcher.

Ontological authenticity is "determined by an assessment of the extent to which individual constructions, including that of the inquirer, have themselves become more informed and sophisticated, or the extent to which individuals themselves become aware of constructions that they did not realize they held until the inquiry brought them from the tacit to the propositional level" (Guba & Lincoln, 2013, p. 70). This was observed in this study through dialectical conversations; openness of purpose; analysis of the researcher's etic position; caring and trusting relationships with respondents and inquirer's initial and final personal constructions and participants' and the researcher's introspective examination about their own learning. Constructions within the three coding processes and member checking of all data enabled opportunity to explain and explore. Identical questions were asked but because of multiple realities different constructions were allowed to emerge through a graded approach with emergent themes.

Educative authenticity is "determined by an assessment of the extent to which individuals, including the inquirer has become more understanding of, more sophisticated about and more tolerant of the constructions of others" (Guba & Lincoln, 2013, p. 70). Educators became more understanding, sophisticated and tolerant of the constructs of others. Educators were enabled to hear others' perspectives. Peer commitment and collaboration fostered open, honest and transparent conversation. Authentic learning during lunchtime conversations changed the lunchroom in how professionals converse. Dialectical conversations; use of peer de-briefer and investigation by the researcher; comparison of participants' and the researcher's assessments of the constructions held by others; and participants and the researcher's self-examining statements about their understandings of other's constructions occurred.

Catalytic authenticity is "determined by the extent to which action (clarifying the focus at issue, moving to eliminate or ameliorate the problem, sharpening values) is stimulated and facilitated by the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 2013, p. 70). Joint constructions are developed through this change of thinking. Responsibility is assigned with the relevant delegation of authority for action facilitated with participant/researcher collaboration. Accessibility of the final report is made to all stakeholders with evidence of practical application.

Tactical authenticity refers to the extent to which participants are "empowered to act" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 7) and is determined by an "assessment of the extent to which individuals

are empowered" (Guba & Lincoln, 2013, p. 70). Participants were empowered in what they do, how they do it, and how to do things better. Data was negotiated as it was collected along with interpretation and reporting while maintaining confidentiality; use of dialectical conversations; member checking; inclusion of representatives as respondents'; and prior agreements about power. Development of propositional knowledge from tacit knowledge occurred with time to voice and opportunity to explore and explain.

3.3.8 Phase 2: Member Checking

A critical feature of the authentication process is member checking (Carlson, 2010), where the interviewee provided feedback to help improve the accuracy and credibility of the study to ensure fairness, vigour, validity and a quality process. This substantiated the honesty of the data and more importantly, the interpretations by the researcher. This feedback occurred at various times through the process and focussed on various aspects of the study (Carlson, 2010). Member checking, as described by Carlson (2010), enables participants to approve interpretations of the collected data. It is a "way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences" (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). Member checking noted by Creswell (2009) is "polished" (p. 191) with themes emerging from the data. This was particularly important with reviewing of the transcripts, which were required to be handled with sensitivity and respect for each participant's voice.

This process of member checking throughout the data collection and analysis process ensured fairness, rigor, validity and a quality process. The transcripts were made available for the research participants for their feedback and comment to verify the accuracy of reporting and also to invite additional comment. The final report contained excerpts from the interviews that allowed the reader of the report to become immersed in the research context and to make their own interpretations of the data presented.

3.3.9 Phase 2: External Checking

It was desirable to have a range of responses from different sources to analyse the respondent perspectives in finding out the answer to the research question as external perspectives provide an additional source of evidence. Two external perspectives were provided from both students from University of Western Sydney and Macquarie University.

External Analysis occurred in two ways. The first occurred through an external student from Western Sydney University who conducted observations and interviews in September 2016 as

part of her Community Leadership project. The aim of the project was to gain an objective and deeper insight into the unique leadership model implemented at the ECEC Centre. The project explored the critical reflective strategy implemented at the ECEC Centre through weekly whiteboard reflection. The second form of external analysis was through a student from Macquarie University, who explored the role of the Director as a leader and leadership roles and wrote a written report.

This study highlighted the unique context of individual services and their impact on leadership models and implementation.

3.4 Setting and Participants

3.4.1 Research Site

This research study journey was set in one faith-based licensed ECEC long day centre. As ECEC centres are regulated environments, the legislative framework at an international (‘United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'), national (Australian Early Childhood Association Code of Ethics, National Children's Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010), State (Education and Care National Regulations under the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (NSW)), and local level influences the study. Whilst there are many Early Childhood Education and Care centres, including a few 'Christian' Early Education and Care centres, this distinct setting situated in north-west NSW was chosen because of the researcher's direct involvement in operating the facility from its inception. “Prolonged engagement at the site” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 303) is one of the criteria for maintaining credibility of the data. The picture of the site is presented in Figure 3.5.



Figure 3. 5 *The Research Site*

The centre became a convenience sample with the sample selected based on accessibility, ease, speed and low cost (Patton, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With the researcher deeply connected with an insider's subjective point of view with extensive knowledge and experience in the service, along with closeness to the setting as a result of prolonged engagement and total immersion, multiple realities of educators were able to be constructed. The inquirer in the setting must seek to understand as only then, Guba and Lincoln argue, can the multiple realities constructed by those in the context, and which are dependent on that context, be identified and examined in light of that context. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 175) state that "contexts give life to and are given life by the constructions that are held by the people in them".

Located within this setting, this case study comprised a bricolage of narrative inquiry and multiple sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) designed to work towards a 'grounded theory' (Charmaz, 2014) of reflective practice in this faith-based ECEC centre through the investigation of educators' perspectives and my own experience. Within this naturalistic qualitative paradigm of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), within which this study was situated, there was a focus on the phenomena of human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) with shifts and changes as this emergent design unfolded.

3.4.2 Participants

Participants were four educators and the leader employed at the ECEC centre that were the focus of the study. All participants were permanent employees with a minimum of a Diploma qualification and at least five years of experience.

3.5 Research Project Administration

3.5.1 Ethical Considerations

As part of the confidentiality and anonymity paradigm, standard questions were set but further questions were asked in response to individual participant responses ensuring interviews developed as a result of the analysis. Reflective questions emerged from the literature and process of reflection and new questions evolved.

The following aspects are important with respect to the study.

3.5.2 Anonymity

Participants who chose to respond were provided with the option of remaining anonymous and providing data through the researcher's supervisor.

3.5.3 Confidentiality

The names of participants who chose to respond and were willing to engage in an interview by the researcher remained confidential. The use of pseudonyms would be used in any publication as necessary.

3.5.4 Participant Consent

The invitation letters and informed consent statements, survey instrument, interview questions and documentation of approval from the Ethics Committee are included in the appendices.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Overview

Reflections from the embedded critical reflective inquiry process were collated and analysed. Next, responses from the externally transcribed semi-structured interviews were examined, coded, categorised and collated with comments and suggestions for the formation of emerging themes. The responses to the questions were analysed to gauge the significance of particular

items to the respondents as individuals. Emerging questions were used further in the semi-structured interviews.

The first semi structured interviews were externally transcribed and analysed line by line (Licqurish & Seibold, 2011) for emerging themes. Data were then coded and categorised and the information was re-analysed during further interviews and member checking. Data analysis continued following each interview and persisted through interpretative analysis with the realisation of the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Comparisons between the reflections and interview responses were also triangulated (Carlson, 2010) with observations conducted onsite and through document analysis.

Data analysis included the development of a range of graphs from raw data and a summary of information from participants. A range of graphs was produced, based upon responses from participants, for each of the research questions. Data was collected until the outcome of interviews became repetitive and no new themes emerged and hence when the research became saturated with information (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Patton, 2014; Creswell 2012).

3.6.2 Grounded Theory

As stated, the specific objective of this study was to investigate the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS in one faith-based ECEC centre. In determining the choice of a research approach for this study, several aspects were considered. First, the examination of conversations and observations of behaviours by the educators was undertaken through a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), in that it is designed to capture the personal thoughts, beliefs, values and attitudes of educators relating to the research question (p. 1). Second, in order to gather authentic information, it seemed essential that this information came from the respondents themselves rather than from any preconceived ideas of the researcher, from compliance authorities or policy makers. Hence the project was a journey of discovery and was therefore inductive in its approach (Creswell, 2012) where the researcher focussed on the ‘grounded data’, was ‘flexible’ and ‘open to helpful criticism’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This commanded creativity, attachment to the respondents and their profession, immersion in the field and an aptitude to understand situations and accounts. It was also deductive in that it worked from the general to the more specific about the research question with the development of specific hypotheses.

Following consideration of these needs, the tools of constructivist grounded theory (Gorard, 2011) were chosen as the best approach. Such a methodology is effective when the aim of the study is to build theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and attempt to reach a theory or conceptual understanding through an inductive process (Saunders et al, 2012) with the theory "grounded" in the group's observable experiences with the researcher adding their own insight into why those experiences exist (Charmaz, 2014). As Corbin and Strauss, (2008) note, “Grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequents of their actions. It is the researcher’s responsibility to catch this interplay” (p. 3). Three characteristics make this study applicable to grounded theory. First, the research adopted an interpretivist approach. Second, the research was about complex social processes between people. Third, there were inadequate theories about the phenomena this study sought to explore. Hence, grounded theory was the best fit. Additionally, grounded theory had considerable significance because it (a) provided explicit, sequential guidelines for conducting qualitative research; (b) offered specific strategies for handling the analytic phases of inquiry; (c) streamlined and integrated data collection and analysis; (d) advanced conceptual analysis of qualitative data; and (e) legitimised qualitative research as scientific inquiry (Charmaz, 2014).

Charmaz (2011) has described grounded theory as:

> A method of qualitative enquiry in which data collection and analysis reciprocally inform and shape each other through an emergent iterative process… Fundamentally, grounded theory is an iterative, comparative, interactive and abductive method (p. 360).

Grounded theory has been further expressed as a ‘method in process’ (Charmaz, 2009) to enable what Charmaz (2006) describes as “making sense of the data” (p. 2) to generate insight into the participants’ world. Rich data must provide the researchers with enough background about the participants, processes and settings. Moreover, Charmaz (2006) notes that rich data must “reveal what lies beneath the surface” (p. 19) and must expose and changes over time. The focus is on the importance of meanings individuals attribute to the focus of the study through the application of active codes to enable the participants’ thoughts, feelings, values, attitudes, assertions, etc. to be captured rather than gathering facts and describing acts. Writing about a constructivist approach to research, Corbin and Strauss (2015) describe the construction of ideas and theories by researchers from anecdotes that are formulated by research participants who are attempting to expound their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and to themselves.

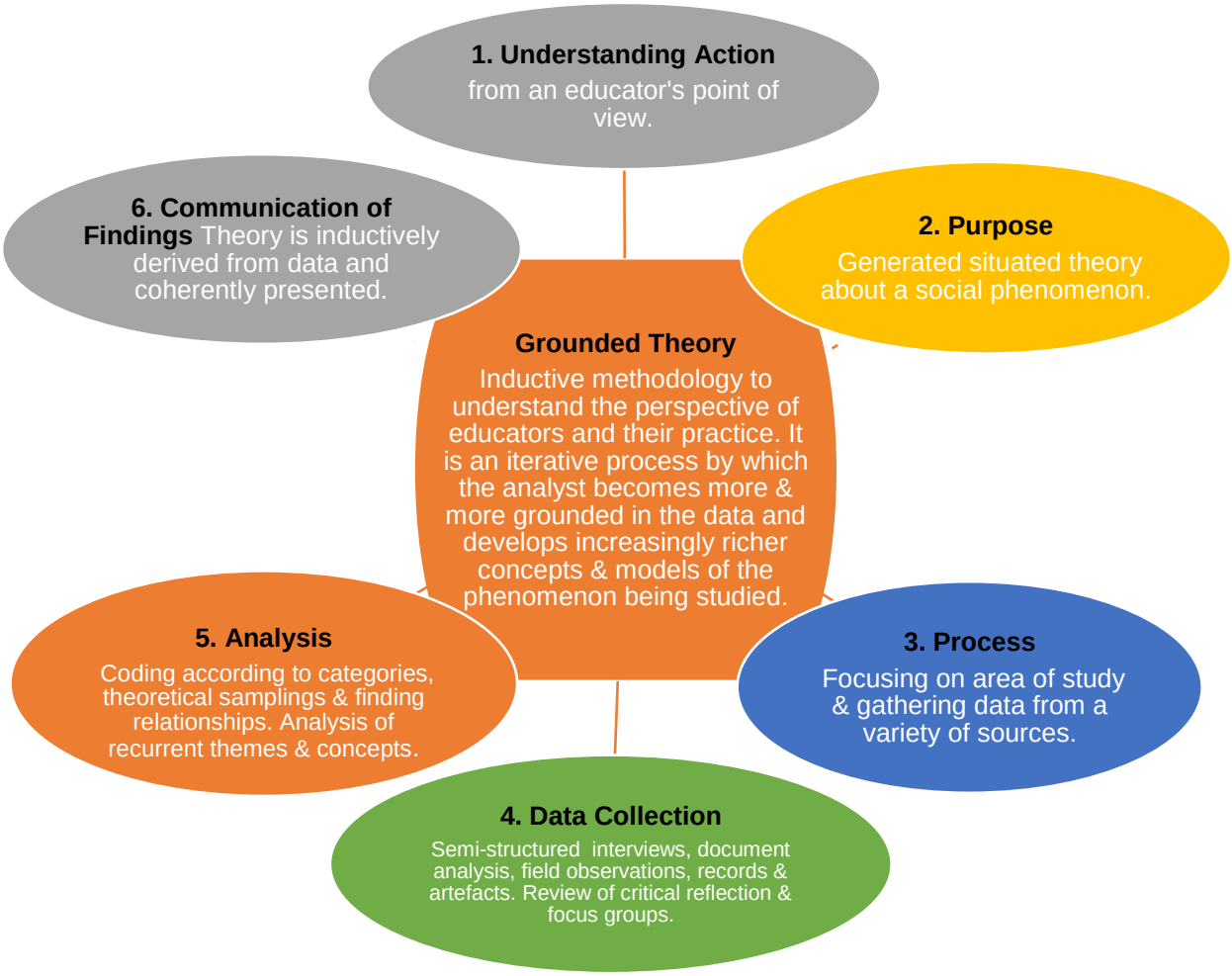


Figure 3. 6 *Grounded Theory Research Methodology*

According to Conlon et al., (2013) Grounded Theory is described as "simultaneous data collection and analysis, pursuing emergent themes through early data analysis, discovering basic social processes within data, inductive construction of abstract categories to explain and synthesize these processes, sampling to refine categories through comparative processes" (p. 2). Grounded theory ~~therefore~~ can be thought of as the lens through which one views the world, in which individuals interpret their experience and create meaning out of those experiences (Bickman & Rog, 2009) with the methodology requiring the researcher to enter the field familiar with the literature pertaining to the subject matter and related ideas (Merriam, 2009) (Figure 3.6). Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) note that a grounded theory further involves "integrating categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions and consequences of the studied processes" (p. 348). A grounded theory methodology was not a linear process. Data collection and data analysis was a continuous process, with both collection and analysis concurrently occurring. The analysis began as soon as the first pieces of data were collected.

Data collection was not a one-off event with a constant comparative analysis taking place as data was being collected. This is illustrated in Figure 3.7.

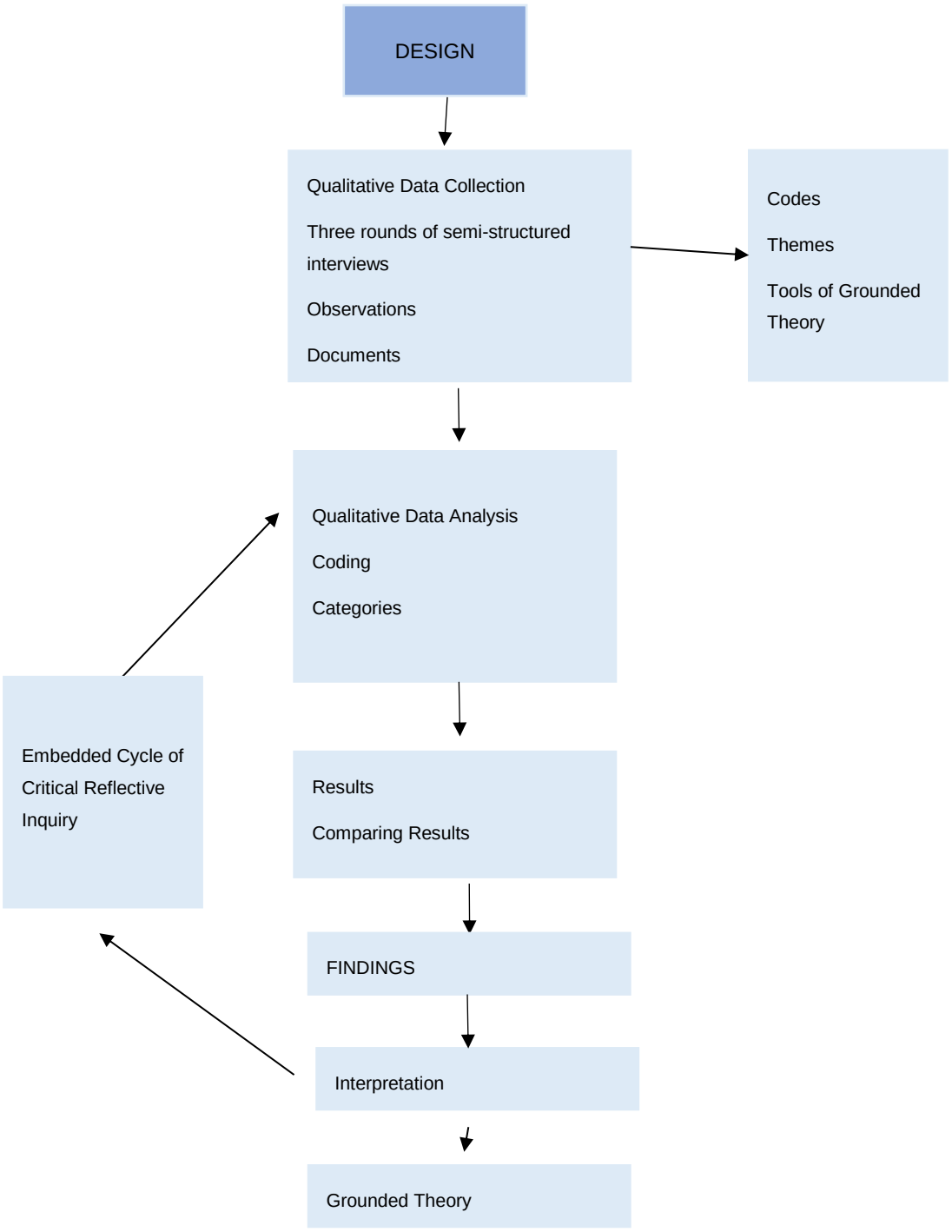


Figure 3. 7 *Data Analysis*

Data analysis and construction of theory is an "evolving process" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 2). Figure 3.8 refers to the process of treating and analysing the data. Data analysis involves interpreting and arranging all information obtained from interview transcripts, field notes and other material

collected to increase understanding of the data of what has been discovered. Creswell (2009) describes it thus:

> The researcher derives a general abstract theory of the process, action or interaction in the views of the participants…Two primary characteristics of this design are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximise the similarities and the differences of information (p. 13).

Grounded theory is a tool which enables the conceptualisation of the social patterns and structures through the process of constant comparison. A grounded theory approach is a way of thinking about the conduct of qualitative research. As such, grounded theory describes the purpose of the qualitative research, the role of the research, the stages of the research and the method of data analysis. As a research method, grounded theory enables the development of a theory which explains the research question. Put simply, grounded theory is the discovery of emerging patterns in the data and generation of theory from data (Walsh, Holten, et al., 2015). The grounded theory approach, however, has the aim, not of the discovery of a theory per se, but a theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation – in this instance the impact of critical reflection as part of the implementation of the national quality standard in one faith-based ECEC centre.

3.6.3 Coding

As indicated in the preceding section of this chapter, an essential element of the data analysis involved coding the data. In order to enable a complete picture of the information procured during the data collection process three levels of analysis occurred (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). During the first facet of the coding process, open coding, the researcher analysed the data by constantly asking questions about what was and was not known. Contrasting categories, groupings, and dimensions within and among the data were recognised through an examination of parts or the whole document in a systematic manner (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

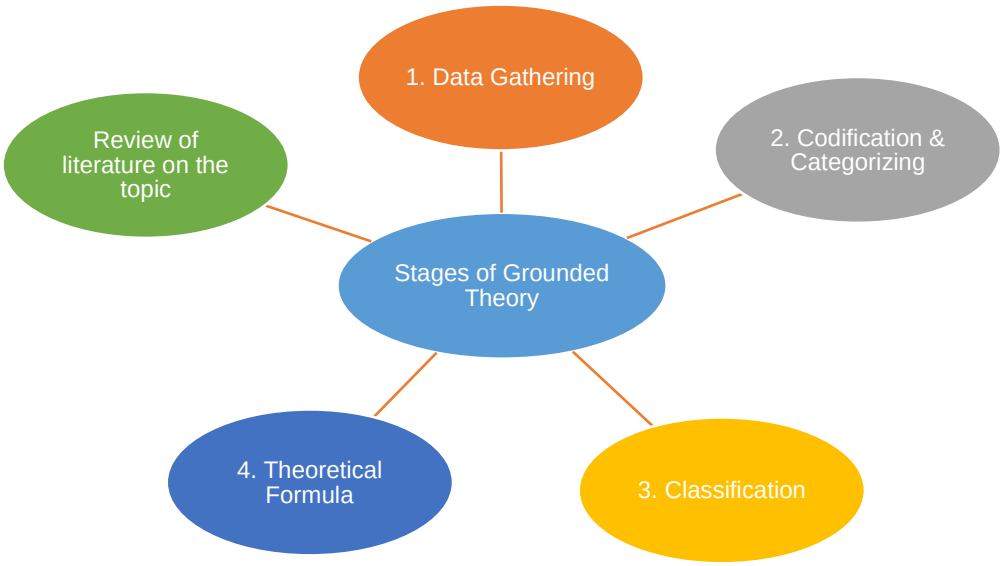


Figure 3. 8 *Methods of Treating and Analysing the Data*

To commence analysis, the researcher begins with the process of open coding. Open coding is a way of searching, comparing, conceptualising and categorizing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Line-by-line coding through this process makes it possible for the researcher to be enabled to identify categories and generate emergent codes. This then makes relevance of the emerging theory for the researcher to look at what direction to take in theoretical sampling.

Data must come from theoretical sampling which is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as:

> The process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects codes and analyses data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges (p. 45).

Glaser and Strauss outline that theoretical sampling is: "more difficult than simply collecting data from a pre-planned set of groups, since choice requires continuous thought, action and search" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 52). Coding of data is an ongoing process which allows the researcher to identify concepts or labelled phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The central topic of this study was the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS. Many topics or categories emerged from the data. Grouping and reduction were essential in order to keep the material manageable.

Axial coding as noted by Corbin and Strauss (2008) created subcategories and associates with "properties and dimensions" (p. 123) which allowed connections between categories within the data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define axial coding as "a set of procedures whereby data are put

back together in new ways after open coding, by putting connections between categories" (p. 123). A 'coding paradigm' according to Corbin and Strauss (2008) involves "conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences" (p. 191). Axial coding was the continuation of asking questions and making comparisons, with inductive and deductive thinking process to relate subcategories to a category (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Creswell (2012) states that theory is developed through axial coding where the categories are identified and related to subcategories.

Selective coding is explained by Corbin and Strauss (2015) as "the process of identifying and choosing the core category and systemically bringing together other categories, validating those similarities and relationships and then realizing categories requiring further refinement and development with integrating and refining the theory" (p. 43) by using categories and their associations with subcategories. It is the development of the narrative that connects the categories through which grounded theory emerges (Corbin & Strauss, 2015); through the process of integration, weaving and refining all the major categories into the selection of a core category.

For Corbin and Strauss, 2015 coding is the foundational analytic process used by the researcher, to structure the analysis process, and from which the researcher constructs codes, themes, descriptions, and theories. A tool that converts data to theory - an iterative and inductive process.

3.6.4 Constant Comparison, Memo Writing, Theoretical Sampling and Saturation

As the data was being gathered, first through the reflections and then through the hermeneutic-dialectic of the semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009), a key component is emergent design, a process of constant comparison (Blazey, 2009), adjustment and further exploration ensured authenticity and quality from the interviewee's perspective (Briggs, Coleman & Morrison, 2012). The constant comparative method amalgamates systematic data collection, coding and analysis amidst theoretical sampling to generate theory which is integrated, close to the data, and proclaimed in a coherent framework for more investigation (Merriam, 2009). This method is a continuous ongoing procedure, forming theories, confirming enhancements, or even discounting as a result of new data emerging from the study. Data analysis and data collection occur simultaneously throughout the duration of a qualitative study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Briggs et al., (2012) notes specifically what is meant by "trustworthiness" (p. 202), a term they prefer to the "equivalent validity and reliability", by quoting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) paradigm for trustworthiness as encompassing credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability, or known as quality. Bowen (2009) describes quality as encompassing

triangulation of data collection, member checking and an audit trail. Triangulation enhanced the quality of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) by incorporating member checks and participant involvement (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In addition to triangulation, the researcher incorporated continuous reflection, examination and exploration of relationships through all phases in the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Corbin and Strauss (2015) note that the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis generates theory systematically by using explicit coding and analytical procedures. This constant comparative analysis technique means comparing the data against itself, against the maturing original data, and against existing theoretical and conceptual claims. The constant comparative analysis technique also requires the examination of the data many times from different perspectives. In other words, codes are examined to identify similarities, differences or variations. Those that are similar are grouped together with a key word or category. As the data was reviewed, each new piece of data was compared, contrasted to previous data and sorted into the most relevant category. Once all the data were reviewed, the researcher looks for categories that can be collapsed. Finally, the researcher will look across the categories for themes to the data to identify similarities, differences or variations (Simulowitz, 2017).

Through this coding process, concepts and relationships were developed that guided the data collection and analysis process. Theoretical sampling was integral to the saturation of categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In order to achieve saturation, grounded theory analysis required a re-evaluation of concepts, themes and categories at numerous stages which form into hypotheses, and through selective coding integrates the contexts of the participants. Theoretical sampling involved sampling and selective coding to theoretically saturate the core and related concepts to weave together the concepts into a theory. Coding the data was an iterative process with member checking leading to the emergence of theory. Coding in this grounded theory approach was a precise method that moved from the transcription of basic details to categories and thus to theory.

Memo writing is a key component of grounded theory. Memos are notes placed on data or initial analyses of data outlining ideas or concepts that occur to the researcher when collecting or analysing the data and often when reflection on the data collected takes place (Creswell, 2013). To be effective memos need to be abstractions that relate to incidents, events or processes. They are not notes about the incidents or about the people in the events (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Closely associated with memos are diagrams that present visual representations of analytic thinking emphasizing relationships between categories and codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In this study, when the research was underway, theoretical sampling was decided by the analysis of previous data, making it possible to answer the questions that arose from the analysis of, and reflection on, previous data. Based on the initial findings, this researcher became aware of where to look next for the information required. Theoretical sampling included interviews with each of the participants; guidance from the data and the literature.

Theoretical saturation happens when theoretical sampling ceases. At this point nothing new is happening in the research as no additional data emerges to show new categories (Tay, 2014: Morse, 2004). In any grounded theory study, the primary goal for the researcher is to achieve data saturation (Charmaz, 2006) or what is called theoretical saturation or when coding for the category ceases. As the researcher sees the same data repeatedly, the researcher becomes confident of saturation in a category.

Saturation, in the context of grounded theory, as noted by Amsteus (2014), implies the point "when categories are completely explained and accounted for, and when relationships between them have been assessed" (p. 76). With a grounded theory study, an adequate theoretical sample, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), is determined by how widely the groups for saturating categories were chosen and according to the type of theory being developed. It is to be noted, however, with saturation and 'knowing' that there is always the potential that another participant will add a new perspective.

3.6.4 Constant Comparison, Memo Writing, Theoretical Sampling and Saturation

As the data was being gathered, first through the reflections and then through the hermeneutic-dialectic of the semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009), a key component is emergent design, a process of constant comparison (Blazey, 2009), adjustment and further exploration ensured authenticity and quality from the interviewee's perspective. (Briggs, Coleman & Morrison, 2012). The constant comparative method amalgamates systematic data collection, coding and analysis amidst theoretical sampling to generate theory which is integrated, close to the data, and proclaimed in a coherent framework for more investigation (Merriam, 2009). This method is a continuous ongoing procedure, forming theories, confirming enhancements, or even discounting as a result of new data emerging from the study. Data analysis and data collection occur simultaneously throughout the duration of a qualitative study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Briggs et al., (2012) notes specifically what is meant by "trustworthiness" (p. 202), a term they prefer to the "equivalent validity and reliability", by quoting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) paradigm for trustworthiness as encompassing credibility, dependability, transferability and

conformability, or known as quality. Bowen (2009) describes quality as encompassing triangulation of data collection, member checking and an audit trail. Triangulation enhanced the quality of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) by incorporating member checks and participant involvement (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In addition to triangulation, the researcher incorporated continuous reflection, examination and exploration of relationships through all phases in the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Corbin and Strauss (2015) note that the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis generates theory systematically by using explicit coding and analytical procedures. This constant comparative analysis technique means comparing the data against itself, against the maturing original data, and against existing theoretical and conceptual claims. The constant comparative analysis technique also requires the examination of the data many times from different perspectives. In other words, codes are examined to identify similarities, differences or variations. Those that are similar are grouped together with a key word or category. As the data was reviewed, each new piece of data was compared, contrasted to previous data and sorted into the most relevant category. Once all the data were reviewed, the researcher looks for categories that can be collapsed. Finally, the researcher will look across the categories for themes to the data to identify similarities, differences or variations (Simulowitz, 2017).

Theoretical sampling is closely connected with both constant comparison and memo writing as memo writing forces the researcher to theoretically code (Glaser, 1978, p. 85) amongst the various categories to "integrate those connections with clusters of other categories to generate the theory" (Glaser, 1978, p. 84). Memo writing is a key component of grounded theory. "The writing of theoretical memos is the core stage in the process of generating grounded theory. If the researcher skips this stage by going directly to sorting or writing up, after coding, she is not doing grounded theory" (Glaser, 1978, p. 83). The researcher documents ideas about the concepts or categories. "Each memo should be introduced by a title or caption which is the category or property that the memo is about" (Glaser, 1978, p. 87). Glaser defined memos as; "the theorising write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (Glaser, 1978, p. 83). The aim of memoing is to theoretically develop ideas (codes), with complete freedom into a memo fund that is highly sortable (Glaser, 1978).

Memos in the process of open coding serve to constantly compare incidents and compare categories and in this process produce more memos which develop concepts. Without memos, there are no theoretical ideas to sort, and density with interrogative richness and to write up (Glaser, 1978, p. 89). Sorting of memos then takes place by the researcher. "While ideational

memos are the fund of grounded theory, the theoretical sorting of memos is the key to formulating the theory for presentation to others whether in words or writing" (Glaser, 1978, p. 116). The memoing process helps the researcher determine which of the theoretical codes provides the best relational model to integrate the substantive theory because it is during memoing that different emerging theoretical codes are discussed and tried out as possible ways of organizing the grounded theory (Glaser, 2003, p. 31).

Each finding was compared with existing findings as it emerged from the analysis of the data. Glaser (1978) notes that:

> "The general procedure of theoretical sampling is to elicit codes from raw data from the start of data collection through constant comparative analysis as the data pour in…This process will continue until it is saturated, elaborated and integrated into the emerging theory" (p. 36).

In this study, when the research was underway, theoretical sampling was decided by the analysis of previous data, making it possible to answer the questions that arose from the analysis of, and reflection on, previous data. Based on the initial findings, this researcher became aware of where to look next for the information required. Theoretical sampling included interviews with each of the participants; guidance from the data and the literature.

Theoretical saturation happens when theoretical sampling ceases. At this point nothing new is happening in the research as no additional data emerges to show new categories (Tay, 2014: Morse, 2004). In any grounded theory study, the primary goal for the researcher is to achieve data saturation (Charmaz, 2006) or what is called theoretical saturation or when coding for the category ceases (Glaser, 1969). As the researcher sees the same data repeatedly, the researcher becomes confident of saturation in a category. This "intense property development" (Glaser, 2001, p. 191) produces the concept needed to fit the theory then as Glaser (2001) notes:

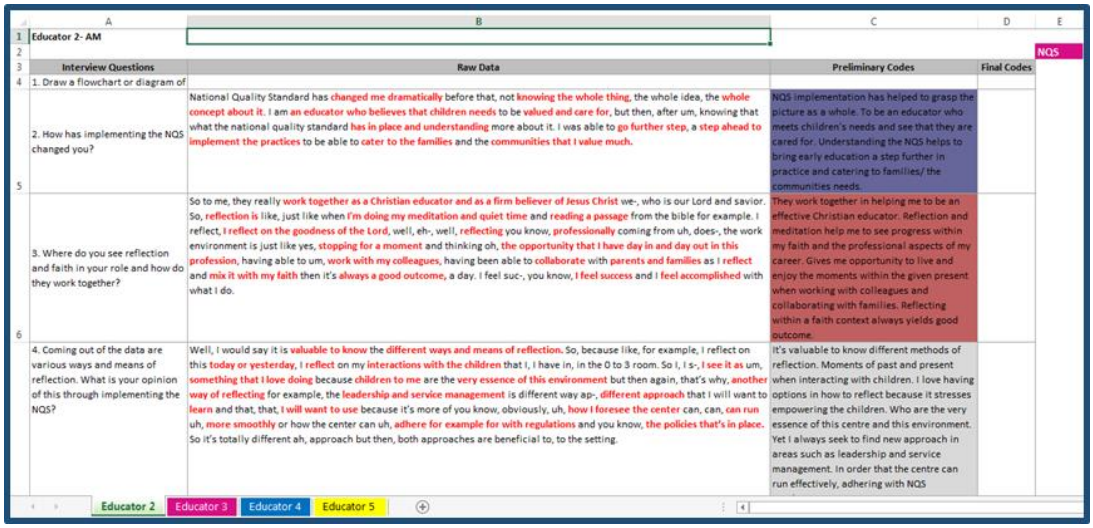
> Once a category is saturated it is not necessary to theoretically sample anymore to collect data for incident comparisons. And, of course, once many interrelated categories of a grounded theory are saturated, theoretical completeness is achieved for the particular research (p. 192).

Saturation, in the context of grounded theory, as noted by Amsteus (2014), implies the point "when categories are completely explained and accounted for, and when relationships between them have been assessed" (p. 76). With a grounded theory study, an adequate theoretical sample, according to Glaser and Strauss (2008), is determined by how widely the groups for saturating categories were chosen, according to the type of theory being developed. It is to be noted,

however, with saturation and ‘knowing’ that there is always the potential that another participant will add a new perspective.

3.6.5 Coding Tables:

Coding tables were established for each of the three rounds of semi-structured interviews to identify raw data with preliminary and final codes as illustrated in Figure 3.9.



	A	B	C	D	E
1	Educator 2- AM				
2					NQS
3	Interview Questions	Raw Data	Preliminary Codes	Final Codes	
4	1. Draw a flowchart or diagram of				
5	2. How has implementing the NQS changed you?	National Quality Standard has changed me dramatically before that, not knowing the whole thing, the whole idea, the whole concept about it. I am an educator who believes that children needs to be valued and care for, but then, after um, knowing that what the national quality standard has in place and understanding more about it. I was able to go further step, a step ahead to implement the practices to be able to cater to the families and the communities that I value much.	NQS implementation has helped to grasp the picture as a whole. To be an educator who meets children's needs and see that they are cared for. Understanding the NQS helps to bring early education a step further in practice and catering to families/ the communities needs.		
6	3. Where do you see reflection and faith in your role and how do they work together?	So to me, they really work together as a Christian educator and as a firm believer of Jesus Christ we-, who is our Lord and savior. So, reflection is like, just like when I'm doing my meditation and quiet time and reading a passage from the bible for example. I reflect, I reflect on the goodness of the Lord, well, eh-, well, reflecting you know, professionally coming from uh, does-, the work environment is just like yes, stopping for a moment and thinking oh, the opportunity that I have day in and day out in this profession, having able to um, work with my colleagues, having been able to collaborate with parents and families as I reflect and mix it with my faith then it's always a good outcome, a day. I feel suc-, you know, I feel success and I feel accomplished with what I do.	They work together in helping me to be an effective Christian educator. Reflection and meditation help me to see progress within my faith and the professional aspects of my career. Gives me opportunity to live and enjoy the moments within the given present when working with colleagues and collaborating with families. Reflecting within a faith context always yields good outcome.		
	4. Coming out of the data are various ways and means of reflection. What is your opinion of this through implementing the NQS?	Well, I would say it is valuable to know the different ways and means of reflection. So, because like, for example, I reflect on this today or yesterday, I reflect on my interactions with the children that I, I have in, in the 0 to 3 room. So I, I s-, I see it as um, something that I love doing because children to me are the very essence of this environment but then again, that's why, another way of reflecting for example, the leadership and service management is different way ap-, different approach that I will want to learn and that, that, I will want to use because it's more of you know, obviously, uh, how I foresee the center can, can, can run uh, more smoothly or how the center can uh, adhere for example for with regulations and you know, the policies that's in place. So it's totally different ah, approach but then, both approaches are beneficial to, to the setting.	It's valuable to know different methods of reflection. Moments of past and present when interacting with children. I love having options in how to reflect because it stresses empowering the children. Who are the very essence of this centre and this environment. Yet I always seek to find new approach in areas such as leadership and service management. In order that the centre can run effectively, adhering with NQS		

Educator 2 | Educator 3 | Educator 4 | Educator 5

Figure 3. 9 *Coding of Interview Transcripts Exemplar 1*

3.6.6 Personal Reflections

The Director's weekly provocations (Figure 3:10), and the researcher's reflections on each of these provocations, was shared with the educators in the centre throughout this 60-week period.

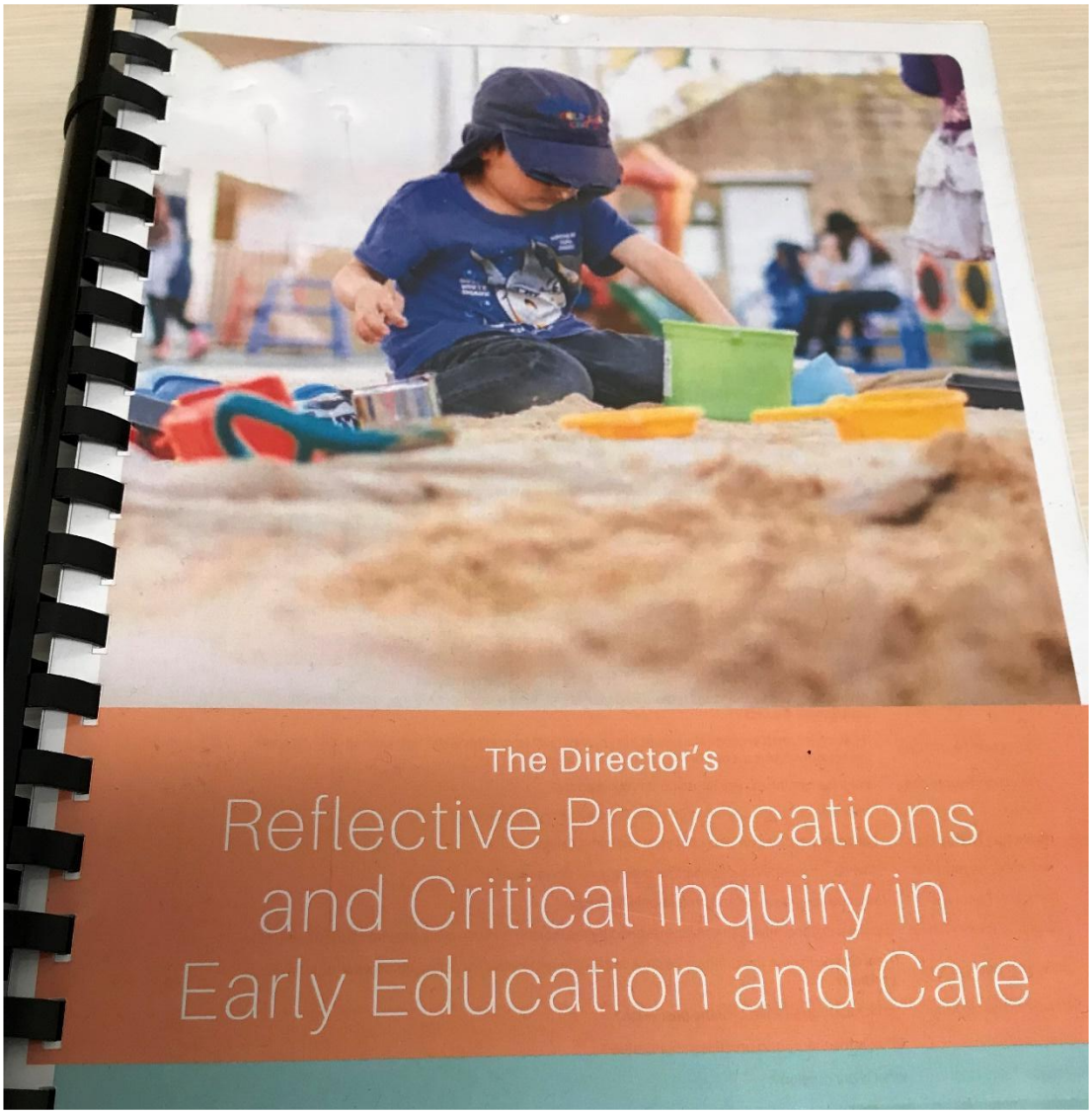


Figure 3. 10 *Director's Provocations*

In addition, the researcher maintained a personal journal and also developed a journal for educators (Figure 3:11) which was further extended with the use of reflective cards used for further provocations (Figure 3:12).

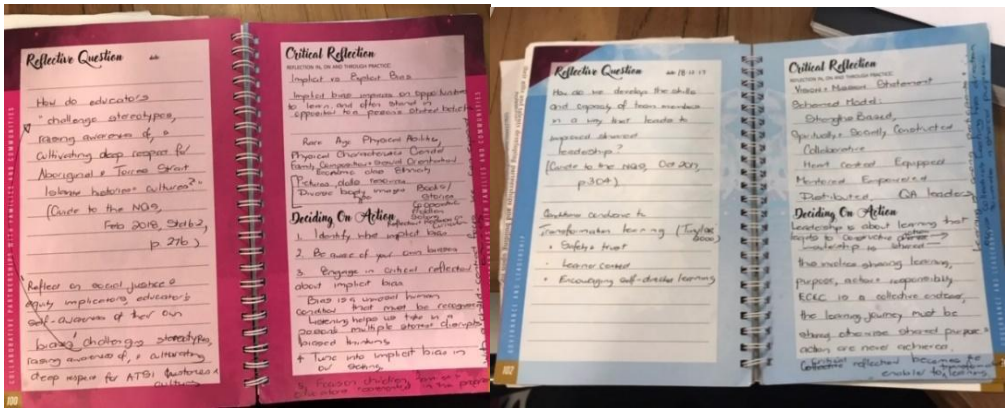


Figure 3. 11 *Staff Reflective Journal Exemplar*

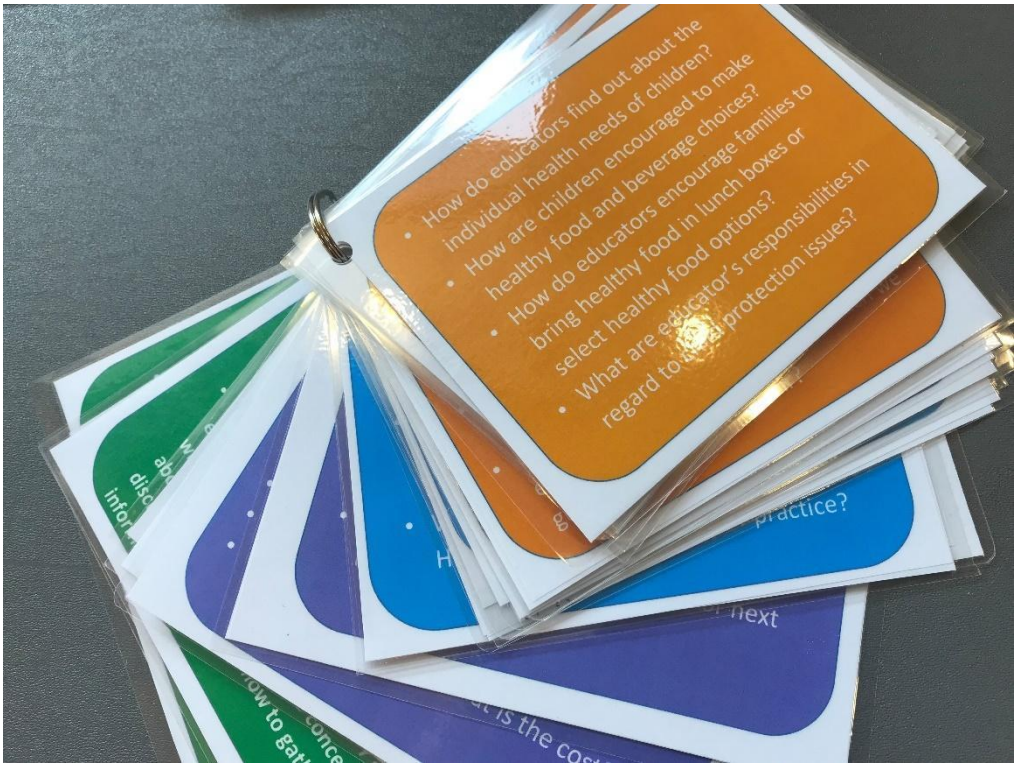


Figure 3. 12 *Reflective Card Provocations*

3.6.7 Themes

Tables of Findings for each of the research questions for each educator in each of the semi-structured interviews were established identifying major themes and sub-themes along with data sources identified. Tables of Findings were established for each of the research questions for each educator in each of the semi-structured interviews identifying major themes and sub-themes along with data sources (Figure 3.13).

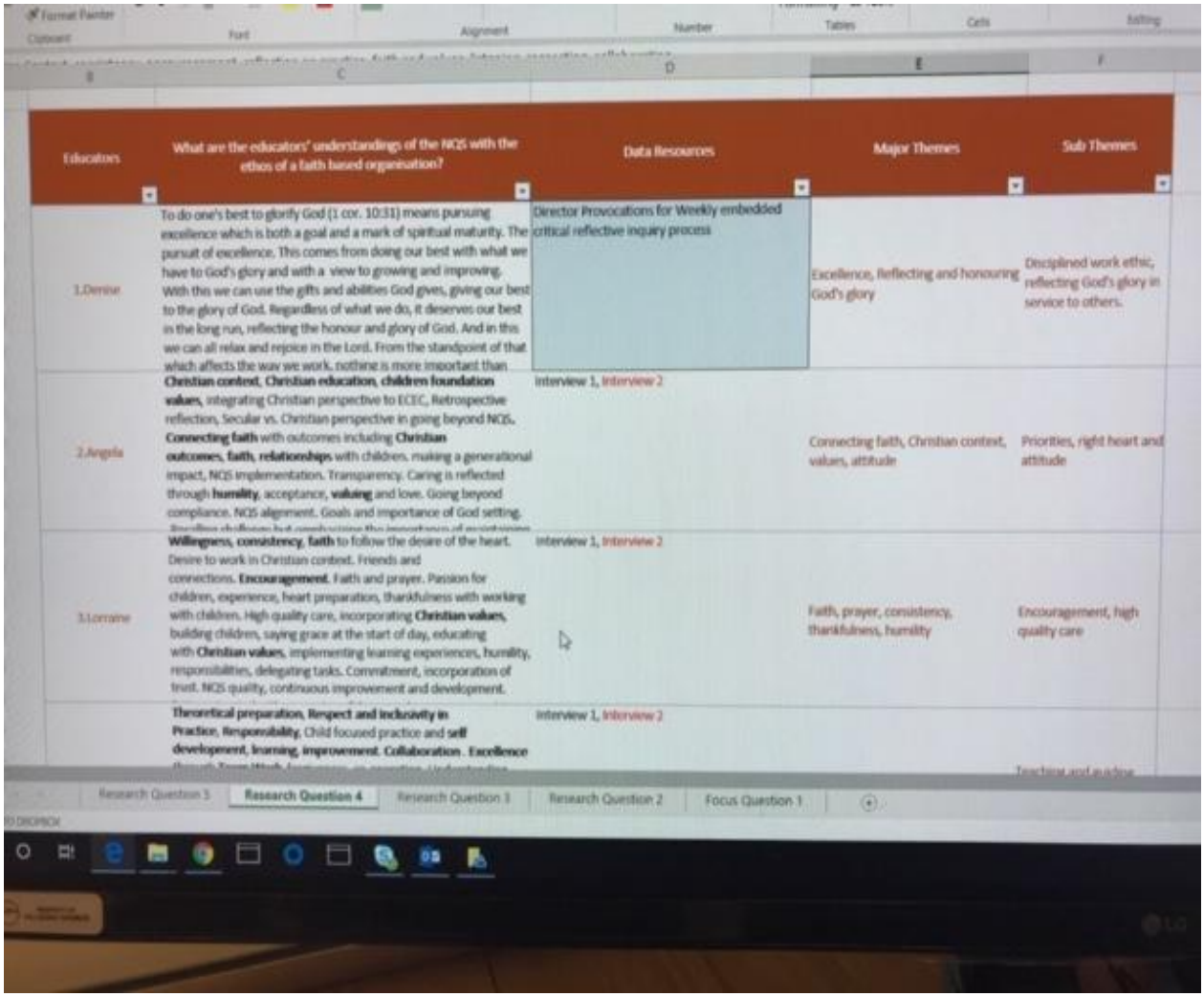


Figure 3. 13 *Themes Exemplar*

Through the interview process, the educators were asked about the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS within their faith based ECEC centre and were able to identify eleven major themes which emerged from the Educators in this study. These were the core components within the data which are unpacked through these educators' perspectives and reveal what was important and why.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the use of a qualitative research design that included a bricolage of multiple sources, narrative inquiry and case study using the tools of grounded theory. Data collection procedures were discussed along with data analysis of the qualitative data, codes and themes. Grounded theory was chosen as the best fit for the study based on the nature of the

research and the aims of the research. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), grounded theory enables the identification of concepts and building of theory from qualitative data. More specifically, grounded theory seeks to identify and explain how and why people behave in certain ways, in similar and different contexts (Charmaz, 2014, Strauss & Corbin, 2015).

By applying the tools of grounded theory to the research question this research offers the possibility of the production of rich data and insightful findings which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings as they relate to the research questions posed in Chapter One of this study. This chapter is structured in the following main sections. First, a profile of the centre in which this study took place is presented. Next, a summary of group characteristics is discussed. Thirdly, participant profiles were developed to introduce the educator participants who shared their experience and facilitated this research. The subsequent sections consider the research questions and includes the themes which emerged from the data collection, coding, classification, categorisation and analysis processes (including the responses from participants in each of the three rounds of semi-structured interview questions) to answer each of the questions.

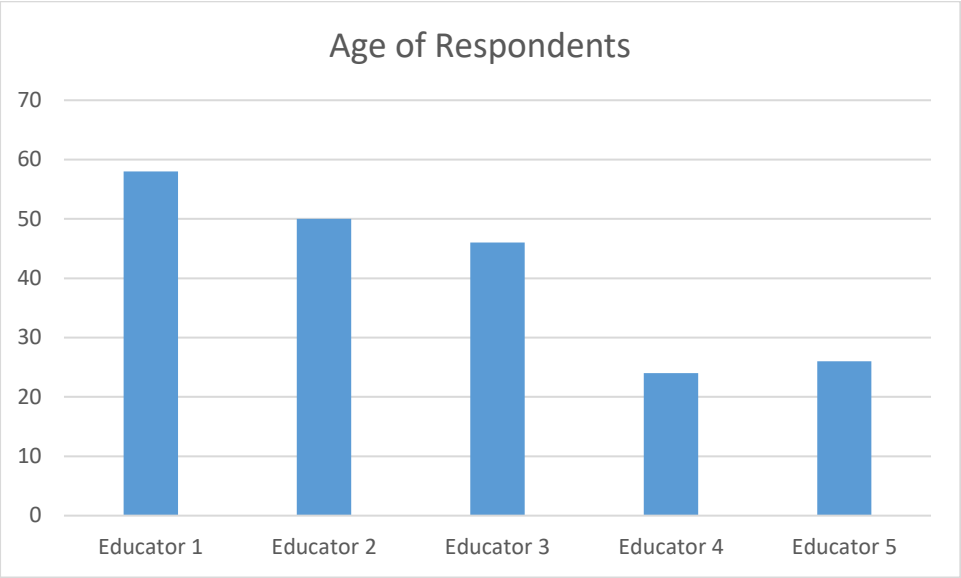
4.2 Centre Profile

The study site is a forty-place licensed and approved Early Childhood Education and Care service established in 2003 catering for children six weeks of age to six years, located in north west NSW. The Centre is committed to the best outcomes for children and families, striving to deliver best practice in Early Education and Care. The service aims to incorporate a Christian curriculum in the delivery of the educational program to support children's holistic development, to partner with families in their role as parents and demonstrate leadership in the ECEC sector.

4.3 Participant Profiles

This portion of the chapter presents the participant profiles. The profile of the respondents is looked upon in terms of age, gender, educational attainment and length of stay in the ECEC sector and, in particular, the ECEC faith-based centre in which this study takes place and enlarges through vignettes of each respondent. The participant profiles were created as a result of observation, interviews and document analysis. The profiles are presented as a guide to the analysis and results of the data gathered. A summary of the group characteristics is presented in the following figures. Pseudonyms are used for each of the participants - Denise (educator one), Angela (educator two), Lorraine (educator three), Sally (educator four), and Emily (educator five).

4.3.1 Age of Participants



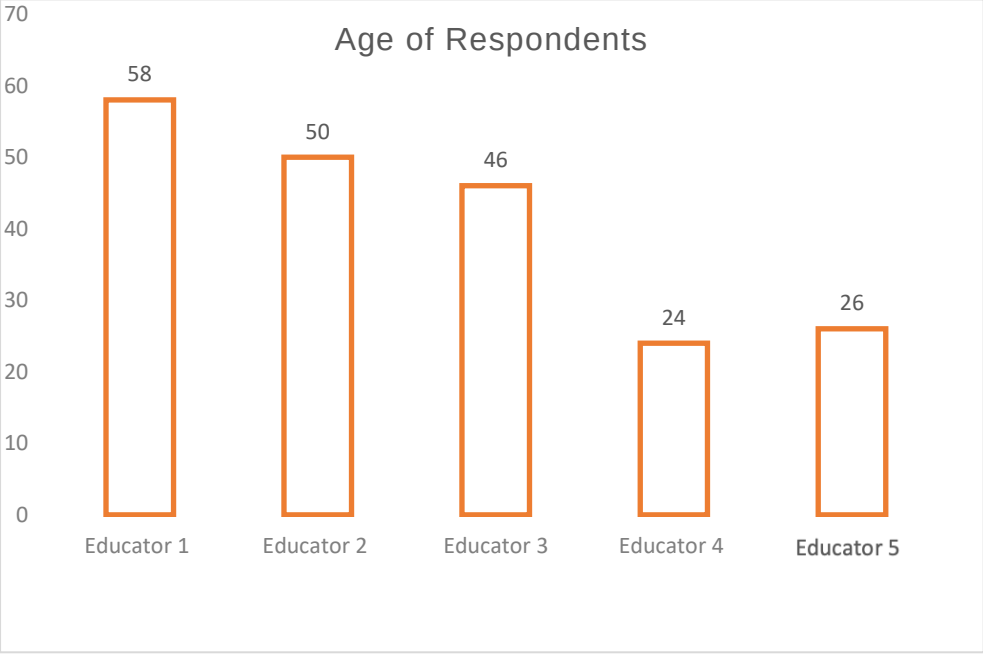


Figure 4. 1 *Participant Profiles – Age of Respondents*

4.3.2 Gender of the Participants

All participants in this study are female.

4.3.3 Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Educator one has a four-year Early Childhood degree as does Educator Five. These educators' degrees have a specialisation in Early Childhood and support teaching of children birth to twelve years of age. Educator Two has a Diploma Level Children's Services qualification and has completed over 50% of an Early Childhood teaching qualification. Educator Three has a Diploma Level Children's Services qualification. Educator Four completed a four-year Early Childhood teaching degree for children aged zero to twelve years of age specialising in Early Childhood throughout the duration of the research study period between 2014 and 2018.

4.3.4 Length of Stay in the ECEC Sector

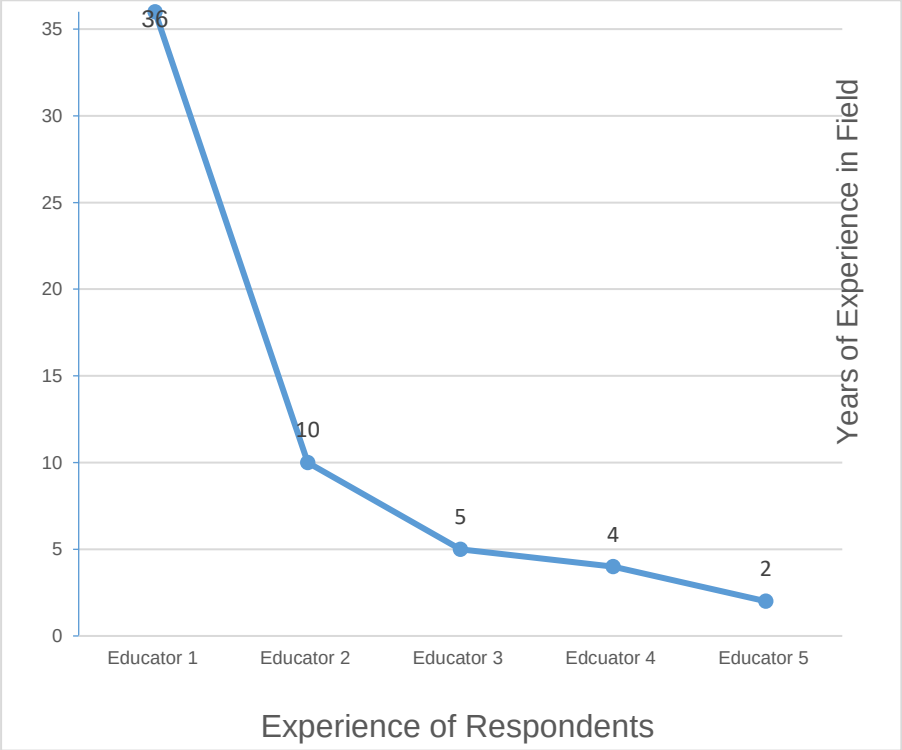


Figure 4. 2 *Participant Profiles – Experience of Respondents*

The figure above shows the distribution of the respondents in terms of their length of stay in the ECEC sector. It shows that the respondents have worked in the sector from two to 36 years.

4.3.5 Educator Profiles

The following vignettes provide a portrait of each educator respondents in this study.

4.3.5.1 Educator One: Denise

Educator one, known as Denise, is a female 59-year-old female director educator who has over 36 years' experience in ECEC and postgraduate qualifications. An educator at this faith-based ECEC Centre since 2003.

4.3.5.2 Personal Philosophy of Early Education and Care

"My passion is seeing best practice in Early Education and Care implemented and embedded in our faith-based context to deliver lifelong outcomes for children, support for families and growth for our AMAZING team! I believe in the unique potential of each child, with unique capabilities and competence. A child can share their journey, their interests and learning as they grow. A child is like us all, in the journey of growth and development, learning each day and reliant on support and care to progress, full of potential with inherent strengths to be drawn out. Children learn best through their environments and the people with whom they have engaged and positive relationships. I want each child to feel valued, believed in and see them learn good boundaries which will support them in their growth and development. I want children to achieve their best. As educators, we put this into our practice through current research and embedded critical reflection to equip each team member. Educators are core learners alongside children with reciprocal, respectful and equitable relationships engaging in pedagogical practice listening and viewing children from a holistic perspective, focussing on the positive image of the child, supporting children in learning their strengths, value, self- confidence, identity and independence. Educators support extend and scaffold children's interests with intentional teaching, loving care and fun, safe environments. Learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when educators work in partnership with families (DEEWR, EYLF, p. 12). As educators, we have a responsibility to listen, respect and support families in the parenting journey and educational process. Families are the child's first teacher and decision making is best facilitated where families and educators work together in partnership for the best outcomes for children."

The skill set identified for Educator One included valuing input which means for her in her practice collecting and sharing all kinds of information with a real sense of responsibility to follow through with what she says she will do.

4.3.5.3 Educator Two: Angela

Educator Two, known as Angela, is a 51-year-old female diploma qualified educator who has been in ECEC profession for six years functioning as Room Leader across all age group from 0-5

and 2IC in the absence of the Nominated Supervisor. Educator Two is currently undertaking a Bachelor of Education in ECEC, birth to five years at Charles Sturt University through distance education and has been working in the Early Childhood Industry for almost 10 years.

4.3.5.4 Personal Philosophy of Early Education and Care

"My passion in this service is seeing children, families, and educators starting and ending their day on a positive note. I love to work alongside people in our service to bring out their best whether it is children, educators or families. I believe that children are capable and competent learners. As an educator, I believe that I am able to equip children, as well as being blessed to be a blessing to the children. Families are also foundational to children's holistic growth and development. That is where children's sense of being, belonging and becoming is developed and nurtured. Partnering with families ensures that we continuously nurture children's wellbeing in these areas."

The skill set identified for Educator Two included confidence in her practice in which she believes her decisions are right and enjoys close relationships with others.

4.3.5.5 Educator Three: Lorraine

Educator Three, known as Lorraine, is a 46-year-old female diploma qualified educator with three years' experience in ECEC.

4.3.5.6 Personal Philosophy of Early Education and Care

"I believe that children need an exciting, supportive, safe and secure learning environment to learn about themselves, to flourish and develop their own identity, to develop their competence and to become an active learner. I also believe that children need to feel safe, secure and supported to grow in confidence to explore and learn. As an Educator, I am passionate to support and empower them in all areas of their learning experiences to achieve the best outcomes. To build and establish children's growth and development through consistent and warm nurturing relationships. I love seeing children excited and happy when they are with us".

Educator Three is keenly aware of the need to treat people the same, which means in her practice, clear rules need to be established and adhered to. The process of learning for this educator is more important than the outcome.

4.3.5.7 Educator Four: Sally

Educator Four, known as Sally, is a 26-year-old female educator who has completed a degree of Bachelor in ECE, birth to twelve years at Macquarie University during the period of study.

Educator Four is an educational leader and room leader. This educator has been at this ECEC Centre since 2014 and had prior experience in ECEC for almost seven years.

4.3.5.8 Personal Philosophy of Early Education and Care

"I believe that children are extremely capable and confident learners. I believe that as children play, they explore their experiences, ideas and theories. I also believe that families are children's most valuable and meaningful teachers and partnering with families is a vital element in knowing and planning for children holistically. As an educator, I am passionate about empowering children in their learning journey, no matter what age they are. I believe my job is to know and love these children, to facilitate, guide and nurture their learning and development, and to share their significant and unique learning through authentic interactions."

Educator Four highly values meeting new people and derives satisfaction in her practice from being productive.

4.3.5.9 Educator Five: Emily

Educator Five, known as Emily, is a 27-year-old female educator with a degree of Bachelor in ECE, birth to twelve years at Macquarie University. Educator Five is an Early Childhood Teacher who has been working at this ECEC Centre since 2015 with two years prior experience.

4.3.5.10 Personal Philosophy of Early Education and Care

"My passion is to ensure children are going home happy, excited to share about their day and feeling safe and excited to come back again. I believe that children are curious about their world, that they have a desire to learn, and that they are enthusiastic about their learning processes. As an educator, I believe that I can facilitate their learning and guide them through their adventures in play. I believe play is learning, and my role is to guide children through open-ended questions, to observe and facilitate, and get children to continuously think and wonder."

The skills set for Educator Five identified that she prefers to take things as they come which means in her practice she prefers to 'go with the flow' and is adept at dealing with problems to figure things out.

4.3.5.11 Summary of Educator Profiles

In summary, the educators in this study are a diverse group of people, a competent team of ladies, educated and experienced with a variety of skill sets which all contributes to a rich learning environment for the ECEC centre to operate effectively. Each of the participants in the study completed the Gallop-Clifton Strengths Finder assessment tool which examined the skills

of executing, influencing, relationship building and strategic thinking. Leaders with dominant strengths in the executing domain know how to make things happen, launch an idea or implement a solution. Leaders with dominant strengths in the influencing domain are those who lead by influencing others through speaking up, and ensuring the group is heard. Leaders with dominant strengths in relationship building create group and organisations that are much greater than the sum of their parts. Leaders with dominant strengths in strategic thinking absorb and analyse information to help the team make better decisions. Shills sets of respondents were evidenced as:

- Educator One: Executing and Strategic Thinking
- Educator Two: Executing and Relationship Building
- Educator Three: Executing and Relationship Building
- Educator Four: Influencing and Relationship Building
- Educator Five: Executing and Relationship building

These differences may give these educators a different lens to view their work and consequently, they may professionally behave in different ways. There is hence richness by having a variety of perspectives come together through the process of critical reflection.

4.4 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard in one faith-based Early Education and Care centre?
2. How do you effectively implement critical reflection in an ECEC centre?
3. How does critical reflection contribute to the effective functioning of an ECEC centre?

Each will now be considered in turn.

4.4.1 Research Question One: What is the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard in one faith-based Early Education and Care centre?

In discussing critical reflection in the ECEC centre, a number of themes emerged from the data. The participants of the study agreed that critical reflection impacts ECEC in a number of ways:

4.4.1.1 Educators engage in authentic reflection

The first theme to emerge concerns authentic reflection. When critical reflection is implemented within ECEC, there is a need for educators to be true to themselves and honest. On several occasions, the participants mentioned that they really value the fact that because critical reflection is mandated, and educators have to reflect, that they are engaged in authentic reflection. It became obvious that it was important to educators that they were open and honest with each other as they engaged in the process of critical reflection and that it was truly very authentic. This involves looking at real world scenarios, levelling with each other, working on real problems and coming up with concrete solutions.

Educator Two in the third interview described authentic reflection as:

> This process is very valuable because it opened up avenues for me personally and for educators to engage truthfully. I will say truthfully in critically reflective practice and awareness of the topics...it's very important...truthfulness is your practice, your belief, your voice, your perception...if there is no truthfulness in the way we express or the way we contribute in critical reflection it's just a process that we are just trying to say things for the sake of saying it, but if it is made of what you know, what you realise, and what you really want to contribute then it is quality reflection and that's why it is important....I'm free 100% to be able to express myself and express what I know.

Educator Three described authentic reflection as:

> An ongoing process because every day is a different experience so every day we can improve and do the best for our children, our centre, our colleagues and establish concrete solutions, development, changes and revision if we need it.

Educator Two further described authentic reflection in the third interview as:

> Talking to others, bringing the bigger perspective, thinking about the negatives and the positives and being respectful. It's about expressing what you feel and why you feel it and then working through what others feel and what they feel and having that professional discussion.

It is no coincidence that coming out of the interviews the participants stressed that authenticity is a very important part of critical reflection. Using authentic reflection in the critical reflection process enables educators to become attuned to core issues in the environment, context and team, foster critical thinking, active learning, and think about how to continue to develop. Authentic reflection is described as educators reflecting honestly and being engaged in the process where they really want others to know what they think and feel. Authentic reflection is about educators being true to each other. Being true to the process is critically important. To be authentic is to be genuine, honest and real and to feel comfortable with the understanding of context, environments

and relationships to provide an understanding of what is happening within the context, environment and relationships, and is an outcome of mandating critical reflection in ECEC.

4.4.1.2 Educators collaborate and work as a team

During the interviews, the participants responded that a very important outcome that came out of the critical reflection process was that they all work together as a team and collaborate. Collaboration is best defined as a partnership and a very important characteristic of critical reflection within a service.

Educator Two in the third interview described critical reflection within collaboration as:

> The staff working together, working so that we are complimenting each other. It helps to understand each other better like the strengths that we have discovered in ourselves that allow us to pinpoint what we are good at and what others are good at.

Collaboration is important in critical reflection to determine what is working and why. Collaboration in critical reflection does this because it provides educators with the opportunity to examine, affirm and critique experiences in a meaningful way. Reflecting with others helps educators come up with new ideas and clarify opportunities for further development. Collaborative approaches are foundational to effective pedagogy in ECEC and critical reflection together with other educators is an important feature of effective ECEC. Collaboration takes place when members of the inclusive ECEC learning community work together as equals to support children to achieve positive outcomes in learning.

Critical reflection within a collaborative approach offers educators an opportunity to learn from and support each other and importantly share the daily workload. Critical reflection results in improving child learning and creating the type of ECEC centre that everyone searches for when they decide to become an educator. Collaborative critical reflection makes educators more able to focus on the skills of children, plan effectively to enhance learning and build relationships with their families to deliver high quality programs. Collaborative critical reflection is linked to understanding through guidance, listening and growth in daily practice.

The collaborative approach is articulated in the NQS in valuing diversity with the expectation that everyone contributes to continuity in teaching and learning. Working collaboratively is about collegiality where the team benefits from the skills and abilities that each individual brings to the team. This way of working means that the team becomes more than the sum of its parts, rather, through cooperation, and critical reflection, through which professional practice is enhanced with what educators offer individually.

4.4.1.3 There is a focus on real outcomes for ECEC

An important aspect of critical reflection as identified by the participants of the study is that there needs to be an action that leads to real outcomes for stakeholders as a result of the critical reflective process. In other words, when educators critically reflect, they are going to decide on an action and do something – action to emerge from the critical reflection process. Therefore, one of the frameworks we want to have is action outcomes of the critical reflection process.

Educator Three in the third interview described an action that leads to real outcomes as a result of the critical reflective process:

> Reflective practice is a continuous process that involves analysing our practices that helps us develop the best outcomes. It is a method of self-assessing our thoughts and our actions with the purpose that it will help us personally to grow and to develop...it is analysing what is going on or what we need to improve and what I need to change to have the best outcomes for the children, families, centre, daily operation, daily practice, reflecting everyday what we have been going through. I do believe that everyone is reflecting by themselves, reminding each other what we need to improve and what things we need to work on. So, everyone is learning and participating. And if we have seen that something is not going well, we talk about it and discuss it and we address it straight away. What we need to do and improve upon for the best outcome for the centre. Honest communication that's the best thing we can do. Everyone is very willing to accept correction, improvement and suggestion and everyone can work together.

Educator Three in the third interview further described action leading to outcomes through critical reflection:

> The best outcome is having the NQS embedded in our practice, in our centre. Because everything was established, we have solid and concrete policies and procedures, we have a quality improvement plan in every area and we have every member willing to contribute to the improvement of our centre, to national laws and regulations.

Educator Two in the third interview described constructive action that leads to real outcomes:

> I think the outcome is that it (the NQS) has pushed us to do better and that's embedded in our daily practice. It's an attitude. We all as a team are very aware of what the standard is. It's an attitude of how can we further, how can we get better? Always reflecting. Where to next? The world is going to keep moving and we need to keep moving forward with that world and be one step ahead. What we're doing, why we're doing it. That's constantly the questions we need to be asking ourselves and the NQS is giving us that platform.

Educator Two in the third interview described the important outcomes of the NQS in:

> The practicality of what we're doing in relation to the NQS...the NQS in practice...what we're able to see.

Outcomes are an important component of practice. Within this, critical reflection as part of the NQS provides an opportunity in collectively comparing ECEC and determining effectiveness. Outcomes that come out of the critical reflective process are the constructive impact, the 'what we do' and 'who we do it with.' This provides advice to stakeholders about a program, what it provides, how it is unique and who it serves. Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of critical reflection on what the program offers or provides.

In ECEC, the approved learning framework, the Early Year's Learning Framework (EYLF), outlines the goals achieved by a child during their time in the ECEC centre. These outcomes cover five specific areas:

1. Children have a strong sense of identity;
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world;
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing;
4. Children are confident and involved learners;
5. Children are effective communicators.

The EYLF asserts that "...to engage children actively in learning, educators identify children's strengths and interests, choose appropriate teaching strategies and design the learning environment" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9). When educators make curriculum decisions, they base their decisions on what they know about each child and their strengths, needs, interests and abilities. They apply that knowledge to planned learning experiences, routines, interactions and the physical environment. Curriculum refers not only to specific planned activities but to all the planned and unplanned interactions, experiences, routines and events that occur in the early learning setting (ACECQA, 2011, p. 203; DEEWR, 2009, p. 9).

The EYLF recognises that "Partnerships involve educators, families and support professionals working together to explore the learning potential in everyday events, routines and play so that children are provided with daily opportunities to learn from active participation and engagement in these experiences" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12).

4.4.1.4 There is an emergence of new understandings

New understandings are an outcome of the process of critical reflection. This is because critical reflection involves observation, asking questions, and putting facts, ideas and experiences together to derive new meanings and understandings. This enhances an educator's ability to assess his/her own values, goals and progress. Knowledge, skill and understanding are pivotal to

ECEC - everyone wants the best outcomes with knowledge, well developed skills and understanding through critical reflection.

Educator Four in the third interview described this outcome of understanding as a result of critical reflection:

> I think there's definitely been progression as we got more comfortable with the process. There was kind of that uncertainty about what it was and what sort of things we were supposed to talk about and really think about but after that I was saying, "Oh, wow, now I know how it works," You are able to open up more and more and get deeper and deeper into your reflections as the questions come. I was more prepared to give an answer and more prepared to think, I am actually allowed to share my opinion and really open with what you believe and why you believe it.so it's given us a bit of room as we go on to think deeper because it's a bit broader. You actually have to think harder because you need to source out with them (other educators) and when sharing each other's answers, you'll be like, "Oh, wow, I didn't think of the question that way. On the board there will be a question and someone will write up an answer and there'll be the first answer on the board and like, "Oh, I wouldn't have answered it that way but wow, I actually agree with what you said," It pushes you to see others' perspectives and teams like being valued and heard when their perspectives are shown.

Collaboration linked to understanding was expressed consistently throughout the interviews with an example of Educator 4 describing the outcome of understanding through the process of critical reflection:

> Collaborative understanding based on beliefs providing opportunities to guide others, to listen, and grow in daily practice.

4.4.1.5 Educators take responsibility for continuous improvement

Responsibility is a character trait that encourages educators to respond to their actions and to the consequences of the actions that may occur. Responsibility is having a duty to deal with something. A responsible educator is one who can be trusted to act without needing strict supervision because he or she is accountable for his/her own behaviour. Responsibility for continuous improvement is important as an outcome of the process of critical reflection because it provides accountability for one's behaviour. Educator Three in the first interview described the responsibility of being an educator as:

> A role model with behaviour, attitude and character.

Responsibilities are the specific tasks or duties that members are expected to complete according to their roles. Defined responsibilities provide clarity, alignment and expectations for those

executing the work. Educators identified distribution of tasks across the team with everyone being aware of who is responsible.

Educator Three in the second interview described the outcome of responsibility through critical reflection with every person being assigned tasks to "Handle and take ownership of this responsibility" with allocated time complying with every aspect of a particular area and compliance in every area of daily operations. Educator Three in the second interview described the outcome responsibility through the process of critical reflection:

> Ownership, commitment in the centre and making sure that I adhere to implementing everything, our policies and practices within the context of the NQS and taking the initiative to progress like reading and updating oneself along with doing my very best to really contribute for the benefit of our centre and working with the team reflecting, complying with rules and regulations and doing tasks with commitment...working together we need to comply with everything in line with the NQS.

4.4.1.6 There is improvement in leadership skills

A further outcome of the process of critical reflection as part of the implementation of the National Quality Standard is an improvement in educator leadership skills. For improvement to occur, it is important that educators are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, values and behaviours, and the ways in which they influence others. Awareness of all of these things can be increased through the process of critical reflection. In other words, critical reflection helps leaders to understand their leadership styles and helps maximise efficiency to achieve organisational goals. These outcomes of the reflective process provide for leadership potential to influence and drive the group efforts towards the accomplishment of goals. This outcome is described by Educator Four in the second interview:

> The NQS has helped me in a leadership role as well as show others. The NQS has facilitated my personal style of leadership quite well because it has given me a very clear set of steps to follow.

The purpose of leadership is to deliver results through others, develop more leaders and make the organisational vision come to fruition.

This outcome of leadership as a result of the process of critical reflection is further described by Educator Two in the second interview as:

> Everyone encouraging, everyone contributing...drawing everything I need to know, to learn from my Director and co-educators…. I am a hands-on leader.

> I want to model practices first, so I can develop others. The NQS contributes to my leadership style in such a way that I allow people that I work with to learn from what you know, from what they see from me as I model them and at the same time I give them liberty to explore by themselves as well as they get to know the NQS as they engage individually as we are equipping and empowering them....we have leaders in quality areas as far as NQS implementation is concerned. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to our reflective board, reflective questions and things like that.

Educator Two in the third interview described the outcome of leadership with collaboration through the process of critical reflection:

> I believe we have established a very effective system of collaboration between leadership, our educators and stakeholders to progress. To be really empowered. To move together. We've established a 'can do' culture. It's like a puzzle that is being put together, every piece is coming into place to fit in its proper place.

4.4.1.7. Summary and Discussion

The previous discussion of the themes has shown that the participants in this study overwhelmingly support the use of critical reflection in their Early Education and Care centre. Educators supported the idea that critical reflection has a positive impact and stated that the use of critical reflection helps educators to be authentic, supports collaboration, and achieves good outcomes for the centre fostering understanding and responsibility with an emphasis on leadership. All of these elements are positive for the centre which is richer because of the service's involvement in the process of critical reflection.

Having discussed research question one, there are some important sub-questions which help us to further understand the impact and role of critical reflection. Each of the sub-questions will be considered and the themes that emerged from the interviews discussed.

4.4.2 Research Question One: Sub-Questions

4.4.2.1 Research Sub-Question One: How does critical reflection impact the ethos / culture of an ECEC centre?

An important aspect of ECEC is the ethos and culture of the ECEC centre. During this research project educators were asked how they think that critical reflection, as part of the NQS, impacts the ethos of their faith-based organisation. Educators agreed that critical reflection impacts ethos and culture by encouraging educators to:

4.4.214.1 Reflect on Practice as it impacts Ethos

Reflection on practice as it impacts ethos occurs as educators think of a particular moment in time, ponder over it, go back through it and gain new insights into different aspects of the situation. This is described by Educator Two in the second interview:

> "The NQS has changed me dramatically...before that, not knowing the whole thing, the whole idea, the whole concept about it…knowing what the NQS was in place and understanding more about it, I was able to go a further step, a step ahead, to implement the practices to be able to cater to the families and the communities that I value...I was able to reflect on the work environment...with my colleagues…. collaborate with parents and families...reflect on this today and yesterday. I learned there is so much potential for me to grow and contribute to make this environment meet the highest standards."

Reflection on practice involves reviewing and evaluating past actions particularly on how particular practice impacts ethos in order to learn from those actions and apply the learning to future actions, an example is a 'critical incident' (Brookfield, 1995) which may prompt or challenge an educator's thinking for critical reflection (Schon, 1987).

Educators can make use of reflective writing to reflect on their practice as it impacts the ethos of the centre. This enables them to identify areas of their practice that are going well and areas that could be improved upon. This process of reflecting on what has gone well, and identifying areas that have improved, can lead to increased self-awareness, improved outcomes, and to improved learning (Regmi & Naidoo, 2013).

4.4.2.1.2 Consider the Context

Context is the circumstances and setting within which things occur. Educators in the present study thought that it is important to consider context as this helps to situate and connect a point of view, making it easier to understand. Educators think that considering the context will impact the ethos of their organisation. Educator Two in the third interview described the importance of context in impacting the ethos of their organisation through reflection:

> "Valuing educators in a way in which they can contribute. They have a voice in what they are doing (in the context). There are so many ways of sharing our ideas and reflections. For example, the reflection board. Everybody expresses what they want to in regard to practice...Educators are collaborative and proactive and knowledgeable of the NQS in practice and really embracing it through critical reflection."

Context is important in critical reflection because it makes the reflective process meaningful to the educators within it. Critical reflection must occur in an appropriate context with real problems and issues. The culture of the context must be one in which educators feel included,

respected and safe and one in which there is meaningful dialogue. Reflecting on real problems within the context provides educators with a need to know, a desire to enhance their skills and a commitment to solving problems that are important to them.

4.4.2.1.3 Use Values to build Ethos

Values are principles and standards of behaviour. Values are important to build ethos because they provide a shared set of principles and a sense of purpose to a rewarding culture. This emerged through the reflective process as described by Educator Two in the first interview:

> Values are very important because that is where children feel secure.... values are in practice connect to the NQS....support confidence and come from educators for children to flourish; as an educator you live and breathe your values."

Our values are important because they help us grow and develop and collectively contribute to the ethos of the ECEC centre. The decisions we make are reflected by our values and beliefs, and they are always directed towards establishing a specific culture within ECEC.

4.4.2.1.4 Implement an Ethos of Improvement

Ethos is a set of ideas and attitudes associated with a particular group or a particular type of activity. When looking at how educators think critical reflection may impact the ethos of their organisation, they supported the idea that the reflective process can cultivate an ethos of continual improvement. As described by Educator Two in the first interview:

> "My goal of learning every day and contributing and doing more for the children and for the environment and for all stakeholders."

Educator Four in the first interview further described how educators think that critical reflection as part of the NQS builds an ethos of improvement:

> "Without critically reflecting we won't, or I wouldn't know what I was doing wrong or what I'm doing correctly or what I could improve in. So, without that I'll be stuck in a rut in a way...I would not be giving my best. So, I like to reflect critically and to improve so that is why we have discussions with our team about what we have been doing, what we can do, what we can improve on and what we have noticed...and while I reflect I can think about what we can do next, how we can improve..."

Educator Two in the second interview described how critical reflection is linked to an ethos of improvement "Is to pursue the goals being put into place...having a positive mindset...engaging in critical reflection."

If used effectively and purposefully, reflection facilitates ongoing personal and professional learning and creates and develops educators capable of demonstrating their progression towards the learning outcomes and required standards. An ethos of improvement emerging from the reflection process can provide a structure to make sense of learning so that concepts and theories become embedded in practice, and constant and innovation are simultaneously fostered.

Educators are thereby able to use their collective knowledge and perspectives through critical reflection to improve practice and the overall quality of Education and Care experiences for children can improve. The benefits of applying continuous improvement include a proactive learning culture. An important goal of a continuous improvement program is to motivate and enable educators to share their skills and knowledge outside of their immediate team.

4.4.2.1.5 Encourage a Culture of Listening

Educators think that critical reflection as part of the NQS will impact the ethos of their organisation through encouraging a culture of listening. Educator Two in the third interview described the impact of encouraging a culture of listening:

> "Taking the time to listen...being very respectful in the way you're reflecting and taking on board what other people say and processing those things in a way that is hopefully unbiased. Being authentic ...representing the whole service. Taking everybody's perspective...everybody having a say. ...professional discussion can happen when people's voices are heard."

Listening is the most fundamental component of interpersonal communication skills and the key to effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages can easily be misunderstood. Listening is, therefore, an important skill in all aspects of life, including critical reflection. Regardless of how engaged we are in listening, it is important to understand that listening involves more than just hearing what is directed at us. Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear. An effective listener must hear and identify the speech sounds directed towards him/her, understand the message of those sounds, critically evaluate or assess that message, remember what has been said, and respond to the information received. Effectively engaging with all five stages of the listening process helps us best gather the information we need.

Active listening is used to confirm what the listener has heard and to confirm the understanding of both parties. Used in critical reflection, active and effective listening can reduce misunderstanding, strengthen cooperation and foster understanding to interpret and assess what is heard, understand its context or relevance, recognise unstated assumptions, make logical

connections between ideas and draw conclusions. Engaging in focussed, effective listening enables the collection of information that best promotes critical reflection and successful communication to resolve conflicts, build trust, inspire people and strengthen teams. Reflective listening enables understanding a speaker's idea, rephrasing the idea back to the speaker and confirming understanding along with mirroring the mood of the speaker to reflect the emotional state with words and nonverbal communication.

The value of listening when reflecting on practice to others' views and perspectives was acknowledged by all educators.

4.4.2.1.6 Build a Culture of Respect

Educators think that critical reflection as part of the NQS builds a culture of respect which impacts the ethos of their faith-based organisation. Educator Three in the second interview described how critical reflection builds on a culture of respect:

> "Respecting others through your relationships and trying to put yourself, like the empathetic side of it, like understanding, this is your role, this is my role. Let's actually discuss this and we need to resolve this with as little conflict as possible… you're not loving me in my role if we're going to argue about this. Let's actually discuss this in a critical way that's going to benefit all parties."

Respect is a building block of healthy relationships and a pattern of behaviour that builds feelings of trust, safety and well-being. People who respect each other trust and support each other and value each other's independence. Receiving respect from others is important as it helps us to feel safe and to express ourselves even when perspectives are different, and you do not agree with them. This is why respect is important to the critical reflection process.

Respect is a pattern of behaviour found in healthy relationships. Respect is a very important component of both personal identity and interpersonal relationships. To feel respected could be considered a basic human right.

The word respect comes from the Latin 'respectus' meaning attention, regard or consideration. It is a concept that refers to the ability to value and honour another person with acceptance of the other person. Without respect interpersonal relationships will be filled with conflict and dissatisfaction. If we don't respect others, they will not respect us and if we don't respect ourselves, we will not be respected by others. Respect is essential to feel safe. Being respectful of others, being respected and respecting ourselves increases our well-being.

4.4.2.1.7 Develop a culture of Collaboration

The importance of working together was consistently identified by educators to support working together to deliver the NQS outcomes required. All educators highlighted the importance of working together and cooperating with reflection identified in context, on context and through the context in the implementation of the NQS.

Educators identified that critical reflection as part of the NQS requires collaboration impacting the ethos of their faith-based organisation. Educator Three in the first interview described how "Community collaboration is vital with relationships…that helps us to support relationship building... it's an interesting thing...our practice...what we are implementing…you've got to talk the talk that you are doing and see it in program and practice."

4.4.2.1.8 Facilitate a better ECEC environment

Educators revealed that critical reflection as part of the NQS facilitates a better ECEC environment which impacts the ethos of their faith-based organisation. As described by Educator Four in the first interview:

> "My role as an educator is to build up the next generation and contribute to this world positively...to teach...to influence... to build up...to advocate." This Educator further described:
>
> "You want to contribute to the benefit of the centre…reflect every day if we need to improve something…we are committed to continuous improvement in our service. You know, like before, I'm hesitant, I'm scared, Can I do this? But I think the support you...the leaders giving motivation and encouragement. It's great… can flourish...we are doing the best practices…"

4.4.2.1.9 Promote Effective Leadership

Effective leadership is promoted through critical reflection and impacts the ethos of their faith-based organisation through enabling leaders to understand the impact of their decisions on the service and align this with organisational goals and accountability for results.

This was described by Educator Four in the first interview as:

> "Leading the team, overseeing educators, supporting them in their roles, providing them with information and supporting them with documentation, encouraging, relationship building, overseeing quality."

Educator Four in the first interview further described how effective leadership is promoted through critical reflection:

> "Coming from people within the service, from the Director and the Church family and also from networking with other services... it's the underlying beliefs and values embedded in our practice."

Educator Four in the third interview further described:

> "Always trying to bring your best and bring out the best in others...it's building others up, recognising their strengths, doing the journey with them, leading them along the way, it's a partnership walking with them and learning from each other."

4.4.2.1.10 Encourage Authenticity

Educators think that critical reflection as part of the NQS will impact the ethos of their faith-based organisation through encouraging authenticity. Educator Two in the third interview described how authenticity is encouraged through critical reflection:

> "The provocations, the questions are valuable...the critical reflections on our views is helping us learn and grow, we're not stuck, every day we are learning and growing and building on each other's knowledge, refining, strengthening our views, values and knowledge."

Educator Two in the third interview further described how critical reflection as part of the NQS encourages authenticity:

> "Giving voice shows that I'm not wrong, I might have doubts in myself, but through this (reflective) process it shows that we can have different answers and that's ok."

4.4.2.2 Research Sub-Question Two: How does critical reflection influence the learning environment?

The second sub-question considers how the process of critical reflection in a faith-based ECEC centre influences the learning environment. In answering this research sub-question educators perceived that:

4.4.2.2.1 Reflective Evaluation Improves Practice

Reflective evaluation is important to the learning environment as part of critical reflection.

Educator Three described how reflective evaluation improves her practice:

> "I reflect on what I have done during the day and do I need to improve something on that particular area. To really improve...not just with the children, but the whole centre, your relationship with your colleagues, your practices, your routine, how you implement the program, the learning...it's learning all over...the whole centre...what you need to improve...we have to jot it down. We have to come up with the problem or the strategy that's not working well...we have to take initiative for developing ourselves. We have to

> take the initiative to progress and develop. The knowledge, the foundation that we have gained, our basis on how we can move on and flourish and progress.... we observe...we demonstrate. We review regularly...we review our practice in every aspect of our daily service operation."

Educator Three in the second interview further described this:

> "We have to check that we're really adhering to the NQS and doing the best practices...we have to make sure we're doing our best to meet our goals and assess our measures to see what we have accomplished...it's everyone's responsibility to participate, to contribute, to achieve, to demonstrate best practices, to be empowered….." Reflecting to align with the NQS...we have to check and reflect...going through every standard and outcomes."

Reflection is the process of reflecting on an experience in order to learn from that experience. Evaluation is the process of making an assessment about that experience. As part of effective critical reflection, it is important to both reflect on an experience (Johnson, 2015) and evaluate that experience.

4.4.2.2.2 Critical Reflection opens new possibilities for learning

The process of critical reflection was identified by educators in opening new possibilities for learning. As described by Educator Two in the first interview:

> "Every day is a different scenario…. different experiences that you encounter with the children…so you have to reflect…. it's a daily reflection."

Critically reflective educators are always thinking about how they influence and affect the learning and teaching environment. New possibilities for learning emerged as influencing the learning environment through the reflective process as educators are able to foster their own growth through the reflective process and remain open to continuous learning. As described by Educator Three in the first interview:

> "So, I like to say, you know, "What are we still doing it this way? Is this working the best it could? What can we do to further it? I like to talk things through. If I have an idea, I'm like 'Will this work?' and getting others' perspectives. I like to draw all over something or make a mind map. Once we understand the NQS, once we are able to articulate it...having been mentored in implementing the NQS just like learners being guided and equipped in implementing the national quality standards in what is required and access to the resources and things like that…"

Critical thinking is an essential life skill in the 21st century democratic society (World Economic Forum, 2014). Critical reflection fosters the development of critical thinking in educators. When educators enter a learning space where questions are asked about what is done and why, new

possibilities are opened with other ways of knowing and being and provide the foundation for better outcomes for children.

This foundation is the underlying base and provides the premise to move forwards. Within ECEC, the NQS provides the foundations of quality in that it brings the seven key quality areas together that are important outcomes for children. Quality Education and Care shapes every child's future and lays the foundation for development and learning (ACECQA, 2017). The NQS helps services and families with a better understanding of quality services and helps families to make informed decisions about the services providing Education and Care to their child.

4.4.2.2.3 Critical Reflection Helps to Identify Areas of Strength

The process of critical reflection in a faith-based ECEC centre influences the learning environment by helping to identify areas of strength. An educator who critically reflects on his/own practice, who examines his/her own interactions with children, assesses the quality of learning environments and experiences, and critiques his/own practice is using critical reflection to help identify areas of strength in his/her own professional practice. This enables an educator to develop deeper understandings, explore concerns, improve the program and raise the overall quality of Education and Care provided to children.

When an educator has been enabled to reflect on individual strengths, that educator is better able to understand how they work, and how to get more out of them, both individually and collaboratively. It is important to know yourself and your capacities. When educators have been enabled to identify areas of strength through the reflective process, they can better understand how they work and how they can improve. This was described by Educator Four in the third interview:

> "We're naturally good at something, it's going to help us feel better about ourselves because we're being used well...and because we're bringing something, it's like that sense of belonging, if you can contribute and if you can bring something really good that the team is valuing, it's going to help your sense of well-being to be, you know, lifted up, and your sense of self-esteem and your sense of worthiness in the workplace that is lifted."

Critical reflection in helping to identify areas of strength enables an educator to grow more, develop skills in self-directed learning, improve motivation and ultimately improve the quality of Education and Care provided.

Helping educators identify areas of strength is about seeking opportunities to increase confidence, enthusiasm and overall performance. Knowing educator strengths provides a better

understanding of educators and how each educator functions. When educators reflect on their strengths, they can better understand how they work and how they can improve.

4.4.2.2.4 Critical Reflection Increases Pedagogical Awareness

The process of critical reflection influences the learning environment through increased pedagogical awareness. Increased pedagogical awareness was described by Educator Four in the third interview:

> "It's not just children who need being, belonging, becoming, we all need it. And that's why leadership is so important and it's so great having Christian leadership because that's recognised because the focus is on the person...let's walk this journey together and learn from one another in the things we're good at and the things we know and the things we've experienced....empowering...mentoring...it's about everybody doing their part...we're all working together."

4.4.2.2.5 Critical Reflection Builds Better Connections to Children

Critical reflection increases awareness of the skills required in learning tasks to engage children in learning. In other words, the process of critical reflection influences the learning environment through better connections to children.

This was described by Educator 3:

> "When it comes it our colleagues our practice is based on understanding, respect and caring about each other and working together as a team In a Christian environment - we trust that we are looking after the children in a loving environment."

And further, by Educator 5:

> "Collaborating with everyone to make the environment an enjoyable workplace to be."

Critical reflection helps us to make good decisions, understand the consequences of our actions and solve problems, and follow through on goals. Through experimenting with different methods of examining and interpreting experiences to learn from those experiences, educators are more likely to communicate their feelings through critical reflection on their practice. This supports better connections with children. A relationship cannot survive on its own. It needs nurturing, giving to each other in a way that creates a mutually beneficial connection. To foster a nurturing relationship there needs to be kind and honest communication, shared goals and a willingness to work through difficulties as disagreements. Nurturing educators helps foster individual strengths and behaviours to deliver better outcomes to children.

4.4.2.2.6 Critical Reflection Increases Awareness of Knowledge and Skills Required for Learning

The process of critical reflection influences the learning environment in increasing the awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning. Educators identified increased awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning outcomes through being empowered with every educator contributing and being supported with the establishment of mentor-mentee relationships.

This was described by Educator 2 described in learning about the NQS:

> "Engage individually to be equipped and enable being empowered with every educator contributing and mentor-mentee relationships established."

Critical reflection increases the awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning to enable educators to be confident and effective in their tasks. It is important for educators to have an increased awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning, engage in continuous improvement, be supported in documenting their practice, reflecting and identifying what works and what to try differently next time. In so doing, educators become competent learners themselves.

4.4.2.2.7 Critical Reflection empowers Educators to Engage Children in Learning

The process of critical reflection influences an educator's learning environment in being empowered to engage children in learning. As described by Educator Three:

> "Our program comes from building children's ideas and letting them question and lead that process – I guess engaging children in a reflective process is good because it helps them to actually be thinking about those questions, moving to thinking about those questions intrinsically."

It is important to empower an educator so that he or she will thrive in learning and skills to engage children in learning. Ways to empower educators include nurturing an authentic workplace, creating opportunities with clear expectations, always being on the lookout to build leaders, sharing the load to avoid burnout and supporting professional learning communities for leadership development.

This was described by Educator 5:

> "Supporting educators as a team to improve critical thinking."

4.4.2.2.8 Critical Reflection Encourages Educators to Maximise the Learning Environment

The process of critical reflection influences the learning environment through encouraging educators to maximise the learning environment. This was described by Educator Three in the first interview:

> "When we're programming. The goals we have for our children, where we are talking about positive behaviour guidance and when we are talking about emotional development...relationship building skills, social skills and that emotional resilience that the EYLF outcome...that's what we are working towards. and needs to be underlying in what we are doing"

Maximising the learning environment through encouragement is being supportive and giving hope for future success, providing motivation with daily tasks and achievement of new goals with a focus on individual educator efforts and achievements. This was described by Educator Two in the first interview:

> "I encourage myself first and foremost and then I encourage my colleagues through learning more."

Educator one further described being encouraged through the learning environment:

> "A culture of reflection supports a positive culture with educators encouraged to ask questions, empower others and demonstrate value in creative thinking and solutions".

Additionally, Educator 5 described how educators are encouraged to maximise the learning environment:

> "Discussions between educators at staff meetings support being encouraged to be reflective by being asked questions about our practice like what we are doing, why are we doing it, and how can we do it better."

4.4.2.2.9 Critical Reflection Facilitates Professional Development

The process of critical reflection influences the learning environment in an ECEC centre as it facilitates professional development. As educators are trained with critical reflection, they are supported to work more efficiently to be the best versions of themselves, which facilitates a better ECEC environment. Ongoing learning and facilitation of professional development support improved professional knowledge and learning practices. As described by Educator 5:

> "It helps to learn and grow, build on knowledge and strength. It helps us to be up to date, gives a voice, shows that even though there may be doubts, through the process there can be different answers."

Critical reflection facilitates professional development as educators think about how to continue to develop themselves, adapt pedagogy, learn to embrace change, and learn through the process of critical reflection. It is vital to remind ourselves of why we love what we do and the reasons that make our work worthwhile. Critical reflection is not about ticking a box, but to understand what has been learned, how one's practice has been enriched, and what one would like to change to develop further.

4.4.2.2.10 Summary and Discussion

Research Sub-Question Two focussed on how critical reflection influences the learning environment. In analysing the data, nine important themes emerged. Critical reflection influences the learning environment by enabling reflective evaluation to improve practice; opening new possibilities for learning; identifying areas of strength; increasing pedagogical awareness; building better connections to children; increasing awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning; empowering educators to engage children in learning; encouraging educators to maximise the learning environment; and facilitating professional development. All these elements contribute to a successful learning environment in an Early Education and Care centre.

4.4.2.3 Research Sub-Question Three: What needs to be considered for critical reflection to be effective?

When exploring what needs to be considered for critical reflection to be effective as part of the NQS within a faith-based ECEC centre, the following factors were identified:

4.4.2.3.1 The need to reflect on Faith-based core values

Critical reflection provides educators with the opportunity to examine and question their beliefs, opinions and values. This study is located within a faith-based ECEC centre and the use of critical reflection in which this study is located was found to be an important strategy in deepening the understanding of Faith-based values. As staff at the centre all identified with these Faith-based values, critical reflection was an important tool to use with implementing the NQS. For example, Educator Two indicated that her faith is one of the measures to which she compares her professional standards. As she critically reflects, it helps her determine if what she is doing is satisfactory. In this way, her faith provides an additional lens through which she reflects on her practice. Faith-based values and a statement of faith represent the identity of a faith-based community. These affirm the common beliefs of a faith-based community. Educator Two in the first interview described this:

> I have the liberty to be proactive, explore and connect beliefs with the environment. Values provide the right foundation and further, I believe in our bible-based values ...the bible is a resource embedded in our practice.

Educator Four in the first interview described how

> Growing up in a church set me up for the faith-based context because I came in knowing the values, the very solid foundation...this is what it means to uphold the values and then applying that into the education side of things, where Macquarie (University) sets you up very well to teach and gives you a very good perspective of different ECEC contexts...it's about different contexts, different business models, different systems, different belief systems.

Educator Three in the second interview described how values were more than caring, learning and attitudes*:*

> It's in everything you do.

Critical reflection and the service values were described by Educator Four in the second interview as:

> Really overflowing into the NQS because you see those themes flowing through it ...empathy, support, opportunity to thrive, faith-based skills underpinned ...I feel our faith and the NQS very easily go hand in hand. It's wanting the best.

Educator Three in the third interview described critical reflection on values:

> We are trying to incorporate our values and the NQS...so it works together hand in hand.

Educator Four in the third interview described how:

> Values shape your leadership...it's something you aspire to be because of those values that you have.

Educator Four in the third interview further described that

> It is a lot more empowering I think because there is a sense of value on the person. The focus is on the person and valuing them.

As the context in this study is a faith-based ECEC centre, this is a factor that deserves to be considered. As critical reflection is implemented as part of the NQS it is important that educators consider the ethos in which the critical reflection occurs.

4.4.2.3.2 The need to reflect on Quality

Staff need to reflect on quality as we they are implementing critical reflection. The NQS calls for ECEC centres to run quality programs and as educators critically reflect on all aspects of the centre, they should be mindful of the quality criteria in the NQS.

Educator Three in the third interview described how educators reflect on quality when implementing critical reflection:

> "Everyone is doing the NQS in our daily practice, we are all empowered to shine, to flourish, to be a leader, to be motivated to do the best of our ability, to be inspired, to always aim for the best outcomes for our centre, families, children and team...it is good because you cannot do everything by yourself. Everyone has different strengths, different talents but when we work together, we contribute, and we incorporate the skills of one another... it really gives the best outcome and strengthens the whole centre...doing critical reflective practice we can see how, and what are we going to improve, what we are going to change and what are we going to continue…so it is a continuous process every day."

Quality was described by Educator Three in the second interview as working together to comply with everything in line with the NQS with reflection as a continuous learning activity.

Educator Four in the second interview described the importance of critically reflecting on quality through the NQS:

> "I need to know and breathe and live and use it as justification. It brings quality."

There are different criteria for quality shaped by perspectives of childhood, cultural patterns, values, structures and objective indicators of process and structural quality Critical reflection is important to quality because it helps educators identify their own strengths and weaknesses and work to continuously improve to provide better outcomes. The most important component is determining what is working and why. Creating new and shared understanding about ECEC principles and practices is important as educators work towards quality practice using critical reflection as the tool for NQS quality (Carmel, Macfarlane & Casley, 2012).

4.4.2.3.3 The need to establish a culture of Critical Reflective Inquiry

For critical reflection to be effective, one of the factors that needs to be established is a critically reflective environment. Establishing a culture of critically reflective professional inquiry, where all educators are involved in the ongoing review, where practices are examined, and outcomes reviewed, fosters the generation of new ideas. In establishing a culture of critical reflective inquiry, there needs to be openness, trust and respect amongst colleagues, where everyone has a voice and is listened to. Educators need to be able to openly raise questions and concerns and

know that their perspective will be valued, discussed and considered. Critical reflective inquiry uses educators situated individual instances of practice as the basis for developing knowledge for improving practice. Educator practice is a rich source of new knowledge as practitioners are constantly engaged in solving problems in which they create, as well as modify knowledge, to solve specific problems.

Reflective practice incorporates Habermas's critical philosophy (Habermas, 1984) and Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1990). This is a method of inquiry used by educators to improve their practice and focus on learning. According to Shapiro and Reiff (1993), it is possible to not only to increase the awareness of one's practice, but also to new ways that knowledge can be applied to new situations and various ways that personal resources can be applied in practice. Critical reflective inquiry supports not only the identification of aspects or forms of practice that can be improved but to discover and generate new knowledge drawing from educators' personal and professional knowledge.

'Reflection' is the process of holistically examining what has occurred (EYLF, 2009, p. 16). This can include thoughts, actions, assumptions and knowledge, feelings, and the context in which specific practice has occurred. Reflection involves intentionally looking back by suspending oneself from the situation and what has occurred. The term 'critique' developed in the context of Habermas's critical philosophy (1984) and Freire's (1972) critical reflection refers to the process of identifying the nature of distortions, inconsistencies, and disharmony emerging from reflection, and working towards correcting such disparities through various processes. This is described by Educator Two in the first interview as:

> "This is my time to be able to share my thoughts and get feedback. It's informal conversing with educators about practice and related to whatever occurred on that day in professional dialogue with the team…the physical aspect is what we are doing on the reflection board ...we have that sort of place. A good way of critically reflecting as a group…it is very, very important to just freely talk about and express a certain practice without fear…to have the ability to say something that will have a positive result and be honoured and valued in your individual perspective."

The critical reflective inquiry process consists of three phases: descriptive, reflective and critical. The descriptive phase involves a description by educators of specific instances of practice. Descriptive narratives include educator actions, thoughts and feelings, as well as the circumstances and features of the situation. This is analytical in the sense that educators become engaged in conscious efforts to view themselves and their actions with a certain degree of

detachment and suspension. In the reflective phase descriptions of what has occurred in practice are examined against an educator's personal beliefs, assumptions and knowledge.

The reflective phase involves three different foci: reflecting against the NQS standards and 'theories in action', reflecting on situations and reflecting on intention. Because knowledge generated is essential for learning the practice needs to be examined in terms of the extent to which actual practice is aligned with theories.

A critical analysis of standards and theories in use leads to a discovery of the level of coherence and consistency between what is actually in practice. This step in the reflective process brings educators insight and self-understanding about their modes of practice. Educators not only discover how they can handle situations but discover disparities between beliefs and intentions and actual practice, optioning to a need for re-learning or programs of change.

The critical phase is oriented to correcting or changing ineffective practice or moving forward to future assimilation of new innovations emerging from practice. It involves discourse about values/beliefs and practice, needs, intentions and action.

Critical reflective inquiry supports knowledge development, improvement of individual practice and shared learning. It does this by helping educators to be reflective and critical in their practice and become astute in identifying good practice versus ineffective practice. Educator Three in the first interview described the process as:

> "If you do reflection every day you will realise you have to improve, and you will do something to improve...every day is a different scenario ...the experiences that you encounter with the children, with the parents ...it's a daily reflection. It's the NQS...quality...improving...developing."

Educator Three in the first interview described critical reflective inquiry:

> "It's mentally like at the end of the day when I was at home lying on my bed. To improve myself. To shut down...write on the board what we do reflect ...it's every week so we have a different reflection. When you see that reflection and it's like- it's very important when you really write it on the board. When you write it on the board it comes from your heart, it comes from your mind so you definitely know what you should write on the board...when you work with the children with your team it will reflect and you action it...the good thing is that when you reflect you will have to put that into action."

Educator Three in the first interview described critical reflective inquiry as:

> "Individual responsibility for personal reflection" because "We really need to evaluate to see if we improve."

It is also possible to generate knowledge that emerges from practice. Furthermore, critical reflective inquiry is a method of changing and correcting professional practice in an on-going way as described by Educator Two in the first interview,

> "What we are doing and the way we are doing it in the moment...I see where my colleagues are coming from as we gather each other's views in an area...I'm encouraged because I can hear where my colleagues are coming from and where I am at, at the very moment, as well as in relation to what we want to reflect upon. It's a good way of lifting each other up and helping each other ...that's how I see it. We want to improve because there's always room for improvement and that's just our way of expressing ourselves and sharing our ideas and thoughts."

Reflections and discussions were shared as a way of getting insights from others, to 'have a say', to be extended, for in order to be critical you need everyone else's perspectives to be informed, to grow, to change and to learn.

4.4.2.3.4 The Need for All staff to be empowered to contribute

Empowerment is an important factor whilst implementing critical reflection. In other words, we want everyone to be empowered to contribute and that is a really important factor in good critical reflection. This is described by Educator Two in the first interview:

> "Everyone should know the vision and where the childcare centre is going and once everyone embraces the vision, we have a goal to work together and everyone is empowered. Everyone is given the opportunity to be part of what we are doing and then one step after another step after another step if we are embracing it, if we are living it, our actions will follow."

Empowerment as a tool supports the critical reflection process and adds depth to critical reflection (Koulaozidos, 2017). Rather than reflecting on the surface, critical reflection empowers educators to engage in deeper thinking in their professional practice. To think critically is to examine practice beyond the surface (DEEWR, p. 13) – to see and think deeply and ponder questions of who, what, where, when, how and most importantly, why. This requires trust and is evidenced when educators are given a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility for decision making in their daily work. When you empower an educator to step up, make their own decisions and pave their own path to success, a better workplace culture is created with empowered educators more likely to go the extra mile, follow best practices, be more productive, embrace change and have a 'can do' attitude.

Empowering educators is the ongoing process of providing the tools, professional development, resources, encouragement and motivation for educators to perform at the optimum level.

Empowerment is important because it helps develop loyalty and trust. Empowered educators understand and believe in the service vision and generate ideas directly aimed at improving the service.

Empowered educators have increased self-confidence, are keen to develop their own skills and also to find ways to use those skills for the service's benefit (DEEWR, 2009). Empowered educators also have a sense of shared purpose and greater collaboration (Broom, 2015). Educator Four in the first interview described how the NQS:

> Gives you a very clear way of doing things and working towards and empowering leaders.

Furthermore, empowered educators have a strong sense of belonging. An empowered environment encourages the best from all the team members. As described by Educator Four in the first interview:

> Teaching has the potential to take someone from this spot to this spot because you see them as valued...and loved...and with potential.

We have seen that empowerment is an important factor when implementing critical reflection. This is because reflection helps educators think more deeply and, in this way, learning through reflection helps to be empowered to contribute and develop confidence and competence and gives us a greater sense of control over our work. Being empowered means educators are given the authority and resources to do their job well to engage children in learning and maximise the learning environment.

4.4.2.3.5 The need for an approach that is Inclusive of different Educator strengths

Strengths are important factors to be reflected upon. Critical reflection helps to identify areas of strength. Educator Two in the third interview described how strengths are needed as a factor to be considered in the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS:

> Different individuals have different strengths. So, if we're able to identify and work with those different strengths you are able to work more harmoniously with your co-educators and compliment other educators' strengths...and then you are able to build the people around you. The people you are working with ...with the goal that each of you will flourish in an area, in this environment...to contribute with better input as per your strengths and as a leader to equip and empower other educators with whom you are working.

Critical reflection helps identify areas for improvement, develop educator strengths and review effectiveness rather than just carry on doing things as they have been done before. Critical

reflection helps an educator to recognise his/her own strengths and use these to guide on-going learning to improve the quality of education and care provided. Identifying strengths helps develop goals to improve through critical reflection.

Educators noted the importance of strengths with acknowledgment of each educator's individual strengths in knowledge and skills. Strengths-based practice emphasises educator's self-determination and strengths and views educators as resourceful and reliant. Strengths-based practice is a collaborative process between educators. A strengths-based approach focuses on the inherent strengths of an educator, trusting and workable relationships; empowering people to take a lead in collaborative ways on mutually agreed goals. Such an approach which focusses on the inherent strengths of an individual educator, group or organisation promotes the positive. This draws upon personal resources of motivation and hope and creates sustainable change through learning and experiential growth (Hammond, 2016).

This section has demonstrated that strengths are an important factor that needs to be considered in the effective implementation of critical reflection. This is because critical reflection is a learning experience and being able to recognise strengths helps us become better at what we do and help to achieve our goals.

4.4.2.3.6 The Need for Actionable outcomes from the reflection process

Insights are generated by analysing information and drawing conclusions which can then influence decisions and drive change. Hence, actionable outcomes from the reflection process are an important factor needed to be considered as critical reflection is implemented as part of the NQS.

Educator Five in the second interview described how action comes from reflection:

> I reflect through discussions with staff, reflection boards, the questions that we have...and they support us as team members so that we can start to improve our own critical thinking...the NQS is the baseline to guide our thinking and how we are doing as educators in this centre...journals...observations…on how other people see things and how I see things and if they agree or don't agree and then we have a discussion. These are really great ways to reflect on our practice...reflective questions on the board keep us thinking. Continuously thinking. The questions change each week...we know we have to be critical, so it really helps us to maintain our practice. We're working to improve ourselves all the time...all connected with the quality areas of the NQS…. Always growing. I'm growing; I'm always reflecting, growing critically and thinking...it's really good for me to learn to have a mentor. To grow. The push to improve is a big motivator.

Educator Four in the third interview further described how action comes through reflection:

> We push ourselves to be better...it's just more conversations...it's more acting and reflecting on that. Actually, again and again. I think the way we reflect is really good because we reflect and then there's action. It's just never reflection without action, there's always this process of, "Hey, let's talk about this. Let's try this, let's reflect on what we just tried. Is it working, is it not? Oh, it's not working, let's reflect again. Oh, it is working. Cool, how can it work better? So, I think it's moving forward, it's that constant process we go through, that's expected of us to go through all the time and to be taking those steps of action because without action, nothing happens. It's taking ownership of action because we're talking all the time about it. The process of doing things is not delayed. It's immediate action because we're talking about it. It's empowerment. It's ownership...this process in place for us to be able to take action quickly and then keep reflecting on that action...there's no hidden reflective conversations...it's all open and transparent like..." Can we do this?" "Okay, let's try it," "is it working?" "Oh, wow, it is working," "Awesome, let's keep doing it and keep reflecting," "Let's reflect again," ...It's embedded in our practice...it's a constant process...it's what is expected...let's make it better...it's embedded critical reflective practice overflowing.

Critical reflection is a meaning making process, it helps us consider what we have learned in the past to inform future action and consider the real-life implications of our thinking. Dewey is attributed with having extended the notion of reflection whilst Schon developed the concept of 'reflective practice'. It is the link between thinking and doing – action (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983). Without action in critical reflection experiences alone might cause us "To reinforce stereotypes, offer simplistic solutions to complex problems and generalise inaccurately based on limited data" (Ash, Clayton & Moses 2009, p. 26).

Action allows us to practice, to understand and to acknowledge someone else's experiences, feelings, thoughts and/or views, it is through living these experiences and critically reflecting upon them that understanding is deepened.

The theme of action was identified in the implementation of the NQS to deliver best outcomes as action comes from reflection. Reflection is a chance to review our decisions and behaviour and get ready for similar situations in the future. We can think critically about our experiences and prepare to improve. Educators identified the importance of every voice being heard through the reflective process to be empowered for action.

4.4.2.3.7 The Need for Educators to be Educated

Education for educators is an important factor that needs to be considered as critical reflection is implemented as part of the NQS. Educators need to be educated in how to reflect and implement reflective practice as part of the NQS through guidance and scaffolding of learning. As described by Educator Two in the first interview guidance:

I am supporting educators along the way with my years of experience.

Critical reflection is a skill that can be learned through practice and feedback (Dewey, 1933; Rodgers, 2002) which is why guidance is needed for educators in the reflective process. Without guidance, the chances are increased that an educator's reflective experiences may not be authentic. To be authentic requires a responsibility to each other, trust, honesty, willingness to be open and humble, genuineness, willingness to take risks, and the ability to work cohesively as a group and manage tension that leads to growth. Guidance supports improvement. Positive guidance through cooperation and interaction between educators promotes positive outcomes for children. Guidance includes informing, advising and assessing integrating all aspects of the curriculum. Guidance must be objective, based on the needs of educators to support educators to achieve learning outcomes. This theme of guidance was expressed by educators as someone who scaffolds learning.

4.4.2.3.8 The Need for all staff to be included to build their sense of connectedness

Belonging and being part of a community is an important factor that needs to be considered as critical reflection is implemented as part of the NQS. People need and want to feel connected to other people. People feel they belong when they feel others are genuinely interested in them and open to sharing information with them. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging (DEEWR, EYLF, p. 7). By engaging in reflection, educators can develop the insights, self-awareness and skills that are needed to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging and the sense of who they are and feeling that they are valued and respected as part of a family and community. As described by Educator Four in the first interview:

> Community collaboration and community partnership overflows into our families because there are networks so we can support them…and connect them...and support them in very practical things through those networks...it's having those trusting relationships with families where they feel they can come to us with something that may not necessarily be easy to come to us about...it's what's best for their family which will help them to flourish.

As critical reflection requires educators to look and think beyond what they already know (Schon, 1995) they need to think about and apply additional layers needed for rich questions and inquiry. These additional layers lead to a deeper understanding of what occurs and why. This includes 'Belonging' and 'Being' part of a community. Educators become more effective through critical reflection as they continually develop their professional knowledge and skills to enable them to strengthen their belonging to their community. When children, families and

educators feel connected to their community, they uphold the values of the community and promote the wellbeing of its members. Building collaborative partnerships and a sense of 'Belonging' and 'Being' to a community empowers its members to be advocates for children and families. 'Belonging' means acceptance as a member of a community and a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need. 'Belonging' is important in seeing value in life and developing emotional resilience as forming connections and a sense of community contributes to our well-being. Forming a sense of belonging with other people around a shared mission or identity is a major contributor to a sense of personal meaning in life. Hence, personal resilience of staff is interwoven into the resilience of the communities to which they belong. It is from this web of our relationships and connections with other people that we draw our strength. Such communities can lift us up when we are down and give us the capacity to deal with whatever challenges come our way.

4.4.2.3.9 Summary and Discussion

In answering this first research sub-question respondents identified important aspects that are instrumental in the effective implementation of critical reflection. The implementation of critical reflection is enhanced when educators see the process as being relevant to them and there is an emphasis on participation and contribution. Critical reflection helped educators reflect on their core values, and particularly their faith-based values, helped bring an emphasis on critical reflective inquiry and requires the need to reflect on quality. All educators should be empowered to contribute. Critical reflection helps identify areas of strength with different educators bringing different strengths to the reflection process with an inclusive approach needed for different educator strengths. By getting educators to reflect on faith-based values, by having an emphasis on quality, by building a culture of critical reflective inquiry, by enabling empowerment, by adopting an inclusive approach to different educator strengths, by fostering actionable outcomes of the reflection process, by supporting educators to be educated and including all staff to build their sense of connectedness, by attending to all of these factors you actually build a culture and professional practice where critical reflection contributes to the success of the Early Childhood Education and Care centre.

4.4.2.3 Conclusion from Research Question One and Three Sub-Questions

From the answers to the research questions and sub-questions, it would seem that critical reflection positively impacts the quality of ECEC and also improves the performance of ECEC

centres. The answers to the research questions and two research sub-questions support the idea that critical reflection is a really important thing to do.

Having considered the role of critical reflection in ECEC we would now like to turn attention to the process of critical reflection and how to best implement critical reflection in ECEC.

4.4.3 Research Question Two: How do you effectively implement critical reflection in an ECEC centre?

It has been shown that critical reflection positively impacts an ECEC centre. We now turn our attention to the process of critical reflection and how critical reflection is implemented in ECEC. As stated, all of the educators interviewed said that critical reflection is really important, and we have examined the reasons why it is really important. So how do we get this model to work? To find this out, educators were asked them about their day to day implementation of critical reflection in their centres. Following are the themes that emerged from these conversations which gives direction to the implementation of critical reflection in ECEC. The first of these implementation themes was structure.

4.4.3.1 Implementation Theme One: Use a Structured approach

Educator Two in the first interview described structure as:

> "Learning, reading, being updated with whatever is happening in ECEC. It's not just like sitting down but we have to take the initiative to progress and to develop ourselves ...the knowledge we have gained ...how we can move on and progress".

Educator Two in the second interview then described a method of self-assessment:

> "Embedded critical reflective practice is a continuous process ...involving professionals analysing our practices and that develops the outcomes to give the best outcomes to our children. It's like a method of self-assessing our thoughts and our actions with the purpose to grow and develop".

Educator Four in the second interview then described the leadership structure:

> "We've got our differences and Quality Area leaders ....and if I'm not working with them, we're not going to achieve because they can't work in isolation. We all need to do our part working together and if we're not doing our part, you know, responsibility in quality areas that reflects across the whole service".

Educator Four in the third interview described the need for structure as it "*Built her up"* to know "*What I could work on,"* and "*What I can bring*."

Structure in the critical reflective process is required to make sense of the situation and develop insight to enable educators to synthesise learnings so that they can change practice and improve. Critical reflection is not a tick box exercise. Through a structured approach, and through practice, educators can develop their own skills to improve performance as they engage more in the critically reflective process and get more out of the experience. Using the strengths of each educator, therefore, strengthens the whole centre with everyone who contributes being valued and having a voice, to develop and support continuous improvement.

Critical reflection needs to be structured in order for it to work effectively (Nerur & Rasheed, 2008). This structure needs to be constructed based on the social and emotional context, service strengths and educator strengths in the reflective process.

A critically reflective, collaborative, structured and strengths-based approach was identified by educators to understand, through the process of critical reflection, what needs to change and why. Educators noted the importance of strengths with acknowledgment of individual educator strengths in knowledge and skills.

4.4.3.2 Implementation Theme Two: Maximise the Benefits of Collaboration

Collaboration was revealed as an implementation theme and very important for critical reflection to work effectively in ECEC, as described by Educator Five in the second interview:

> "Talking to each one about what is happening so everyone is in the loop and they know what to do so that we are flowing seamlessly.... listening to others and respecting their views."

The importance of collaboration for critical reflection to work effectively in ECEC was further described by Educator Four in the second interview:

> "Implementing the NQS requires reflection because we reflect in many different ways... we're doing it on our board as a theme coming in and just writing it up... we're doing it through mind mapping and we are reflecting on what we are doing and why we are doing it...and I think it's good to have many ways of reflecting on what we're doing in relation to the NQS...because I think the NQS can be interpreted in different ways...I think reflecting and using reflection is good for reflecting on ways we are implementing best practice...it's getting them (educators) to go through the process of what's happening and asking that question, "Well, why is it doing that? What do you think? What could happen next? Why do you think that happened that way? Could it happen a different way?" Those sorts of questions in those spontaneous moments."

Collaborative learning is defined as "a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together" and more specifically as joint problem solving (Dillenbourg, 1999, p.

1). Collaboration is further defined by Roschelle and Teasley as "mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem together" (as cited by Dillenbourg et al, 1992, p. 2).

Collaboration was further described by Educator Two in the third interview as *"Partnership," "Continuous input*" and "*Ongoing reflection" with* Educator Two in the first interview describing the importance of collaboration to enable critical reflection to work effectively within ECEC: "*I have to work with the team…I have a responsibility."*

Additionally, Educator One in the first interview described how:

> "We want to work together…everybody…everybody is given the opportunity to be part of what we are doing…it's workable."

Collaboration occurs when a group of educators critically reflect together, openly sharing plans and ideas, making decisions and solving problems, setting goals, assuming responsibility and accountability. Collaboration provides every educator within the team with equal opportunities to participate and communicate their ideas. Collaboration allows educators to come together on a common platform and with common goals by brainstorming various solutions. Collaboration also allows a team member with more in-depth knowledge, previous experience with a specific task, or another perspective on a situation to teach another educator new information in practice. Collaboration thereby generates a circle of knowledge and supports each team member to understand their role.

4.4.3.3 Implementation Theme Three: Build a foundation of Trust in Person-centred relationship and heart-openness

The next implementation theme revealed was that of trust with the ECEC centre built on a person-centred relationship and heart-openness. This is important to critical reflection because when an educator is engaged in a person-centred relationship, this allows others to know who an educator really is and what is important to her/him. This space allows educators to engage in critical reflective dialogue where educators can begin to challenge each other's opinions and views, remembering the relationships that have been built Educator Five in the second interview described this:

> "Talking to each one about what is happening so everyone is in the loop and they know what to do so that we are flowing seamlessly.... listening to others and respecting their views."

Out of trust flows heart-centeredness as described by Educator Two in the second interview by referring to the biblical verse of 1 Samuel 16:7 “Talking not about man’s appearance but the heart, serving, being diligent with due respect to everyone around me.... letting it flow to create an environment conducive to excellence ...continuously embedded in our reflective practices. The core of what we do...you love what you do.*”* (NIV)

Being heart-centred was described by Educator Four in the first interview:

> “This is what you are passionate about...being responsible...being equipped...having the potential to do this...and then reflecting with everybody you are working with...an overflow of the heart... working with people who want to serve in their job makes a massive difference. Striving for the right things. Being thankful in the context.”

Educator Two in the second interview further described the basis of trust in the reflective process:

> “Not just a process. I see the heart.... there’s a reason for what we do...it’s like an anchor. Yes, it is anchored in my practices and my beliefs as an early childhood educator. So, I was able to fine-tune what I knew already prior to the NQS and I was driven more, to strive, to improve...so it anchored my path as an early childhood educator. It’s a good thing.”

Educator Two in the second interview further described ‘heart-centeredness’ expressed through critical reflection in the service philosophy and values:

> “It’s what the centre is...we go back to why we do things.”

Educator Three in the second interview described having the right attitude and described:

> “The attitude of the heart, a passion, having the right attitude not only for the children but for the whole centre, your colleagues, the whole environment and the outside community. It’s the best thing to have the right heart, the right attitude, the right perspective; it will just freely flow so you can create a harmonious and peaceful environment.”

If your heart is in the right place, then it will overflow into everything to bring your best and be passionate in what you do. Educator Two in the second interview described:

> “It’s like moving forwards...committed for continuous improvement... ongoing... continuous improvement culture, instilled in our heart, in our mind...its personal...as a group...development...and learning...working together...everyone contributing”.

Educator Two in the second interview further described:

> “It’s a consistent - like practice, built in the heart and in our mind that like, not like depends on what you don’t feel like today not feeling this one, but it’s like instilled in our heart and in our mind in what we have to do …We are consistent everyday ....it’s

> established in our culture that everyone is like motivated to move forward and not satisfied of what we have now but we are committed to improve. Continuous improvement...every one of us."

Educator Three described in the third interview how heart-openness and trust with the service culture based on person-centre relationships flow out of the reflective process:

> "In our mind...not like it depends on you don't feel like this today, but it's instilled in our heart and minds that we are consistent every day, established in our culture that everyone is driven, motivated to move forward and committed to continuous improvement."

Educator Four in the second interview described how critical reflection fosters trust, person-centeredness and heart openness in "*valuing people, respect, kindness, positivity*," whilst Educator Five in the first interview described how critical reflective practice emerged as a way of giving her best, reflecting upon herself, sharing herself and getting insight from others:

> "We have a responsibility to bring what we have, talents, ideas and the way we think...being a light in the community to bring our best and be passionate about what we are doing. This, itself, is a process of reflection for if your heart is in the right place the reflecting process is going to be on how we can do it better...to move forward and refine our skills. For prioritising the smallest things with the purpose behind what we do, why we do it, brings our best."

Educator 5 described in her round one interview that critically reflective practice also emerged as a way of giving her best, reflecting upon herself. Reflection and discussion were shared as a way of getting insight from others including children, to "have a say" and be extended:

> "We have responsibility to bring what we have, talents, ideas and the way we think. ...being a light in the community to bring our best and be passionate about what we are doing." This, itself, is a process of reflection for "if your heart is in the right place the reflecting process is going to be on how we can do it better. . .to move forward and refine our skills.... for prioritising the smallest things with the purpose behind what we do, why we do it brings our best."

The person-centred relationship, heart openness and trust emerging through critical reflection and heart-centeredness was also identified is a receiving process:

> "As challenges arise reflection occurs - what is happening and how is this going to be better?" Critical reflection was further identified as needing to be critical - "looking at the good and the bad...what's working? What's not? How do you make the things not working move forwards and how are those things not working going to work with the things already working?"

If you are contributing honestly to the reflective process based on trust you are contributing to an inclusive environment in which critical reflection can work effectively.

4.4.3.4 Implementation Theme Four: Equip and Empower Educators to Enhance their Practice

Empowerment emerged as an implementation theme of the critical reflection process and as a desired outcome of the learning process. As critical reflection is foundational to the NQS educators should be empowered to use critical reflection as an ongoing process and a lifelong pursuit. Once educators have grasped the basics of critical reflection conceptually, they can be empowered to achieve and sustain effective practice and be equipped and enabled to enhance their practice.

As described by Educator Two in the second interview:

> "I am empowered with the NQS being the essence and substance of what we do...we are empowered."

Educator Three in the second interview described being "*Helped to excel."*

Educator Two in the third interview described being empowered critical reflection through team meetings:

> "I feel like I've been heard... I think team love being heard, and when their reflective process gets put into action...it's very empowering for that team member because they have caused change...and being able to influence something helps you feel like part of the team and helps you feel like you're contributing to something bigger than yourself."

Being equipped through critical reflection was described by Educator Two in the third interview:

> "Empowered, know what you are able to do and the many avenues available to you."

Educator Two in the third interview described being:

> "Guided in the process to be empowered."

Educator Two in the second interview described being equipped through:

> "Patience, endurance, practices and strategies to be enhanced and helping me to do the best I can in relation to what I can achieve as an early childhood educator."

Educators must be equipped with the knowledge to know what works and what will make them better at their job. It is important that educators know how to improve with tools to be successful educators and pedagogical leaders.

Educator Four in the second interview described how:

> "I've been more equipped because I've been given a responsibility and, having won it, and being given the opportunity to be empowered, to earn it."

4.4.3.5 Implementation Theme Five: Adopt the Practice of Mentoring

The fifth implementation theme to emerge to enable critical reflection to be effective in ECEC is that of a mentored relationship. Educator Two in the second interview described this as:

> "Having access to the resources, being mentored by the Director, and being mentored by someone who has respect for the whole system."

Educator One in the second interview described how she had been mentored:

> "Being mentored by my Director I draw everything that I need to know from my Director that's how I pass information to Educators as well...from my Director to the Room leader to the educators in each group…that's how I see NQS implementation as far as leadership is concerned ..Lots of communication, interaction, lots of critical reflection and engagement."

Mentoring is defined by Smith (2007) in Amrosetti (2010) as a particular mode of learning wherein the mentor not only supports the mentee, but challenges them productively so that progress is made (p. 277). Mentoring is important in critical reflection to enable educators to develop from the reflective process. Through the mentoring process, educators can show what new knowledge they have learned, and discuss how they will apply their new understanding in their practice.

Mentors can record insights, experiences, successes and challenges; seek and provide feedback; identify areas of strengths; determine next steps for professional learning and development; and act as a springboard for the reflective process. When mentors detect areas of need during the critically reflective process, they can provide targeted support and relevant professional learning for these areas. A mentoring relationship is a learning relationship (Hayes, 2019). Mentors model, support and champion their mentee and scaffold the learning process for the mentee. A mentor is an encourager, someone to share with, to help improve, provide practical wisdom and suggest new approaches. A mentor leads a mentee to reflect. The mentor aims to consistently facilitate learning independently, implement highly effective teaching strategies with reference to sound methodological principles and professional practice. A mentor is a knowledgeable, experienced highly proficient teacher who works alongside another educator quite closely at first and then this gradually diminishes as the mentee becomes more capable and confident. The mentor is highly self-aware and demonstrates a strong ability to reflect on practice. A good mentor is inspiring, knowledgeable, friendly, empowering, passionate, resourceful, with lots of

bright ideas, willing to support and help, approachable, willing to observe and give constructive feedback (Maldrez, et al., 2009). In ECEC, mentoring is a critical attribute of professional teaching practice integral to leading the provision of quality learning with distributed leadership and collaboration playing an important part in effective mentoring and part of the emerged 'SCHEMED' implementation approach for critical reflection within ECEC.

4.4.3.6 Implementation Theme Six: Encourage Educators

The next implementation theme to emerge was encouragement which is essential for critical reflection to be effective in ECEC, described by Educator Three in the second interview:

> "Being supported, motivated and encouraged is the best thing I experience here in the centre...you know I really need it a lot. I really need to learn more and more but the trust and confidence that you entrusted to me...that's a great part to motivate myself. I can do all these things with the support of my colleagues, of my staff, of my leaders. It really helps a lot with confidence building so I can flourish in this area...it really helps you a lot to stand and be a leader to flourish and take a step for personal growth."

Educator Three in the second interview further described being encouraged:

> "Growing my skills, knowledge and capabilities...my confidence was built in this centre...it motivates me.... I want to contribute. I'm so thankful; I really value and appreciate everything."

Educator Three described encouragement in the critical reflective process:

> "Through continuous learning every day."

Educator Two further described:

> "Support for achieving my goal...shows what I am able to do and gives room for improvement."

Additionally, Educator Five described:

> "Potential to take someone from this spot to this spot because you see them as valued."

Educator Two in the first interview described how:

> "Once everybody knows the vision and goals everybody is just empowered." Whilst Educator One in the first interview described "I must encourage myself first and foremost because if I don't encourage myself you know first, then I can't encourage my colleagues."

Encouragement is positive feedback that focuses primarily on improvement. Encouraging is recognising, accepting and conveying faith in educators to '*Be the best,*' to feel worthwhile and

appreciated regardless of the results achieved. What educators do matters. Based on mutual trust, respect and focussing on an educator's strengths, the tools of encouragement create a stimulating learning environment.

It is important to encourage educators to enhance their performance in all aspects of their practice and help them to become goals oriented and motivated to direct and sustain positive behaviour working towards their goals and tailor activities to achieve this purpose. It also helps to drive creativity and curiosity with the desire to learn more.

Strategies to support encouragement include making relationships a priority, respectful dialogue and shared decision making. The more encouraged an educator is, the more belonging he or she experiences. An ECEC centre based on encouragement attempts to develop social interest by enhancing an educator's sense of belonging and connection.

Shared decision making in which educators are allowed to make choices regarding their service fosters a climate of encouragement. Educators can participate in planning and working in teams, they can learn to evaluate this through reflective practice. The more educators are involved in the decision making of the service the more they feel a sense of belonging and connection. The more connection educators feel, the more courage they have to participate and contribute which results in cooperation and collaboration.

4.4.3.7 Implementation Theme Seven: Make use of Distributed Leadership and Role Allocation

The final implementation theme to emerge as crucial to the effectiveness of critical reflection in ECEC was the concept of distributed leadership and role allocation through task distribution.

Educator Two in the third-round interview described this:

> "Collaboration needs to be identified through quality area allocation with strengths-based input...identifying different strengths to work more harmoniously with co-educators for strengths to compliment and build each other up, with respect and a unified goal that every individual will flourish in the ECEC environment."

Educator Four in the second interview further described the importance of distributed leadership and role allocation of task distribution to critical reflection working effectively in ECEC:

> "Different leadership points with different quality area leaders...that's how it works with implementing the NQS into our service ...that there are those appointed people. I think given all the different aspects of the NQS; it runs very smoothly because everybody is involved in knowing what is needed to run the service. So, it is not just one person

> running everything. It's different people responsible for different areas and everybody's aware of who is responsible for it works quite smoothly across a level playing field."

Educator Four in the second interview described how this happens:

> "It's distributed because we're empowering people, we trust people, and recognise areas they are passionate about."

Distributed leadership in ECEC emerges through critical reflection founded on valuing the collective knowledge and expertise that individual educators bring. Distributed leadership is relational (Duigan, 2006; Spillane & Coldren, 2011) and captures the multiple spheres of influence reflected in the structures and context within which a specific early childhood service operates (Waniganayake et al., 2012). By incorporating both the micro perspective within the centre and the macro perspective of the environment beyond the centre, critical reflection can bring together educator specialist knowledge and skills and apply this expertise in shared projects that benefit children, families and the community.

Distributed leadership is a conceptual and analytical approach to understanding how the work of leadership takes place amongst educators within ECEC. Rather than focus on the characteristics of an individual leader, critical reflection in distributed leadership provides for educator engagement in tasks that are 'stretched' or distributed across the service or organisation. Understanding leadership from this distributed leadership perspective means seeing leadership activities as a situated and social process at the intersection of leaders, educators and the situation.

4.4.3.8 Operationalising the SCHEMED implementation approach for critical reflection as part of the NQS on a daily basis.

We have now explored and seen emerge crucial components of what is required in order for critical reflection in ECEC to operate effectively and assist educators to be successful in their jobs. This has been discovered through the process of critical reflection itself in unpacking what educators thought, how they operated and examination of their thoughts on how ECEC centres operate. The themes identified by the educators have been structured to form the acronym 'SCHEMED'- structured, collaborative, heart-centred, equipping and empowering, mentored, encouraging, and distributed – and an implementation approach for critical reflection within ECEC. Critical reflection is crucial for this to work with 'SCHEMED' being the implementation pathway for critical reflection in ECEC. It is important to consider how educators operationalise

the SCHEMED approach for implementation of the model of critical reflection as part of the NQS in their daily practice. In considering this the educators felt that:

4.4.3.8.1 Reflection needs to be part of a day to day role

Reflection as part of the structure of an educator's day to day role involves making real decisions about what is the best practice for the context whilst also evaluating that practice. An example is making quick reflective points for use as prompts of later reflection on action (Schon, 1987). In talking about reflection as part of an educator's day to day role, a culture of reflection was discussed by respondents.

Educator Four in the first interview described how she reflects as part of her day to day role:

> "So, I like to say, you know, why are we doing it this way? Is this working the best it could? What can we do to further it? That's a lot of my processes. I'm a talker. I like to talk things through. If I have an idea, I'm like, "Will this work?" And getting others' perspectives and then forming some sort of plan that's going to be like "Yeah, this is what's going to work best." I'm also very visual. So, if I'm with people, I like to draw all over something or make a mind map and in our room, we obviously have our reflection question on our board which we talk about. So, I'll be like, "This is our reflective question" And someone will be like. "Oh, yeah, I thought about this, can we do this?" ...and then a discussion within the room of ideas that are going to work. It's a lot of verbal conversation because that's the way I process it. So, if someone suggests an idea, we'll talk about that and we if have other ideas we'll think about how to extend it, what other resources are available, that sort of thing. So, for me reflection is like constantly happening in my head. I go home, and you know I'm like "What could I do better today?" If I've got something what I really want to think about I'll write it down...then I'll write it and process if or discuss it with somebody else late during the day. Writing it go down seems to help me a little bit more. It's really important critically reflecting. A really important aspect for me is I can ask the question and come up with my ideas...but in order for it to be critical, you need everybody's else's perspectives because then that informs you of what needs to change and what needs to stay the same. I feel like it's never ending conversations of "What can we do differently? Why are we doing this? "I think it's because we care. We care because if you care about something you want to do it well. We care a lot about what our service is providing...so I think attitude makes excellence...if you've got an attitude of caring about what you are providing then it's just going to overflow out of that."

4.4.3.8.2 They Should Strive Daily for Improved Practice

Educators discussed how reflection involves daily striving for improved practice, to be equipped for their roles.

As described by Educator Four in the second interview:

> "That is how the process works...to go through the NQS and be assessed by that minimum standard...I've been more equipped and been given responsibility and the

> opportunity to learn it…I am more aware of my responsibilities...it's a shift in attitude...that is what changes…I have more purpose in what I do and why I do it and I have justification for what I do and why I do it."

4.4.3.8.3 They Should Apply Change in Practice Daily

Educators implement critical reflection as part of their daily practice by applying change in practice on a daily basis. Critical reflection by educators applying change in their practice daily happens as an educator analyses his/her performance, actions and thinking in order to yield solutions and improvements that make one better at what one does. Educators overwhelmingly identified the importance of writing reflections up and sharing these reflections with other educators.

This was described by Educator Four in the second interview:

> "If your heart is in the right place in your role then the reflecting process is always going to be how can we do it better...our attitude underpins the whole reflection process because if we don't reflect, we're not going to see what we can do better. We're just going to keep doing things because that's the way we do them and that's not the best way to move forward or to get better at what you do or to refine your skills...it is a refining process.... If challenges arise, we reflect... Why is it happening? What's happening? How are you going to get through this to do it better? It helps keep it positive because you're not doing it by yourself...when you're reflecting it needs to be critical thinking because you need to approach it from a perspective that is unbiased stepping out of it and looking at it from a very critical point of view."

Educator Four in the third interview further described how she applied change in her practice daily:

> "We're always questioning, what we are doing and why we are doing it...and those conversations are happening more and more...holistically, authentically...through those questions and reflections. They are quite intentional and important for educators themselves to be able to go through a process of reflection personally. To be valued…opinions valued…heard...ask questions…you're important, you're opinions count, your knowledge is valued, your ideas and experience and awesome and we want to hear about them...contribute...culture of respect...distributed, empowering...together...bringing ideas, sharing, building together...it's authentic, its transparent, full of integrity as a person, and its distributed."

4.4.3.8.4 There is a Need for a Daily Focus on Standards

A daily focus on standards is an important factor as educators implemented critical reflection as part of their day to day role. This was described by Educator Three in the third interview:

> "I think critical, reflective practice...reflective every day because every day is a different experience...so we need to do this for the best for the children, for the centre, for the best

> of our colleagues…reflect every day...we can then establish concrete solutions and develop and change and review if we need it."

This was described by Educator Two in the second interview:

> "I can see every staff is trying and striving our best to really promote the excellence of our centre through the NQS, having commitment, ownership of responsibility. I would say that's the best thing that we can, I can contribute to the centre, ownership, responsibility, commitment".

Educator One in the first interview described:

> "I see myself as more matured and equipped in relation to the NQS, implementation…daily…I am more equipped…my confidence was built."

Critical reflection gauged against the NQS helps educators improve their practice to deliver the learning outcomes of the EYLF. Critical reflection is undertaken against the standards not just to revisit enacted practice, but to guide future action. Ongoing reflection on educators' practice against the standards can align the performance and development process and develop the skills of educators. Critical reflection against the standards provides educators with a basis for mutual understanding which can be used as tools to facilitate interaction and outcomes. Standards promote competitiveness and strengthen innovation (Porter, 1979).

4.4.3.8.5 There is a need to be Authentic with Colleagues.

Authenticity with colleagues is an important factor as educators implement critical reflection as part of the NQS in their daily practice. As described by Educator Four in the second interview:

> "Conversation, open communication and honest communication…that's the best thing we can do…. I think everyone is very willing to accept correction, improvement and suggestion, and that everyone can work together. It's helpful what we do with reflection…we gain insights and some points we can apply to yourself…knowledge and insight we can apply to our practice."

In an authentic learning environment reflecting involves social decision making, where educators collaborate. Authenticity is essential to the critical reflective learning process as educators address real problems and provide an opportunity for educators to learn with the intention on issues meaningful to them. Authenticity is about communicating in honest learning, in a way that an educator is comfortable with – this can happen in a model of reflection. Authenticity means being real, genuine and credible. Authenticity is important because without it there cannot be change. Reflection on experiences gives educators a context for each new experience and makes it real and purposeful. Hence authentic critical reflection brings change.

4.4.3.8.6 There is a need for Daily Collaboration

Daily collaboration is required as educators implement critical reflection as part of their daily practice. This was described by Educator Five in the second interview:

> "Listening to others, respecting their views, working together, supporting each other and developing by combining all our knowledge and growing together."

Educator Three in the first interview described daily collaboration in the implementation of critical reflection:

> "Reflection as continuous learning, learning together every day, continuous, ongoing and partnership."

This was further described by Educator Two in the third interview:

> "Partnership, continuous input, ongoing reflection and conversation".

A further description of daily collaboration was provided by Educator Two in the third interview:

> "Quality time to engage in productive conversations with each other...verbal or written...to exchange ideas with thoughts and perceptions of practice...it's happening, its progressive, it's continuous...it's productive ....to everybody and to the environment. It's your description of getting deeper, probing to a deeper level."

Educator Four in the first interview outlined reflection through daily collaboration with team members:

> "I write reflections and discussions, they are a great way because sometimes I can get insights from other team members that I don't know myself or would take a long time thinking about by myself so I sometimes ask for inspiration and write their ideas soon...we reflect and see how we can extend on that as well...Teamwork. We are understanding of each other and try to see specific things, so we can understand each individual as a person and as an educator."

Daily critical reflection was further described by Educator Five in the second interview:

> "Reflection as a team that supports educators to improve their own thinking - the NQS is the guide through which to extend this thinking." Educator Five further stated that within the faith-based context in which this study was conducted that "I think it helps a lot because we are more understanding of each other. We are more forgiving, I guess. We respect each other. We listen. We understand. Once gathered collectively, a masterpiece is then produced that will benefit not just now but what happens in the future."

Enabling educators to engage in critical reflection encourages educator involvement and responsibility. As a result, collaboration is purposeful and meaningful. The importance of

working together was consistently identified by educators to support working together to deliver the NQS outcomes required. All educators highlighted the importance of working together and cooperating in partnership with families and each other.

4.4.4 Summary and Discussion

Analysing the data in this section led to the development of the SCHEMED implementation approach that revealed that critical reflection must be structured, collaborative, founded on trust built on person-centeredness and heart openness, equipping, meaningfully mentored, empowering and distributed. In operationalising this approach in the classroom educators need to implement critical reflection as part of NQS daily tasks. A range of strategies utilised by educators to facilitate the effective implementation of critical reflection in daily practice have been presented. These include reflection as part of an educator's day-to-day role; daily striving for improved practice; applying change in practice daily; a daily focus on standards; authenticity with colleagues and daily collaboration. These strategies support Educators in the effective implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS in day to day tasks where critical reflection contributes positively to the success of an Early Education and Care centre.

4.4.5 Research Question Three: How does critical reflection contribute to the effective functioning of an ECEC centre?

4.4.5.1 An Effective ECEC Centre

The ECEC educators were also asked about their perceptions about what constitutes an effective functioning ECEC centre. The themes identified from the analysis of the educators' responses were called META themes as they access the conceptual rather than the operational level of the responses from the educators relating to an effective functioning ECEC centre. In answering research question three, the META themes will be identified and the relationships between the META themes and critical thinking will then be explored.

4.5.1.1 META Theme One: Belonging

One of the first things identified by the educators interviewed is that for an Early Childhood Education and Care centre to function, and function well for both children and staff, educators need to have a strong sense of belonging.

Educators said that they need to belong, be part of the team, know all educators are in this together, and they are part of something bigger than themselves. They are inputting into young lives with a real sense of belonging in the community and doing something significant. The data

indicated that educators that a shared worldview based on biblical values, socio-emotional relationships and individual and collective faith at the centre was at the centre of 'Belonging'. Biblical values make explicit what is implicit; to communicate what is important in a faith-based ECEC centre. These values are described in the book of Galatians in the Bible: "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These values are not only just personal but relate to the collective faith of the ECEC centre as a whole. These values are theologically and biblically derived and are appropriate for the individual educator, group of educators, the centre as a whole, and the wider community. Social-emotional relationships provide a strong foundation of promoting healthy social emotional development and an enhanced sense of belonging within an ECEC centre.

Educators need to feel a sense of belonging in order to find meaning in their work and to engage the power of their emotions. This was described by Educator Four in the second interview:

> "Relationships underpin everything...it is where you find your sense of self. It is where you learn through others and their experiences. When you have a strong sense of well-being from feeling a sense of belonging you are more able to learn."

The more educators discover links between personal ideas, a meaningful organisational mission or intention and values the more committed educators are to their goals.

Belonging is a feeling of security where members feel included, accepted, related, fit in, which enhances their well-being. People need to belong because it is a feeling to be needed, to be part of something bigger than an individual alone. To have the feeling that we 'belong' gives us the feeling that we have value and can make a difference. We feel that it is important to our well-being to need to 'belong' and be accepted and be part of something bigger than ourselves

Belonging is identified as being proactive, contributing freely, having a voice, using resources and other educators around you. Belonging for an educator was described by Educator Four in the second interview:

> "It's not just for ourselves...we're doing this for our community, for our families."

Educator Two, in the first interview described belonging as:

> "It's about something bigger than yourself; it's about the foundation of future lives and generational impact."

It is interesting to note that the approved learning framework for ECEC, the EYLF, describes the importance of this concept of 'Belonging' for children. Belonging is represented in the

Australian Early Childhood curriculum, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as follows:

> "Experiencing Belonging - knowing where and with whom you belong - it is integral to human existence. Children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community. Belonging acknowledges children's independence with others and the basis of relationships and defining identities, in early childhood and throughout life, relationships are circular to a sense of belonging (EYLF, 2009, p. 7)."

Educators in this study have described how a sense of 'Belonging' is not only important for children but crucial for educators themselves. Belonging acknowledges the basis of relationships in defining identities. In ECEC and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children and educators are and become through understanding that you are part of a group, feeling that you are part of a family and having a feeling that you are linked with others and experience important relationships.

Belonging is defined on page 7 of EYLF (2009) as, "knowing where and with whom you belong." In other words, belonging is fitting into an environment or having the right personal or social qualities to be a member of a group. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1987) tells us that we all need belonging. Through trust and acceptance, we affirm that we are part of a group. When you have community, you have belonging. Where there is fostered a sense of community, collaboration and personal engagement in learning, educators are more likely to enjoy critical reflection as a learning experience. Where a learning environment provides multiple layers for engagement and participation, educators are more able to participate in a manner most suitable to their needs, interpret and negotiate knowledge and bring pedagogical benefits. Our belonging to, or connectedness with people, places and groups, allows one to develop a distinct identity characterised by affiliation, acceptance and association.

Belonging occurs when an educator is feeling secure, where members feel included, accepted, related, fit in, with the feeling of home that enhances their well-being. Various groups such as family, friends and community enable people to belong as these are seen as the very important groups for people to want to fit into. People want to feel and be included by their group for who they are. They want to be able to feel part of a wider community but most importantly, they want to feel like they belong in a family of people who love them for who they are and accept them. Hence, belonging is a basic human need as each person is dependent on others to feel included and accepted. People need to belong because it is a feeling to be needed, to be part of something

bigger than an individual alone. To have the feeling that we ‘belong’ gives us the feeling that we have value and can make a difference. We feel that it is important to our well-being to need to ‘belong’ and be accepted.

Our need to belong is what drives us to look for enduring relationships with others; it motivates us to participate in a group for by belonging to a group we feel as if we are a part of something bigger and more important than ourselves. Our personal resilience is interwoven into the resilience of the communities to which we belong. Membership of a group offers people both inclusion and closure. Social psychologists have studied our need to belong. Abraham Maslow in 1943 proposed that a basic human need was the need to belong, after physiological needs of food, sleep and safety. One way to build a sense of belonging is to understand others’ perspectives through the process of critical reflection in being open and valuing everyone’s thinking.

From talking with the educators in this study ‘Belonging’ is important and strategies they suggest that enhance ‘Belonging’ include being respectful and accepting, providing positive and nurturing relationships, engaging, with others, appreciating others for their individuality, and creating meaningful learning within the environment. Educators also suggest that forming a community that engages in critically reflective practice helps educators to belong within the team and the community.

It is important to gain a deeper understanding of what contributes to ‘Belonging’ in ECEC. The educators in the study elaborated on the theme of Belonging and the following evidence codes emerged. Belonging is enhanced when educators:

4.5.1.1.1 Share the same ideology

As previously stated, belonging is defined as, “knowing where and with whom you belong” (DEEWR, p. 7). In other words, ‘Belonging’ is fitting into an environment or having the right personal or social qualities to be a member of a group, hence ‘Belonging’ is shaped by service ideology and educators’ values. Ideology is a system of ideas that an individual or group holds. Ideology is a set of beliefs or principles that an organisation may have whereas philosophy is aimed at the principles governing behind it. The service ideology is the set of principles in service operation influenced by beliefs and values as well as collective and individual identities and represents the link with educator agency, safety and well-being with the learning environment. Ideological differences emerge through diverse approaches and views about what is best for young children. ECEC is a dynamic area which attracts attention and robust debate

from all areas of society and many academic disciplines. A good ideological fit with one's environment is associated with a strong sense of 'belonging'.

Educator Three in the first interview described how:

> Priorities, attitudes and interactions within the Christian context: respecting others, loving others through relationships, understanding of roles... seeing where they are coming from... discussions in a critical way to benefit all practices… we see underlying Christian values of like humility, integrity, empathy.

Educator Four in the second interview described how:

> Mission, vision and values all flow from the philosophy in our practice.

4.5.1.1.2 Share the same values

Values are basic and fundamental beliefs that guide or motivate attitudes or actions (Eyal, et al., 2009). They help us to determine what is important to us. Values help us create and contribute meaning and purpose with fitting into a group and developing a sense of 'belonging'.

Educator Three in the first interview described "Teaching has the potential to take someone from this spot to this spot because you see them as valued." Educator Four in the second interview reported that:

> "My Christian values are very important to me in everyday practices...we always reflect on what we are saying, and this goes back to our Christian values and my personal values.... embedded in our daily actions, daily practice. To see what we can improve."

Educator Four in the second interview further described:

> "The culture around the NQS...before the culture is minimum expectations that we need to go beyond, reflection is expected...high expectation is part of the culture...expectation about staff to bring their best...really something you aspire to because of those values that you have." In the third interview Educator Four stated how "Values such as respecting children and families and providing quality care links very well with the NQS."

4.5.1.1.3 Have a sense of agency in the direction of the centre

Agency is defined as, "being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 45). In other words, agency is the capacity of individuals to independently act. We have a sense of agency when we feel in control of things that happen around us. Having agency means "being able to make choices and decisions to influence events and to have an impact on one's world" (DEEWR, p. 45). A sense of belonging is developed when one has a sense of agency with participation in decision making within the environment.

Educator One in the first interview described:

> "Critical reflection is my way of improvement for me to meet my goals, my vision for ECEC, my time to share my thoughts. Educator Three in the first interview described how she critically reflected in different ways to 'Improve learning' and "progress."

Educator Four in the second interview described:

> "I think the outcomes of the NQS in practice is that it has actually lifted our standard, it's pushed us to be better because we have been given that platform to say, Hey, here's what you need to do... for our service it's not just that it's like, Oh, this is what we need to go beyond. So, it's a different attitude... so I think the outcome is that it's pushed us to do better than that what is set...embedded in our daily practice."

4.5.1.1.4 Work within a safe environment

Settings that promote well-being and safety are fundamentally connected to a sense of belonging. When we feel safe, it is easier to relax and do all the things that comfort us, focus on our work, and ensure a stability which supports connection and feeling like we belong.

Educator Two in the first interview described how:

> "We have to comply with the standards."

In the second interview Educator Two then described:

> "We make sure everything that has been set out in the NQS we are complying with...policies and procedures we are adhering to ....to promote health. safety, wellbeing...it works had in hand."

Educator One in the first interview described how:

> "The quality areas... for example... children's health and safety... we look after each other's well-being, the well-being of children, and the well-being of educators."

4.5.1.1.5 Contribute to the group identity

Identity is knowing who you are. A sense of group identity develops with educators feeling like they have a place and a right to belong to the group and understand the different roles of those within the group.

Educator Five in the second interview described:

> "My faith is a very large part of defining my identity because it's where my beliefs and values stem from...my faith has shaped me from the day I was born."

4.5.1.1.6 Belonging and Critical Reflection: The Relationship

Now that 'Belonging' has been discussed and the sub-themes identified as ideology, values, agency, safety and identity, this thesis will now look at the role of critical reflection within 'Belonging'.

Belonging helps educators to critically reflect, and in critically reflecting an enhanced sense of belonging develops. Critical reflection is more than thinking and discussing. It is about working with colleagues and forming partnerships with professionals to share information and to understand each other's practice skills and expertise through the process of critical reflection. The development of this understanding is critical to running a successful ECEC centre.

Engagement as a mode of belonging allows educators to construct a constant process of negotiation with the interplay between participation, processes and practices. Engagement provides a means for community members to define, maintain, and negotiate their activities and practices, and creates a space for creating identities with a sense of belonging. Aligning practices allows educators to direct their energies towards common goals and helps to understand educator identity and learning.

In summary, to function as an Early Education and Care professional, to really do your job well, educators identified the need to feel like they belong, to be part of the team, to all be in this together, to be working at something bigger than themselves having input into young lives with a real sense of doing something important and belonging in their community doing a significant thing. In other words, belonging is needed in ECEC and facilitates and helps educators to critically reflect. If you feel like you belong you are more likely to be engaged in critical reflection and by the process of being engaged in critical reflection this, in turn, will help you feel like you belong more. This is a recursive relationship – one causes the other – which in turn strengthens the original thing that caused it. Belonging helps you to critically reflect, and in critically reflecting, you then have an enhanced sense of belonging, more than prior to critically reflecting, and it is the process of critical reflection that does that.

4.5.1.2 META Theme Two: Being

When educators were asked about how ECEC centres needed to function, and function well, the second theme that emerged was the idea of "Being".

Educator Two in the second interview described 'Being' as:

> "Feeling fulfilled, empowered and a co-labourer with parents and children."

Educator Three in the second interview described ‘Being” as:

> “Being grateful to feel challenged, to learn through encouragement, to be empowered and take step for personal growth...I want to contribute.”

Educator Four in the second interview described:

> “I’ve been given a responsibility ...I’ve been equipped and given the opportunity to be empowered.”

Educator Four in the third interview further described that:

> “If you can contribute and bring something good that the team is doing, it’s going to help your sense of well-being and you will be lifted up along with your sense of self-esteem and sense of worthiness in the workplace.”

Being is defined as “recognizing the significance of the here and now in children’s lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life’s joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 7). ‘Being’ is to experience what is happening now; it is life in the present. For both children and educators ‘Being’ is understanding that he/she is accepted for who he/she is and knowing that others care about them. ‘Being’ for an educator was reflected through having a voice through the critically reflective process to be able to contribute and thereby foster a sense of confidence, being positive, and being equipped to be proactive in contributing.

This theme that emerged for educators is most interesting given that ‘Being’ is important for children as identified in the approved learning framework, within ECEC, the EYLF, which describes the importance of Being:

> “Childhood is a time to be, to seek, and to make meaning in the world. Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children’s lives. It is about the present and children knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life’s joys and complexities, and facing challenges in everyday life” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 7).

ECEC is not just preparation for the future; it is also about the present. Educators who explore their own practice through critical reflection develop changes in attitudes and awareness which can benefit their professional growth and sense of ‘Being’. Within ECEC, ‘Being’ is needed and facilitates educators to critically reflect. A sense of ‘Being’ is about building and maintaining relationships with others, taking part in life’s journey and facing challenges in everyday life. From talking with educators about this concept of ‘Being’ strategies they suggested to enhance ‘Being’ include appreciating skills; providing opportunities for learning extending on interests;

embracing cultural support for individual educators; having respectful relationships; understanding each individual educator's uniqueness and recognising each other's values and skills; and allowing educators to express themselves and celebrating achievement.

'Being' is important because all of us want to feel important and all of us want to feel we are contributing to this world. Educators identified that it is not just children as described in the approved learning framework, the EYLF, who need to 'Belong,' to 'Be' and to 'Become.' In the same way, Educators need to be connected and included, to 'Belong,' 'Be,' 'Become' and yet also 'Collaborate.' If an educator can contribute to what the team values, this contributes to an educator's sense of 'Being' through a sense of well-being or worthiness in the workplace.

As identified by educators in the interviews, within the theme of 'Being', the following sub-themes emerged from the data. 'Being' is enhanced when educators:

4.5.1.2.1 Work together as a collective

A collective is a group of individual educators brought together by a common interest and experiences, sharing information, resources and perspectives with each other through the critical reflection process. Educators must work with different types of knowledge and learning about knowledge in practice and relationships of inquiry, knowledge and professional practice. Faith through critical reflection supports well-being. Beliefs can be strengthened by the critical reflective process. Indeed, people of faith should always be willing to think critically about beliefs. Being reflective is compatible with also being deeply optimistic and full of hope. Every educator has skills, connections and presence to engage in the critical reflection process to deeper understanding and broaden perspectives.

Collective action occurs when a number of people work together to achieve something more than an individual can alone and thereby being collective supports a sense of being.

Educator Four in the second interview described how:

> "Listening to others, respecting their views, working together, collaborating to ensure that we are always developing...everyone in the loop so they know what to so...flowing seamlessly."

Educator Four in the third interview described how educators "Combine all of our knowledge and grow together."

4.5.1.2.2 Engage with other educators

Engaging with other educators helps achieve shared goals thereby contributing to a sense of being.

Educator Two in the first interview described how

> "Critical reflection is my way informally of conversing with, just talking about, practice, with others, related to what occurred during the day;" "Really work together so reflection can work." This was further supported by Educator Three in the second interview describing "Connections" and "Working collaboratively."

4.5.1.2.3 Have faith in God

For Christians, having faith in God's promises allows one to find fulfilment and a sense of being. The word, faith, may carry different meanings for different people. Optimism has also been linked to well-being supporting an individual's sense of being.

Educator Four in the second interview described how:

> "My faith is very defining in what I do and why I do it."

Educator One in the second interview described:

> "So, I have a picture here… A childcare centre... there's sun shining and on top of that is my faith in my almighty God... my faith is like helping me to sort of do the best that I can in relation to what I can achieve as an early childhood educator."

4.5.1.2.4 Turn knowledge into practice

Practice is the application and implication of the significant learnings put into operation through the critical reflection process. There are different types of learning and different conditions of learning. These include internal and external, verbal, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies and attitudes. Approximations are the strategy used to reduce the complexity of learning and to approximate teaching practice about critical reflection. Instead of teaching a whole group of educators, one can teach one educator at a time or co-teach with a mentor teacher. Another approximation is for one teacher or educator (or a pair of educators) is to lead the group in a critical reflection experience with other educators. Role modelling is a powerful teaching tool for passing on the knowledge. Demonstration may be used at times where there may be a level of difficulty in comprehending verbal instructions.

An educator must work with different types of knowledge and come to an understanding of how theory informs practice. When educators understand how the two are intrinsically linked, they

come to be more open to the possibility that theory really matters (Timperley, 2011) and develop a sense of being, in knowing their role in constructing knowledge, and learning, and growing through that process.

Educator One in the first interview described:

> "I understand the NQS more as I was able to have hands on, encounter it, because of engagement."

4.5.1.2.5 Focus on serving others

Service to others means doing something for someone else without expecting reward or gain. It connects with the one you are serving and, if that is someone you know, it creates a stronger bond with them.

Educator Three in the third interview described how:

> "Christian values are embedded within all our educators, always serving, serving each other, and reflect God in our lives."

4.5.1.2.6 Being and Critical Reflection: The Relationship

Now that 'Being' has been discussed and the sub-themes identified as collective, engaging with other educators, faith and serving, let us now look at the role of critical reflection within 'Being.'.

Critical reflection is about making us better. Being critical is about how social structures, systems and processes work, in order to be able to change at a deep level to achieve lasting and greater good. The question educators need to ask is 'How is this making my practice better?' Everything we do in our profession should make our practice better with the intention of delivering better outcomes to children and families.

The critical reflection process requires engaging with others, asking open-ended questions and using reflective listening to participate in meaningful critical reflection. Critical reflection involves looking at assumptions and contrasting them with competing or alternative assumptions. When we think critically in this way, we can better understand how faith (and its assumptions about the world) differs from others' perspectives and other beliefs, and what those differences mean for us. By engaging in critical reflection, therefore, we can be discerning and thoughtful to 'be' the best we can be. Engagement in the critical reflection process helps educators to see others' perspectives and shifts their orientation from a 'me' orientation to a 'we' orientation. This helps educators to synergise with others.

Everyone can consider the critical reflection experience either together or in small groups. It is helpful for one educator to act as the facilitator or coach for the critical reflection experiences with the goal that the core principles of the critical reflection process become integrated. Another idea is the goal of collective improvement in the critical reflection process through collaboration with the group with one educator leading the group.

If you have this sense of being and that you are contributing, it helps you to critically reflect because you want to become the best version of yourself. In doing this process, critical reflection helps an educator to 'be' more in the contribution being made

4.5.1.3 META Theme Three: Becoming

When educators were asked about how ECEC centres function and function well, the third theme that emerged was the idea of "Becoming".

Educator Three in the third interview described 'Becoming' as:

> "Every day is a learning process...then you grow...in knowledge and skills for the individual...then you share it with the whole team."

Educator Five in the second interview described 'Becoming' as:

> "I've been assisted to be critically reflective. I'm not at a standstill, I'm growing...I'm growing to learn."

'Becoming' was described by Educator Two In the third interview as:

> "Going to another level...this is collaborative...becoming ...being more equipped...explore...proactive...embrace it."

This is not surprising as Bartlett (1990) points out that 'Becoming' a reflective practitioner involves moving beyond "how to" questions and asking "what" and "why" questions. In reflecting on these types of questions, we begin to exercise control and open the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom life (Bartlett, 1990, p. 267).

When we accept differences through critical reflection, we can 'Become' something bigger than ourselves.

> "Children's identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. They are shaped by many different events. Becoming reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as children learn and grow. It emphasises learning to participate fully and actively in society (DEEWR, 2009, p. 1)."

To experience change through different events and circumstances in one's life, one's sense of 'Belonging' refers to the changes one experiences as he or she grows, learns and develops. 'Becoming' is going to another level. Within ECEC, an educator's sense of 'Becoming' changes over time as an educator gains knowledge, extends understanding, creates relationships and develops skills. This enables an educator to actively participate. Strategies to include 'Becoming' include focussing on individual strengths; enabling confidence; reflecting on individual growth; aspiring others; acknowledging self; maintaining and developing relationships; building foundations of learning and expanding on skills.

As identified by educators from the interviews, within the theme of 'Becoming' the following sub-themes emerged from the data. Becoming is enhanced when educators:

4.5.1.3.1 Improve and develop their educational practice

An educator's practice is defined by their pedagogy and guided by educational outcomes. The aim is to provide the best possible environment for young children's learning. The goal of developing a culture of improvement is that it supports an iterative process in which everyone is better able to identify better ways and become all they can be.

Practice was described by Educator Two in the second interview as "The NQS continuously embedded in our reflective practices, the core of what we do."

4.5.1.3.2 Focus on the conditions of learning

Conditions of learning are those factors that influence learning. Some conditions are external whilst other conditions are internal and according to Gagne (1985), internal conditions are states of mind that the learner brings to the learning task. Reflecting on conditions of learning supports educators to become all they can be.

Educator One in the second interview described the importance of improving conditions of learning in educator provision of:

> "Opportunities to better themselves in what the standards are saying, the government, the regulatory body... continuously embedded with our reflective practices... ongoing... going back to what we do for children, families and communities."

Educator Four in the first Interview described conditions of learning as:

> "There's lots of verbal conversation in our room and I think it's my doing because that's the way I process...so if someone suggests an idea, we'll talk about that and be like, "Oh, we need to make sure that we're doing that", that there's a follow-up to do. So, you know, have you got other ideas you have in mind for, you know, if we need to extend it,

> what other resources are available, that sort of thing...Reflection is constantly happening in my head.... what could I do better today? Then I'll process in my head writing helps me to meditate on something a little bit more."

4.5.1.3.3 Make use of approximations of practice

Approximations take myriad forms but are all designed to create a space in which the complexity of learning is reduced to allow educators to attend to, and develop, particular aspects of their practice in a safe space with instructional support.

Approximations hence support the design of practice to learning for an educator to become all he/she can be. As the dynamic interactions between multiple factors, approximations contributing to educator learning were described by Educator Two in Interview Two:

> "Reflecting on leadership and service management ...I want to learn to improve...adhere to policies and regulations ...not just a process... not just a routine...not just a procedure...the essence of the environment."

4.5.1.3.4 See themselves as a role model

A role model serves as an example of the values, attitudes and behaviours associated with a role. A good role model continues to strive for better outcomes.

Educator Two in the first interview described the importance of role-modelling:

> "Modelling practices is really important to build on."

Whilst Educator Two in the second interview described role - modelling:

> "I model practices first, so I can develop others."

4.5.1.3.5 Demonstrate practice

Demonstrating practice allows educators to feel like they can be their authentic selves and, within a supportive environment, can lead to better collaboration and problem solving to allow an educator to become all he or she can be.

Educator Two in the second interview described demonstration:

> "I am a hands-on leader... I want to model... to do things... the NQS contributed to my leadership style... to learn from people I work with... to learn from what you know they see me as I model them and give them the liberty to explore themselves as well as they engage with the NQS individually as well."

4.5.1.3.6 Becoming and Critical Reflection: The Relationship

Now that we have discussed 'Becoming' and the sub-themes identified as practice, conditions of learning, approximations, role modelling and demonstrating, let us now look at the role of critical reflection within 'Becoming'. Becoming is defined on page 7 of EYLF as "reflecting this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years of as young children learn and grow." Critically reflective educators are always thinking about how they influence and affect the learning and teaching environment. They also think about the likely effects of their teaching upon the quality of children's learning. A critically reflective educator will frame their reflections incorporating a child's perspective and will embark upon a deliberate process of gathering information and evidence to become the best he or she can 'Be'. 'Becoming' is needed in ECEC and helps educators to critically reflect and by critically reflecting, educators 'Become' more. Becoming occurs as both staff and children develop together through a shared experience.

4.5.1.4 META Theme Four: Collaborating

As outlined in the previous sections on "Belonging', 'Being' and 'Becoming,' these META themes are similar to elements in the approved learning framework for ECEC, the EYLF, for children. It would seem that these elements are crucial not only for children but also for Educators. In this study, the Educators perceived that it is important to 'Belong', to 'Be', and to 'Become'. In addition to this, these educators also said that it is important to 'Collaborate' for the ECEC centre to function well.

Educator Two in the third interview described how:

> "Educators have the voice to be able to contribute so belonging, being, becoming and our beliefs encompasses our practice. When you belong, you embrace it and then you become part of it and then you go to another level because you know this works and this benefits everyone...and with the help of every educator that's around you who is on the same journey you embrace it even more."

Educators have said that 'collaborating' comes through the close relationships established within the team to define what is done and why it is done.

'Collaborating' is building connection, fusing the layers and interconnecting relationships of 'Being', 'Belonging' and 'Becoming' together, extending to be secured to something bigger than ourselves. 'Collaborating' is about the care and wellbeing that is unique amongst a group of educators. Through critical reflection, 'collaborating' develops amongst educators as they share and critique practice and learn together by reflecting on their experiences. 'Collaborating' is important because it is the basis for attachment, trusting relationships and security to

understanding for growth, health, a sense of worth, empathy and cooperation with others. Secure attachments provide a sense of security and confidence.

Within ‘Collaborating’ the educators in the study identified variables, or sub-themes that impacted the levels of bonding in the workplace. Collaborating is enhanced when educators:

4.5.1.4.1 Can take action

Team reflection allows educators to express thoughts, feelings and perspectives about a shared experience, to build openness and trust in the team, and to draw out key learnings and insights to move forward to improve future application. Reflection individually and then sharing individual reflections with the group provides insights and learning to emerge for action for future application and improvement and set up the conditions for next time through listening for understanding and learning by doing. The critical reflection process is active and provides actionable outcomes from the process. Insights are generated by analysing information and drawing conclusions which can then influence decisions and drive change. Educators voices reflected through the process of critical reflection contribute to educators being empowered for action.

Educator Four in the second interview described how

> “That push to improve is a big motivator to work together as a team to get things done...to grow...to learn...we are always thinking...always reflecting...discussing with others.”

Educator Five in the second interview described being as:

> “Intentional in processes for reflection... it pushes you to see others perspectives... we push ourselves to be better... more conversations... taking action and reflecting... again and again... because where we reflect there’s action... its’s never just reflection without action there’s always this process of “Hey, let’s talk about this. Let’s try this, let’s reflect on what we just tried. Is it working, is it not?” Oh, it’s not working, let’s reflect again... Oh, it is working... Cool, how can it work better?” So, it’s, I think, moving forward, it’s just going to be that constant process that we go through, that we go through all the time and to be taking these steps of action… Because without action nothing happens.... It’s an expectation... it’s expected that you’re always going to reflect... that is part of your job... it’s part of your role... it’s part of being an educator. It’s you are always going to be reflecting on what you are doing and why you are doing it, to always have an answer. It’s like that... expected.” In the second interview Educator Five further described “Taking ownership of action. Of doing things... not delayed... its empowerment. Its ownership... this process is in place for us to be able to take action quickly and then keep reflecting on that action.”

4.5.1.4.2 Are engaged in an educative process

Education is the process of receiving or giving instruction, learning and building knowledge and includes the theory and practice of teaching. Collaborating develops as knowledge is gained and learning takes place. Critical reflection enables educators to share stories about their educational experiences within the workplace, develop trust and to collaborate on practices. Successful learning in a team of educators is the construction of effective collaboration practices, a requirement of the NQS. As we have discussed, critical reflection is a responding process to make meaning of an experience. Critical reflection is descriptive, analytical and critical through which depth and breadth are added to an experience and connections built. In regard to education and collaboration, critical reflection is integrated through identifying learning outcomes related to the experience such as understanding multiple perspectives and new solutions to a problem; designing the critical reflection learning activity to best meet these outcomes; engaging educators in critical reflection and evaluating feedback. Critical reflection as self-awareness is powerful for education especially when so much of what educators do and how they educate is influenced in the moment. Asking 'what' and 'why' questions gives educators a certain control in the educative process and as described by Bartlett (1990, p. 267) "opens up possibilities for transforming our everyday classroom life." Collaborating occurs through critical inquiry and learning with others in successive levels of expertise in educating and teaching - those educators newly qualified, those experienced and those who are lead educators. Given the nature of education, learning should never stop. Educators gain insights from both their own and their colleagues' observations through critical reflection, with critical reflection engagement by educators developing awareness which can benefit professional growth. Relationships are hence established and linked through critical reflection based on shared experiences and bonding secured through the critical reflection process.

Educator Four in the second interview described how:

> "The team is expected to be reflecting and asking questions that lead to professional discussions... critically reflecting… children's learning as well... being able... building... feeling like I've been heard and ready to take action… continuing, being able, thinking more deeply of what you believe and why you believe it… bringing our best learning so I have a reason for what I'm doing... Knowledge is valued, ideas and experiences."

4.5.1.4.3 Are authentic in their professional practice.

Authenticity is described by Brown (2012) as cultivating the courage to be vulnerable and to believe that we are fundamentally worthy of acceptance as we are as there is no better way to

invite grace, and joy than by practicing authenticity. Authenticity is as an attribution that is socially constructed and appears in many domains of social life (Carroll, 2015). It is genuineness, trustworthiness and credibility. Collaborating links with authenticity in that it develops with integrity, transparency and authenticity. Authenticity builds trust and leads to educators who trust each other and are closer because they are authentic with each other. Trust and commitment are needed to maintain and develop social dynamics in relationships. When trust is in place, each individual in the team becomes stronger because he or she is part of an effective, cohesive group towards the achievement of group goals. Authenticity is important to educators in the process of critical reflection through educators being open and honest with each other as they engage in the process of critical reflection. It is important that the process of critical reflection is truly authentic, involving looking at real word scenarios, levelling with each other, working on real problems and coming up with concrete solutions (Rolfe, et al., 2011). Educators want to know what other educators think and feel. To be authentic is to be genuine, honest and real and to feel comfortable with understanding context, environments, and relationships and to understand what is happening within the context, within the environment and within relationships. As a result of this, educators who are authentic with each other form closer bonds within the workplace. In an authentic learning environment, educators collaborate and address real problems which enable educators to learn with intention on issues meaningful to them. Authenticity is about communication in honest learning – without it there can be no change. Critical reflection gives educators the context for each new experience to make it real and purposeful, thereby fostering change (Fook & Kellehar, 2010).

Educator Four in the second interview described how:

> "Everybody is getting a say, everybody feels like they are contributing... professional discussions happen where people's voices are heard…where people are feeling they are on board… the whole process is about bringing out the best in others… critically reflecting as a team to get to the bottom of this so that the team can say "Yes, I am on board."

Educator Four in the second interview further described:

> "It is embedded in our practice because it is what pushes us forward... it's that constant process that just naturally happens in our service because that is what is expected... it makes it better... children as well... I guess it's about trying to represent what you've seen and heard reflected in a really meaningful and authentic and respectful way."

4.5.1.4.4 Develop autonomy that is supported by responsibility

Autonomy is independence which is supported through responsibility (McCombs, 2019). Collaborating and responsibility play an important role in building resilience. With responsibility – with guidance and support – educators are helped to learn to develop resilience, grow and bond. Having a sense of how time at work is arranged can increase autonomy with the opportunity to focus on tasks or projects and means educators can decide how their work should be done. Through the process of critical reflection goals can be decided upon and educators empowered to decide the best way to achieve these goals. Generally, a high degree of autonomy engenders a sense of responsibility and greater job satisfaction and greater bonding achieving goals. Trust is key. It's also about educators having the self-confidence to do certain things and become independent, with the ability to act and think for oneself, supported through the process of critical reflection.

Educator One in the second interview described autonomy:

> "Everyone is regarded as a leader... quality area leaders... everyone is encouraged to contribute."

4.5.1.4.5 Are enabled in their professional practice

Enabling empowers, allows, facilitates and equips an educator to problem solve (ECA, 2015) and in so doing fosters bonding.

Educator One in the second interview described:

> "With more knowledge I am more equipped to complete tasks in relation to the NQS...I can understand it more fully."

Educator Three in the first interview described how there are

> "Conversations happening...and that's a really lovely time...to bring what we have...underlying in the outcomes that we're working towards... it continuous you know, growing, developing yourself...It's a continuous process everyday learning.... relationship is about giving trust...consistency...the best opportunity to flourish." Educator Four in the first interview described "Building on other's strengths."

Through team-based reflection learning is enabled as educators work together toward achieving goals and hence develop closer bonds through this partnership.

4.5.1.4.6 Work within a structure that facilitates bonding

Structure is an arrangement and organisation of interrelated elements in a system (Clark, 2007). How the group collaborates is contingent on the structure put into place to provide integrity and support. Structure ensures the optimal outcomes to ensure development, support and process - improvement initiatives. Structure is an integral part of the teamwork process and hence bonding of educators within a team. A proper structure is an enabler for and the result of effective communication of what educators have said, leadership, ECEC monitoring within the workplace, and mutual support to provide collaboration amongst educators and achieve workplace objectives (ACECQA, 2017).

4.5.1.4.7 Collaborating and Critical Reflection

Now that we have discussed 'Collaborating' and each of the sub-themes identified as action, education, authenticity, autonomy, enabling and structure, the role of critical reflection within 'Collaborating' will now be discussed.

As critical reflection provides educators with the opportunity to examine their practice, it is the glue that holds the centre and learning together. It does this in enhancing educator self-awareness, a sense of community and the provision of optimal educative experiences. By involving educators in real issues, learning at the centre provides educators with opportunities to know, a desire to enhance their skills, and a commitment to solving problems of importance to them. Collaborating is needed in ECEC and critical reflection can help achieve this.

Educator Two 2 in the third interview described 'Bonding':

> "Embedded critical reflective practice is when an educator or a set of educators take time and when I say time, it's quality time, to engage in productive conversations with each other in any form, share, challenge and exchange ideas, thoughts and perceptions of practice as early childhood educators. It doesn't stop. It's like you breathe it so you know where everyone is coming from. It's productive to everybody and to the environment and you pass it onto the children and families that we build relationships with."

Critical reflection and autonomy are both considered desirable educational goals (Pemberton & Nix, 2012). If knowledge is the result of knowing and learning extends the breadth of knowing, then critical reflection is a way to help educators extend their experiences of knowing and to gain a better understanding of learning. During the process of critical reflection when educators recapture their experience, think about it and evaluate it, new experience becomes meaningful and new knowledge is made. Critical reflection helps educators gain a better understanding of self to become active learners. When educators are engaged in critical reflection, skills are

learned more effectively, and educators become more motivated, developing a skill, which in turn empowers educators to become active and autonomous learners.

Educator autonomy is defined as the "capacity to take control of one's learning" (Benson, 2001, p. 47). To be able to control their own learning, educators need self-directed learning skills. Critical reflection benefits educators' personal capacity building. Through engaging educators in critically reflection, learning capacity develops, not just learning for the sake of acquiring knowledge. The knowledge thus gained through critical reflection as a way of learning is constructed actively through developing arguments, using disciplined inquiry to construct meaning, making distinctions and solving problems. When educators bring their ideas or problems for evaluation, they begin to make choices about what to do and what not to do. Critical reflection, therefore, becomes a form of response (Boud et al., 1985; Finlay, 2008) to an educator's new experience. This, thereby, makes this new experience meaningful to enable educators to control their own learning.

In summary, if an educator feels like she or he belongs, is being all she or he can be through becoming self-actualised through contribution in the process of critical reflection, with having one's needs met (Narvaez, 2018), and is becoming a better version of himself or herself through this process of critical reflection, they can experience real collaboration enabling educators to feel like they are on a team of people and part of a community.

4.5.1.5 META Themes Overview: Connections

In this study ECEC educators said that it is important to 'Belong', to 'Be,' to 'Become', and to 'Collaborate'. This is interesting because it reflects many of elements of the EYLF with some additions. In summary, educators explained that first of all they wanted to belong in their centre to be accepted, to be at home and to function in an optimal way. Secondly, educators explained their sense of being in how they are developing themselves and undergoing a level of self-actualisation in their job, with their job making them a better version of themselves because of the contribution that an individual is am making. Thirdly, educators explained becoming out of that process a new person with extra skills and learning with others. Finally, educators described a sense of collaborating and a sense of connection.

As discussed previously, "Belonging', "Being', "Becoming' and 'Collaborating' helps educators to critically reflect which in turn enhances their ability to 'Belong', to "Be', to 'Become' and to 'Collaborate.' This is a recursive circular process within which critical reflection plays an important role.'

4.4.5.2 A Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC

Having discussed the META themes and sub-themes, let us now look at how these fit together, and how these layers interact with each other. A visual diagram of a model illustrating the interconnections between the META themes and sub-themes is progressively built in figures 4.3., 4.4., 4.5., 4.6 and 4.7. In particular, the acquiring nature of core components within the model presented in Figure 4.7 highlights relationships and illustrates connections between the themes. This provides the framework for ECEC educators to critically reflect on practice. These figures help to present the research findings with summation of the data to enhance conceptual understanding of the critical reflection process (Korthagen, 2017). This operational model of ECEC presented (Figure 4.7) is layered and multidimensional and provides an understanding of core components within effective ECEC and the relationships between each of these components.

4.4.5.1 Belonging

The underlying structure of the operational model is represented by an inner layer depicted in Figure 4:3. This inner layer represents the theme of 'Belonging' and situates the respective sub-themes of Belonging. As we have discussed, 'Belonging' is needed in ECEC and helps educators to critically reflect, and in critically reflecting, they have an enhanced sense of belonging.



Figure 4. 3 *Inner layer of view of Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC*

Educators need to feel a sense of belonging in order to find meaning in their work and to engage the power of their emotions. The more educators share an ideology, have shared values, develop a sense of agency, work within a safe environment and contribute to the centre's identity, the more they feel as if they belong. To have the feeling that we 'belong' gives us the feeling that we have value and can make a difference. We feel that it is important to our well-being to need to 'belong' and be accepted and be part of something bigger than ourselves. When you belong, you can 'Be' fully present in the moment. 'Belonging' is, therefore, the precursor to 'Being', 'Becoming' and 'Collaborating'. As stated, 'Belonging' helps you to critically reflect, and in critically reflecting, you then have an enhanced sense of belonging, more than prior to critically reflecting, and it is the process of critical reflection that achieves this.

4.4.5.2 Being

The second layer of the model is depicted in Figure 4:4 and represents the theme of 'Being"

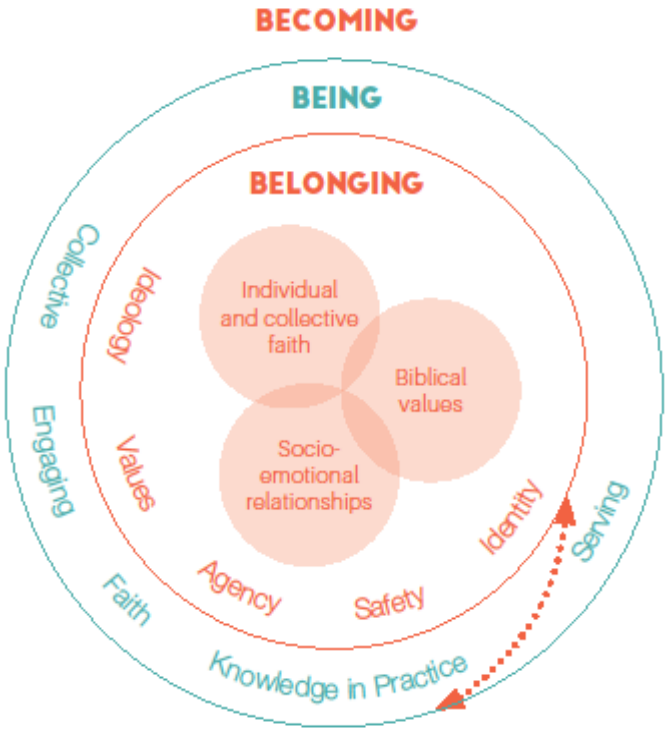


Figure 4. 4 *Inner and second layer view of Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC*

As already discussed, when educators were asked about what enables ECEC centres to function, and function well, they have talked about this idea of "Being". 'Being' is to experience what is happening now, life in the present. A sense of 'Being' builds upon belonging in seeing value in the present, focusing on strengths - what educators know and can do - and acknowledging an

educator's strengths in practice. As educators work together as a collective, engage with other educators, have faith in God, turn knowledge into practice, and focus on serving others, they experience a sense of 'Being'.

Educators who explore their own practice through critical reflection develop changes in attitudes and awareness which can benefit their professional growth and sense of 'Being'. This enables educators to contribute to what the team values, their well-being and their sense of 'Belonging' in the workplace. As stated, if you have this sense of 'Being', it helps you to critically reflect because you want to become the best version of yourself, and in doing that process, critical reflection helps you to be more. 'Being' is being self-actualised in your job, becoming better because of the contribution being made through the process of critical reflection enabling one to 'Become' more.

4.4.5.3 Becoming

The third layer of the operational model (Figure 4:5) represents the theme of 'Becoming'.

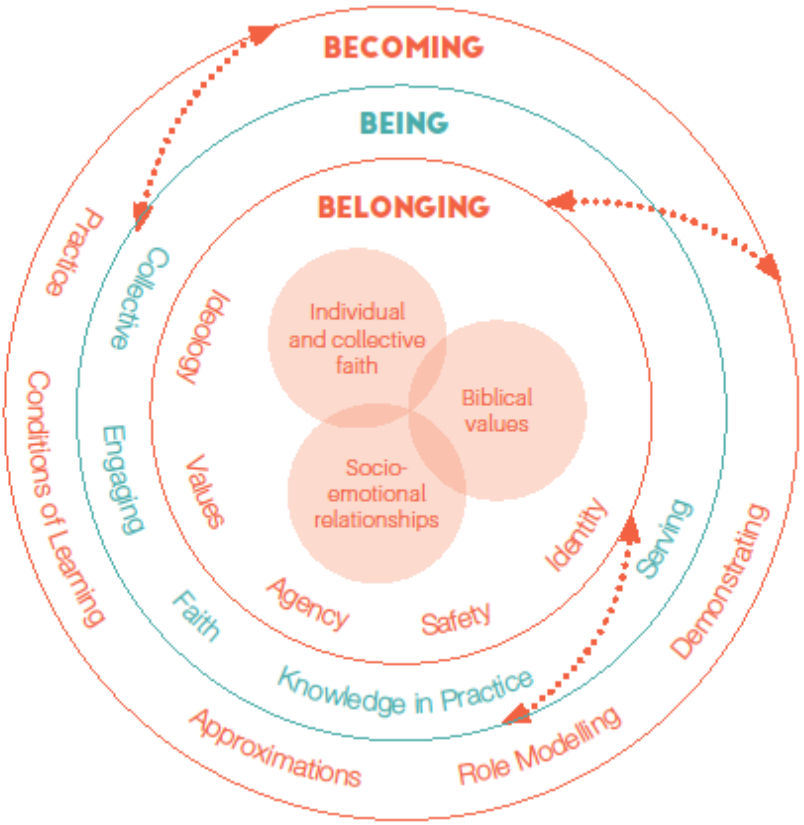


Figure 4. 5 *Inner, second and third layer view of Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC*

'Belonging' and 'Being' are foundational to 'Becoming' as they enable educators to feel secure, meet challenges, engage in learning and fulfil potential. As previously discussed, 'Becoming' a

reflective practitioner involves moving beyond "how to" questions and asking "what" and "why" questions to open transformative possibilities for when we accept differences through critical reflection, we are able to 'Become' something bigger than ourselves. To experience change through different events and circumstances in one's life, one's sense of 'Becoming' refers to the changes one experiences as he or she grows, learns and develops.

'Becoming' is going to another level. Within ECEC, an educator's sense of 'Becoming' changes over time as educators improve and develop their educational practice, focus on the conditions of learning, make use of approximations of practice, see themselves as role models and demonstrate practice. All of these skills are improved through active participation in the critical reflection process.

4.4.5.4 Collaborating

The fourth and final layer within this model (Figure 4:6) represents the theme of 'Collaborating.'

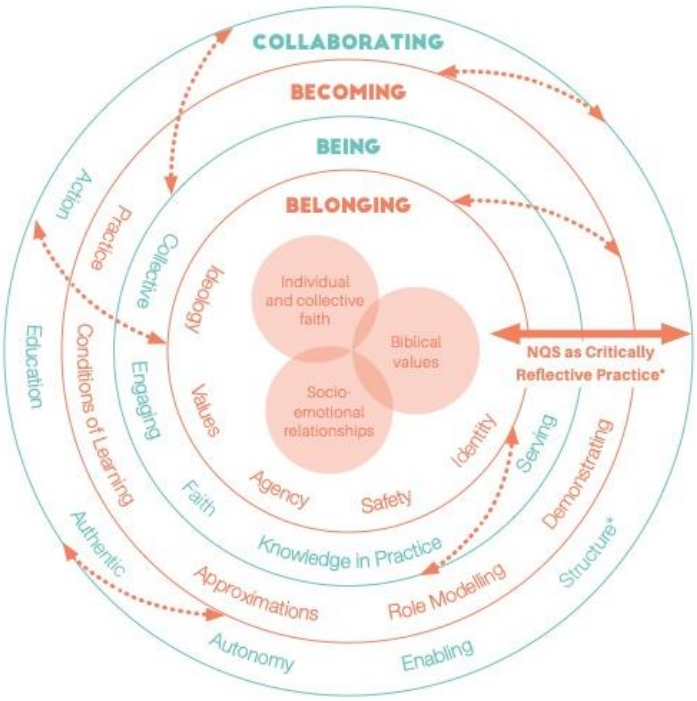


Figure 4. 6 *A Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC*

This layer provides both the functional and procedural means of linking the variables enabling structure as emerged through the data. Hence, this layer is the pinnacle of the critical reflection process and requires all other layers to support it. This layer secures those connections and manages the operation of effective critical reflection in ECEC establishing context and mapping between both dependent and independent variables, each layer therefore in this conceptual model

serves the layer above it and is served by the layer beneath it. For example, the layer that provides ‘Becoming’ is needed by the layer above it that comprise the components that make critical reflection effective within ECEC. This interconnectedness and actions within layers are visualized as connected by diagonal connections in those layers to represent the motion and life within the dynamic critical reflection process in ECEC.

It would seem that a commonly shared goal enables a binding force that knits members together (Bennis & Ward, 1997). As discussed, if you feel like you belong, that you are being self-actualized, that you are becoming a better version of yourself through this process of critical reflection, critical reflection can create real collaboration enabling educators to feel like they’re on a team of people for a community. Collaborating is enhanced as educators act, engage in the educative process, are authentic in their professional practice, develop autonomy supported by responsibility, are enabled in their professional practice, and work within a structure that facilitates collaborating.

4.5.5.5 Critical Reflection

Having looked at the layers of the model and the ways that the components interact with each other, we now turn our attention to the way that critical reflection impacts the components and layers within the operational model (Figure 4.7).

Critical reflection is the glue that binds the team together, building upon ‘Belonging’, ‘Being’, ‘Becoming’ and ‘Collaborating’ and is maintained through the mutual interaction of these four important components. In this way the model represents system thinking - seeing beyond what initially appears to be a set of isolated and independent layers - to identify a system of interactions that encourages us to understand how this process works. By examining the internal relationships amongst the multiple components within this system, we develop a deeper understanding of how this process operates in time and space. This understanding allows us to work with the system to develop interventions to create lasting change.

This is a model of action of the process of critical reflection in providing the cycle to pose questions and enhance learning. As an action model, visualising the series of actions and flows within the system, it represents the process of critical reflection and the activity within this system and conditions required. The model layers give a visual description of what is going on

with the critical reflection process.

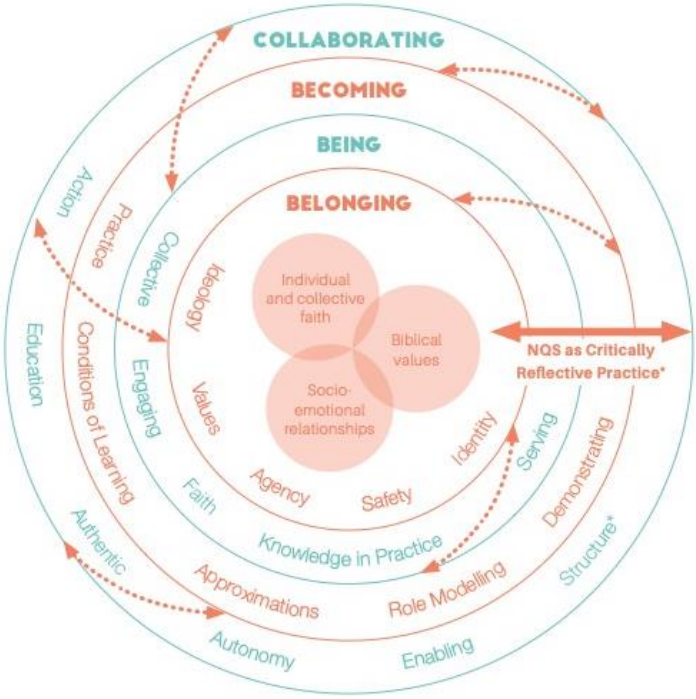


Figure 4. 7 *The Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC*

4.4.5.3 The Member Checking of the Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC.

After this model was developed, the educators in the study were asked about the model as a form of member checking. This was implemented in two steps.

Firstly, educators were asked to comment on the model and then highlight specific areas of importance to each educator. This resulted in an ongoing discussion of what the model is and what is important.

Secondly, educators were asked their perspectives on the Early Years Learning Framework, the approved learning framework for children in ECEC within Australia. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) describes the principles, practices and outcomes that support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. The EYLF diagram in Figure 4.9 shows the relationship between learning outcomes, principles and practice. The EYLF draws on conclusive international research that Early Childhood is a vital period in children's learning and development (EYLF, 2009). The Framework forms the foundation for ensuring that ECEC settings throughout Australia experience quality teaching and learning. As the Approved learning framework, this is reflected in both the National Regulations

and the NQS and so educator reflections from both the EYLF and the emergent operational model for critical reflection for ECEC through this study were documented and follow in the member checking process for each educator.

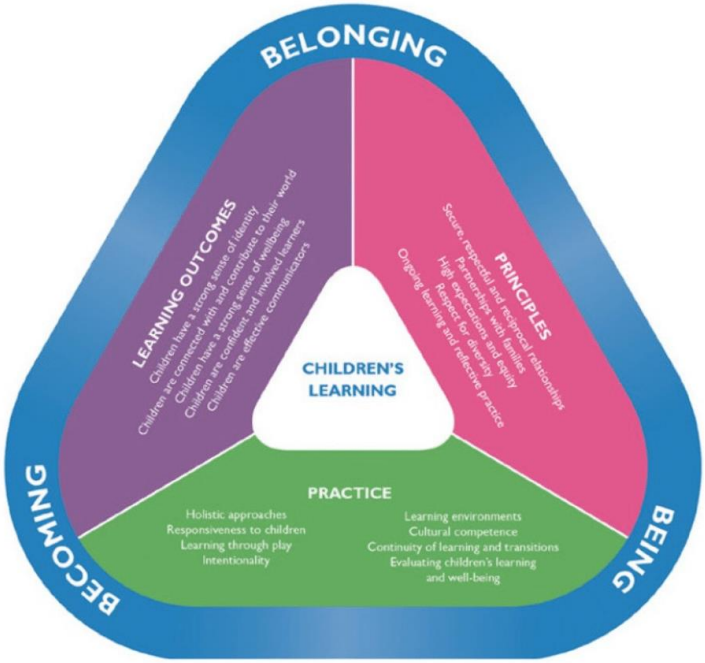


Figure 4. 8 Commonwealth Early Years Learning Framework Diagram

4.4.5.3.1 Member Checking Process for Educator One and her Interpretation of the Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC

Educator One described the importance of collaborative strengths supporting authentic critical reflection in the Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC:

> "Educators have value, potential and a wealth of knowledge, and can be empowered to develop an learn with the whole team working to continuously improve and support each other as the teamwork towards the best outcomes of the NQS. This model supports critical reflection."

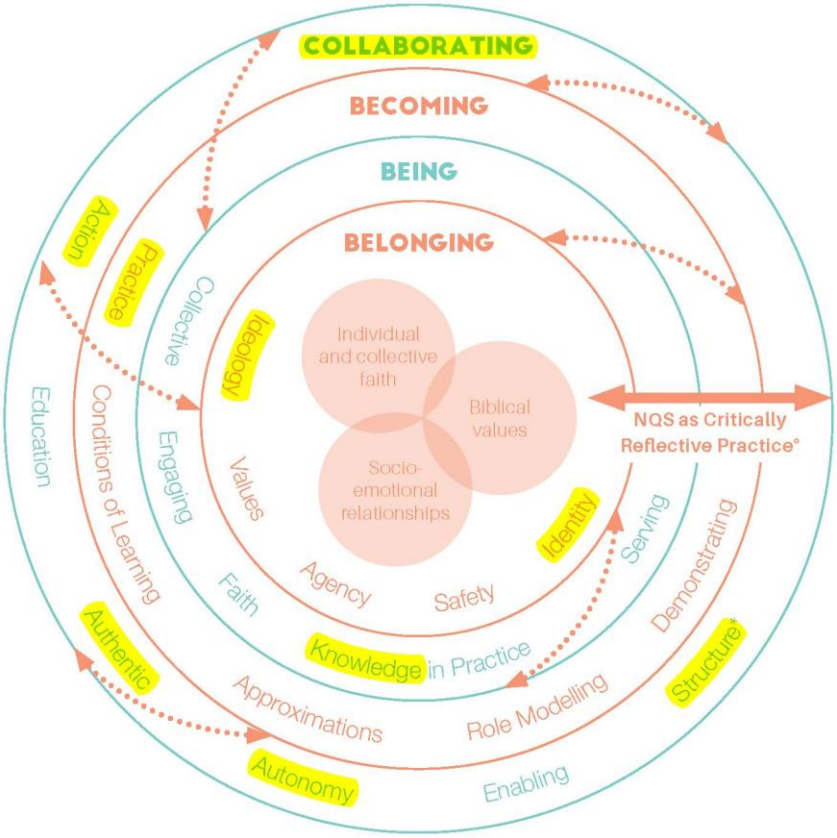


Figure 4. 9 *Educator One –Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC Interpretation*

The model for Critical Reflection in ECEC is founded in social constructions and ideology supporting the development of educators' identity and knowledge in practice for continuous improvement. Educators have value, potential and a wealth of knowledge and can be empowered to develop and learn with the whole team working to continuously improve and support each other as the teamwork towards the best outcomes of the NQS. Such a model supports critical reflection and can be applied to any ECEC context. Leadership is not just about directing tasks. All people are viewed within a Christian world view as having value.

4.14.1.1 Points of Distinctiveness in this Diagram for Educator One

Educator One described how the Operational model of Critical Reflection in ECEC extends the EYLF diagram:

> "The diagram developed extends on the EYLF diagram, focussed on the perspective of educators".

Highlighting the importance of the ideology, philosophy, vision, goals and leadership direction, continuous improvement can result. Threshold conditions of regulatory requirements are critical through knowledge in practice, but, do not alone guarantee improved outcomes.

Educator One further stated that "processes" are also critical. These "processes" were identified by the researcher to include the contextual culture and embedded centre operations in daily practice.

4.14.1.2 Comparisons with Commonwealth EYLF Diagram

For Educator One, children are not alone in the need *to* ***be, belong and become***

> "Children are not alone in the need *to* ***be, belong and become***. These needs are also experienced by educators"

Needs of 'Being', 'Belonging', and 'Becoming' are also experienced by educators. If an educator can make a valued contribution to the ECEC team, then this contributes to their sense of being, belonging and becoming. Well-being is fostered through a sense of worthiness in the workplace. It is the considered view of this educator that ***Being*** is reflected through a growing sense of confidence, being positive, embracing and equipped to be proactive in every contribution. ***Belonging*** for an educator is developed through collaboration, walking together side by side, hand in hand with the team, having a voice and contributing. ***Becoming*** is gaining knowledge as an educator, collaborating and building each other up to deliver the best outcomes and participating in the importance of implementation of the NQS in the best way to the highest standards and bonding together through this process.

4.4.5.3.2 Member Checking Process for Educator Two and her Interpretation of the Operational Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC

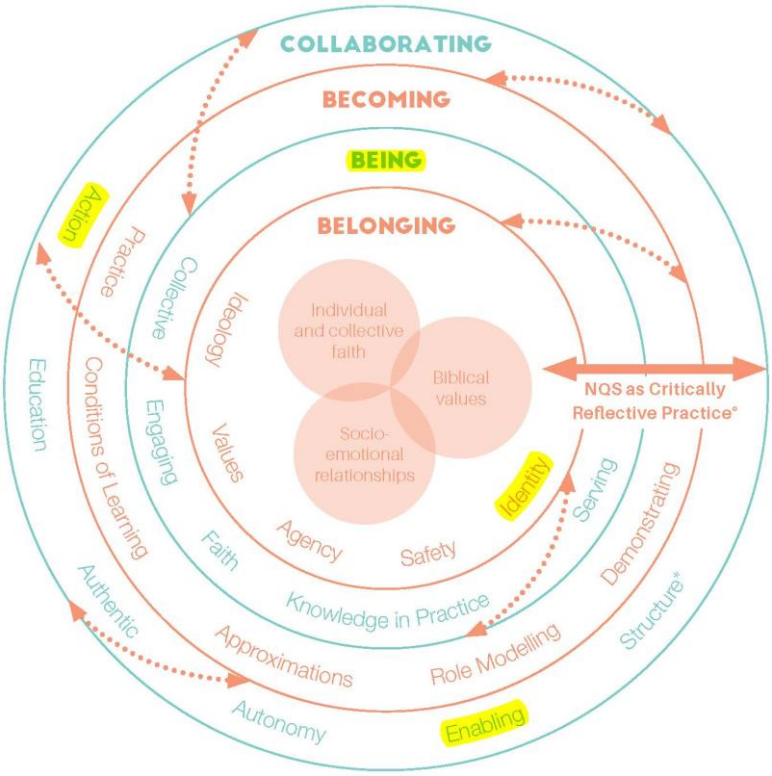


Figure 4. 10 *Educator Two – Model of Critical Reflection in ECEC Interpretation*

The Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC is described by Educator Two as a

> "Representation of what she believes ECEC is."

As Educator Two looks at the Operational Model she states:

> "All the key ingredients – 'Being', 'Belonging', 'Becoming' and 'Collaborating' are all represented which tells me that ECEC for an educator is a journey and it can be lived with accomplishment, with passion, fulfilment and opportunity to raise and care for children and their families, to be part of a community. Each level builds on the next".

This diagram, to Educator Two, is a representation of what she believes ECEC is with each level building upon one another.

Educator Two further describes:

> "Feeling like I belong, being motivated to fulfil my potential, and flourishing in this profession - comes from my being, knowing, connection and bonding with the people

> around me. This includes children, fellow educators, families and communities. Reflection is the key ingredient to success."

For Educator Two, feeling like she belongs, she is being motivated to fulfil her potential to flourish:

> "Comes from my being, knowing, connection and bonding with the people around me. This includes children, fellow educators, families and communities. Reflection is the key ingredient to success".

Educator Two specifically describes how this diagram represents this Christian setting and can be adapted to any ECEC environment:

> "This model represents this Christian setting. It is also true for other services as long as their minds are open to the possibilities of what ECEC should be embracing. This Model is a reality for us. We are biblically based through faith, being transformed by the word of God. It is a bonus to be in a Christian environment, but it can be adapted to any ECEC environment."

4.14.2.1 Points of Distinctiveness in this Diagram for Educator Two

What stands out for Angela., Educator Two, is identity. For once you know who you and that you are more than able to Belong, Be, Become and Collaborate. This educator identifies as a Christian and values and agency are important for her as the solid foundation of what she believes in and what she wants to become.

Reflective practice is overarching and embracing and enhances the whole process:

> "When an educator reflects personally and applies this reflection in the totality of who she is, and where she can go, potential can be fulfilled. Critical reflection as a holistic embedded practice in ECEC nowadays and is going to progress more and more. For an educator to really fulfil his /her potential, dreams and passions then they need to understand what critical reflective practice all is about and live and breathe it day by day. It is the passport to achieving what we want to achieve."

Critical reflection fosters improvement so we can achieve what we want to achieve.

Educator Two identified through the highlighting process that what was most important to her was 'enabling' and 'action' in the outside core as she wants to be able to pass it on – to be a blessing to someone or a group of people through her actions.

The collaborating section of the diagram describes how educators can be part of a group that is being guided by a distributed leadership model. This is described by Educator Two:

> "It is important for everyone to be linked together spiritually, united in our goals, collaborating, believing together, with everyone working together to achieve, looking at the heart of educators. Distributed leadership is a reality – it is going to be demonstrated and evident. All these elements are key, we always have the goals of empowering each other, believing where each other can go from one level to another to reach potential as we distribute tasks as per each other's strengths. If every ECEC adopts this there will be a very bright future for all ECEC environments to deliver the best outcomes".

4.14.2.2 Comparisons with Commonwealth EYLF Diagram

Educator Two was able to identify where 'Collaborating' fits when compared to the EYLF diagram by describing how 'Collaborating' pertains to the educators themselves because:

> "For educators to be able to deliver the best outcomes for children they themselves need be established and strong in 'Being,' 'Belonging,' 'Becoming' and 'Collaborating'.

Educator Two identified that the diagram, when compared to the EYLF diagram, provides the foundation for becoming an effective educator– – this need to know they belong to the right environment; that an educator's identity is secure; that they can become the best educator they want to be so they can collaborate together to achieve the result and outcomes they want so that they can achieve outcomes for children. If the model and foundation is right, the best outcomes can be delivered. If we build into the model the educators we want to be, the outcomes are more likely to be passed onto children and families.

4.4.5.3.3 Member Checking Process for Educator Three and her Interpretation of the Operational Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC

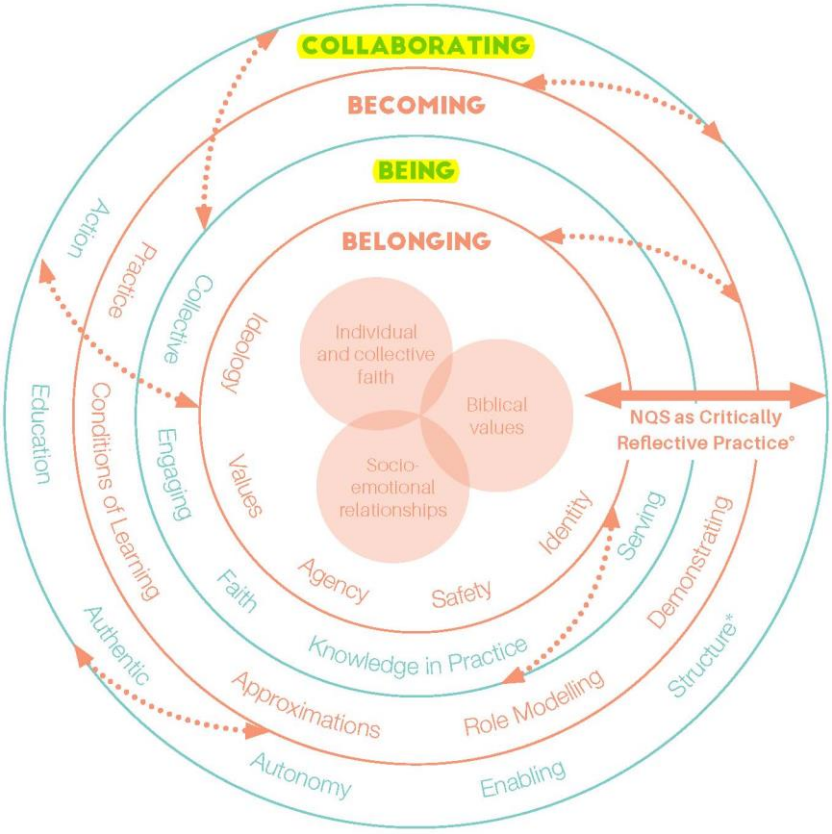


Figure 4. 11 *Educator Three – Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC Interpretation*

This next section details the voice of Educator Three in the way she expresses her perceptions of the operational model:

> "Within the EYLF diagram, we have 'Belonging', 'Being', 'Becoming' and 'Collaborating.' Being an educator and being able to step into the role of a room leader, I feel like it is a step forward for me. I gained a lot of experience handling this position, and it has built confidence and professional development within my character. I learned from the people on the team, and it is continuous improvement to strengthen the relationship among the team. I am looking forward to gaining more experience and continuing to develop my professional skills, all for helping to improve this centre and our services. The fact that I can openly share my knowledge and experiences to my best ability and can be a role model for others is a great opportunity. It allows me to flourish, shine and develop in my areas of strength and weaknesses. I can learn more about my weaknesses and from there improve my personal development. Collaborating is a new one for the EYLF. It is a very good idea because through collaborating, we can build a strong relationship within the team, our services. Not just within the centre but also

> creating bonds with the families in the outside community. We have started to build our relationship within the team by supporting each other and extending help to one another as much as we can".

Prompted by the researcher, on the level of 'Collaborating' within the diagram, Educator Three further described:

> "Through collaborating, there is a strong unit which has helped the team develop a strong relationship and encouraged the team to move forward by being a stronger helping community as well as being better people individually. As the team are progressing individually, the team is developing confident relationships with each other, and building trust and respect toward one another".

Educator Three further voiced how the model fosters collaboration:

> "Because we are a Christian environment, our aim is to have a high education based on our Christian faith. The team does this by collaborating."

Educator Three described how the team has reflective relationships based on biblical values enabling authenticity, autonomy and improvement:

> "Being Christian based, we share our knowledge of God with the children and then from an early age, we start helping them build a relationship with God and we empower them. We are very grateful to have this centre because it gives a chance to use our leadership, skills and confidence to empower others. This helps a lot in our individual improvement. We are equipped to take on a leadership role and lead our team to the best of our ability to achieve our goals."

On the distribution of tasks, Educator Three described how

> "Distributing tasks amongst the team is a good idea because you cannot do it all by yourself."

So, by distributing the tasks and working as a team, educators are also equipping the other members and mentoring and empowering them. Delegation enables others to flourish and develop their skills and strengths, as well as discover their weaknesses and thereby encourages development and improvement. So, it is a very good idea having the distribution of tasks and delegating the responsibilities

4.14.3.1 Points of Distinctiveness in this Diagram for Educator Three

Educator Three detailed that what stood out most for her in this diagram was ‘Being’:

> “Through ‘Being’, I can see my identity and assess myself; my strengths and my weaknesses”.

Educator Three further detailed:

> “‘Being’ allows me to explore my past experiences and be able to contribute as much as I can to the team. Knowing my weaknesses, I have the chance to improve so that I can help as much as I can”.

Educator Three also described how ‘Belonging’ was another component that stood out to her in the diagram:

> “When you feel like you belong to the group, you have more opportunity to explore yourself and you are comfortable to share your skills and knowledge with the team. Feeling like you ‘Belong’ eliminates hesitation when working as a team”.

Belonging creates the motivation to share knowledge gained through past experiences.

Educator Three further described:

> “Within these areas, what is most important to me is collaborating. If you have established a relationship with the team, it allows you to move freely. There is no barrier within the group, and everyone feels free to communicate. With no barrier, anyone can express their ideas and is willing to listen to each other. This helps and encourages everyone to openly share their experiences, knowledge and skills and creates a strong relationship within the team. We know, when sharing our ideas, everyone will listen and appreciate what each person has to say and has done. With that collaboration and unity, you can move forward with no hesitation and you have freedom and comfort to share with the team.
>
> Within these areas, I see critical reflection fitting in because it really helps us self-improve. Through critical reflection, we evaluate ourselves and by evaluating ourselves, we know what we need to focus on. This helps us see the bigger picture of what is going on in our day to day operation. Through self-reflection, you have the chance to reflect one scenario or many that happened during your day and it helps. If we were to reflect on everything we do, we would see a significant improvement in our weaknesses. Our main goal is to achieve excellence in everything we do, and self-reflecting helps us achieve that.
>
> It encourages a good quality of work and a good attitude. Everything within this diagram is important to our centre and team, but they mean something different to each of us individually. You cannot disregard one as they all play an important part in our centre.”

4.14.3.2 Comparisons with Commonwealth EYLF Diagram

Educator Three described comparisons of the operational model with the EYLF diagram:

> "If we have a look, we want to have the best outcomes for our children, so we aim to have the best outcome. We have the five learning outcomes. We want to provide for the children, we want to see their development every day as they grow principles and practice, we embrace our practice. We want to make sure that we observe and remain consistent in our practice and we see with the principles that these two relate and are linked to each other. In addition, we have the collaborating here – this so good that we have the bonding now because it brings us towards being united in the same spirit, goal and aim."

4.4.5.3.4 Member Checking Process for Educator Four and her Interpretation of the Operational Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC

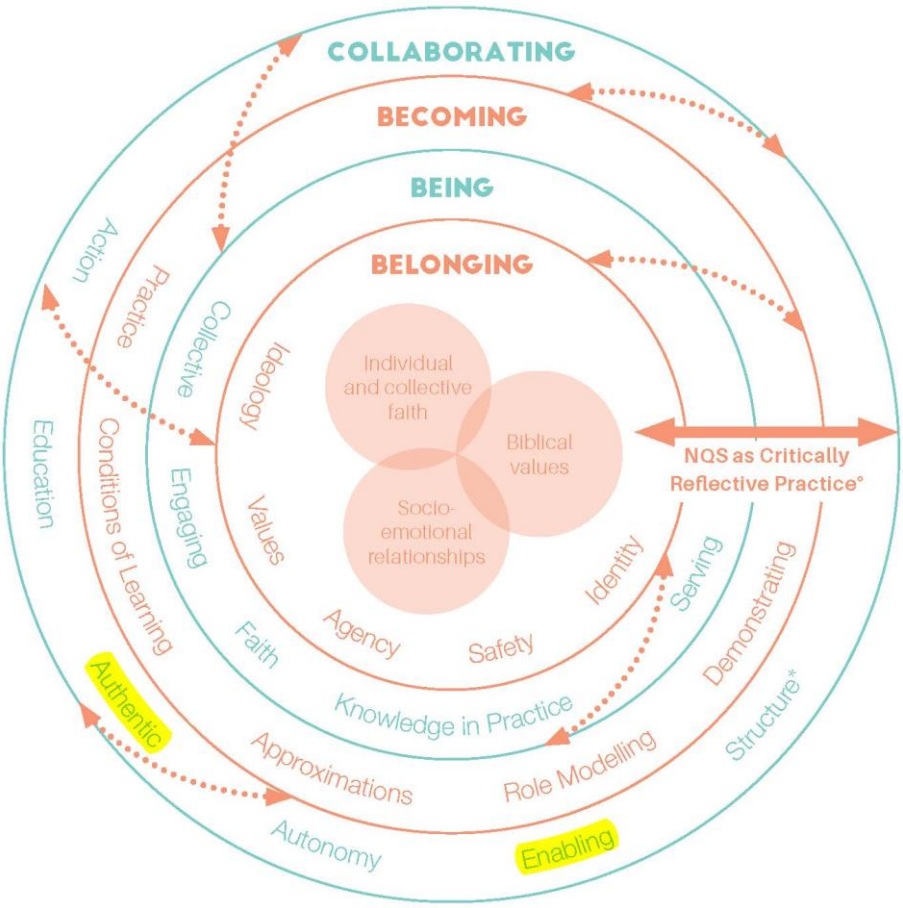


Figure 4. 12 *Educator Four – Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC Interpretation*

Educator Four identified:

> "I can see that everything relates to each other and the components flow from one another."

The flow of the diagram helps this educator understand the thought process - what this means, where does it goes and why is it important - everything relates to each other and flows from it and there cannot be one without the other.

Educator Four describes this in the following way:

> "If you have a sense of 'Being' - 'Being' in the moment, your sense of 'Being' in who you are, you have a sense of 'Belonging' if you are moving forwards in it, and that's what you are 'Becoming'."

Adding the extra element of 'Collaborating' is described by Educator Four as a representation of "connections" and "strength" of the 'Collaborating' layer that "defines the outcomes".

The diagram helps her to understand this perspective and her individual perspective.

4.14.4.1 Points of Distinctiveness in this Diagram for this Educator

The centre is the core for this educator described by Educator Four in the following way:

> "This represents faith in believing - it is the core, the engine, the heart pumping ...everything flows out of it...with individual and collective faith and ideology"

Educator Four describes the significance of the layer of 'Bonding':

> "The extra element of collaborating plays an important role in our connections through our bonds, collaborating, learning, growing and caring….whilst 'Being', 'Belonging', 'Becoming' and 'Believing' are self-focussed, 'Collaborating' collaborates, grows, '=and learns, as values and socio-emotional relationships are defined in who we are and what we can do."

Educator Four identifies that once you have a sense of identity that is unshakeable, everything flows from it. This does not change once you know your identity in Christ:

> "Once you have a sense of identity that is unshakeable, everything can flow from it. This does not change once you know your identity in Christ – it is the engine, heart and everything flows from it."

For this educator, the arrows depict points of distinctiveness which are significant, and bigger than those flowing into it. Educator Four describes this in the following way:

> "Critical reflections naturally flow through organic conversations, not forced or pre-empted, with growing knowledge of what was said and reflected away from each other not realising what each one had said".

Authenticity is significant for this educator in the diagram described clearly in the following way:

> "There is no point engaging in reflection if it is not authentic."

Enabling is also significant for this educator, along the same lines as empowerment:

> "One of the main things in this service, is that everyone is valued for what they bring to the service, as part of this team, everyone has elements of this diagram. Educators are being given the opportunity to keep moving forwards, to keep a strong sense of their wellbeing and feeling empowered in their sense of belonging".

Educator Four further describes how the diagram fosters learning:

> "The diagram shows what we value about people, they match up and overflow from one another, and this is what it looks like in this model. This is what we have come to in our reflections, this is what we believe. We are always learning about others."

The model complements an implementation approach for critical reflection as it is focussed on elements in people, in keeping moving forwards as a service, individually and as a team. It matches and overflows from reflection and provides a constructive platform to reflect with others, it is equipping as we cannot go anywhere without the right tools. It is collaborative as we need others. It needs mentoring to be part of becoming and bonding, someone connected to you to push you further, understanding who you are and what you are good at, your strengths, sense of self and identity and knowing you value in who you are. It is heart centred out of which balance flows where it should be and is the core vital to the leadership model. It is distributed as you cannot have a team that is empowered to do a job without giving them a job to do.

4.14.4.2 Comparisons with Commonwealth EYLF Diagram

Educator Four describes comparisons with the EYLF diagram:

> "The ELYF is a great base from where we as a service, educators and team have now come; but our diagram has gone beyond this because we have done so much work and intertwined believing alongside the standards."

4.4.5.3.5 Member Checking Process for Educator Five and her Interpretation of the Operational Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC.

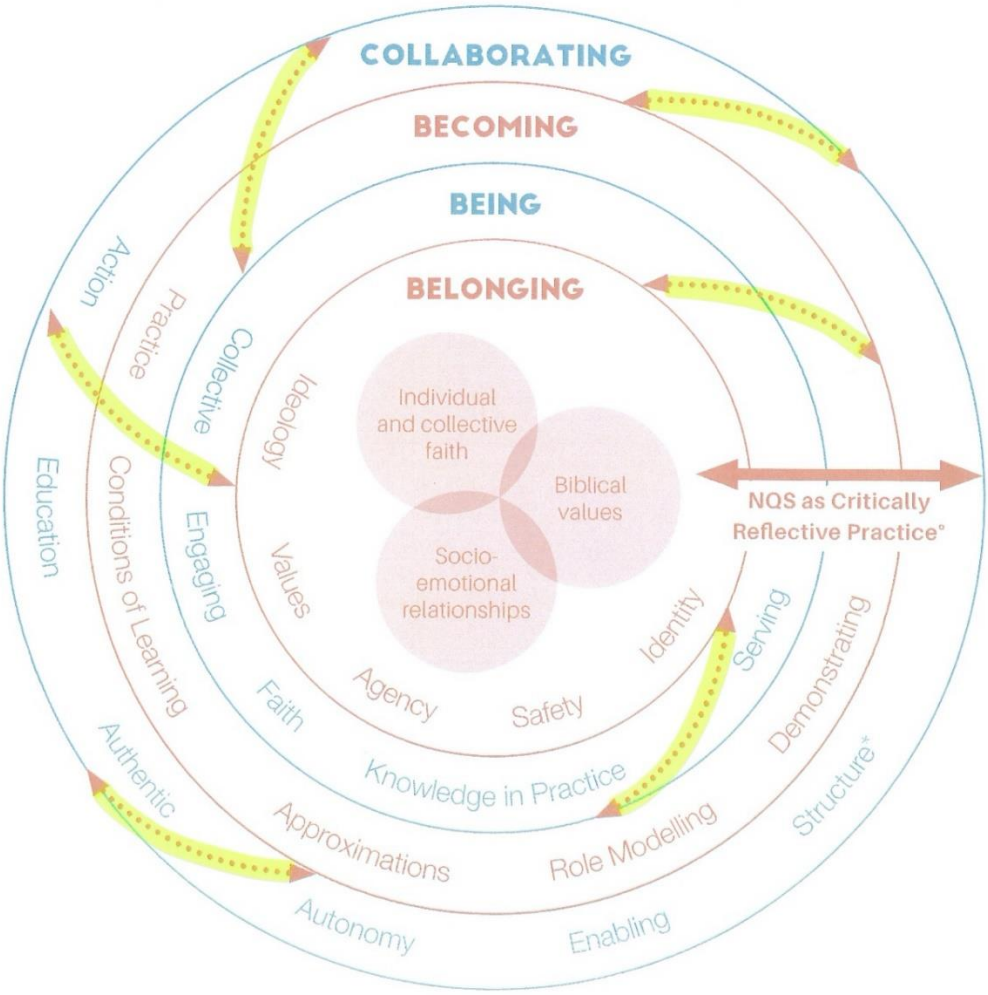


Figure 4. 13 *Educator Five – Model for Critical Reflection Interpretation*

In this diagram this educator thinks they all the components are equally as important as each other because ‘Being’ is ‘Belonging’ is ‘Becoming’ is ‘Belonging’ and ‘Belonging’ is ‘Being’ and ‘Collaborating’ that major part that helps all of these become one, including with our children. All the key points in this diagram, according to this educator, help you to understand through breaking it down. Collaborating is ideology, values, agency, safety and identity.

> “All the components are equally as important as each other because ‘Being’ is ‘Belonging’ and ‘Becoming’ is ‘Belonging’ and ‘Belonging’ is ‘Being’ and ‘Collaborating.’ These are all major parts that help all of these become one, including with our children. All the key points in this model help you to understand through breaking it down. Collaborating is sharing ideology, values, agency, safety and identity.”

4.14.5.1 Points of Distinctiveness in this Diagram for this Educator

Having identified how all the components are equally as important as each other, this educator describes the links between the components highlighted by the arrows: The highlight in the diagram for this educator is the link between the different parts which she identified as foundational to the beliefs of the Centre, the ECEC sector in general and as an educator. She identifies how faith is added to our being and identified that as a Christian it is as important as all the other elements:

> "As a Christian, faith is as important as all the other elements, It's OUR being, and we are helping children foster that in THEIR being. 'Being' is 'Becoming' and 'Becoming' is ''Belonging' and 'Belonging' is 'Collaborating'

What also stands out for this educator in the diagram is the importance of being authentic:

> "We need to be true to what we believe in, not pretending, to be, from the heart, believing in values and ideology."

Educator Five voices that if we are not critically reflecting, we are not learning and if we are not learning we are not thinking about continuous improvement and progressing:

> "If we are not getting better this means we get stuck in one spot, not moving, which is not helpful to us as individuals, as a team member, educators or children. We need to be moving forward as educators, we need to be learning and fine tuning ourselves to also give children the standard they deserve, the best standard. If we are not reflecting, we are not growing."

'Collaborating' this educator sees, as relationships – that, for this educator, is a very important part of her job, her career and what she does - all relationships:

> "Collaborating - all relationships - because if you do not have a good relationship for example, with a team member, that will affect your relationships with families or children. You need to have good relationships and if you do not, you need to find out why."

With the model, there is support identified for this educator which models how she should guide and support her team. As she is receiving that, she identifies the need to give it. Empowerment allows people to move forward, it is important to move forwards all the time with responsibility and accountability. This is a good model according to this educator because there are defined roles – every educator has their role, but they all support each other, and they are all supported distributing the responsibilities to allow the raising of standards.

Within the diagram this educator describes how the model can guide. support and build the team through empowerment, responsibility and accountability:

> "Empowerment allows people to move forward, it is important to move forwards all the time with responsibility and accountability. This is a good model. It works well in this service, because there are defined roles – every educator has their role, but they all support each other, and they are all supported distributing the responsibilities to allow the raising of standards. If only one person does it the standards would not be achieved to the same standard. This model helps this to be drawn out and helps educators understand it visually."

4.14.5.2 Comparisons with Commonwealth EYLF Diagram

What is different for this educator is the middle section of diagram which identifies beliefs which is not part of the EYLF national curriculum. This educator identifies that it would be good to add this to the EYLF. What this educator further identifies is that this diagram fosters a holistic approach for educators to facilitate the delivery of best outcomes for children's learning and thereby precedes the EYLF diagram:

> "Beliefs is not part of the EYLF national curriculum.... it would be good to add this to the EYLF....the model fosters a holistic approach for educators to facilitate the delivery of best outcomes for children's learning and thereby precedes the EYLF diagram."

So, what are the implications of this research? The next chapter will provide the answer to what this all means.

4.4.5.3.6 Summary

Having now discussed the themes of 'Belonging', 'Being', 'Becoming' and 'Collaborating', and examined each of the sub-themes within each of these components, and the interactions between the components, an operational model for critical reflection for effective ECEC functioning was developed. The operational model for critical reflection in ECEC was built from the bottom layer up to four layers. It was then member checked with the educators involved in this study. As noted, educators felt that critical reflection impacts each of the layers of the model. However, this impact is enhanced when educators focus on the relationship between critical reflection and ECEC ethos and culture.

4.4.5.4 Summary and Discussion

Having considered the META themes and sub-themes, this section has analysed how these fit together and how these layers interact with each other. Having looked at the layers of the model and the ways the components interact with each other, we examined the way critical reflection

impacted the components and layers within the operational model presented. Figures 4:8 was implemented with Figure 4.9 as a member checking process by asking each educator their perspectives. Each educator identified different focus points which were highlighted. In answer to the final research question, the educators involved in the study identified ten significant characteristics worthy of consideration. These included the following characteristics that educators identified in how critical reflection impacts an ECEC centre.: reflect on practice as it impacts culture; consider the context; use values to build ethos; implement an ethos of improvement; encourage a culture of listening; build a culture of respect; develop a culture of collaboration; facilitate a better ECEC environment; promote effective leadership; encourage authenticity. These ten characteristics were identified by educators that impact the ethos, climate and culture of their faith-based organisation through the critical reflection process.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This following chapter discusses the implications of the findings presented in Chapter Four and is structured in three main sections. The following section (5.2) discusses how critical reflection impacts ECEC operations and learning environments. Section 5.3 then discusses how to implement critical reflection in an ECEC centre. The final section (5.4) discusses how critical reflection contributes to the effective functioning of an ECEC centre and impacts the ethos / culture of ECEC.

5.1.1 Methods and modes of Critical Reflection in ECEC

Before discussing the impact of critical reflection on ECEC it is important to consider the various methods or processes of implementing critical reflection and the various modes, or styles or ways of doing this. Understanding these various modes and methods is an important step in structuring the process of critical reflection with a consequent impact on quality (Roberts, 2007).

5.1.1.1 Methods of Reflection

Educators use a number of methods to carry out the practice of critical reflection in ECEC. The methods of reflection observed through this study included written methods; scheduled reflection such as meetings; case study; video and audio recall; mind maps; stories; narratives; educator reflection documented through journaling; individual reflection; questioning (WHAT are we doing? WHY are we doing it? HOW can we do it better?); provocations (questions, cards, pictures, poems, narratives, articles; collaborative inquiry); collective reflective practice; conversations; paraphrasing; sharing readings; participative discussion; reflection boards; sharing ideas; sharing the research journey; modelling; mentoring; coaching; networking; reflection on roles; discussion on everyday practice and learning; artefact collection; action learning; self-assessment; self-reflection and reflecting aloud. Reading can stimulate reflection as a reader considers ideas conveyed by the author and compares them to other mental constructs such as individual experiences, beliefs, values or other texts read. Reflective questions may consider the values or philosophical outlook expressed by the author.

5.1.1.2 Modes of Reflection

This study affirms that modes of reflection build upon one another which are congruent with educational reflective thinking associated with the work of Dewey (1933), Danielson, (2008a); Grimmett, Erickson, Mackinnon, and Riecken, (1990). In the present study, it was found that lower level reflection occurs with directed practice (such as through instruction) whereas higher-level critical reflection is used for complex reflection (challenging deep-seated assumptions with transformative action). Educators adapt the mode of reflection to the decision-making process and level of thought required. In this study educators engaged in routine reflection, situational reflection, intentional reflection and analytical reflection.

Routine reflection is evidenced in knowledge from an external source and relies on applying policies procedures and practices in a formulaic way to direct, but not inform, practice (Danielson, 2008a). This was evidenced in the present study through the utilisation and weekly application of policies and procedures.

Situational reflection involves reflection occurring in the context, on the context and through the context (Schon, 1983; Danielson, 2008a). In the context situational reflection is seen in ‘thinking on one's feet, on the spot, in the moment’, and is often intuitive. It is demonstrated through observations of reflection in everyday practice, sharing ideas, reflecting in action, modelling, and educator networking and discussion. On the context reflection is evident is reflection after an event has occurred. This was evidenced in the current study through weekly key team meetings and team decision making. Through the context reflection was observed as a reasoning process, through examining practice by asking questions about experiences, events, interactions and interpretations that happened in daily practice. This occurred through this research journey, through Director Provocations, through the embedded critically reflective questioning process, through self-reflection documented in educator journals, and collective reflection documented through minutes of meetings and through educator through whiteboard reflection.

Intentional reflection is seen through seeking more information than the immediate context, including review of theories, pedagogical practices, legislative frameworks, current research and dialogue with other professionals and professional agencies. This was evidenced in the present study through Director Provocations, weekly updates with the embedded weekly critical reflective questions, and minutes of weekly leader meetings, along with engagement with other professionals through which collaborative professional dialogue and reflection could occur with

research colleagues, research supervisors and professional agencies such as Community Early Learning Australia (CELA), ACECQA and the Inclusion Support Agency.

Analytical reflection, being dialectical and transformative is evidenced through this study building on purposeful reflection to gain understanding of the research questions and problem identified in this study to generate solutions. The operational model developed from the data from this study evidences analytical reflection resultant in implementing changes to transform current practice giving rise to new practice.

5.2 The Impact of Critical Reflection on ECEC Operations and Learning Environments.

The first research question of this study calls us to investigate the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS in one faith based ECEC centre. This section contains a literature informed discussion of how critical reflection impacts ECEC operations, ethos and learning environments. Implications of the findings are also outlined as they may be useful for educators within ECEC centres, organisations providing Early Education and Care Services, training institutions, and regulators.

5.2.1 Impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard in one faith-based Early Education and Care Centre

The findings of the study demonstrate that critical reflection in ECEC as part of the NQS makes a positive contribution to quality outcomes of ECEC. These positive findings demonstrate that ECEC is enhanced when critical reflection is done well. This is important as the quality of an ECEC centre links to children's enhanced lifelong outcomes, increased economic and social returns, improved employment prospects, increased earning capacity and living standards, less presence in the justice system, and less dependence on social and welfare services (Moore & McDonald, 2013; OECD, 2016; SCRGSP, 2015). Given we know that quality ECEC has such profound impacts on children's life-long outcomes and broader economic and societal gains (AEDC, 2013; OECD, 2014, 2015, 2016), understanding how critical reflection works and developing knowledge of how critical reflection should be implemented in an ECEC centre is pivotal to outcomes to children, families and broader society. This knowledge is essential to overcome existing misunderstanding and misinterpretation (Macfarlane, Cartmel & Nolan, 2014).

The present study found that critical reflection may build authenticity; facilitate collaboration; promote outcomes; increase understanding; facilitate the delegation of responsibility and promote leadership development. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered within the context of the literature to demonstrate the implications of the findings presented in Chapter Four.

5.2.1.1 Critical Reflection Builds Authenticity

Let us consider the first identified outcome of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS highlighted by this study – that of critical reflection and authenticity. As educators engage in critical reflection, they act in authentic ways as they critically reflect, interact with colleagues, and share multiple perspectives. Through this process, they are perceived as more authentic to their colleagues.

The implication of this for ECEC is that all educators should engage in the process of critical reflection because in so doing they interact in professionally authentic ways. This builds a community that works together within the ECEC centre that is open and honest with each other. Each educator benefits from being in a team that works closely together, thus creating a better workplace environment, and enhanced well-being outcomes that deliver better outcomes to children. These results are consistent with the literature in evidencing that those deep levels of reflection on professional behaviour result in behaviour change (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 2013; Ratelle et al., 2017). Authenticity happens through listening, observing and thinking about how theory is translated into practice (Watstein & Mitchell, 2014) and how practice informs theory. This applied knowledge consists of values, beliefs, practices and theories (Hughes, 2014) that are dynamic and dialectical (Hegel, 2016). Being authentic during reflection facilitates new understandings and further questions. The implication of authenticity as an outcome of critical reflection for educators is that the team of educators is brought together to build the climate and community desired within the service to deliver the best outcomes to children and families.

The Greek philosophy Aristotle (1920) pondered the nature of influence and concluded that to be influential, one had to focus on providing factual information. However, he also noted that fact alone is not enough - facts need to be supported. Critical reflection is fundamental to developing influencing capacities. Authenticity represents the true nature of beliefs; being true to oneself. It is important in critical reflection to clarify thoughts and feelings, both your own and that of others. To be authentic, you must know who and what you are, which comes from self-reflection. For authenticity to be meaningful, it needs to be sought in relation to issues that matter to us

fundamentally (Kroeber, 2010, pp. 40-41). To be authentic, there must be relationships with educators with debate, discussion, reflection, and further reflection to review practice in a particular way. Provocations need to be strengths-based linked to the NQS in an embedded process of inquiry. Asking questions of "What are we doing?" "Why are we doing it?" and "How can we do this better?" to improve practice and foster understanding. This enables educators' voices to be heard and empowers them to develop and apply changes and improvements in daily practice. Choosing to be authentic through critical reflection is in our best interests.

5.2.1.2 Critical Reflection Facilitates Collaboration

Increased collaboration is the second outcome of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS revealed in the present study. Educators who critically reflect, work and learn together. They come together as learners, learn from one another, and form professional and personal relationships as they collaborate to improve practice. Early childhood educators can observe other educators in action, engage in professional conversations about the impact of different approaches, and get feedback on their own practice. As educators engage in critical reflection, they increase the amount of collaboration between colleagues, which in turn builds a sense of working together, a sense of being on the same team, and all helping each other. This impacts the climate of the ECEC centre and is the type of ECEC environment that ultimately benefits educators through an increase in their wellbeing and better outcomes for children in their care.

The implication of collaboration for ECEC is that all centres should engage their educators in the process of critical reflection. In so doing, collaboration provides opportunities for educators to learn from one another on an ongoing basis; foster a trusting and open learning community where collective responsibility is taken for progress, changes to improve practice and outcomes for learners. This results in better outcomes for the service.

Critical reflection fosters collaboration which in turn fosters a professional learning community where all educators contribute as equals, seeking to understand and respond to what is happening in their ECEC centre, with a focus on problem-solving skills, informing and evaluating practice together, and implementing changes to improve practice. A collaborative team capitalizes on each educator's strengths, supporting each other's professional growth, debating ideas and problem solving together. This increases synergy, which allows the team to achieve more than they would if educators worked independently. Hence all educators should be engaged in the process of critical reflection to continuously improve and support enhanced outcomes. Consistent

with the literature, these findings show that collaboration is essential for critical reflection, as through this, educators can engage in dialogue and professional conversations and comprehend new understandings about practice successfully and foster what Mitchell (2008) terms “a critical consciousness” (p. 54). Collaborative dialogue allows educators to combine action and reflection in practice which facilitates raising issues arising in practice and analysis of patterns and links between concepts, to enable transformative social action and change (Brown & Bates 2017).

The goal of critical reflection is to continuously improve practice for enhanced outcomes. Collaboration helps educators see how certain decisions are made or hindered in their engagement in higher-order thinking. Collaboration involves educators being “active agents in the production of a new pedagogic discourse, rather than merely the consumers of the professional knowledge produced by academics and educational researchers” (Edwards & Brunton, 1993, p. 156). Collaborative reflective discussion contributes operationally to the effective running of an ECEC centre, strengthening outcomes through hearing other educators’ perspectives and thereby engaging understanding. Collaborative learning fosters critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others’ ideas. This shared learning gives educators an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning, and thus become critical thinkers (Totten, Sills, Digby, & Russ, 1991).

5.2.1.3 Critical Reflection Promotes Real Outcomes

Obtaining real outcomes is the third outcome of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS as found in this study. The implication of real outcomes is that if you critically reflect you are more likely to achieve real outcomes, make a difference, and have an impact. The implication is that with real outcomes, action happens, which matters. Educators want to see action and real outcomes achieved through the process of critical reflection. When critically reflecting on questions such as; ‘What are we doing’, ‘Why are we doing it?’ and ‘How we can do it better?’ all educators have a voice, and when that voice is heard, action is the result. Educators are prepared to put time and effort into the critical reflection process because they know what they say and think matters, because things happen as a result of the critical reflection process. This empowers educators to feel they have a substantive say in how the ECEC centre is operated. This is consistent with the literature as identified by Fook, White and Gardner, (2006) in knowing that through critical reflection we are enabled to look beyond our own immediate circumstances to what external factors might influence the choices we make and the actions we take including the social context and the broader context of the organisational culture and structure (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). In accordance with the literature, where critical reflection

is embedded and supported in the day-to-day operations of services, educators are encouraged to question not only their practice but that of their colleagues, including managers (Roberts, 2016) and so be equipped to be better able to understand and explore insights from skills, competencies and knowledge through relevant and meaningful learning. This thereby assists educators to make sense of themselves and their learning experiences to provide real outcomes. (ACECQA 2017; Tofade, et al., 2013).

The implications of real outcomes for educators is that all educators should be engaged in the process of critical reflection because by aiming for significant outcomes educators can measure what they are already doing, reflect on what has been achieved, and what needs to be improved, or changed, to create significant change. This helps educators to stay true to their mission and ensure they are meeting the outcomes set.

ECEC is enhanced when critical reflection is done well. Challenging assumptions through dialogue and debate of theoretical perspectives and constraints relevant to the service context improves the quality of ECEC. This is consistent with the literature in knowing that educators become "more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional inquiry" (DEEWR, EYLF, p. 14) as they understand the theoretical perspectives that underpin their practice to provide the foundation for understanding what is done and why. Therefore, the better educators engage in critical reflection, the better the ECEC outcomes. For educators, there will be a better work environment and educators will become better at what they do.

5.2.1.4 Critical Reflection Increases New Understanding

This study supports the process of critical reflection helps increase new understanding in educators. Particularly when they engage in critical reflection by looking at an issue objectively, evaluate it, and then share this with team members to build understanding. Consequently, it is the recommendation from this study that all centres should engage their educators in the process of critical reflection where they analyse information, solve problems, plan strategically, and present ideas to others in a way that can be readily understood to lead to improvement in practice. As active learners, educators rigorously question ideas and assumptions rather than accepting them at face value, and identify, analyse and problem solve to arrive at the best possible solution. In other words, being critically reflective requires constantly getting evidence about how effective or worthwhile our actions are, so we can change what we are doing according to the evidence of its value. As identified by Fook and Askeland, (2006) this is "an ability to recognize our own influence – and the influence of our contexts, the type of knowledge we create, and the way we

create it" (p. 45). In other words, being reflexive requires constantly getting evidence about how effective. This builds an integrated knowledge base through an active approach to learning, linking new to existing knowledge. Consistent with the literature, taken together, these capabilities are intrinsic to the development of an educator who is self-aware and self-regulated. Through questioning and testing theories in their practice, educators become empowered and encouraged to become researchers, to try new ideas and test theories (Vale, 2015).

5.2.1.5 Critical Reflection Facilitates the Delegation of Responsibility

Delegation is empowering others to make decisions. This study supports the idea that delegation of responsibility is an outcome of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS. Delegation is assigning responsibility to others along with the authority to do what is needed to complete the tasks. Through critically reflecting as educators, delegation becomes a helpful tool because the discussion and reflection process enables allocation and distribution of team responsibilities and accountability. This encourages growth and development for team members and their roles; supports succession planning and personal development. The implications of delegation for ECEC is that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection as effective delegation improves overall efficiency and effectiveness; productivity is increased; new avenues for creativity opened and team enthusiasm promoted. This is compatible with the literature in showing that critical reflection develops educator understanding of their own practice and the continual development of the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children (Blatchford et al., 2008; Child Australia, 2017; MacNaughton, 2003; Marbina et al., 2010; Summerville & Hokanson, 2014). As described by Kessl, (2009), "it also entails a more general orientation on the part of the professional to the role and responsibilities of the profession on contemporary societies" (p. 306). Knowledge creation, through ongoing reflection on experience is something that never stops in a committed practicing professional at any level (Fook & Gardner 2007; Hickson, 2011) with an onus on all educators to be aware of, and take responsibility for, the learning environment that is created that leads to continuous improvement.

Delegated responsibility of tasks to others provides for an ability to focus on higher-level tasks, providing others with the ability to learn and develop new skills, and develop trust between educators, improving communication. This enables educators to strengthen their critical thinking skills and increase educator confidence enabling growth in new leaders to improve the quality of ECEC provision (Reina et al., 2017).

5.2.1.6 Critical Reflection Promotes Leadership Development

Promotion of leadership is the sixth and final outcome of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS that has emerged through this study. Consistent with the EYLF Educators Guide (DEEWR, 2010), reflective practice assists educators to become more thoughtful about their work and look at new possibilities in practice and, if embedded in daily practice, achieve better outcomes for children. Critical reflection helps educators become increasingly thoughtful about their work and motivated to explore new ideas and approaches (Anning & Edwards, 2006).

Through critical reflection, leaders can analyse and adapt their approach to decision making and problem solving whenever the need arises to resolve a challenge. This happens at all levels of leadership and this impacts the performance of the organization. Critical reflection thereby makes desirable business results more likely.

The implications of the promotion of leadership for educators are that greater roles can be provided which can serve as a strong motivator, increasing productivity and decreasing turnover. Team leaders have a responsibility to communicate team goals which can be achieved through the process of critical reflection thereby ensuring work is completed within time schedules at the quality level required. The implications of the promotion of leadership for ECEC centres is that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection as leadership and decision making amongst educators the service is enabled to build a strong and motivated workforce.

We have known for a while that the capacity to reflect grows as educators learn from their experiences (Boud et al., 1985). Therefore, reflection enables a meaningful way for educators to gain authentic understanding. Reflection as a tool for learning encompasses a life-long habit, a characteristic of highly skilled professionals. This builds leadership capacity both in ourselves as professionals and those we work with contributing significantly to workplace culture and therefore educators' well-being (Dickson-Swift, Fox, Marshall, Welch & Willis, 2014).

Authoritative leadership recognises self-awareness and mindfulness of others, which encourages respectful relationships, adaptability, support and effective communication (Sinclair, 2007). This leadership style utilises modelling and reinforcing of values and behaviours, and daily practices aligning with NQS expectations, to encourage educators to engage in the same (Hanson, 2014). Charismatic leadership is considered by many as the most constructive type of leadership (Bass, 1985; Conger, 1990; House & Howell, 1992) and personal feedback can improve charismatic leadership abilities (Barling, Slater & Kelloway , 2000). Critical reflection is a social process (Brookfield, 1995) and most effectual as a collaborative effort (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993).

Educators need to understand how their team members perceive the leader's actions through critical reflection to enhance a shared vision.

5.2.2 Critical Reflection and the Ethos and Culture of ECEC Centres

During the study, educators discussed how a focus on ECEC ethos and culture during critical reflection helped to strengthen and improve ECEC. As stated in Chapter Four, findings from the data show that there is a need to reflect on practice as it impacts ethos, reflect on issues within the context including values; implement an ethos of improvement, encourage a culture of listening and respect; develop a culture of collaboration to facilitate a better ECEC environment; promote effective leadership and encourage leadership. The implications of these findings as they relate to the literature will now be reviewed.

5.2.2.1 The need to reflect on practice as it impacts ethos

The educators in this study discussed the benefits of critically reflecting on practice as it impacts ethos because, it helps to establish credibility, demonstrates trustworthiness and helps in the establishment of values. Construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978) is a contextualised active process based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment. Learners continually test these hypotheses through social negotiation, with each educator bringing a different interpretation and construction of the knowledge process and past experiences. By individual educators making connections between themselves and their broader social, cultural and structural environment (Cook-Sather & Abbot, 2016), they are enabled to build our understanding of how their ideas, beliefs and perspectives might be at least partially determined by their social contexts (Benade, 2016; Burke, et al., 2009). There is an onus on all educators to be aware of, and take responsibility for, the learning environment that is created. All educators need to ask how best a climate of critical reflection can be created and be prepared to question and change in fundamental ways to enhance practice through this process.

The implication of the need to reflect on practice as it impacts ethos for ECEC centres is that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection to establish guiding principles and standards that reflect the identity of the centre. Values and beliefs identified through reflective practice uncover the structure and content of educators' perspectives (Garvis et al., 2011) to enable practical application of their reported values to the ECEC learning environment. In reflection on, and discussing such issues, critical reflection focusses on changing and improving practice (Fook, 2001) and, as noted by Kessl, (2009), is "a process of thinking of, comparing and

verifying the purpose of learning about and improving practice, developing practice-based theory, connecting theory to practice and imposing and changing practice" (p. 312).

The implication of this need to reflect on practice as it impacts ethos for educators is that all educators need be engaged in critical reflection to share perspectives to establish important values to promote credibility and establish trust. Dewey (1933) spoke of the cultivation of a mindset on the part of educators that was self-reflective and directed towards instilling reflective inquiry and a capacity for moral judiciousness. The task is to make explicit why an environment of respect, trust and acceptance is so vital. This is the curriculum aspect of values education with the essential focus the raising of critical and self-reflective questions. and it is important values support sound decision making in education (De Nobile & Hogan, 2014).

The implication of the need to reflect on issues within the context including values is that values reflect the fundamental beliefs of educators and guide them in the decisions they make within the ECEC centre. Values, therefore, need to be considered in the critical reflection process. Educators need to understand the professional and ethical dimensions of their work reflected in ECEC frameworks, standards and documents, and shift from focussing on technical aspects of their work such as "What works?" to reflectively inquiring 'Why' around questions of curriculum, pedagogy and outcomes being delivered. This is why educators and services must critically engage with the various documents and why it is important for educators to critically reflect over whether or not they are acting in the ways reflected, for example, in the Australian early Childhood Code of Ethics.

5.2.2.2 The need to reflect on issues within the context including values

This study supports the idea that the ethos and culture of the centre are impacted when educators critically reflect on issues within the context of the centre. The implication is that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection to evaluate the processes of learning within the context to question why they do what they do. This involves learning from this process and initiating change where required as an iterative process opening avenues for transformative educational change. In this way, critical reflection can highlight differences between theory and practice to effect change.

Context influences educators in a variety of ways in their everyday interactions as well as in learning outcomes and processes. 'Thinking critically' 'entails the recall, consideration and evaluation of experiences, usually in relation to a broader purpose' (Farrell, 2011, p. 5). Educators bring with them the assumptions and practices of the large context, but their specific

context needs to be considered in the reflective process for them to confront themselves, their processes and their outcomes. Context encompasses the cultural, social and political environment in which reflection takes place. This broader cultural, social and political context influences every aspect of learning. The services' mission, values, beliefs, environment, strategy, teaching practice and leadership reflect the culture. This is reflected in educator personal experience and formed by the context in which educators have developed. Markham and Couldry (2007) pointed out that exposing one's perceptions and beliefs to others can make a person feel vulnerable. Educators need to understand the importance of a supportive culture where professional learning is to occur through critical reflection in the context in which educators operate. It is vital to take account of the context and plan learning experiences based on how the context frames and influences possibilities and consider the local context of an ECEC centre as a focus of learning with a set of values. It is important to recognize the influences of the socio-political context on the local context with understanding of context through the lens of educator perspectives as each educator brings their own foundation of knowledge and set of life experiences with them. Educators need to consider themselves learners within the local context in which they operate utilising the kind of reflection consistent with the values of learners. These values inform thoughts, words and actions and are important because they influence growth and development.

As ECEC is a dynamic changing sector it follows that educators must be able to evaluate the part they play in meeting changing needs. Educators need regular opportunities to reflect upon their moral and social purposes, work collaboratively both inside and outside the ECEC centre and strive for continuous learning related to their own needs for growth and expertise in maintaining NQS standards of practice. In other words, educators must be trained and empowered to become and remain practitioners at the heart of whose practice is critical reflection (Koulaouzides, 2017).

5.2.2.3 The need to implement an ethos of improvement

The third need identified by educators of how critical reflection as part of the NQS impacts the ethos, culture and climate of their organization, is the need to implement an ethos of improvement. Such an ethos supports growth and change to improve practice. Critical reflection helps educators to think more about their work to enhance their practice and, if embedded in daily practice, achieve better outcomes for children (DEEWR, 2010). Where the assumptions driving change are constantly examined within the ECEC environment, meaningful outcomes can be produced from the planned change and thereby create meaningful contexts and continuous improvement and help educators become increasingly thoughtful about their work and motivates them to explore new ideas and approaches (Anning & Edwards, 2006).

The implication of the need to reflect on implementing an ethos of improvement for educators is that they can engage in deeper learning to cultivate capacity as enabled self-aware practitioners through critical reflection. By integrating theory and practice educators are enabled to enhance learning and professional practice through the process of critical reflection by applying, contrasting and integrating theory to the practice explored through an authentic experience (Patrick, et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2010) and therefore improve what they do.

In Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs', self-actualization represents the highest-order motivations which drives us to realize our true potential and achieve our 'ideal' self. In other words, self-actualized people are those who are doing what they are capable of. The growth of self-actualization (1992) occurs through the need for personal growth and discovery. For Maslow, a person is always 'becoming' and never remains static (Maslow, 1987). Day (2011) extends this by identifying the fulfilment of basic needs being contingent upon societal membership. This means that need fulfilment needs to be achieved at the societal level not simply at an individual level. Therefore, improving an ECEC service through the process of critical reflection can have a substantial influence on whether basic needs, respect and autonomy are met (Tay & Diener, 2011).

The implication of the need to reflect on implementing an ethos of improvement for ECEC centres is that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection to support continuous improvement and better outcomes. As Fook (2002) defined critical reflection as "a way of researching personal practice or experience to develop our understandings of ourselves as knowers or makers of knowledge" (p. 444), improvement in practice is enabled as educators make specific connections between themselves as individuals and their broader social, cultural and structural environment, by understanding how their ideas, beliefs and assumptions are at least partially determined by their social contexts.

5.2.2.4 The need to encourage a culture of listening

This study found that critical reflection as part of the NQS impacts the ethos, culture and climate of their organisation however educators need to encourage a culture of listening and respect. Listening is a sign of respect (Baldoni, 2016) showing that you value what the other person has to say, and this is important for engagement and communication. Conceptually, reflection is a transformative process actualized by reflecting theoretically and creating individual knowledge related to lived experience. Reflection is an interpersonal process initiated and supported through feedback and collaborative reflection on experience. The critical reflection process is continuous,

inseparable from the transfer of theoretical knowledge in practice by acting individually and in interactions with others, hence listening is crucial (Lambert, 2003). Assessment of acquired new understanding is required by reflecting in, on and through practice with application to continuously improve and careful listening (Danielson, 2008). Integrating theory and practice through reflective inquiry and questioning as a learning activity fosters continuous improvement underpinned through a culture of listening. The implication of this need to encourage a culture of listening and respect for educators is that all educators have a voice which is valued in the process of critical reflection (Grimmet, et al., 1990). All centres should engage their educators in critical reflection through a culture of listening and respect to be effective.

5.2.2.5 The need to develop a culture of collaboration

In a similar way to the last point, this study has found that critical reflection as part of the NQS impacts the ethos, culture and climate of their organization, when educators in a centre develop a culture of collaboration. A better ECEC environment is facilitated with all educators within the ECEC centres engaged in critical reflection to enhance learning and deliver better outcomes.

Educators need to use all their senses including watching, listening, feeling and thinking about what they do and work from a space of possibility (Macfarlane, Cartmel & Nolan, 2011). Within this, collaborative dialogue and professional conversations are essential, so that educators can comprehend new understandings about practice successfully, Collaborative discourse – discussion between educators – raising issues arising in practice and analysis of patterns and links between concepts, enables transformative social action and change (Brown & Bates, 2017). Critical breadth to understanding is developed when knowledge is used critically to not accept a situation at ‘face value’ but used to examine what may influence it by looking beneath the surface. This ability to think critically is developed over time (Black, 2010).

5.2.2.6 The need to promote effective leadership and encourage leadership

The final need identified by educators of how critical reflection as part of the NQS impacts the ethos, culture and climate of their organisation, is through the need to promote effective leadership and encourage leadership. All educators within the ECEC centres should be engaged in critical reflection for productivity to be enhanced through leadership empowerment, the team motivated and culture energized. As educators engaged in critical reflection build a “a strong culture of professional inquiry” (DEEWR, EYLF, p. 14) they understand the theoretical perspectives that underpin their practice to provide the foundation for understanding what is done and why and hence become more effective at what they do through understanding what is

done and why. Leaders can then be empowered based on strengths with resultant continuous improvement and enhancement of workplace performance.

In summary, this study has found that critical reflection has a positive impact on the ethos, culture and climate of ECEC. Engaging in critical reflection with educators about their practice is an important way for them to reveal their assumptions and make better informed decisions. The practices associated with a critically reflective culture facilitate continuous improvement through learning, development and service collaboration (Barnett 2006). When individual and collective critical reflection becomes part of the culture, meaningful improvement can occur. Peterson and Deal (2002) indicate that every school has its own distinct and unique culture. Schein (1992) discussed how culture exists at three levels. The most visible level is the architecture, stories and traditions. Values form the second level and govern organisational educators' behaviour and rationale for their actions. Although values assist in understanding why the organisation works in the way it does, they do not explain the driving forces or very essence of the culture which are the underlying assumptions that comprise the third level of culture. These assumptions not only shape educators' thoughts, perceptions, feelings and behaviours but guide the organisation's relationship to the environment, activity and relationships. Culture and improvement are integrally interconnected so that in building a culture of critically reflective practice, where daily reflections focus on teaching and learning, meaningful improvement can occur. This is described by Swygert (2004) with culture being the social energy driving the school and the interconnectedness of critical reflection, culture and improvement:

> "Strong positive cultures do not just happen. They are built over time by those who work in and attend the school and by formal and informal leaders who encourage and reinforce values and traditions. Many schools limp along with weak and unfocussed cultures due to a paucity of leadership and lack of concern. The central concern here is the development of meaningful and productive schools. Leaders must shape and nourish cultures where teachers can make a difference and every child can learn and where there is a passion and commitment to designing and promoting the best that is possible" (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 8).

5.2.3 Critical reflection and the learning environment

Having discussed the outcomes associated with the use of critical reflection, and the way that critical reflection can impact the ethos, culture and climate of an organisation, we now turn our attention to the critical reflection process. As shown in Chapter Four, critical reflection improves practice through reflective evaluation to open new possibilities for learning. In particular, the teachers in this study identified that critical reflection impacts the learning environment by

helping teachers: identify areas of strength; increase pedagogical awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning; become empowered to engage children in learning; and maximise the learning environment. The implications of each of these findings will now be considered in turn within the context of the literature.

5.2.3.1 Critical reflection improves practice through reflective evaluation to open new possibilities for learning

This study has found that learning through critical reflection fosters educator growth when educators use critical reflection to evaluate their prior experiences and remain open to continuous learning by thinking about new situations. In other words, as educators reflect on an experience with the aim to learn from that experience, new possibilities for learning unfold. It is possible to reflect on an experience, especially at a shallow level, without really evaluating that experience. As educators engage in critical reflection, grounded in reflective inquiry and reflective evaluation, they can, in turn, teach ways of thinking to others (Rodgers & La Boskey, 2016, p. 71). Reflective evaluation on practice is therefore central to the development of knowledge, with the goal that by enabling of the process, transformation and continuous improvement will occur (Williams, 1998).

Reflective evaluation, therefore, has the potential to open up new possibilities for learning. Educators should engage in critical reflection so that they can develop, be open minded about learning as it is an ongoing process. They can share with others, evaluate experiences, and reflect upon experiences to learn from these experiences and become more effective. The implications of reflective evaluation for ECEC centres are that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection. Evaluation on practice leads to desired outcomes through continuous learning as educators reflect and evaluate and seek to continuously improve.

5.2.3.2 Critical reflection identifies areas of strength

The educators in this study all support the idea that critical reflection identifies areas of strength. A strengths-based approach requires educators to be engaged in reflective practice (Dept. of Education & Early Childhood Development, VIC, 2012). This approach views situations holistically and looks for opportunities to complement and support existing strengths and capacities. A strengths-based approach focusses on questioning strategies to identify what works and how it works so those strategies can be continued and developed. Critical reflection, as a continuous process, involves educators to develop a critical understanding of their own practice and continually develop a critical understanding of their own practice and the necessary skills,

knowledge and approaches to achieve the best outcomes. Identifying educator strengths through critical reflection is valuable not only as it allows the approach to tasks and challenges with better understanding of how to succeed, but it also allows effective communication amongst educators on what they can contribute, and this helps facilitate continuous improvement. As educators identify areas of strength through critical reflection, they are enabled to identity gaps to build the complementary partnerships within their team necessary for success. All educators therefore should be engaged in the process of critical reflection to each become aware of their strengths, manage them effectively, and thereby contribute to team success. In this way, ECEC centre staff can see the reality of their current situation and be empowered as educators to enact change to foster continuous improvement.

5.2.3.3 Critical reflection increases pedagogical awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning

This study had found that critical reflection increases pedagogical awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning through examining theories and research evidence, practice, individual and group reflections, educators' experiences and expertise, and community expectations and requirements. Critical reflection informs both curriculum (all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events planned and unplanned) and teaching in an ECEC centre. It reflects and supports the principles of, and outcomes sought, by an ECEC centre. Critical reflection, therefore, on educators' pedagogy optimises children's learning and development. Shared understanding developed through critical reflection on pedagogy provides strong foundations for ongoing learning and development in all aspects of life, providing educators within an ECEC centre of the evidence base behind their pedagogy and awareness of how they contribute to the development of pedagogy.

> *"*In clarifying 'pedagogy' we can develop a deeper understanding of what is informing our practice and why we work in particular ways. This helps us to make our practice more visible both to others and ourselves." (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005, p. 3)

Intentionality involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions (DEEWR, 2009b, 41; DEEWR, 2009c, 15) and engaging in critical reflection is intentional in supporting increased pedagogical awareness for educators. This includes understanding child initiated and educator directed learning experiences and intentional teaching in planned or spontaneous experiences (Mangione et al., 2011). This further includes knowledge of children's cultural contexts which is gained through interactions with children and their families and children's skills; knowledge and understanding gained through interactions and

assessment of children's learning and development (OECD, 2006); and development of a range of teaching strategies which may include questioning, modelling, facilitating, telling and instruction, co-construction and scaffolding (McNaughton & Williams, 2004). Critical reflection supports educators to develop content knowledge to support children's learning along with their cultural identity, sense of contribution, belonging through extension of children's thinking and inquiry. High expectations for every child, every day affirmed through critical reflection, can support educators to plan individually designed learning experiences (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2008).

Pedagogy develops through research and reflection by educators and at an ECEC centre level and this enables continuous improvement in educators' practice with the aim of providing the best outcomes in children's learning and development. The implication of this outcome is that all educators should be engaged in critical reflection to focus understanding of knowledge and how it relates to behaviour and the quality of teaching performance and learning outcomes. All ECEC centres should engage their educators in critical reflection to collaborate, and negotiate meaning, and thereby enhance service pedagogical outcomes.

5.2.3.4 Critical reflection empowers educators to engage children in learning

Quality experiences for children do not happen by themselves. This study supports the idea that quality learning experiences require a strong commitment to critical reflection to empower educators to engage children in learning. When educators analyse and understand the impact of their practice, they can continuously improve. 'Ongoing learning and reflective practice' are identified in the EYLF as core principles that underpin effective ECEC. This aligns with Element 1.2.3 of the NQS which requires that 'critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the program'. So, critical reflection involves educators being engaged in what happens with the children in their rooms and reflection on what might change. It involves empowering educators to reflect on their own personal biases, examine their perspectives, consider all aspects of experiences and engage in collaborative discussions with their colleagues. This provides educators with insight to inform future decision making. Critical reflection empowers educators to examine their interactions with children, assess the quality of learning environments and experiences, and analyse their own practice. In turn, an educators' professional practice is strengthened through developing deeper understandings, exploring perspectives, improving the program and delivering better outcomes for the ECEC centre. By empowering educators, they become more engaged in learning as they embrace the idea that learning is an iterative process, setting goals, checking their progress and

adjusting their actions, contributing to each child's outcomes of learning. The implication of this is that all educators should be engaged in critical reflection to be empowered to engage in learning to enhance each child's learning outcomes. The implication of this for ECEC centres is that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection to build an empowered team, increase educator motivation, improve problem solving skills and teach educators, all of which are vital to improving learning outcomes for every child.

5.2.3.5 Critical reflection improves practice through reflective evaluation to open new possibilities for learning through encouragement of maximization of the learning environment

The final aspect of the way that critical reflection can impact the learning environment as found in this study is the way that critical reflection can maximise the learning environment. This is achieved by educators engaged in collaborative relationships through which they gain a greater depth of understanding regarding each child's needs and abilities. This enables them to implement new teaching practices to enhance learning teaching and learning that are relevant to the child. When relationships are built upon a foundation of reflective evaluation educators and families can play an active role within the learning environment where educators and families can work together to create a learning environment that caters for, and celebrates, diversity where everyone feels a sense of belonging and empowerment because within the relationships comes an understanding of others' needs, concerns and interests.

The implication of encouragement of maximization of the learning environment for educators is that they should be engaged in critical reflection and be empowered to build a sense of belonging. This contributes to the co-construction of the learning environment that maximizes outcomes for all children.

Critical reflection is inherently ideological but also morally grounded. There is general acceptance that it springs from concern to create those conditions under which educators can learn from each other, anchored in values of justice, fairness and compassion where each educator is respected valued and heard. Therefore, critical reflection is the foundation of the NQS underpinning pedagogy (EYLF, 2009) with understanding needed that critical reflection is required to not only be implemented but to inform practice (ACECQA, 2018). By giving educators more autonomy, they are better able to use their personal attributes, skills and strengths to contribute to job performance. As learning is social in nature and "children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 34) educators' realization of

emotional wellbeing affects children's outcomes as well as their own (Carson et al., 2001). In pedagogical terms this means the creation of democratic learning environments. Educators who know how to use critical reflection know about the effects they have on children. They are alert to the presence of power in their rooms. Knowing that their actions can silence or activate children's voices they listen attentively to what children say. They deliberately create reflective moments that become the focus of activity. All their actions are explicitly grounded with reference to children's experiences and which children know and in terms of professional development means engagement in critical conversations. An educator who models critical reflection in her own practice is a catalyst for critical thinking in children and for this reason, critical reflection should be an important indicator to look for in any attempt to judge an educator's effectiveness. The state of an educator's wellbeing is the viewpoint from which they will engage and shape children (Temple & Emmett, 2013); therefore, if emotional relationships and environments are shaped by critical reflection children's development and outcomes for all stakeholders will be affected. "Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships... attunement to… thoughts and feelings" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12) foster a strong sense for wellbeing generating feelings of value and respect. An ECEC centre committed to critical reflection cultivates through collaborative communication an impact to the learning environment for children: "I attend this way; therefore, it emerges that way" (Scharmer, 2010, p. 5)." A positive sense of identity "(DEEWR, 2009, p. 25) requires a healthy sense of self-worth leading to emotional wellbeing, nurturing educators; feelings of acceptance, trust in others and confidence in professional identity, impacting an educator's capacity to engage in a positive ECEC contribution as mandated in the NQS. As children "rely on secure, trusting and respectful relationships with the adults in their lives, promoting their wellbeing, self-esteem and sense of security" (ACECQA, 2013a, p. 119), collaborative critical reflection with children and families is fundamental to quality ECEC.

5.2.4 Important considerations when implementing critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard within a faith based ECEC centre

Having considered the outcomes of critical reflection in ECEC, the findings of the study also highlighted five important considerations when implementing critical reflection as part of the NQS within a faith based ECEC centre. Each of these considerations will now be discussed in turn.

5.2.4.1 There is a need to reflect on core and faith-based values in a faith-based ECEC centre

This study has highlighted that, when using critical reflection in ECEC, there is a need to reflect on faith-based values in a faith-based ECEC centre. Values inform our thoughts, words and actions and help us grow and develop and create the future we want to experience. Garvis et al. (2011) discussed how critical reflection on values and beliefs uncovers the structure and content of educators' perspectives to enable practical application of their reported values to the ECEC learning environment. This is consistent with the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) with values embodied in the principles that undermine practice, inclusive of reflective practice, and captured through the NQS as a guiding principle that applies across quality areas. As educators stop, reflect and think about what is done and why (ECA, 2016) critical reflection influences the centre character and what it seeks to do. This process illustrates how philosophy influences practice. Within a faith-based ECEC centre there is an additional lens through which educators look at their professional practice and it is through this additional lens and Christian world view that educators critically reflect on their practice. The implication of reflecting on faith-based values in a faith-based ECEC centre for ECEC centres is that all educators in all ECEC centres should be engaged in critical reflection as that informs decision making and therefore guides educator beliefs, attitudes and behaviour.

5.2.4.2 Establish a culture of reflective inquiry

The second consideration that came out of the interview data in regard to critical reflection as part of the NQS within a faith-based ECEC centre is the need to establish a culture of critical reflective inquiry. This means that culture can change in an ECEC centre and even new educators coming into an ECEC centre can be immersed in the culture where critical reflection is embedded, and they are more likely to critically reflective themselves as they take up and immerse themselves in the culture of the institution. Critical reflection is therefore not tagged on but part of the very culture of the ECEC centre. Freire (2000) notes that critical reflection on practice is "a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise, theory becomes "blah, blah, and blah, and practice, pure activism" (p. 20). Further, as noted by Rolfe et al. (2001) critical reflection is an approach, generating a climate of "critical acceptance" (Fook & Kellehar, 2010, p. 230) learning through critical reflection on the concept of praxis (Knott & Scragg, 2010; Schon, 1987), applying, contrasting and integrating theory to practice that is explored through authentic experiences, articulating questions, confronting biases, examining causality and identifying systemic issues for critical evaluation and knowledge transfer. Critical

reflection thereby becomes the seed for thoughtfulness, intentionality and positive change (DEEWR, 2009; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2012; Marbina, et al., 2010: Rosenberg, 2010). This culture can reflect trust and allow educators to validate each other. In such a culture, educators can understand the value of questions and adventure of seeking answers knowing that critical reflection is powerful in creating educator inquiry leading to better outcomes for children.

The implication of establishing a culture of reflective inquiry for ECEC centres is that educators will engage in critical reflection to create change. Educators, who wonder, question and consider possibilities, foster a zeal for questioning and learning. This reflects their quest for understanding and continuous improvement within their ECEC centre. Asking the right questions comes from a culture of inquiry where asking questions are encouraged and divergent thinking rewarded.

5.2.4.3 Adopt a reflective approach inclusive of all educators

The third consideration regarding critical reflection as part of the NQS that arose from the data is that all educators need to be involved. For an ECEC centre this highlights the need to be mindful of the team of educators and staff, making sure that every educator is involved in the process of critical reflection, interacting and making sure that all educators are involved. Engagement will occur in continuous learning through paying attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday action by reflectively examining practice. This leads to self-evaluation and professional growth. This is consistent with the literature in which critical reflection leads to transformed ways of thinking (Ryan, 2011; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Ossa Parra et al., 2015). It is only by having all educators involved that the team can examine their knowledge and ask questions of inquiry about beliefs and whose needs are best being met. Importantly, all educators need to be involved as critical reflection in ECEC relies on educators questioning and challenging their own assumptions (Clark & Creswell, 2011), backgrounds, values, beliefs, feelings and behaviour whilst also attending to the impact of the wider organisational, ideological and political contexts. As stated, critical reflection is an approach, not a technique or technology, which encompasses planning and consideration, linked to values and social identity (Benade, 2016).

5.2.4.4 Action outcomes of the reflection process

The fourth consideration to come out of the data calls our attention to the way that the outcomes of the reflection process are actioned. Actioning of the right outcomes creates habitual patterns of behaviour which leads to success. The implication of this is that ECEC centres should engage their educators in critical reflection for action to create momentum to achieve the service goals.

As described in Chapter Two, the NQS requires a high level of critical thinking by educators to embed critical reflection in decision-making and professional judgments (ACECQA, 2013; DEEWR, 2009) for critical reflection to be a catalyst for change. Each educator is accountable to analyse and reflect upon his or her practice with an emphasis on continuous improvement, the implementation of the program and ongoing learning.

5.2.4.5 Train and empower educators

The fifth consideration to arise from the data is that within ECEC there is a need to train and empower educators. This allows the strengths of educators to be improved, and consequently, they will develop better skills of critical reflection. In this way, educators will have increased job satisfaction, increased capacity to problem solve and innovate, increased morale, and acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities to promote learning and development (Sheridan et al., 2009).

Critical reflection as a rationale for practice is psychological, professional and pedagogical, serving as a methodological and ethical anchor and foundational reference point with a set of tested beliefs that help guide actions in unpredictable situations. Critical reflection is shaped by our context and needs to keep adapting to different circumstances. Whilst foundational beliefs remain unchanged, we keep learning in different ways. Critical reflection grounds us emotionally, clarifying our questions and assumptions (Brookfield, 2005. When we think this way, we can control the ebbs and flows of our emotions and connection to an educator's morale in powerful ways. It is generally accepted that the best teachers and best schools can clearly articulate and clarify their ideology - what they think and what they believe-and make this explicit in how learning works with constant reflection (Malm, 2009). Therefore, educators need to be trained and empowered to become aware of their own practice to constantly reflect on, refine and build their knowledge of how critical reflection works (Shandomo, 2010). This lies at the heart of learning for an educator through partnership from both inside and outside the ECEC centre to confront thinking and practice. This is necessary for the outcome/s of reflection to deliver transformation of practice through change. It has long been identified that doing things the same way, implied knowledge, dependence upon intuition and 'crowds, praise and power' (Jackson, 1968) limit the ability of many educators to move beyond 'single loop' learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Key, therefore, is for educators to be learners themselves to be successful in their jobs developed through the critically reflective process. Reflection in, on and about an educator's practice is essential to building, maintaining and furthering the capacities of educators to think and act professionally (Day, 1999). As critical reflection is a learned skill, educators need to be trained and empowered to contribute. Many educators require direct

instruction along with practice to increase their skill level. As critical reflection requires educators to extend their outlook beyond what they already know (Schon, 1995), they need support and structure to think about rich questions and inquiry with consideration of broader social and political influences such as policy changes.

As ECEC is a dynamic and ever-changing sector, it follows that educators must be able to evaluate the part they play in meeting changing needs. Educators need regular opportunities to reflect upon their moral and social purposes, work collaboratively both inside and outside the ECEC centre and strive for continuous learning related to their own needs for growth and expertise in maintaining NQS standards of practice. Educators must be trained and empowered to become and remain practitioners at the heart of whose practice is critical reflection, engaged genuinely, holistically, with every educator encouraged to inculcate in authentic reflection inclusive of values within the ECEC context in examining what is done, why and how, in practice. Further, it is important for an educator's perspective to be recognised not only in the initiation of ideas, development and evaluation and partnerships, but also in any outcomes that may result.

5.3 The SCHEMED Implementation Approach

The second research question in the present study asks us to consider how critical reflection is operationalised in ECEC. The findings of this study support using the 'SCHEMED' implementation approach. Through this approach critical reflection is understood conceptually (Korthagen, 2017), not "tagged on" (Barton & Ryan, 2014), and forms a way of working and learning. This helps educators to operationally understand the concept of, and practices associated with, critical reflection (Wilson, 2013); supports educator understanding of the purpose of critical reflection (Liu, 2015); and provides an implementation approach for critical reflection within ECEC.

From the data, educators indicated that critical reflection can be best implemented in ECEC by adopting the SCHEMED approach. The acronym SCHEMED outlines the seven components of effective implementation of critical reflection– structure, collaboration, heart-centredness, equipping, mentoring, empowering and distributed. Critical reflection is best implemented when you:

5.3.1 Use a Structured approach

The first of these components in the SCHEMED implementation approach is structured social construction. This occurs within the context of an ECEC centre, as in this qualitative research study and in this faith based ECEC centre in which this study took place.

Structure provides guidance, providing clarity and growth to achieve objectives and deliver outcomes. This does not happen by chance; this must be planned for. Structure needs to be provided for to enable critical reflection to be done and include the critical elements, prompts, questions, activities and organised discussion for educators to think about their practice. Constructions can occur based on context, service values and educator strengths. Theory can be built from social constructionist perspectives (Turnbull, 2002). Educators are often caught up in what they are doing so structure is needed to plan for sharing perspectives on how well the ECEC centre is doing, how educators are doing, and the effect educators are having on those around them along with critical reflection on aims, responses, feelings and performance to achieve the desired outcomes. As an inside-outside process, educators need to engage in critical reflection to build professional capital and examine theory and practice authentically for individual and collective educator growth. Critical reflection thereby becomes the wheel driving transformative practice unifying theory and practice and is best carried out by getting educators together. Educators can then come up with a process that is part of their normal working day where they make sure critical reflection is done right by attending to all the characteristics that are important.

5.3.2 Maximise the benefits of Collaboration

Collaboration has been cited as a primary factor in teachers' ability to implement change in their instruction as they move forward toward more effective pedagogical strategies (Gajda & Koliba, 2008). Collaborative critical reflection identifies what needs to change and why so that tasks can be distributed based on educator strengths to enhance both teaching and student learning (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Collaborative critical reflection identifies what needs to change and why. Through collaboration, tasks can be distributed to enable the team to deliver best outcomes based on educator strengths with high quality collaboration shown to enhance teacher and student learning (Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

5.3.3 Focus on Heart Centred Values

Effective ECEC centres remain true to their core values and principles. Educators within these centres are asked to reflect on these values which are central to the centre's operation. This involves reflections that may be both personal and professional. As Watkins and Donnelly (2014) note, a reflective heart-centred environment is inclusive, person-centred, and values based.

5.3.4 Equip and empower to enhance practice

Educators who engage in sustained professional development geared specifically toward higher-order thinking can improve their teaching practices (Wenglinsky, 2000). Further, equipping educators with a voice and empowerment based on strengths facilitates responsibility. Equipping educators supports engagement, mission and success (Anderson, 2017) improving one's practice is not only important to an educator's personal growth and satisfaction in their work but important for an educator's learning. By dedicating time to critical reflection, and improvement in an educators' practice, we can stay true to our educators, help them become the best they can be, and make generative changes in practice to create rewarding professional experiences. Equipping educators with a voice and empowerment based on strengths facilitates responsibility and positions them to be engaged and to be successful (Anderson & Jefferson, 2017).

5.3.5 Adopt Mentoring

Confidence develops through mentoring support in the legislated ECEC context with systems guidance in procedures, policies, frameworks, the code of ethics and practice. Mentoring promotes authentic practice and is most meaningful when there are established signposts towards best practice (Aiken, et al., 2014). Mentors, therefore, provide a driver for best practice. Mentors help achieve goals (Glass & Minnotte, 2010; Marques, 2011). Educators need to take the opportunity to engage in professional development through systematic investigation of practice with the help of a 'mentor' or critical friend inside or outside the ECEC centre to be supported and challenged. Cunningham (2012) suggests if teachers are able to discuss and analyse problems that arise in their classroom with others, this helps their analysis of situations, which could lead to improved classroom practice, sustained and systematic improvement and the kind of reflective practice partnerships that makes the relationship between reflective practice, change and improvement explicit. Confidence develops through mentoring support in the legislated ECEC context with systems guidance in procedures, policies and frameworks. Mentors provide a driver for improved practice and are most successful when the mentoring relationship promotes

authentic practice with established signposted towards best practice (Aiken et al., 2014) and achievement of goals (Glass & Minnotte, 2010).

5.3.6 Encourage Empowering

Empowerment through encouragement supports development and motivation and whilst motivators may change over time, it is important to understand what motivates educators (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014).

5.3.7 Make use of Distributed Leadership and role allocation

Utilising a collaborative strength based (Rath & Conchie, 2009) distributed leadership model (Bolden, 2011) supports critical reflection (Zhang et al., 2017) and builds confidence through support, promoting effective delegation of tasks, developing educators though sharing, encouragement, empowering conversing and discussion within the legislative context. The SCHEMED implementation approach allows theory and practice to come together. Through this approach, growth is enabled, and educators supported to feel valued and empowered with greater motivation to deliver best practice outcomes.

5.3.8 The Implications of Implementing Critical Reflection

This study would suggest that critical reflection is most effective when the SCHEMED Implementation Approach is adopted. In implementing SCHEMED, ECEC centres need to take this approach, through structuring their workday and workflow so that this becomes part of an educator's normal working day and not just something "tagged on" (Barton & Ryan, 2014) but becomes a genuine, authentic part of an ECEC educator's daily work practice, integrated into each educator's daily work. SCHEMED provides a systematic structured approach to effectively integrate critical reflection into the workflow of an ECEC centre, organisational structure and individual educator's working day. This study addresses the problem identified in Chapter One of the need for educator increased understanding of the purpose of critical reflection in ECEC. Educators then need knowledge of how to effectively implement critical reflection in ECEC centres. The results of this study indicate that critical reflection is important and impacts the effective operations of the centre. Effective implementation of critical reflection is achieved when the approach is Structured, Collaborative, Heart-centred, educators Equipped, educators Mentored, educators Encouraged, and tasks Distributed. This approach can serve as a benchmark to improve both the quality and consistency of reflective practice in ECEC, supporting

implementation of a high-performance learning culture in ECEC with embedded consistent critical reflective practice across the centre.

5.3.9 Implications of Critical Reflection as part of daily practice on the learning and teaching environment

Study findings evidenced in Chapter Four that emerged from the data show that educators understand that through implementing critical reflection as part of the NQS in everyday practice that they should strive daily for improved practice. In other words, if you want to do critical reflection well, critical reflection becomes part of an educator's day to day role, applying change in practice daily in an authentic way with daily collaboration with colleagues. These important considerations impact the learning and teaching environment and so the implications of daily practice will now be considered in more depth.

5.3.9.1 The need to strive for improved practice daily

The educators in this study understood that they should strive for improved practice with critical reflection a part of their day to day role. As educators, they need to be engaged in critical reflection daily to increase their skills. The reason for this is that educators draw on many theories to inform and guide their practice, and like different lenses, these theories enable educators to see the world from different perspectives to make sense of and respond to, different circumstances and contexts. By adopting a critically reflective approach to pedagogical practice, understanding is deepened, and educators are empowered to do better. Educators thereby become "more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional inquiry" (DEEWR, EYLF, p. 14), to understand why to improve what they do.

The implication of educators understanding that they should strive for improved practice with critical reflection a part of an educator's day to day role for ECEC centres is that all centres should engage their educators in critical reflection daily for continuous improvement. Critical reflection makes what is implicit made explicit, for it is in realising one's strengths and potential that new opportunities emerge for continuous improvement, maximisation of outcomes and enhancement of workplace performance.

5.3.9.2 The need to apply change in practice daily

The implication of educators understanding that they should apply change in practice daily is that critical reflection becomes embedded in what they do. Educators need to recapture experiences, think about them, evaluate them and critically reflect upon those experiences in learning. The

EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) states that "reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Its intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning" (p. 13). The EYLF Educators Guide (DEEWR, 2010) talks about the need for educators to become more thoughtful about their work and to extend their practice through reflection, and, if embedded in daily practice, achieve better outcomes for children. Consistent with this is that change through critical reflection allows for personal growth with the discovery of insight; promotes flexibility to adapting to new environments and situations; provides for improvement; allows for strength and triggers progress and creates opportunity.

The implication of educators understanding that educators should apply change in practice daily for ECEC centres is that critical reflection should be embedded in an educator's daily tasks to provide for growth, development, improvement and innovation. Critical reflection is a social constructivist approach to learning, which recognises that educators build knowledge as they work and interact with others (Wenger, 1998).

5.3.9.3 The need to be authentic with daily collaboration with colleagues

The third implication of educators understanding that they need to be authentic with daily collaboration with colleagues is that educators need to be genuine with their words, actions and communication in the workplace. In this way they will have a positive impact, and foster teamwork through sharing their honest perspectives with each other which provides for the best outcomes for children and families. As they expose their vulnerabilities to colleagues in the desire to learn, this will support authenticity, encouragement of trust and emotional regulation and provides for continuous improvement. For it is through engagement in critical reflection and sharing beyond an individual educator's lens through engagement in critical inquiry that alternate perspectives are found along with deepened understanding, growth and development.

The implication of educators understanding that they need to be authentic with each other communicating openly daily is that all educators need to be engaged in daily critical reflection in an authentic way using a range of strategies to support their learning (OECD, 2013). It is important values support sound decision making in education (De Nobile & Hogan, 2014) and beliefs identified through reflective practice uncover the structure and content of educators' perspectives (Garvis et al., 2011) to enable practical application of their reported values to the ECEC learning environment. Challenges to habits of mind leads to change in educators' worldviews, precursors for behaviour change (Burgess, 2012; Kelly & Barker, 2016; Leiberman

& Linke, 2007 & Harvey et al., 2010). Making meaning and shifting perspectives is transformative through learning and extension of professional understanding facilitates through authenticity with daily collaboration with colleagues.

The implication of educators understanding that they need to be authentic with daily collaboration with colleagues for ECEC centres is that all centres should engage their educators in daily critical reflection. Critical reflection grounds not only our actions, but also our sense of who we are. By challenging our prior understandings and experimenting with new ways of doing things we can grow, move forward and make positive change. We know why we believe what we believe and the rationale behind our practice. Critically reflective educators know what they do and why, having developed their sense of being, grounded in difficult decisions in core beliefs, values and assumptions. Making a commitment to daily practice engages educators to get better at what they do. Educators then become more confident to challenge past understandings, encourage new ideas and perspectives and grow in their professional practice.

5.4 The Contribution of Critical Reflection to the effective functioning of ECEC

We have then seen the impact of critical reflection at an operational level. The third research question asks us to consider how critical reflection operates at a conceptual level and can be used to help ECEC centres effectively function. This enables the gap in the literature identified by Korthagen (2017) about a lack of understanding of critical reflection at a conceptual level to be addressed with the development of an operational model for ECEC. This model enables educators to understand critical reflection conceptually. This is a real need as to date there has not been a published structure to support this process (ACECQA 2017).

5.4.1 The Operational Model for Critical Reflection in ECEC

The conceptual model developed through this study helps highlight important connections regarding critical reflection in the real-world system and processes of ECEC. This operational model, developed from the data, recognises the complexity of ECEC and the multiple levels of influence which impact growth and the provision of quality. This provides a structural framework to guide the act of reflection and provide conceptual understanding of how critical reflection works in ECEC. This is consistent with the literature in understanding that in order to analyse effectively one must be thoroughly familiar with the subject matter and include a structure using a reflective model (Bell & Mladenovic, 2013). Adopting a structured approach guides inquiry and understanding of content knowledge (Blachard et al., 2010) and prevents a

"waste of time" (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012, p. 385). Conceptually, reflection is a transformative process actualised by reflecting theoretically and creating individual knowledge related to lived experience. The development of this model addresses the identified gap in the literature as there is a lack of understanding of how critical reflection impacts the effectiveness of ECEC centres.

The ECEC context has a focus on relationships, continuous improvement and underpinnings of philosophy, values and beliefs. This model is a great foundation to reflection as it provides a starting point, a structure and provides an understanding of the impact of the recursive nature of critical reflection. As Bassot (2016) notes, critical reflective practice in ECEC has distinct situations for which analytical reflection must be applied to impact workplace practice.

The findings of this study support the findings of Ghaye & Lillyman (2014) which show that critical reflection supports continuous improvement, in helping educators to look both retrospectively and forward. This assists the educator to plan, observe, reflect and generate a revised plan. This is consistent with the literature as Larrivee (2008) points out that both critical inquiry and self-reflection are necessary to become a critically reflective practitioner. This model shows the relationships between the various layers in ECEC and that critical reflection enhances an understanding of each of the layers, and transitions between layers, and also impacts how educators see themselves, others, through exploring values, views and/or opinions.

As stated in previous Chapters, this study drew on the approach used by Fook and Gardner. This was founded on the idea that critical reflection involves the recognition of deep-seated assumptions with the goal to enhance professional practice (Fook, 2017). This approach to critical reflection requires personal or professional experience to be deconstructed and analysed in order to understand different assumptions, relationships and influences and how these impact practice. As new understandings emerge, the individual can reconstruct the 'incident' and develop new techniques to deal with a similar incident in the future. This approach used by Fook and Gardner (2013) approach "involves the unsettling and examination of hidden assumptions to rework ideas and professional actions. The model draws upon reflective practice; reflexivity; postmodernism and critical perspectives" (p. 21). Through this critically reflective process, an analysis of power within the workplace or within relationships can be explored which may lead to transformative change. Fook and Gardner's (2007) approach focuses upon uncovering buried and strong assumptions whilst also giving power to participants to enable an individual to act on his or her own free will. Fook et al. (2010) suggests that by working in this way the centre of an issue can be established which includes emotional aspects. This thereby acknowledges the fundamental importance of power dynamics, the broader organisational and social impacts and

considers how emotions affect our attitudes and experiences. The findings in this study support this approach.

‘Belonging’, ‘Being’, ‘Becoming’, and ‘Collaborating’ have been identified as really important elements and critical reflection enables each of these to become a reality through a recursive relationship. Belonging is central to ' being and becoming’ (DEEWR, EYLF, 2009, p. 7). Being recognises the significance of the here and now, building and maintaining relationships with others, “engaging with life's joys and complexities, in meeting the challenges of everyday life” (DEEWR, EYLF, 2009, p. 9). Becoming fosters authentic change to grow and transform practice through the embedded critically reflective process engaging educators to “Be, seek and make meaning of the world” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 7) founded at the core in belonging and contributing to the group (DEEWR, 2010, p. 7). Collaborating - the welding together of Being, Belonging, and Becoming as the connecting, attaching, actioning agent and is one of the leading approaches to researching interpersonal relationships and organisations (Mikulincer & Shaver 2011).

‘Belonging’, “Being,’ Becoming’ and ‘Collaborating’ helps us to critically reflect which in turn enhances our ability to ‘Belong’, to ‘Be’, to ‘Become’, and to ‘Collaborate’. If you feel like you ‘Belong’ you are more likely to be engaged in critical reflection and this process in turn helps you to ‘Belong’ more. Educators explained their sense of ‘Being’ as undergoing a level of self-actualization in their job with critical reflection facilitating this. ‘Becoming’ encourages critical reflection, because you want to ‘Become’ a better version of yourself. By critically reflecting, you ‘Become’ more through this recursive process. Critical reflection can create real ‘Collaboration’ enabling educators to feel like they ‘Belong’ with a group of people working towards shared goals.

‘Belonging’, “Being’, ‘Becoming’ and ‘Collaborating’ all contribute to an environment where critical reflection is fostered, educators challenged through a variety of modes and methods of critically reflecting and continuous growth cultivated. For the ECEC sector, the operational model for critical reflection in ECEC offers conceptual understanding of the process of critical reflection within ECEC. This model can serve as a benchmark for both the quality and consistency of reflective practice and can be extended through research in other centres.

For educators themselves, the operational model for critical reflection in ECEC can provide evaluation of individual performance and specify areas of improvement through understanding the variables and relationships of how critical reflection within ECEC works. What is needed is for ECEC educators to understand that there so much to be gained by the environment within

which educators exist for critical reflection to become part of their ECEC service environment with understanding of the key components within it.

It is important that the way that critical reflection impacts the operations and strategic direction of the ECEC centre is understood. The data from this study supports the notion that the functioning of the ECEC centre is multi-layered and employees are self-actualised through belonging, being, becoming, and collaborating. In so doing it supports and extends the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009).

The operational model for critical reflection in ECEC can be used to motivate educators to want to engage in the critical reflective process. One way to do this would be for educators to hear the experiences of other educators of how reflection helped them. As educators engage in reflection this conceptual model can help them deepen their thinking. As educators gain experience in critical reflection their confidence will grow, they can engage at deeper levels. By engaging in critical reflection, the functioning of the centre will be enhanced as Ghaye (2000, p. 7) acknowledges we should "Make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces" and offer us the "courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos".

5.5 Conclusion

The themes that have emerged from the data of this study support, along with the literature, the importance of critical reflection as the foundation of the NQS that underpins effective pedagogy (DEEWR, EYLF, 2009). Critical reflection has been seen to be integral to the provision of quality ECEC, not only at an operational level, but at a higher strategic level. As a result of critical reflection, positive outcomes have been identified that include among others, positive climate and culture, educators working together as teams, and positive outcomes for children. Critical reflection helps deliver genuine learning, challenges educators to develop higher-level thinking and problem solving, raises educators' awareness of the structures surrounding ECEC centre environments, and builds connections to the community with a deeper awareness of needs. Critical reflection on past experience can clarify learning and make this meaningful to present circumstances; affirm core beliefs and values and develop new learning. Critical reflection solidifies learning through practice; identifies gaps in learning and creates new perspectives to make learning relevant and meaningful to the present and identify strategies for the concept of critical reflection to be more fully understood. It is the conclusion of this study that all educators need to be engaged in critical reflection and all ECEC centres should engage their educators in critical reflection to enhance practice and outcomes.

In this chapter, critical reflection has been seen to make an important contribution to ECEC and this study has strengthened our conceptual understanding of how critical reflection works in ECEC through the development of an operational model for critical reflection in ECEC and implementation approach for critical reflection in ECEC. This development addresses the gap in the literature identified by (Korthagen, 2107) for the need for educator understanding of critical reflection at a conceptual level. Furthermore, this study has addressed the gap in the literature noted by Wilson (2013) for the need to define the concept of, and practices associated with, critical reflection well operationally, and address the need highlighted by Liu (2015) for educator understanding of the purpose of critical reflection. In evidencing many positive outcomes that flow from critical reflection, important factors were highlighted to consider when implementing critical reflection for success, particularly in the area of teaching and learning. This study has shown that critical reflection not only contributes operationally to an ECEC centre, but impacts the very culture, climate and ethos of practice within an organisation to contribute to operational success with the model and implementation approach put forward to illustrate the best way to do critical reflection in ECEC.

The SCHEMED implementation approach put forward addresses the lack of an approach for critical reflection in ECEC (ACECQA, 2017), ensures that critical reflection is not “tagged on” (Barton & Ryan, 2014) but rather forms an active way of working and learning. The development of this operational model for ECEC and implementation approach for critical reflection in ECEC through ‘SCHEMED’ provides for the ideal conditions and practices that enable critical reflection to work effectively in ECEC to provide success for educators, an ECEC centre and the ECEC sector to not only inform practice (ACECQA, 2018) but transform practice. The operational model for critical reflection in ECEC emerged from the implications from the answers to the research question and research sub-questions and evolved into the operationalisation of the approach for critical reflection to work successfully in ECEC.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The problem this study investigated was that there was no set way or approach to implement critical reflection with the process unique to each service (ACECQA, 2017), being "tagged on, rather than constituting a way of working and learning" (Barton & Ryan, 2014, p. 410) with a lack of educator understanding at a conceptual level (Korthagen, 2017). This study provides understanding of how critical reflection impacts ECEC and how critical reflection best works in ECEC. It puts forward the approach for how critical reflection is to be implemented in ECEC through SCHEMED and offers conceptual understanding of critical reflection through the operational model. This knowledge offers transformation of ECEC practice through the understanding of the foundational underpinning provided by critical reflection in educator practice (ACECQA, 2018).

In this chapter, the main findings regarding the research questions are summarised and general conclusions based on the findings of the study presented in this thesis are described. This chapter also reports on the contribution of this study. Furthermore, the strengths and limitations of this thesis are considered and suggestions for further research are presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for all stakeholders in ECEC.

6.2 Overview of this Study

The overall purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the impact and implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS in one faith based ECEC centre, through educator perspectives.

The first chapter of this thesis commenced with a description of how this study came about and gave a background to the study. This chapter introduced the requirement in ECEC within Australia for the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS. It was identified that there was a lack of educator understanding of the purpose of critical reflection (Liu, 2015), and practices associated with critical reflection were not operationally well defined. There was a need for critical reflection to be well defined (Wilson, 2013) and a good level of understanding of critical reflection at a conceptual level (Korthagen, 2017). It was hoped that critical reflection could be used as a strategy of the Australian Commonwealth Government in ECEC to improve

Australia's ECEC international performance and standing. From this background the research questions were proposed, and the structure of this thesis was outlined.

Chapter Two provided a review of the literature which included a critical component within the literature review of critical reflection as identified by Fook. A background was painted of ECEC within both the international and Australian context to provide an understanding of the development of the NQS within the national Australian context. When ECEC centres are run it is important that ECEC frameworks and standards are applied within the legislative context. Hence, the connection between critical reflection and these important documents in the way ECEC centres go about their business was reviewed. Examples of these important documents included the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Australian Early Childhood Code of Ethics. As ECEC centres require a high standard of pedagogical practice the next section explored the relationship between critical reflection, theoretical perspectives and pedagogically professional practice. The way in which we are developing our educators was critically reflected upon and the following section reviewed professional learning. A review of existing models of critical reflection was undertaken and the imperative highlighted to work towards a model for critical reflection for ECEC. The approach used by Fook and Gardner (2007) for critical reflection was examined and highlighted as a critical component within this thesis. Four modes of critical reflection were examined in order to gain an understanding of the complexity of reflection. Methods of critical reflection as applied in ECEC were examined. The association between critical reflection and philosophy provided an understanding of the importance of reflecting over philosophy in identifying the special character of an ECEC centre. The conclusion to this chapter highlighted the importance of critical reflection in ECEC in attending to Commonwealth compliance frameworks and the imperative of this research study in investigation of this topic was framed by three research questions:

1. What is the impact of the implementation of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard in one faith-based Early Education and Care centre?
2. How do you effectively implement critical reflection in an ECEC centre?
3. How does critical reflection contribute to the effective functioning of an ECEC centre?

Chapter Three described the research methodology and design. The purpose of the research study was presented with an overview of the chapter. The approach used in investigating the problem of the study was outlined. The intentional foundation of the study in Fook's (2002) notion of

critical reflection was explained with modification of the approach by adopting a longer design pathway outlined. These stages included Director Provocations; secondly, delving into the research questions through a series of three rounds of semi-structured interviews with each of the participants; unpacking and critiquing the provocations, observation and document analysis; non-vested interest critique through multiple sources; and framework emergence. It was discussed how the tools of grounded theory were used. Emic and etic perspectives were explained. The bricolage of methodology used encompassing elements of case study and narrative inquiry were discussed. The use of the hermeneutic dialectic was examined, participants involved in the study, and the collection of data. A photo depiction of the coding process was provided. The data analysis process through which the framework emerged was illustrated. Methods of treating and analysing the data were explained. This included coding, constant comparison, memo writing, theoretical sampling, saturation, triangulation and member checking. Important considerations were made clear and discussed, including ethical considerations and quality criteria.

Chapter Four presented the findings that were drawn from the data to address each of the research questions. The first section provided an introduction and outlined the goals that drove the collection of the data and subsequent data analysis. Presentation of the findings included a profile of the site followed by vignettes of each of the respondents. Themes that emerged were presented for each of the research questions. In summary, we learned from the research questions that critical reflection makes a significant contribution to the effective operation and running of an ECEC centre.

Having considered the themes that emerged from answering the first research question, the next section in Chapter Four considered the second research question and unpacked how critical reflection is best implemented in an ECEC centre through the SCHEMED implementation model. From the data, Educators identified that critical reflection must be structured, collaborative, founded on trust built on person-centeredness and heart-openness, equipping, meaningfully mentored, empowering and distributed. Each of these elements were identified as implementation themes within the SCHEMED implementation model for critical reflection in ECEC.

The final research question considered how critical reflection impacts the effective functioning of ECEC. A ‘bigger picture’ of ECEC was examined, and the way educators saw themselves within this bigger picture, and what conditions needed to be in place for this to effectively function. The emergent themes outlined the benefits of critical reflection and the conditions that needed to be in place for critical reflection to occur. These were identified as Belonging, Being,

Becoming and Collaborating. This was noted as being of interest given that this was reflective of the EYLF but with some additions. The role of critical reflection within each of the components of Belonging, Being, Becoming and Collaborating was reflected upon evidencing from the data that critical reflection helps each of these to become a reality.

Having discussed the important components of Belonging, Being, Becoming and Collaborating, these four important layers were represented in an operational model for critical reflection in ECEC. As models enhance systems thinking, from this diagram was developed a model for critical reflection within ECEC. This model was designed to not only provide an accurate and useful representation of the body of knowledge to solve the problem identified in Chapter One of this study but to provide a tool to visualise critical reflection within ECEC to assist conceptual understanding of the process. As a visualisation tool this model provides a direct link between data and offers conceptual understanding of the process of critical reflection for ECEC. It provides understanding of the variables and relationships amongst each other and provides for deepening of educators' knowledge. This model hence offers not only implementation, and informing of, practice but transformation of practice, specifically within ECEC. In summary, this study evidences how critical reflection helps ECEC to effectively function through the SCHEMED implementation model.

Chapter Five provided an interpretation of the findings with discussion of implications for the ECEC sector, an individual ECEC centre, and for educators themselves. Many important positive outcomes of critical reflection were highlighted, demonstrating that critical reflection contributes operationally to the success of an ECEC centre. Several important factors and considerations were highlighted which impact the success of critical reflection, particularly in the area of teaching and learning. An implementation approach for critical reflection in ECEC was proposed that could contribute to educator, service, organisational and ECEC sector success. At a higher level, critical reflection was shown to impact the very culture, ethos and climate of an organisation and impact organisational success. The interrelatedness of critical reflection, culture and continuous improvement was explained.

For the ECEC sector, these findings were described as offering the ability for leaders in the sector to drive continuous improvement by using the implementation approach and operational model to deepen educators' knowledge through conceptual understanding of the process for critical reflection within ECEC. Furthermore, this model can evolve and be expanded through research in other services.

For an ECEC centre, these findings were outlined to provide a model to guide educators' reflective practice. This approach and model can also be useful to an ECEC centre to develop a high-performance learning culture and establish consistent reflective practice across the service. Furthermore, this approach and model can serve as a benchmark to improve the quality of reflective practice across an ECEC centre.

For educators themselves, these findings and the development of an approach and model for critical reflection within ECEC were shown to enable educator understanding of the variables and relationships amongst each other. In understanding these variables and relationships, educators can be assisted in evaluating their performance and specifying areas for improvement.

6.3 Consolidated Views

A summary and overview are now provided for the benefit of the reader to consolidate the discussion contained in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

This study has confirmed that critical reflection is a core principle that underpins effective ECEC. Critical reflection involves educators engaging with questions of philosophy, standards, frameworks, ethics and practice to examine practice, gain insight, and inform future decision-making to raise the overall quality of ECEC. An educator who examines his/her practice, assesses the quality of the learning environment and experiences and analyses his/her own practice, is using critical reflection to strengthen his/her own professional practice through developing deeper understandings, exploring concerns and improving outcomes for children and families.

This study has evidenced that critical reflection in ECEC makes an important and positive contribution to quality outcomes of ECEC. This study has found that critical reflection in ECEC as part of the NQS provides really important positive outcomes to an ECEC centre. Critical reflection does this through facilitating collaborative inquiry amongst the team of educators within an ECEC centre to increase educator understanding, build authenticity, enabling the team to delegate responsibility, promote leadership and action outcomes which provides for raising the overall quality of ECEC.

This study has further found that through the process of critical reflection, practice is improved. This happens through educators identifying their areas of strength, being more aware of their own knowledge, skills and pedagogical practice which provides for better outcomes to children

through educators being enables to better engage children in learning and amplify the learning environment.

We have also learned through this study that critical reflection as part of the NQS needs to be implemented daily to improve practice, embedded as part of an educator's day-to-day role with opportunities to apply change daily, and built upon the team collaborating together authentically.

This study has discovered that there are a number of important considerations when one is implementing critical reflection. Educators need to reflect on their values and service quality to establish a culture of critical reflective inquiry, with professional relationships inclusive of all educators, contributing to discussions and debates and being empowered to contribute to continuous improvement.

The second part of this study has discussed how to best implement critical reflection and provides advice on an implementation approach – SCHEMED - recommended for adoption by the ECEC sector. For success, critical reflection should use this structured approach, maximise the benefits of collaboration, encourage heart-openness and person-centeredness, equip and empower educators to enhance their practice, use mentors, offer encouragement and distribute roles between educators.

The last section of the study develops our understanding that critical reflection not only impacts ECEC at an operational level, but strategically through affecting the entire ethos, culture and climate of an ECEC centre and institution. This study has shown how critical reflection creates real collaboration amongst a team of educators, where individual educators feel they belong and engage in critical reflection to feel like they belong more. Educators then are enabled to self-actualise and become, encouraged to critically reflect because an educator wants to become a better version of himself/herself and be the best he/she can be. This study has put forward an operational model for critical reflection in ECEC which provides conceptual understanding of how critical reflection works in ECEC and identified the key components.

In summary, this study has demonstrated that critical reflection provides really positive outcomes for an ECEC centre, increasing team capacity and the way educators work together collaboratively, shaping the ethos, culture and climate of an ECEC centre and institution, and strengthening our conceptual understanding of how critical reflection works not only operationally but strategically in not only informing practice but transforming practice to take an ECEC centre, and an institution to a whole new level, with an implementation approach put forward for critical reflection in ECEC to be successful.

6.4 Contribution of this Study

This study contributes in a number of main areas.

Firstly, this study contributes to overall knowledge development about the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS within ECEC. It responds to the call for research into ECEC. It acknowledges the need for research into the implementation of critical reflection within ECEC. It brings forth much needed educator perspectives. The findings unearthed, and implications discussed for critical reflection reported in this study were based on research data from educators' perspectives, who should participate in defining what constitutes its effectiveness.

The understanding of the significant important positive outcomes of critical reflection, realisation of the need for an educator to embed critical reflection in daily practice, awareness of the important considerations when educators undertake critical reflection and recognition of how critical reflection impacts the ethos, climate and culture of not only an ECEC centre, but an entire institution should underpin a foundation for critical reflection in ECEC and be embraced at both an operational and strategic level.

This study further provides ECEC stakeholders with knowledge that critical reflection contributes operationally and strategically, to the operation of an ECEC centre. The SCHEMED implementation approach for critical reflection in ECEC is recommended for adoption by the ECEC sector in order to provide the means for critical reflection in an ECEC centre to be successful.

The operational model for critical reflection in ECEC developed in the study offers insight into the range of factors that influence critical reflection as part of the NQS within ECEC. Appreciating how critical reflection works in a recursive relationship to enable educators to 'Belong' through the process of critical reflection, to 'Become' self-actualised, to 'Be' the best version of themselves and 'Collaborate' together as a cohesive team supports conceptual understanding for educators on how critical reflection works in ECEC. Given the information contained herein, it is evident that to improve and sustain ECEC delivery in the future, it is essential for ECEC stakeholders to grasp this understanding from educators' perspectives of how critical reflection works in ECEC, an understanding that transcends NQS checklists or tasks.

In terms of assisting in the design and development of ECEC, this study could be pertinent to educators involved in ECEC programs, as well as university administrators. For educators, it could provide a platform for 'how' to critically reflect and which practices are effective or non-

effective. Understanding of 'how' the critically reflective experience encourages or discourages educators might enable consideration and implementation of constructive changes.

For university administrators, this study could provide encouragement to review the quality and content of ECEC courses with a focussed addition of critical reflection. Lastly, this study has contributed to a tool for embedded critical reflection development within ECEC, for guided practice.

A poster presentation of the findings (Appendix G) has been presented at the 2019 Child Aware National Conference (https://kaigi.eventsair.com/QuickEventWebsitePortal/2019-child-aware-conference/info/Agenda/AgendaItemDetail?id=785c3a09-4425-4e0b-b6e1-3ff6e0d1ff1a), an initiative of Families Australia. Findings have been presented at the inaugural 2017 Australian Early Childhood Christian Educators Conference (https://juliewyliemusic.com/event/australian-christian-early-childhood-educators-association-conference), the 2018 International Early Childhood Symposium (https://nsw.childcarealliance.org.au/events/calendar/events/iecs2018) and the 2019 Australian Early Childhood Educators Conference (Appendix G).

6.5 Constraints, Assumptions and Limitations

As with any research study, there is a possibility of flaws in design, data, and interpretation. The following are assumptions and limitations that have been identified.

Assumptions:

Given the qualitative paradigm within which this study was located the theoretical assumptions this study is based on are:

1. The methodological assumption of constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). Educators are capable and competent practitioners who understand and bring to the site a wealth of knowledge.
2. As was discussed in the methodological chapter and ensuing chapters, this study was initially based upon Fook's work (Fook & Gardner, 2007) with its application and augmentation. This evolved into a pathway that consisted of five stages. An assumption was that Fook's work was trustworthy (Guba, 1981), a quality criterion. Chapter 3 explains the evolutionary nature of this study and the pathway it took in the development of a theory of practice and grounded theory.

Limitations:

In this study, one factor that needs to be considered is the fact that the study was designed to investigate the impact and implementation of the implementation of critical reflection, as part of the NQS, in one faith based ECEC centre, from educators' perspectives. Consequently, the generalisability of the study results with respect to other types of ECEC settings could be limited. Consequently, this becomes a recommendation for further research. Furthermore, as the applicability of the results of the study to international educational contexts is unknown, this too, becomes a recommendation for further research.

Additionally, whilst the researcher knows that qualitative research was the best choice for this study, qualitative research tools, such as interviews, are not designed to capture statistical information. Therefore, further research could couple this study with quantitative research. For example, a survey designed for quantitative research, and subsequent statistical analysis, may strengthen the data already discovered using qualitative research tools.

Some researchers into the qualitative paradigm would see this study as not being objective and hence some people might perceive this as a limitation. However, within the qualitative paradigm, the particular worldview of this researcher and this paradigmatic worldview, it is legitimate as has been unfolded in this study.

6.6 Recommendations for Further Research

In an effort to address the contributions of this research study, the results provide much needed information to all stakeholders within ECEC and the results gleaned from this study yield several important recommendations for additional research in the area of critical reflection within ECEC.

Research into the implementation of critical reflection, as part of the NQS, from educators' perspectives within Australia, and within faith-based contexts, is in its initial stages. This study is distinctive at this point in time because it contributes to the overall body of knowledge related to critical reflection within ECEC, to studies of higher education, and to research into critical reflection within education and, within a faith based ECEC context. However, further studies related to these areas need to be continued.

This SCHEMED model could more widely applied within the ECEC sector. It thus could support the professional development of educators in conceptual understanding of critical reflection in ECEC.

A larger sample would be desirable to expand upon what has been reported in this initial development of a conceptual multidimensional model for critical reflection within ECEC. A study of the implementation of critical reflection in the international context would be advantageous by introducing larger variation in educator perceptions; this could also assist in determining any cultural influences.

Furthermore, this study needs replication in other sites in order to test if the same outcomes are delivered. In other words, if educators in other sites engage in such a critically reflective journey of discovery, they obtain better insight into their identity and build the same collaborative structure in the same way?"

In addition, a study differentiation between undergraduate and postgraduate programs might illuminate differences in educator perceptions seeking their first degree as opposed to students seeking further university qualifications with experience within the sector. There are likely to be differences between these two types of students and what they consider to be important attributes for the effective implementation of critical reflection, as part of the NQS, within ECEC, and within faith-based contexts.

Further research is needed to confirm the multiple dimensions of the SCHEMED model as part of an integrated system. The interactions between the dimensions and the extent to which they impact on each other will have to be examined.

Finally, as this study was focussed on educators, further research required can extend this critically reflective journey of discovery with children within the ECEC context broadly and, specifically, within the faith based ECEC context.

6.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided an overview of the study with contribution of the study and recommendations for further research. This study provides the bedrock for the effective implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS within ECEC, and, irrespective of how the educational context may change in the future, the fundamental factors that impact learning and success derived through critical reflection as part of the NQS have been identified by educators themselves. What we therefore have is an exciting future to work towards. Any great discovery requires one to set their sights enthusiastically high. To cross the bridge of discovery we must develop an image of what and who we can be. It also serves to help us identify what we still have much to work on. Once we can see how much further we must go in new journeys our

expectations can rise and be fulfilled. I will forever remember this journey and understand that it was the most crucial and rewarding journey of my life.

> "In a mirror we find a reflection of our appearance, but in our heart, we find a reflection of our soul." – Unknown.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION CONSENT INFORMATION FORM



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION – Educator

Understanding the Faith Based Context in Early Education and Care

What is the nature of the intersection between the National Quality Standard and the praxis of one faith-based Early Education and Care Centre?

– Perspectives of Educators

Dear Educator,

This purpose of this letter is to request that you volunteer to take part in a research project that aims to inquire into the implementation of critical reflection in Early Childhood Education and Care through a faith-based case study.

If you agree to take part, each participant will be asked to participate in three interviews (duration of about 20-60 minutes). These interviews will take place at the Centre in your standard working hours at times that are convenient for you and backfilled by a casual staff to ensure educator: child ratios are maintained.

You can change your mind and are free to withdraw at any time. Refusal or withdrawal will not in any way affect your relationship with the Centre or Avondale College of Higher Education.

All information will be confidential. Interviews will be digitally recorded, and no names will be used in any written report. These notes will be kept locked in the chief

researcher's office and destroyed after five years. The data collected from your participation will be used for the preparation of a report and possible journal publications.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please sign the attached participant consent form.

For further information please contact Debra Williams or Dr Phil Fitzsimmons at one of the following addresses, or talk with the Chief Financial Officer, Mr Peter Ridley.	
Assoc. Prof. Phil Fitzsimmons	Debra Williams
School of Education, Business and Science	Manager
Avondale College of Higher Education	Hillsong Child Care Centre
PO Box19, Cooranbong	PO Box 1195 Castle Hill
NSW, 2265	NSW 1765
Australia	Australia
Email: phil.fitzsimmons@avondale.edu.au	Email: Debra.williams@hillsong.com
Phone: +612 49802183	Phone: +612 88464899

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.

APPENDIX B: EDUCATOR CONSENT FORM



EDUCATOR CONSENT FORM

Understanding the Faith Based Context in Early Education and Care

What is the nature of the intersection between the National Quality Standard and the praxis of one faith-based Early Education and Care Centre?

– Perspectives of Educators

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project undertaken by Debra Williams.

I have been given information about the research into my understanding of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard through a faith-based ECEC case study from the perspective of educators. I have been provided with the opportunity to discuss this project with the researcher. I understand that if I have further questions, I can contact Dr Phil Fitzsimmons or Mr Peter Ridley.

I understand that:

- I will be requested to take part in a series of interviews.
- I can withdraw at any time during the project.
- My participation in this research is voluntary.
- My refusal to participate or withdraw consent will not affect my relationship with Hillsong Child Care Centre or Avondale College of Higher Education.

All information will be confidential.

I have been advised of the time elements associated with this research and have had an opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I am aware I can contact Debra Williams in the first instance, and if unresolved the Avondale's HREC secretary as detailed below.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box19, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, 2265 or phone (612) 4980 2121 or fax (612) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.

Educator's Name: ……..……

Signature: ……

Date: ……

APPENDIX C: EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Avondale

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION – Educator

Understanding the Faith Based Context in Early Education and Care
What is the nature of the intersection between the National Quality Standard and the praxis of one faith-based Early Education and Care Centre?
– Perspectives of Educators

Dear Educator,
This purpose of this letter is to request that you volunteer to take part in a research project that aims to understand the nature of the intersection between the Commonwealth compliance system for Early Education and Care, the National Quality Standard, with the praxis of Hillsong Child Care Centre.

If you agree to take part, each participant will be asked to participate in three interviews (duration of about 20-60 minutes). These interviews will take place at the Centre in your standard working hours at times that are convenient for you and backfilled by a casual staff to ensure educator: child ratios are maintained.

You can change your mind and are free to withdraw at any time. Refusal or withdrawal will not in any way affect your relationship with the Centre or Avondale College of Higher Education.

All information will be confidential. Interviews will be digitally recorded, and no names will be used in any written report. These notes will be kept locked in the chief researcher's office and destroyed after five years. The data collected from your participation will be used for the preparation of a report and possible journal publications.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please sign the attached participant consent form.

For further information please contact Debra Williams or Dr Phil Fitzsimmons at one of the following addresses, or talk with the Chief Financial Officer, Mr Peter Ridley.

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Manager
Hillsong Child Care Centre
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EK -

APPENDIX D: ETHICS APPROVAL

Avondale
COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Human Research Ethics Committee
Telephone: 02 4980 2121
Fax: 02 4980 2117
Email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au

25 February 2016

Debra Williams
5 Stephanie Place
BELLA VISTA NSW 2153

Dear Debra,

Thank you for submitting the additional material for your project *Understanding the faith-based context of One Early Education and Care Centre: Educator's perspectives*, supervised by A/Prof Phil Fitzsimmons and Dr Marion Shields.

The committee accepted your appeal to the condition of moving the study to another early childhood education centre where the researcher had no line manager relationship with the participants. The committee has rescinded this condition.

I am pleased to advised final approval is granted for your project for the duration till 31 December 2019, project number [2015:42]

The following additional standard conditions apply:

1. That you notify the committee of any changes to circumstances or research design, which might require a review of the ethics approval.
2. That you provide an annual interim report of your progress to the committee, and a final report once this project is completed. The first report will be due twelve months from the date you commence the research. The progress report template is available on the Avondale ethics approval webpage.

We wish you well in this valuable research endeavour.

Sincerely

Roberta Matai
Secretary
Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX E: EDUCATOR PROVOCATIONS

Embedded Critical Reflection Cycle of Inquiry

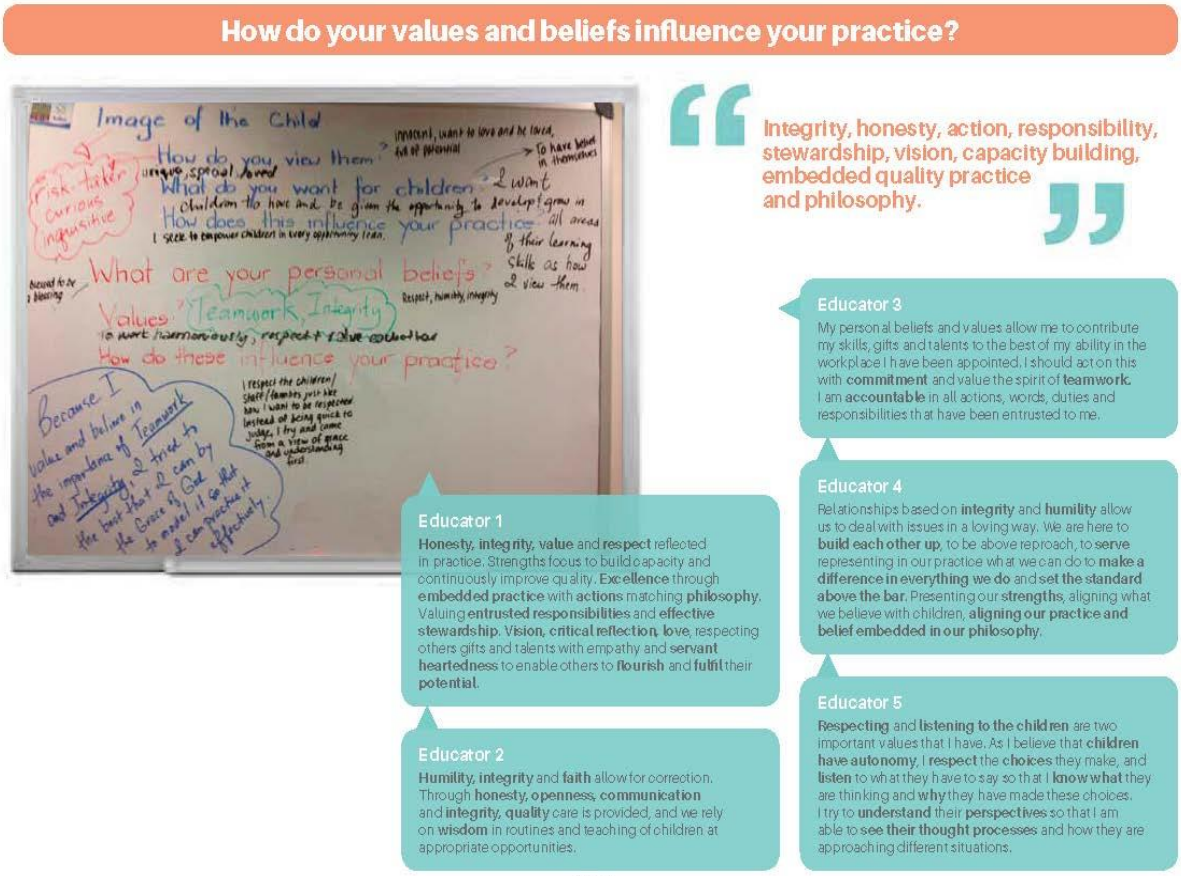
Question One	How do your values and beliefs influence your practice?
Question Two	How do you think we can create more opportunities for professional conversations?
Question Three	How do you engage with 'teachable moments?'
Question Four	What does 'Inclusive Practice' look like to you?
Question Five	What are you reflecting on this week?
Question Six	Describe the 'Christian' aspect of your role in this Centre.
Question Seven	Does the 'Christian' aspect of this Centre match your philosophy and if so, how?
Question Eight	Describe your role. What aspects of your role inspire you? What challenges you?
Question Nine	What is quality? What is embedded practice?
Question Ten	Describe your practice in promoting quality and excellence in the delivery of Education and Care in our Centre.
Question Eleven	What does reflective practice look like in our context?
Question Twelve	Is everyone nurtured to flourish?
Question Thirteen	What does the NQS mean to you?
Question Fourteen	What makes excellence?
Question Fifteen	How do you think the NQS intersects with the theory and practice of our Christian Child Care Centre?
Question Sixteen	How do you promote a safe environment?

Question Seventeen	Describe your practice.
Question Eighteen	How do you honour others?
Question Nineteen	Embedded excellence in our daily practice: how does it happen?
Question Twenty	Embedded excellence in our daily practice: how does it happen?
Question Twenty - One	How do you see Centre practices in this faith-based service align with Christian principles?
Question Twenty - Two	What values do you see reflected in the Centre and in your practice?
Question Twenty - Three	How do you embed critical reflection in your daily practice?
Question Twenty - Four	How do you critically reflect?
Question Twenty - Five	What is Quality?
Question Twenty - Six	What is Embedded Practice?
Question Twenty - Seven	Describe your role as an educational practitioner in this faith-based service. What aspects of your role inspire you? What challenges you?
Question Twenty - Eight	Describe your role as an educational practitioner in this faith-based service. What aspects of your role inspire you? What challenges you?
Question Twenty - Nine	What does the NQS mean to you? How do you think the NQS intersects with the theory and practice of our Christian Child Care Centre?
Question Thirty	What do you think is the heart of what you do? How about your team? How are you building professional standards with your team?
Question Thirty - One	Describe your practice in promoting quality and excellence in the delivery of Education and Care in our Centre.
Question Thirty - Two	How are you contributing to build a culture of professional practice and inquiry?

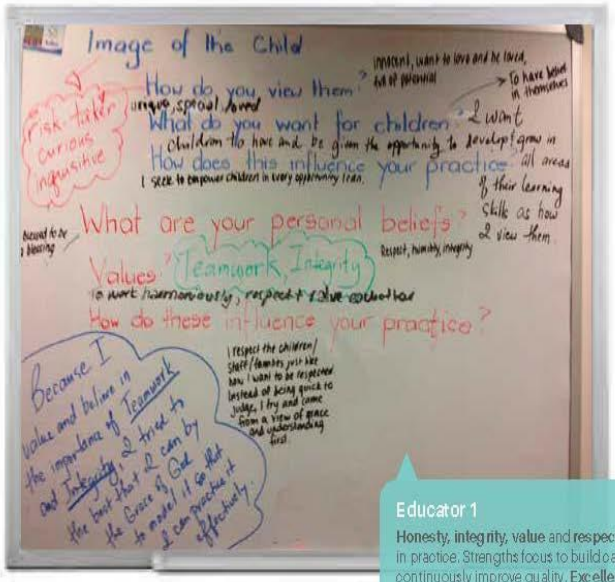
Question Thirty - Three	How do you see centre practices in this service aligned with Christian principles? What does this look like for you ? For you in relation to your co-workers? In relation to Children? Families? Community/ Other Stakeholders?
Question Thirty - Four	How do you support the team to ensure standards are met to high standards?
Question Thirty - Five	What makes excellence? Embedded excellence in our daily practice: how does it happen?
Question Thirty - Six	What are you reflecting on this week?
Question Thirty - Seven	What are your personal beliefs? Values? How do these influence your practice?
Question Thirty - Eight	How do you put research into practice?
Question Thirty - Nine	What is your focus in this service?
Question Forty	How do you honour others?
Question Forty - One	Is everyone nurtured to flourish?
Question Forty - Two	What are you documenting? Is there evidence of children's outcomes? Are they different to EYLF outcomes? If so, how?
Question Forty - Three	How do you instil professional practice in your team? How important is collaborative planning and taking individual responsibility?
Question Forty - Four	What documents do you use to guide your practice?
Question Forty - Five	What values do you see reflected in the Centre and in your practice?
Question Forty - Six	Describe the 'Christian' aspect of your role in this Centre.
Question Forty - Seven	How do you think we can create more opportunities for professional conversations?
Question Forty - Eight	Describe your personal and professional highlight.

Question Forty - Nine	How are collaborative partnerships fostered by your team to improve outcomes for children and families?
Question Fifty	How do you instil in your room/ the centre a positive workplace organisation culture to improve outcomes for children?
Question Fifty - One	What have you learned over the last week?
Question Fifty - Two	What is our mission?
Question Fifty - Three	Why am I doing what I am doing in this Centre?
Question Fifty - Four	What is the theory and practice in our Centre?
Question Fifty - Five	What is the theory and practice in our Centre?
Question Fifty - Six	What are you willing to do?
Question Fifty - Seven	Critical thinking- how do you critically reflect? What does reflective practice look like in our context?
Question Fifty - Eight	What do you need?
Question Fifty - Nine	What is the cost?
Question Sixty	Why do you want excellence?

Exemplars of Critical Reflection Meetings



How do your values and beliefs influence your practice?



"Integrity, honesty, action, responsibility, stewardship, vision, capacity building, embedded quality practice and philosophy."

Educator 1

Honesty, integrity, value and **respect** reflected in practice. Strengths focus to build capacity and continuously improve quality. **Excellence** through **embedded practice** with **actions** matching **philosophy**. Valuing **entrusted responsibilities** and **effective stewardship**. **Vision, critical reflection, love**, respecting others gifts and talents with empathy and **servant heartedness** to enable others to **flourish** and **fulfil** their **potential**.

Educator 2

Humility, integrity and **faith** allow for correction. Through **honesty, openness, communication** and **integrity, quality** care is provided, and we rely on **wisdom** in routines and teaching of children at appropriate opportunities.

Educator 3

My personal beliefs and values allow me to contribute my skills, gifts and talents to the best of my ability in the workplace I have been appointed. I should act on this with **commitment** and value the spirit of **teamwork**. I am **accountable** in all actions, words, duties and responsibilities that have been entrusted to me.

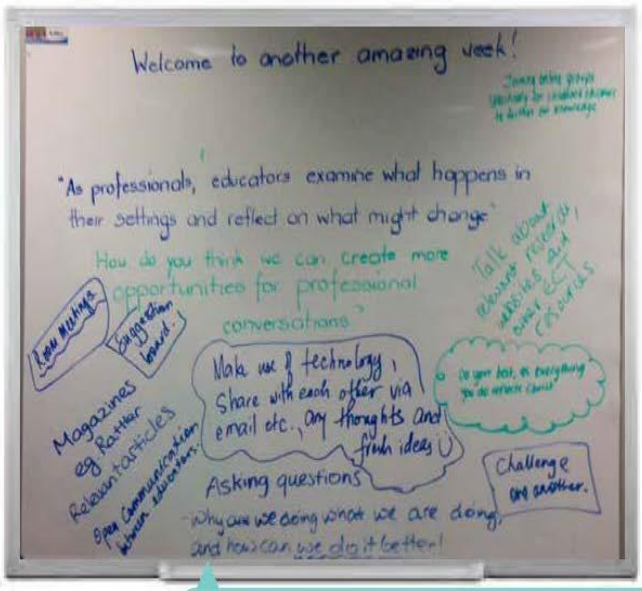
Educator 4

Relationships based on **integrity** and **humility** allow us to deal with issues in a loving way. We are here to **build each other up**, to be above reproach, to **serve** representing in our practice what we can do to **make a difference in everything we do** and **set the standard above the bar**. Presenting our **strengths**, aligning what we believe with children, **aligning our practice and belief embedded in our philosophy**.

Educator 5

Respecting and **listening to the children** are two important values that I have. As I believe that **children have autonomy**, I **respect** the **choices** they make, and **listen** to what they have to say so that I **know what** they are thinking and **why** they have made these choices. I try to **understand** their **perspectives** so that I am able to **see their thought processes** and how they are approaching different situations.

How do you think we can create more opportunities for professional conversations?



> Developing skills and dispositions for reflection "requires *practice, intellectual engagement* and *purpose.*" (Rocco, 2010, p. 313)

Educator 1

Dialogue that is **spontaneous** and **intentional. Willingness to engage** in **professional dialogue** about our **practice** that allows **appreciation** and **extension of understanding** of our practice in an explicit way to allow **educators** to **grow professionally** enabling the learning of new knowledge, questions and practices, with **dialogue coupled with reflection** to move to action and create transformative learning.

Educator 2

By using **technology as a tool for communication** whereby **fresh** and **new ideas** and a **cycle of review of practices** for example are being **discussed, examined and generated.**

Educator 3

Open communication and having professional conversation. Getting insights and experiences that help us improve.

Educator 4

Professional conversations in a **focussed environment** with an agenda with the team to reflect, plan, celebrate and collaborate on what we believe and what we want to see happen in our space.

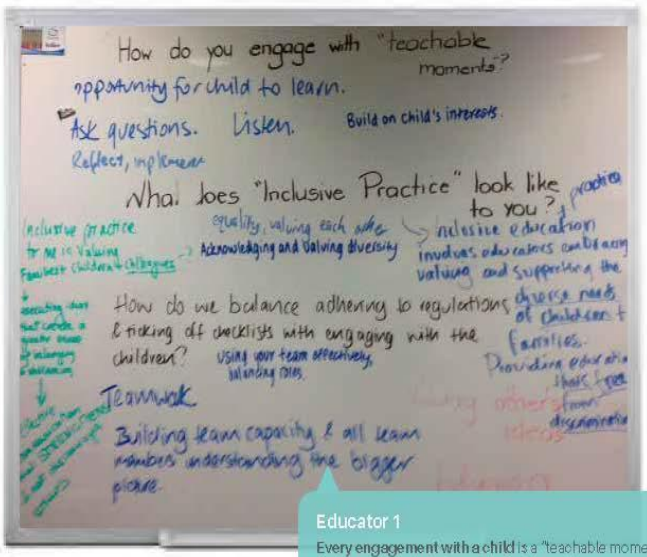
Educator 5

The **reflective questions on the whiteboard** are a great way to stimulate professional conversations. Especially during breaks, it is a common topic that the educators can talk about.

Educator 6

Professional conversation must be created **naturally throughout the day.** It should not be only when we have training but when spontaneous issues occur. It should be part of the program.

How do you engage with "teachable moments"?



> Teachable moments are about *partnership* with children, educators and parents; *creativity, observation* and *reflection together*. We believe that to create teachable moments is part of the role of educators.

Educator 1

Every engagement with a child is a "teachable moment!" **Partnership** and **sharing** with **families** with **engagement of children** provides a wonderful opportunity for teachable moments - celebration, reflection, extension, implementation in learning experiences and follow up. Engaging one to one or with small and large groups with exploration, observation, investigation, hypothesizing, experimenting in the moment and reflection.

Educator 2

"Teachable moments" are very important between **children and toddlers** to **engage with them, getting down to their level** and **asking open ended questions** to engage children further and to get as much information as possible. It is to **learn** from them **in the moment**.

Educator 3

Working together with parents. Also having lots of **interaction with educators and children** and finding out about children and ways children's learning can be extended through interests, experiences and resources. **Responses back from children** enable positive communication and opportunity to **ask** about children's ideas.

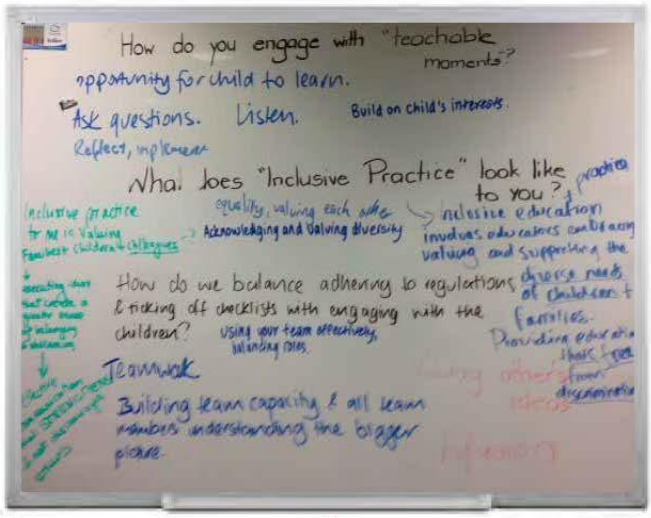
Educator 4

Children have good theories. Get down to their level and **find out.** Using a laptop to have a research question and **investigate** it **together.** With documentation to **reflect** with the child on a photo on what we were thinking. It is not always in the moment but reflecting with children and **returning** to it **later** when **children** have had **time to process.** Part of the role of educators is to **make teachable moments through reflection.**

Educator 5

First **see how the children** can **scaffold each other** in their learning, **ask** questions to **prompt** thinking, then **suggest** ideas, and **discuss** with the children. Sometimes **model** and **demonstrate** if this is the better option.

What does "Inclusive Practice" look like to you?



> Building *knowledge*, children's inclusion and *engagement*, children's *development*, family *participation*.

Educator 1

Building **knowledge** and **skills and professional capacity** of educators. Utilising **strengths** to **continuously improve** the quality of the environment. Building **capacity** of the service and additional **resources** and **support**. **Facilitating every child's** developmental **needs**, **interests** and **experiences** being met through the EYLF and **supporting educators** to develop quality programs for every child. **Equity, access** and **support services** for all. Including **all children. Quality** - as measured by NQS and EYLF outcomes for children. **Consistency** in delivery of program nationally. **Integration** in service approach and delivery.

Educator 2

Giving all children opportunity to help children develop in every area. Making sure **all children** have the **opportunity** to **engage** and **learn** in the moment. Learning the child's perspective. Giving encouragement and **feeling** of **being included.**

Educator 3

For me, inclusive practice means that it is an **attitude/principle** that we **value** and we **welcome all children** in our service and we **provide equal support** and respect for each of them.

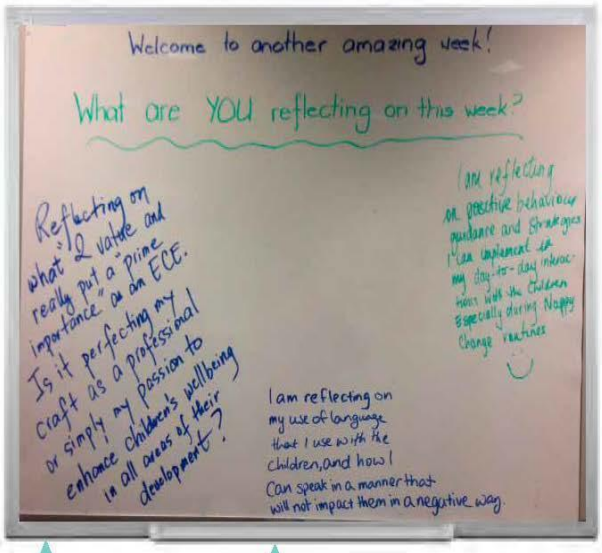
Educator 4

When I think of Inclusive Practice, I think of **equity** - What does each child **need**? Making the **programme** available in **meaningful** ways. Having time to communicate. **Formal support** (e.g. Bicultural Inclusion Support) and **information** (e.g. child in a wheelchair with a broken leg). Creative ways to meet a child's needs to help them feel loved, secure and supported in the environment.

Educator 5

To me inclusive practice means **making sure everyone is included in play opportunities** and **decision making**. It is about **listening to opinions** from everyone, **taking their perspectives into account** in planning and programming and for the children to know that they have the right to speak up about their thoughts and opinions on matters that affect them.

What are you reflecting on this week?



> "To continuously move ONWARDS and UPWARDS!"

Educator 1

This week I am reflecting on **our goals** and new projects to **continuously move onwards and upwards!**

Educator 2

This week, I am reflecting on **how**, as a room leader, **I can impart more knowledge** on my co-educators in their understandings of each child for whom we care.

Educator 3

What I need to improve on to achieve everything on time and make sure everything I do is accurate to deliver the best for our service.

Educator 4

This week I have been reflecting on a few different things. We have some new team members in our room and I have been noticing that the relationships are very different between myself and the children, and the other staff and children. I have been reflecting on:

1. What is actually happening with relationship - what can I see are the main differences between my relationships and their relationships.

2. Why is there a difference? Is it because they are new staff? Is it because we have different personalities or behaviour guidance techniques that children respond to? Is it a combination of a few different things?

3. How can I be supporting my team to build and foster strong relationships so that the children are not so dependent on just me for their needs during the day. What can be done to tackle the problems stemming from the lack of attachment (or too strong an attachment to myself)?

Educator 5

I have been thinking on the notion of **"sharing is caring"**. Sharing is caring is a common phrase that is being used in our room. I have been thinking that as educators, we need to teach children how to be fair and take turns as well as being able to share and give.

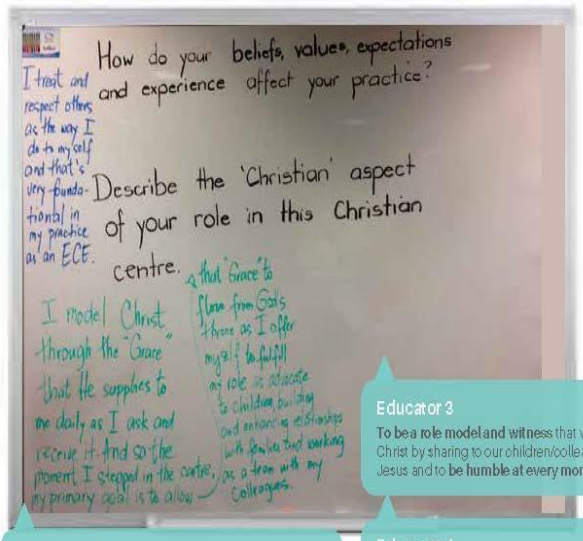
Educator 6

I'm reflecting on "how can **Educators** be **professional** in a faith based centre where we all attend the same church and interact outside of work?"

Educator 7

This week we are reflecting on **"what is quality?"** How to ensure we achieve this and maintain and high quality of service and care.

Describe the 'Christian' aspect of your role in this Centre.



> Serve, excellence, professionalism, love, respect, pray, reflect, forgive, show grace.

Educator 1

To **serve** to have the right **heart** and **attitude** – to **make the most of our job** and be happy in our work...it is a gift...to **bless** others, to **serve** and **see them reach their potential!**

Educator 2

I role model Jesus Christ first and foremost and having said that, **in whatever I do, I do it for His glory**, always reminding myself of the question "what would Jesus do?" in every work situation I may be facing or challenged with.

Educator 3

To be a role model and witness that we are a follower of Christ by sharing to our children/colleagues the love of Jesus and to **be humble at every moment.**

Educator 4

The Christian aspect of my role is completely tied into what I do. I find it hard to distinguish the 'Christian' aspect because **it is embedded in what we do. The idea of excellence stems from my desire to work for Christ in all that I do.** He has given me these opportunities and by being an honest, transparent and passionate member of this team I am able to show Jesus love to our children and families. I think the main difference I notice about working with a Christ-centred organisation is that **there is a *genuine* sense of love, compassion and professionalism** that you don't find in a business model service. It is part of my job to uphold Christ and represent him. That is part of my responsibility as a Christian and teacher in this position.

Educator 5

As a Christian, I have been brought up learning to **serve others.** I want to, and try to, serve others **through my actions.** I **respect** others and try to understand their perspectives, and what they are thinking, both children and adults.

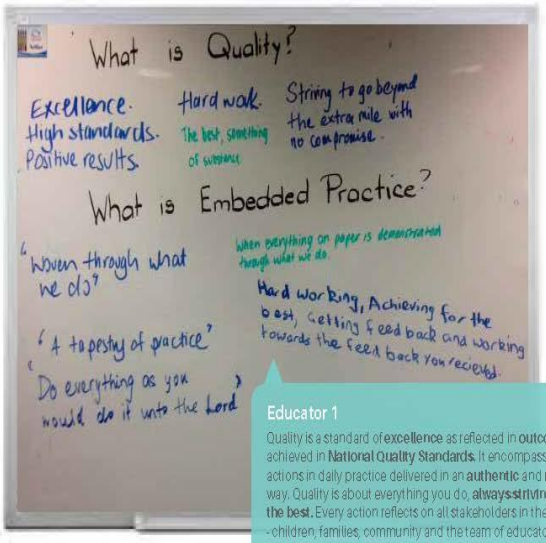
Educator 6

Firm foundations I've been brought up are to always **show love and respect** with others around me. I continually **pray** to always do my best and always see the best in others. I try to **reflect** this with my students and parents.

Educator 7

My Christian faith is lived out by **loving and caring for each and every person.** To **see the positive in each person** and **have grace when challenges arise.** Also **learning to forgive** as we understand we are humans and we all make mistakes.

What is quality? What is embedded practice?



> "Excellence, lifestyle, knowledge, outcomes, authenticity, meaningfulness, adherence to policies and procedures, standards, always striving for the best. An environment where everyone flourishes and goals set."

Educator 1

Quality is a standard of **excellence** as reflected in **outcomes** achieved in **National Quality Standards**. It encompasses all actions in daily practice delivered in an **authentic** and **meaningful** way. Quality is about everything you do, **always striving for the best.** Every action reflects on all stakeholders in the Centre - children, families, community and the team of educators. Embedded practice is the foundation of **critical reflective inquiry** to **strive for excellence in all that we say and do.** It involves **authenticity** and **best practice** with consideration of others' perspectives.

Educator 2

Meeting standards equals **excellence in everything we do**, in our environment and in our interactions with everyone. We should **strive to deliver quality**. Quality standards delivered to all stakeholders, to children and families. It involves **adherence to policies and procedures.** All those things we do in this environment in an ongoing continuous way - our **lifestyle** in relation to delivering quality practice to all stakeholders.

Educator 3

For me quality is **meeting the highest expectations** and **setting the standards** and **giving the best** we can. Embedded practice means that our **goal is set, fixed** and **consistent** and it should be **incorporated in our daily service operations and routines.**

Educator 4

Meeting standards but also **doing your best to go above that which is feasible.** Providing a space where we can **meet positive outcomes for all stakeholders. What you believe is what you do**, everything we do and everything we say is instilled in our practice. How we work every day. Should be able to see **policies** and **beliefs** and **perspectives in how we work** and the **initiatives** we take. Delivered in a way that is **authentic. Authenticity and embedded practice go hand in hand.**

Educator 5

There are a range of different factors that influence the quality in early childhood education and care. There are **standards that guide the practices** and **management structures that also scaffold the centre** and their quality. **Quality education** is what children deserve, and **in these settings children will flourish and learn.** Quality education is what **educators should strive to give to children.** Embedded practice is **when good practices are being adhered to without thinking about it.** A bit like a **good habit** in the work place. Also about having good **knowledge about the practices and theories that are being used and implemented** in the centre.

Describe your practice in promoting quality and excellence in the delivery of Education and Care in our Centre.



> Effective curriculum, reflective practice, authenticity, engagement, inclusivity, consistently following policy and procedure.

Educator 1

Authenticity and commitment to **excellence**. **Child focussed** with effective curriculum and pedagogy. Foundation of **critical reflective inquiry** informed by current research. **Inclusive, engaging** and **empowering** valuing strengths, gifts and talents of each participant.

Educator 2

Making sure **what I do reflects what I value for the child**, the child's enhancement, and learning. Whatever I know I am capable of imparting this to the **team** so that they can do it as well with a **high standard outcome**. Ensure that what I believe is my contribution is clearly communicated and passed on so that **what I say is what I do** and **it reflects that I do it.**

Educator 3

As an Educator, with the best of my ability, it is **embedded** in my **practice** to ensure that the service is ready for operation at the beginning of each day and all our **children** are **safe** and adequately **supervised** at all times. We work as a **team** to assist and contribute in the **implementation** of our **curriculum** and **education program** to enhance and support the **learning development** of our children. **Reflective practice** is part our **daily professional practice** that helps us to continue what is good and improve and make changes where needed. We maintain and observe educator-to-child ratios and qualifications at all times and ensure a high standard of hygiene is maintained and work in accordance with the **policies** and associated **procedures** of our service operations.

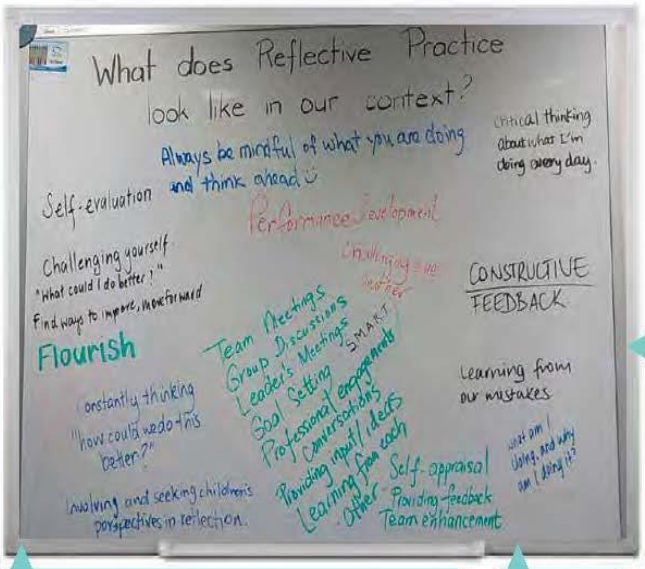
Educator 4

My practice promotes quality and excellence through **consistently following policy and procedure,** and **constant reflective practice** with other educators and the leadership team. **'Why'** is the constant question in my head when thinking about practice. 'Why do we do this?' and **'How can we make it better?'** These critical reflective questions are paired with the values, perspectives and beliefs that I have about children to ensure best practice can develop in our service.

Educator 5

Through **programming** and **planning** for children and making sure that it is **interest based** and also **stimulating**. By **reflecting** and **discussing** with other educators about the children and other aspects in the room. By **questioning** how to do it better, are the children enjoying the day, are the staff enjoying the day? **Discussing strategies** with other educators. **Talking and listening** to the children.

What does reflective practice look like in our context?



> Input....exploration...spontaneous...intentional... equipping, empowering...questioning, thinking...journeying and discovering together. Come ready to think... what we are doing, why are we doing this and how can we do it better.

Educator 1

Input from ALL team on key issues via **whiteboard reflection** and **in-depth exploration** by key leaders at leaders meetings. **Spontaneous and international professional conversations and questioning** to **equip, empower and think** about what we are doing as a team and why.

Educator 2

Reflective practice in our context is **healthy looking** in the sense that educators are encouraged to engage in critical reflection by **responding to questions on a weekly basis** in order to collect and gather information and insights coming from different perspectives and views.

Educator 3

It is a **continuous everyday learning** where everyone will be maturing and growing in our profession.

Educator 4

If excellence is constant reflective practice, then this happens in leaders meetings every Monday, weekly in our staff room on the reflective whiteboard, in the Preschool Room we also include a more **specific reflective questions about the room or our practice in the program every week,** and there is **a lot of open discussion within the rooms about what is happening, why it might be happening, and is there a better way to do it.**

I think it is also an expectation that **we reflect in our context.** When you enter the doors to our service as an educator, it is expected that you **come ready to think, engage in critical reflective practice, and to really think hard about how we can do things better. It's an attitude and environment** that I love being a part of because I believe there is always a way to do something better.

Educator 5

Discussions between educators, staff meetings, **being encouraged to be reflective by being asked questions on our practice. Being asked, "what are we doing, why are we doing this and how can we do this better",** which stimulates critical thinking and discussion between staff.

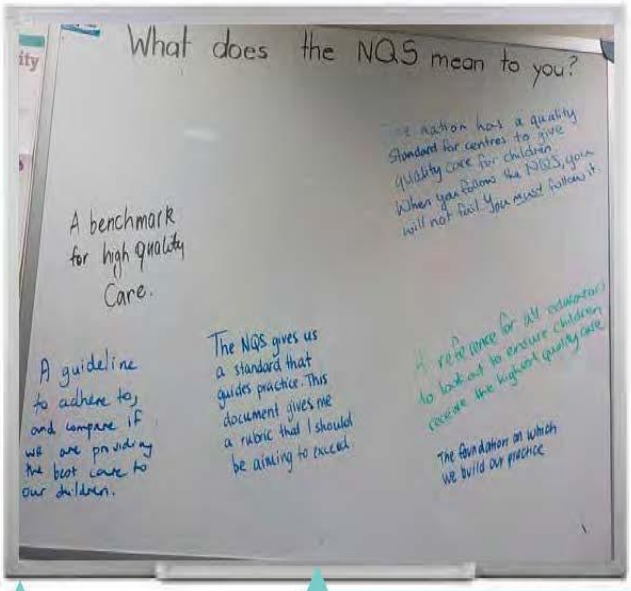
Educator 6

Room leaders **reflecting on the program** during leaders meetings and when in staff room.

Educator 7

Weekly Leaders meeting and room meetings gives time for leaders and educators to reflect upon concerns and allow communication and feedback.

What does the NQS mean to you?



> Measure of excellence... guides practice.

Educator 1
The NQS is the standard – it is **clearly measurable** and **outlines how excellence can be achieved** and **embedded in our daily practice.**

Educator 2
The NQS is needed **in order** for every early childhood education and care services **to deliver the best outcomes for children, families and all stakeholders** as outlined **across the seven quality areas.** To me, NQS also means high quality of care, high quality service and best practice.

Educator 3
National Quality Standard is the guideline set for us that we follow to meet and make sure that we are running our operations and services in an excellence performance measured way and everything is in place.

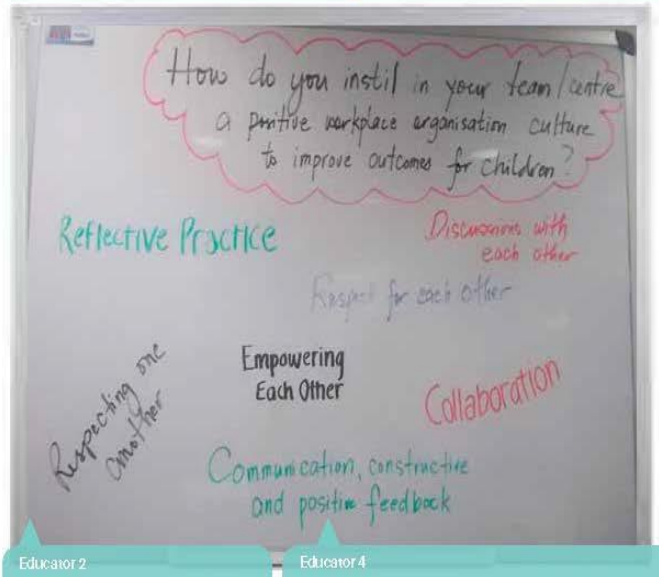
Educator 4
The NQS means that I have **a measure for excellence.** It helps **guide my practice** and allows me to see where and how I can practically go above and beyond just meeting a requirement. It give me a standard to beat. It's almost like **a challenge** – here's what you should be doing, now you take it one step further. BOOM.

Educator 5
The **NQS is the standard that all educators and centres need to abide by.** It is a guideline that can be used to ensure that educators are **doing the right thing for the children and families.**
As quality education is vital for children and their wellbeing and development in areas such as cognitive, social and emotional, **the standards are an important part of the daily practice that allows for me to think about the way that I can provide quality education for all children.**

Educator 6
NQS is very important in **maintaining a high standard in centre. The NQS allows this centre and educators to strive for excellence in all areas of the program.**

Educator 7
NQS is a system setup **to ensure the centre's services is maintained at a high level. It sets a** margin and **guideline for the educators to work towards and allows educators efforts to be recognised.**

How do you instil in your team in your room/the centre a positive workplace organisation culture to improve outcomes for children?



> "Reflection IN practice, ON practice, ABOUT practice. Positive communication, policies and procedures, fun, kind, loving interactions, constructive and positive feedback. Strengths, collaboration and critical reflection."

Educator 1

Respecting duty is an ethical responsibility reflected in the Australian Early Childhood Code of Ethics. A culture of reflection supports a positive culture with educators encouraged to ask questions, empower others and demonstrate value in creative thinking and solutions.

Reflection in practice supports a clear and honest picture of what is being done well and the areas that need improvement or those areas that can be extended or enhanced to an even higher level of quality. Ways to do this include personal reflective diaries or journals recording thoughts, questions or planned actions or a collective educator journal. Reflection on practice underpins the National Quality Framework that 'the rights and best interests of the child are paramount' (ACECQA 2011, Guide to the NQS, p.7). This is achieved through self-assessment and reflective practice which is central to the development of the Quality Improvement Plan and shows clearly and honestly what is done well and what areas may need improvement or can be enhanced. Keeping this principle at the forefront of reflection in practice keeps our focus on the reason for **WHY** we do **WHAT** we do and our commitment to ongoing quality improvement processes.

It includes application on three levels:

- The **individual** level where it is evidenced in the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours of each educator in their interactions with children, families and other educators. Educators need to think about their own values, beliefs and attitudes and acknowledge and address any bias held (Educators' Guide, p.22).
- At the **Centre** level where it is evidenced in the policies, procedures, expectations and practices of the context and the perspectives of children, families and community influencing decisions
- At the **systems** level evidenced by Centre engagement with the community.

Continuous cyclical embedded assessment, review and reflection on practice along with planning strategies and actions enables continuous improvement and enhancement in all quality areas.

Encouragement for reflection and discussion **about** practice as part of everyday action helps instil a positive workplace organisational culture to improve outcomes for children. It is fostered by educators feeling safe to ask difficult questions, linking ideas in the Early Years Learning Framework and the Standards and Elements within the National Quality Standard. Self-assessment, reflective practice and taking action all support improved outcomes for children, families and educators.

Educator 2

Communication with each other, **constructive and positive feedback** to encourage teamwork. Building culture that each **team member** has different **strengths to contribute. Ongoing critical reflection** and embracing each educator's input and contribution in the delivery of the best possible outcomes for children.

Educator 3

- Establish **policies and procedures** that serves as guidelines for everyone
- Open and consistent **positive communication**. Everyone should be a role model of brining and demonstrating positive attitude/character to impart to everyone.

Educator 4

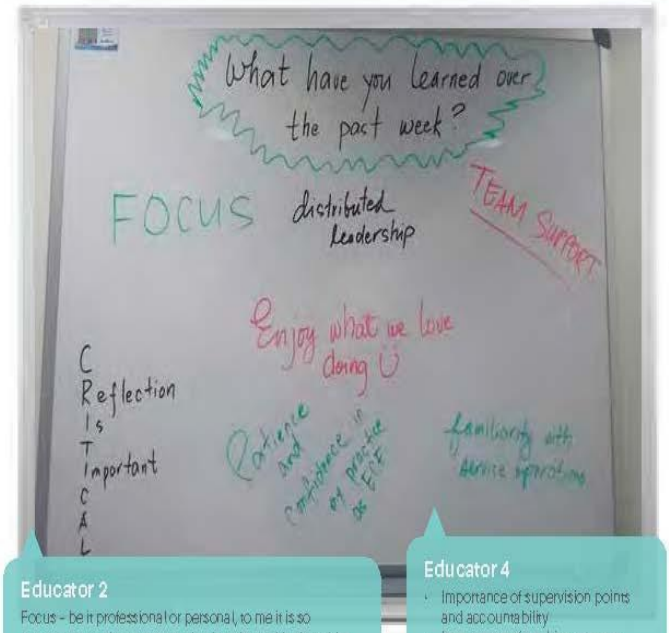
By making sure interactions with each other are fun, done with kindness and love, wanting to empower them for making a better decision. We're here to build each other up, by bringing solutions wanting to upskill and empower. Kids see how we relate to each other so we teach them through modelling and team work creates harmony. We're still working on how to approach conflict, but I want excellence and I want my team to want that as well. By encouraging my team in what they are doing really well, picking up positives and things to improve in a way that is humble. Performance reviews help address suggestions in helpful way. Creating team pedagogical cohesion.

- Communication systems in place
- Policies and procedures followed
- Roles and responsibilities clear for each educator/staff
- Positive workplace attitude modelled
- These things in place improve professionalism and communication therefore increasing the outcomes for children

Educator 5

Through **constructive and positive feedback, discussions with team members, respecting one another, reflecting together, collaborating with each other.**

What have you learned over the past week?



> Embedded reflection in daily practice, shared leadership, teamwork, focus, ongoing critically reflective conversations, communication, learning, supervision, accountability, patience, confidence and working together.

Educator 1

I have learned that:

- Reflection is needed on the words we use.
- We can dream of diverse opportunities and possibilities.
- We are SO connected with a larger world and community!
- Reflection on the role of mentoring relationships provides opportunities for furthering professional learning for both the mentor and mentee in developing their skills, knowledge and practices as Early Childhood practitioners.
- Effective teams are fostered with leaders that provide individual and team learning through learning and leadership opportunities and honest feedback so that individuals are held accountable for their contribution to improving the team.
- Creating shared meaning is a key step in supporting reciprocity.
- Pedagogical leadership, as seen as a key responsibility, needs to be based on vision, strategy structure, clear tasks and articulated values.
- Distributed leadership supports tasks and goals.
- Reinforcing distributed leadership requires direct and intentional actions. Within a distributed model sharing leadership leads to independent decision-making and can strengthen team work.
- Shared leadership can also enhance pedagogical practices and lead to a self-directed work culture and hence higher quality.
- For pedagogical leadership to be successful, employees must feel secure with this security derived from the leader's presence, the work community and from the leaders trust in their employee's expertise.
- Distributed and shared leadership manifests as multilevel and multifaceted actions and can occur between different levels. The most important requirement for successful distributed/shared leadership is trust between the practitioners, which must involve face-to-face communication to flourish.
- Distributed leadership supports the shared responsibility for the core tasks, goals and guidelines of the organisation, it is a reciprocal process among the practitioners.
- Distributed leadership involves a shared vision and purpose of the work to increase commitment to the work and enhance the greater distribution of leadership.
- Genuine distributed leadership only emerges from a culture of learning and collaboration, and where all early childhood professionals willingly pursue and take up opportunities for professional growth.
- Reflective practice MUST be embedded in daily practice and can take a variety of forms and can be engaged in practice in a variety of ways.

Educator 2

Focus - be it professional or personal, to me it is so paramount to always ensure that in spite and in the midst of a whole lot of things going on in and around, going back to the goal as to why we are here and doing what we love, enjoy and passionate to do is so important and will guide us and lead us to the path where we are supposed to be. An open and critical ongoing reflective conversations between educators is a continuing learning process I would say.

Educator 4

- Importance of supervision points and accountability
- Importance of tracking systems
- Children's abilities to lead, play and define their rules
- Patience in ideas and thoughts regarding practice
- More confidence in my beliefs regarding behaviour guidance

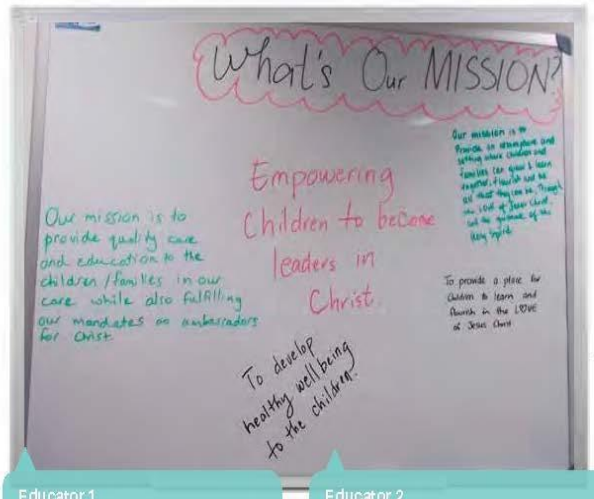
Educator 3

Being the new WHS Representative, I started to learn and get familiar with our service operations that pertain to WHS matters and the duties and responsibilities that I need to perform. In connection to this role, my communications to our Venue Management has been established.

Educator 5

I learned that it is great to be able to rely on my team, that they are there to be my support, and I to them. We are a great team and we are growing with each other, learning each other and being able to come together to be a team. Working together as a team is a great way to grow and learn for both staff and children.

What is our mission?



> To love what we do; to provide high quality Christian education and Care that reflects our love and desire for the best outcomes for children. To support our families. To be a lighthouse service through community partnerships and relationships.

Educator 1

Our mission is to **love what we do** – to **value our children, strengthen our families and empower our community.** To **build relationships with families and provide support.** To **provide high quality Early Education and Care that reflects our love and desire for the best outcomes** for all our children and families. To strive to create **learning environments and experiences** for children and families **based on secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships, partnerships with families, high expectations and equity, ongoing learning and reflective practice founded on Christian principles.**

Educator 2

Our mission as early childhood educators is to **be an instrument in raising up children who will be the future leaders with knowledge and faith in God in this Christian environment.** As we fulfil our God given mandate with aligned vision and mission from our leaders, we are united in accomplishing and **bringing out the best in these children** so that when they go out there in the world, they are well and able to do the same and pass on the legacy that we have created for them. As a Christian ECEC setting, our mission is to **ensure that the best interest of children and families are the first and primary focus** which again aligns with the **vision and mission** of the Hillsong church as well as in relation to reaching out to communities.

Educator 3

Our mission is to provide **high quality Christian education and care that reflects our love and desire for the best outcomes of our children.** We value our children and we want to have **collaborative partnership with our families and to provide them support.**

Educator 4

To be a **lighthouse service through community partnerships and relationships and support** for families, to **provide high quality ECEC** and **strive for best outcomes for children**, to **build trust in the community** for church and Jesus, to bring a **high quality Christian perspective into the ECEC sector**, to bring our best and to carry and live Hillsong **vision** statement.

Educator 5

My mission is to make sure I provide **quality education for the children**, to make sure that they are safe and happy, enjoying their time and learning and practicing skills in various areas such as cognitive, social, emotional, and physical and so on.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Round Interview Questions

1. Tell me how you see your role as an educator in this Christian Early Education and Care Centre.
    a. How long have you been teaching in the early education sphere?
    b. Where did you do your training?
    c. Were you adequately prepared to teach in a Christian centre? If so, what the aspects that supported you? If not, how did you prepare yourself?

2. Can you unpack for me your Christian perspective on education, and in particular early childhood education? In other words, what is your philosophic or ideology on Christian education and how you put this into your practice.

3. Tell me about your perceptions of implementation of the National Quality Standard (NQS) in your daily practice.
    a. What aspects of the NQS fit with your personal educational ideology or educational belief system? Which don't and why?
    b. What aspects of the NQS fit with your personal Christian ideology or educational belief system? Which don't and why?
    c. Have you had to adjust any aspects of your teaching to fit with the NQS? Which aspects have you changed and how did you go about this?

4. How would you describe the 'Christian 'aspect of your role in this Early Childhood Education and Care Centre?

5. How important to you is critical -reflective practice? What flows from it? How do you reflect and when do you engage in reflection?

6. What makes excellence in Early Education and Care?

Second Round Interview Questions

1. Draw a flowchart or diagram of how you think this centre now runs given the NQS implementation with all the aspects of what you think is involved.

2. How has implementing the NQS changed you?

3. Where do you see reflection and faith in your role and how do they work together?

4. Coming out of the data are various ways and means of reflection. What is your opinion of this through implementing the NQS?

5. What have you learned through implementing the NQS about:
   - Yourself
   - The Centre
   - The ECEC sector

6. What is your opinion of how the NQS has impacted in what you do now?

7. How do you feel you have been personally equipped to implement the NQS?

8. What attitudes do you see reflected in implementing the NQS to prior to the NQS? Has anything changed for you?

9. Coming out of the data is the "*attitude of the heart*". How does this fit with you?

10. Coming out of the data there is a distinction between '*caring*' and '*educating'* – is this the case for you post NQS and how do you see this distinction?

11. Tell me about the NQS now from your perspective – quality areas, ratings, criteria, excellence. Has anything you strive for changed or shifted? Did the NQS allow you to do this or was it another process?

12. What does excellence mean to you? Draw a picture or add to your existing picture what an excellent Centre looks like.

13. In what ways does the NQS facilitate your leadership style to develop others? Has this changed or shifted with implementation of the NQS?

14. Has your faith made a difference in this context for you 'before' and 'after' the implementation of the NQS? Has your practice and strategies to outwork a Christian perspective of education changed and if so in what ways?
    Coming out of the data is faith of educators in daily practice and guiding children to grow in their faith – what does this look like for you and has this changed or not changed as a result of the NQS?

15. Has your mindset changed or not changed as a result of implementation of the NQS?

16. How would you describe the mission, vision, values and philosophy of this Centre?

17. Coming out of the data is experience in a church setting with children, qualification and ECEC sector experience. What do you think is most important and why?

18. How do you think other educators perceive you? What three things would they say about you?

19. What does a passionate educator look like? What does a critically reflective practitioner look like? What does a Christian educator look like? Please draw a picture to represent this.

Third Round Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your faith.
2. Tell me about Christian Leadership in the context of this Early Education and Care centre.
3. Tell me about how embedded critical reflective practice works.
4. What is the outcome so the NQS in practice - and embedded in daily practice in this ECEC Centre?
5. Tell me where you think we are now with the NQS?
6. What is the culture established as a result of the NQS?
7. What is the nexus of Christian faith and the NQS?
8. How valuable do you think research process been?
9. Describe how you have found being engaged in this research?

APPENDIX G:

2019 Child Aware Conference – Research Poster Presentation

https://kaigi.eventsair.com/QuickEventWebsitePortal/2019-child-aware-conference/info/Agenda/AgendaItemDetail?id=785c3a09-4425-4e0b-b6e1-3ff6e0d1ff1a



Mrs Debra Williams
National Compliance and Development
Hillsong

A Model for Implementation of Critical Reflection in Early Childhood Education and Care

Abstract

The NQS is the benchmark for quality in ECEC with reflective practice positioned to raise standards and inform future planning and decision making and identified as foundational to good practice with educators expected to engage in a 'lively culture of professional inquiry.'

This qualitative study, using the tools of grounded theory, within the context of one centre, explored critical reflection as a legislative requirement, unique to each service with no set way or approach, with educators finding it challenging to do, with limited understanding of its purpose and a lack of understanding at a conceptual level with the result that it is 'tagged on, rather than consulting as a way of working and learning', with the concept of, and practices associated with, critical reflection not defined well operationally.

A 'SCHEMED' model emerged developed on the interrelationships and components, flows and actions within the system complied from the data to evidence the culture and theory that emerged. The process of reflection shifts the NQS and reveals personal and professional identities, exposes the 'feeling' within a service and shifts the identity of the site itself.

Findings provide conceptual understanding of the process of critical reflection within ECEC, a pictorial strategy for understanding the variables and relationships amongst each other, a tool to visualise knowledge of how the process of critical reflection works in ECEC, a benchmark for quality and consistency of reflective practice, guidance of educators' reflective practices, support for professional learning and improvement andevaluation of individual performance.

Biography

Debra Williams has been working in the ECEC for over 35 years as Consultant, Facilitator, Adviser, Lecturer, Director, Manager and Publisher. She holds a degree in Education, Diploma of Management, Graduate Certificate in Research and is currently completing a PhD exploring educator perspectives in implementation of critical reflection in the Commonwealth compliance system for Education and Care, the National Quality Standard, in a an Early Education and Care Centre in Australia.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CRITICAL REFLECTION AS PART OF AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH STANDARDS IN EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE – *Debra Williams*

The National Quality Standard (NQS) is the benchmark for quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) within Australia. The Australian Government positioned reflective practice at the core of the NQS (ACECQA, 2012) in order to raise standards and inform future planning and decision making (COAG, 2009; Kennedy, 2011). The problem this study explores is that critical reflection is identified as unique to each service with no set way or approach (ACECQA, 2017), identified as a Commonwealth legislative requirement (DEEWR, 2009) yet educators find it challenging to do resulting in it "being tagged on, rather than constituting a way of working and learning" (Barton & Ryan, 2014), with the concept of, and practices associated with, critical reflection not defined well operationally (Wilson, 2013). Educator understanding of the purpose of critical reflection is limited (Liu, 2015) with a lack of understanding at a conceptual level (Korthagen, 2017). This qualitative study explored both respondents and my own professional journey within the context of one faith-based ECEC centre using the tools of grounded theory. In looking at the bigger picture of ECEC and developing a META view of ECEC from educators' perspectives, and the role of critical reflection within this, critical reflection was looked at, and the way educators saw themselves within this bigger picture, and what conditions needed to be in place for this to occur. Critical reflection evidences operational benefits, but, at the higher meta view of ECEC, critical reflection helps this meta view to become a reality. How this works in practice in ECEC centres is through the 'SCHEMED' implementation model.

1 INTRODUCTION

This study looked at the impact of the requirement of implementing critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard (NQS) in Early Education and Care (ECEC). The term 'impact' is chosen rather than 'outcome,' as it refers to a much broader effect and can be conceptualised as a longer-term effect, framed by the guiding question:

What is the impact of the mandatory application of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard in one faith-based Early Education and Care centre?

The Australian Government introduced the NQS within ECEC in order to raise standards (ACECQA, 2012) and inform future planning and decision making (COAG, 2009; Kennedy, 2011). Reflective practice was positioned at the core of the NQS (ACECQA, 2012) as a strategy to raise standards. This study explored the professional practices of several ECEC educators and my own professional journey within the context of one faith-based ECEC centre through a reflective process in which the answer to this question was considered.

2 THE PROBLEM

The 'Guide to the NQS' states that critical reflection is 'foundational to good practice' (p.178), with the Australian Children's Education and Care Authority (ACECQA, 2017) affirming that the process of critical reflection is unique to each individual service context with no set way or approach. Educators, however, find critical reflection challenging to do, and, it is often "tagged on, rather than constituting a way of working and learning" (Barton & Ryan, 2014, p.410). Given the focus outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) to engage in a "lively culture of professional inquiry" (p.13) in such a way that educators "learn together, use collective knowledge, consider and implement changes" (p.7) and "engage in questions of philosophy, ethics and practice" (p.13) there was obviously a need to understand what critical reflection is, what its components are, what type of environment fosters it, and what type of environment may be engendered by implementing it.

3 RATIONALE

1. Lack of research about the implementation of critical reflection as a strategy to raise standards by the Australian Commonwealth Government. There is a need to assess the implementation of critical reflection as a strategy within the ECEC context to determine if the strategy is working.
2. Lack of research about the application of critical reflection within ECEC. The literature shows there is no quick fix to encouraging critical reflection and within the literature it is shown that critical reflection is yet to be understood at a conceptual level (Korthagen, 2017).
3. Lack of research on how critical reflection fits with ethos. The research context offers an investigation of factors that affect and inform this research, necessary due to the lack of research in this area.

4 METHODOLOGY

Stage One: CRITICAL REFLECTION



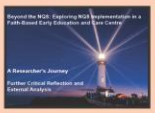
Over a continuous period of 64 weeks, the Centre Director reflected and asked the team to critically reflect over an issue associated with ECEC.



Stage Two: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS - THREE ROUNDS



Stage Three: EXTERNAL CRITIQUE







Two external perspectives were provided from students of the University of Western Sydney and Macquarie University.

Stage Four: ANALYSIS, WRITE UP AND DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

After data was collected from semi-structured interviews and external perspectives, the data was analysed.



A PhD thesis was written and results disseminated.

5 FINDINGS

Research Question: **What is the impact of the mandatory application of critical reflection as part of the NQS in one faith-based ECEC centre?**
Critical reflection in ECEC as part of the NQS makes a positive contribution to quality outcomes of ECEC. In particular, critical reflection in ECEC as part of the NQS helps to: build authenticity; facilitate collaboration; promote outcomes; increase understanding; delegate responsibility and promote leadership.

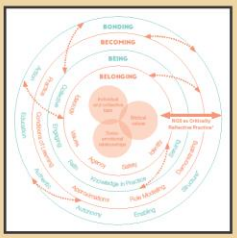
Research Sub-Question One: **What is the process of critical reflection in a faith-based ECEC environment?**
Critical reflection improves practice through reflective evaluation to: open new possibilities for learning; identify areas of strength; increase pedagogical awareness; build better connections to children; increase awareness of knowledge and skills required for learning; empower educators to engage children in learning and encourage maximisation of the learning environment.

Research Sub-Question Two: **Within a faith-based ECEC Centres, what are the considerations with regard to critical reflection as part of the NQS?**
There is a need to: reflect on faith-based values in a faith-based ECEC centre; reflect on quality; establish a culture of critical reflective inquiry; adopt a reflective approach inclusive of all educators; action outcomes to the reflection process; and train and empower educators to contribute.

Research Sub-Question Three: **How do educators understand the implementation of critical reflection as part of the NQS in daily practice?**
Educators understand that through implementing critical reflection as part of the NQS in daily practice that they should: strive daily for improved practice with critical reflection as part of an educators' day-to-day role; apply change in practice daily; and be authentic with daily collaboration with colleagues.

Research Sub-Question Four: **How do educators think that critical reflection as part of the NQS will impact the ethos, culture and climate of their organisation?**
Generally, critical reflection had a positive impact on the ethos, culture and climate of ECEC. In particular, there is a need to: reflect on practice as it impacts ethos; reflect on issues within the context including values; implement an ethos of improvement; encourage a culture of listening and respect; develop a culture of collaboration to facilitate a better ECEC environment; promote effective leadership; and encourage authenticity. In each research question and sub-question educators confirmed that critical reflection is really important to do.

We were interested in exploring a higher-level view of ECEC. We asked ECEC educators what was important in ECEC and they said it was important to 'Belong', to 'Be,' to 'Become', and to 'Bond.' This is interesting because it reflects many of the elements of the EYLF with some additions. This META view of ECEC works holistically with critical reflection playing an important role in ECEC. 'Belonging', 'Being', 'Becoming' and 'Bonding' helps us to critically reflect which in turn enhances our ability to 'Belong', to 'Be', to 'Become' and to 'Bond.' This is a recursive circular process within which critical reflection plays an important role. If you feel like you belong you are more likely to be engaged in critical reflection and this process in turn, will help you feel like you belong more. Educators explained their sense of 'Being' as undergoing a level of self-actualisation in their job and critical reflection facilitates such. 'Becoming' encourages you to critically reflect, because you want to become a better version of yourself. By critically reflecting you 'Become' more through this recursive process. Critical reflection can create a real bonding spirit enabling educators to feel like they are part of a team of people. Through this recursive circular process, critical reflection helps you to 'Belong' more, to 'Be' more, to 'Become' more, to 'Bond' more. This is represented in the META view model for ECEC with the flows, activity, interaction and interconnectedness within the system and the layers.



6 DISCUSSION

Critical reflection contributes operationally to the effective running of an ECEC centre. However, when a META view is taken of ECEC, **B**elonging, **B**eing, **B**ecoming and **B**onding were identified as important elements and critical reflection helps each of these to become a reality through a recursive relationship.

Educators discussed how critical reflection may be implemented in ECEC. This led to the development of the **'SCHEMED'** approach. For success, critical reflection should: use a **S**tructured approach; maximise the benefits of **C**ollaboration; encourage **H**eart-openness; **E**quip and **E**mpower educators to enhance their practice; use **M**entors; offer **E**ncouragement; and **D**istribute roles between educators.

In summary, critical reflection makes an important contribution to ECEC and this study has strengthened our conceptual understanding of how critical reflection works, informing and transforming practice.

7 FUTURE WORK

Future work can examine outcomes of the implementation of the SCHEMED model within the ECEC sector and support professional development of educators in conceptual understanding of critical reflection in ECEC.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Peter Beamish Faculty of Education, Business and Science, Avondale College of Higher Education.
Dr. Marion Shields
Dr. Phil Fitzsimmons

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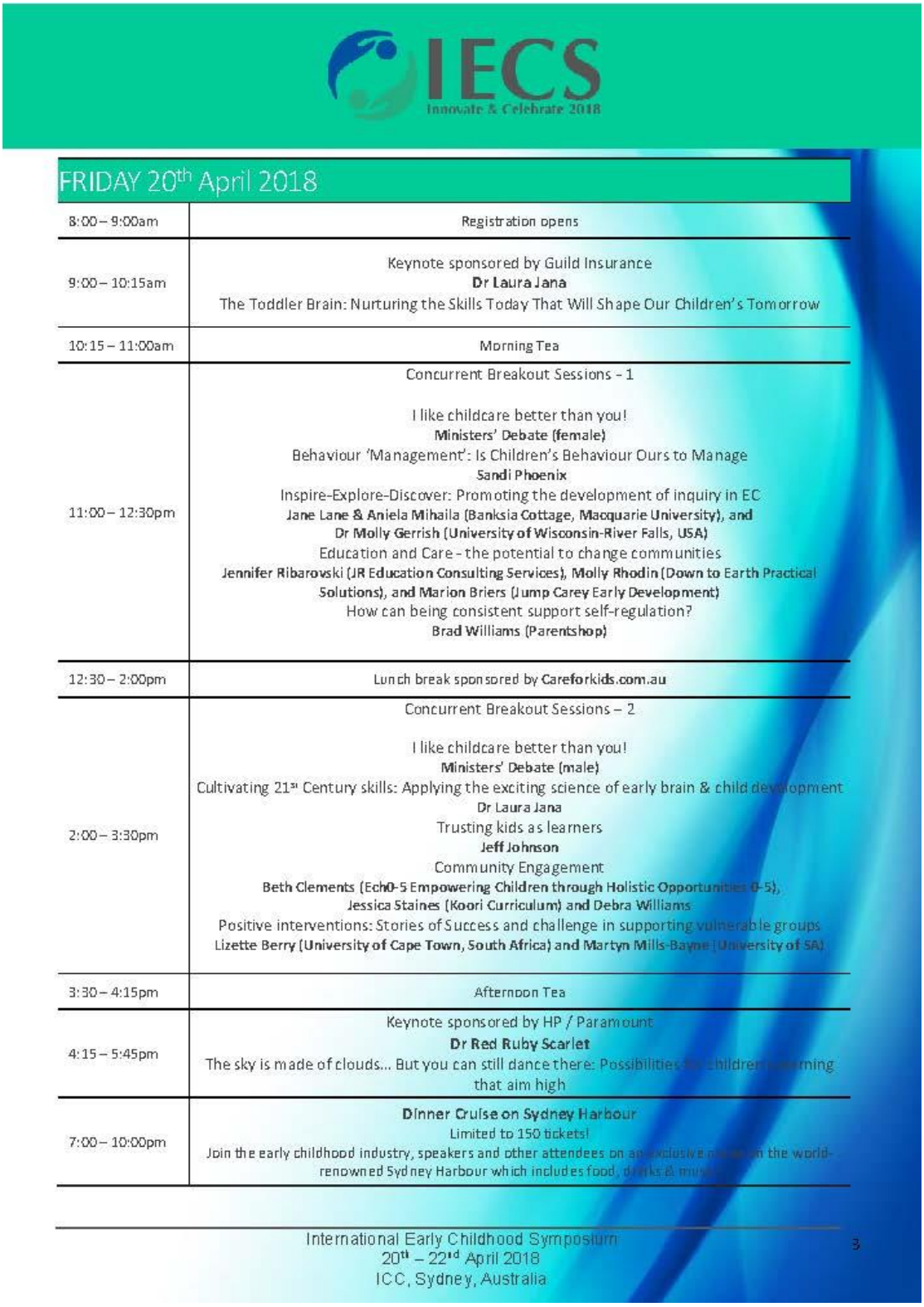
2018 International Early Childhood Symposium

https://nsw.childcarealliance.org.au/events/calendar/events/iecs2018)



IECS
Innovate & Celebrate 2018

FRIDAY 20th April 2018

8:00 – 9:00am	Registration opens
9:00 – 10:15am	Keynote sponsored by Guild Insurance **Dr Laura Jana** The Toddler Brain: Nurturing the Skills Today That Will Shape Our Children's Tomorrow
10:15 – 11:00am	Morning Tea
11:00 – 12:30pm	Concurrent Breakout Sessions - 1 I like childcare better than you! **Ministers' Debate (female)** Behaviour 'Management': Is Children's Behaviour Ours to Manage **Sandi Phoenix** Inspire-Explore-Discover: Promoting the development of inquiry in EC **Jane Lane & Aniela Mihaila (Banksia Cottage, Macquarie University), and Dr Molly Gerrish (University of Wisconsin-River Falls, USA)** Education and Care - the potential to change communities **Jennifer Ribarovski (JR Education Consulting Services), Molly Rhodin (Down to Earth Practical Solutions), and Marion Briers (Jump Carey Early Development)** How can being consistent support self-regulation? **Brad Williams (Parentshop)**
12:30 – 2:00pm	Lunch break sponsored by **Careforkids.com.au**
2:00 – 3:30pm	Concurrent Breakout Sessions – 2 I like childcare better than you! **Ministers' Debate (male)** Cultivating 21st Century skills: Applying the exciting science of early brain & child development **Dr Laura Jana** Trusting kids as learners **Jeff Johnson** Community Engagement **Beth Clements (Ech0-5 Empowering Children through Holistic Opportunities 0-5), Jessica Staines (Koori Curriculum) and Debra Williams** Positive interventions: Stories of Success and challenge in supporting vulnerable groups **Lizette Berry (University of Cape Town, South Africa) and Martyn Mills-Bayne (University of SA)**
3:30 – 4:15pm	Afternoon Tea
4:15 – 5:45pm	Keynote sponsored by HP / Paramount **Dr Red Ruby Scarlet** The sky is made of clouds... But you can still dance there: Possibilities for children's learning that aim high
7:00 – 10:00pm	**Dinner Cruise on Sydney Harbour** Limited to 150 tickets! Join the early childhood industry, speakers and other attendees on an exclusive night on the world-renowned Sydney Harbour which includes food, drinks & music

International Early Childhood Symposium
20th – 22nd April 2018
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3

Room C: Trusting kids as learners

Presenter: Jeff Johnson

Children are wired for learning--they are good at it, eager to do it, and driven to it--yet too often we adults get in the way and take control of learning. We expect kids to learn what we want, when we want, how we want, and where we want. This session is about trusting kids as learners and creating environments where they are free to lead their learning.

Room D: Community Engagement

Presenters: Beth Clements, Jessica Staines and Debra Williams.

Presented by Beth Clements, EchO-5 Empowering Children through Holistic Opportunities 0-5

There are a growing number of digital platforms out there that say they support community engagement, but what difference do they really make? Why information are we sharing? How do you use them most effectively and can they actually enhance quality areas 1, 5 and 6? Over the last three years I've worked across large 100+ site organisations, small chains and individual centres to support professional development and quality outcomes for children. Most of these organisations used some kind of digital platform to engage with families and this presentation shares the insights I've learned from working across this variety of environments.

Presented by Jessica Staines, Koori Curriculum

Mums and Bubs Early Education Program at Redfern's Aboriginal Medical Service

In 2017 Paddington Children's Centre and the Koori Curriculum partnered together to develop a Mums and Bubs Program at the local Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern. Many of the Mothers in Redfern suffer from the effects of intergenerational trauma, have little extended family support and few personal parenting skills. This group comes together twice a month play and yarn whilst early childhood educators facilitate a quality learning program for the Bubs. This is a safe, secure hub where mothers are supported respectfully to scaffold their parenting skills.

Presented by Debra Williams

Embedding Critical Reflection in your daily practice: Why and How?

The National Quality Standards describe effective leaders of the quality improvement process in ECEC services, as goal setters of philosophy, ethics and practices. To achieve this, they need to engage their team in ongoing learning and critical reflection . The team becomes a community of practice with each member of the team adding their perspective and expertise to support inform and enrich decision-making. This session will explore the issues and challenges one childcare service encountered in their attempt to become reflective practitioners of Early Childhood Education and Care, philosophy, ethics and practice. It will also report on the environments created and practices instituted, as a result of this reflective practice process."

Room E: Positive Interventions: Stories of Success and challenge in supporting vulnerable groups

Presenters: Lizette Berry and Martyn Mills-Bayne

Presented by Lizette Berry, Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Parents living in adverse conditions face a range of challenges that may affect their ability to parent effectively and to promote positive child outcomes, particularly during early childhood. There is growing recognition that parents, particularly those experiencing high levels of adversity and stress, require parenting support interventions. Teenaged parents are a particularly vulnerable group.

This presentation draws on data from an outcomes evaluation of a teen parenting programme, offered to school-going, adolescent caregivers who have parental responsibilities for one or more young children. Participants were from three peri-urban informal settlements in Cape Town, South Africa. The evaluation measured change in inter alia, parenting practices, lifestyle choices and resilience at three time intervals over two years.

2017 Inaugural Australian Early Childhood Christian Educators Conference

https://juliewyliemusic.com/event/australian-christian-early-childhood-educators-association-conference/



CREATING EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITIES OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

"Ministering the gospel of God's grace and reconciliation, through early childhood communities of practice"

AIMS OF ACECEA

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The inaugural ACECEA Conference represents an investment in your professional development, through an opportunity to join conversations that will shape your thinking and practice

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers met through the course include:

- **6.2.2** Participate in learning to update knowledge and practice targeted to professional needs and school or system priorities.
- **6.3.2** Contribute to collegial discussions and apply constructive feedback from colleagues to improve professional knowledge & practice.
- **7.4.2** Participate in professional and community networks and forums to broaden knowledge and improve practice.

ACECEA MEETING

The ACECEA inaugural association meeting will be held during the conference. At this time conference attendees will be given the opportunity to become a member of the association.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Julie Wylie	Director of Musical Play for babies and pre-schoolers, Senior music specialist at the Champion Centre Burwood Hospital, Christchurch NZ.
Dr Marion Shields	Senior lecturer and researcher in Avondale College of Higher Education Faculty of Education Business & Science - Early Childhood Strand.
Royce Dewe	National Co-ordinator of the Christian Early Childhood Association of Aotearoa, Consultant for Christian Early Childhood Education & Care Services Aotearoa, immediate past Director of Whanganui Central Baptist Kindergarten & Creche Trust (CBK).
Kaye Judge	Lecturer and researcher in Avondale College of Higher Education Faculty of Education Business & Science - Early Childhood Strand.

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS

Flavia Butler	Nominated Supervisor & Educator at Avondale Early Learning Centre.
Bev Christian	Senior lecturer and researcher in Avondale College of Higher Education Faculty of Education Business & Science - Primary Strand.
Deb Williams	Director Hillsong Child Care Centres & PhD Candidate Avondale College of Higher Education Faculty of Education Business & Science.
Sandra Ludlow	Lecturer and researcher in Avondale College of Higher Education Faculty of Education Business & Science - Early Childhood Strand.
Karen Petrie	Director Northpine Christian College Day Care & Early Learning Centre

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2019 Australian Early Childhood Christian Educators Conference



AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS'

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2019

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'Ministering the gospel of God's grace and reconciliation, through early childhood communities of practice'



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Monday 9th

REGISTRATION 8.30
Ella Hughes Chapel

WELCOME & WORSHIP 9.00
Welomce to Country and Avondale
Deb Williams & Karen Petrie

KEYNOTE 9.20-10.25
Research Findings: Christian Leadership
Dr Marion Shields

MORNING TEA 10.30-11.00
Ella Hughes Chapel

KEYNOTE II 11.00-11.50
Live More Happy
Dr Darren Morton

WORKSHOP 12.00-1.00
Education Faculty Building
1a. Dealing Christianly with Unsatisfactory Performance (EHC)
Dr Marion Shields
1b. Godly Play Pedagogiese (E19)
Judyth Roberts
1c. Outside in Nature - Examples of Practice (E23)
Tiffany Flatley & Samantha Lee - Northpine ELC

LUNCH 1.05-1.35
Ella Hughes Chapel

Teacher Professional Inservice for NESA

Monday 9th

WORKSHOP 1.35-2.35
Education Faculty Building
1d. Scaffolding Locomotion Skills in 2-5yrs Olds (Audio)
Wendi Herman
1f. Goldy Play Pedagogies (E19)
Judyth Roberts

ACECEA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2.40-3.15
Ella Hughes Chapel
Deb Williams & Organising Committee

AFTERNOON TEA 3.15.3.30
Ella Hughes Chapel

KEYNOTE III 3.30.4.10
Educational Metaphors: A Lens to Evaluate Praxis
Dr Hilary Monk

WORKSHOP 4.20-5.05
Intentionally & Deliberatley Choosing our Metaphors of Teaching & Learning
Dr Hilary Monk

DINNER 5.15-6.15
Cafeteria

WORKSHOP 7.00-8.00
Ella Hughes Chapel
Walking with Jesus Through Children's Day-to-day Experiences
Jodi Humphries

RESOURCE SHARING NIGHT 8.00-8.30

Tuesday 10th

PRAYER WALK 7.15
Girls'Walk

BREAKFAST 7.30-8.30
Cafeteria

REGISTRATION 8.30-9.00
Ella Hughes Chapel

KEYNOTE I 9.00-10.00
Christian ECEC - Nature, Mission & Vision
Sandra Ludlow - Round Table Dscussions

WORSHIP 10.00-10.05
Dr Kevin Petrie

WORKSHOP 10.10-11.10
Education Faculty Building
1a. Changing the Culture of Your Centre (E19)
Dom Valastro & Yvette Wynne - Integricare
1b. Play-based Pedagogies for Pre-kindy (E23)
Sandra Ludlow
1c. Indigenous Perspectives in Christian ECEC (EHC)
Leon & Aunty Kathleen - Tregear Presbyterian Preschool

MORNING TEA 11.10-11.30
Ella Hughes Chapel

KEYNOTE II 11.35-12.25
Embedding Critical Reflection in Your Daily Practice: The Impact?
Deb Williams - Hillsong Childcare

LUNCH 12.25-1.00
Ella Hughes Chapel

WORKSHOP 1.00-2.00
Education Faculty Building
1d. Hills ELC Educators - Using Floor Books with the Project Approach (E19)
Elna Hale & Team - Hills ELC
1e. Embedding the EYLF with Christian Studies (E23)
Carolynne Noonan & Bethany McGibbin - QLD Lutheran EC Services

KEYNOTE III 2.05-3.05
Ella Hughes Chapel
Belonging, Being & Becoming Through Bush School
Dianne Hillsdon - Manning District Adventist School

Tuesday 10th

AFTERNOON TEA 3.10-3.30
Ella Hughes Chapel

WORKSHOP 3.30-4.30
Outdoors
1f. Bush Kinder/Nature Play
Dianne Hillsdon - Manning District Adventist School

WORKSHOP 4.30-5.30
Education Faculty Building
1g. Outside in Nature - Examples of Practice (E23)
Tiffany Flatley & Samantha Lee - Northpine ELC
1h. Indigenous Perspectives in Christian ECEC (EHC)
Leon & Aunty Kathleen - Integricare Drummoyne

DINNER 5.30-6.15
Cafeteria

WORKSHOP 7.00
1e. Attachment, Nature, and the Young Child's Felt Sense of God (EHC)
Bev Christian

MOVIE & POPCORN PARTY 8.30
Ella Hughes Chapel

Wednesday 11th

PRAYER WALK 7.15
Girls'Walk

BREAKFAST 7.30-8.30
Cafeteria

REGISTRATION & WORSHIP 8.30-8.50
Ella Hughes Chapel

CENTRE TOURS 9.00-11.55
TOUR 1: Macquarie College Preschool & Rumpus Room - Darling Street and Chatham Street, Broadmeadow
TOUR 2: Avondale Early Learning Centre & Narnia ELC - Narara

TOUR DEBRIEF & CONFERENCE CLOSURE 12.00-12.20
Ella Hughes Chapel
Deb Williams, Sandra Ludlow & Karen Petrie

LUNCH 12.20
Ella Hughes Chapel

Teacher Professional Inservice for NESA

Abstracts

SANDRA LUDLOW - PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGIES FOR 3-6YR OLDS

This workshop seeks to scaffold educators understanding of how to implement play-based pedagogies in Early Stage 1 classrooms. It explores environments, resources, experiences and educator behaviours that may be used as provocations to children's meaning making, knowledge and skills acquisition, critical and creative problem solving. It will also assist educators in devising strategies to record, assess and reflect on children's meaning making during their play. Participants will leave with practical ideas to implement in their own classrooms.

SANDRA LUDLOW - THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF CHRISTIAN ECEC: ACTUALITY AND ASPIRATIONS

This keynote is by nature a combination of a review, a celebration and a provocation. It attempts to engage attendees of this conference in a dialogue about the philosophical underpinnings of contemporary Christian ECEC in Australia and current practices in Christian ECEC. It further seeks to position both within contemporary ECEC philosophy and practices and to explore answers to the questions what is, what could and what should be the function and nature of Australian Christian ECEC moving forward into the new decade?

DOM VALASTRO & YVETTE WYNNE - WHAT DID CULTURE EAT FOR BREAKFAST? A WORKSHOP DISCUSSING THE WORKPLACE CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS FOR A CHRISTIAN EARLY EDUCATION CENTRE

The management clique "that culture eats strategy for breakfast" is most applicable to those of us running centres where we are attempting to integrate the positive news of the gospel into our day-to-day activities. We can have the best strategy, but without the right culture, it can ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. The change management implications can be very significant. What are the challenges and considerations when trying to create or develop a faith-based culture? This workshop is informed by the learnings over the last two years at Integricare.

DEBRA WILLIAMS - AN INQUIRY INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CRITICAL REFLECTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: A FAITH-BASED CASE STUDY

This keynote presentation reports on research that explored the impact of the mandatory application of critical reflection as part of the National Quality Standard, in one faith-based early education and care centre? It describes the issues and challenges this service encountered, in their attempt to become reflective practitioners of Christian early childhood education and care, philosophy, ethics and practice. The keynote concludes with research findings about the type of environments and practices that scaffold effective critical reflection, and the impact of critical reflection on the ethos and culture of this service.

Abstracts

HILLS ELC EDUCATORS - USING FLOORBOOKS WITH THE PROJECT APPROACH

This workshop explores practical ways educators use floor books to support children's meaning making, reflection and dispositions to learn, during emergent projects. Attendees will learn how to make children's learning and meaning making visible to other children, families and educators. They will also explore ways to use floor books to assess, extend and deepen children's investigation during the project.

CAROLYNNE NOONAN & BETHANY MCGIBBON - EMBEDDING THE EYLF WITH CHRISTIAN STUDIES

This workshop will demonstrate and discuss ways to link the key elements of our Christian Faith to the Early Years Learning Framework, in everyday practice.

DIANNE HILLSDON

Bush School is a delivery model in which students visit natural spaces to learn personal, social and technical skills. It has been defined as "an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a bush setting. Bush school is both a pedagogy and a physical entity, with the terms often being interchanged. Bush School means to build independence and self-esteem in children and young adults. This session will explain the ethos and philosophy behind the movement and describe the potential of the natural environment to integrated learning with personal skills development. Dianne will describe her personal journey and current pedagogical strategies running a Bush School, in your current setting. The Adventist Schools Community of Faith and Learning Model's believing component will be explored through this workshop, in conjunction with the EYLF metaphors for children's lives: belonging, being and becoming . Attendees will be given an opportunity to experience first-hand the pedagogies of Bush School.

BEV CHRISTIAN - ATTACHMENT, NATURE, AND THE YOUNG CHILD'S FELT SENSE OF GOD

This workshop explores a proposition that children may develop an attachment to nature paralleling their attachment to significant people in their lives. It focuses on the senses and how young children become attuned to the natural world when regularly given outdoor experiences. Research supports the concept that children who are exposed to nature develop personal attributes that help them become well-adjusted happy individuals. The literature also indicates that individuals who developed strong bonds to nature in childhood have a higher capacity to care for the natural world. What is lesser explored is the relationship between children's experiences in the natural world and their perceptions of, and possible attachment, to God. This workshop also includes hand-on activities that are suitable for young children, and which demonstrate a way forward for Christian early childhood educators to connect young children to God through nature.

Bios

SANDRA LUDLOW



Course Convenor for the early childhood programs at Avondale, a University College and a Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Education. During her teaching career, Sandra has been a lecturer, director and teacher of several long day care centres, an infant (K-Yr2) teacher, and a sole charge, (K-Yr6) principal/teacher. Throughout all of these roles, Sandra has maintained a passionate interest in emergent curriculum in both infant and preschool classrooms and in nurturing young children's spiritual awareness, faith formation and biblical knowledge through the Biblical curriculum. This passion has shaped the topic of her current research projects in early childhood education and care settings - nurturing children relationships with God through nature play and STEAM and the role of play in scaffolding the emergence and development of 3-4yr old children's spiritual awareness and faith formation?

DEB WILLIAMS



Debra has been working in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector for over 35 years in a variety of capacities including as Consultant, Facilitator, Adviser, Lecturer, Director, Manager and Publisher. She holds a degree in Education, Diploma of Management and Graduate Certificate in Research and is currently completing a PhD exploring educator perspectives in implementation of critical reflection in the Commonwealth compliance system for Education and Care, the National Quality Standard, in a faith based Early Education and Care Centre in Australia, Hillsong Child Care Centre.

BEV CHRISTIAN



Head of Discipline of Education at Avondale, a University College. She spent many years working in Primary Schools as a teacher, administrator and curriculum writer before transferring to the tertiary sector. Bev lectures in the area of Professional Development. Her aim is to help pre-service teachers develop their God given potential as caring and innovative classroom practitioners. One of Bev's current research interests is is nature pedagogy and its connection to children's spirituality.

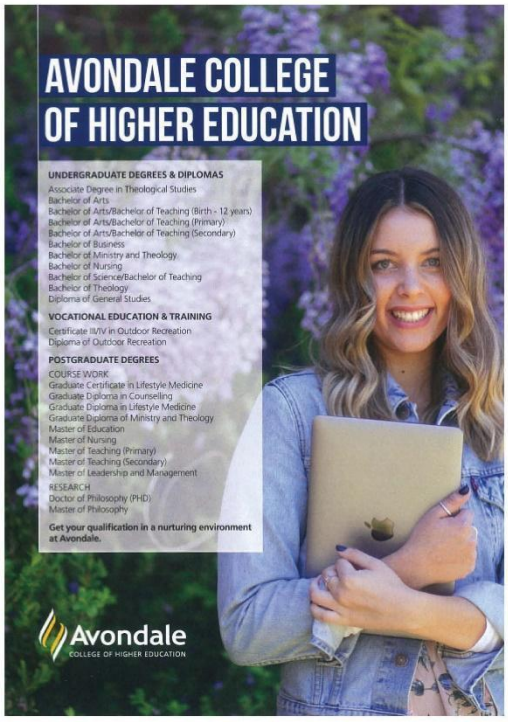
Bios

DIANNE HILLSDON



Dianne has been working with Adventist Schools Australia since 1992. She has been a: Classroom teacher Canberra Christian School, Central Coast Adventist School Erina, Hurstville Adventist School Sydney and Gilson College Mernda Campus Victoria; School principal at Hurstville Adventist School and Manning Adventist School Taree; Tertiary lecturer at Avondale College; Assistant Head of Junior School at Central Coast Adventist School; Associate Curriculum Office Primary – Adventist Schools Australia; Encounter Bible Curriculum Writer – Adventist Schools Australia; Education Director; Adventist Christian Schools Western Australia.

She became interested in Forest Schools when visiting the UK in 2013 on a study tour with the Association of Independent Schools (WA). Since then, she has become a qualified Level 3 Forest Schools Practitioner. She is the only qualified facilitator of the Bush School program in Adventist Schools across Australia. She has led forest schools in VIC and NSW and is passionate about the well-being of children using nature as a classroom.



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