Leadership in Christian Early Childhood Education: A Grounded Theory

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education, Business and Science

Avondale College of Higher Education

October 2019

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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervising colleagues:

To Phil Fitzsimmons who introduced me to grounded theory, made me think deeply and with whom I had the most wonderful arguments!

To Sherry Hattingh who is the most clear-thinking, organised and supportive supervisor one could have.

To Peter Beamish who has an outstanding ability to see ‘the big picture’ and find solutions to challenges.

Thank you so much!

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the many Christian early childhood education leaders who have contributed to the body of knowledge contained in this document. In particular, the four Directors/Leaders who shared their time, thoughts and prayers with me in order to help me in my research. Their kindness, patience and inspiration was a great blessing and I thank them for it.

Most importantly, I am so grateful to God for leading me to undertake this study, helping me to perceive its importance and giving me the energy and perseverance to bring it to a conclusion.

ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing proliferation of Christian early childhood education and care centres for pre-school aged children in Australia and internationally, it would appear that the Christian aspect of the leadership and management of these centres has not been thoroughly investigated. This research project explored the beliefs, values and practices of four leaders of Christian early childhood education and care centres in New South Wales, Australia from four different denominational groups. Using the tools of grounded theory in a three-round hermeneutic dialectic interview process, the leaders' perceptions of the integration of Christian faith into their practice was examined. The results uncovered a deep individual commitment to a God-centred approach in all areas of their daily practice. The leaders' faith relationship with God, led them to a dynamic worldview that compelled and empowered them to relate to children, staff, families and their communities in a loving, holistic, compassionate, respectful and supportive manner. The detailed results of the findings are presented as case studies, with the subsequent analysis leading to the development of a grounded theory of Christian early childhood education leadership.

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DEFINITIONS

Within the field of early childhood education and care a number of acronyms, as well as sector-specific terminology, are in frequent use. To assist in clarifying this thesis, the main ones are explained as follows:

- **ACECQA -** Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. ACECQA is an independent national authority, guided by a 13-member Governing Board whose members are nominated by each state and territory of the Commonwealth. ACECQA guides the implementation of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (Appendix A) nationally and ensures consistency in delivery through mandatory appraisement and accreditation.
- **CECEC –** Christian early childhood education and care (see ECEC)
- **Director –** this is the specific term for the leader of an early childhood centre in Australia. However in this thesis 'Director/Leader' will be used so that the role will be clear in other locations.
- **Early Childhood** - While often defined as birth to eight (Rodd, 2013), within this thesis the focus is on three to five years. In addition, some Early Childhood centres also have 'Babies Rooms' which cater for birth to two years of age.
- **ECEC** - Early Childhood Education and Care: Centres that provide education and care for children from birth to five years of age may also be known as preschools, early learning centres or child-care.
- **EYLF** - Early Years Learning Framework (Appendix B). EYLF is an early childhood curriculum framework, which is designed to guide early childhood educators in developing quality, early childhood education programmes.
- **Educators** - Early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood settings: The Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care is the nationally regulated entry-level qualification for working in early childhood education and care. The Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care is the minimum qualification to work in early childhood centres, including preschools.
  Half of the educators at an early childhood service need to have a diploma-level qualification or above (or be actively working towards) in order for the service to meet regulations (TAFE, NSW, 2017).

- **Legislation** - Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Act 2010, No 104 (see NQF).
- **Long Day Care** - This refers to centres that provide, as the name suggests, longer hours of operation, usually to cater for parents' work schedules. The hours are normally from about 6:30a.m. to 6:30p.m.
- **NQF** - National Quality Framework: "The National Quality Framework (NQF) provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services across Australia" (ACECQA, 2017, p. 1). Established in 2012, it replaced separate state/territory licensing processes.
- **NQS** - National Quality Standards (Appendix C): Within the NQF, the mandated standards outline in very specific detail the requirements for acceptable provisions for very young children at ECEC centres.
- **OSCH** - Outside School Hours Care, also known as Out of School Hours care (OSHC); as the name suggests, this is an additional program conducted during school holidays, pupil free days and before and after school. Usually run in primary schools it is sometimes located in ECEC centres.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> *"The most important period of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to the age of six."*
>
> *Maria Montessori*

This statement by Maria Montessori, a pioneer in early childhood education, sets the scene for this thesis, for the focus of this research is the praxis of those who lead and direct early learning education and care centres. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is a rapidly expanding educational sector which has been subject to both rapid change and increasing accountability, both nationally and internationally, in recent years (Sims & Brettig, 2018; Stuart, 2018; Rodd, 2013). Thus, the leaders of ECEC Centres are the ones who, within this mix of policy, pedagogy and pressure for change, must lead and direct the care and education of very young children. The importance of this role cannot be underestimated as the quality of leadership has been found to have a critical influence on the quality of programs, children's well-being in these centres, and academic achievements into adulthood (McCoy et al., 2017; Nutbrown, 2012; Sims, Waniganayake & Hadley, 2017; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

In recent years a new subsection within the Early Childhood Educational sector has emerged which is also developing and growing; this is the Christian Early Childhood Education and Care program. Several authors (Reinke, Peters & Castner, 2018; Rodd, 2013) have commented on the need for further research on early childhood education leadership; however, neither this emerging area nor its leadership appear to have been investigated.

Purpose of This Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative investigation, using the tools of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) within the framework of a hermeneutic dialectic (Honkavuo, Sivonen, Eriksson, & Naden, 2018) to explore the Directors/Leaders of CECEC Centres' concepts of a framework of Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership. The study was undertaken in New South Wales, Australia and the following question was used to guide and frame this study:

> ***What do four Directors/Leaders of Christian early childhood education and care centres perceive about the praxis of their Christian leadership?***

Consequently, in this investigation, a case study approach was used to enable the Directors/Leaders to explain their perceptions about Christian early childhood education leadership in detail and for the reader to be able to 'hear' their voices.

1.1 Background and Rationale for this Research Project

The development of this research project originally stemmed from a perceived need to address the apparent lack of quality research about Christian early childhood education leadership. As an experienced educational administrator with over thirty years of school leadership, I undertook the development of an educational leadership unit for final-year, Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, pre-service teachers at a small, private Christian tertiary institution in New South Wales, Australia in 2008. The necessity for early childhood pre-service teachers to undertake studies in leadership has been supported by Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos and Maloney, (2014), Rodd (2013) and Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley and Shepherd (2012). These authors note that within the field of early childhood education, educators with a degree are more likely to move into leadership positions than in other educational sectors. Therefore, development in understanding the concept and practice of educational leadership was important for these pre-service teachers.

It was in this role of developing an early childhood educational leadership subject when I started to become aware of some of the issues associated with leadership in the Early Childhood context, such as the lack of information on practical leadership and, to a lesser extent, management for beginning leaders. Furthermore, the dearth of publications about CECEC centres and the leadership, management beliefs and practices of their Directors/Leaders appeared to reveal a serious gap in relevant, available research literature.

At this point, the necessity for research into this topic became very obvious. Although my experience in leadership gave me a wealth of practical strategies, it also gave me considerable tacit knowledge of leadership practices, as well as the unarticulated, contextual understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gascoigne & Thornton, 2013). Buunk, Smith and Hall (2018) explain that tacit knowledge is a personal construct and is therefore difficult to classify or express due to its deep-seated existence within the brain, such as personal expertise. However, by contrast explicit knowledge is the knowledge that can be verbalised, organised and easily communicated to others via documents or manuals (Shah & Mahmood, 2016). Therefore, conversion to explicit knowledge (Buunk et al, 2018) was required in order to be of value to current practitioners and the students who aspire to leadership. Thus, an

authentication of my tacit knowledge and understandings necessitated a deep exploration of current Christian early childhood educational leadership.

Practitioners' beliefs are extremely important, as described by Nelson and Guerra (2014), who provide an insight into the importance of beliefs. They note, "Beliefs are the deeply personal, individual truths one holds about physical and social reality and about self" (p. 70). Furthermore, Nelson and Guerra (2014) go on to state that while these internal beliefs may even lack logic, they have a stronger influence on behaviour than cognitive knowledge and can predict an individual's behaviour. Further, this closely held set of values, beliefs and feelings acts as a filter in relationships, communication and behaviours. Consequently, the exploration of these deeply held convictions is vital to an understanding of the practices of Directors/Leaders of Christian Early Education and Care centres.

1.2 The Broad Contextual Background: Educational Leadership

As a whole, the field of educational leadership has experienced several major developments over the last fifty years. Shafique and Beh (2017) explain that not only have there been different concurrent and sequential theories of leadership such as transactional (Bass, 2008), transformational (Burns, 1978), charismatic (House, 1976), servant (Greenleaf, 1977), and distributed (Harris, 2014), but in addition there has been a growing awareness of the complexities of the role of leadership itself (Hughes, 2018).

As society moves from the industrial age to the knowledge age, Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2013) note the complexity-inspired perspective on leadership shifting from a focus on the individual to a focus on the organisational process. Within education this complexity has been noted by Duignan (2012) who wrote: "Educational leaders need to recognise another significant issue...that schools are living, complex, dynamic, mostly non-linear organisations" (p. 21). In fact, Duignan (2012) goes on to suggest that there is a need for a greater comprehension of this complexity which should be done through "courageous conversation and dialogue where the varied perspectives of students, parents, teachers and other key stakeholders are shared and carefully considered" (p. 35). In other words, aspects of honesty, authenticity, collaboration and a relational, interactive community are essential developments that educational leaders need to address if schools are to meet the needs of students and communities in the twenty first century. Further, Sims, Waniganayake and Hadley (2018) admit that within the plethora of research on leadership, its complexity is very obvious and is too much for one person alone to manage all aspects effectively.

As well, researchers (Cranston, Ehrich & Kimber, 2006, Duignan, 2012, Grobler, 2017; Northouse, 2013) have commented that many corporate, political and religious groups have become increasingly disenchanted with ineffective approaches to leadership (Ragozzine, 2008). “There is a new energy abroad that is calling, perhaps crying out, for leaders to be more moral, ethical, authentic and capable” (Duignan, 2012, p. 215). Consequently, communities have become more vocal in their calls for a more community-based, authentically collaborative approach.

1.3 A Deeper Context: Early Childhood Educational Leadership

A particular subset of leadership is early childhood educational leadership. However, this area has only had limited research (Rodd, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2012; Aubrey, 2011). Additionally, Rodd (2013) and Aubrey (2011) found that many of those holding a leadership role within early childhood education centres, have not had training in leadership and feel very inadequate in the position. Not only has there been a limited amount of research-based literature about early childhood education leadership, but significantly, more recent research has found that the leadership of ECEC centres has a critical impact on the quality of the programs offered. Described by Waniganayake et al., (2012) as ‘pivotal’, these authors note that an accumulating number of research studies show that Early Childhood education leadership can “positively impact on the quality of the centre as a workplace, the quality of education provided and the developmental outcomes achieved by children over time” (p. 15). Consequently, “what happens to children in the early years has consequences right through the course of their lives” (Moore, 2006, p. 1) and thus reflects the importance of Early Childhood educational leadership. Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, and Thornburg’s research (2009) supports the findings of the NSCDC report as this comment indicates: “both small experimental studies and quasi-experimental studies of large scale programs have shown consistently positive effects of exposure to preschool” (p. 52).

As mentioned earlier, early childhood education is a critically important foundation stage in a child’s life. The Nutbrown Review (2011) found that quality early childhood education programs had a lasting positive effect on social and behavioural outcomes as well as English, Mathematics and language development. In addition, Warren and Haisken-DeNew’s (2014) longitudinal Australian research matched Year Three Literacy and Numeracy results from NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) with preschool attendance, finding strong and significant positive effects. However, as

detailed in Chapter Two, the quality of the leadership determines the quality of the early childhood educational program, hence the investigation of this critical area.

1.4 A New Approach in Early Childhood Educational Leadership

Across Australia many CECEC centres have been, and continue to be, established by various church and community groups. However, a rigorous literature review revealed an apparent lack of research data on leadership of CECEC centres, together with a corresponding lack of guidance for novice leaders in these centres.

Of particular interest, and indeed the focus of this thesis, is the exploration of Christian early childhood educational leadership. However, despite numerous literature and database searches, there appears to be a paucity of information surrounding Christian early childhood educational leadership. Further, given its apparent value together with its implementation in many CECEC centres there is an obvious need for this research project.

1.5 Choice of Research Design

The brief description provided here will be elaborated in greater detail in Chapter three. The purpose of this study was to conduct an investigation into Christian early childhood education leadership within a qualitative paradigm (Creswell, 2014).

The tools of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) were deemed to be the best fit for the focus of this research study and were therefore chosen to investigate the beliefs, values and practices of twenty-three Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres. A survey-questionnaire (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) designed to update the researcher on the current field of Christian early childhood educational leadership was used initially (Phase One) to explore the attitudes of the Directors/Leaders about their work, and in particular the nexus between their leadership and management role, their faith and their Christian practice. As will be noted in Chapter three, the twenty three Director/Leaders represented the only ‘CECEC’ Centres listed in New South Wales, Australia. From the returned fourteen survey-questionnaires, a cohort of three experienced and successful Directors/Leaders of Christian ECEC centres was chosen for the hermeneutic dialectic (Honkavuo et al., 2018) interview section of this research (Phase Two). The limited number was chosen to facilitate in-depth interviewing to occur. This consisted of three rounds of semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Coleman, 2012) to explore the topic of faith and practice in the leadership of Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres. In addition, a fourth participant attended a presentation on the preliminary findings of

the study and asked to be involved, increasing the interview-cohort to four. This fourth participant also completed a survey-questionnaire and met the criteria for selection as outlined in section 3.6. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed (Holton & Walsh, 2017) by the researcher, then carefully analysed, line by line and coded (Charmaz, 2014). From each interview emerging themes and patterns were explored, considered and compared, leading to questions for the next round of interviews. In-situ observations (Holton & Walsh, 2017) were also conducted by the researcher which contributed to the data with additional information as well as triangulating (Briggs, Coleman & Morrison, 2012) the information from the survey-questionnaires, the interviews and published documents from the centres.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The Title

The title: 'Leadership in Christian Early Childhood Education: A Grounded Theory' summarises and encapsulates the perspectives of this research study. Rather than focussing on the professional skills of educational leadership, this project concentrates on the underlying beliefs and motivation of those undertaking Christian early childhood education leadership. It is a value-focussed, exploration of why and how they enact Christian early childhood education leadership and how they perceive its praxis.

Further, as these underlying beliefs are explored it becomes apparent that the concept of geographies, particularly emotional and spiritual geographies, is especially relevant (Bartolini, Chris, MacKian & Pile, 2016; Hargreaves, 2001; Jupp, 2013; Olson, 2015). Beliefs and motivations do not occur in a vacuum; in reality they emerge, develop, change and exist within relationships, that, in and of themselves are interactive relationships. The concept of geographies encompasses this perspective and will be explored in greater detail in Chapter two.

The Chapters

Following this Introductory Chapter, the relevant literature is explored in Chapter two. As stated previously there appears to be a serious lack of scholarly research within the area of Christian early childhood educational leadership, and therefore the historical background to the actual Early Childhood Education sector is first considered, with subsequent material covering leadership, early childhood education leadership, and educational leadership. These areas are then explored in greater depth and specificity within Christian leadership, Christian educational leadership, and finally, culminating in what is known about Christian early childhood educational leadership.

Chapter Three addresses the research design and method of this project, which relies on a qualitative approach, using the tools of grounded theory in a hermeneutic dialectic. Through survey-questionnaires, in-depth semi-structured interviews, on-site observations and examination of documentation, the essential elements of Christian early childhood educational leadership were explored. Detailed coding was used to analyse the data, with constant member checking for correctness of data as well as accuracy of interpretation by the researcher. In addition, cross-comparison between participants' responses provided opportunities for a deeper exploration through further questioning during the three rounds of interviewing as well as in-situ observations.

Chapter Four provides the results of the data gathered from the larger group of Directors/Leaders (Phase One) through the written survey-questionnaires.

Chapter Five provides the results of the data gathered from the interviews and the observations of four case studies and the work of their respective Directors/Leaders The findings, agreements and contradictions found within the results, as well as new knowledge hitherto unreported in the literature, are incorporated within each case study.

Chapter Six: The deductions and inferences, the benchmarks of excellent practice, and the models of exceptional leadership, are collated and used to provide a grounded theory of Christian early childhood educational leadership.

Chapter Seven presents the conclusion and a number of recommendations that are provided for both novice early childhood education leaders as well as experienced practitioners in the field, who may wish to develop a Christian approach to ECEC within their centres. These findings will also be of value to pre-service teachers, finalising their professional development before undertaking employment within the area of CECEC centres.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview

Leadership is a complex concept that can include many different tasks, amongst a wide variety of people, within many different contexts. The purpose of this research project was to examine leadership within early childhood education and care in a Christian context through the perceptions of the Directors/Leaders of ECEC centres. This necessitated a consideration of the major contextual background areas and relevant findings from research literature. The major difficulty with this intention was that Christian early childhood educational leadership does not appear to have been a focus for research despite considerable effort on the part of this researcher to find it. Therefore, it was necessary to explore the background and foundation of Christian early childhood educational leadership from within related areas.

The following eight areas were chosen to provide relevant information as the foundation for further exploration into Christian early childhood educational leadership and to build the groundwork for a detailed examination of Christian early childhood educational leadership. An explanation is provided for the choice of each area.

2.1.1 **The Early Childhood education sector**: Understanding the context in which this research is located is critical to understanding the forces that have changed and continue to change this sector and its leadership (Sims et al, 2018; Waniganayake et al., 2012).

2.1.2 **Leadership:** The concept of leadership is a foundation area for this research project. This section provides a broad, historical understanding of leadership across various contexts and describes how leadership approaches have changed over time (Sims et al., 2018; Waniganayake et al., 2012).

2.1.3 **Leadership in the Early Childhood educational context**: In recent years research has begun to investigate this aspect of leadership as it is an essential basis for understanding Christian early childhood education and care, although it is still under-researched (Rodd, 2013).

2.1.4 **Leadership in the educational context**: Leadership in education is vastly different from leadership in industry, with the leader having responsibility for numerous staff, large numbers of children involving a high legal duty of care, and a large parent

body with high expectations and requirements for their children's education and development. The 'product' of this task is the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in children. The importance of these outcomes to the various stakeholders, particularly parents and employers, greatly influences the role of educational leadership in any educational facility, including CECEC centres (Bush, 2018).

2.1.5 **Leadership in the Christian context**: Given that very little is known, or even documented, about Christian early childhood education and care, this section leads into that topic by considering the underlying principles and practices that characterise Christian leadership (Stewart, 2008).

2.1.6 **Leadership in the Christian educational context**: Christian Schools are being established in considerable numbers throughout Australia and provide education for approximately one third of all school aged children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, [ABS], 2013). Some research has occurred within this sector which adds to an understanding of CECE; particularly the nexus between 'Christian' and 'educational leadership' (Drexler, 2007).

2.1.7 **Leadership in the Christian Early childhood Educational context:** this is the most relevant section within this literature review, about which very little is known. The focus incorporates recent calls for the inclusion of spirituality in children's education (Woods, 2007).

2.1.8 **Human Geographies:** this section provides an additional perspective on the many relationships within Christian early childhood education leadership (Hay, 2016).

2.2. Introduction

Early childhood education is a critically important foundation stage in a child's life; Sylva et al. (2010, p. 94) found that "High quality preschooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children" and particularly brain development (Shonkoff, 2010). The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child [NSCDC], in both 2004 and 2007 reported that children's early experiences had a substantial and long-lasting influence on their lives. Research by Pianta et al. (2009, p. 52) also supports the findings of the NSCDC report as this comment indicates: "both small experimental studies and quasi-experimental studies of large scale programs have shown consistently positive effects of exposure to preschool". In addition, as mentioned in the introduction, the 2011 Nutbrown Review also noted the lasting beneficial effects of quality early childhood education programs.

In 2018, there were 342,479 children aged four or five attending early childhood education and care programs in Australia (ABS, 2019) and across Australia many CECEC centres have been established by various church and community groups. However, the literature search revealed an apparent lack of research data on leadership of CECEC, together with a corresponding lack of guidance for novice leaders in these centres.

Reflection on the lack of research and publications on CECEC centres and/or leadership in these centres, led to further appreciation of the real need that exists for quality research data and practical guidelines on leadership and management of CECEC centres, and hence the motivation for the development of this research project. These conclusions were reinforced by conversations with several Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres who expressed frustration at the lack of such material and offered their support to this research project. Therefore, research into the ways Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres lead their centres and what they believe about leadership in this context is significant, as it provides data about how leadership is actually conducted in the natural settings of CECEC centres.

As stated in the introduction, practitioners' beliefs should not be underestimated for the influence they have on behaviour, even bypassing logic and cognitive knowledge to motivate and shape practices (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Thus, the exploration of these deeply held convictions are vital to an understanding of the practices of Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres.

2.3 The Early Childhood Education Sector

The first foundation area for this literature review is the Early Childhood Education sector, an incredibly complex, rapidly-expanding and evolving educational arena with legal ramifications and government involvement designed to raise the standard of the service. In considering early childhood education leadership, the field of Early Childhood Education and Care itself must be examined. Early Childhood Education and Care, a term "used to encompass children's participation in both child care and early childhood education" (Baxter, 2015, p.1) appears to have experienced more attention, policy changes and mandates than any other educational sector in recent years, as is noted in the following comment: "Early childhood continues to experience acute and chronic change where pressures for rapid and extensive adaptation, innovation and transformation have occurred over an extended period of time" (Rodd, 2013, p. 183).

Two factors in particular have been influential, both stemming from international reports on the Australian Early Childhood Education sector. The first was the *Starting Strong II Report* in 2006 from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which examined comparative performances on several indicators within early childhood education provisions in OECD countries. On participation rates, legal entitlement to a prior-to-school program, and public expenditure on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), Australia ranked poorly. Compounding this was the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) *Innocenti Report Card 8* of 2008, in which of the ten benchmarking 'minimal standards for protecting the rights of children in their most vulnerable and formative years' (UNICEF, 2008, 2), Australia was only able to achieve two: (a) subsidized and regulated child care services for 25% of children under three and (b) 80% of all child care staff trained (Waniganayake et al., 2012, p. 34). The associated score ranked Australia twenty-second out of twenty-five OECD countries and revealed the paucity of provisions for ECEC in Australia. Goals such as a national plan for ECEC with priority for disadvantaged groups, limits to child poverty, child health outreach services, percentage of tertiary trained staff and percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spent on ECEC were not achieved by Australia (UNICEF, 2008, p. 2). The poor showing on these two factors added pressure to improve services within the Early Childhood Education sector leading to a change within the policy platform of the new Labour government in 2007 which was a commitment to transform the Early Childhood Education sector in Australia.

This commitment manifested itself in the Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) and associated Regulations (2011) which led to the development of, and mandates, the National Quality Framework (NQF) (see Appendix A). Briefly, within the NQF are Standards, Regulations, an assessment and rating system and curriculum guidelines – the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (see Appendix B). The NQF came into effect at the beginning of 2012 and is a legal requirement for all Long Day Care centres, Preschools and Kindergartens, Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) and Family Day Care in Australia. To ensure the implementation of the NQF and the quality of that implementation, the national Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) was created at the same time to supervise, assess and rate the process as well as ensuring that the standards are met (see Appendix C).

ACECQA and the regulatory process are critical components of the government's strategic plan to "increase its focus on the early years (birth to eight years) to ensure the

wellbeing of children throughout their lives" (Collier, 2012, 1, SCSEEC). Meanwhile, similarly in England, there has been a push to improve care and education for very young children (Ang, 2011). Within each Australian state and territory, authorised assessors work with leaders of ECEC centres both to rate and to assist in meeting and improving their performance quality in seven vital areas of service. These areas include: educational program and practice; children's health and safety; physical environment; staffing arrangements; relationships with children; collaborative partnerships with families and communities; and, leadership and service management (ACECQA, 2015). The quality of each of the areas is officially assessed and rated at five levels: Exceeding National Quality Standard, Meeting National Quality Standard, Working Towards National Quality Standard, and finally, Significant Improvement Required. Leaders can also apply for an additional, rigorous assessment to achieve the highest rating of Excellent Standard. In order to provide transparency and accountability these quality ratings, following assessment, are published on the national register of services and on the MyChild website.

Two additional factors have also strongly influenced the sector. These include rapid growth due to a large increase in demand for childcare where both partners in families are employed. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017, 4402) reported that there had been a trend towards an increased use of formal care with a similar reduction in informal care. The ABS also reported that the participation of women in the workforce had influenced this increase. Further, Pocock and Hill (2007) reported that by the mid-2000s more than 70% of childcare in Australia was delivered by private organisations with probable financial priorities. However, there are concerns about this, as noted by Tayler (2011, p. 213), who commented that while spending and enrolment levels have increased in early childhood education and care, which she describes as "part of a social investment strategy aimed at delivering long term economic and human capital benefits", yet governments in many western countries have not invested sufficient levels of financial support to ensure the high-quality provision which is needed, and have instead relied on private providers without implementing strong regulations to ensure that high quality provision is actually delivered (Tayler, 2011). Brownlee, Nailon and Tickle (2010) reflect similar concerns and comment on the pressure to deregulate child-care such as removing the requirement for trained teachers in childcare, thus reducing some of the costs but not supporting the research findings into the necessity of qualified staff in high quality child-care.

Clearly the issue of ‘high quality’ in early childhood education and care is of major importance. New Zealand’s Education Review Office (ERO) which oversees all aspects of education in New Zealand describes ‘high quality’ thus:

> Children who participate in high quality services learn in a safe and inclusive environment where they are respected, supported and challenged in their learning. They are happy, confident learners who are included and listened to. Their progress, achievements and successes are acknowledged and celebrated. Relationships between educators, parents and whānau, based on mutual trust and respect, strengthen partnerships for learning.
>
> *Quality in Early Childhood Services Report, 2010, p. 4, (ERO).*

Further, the ERO goes on to note that the combination and interaction of leadership, philosophy, vision, relationships and interactions, teaching and learning, assessment and planning, professional learning, qualifications and support, self-review and management are the essential factors that form the foundation of a high-quality early childhood service. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007, p. 89) describe a discourse of quality within the field of ECEC grounded in “objectivity and quantification”. However, the authors also see this discourse now developing through a postmodern perspective into ‘making meaning’, judgement and ‘customer satisfaction’. That is to say, rather than just attention on facilities and provisions, the initial focus, the emphasis has moved forward to also valuing customers’ perceptions and their appreciation of the service.

White and Friendly (2012) investigated Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand and echoed Tayler’s (2011) findings. They concluded that early childhood education and care was seen as a solution (if only partial) to “school readiness, child poverty, income and gender inequality, women's labor market participation, and population decline” (White & Friendly, 2012, p. 294). Jenkins (2014, p. 147) examined early childhood education development programs from an economic perspective, noting “Early childhood development (ECD) is an often unrecognized but critically important topic for economic development”. Jenkins (2014) described three effective longitudinal early childhood education intervention programs for disadvantaged children: The Chicago Child Parent Centers program resulted in “children in the intervention group” displaying “a higher rate of high school completion, more years of completed education, lower rates of juvenile arrest and school dropout” (p. 148); The Abecedarian study similarly “found lower levels of grade retention and high school dropout, reduced placement in special education, and higher rates of attending a 4-year college” (p.148); and for children

in the Perry Preschool Project, “the program produced lasting effects through age 40 on employment rates and earnings and substantially reduced adult poverty rates and the likelihood of arrest” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 148). With possible results such as these in view, the attraction for governments to subtly ease restrictions and increase provisions is obvious. There is a need to investigate whether this discrepancy between the provision of high quality ECEC and the possibility of an easing of restrictions is an area of conflict or ethical dilemma for Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres.

The Early Childhood Education sector in Australia has experienced unprecedented growth, change and reformation on a national and individual facility level over recent years, moving from a comparatively un-regulated, fragmented sector to an increasingly governed area of education (Rodd, 2013). The effect of this revolution on leaders and leadership behaviours in ECEC centres has been, and continues to be, substantial in areas such as accountability, recruitment and qualifications of staff, policy development and organisation (Rodd, 2013). For these reasons research on early childhood education and care, and particularly its leadership practices, is vital (Rodd, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2012). Of equal importance in investigating Christian early childhood educational leadership is the nexus between this highly governed section of the educational field and the leadership beliefs and practices that leaders in Christian ECECs bring to their work.

The next section of this chapter provides an introduction to leadership in a generic sense. The actual concept of leadership and tracing its development in theory and practice, across a range of contexts through to the present day, is explored.

2.4 Leadership

The current study focuses on the leadership practices of Directors/Leaders in Christian early childhood education and care settings and so, as part of the foundation for leadership research, this section of the literature review addresses leadership in a generic sense. Further, even though the ultimate focus of this thesis is about exploring a type of leadership within a particular educational setting, universal leadership pre-dates educational leadership and in fact underpins it.

The literature is awash with theories of leadership, many of which are extensions of an earlier theory and then extensions of that again (Daft, 2018; Northouse, 2013; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Yukl, 2010). However, from these various identified leadership practices many leaders today use a flexible eclectic approach; consequently, an understanding of the

basis for their practice and its composition may provide a useful insight into the daily work of early childhood education leaders in Christian settings.

Regarding leadership, Bass (2008, p. 25) states: “In industrial, educational, and military settings, and in most social movements, leadership plays a critical, if not the most critical role*”.* Elaborating on this description, Manning and Curtis (2012, p. 1) comment that: “the leadership process has been central to human interaction since the dawn of society”, mentioning its importance in political history and government, social conscience; and the role of military leaders and philosophers who have helped to shape civilisation through the centuries.

However, in their initial ‘Review of Leadership Theory and Competency Frameworks’ Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, and Dennison (2003), observed: “Leadership is a complex process and we have serious reservations over the extent to which a set of standards, qualities or competencies can ever fully capture the nature of what makes some leaders/organisations successful and others unsuccessful” (p. 5). This statement articulates what many aspiring leaders and employees have realised for some time, i.e., that despite its acknowledged importance in many fields of endeavour, there is an element of the unknown within the concept and practice of leadership. Lord, Jefferson, Klass, Nowak and Thomas (2013) also note this issue: *“*Leadership as a subject has been extensively researched. Despite this, it remains a term that defies easy definition and those definitions which do exist are highly contested*”* (2013, p. 180). Yukl (2010, p. 2) provides an insightful comment: “Researchers usually define leadership according to their individual perspectives and the aspects of the phenomenon of most interest to them”, which may explain some of the multiplicity of the leadership phenomenon. Yukl then goes on to note that while leadership has been an appealing topic of research for many writers, addressing a wide variety of perspectives and styles of leadership, the result has been a very large body of research on the topic that has not precisely defined or clarified the phenomenon (Yukl, 2010, p. 12). Various attempts have been made to categorise or organise this literature such as by focussing on the leader, or the followers or the characteristics of the situation. The following figure (2.1) illustrates the theoretical progression of this leadership research and the way that various theoretical leadership proponents are grouped with others displaying a similar approach.

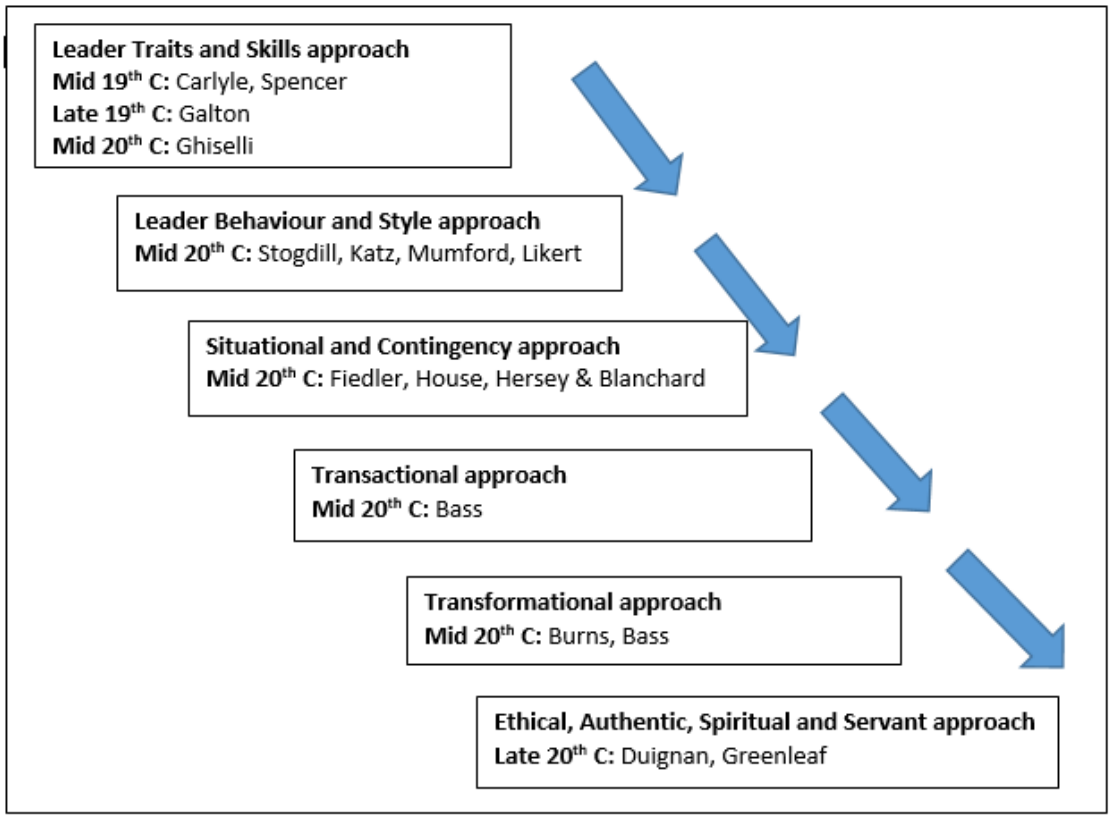


Figure 2. 1

Progression of generic leadership characteristics research

From Figure 2.1 it should not be understood that one approach to leadership is subsumed by the next or that one research focus cancels out any of the previous ones. In reality, while each of these aspects of leadership has emerged, developed and been explored by researchers there is also a great degree of overlap and integration at any one time. In addition, individual practitioners tend to use varying approaches that mesh with their situation and unique personalities in an eclectic approach. Nor should it be understood that these are the only approaches to leadership that have existed. However, the groups in Figure 2.1 are the main groups within business practice and to a certain extent, educational practice over the last one hundred and fifty years. Daft (2018, p. 5) comments that "the concept of leadership will continue to develop" which reminds us that as our society changes over time so the way that leaders approach their roles also has to accommodate societal requirements and expectations. Hesselbein (as cited in Daft, 2018, p. 7) adds: "organizations have to keep changing and adapting when it's necessary". This progression of leadership research,

however, has received considerable attention within the field of education and will be discussed further in the educational leadership section.

Also from Figure 2. 1, it can be seen that most contemporary leadership research began by examining the leader himself and at a time when leadership was seen to be a role exclusively practised by men. Early consideration of, and research into, leadership is generally accepted as beginning with the work of Thomas Carlyle, a philosopher, historian and writer in the mid nineteenth century, who believed that leaders were 'born' and not 'made' (Australian Public Service [APS], 2013). This theory, which came to be known as 'the Great Man Theory' focussed on the personal characteristics of the leader, citing the leadership attributes of examples such as Oliver Cromwell and Napoleon. However, a contemporary of Carlyle's, Herbert Spencer rejected this theory as too simplistic. Spencer believed that certain leaders came to prominence as a result of the complex interaction of many factors, including their racial and social backgrounds, which had contributed to their development (Northouse, 2013).

The 'Great Man Theory' was considered to be unscientific, and subsequently Carlyle's writings were taken further and the concepts expanded by Francis Galton (Aubert-Marson, 2009), who even investigated certain leaders' backgrounds and relatives on the premise that 'great men' would have similarly eminent relatives; further, that they would exhibit particular traits that constituted excellent leadership traits. These 'leadership trait' theories were extensively investigated and persisted from the late eighteen hundreds into the mid-twentieth century and to a certain extent, beyond. For example, a major study of leadership traits of over 300 managers from 90 different businesses was conducted by Edwin Ghiselli and published in 1971 (Day & Antonakis, 2012). The study identified six traits deemed to be essential for effective leadership: the need for achievement, intelligence, decisiveness, self-confidence, initiative, and supervisory ability. Similarly, Khan (2013) notes that most of the lists of traits published by researchers during this time commonly contained traits of integrity, drive, intelligence, and sociability.

However, by the mid-20th century trait theory was rejected by Stogdill and other researchers on the basis that the theory did not account for situational differences (Zaccaro, 2007). Stogdill considered not only the effects of situational factors external to the actual leader, such as circumstances that demanded particular skills of the leader, but also the characteristics of the leader and those of the followers, together with the influence and

relationships of each upon the other (APS, 2013). This latter perspective was to feature prominently in later leadership research and theory. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that some outstanding leadership traits, including charismatic traits, have gained a legitimate place in the complexity that is leadership, for the outstanding contribution of leaders with these qualities, which have contributed to their professional effectiveness, cannot be denied (Zaccaro, 2007).

Leadership research then moved to examining the actual behaviour of the leader rather than just his traits or characteristics which were considered to be fixed. This signalled a clear change of perception, from leaders born, by virtue of their outstanding, innate characteristics, to leaders able to be *made* or *developed*, by means of practising skills and behaviours that were deemed to be effective leadership actions. The major proponent of this approach was Robert Katz, who, stemming from his own research and observation, published an article in the Harvard Business Review in 1955 entitled: "Skills of an Effective Administrator" (Katz, 1955). Katz proposed three skills necessary for effective administration. These were: technical (the ability to use the tools relevant to that particular leadership role such as information communication technology); human (the ability to be able to interact effectively with people – peers, subordinates and superiors); and conceptual skills (the creation, understanding, development and implementation of ideas), which were seen to be quite different from traits or innate characteristics of leaders. Katz (1955) noted that all three skills were necessary at various levels within an organisation, but technical requirements would likely be reduced at upper levels of leadership, while conceptual skills might be less necessary at the lowest levels.

In later years Michael Mumford and his colleagues extended the skills approach of Katz by examining the relationship between the leader's skills and his/her performance (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding et al., 2000), developing a more complex model. Central to this model were effective leadership skills: problem solving skills, social judgement skills and knowledge. The individual still needed to have general cognitive ability, knowledge from experience (termed crystallized cognitive ability by Mumford's team), motivation and a suitable personality, as well as effective problem solving and performance skills (Mumford et al., 2000). However, career experiences and both internal and external environmental influences were also included as elements that could have a major effect on the leader's performance, but are likely to be beyond the control of that individual (Northouse, 2013).

While still focussed on the leader and labelled as the ‘style’ approach to describing leadership (Northouse, 2013), the leader’s behaviours were further studied and found to fall into two broad dimensions: a focus on people or a focus on tasks. Research on this aspect of leadership was conducted by Rensis Likert at Michigan State University in the late 1940s. Following widespread interviews with managers and employees the study found that two aspects emerged: job-centred leadership behaviour and employee-centred leadership behaviour. Likert contended that the employee-centred approach was more effective. Around the same time, Ohio State University researchers were conducting similar research with similar results which they termed: initiating structure behaviour and consideration behaviour – the main difference being that the Ohio researchers did not interpret the behaviour (Northouse, 2013, p.76). The style approach is still widely used in training and helping leaders to diagnose the balance within their leadership approach. Most criticisms relate to the lack of substantiating research between the actions and outcomes; the main conclusion being that considerate leaders have happier employees (Northouse, 2013, p. 85).

Another group of theories places a greater emphasis on relational and situational contexts. These include interactionist or contingency theories which focus on the interaction between the leader, with particular qualities, and the followers with their qualities, within certain situational contexts (Thomas & Thomas, 2011). Within this group are the contingency theory (the leader’s adaptability to the task or group) (Rodd, 2013), the path-goal theory (the leader’s ability to raise motivation in the group, developed by Robert House), and the situational (the leader’s ability to adapt the situation) that further contribute to a better understanding of what constitutes leadership (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). Fiedler’s contingency theory with its focus on the need for alignment of the group or task with the leader’s personal leadership style, in order to be effective, has been criticised for its perceived lack of allowance for flexibility in the leadership. However, this theory has moved the understanding of leadership from a focus on the leader and his/her behaviours to the context in which the leader operates and the link between them. It allows that all leaders may not be perfect in every situation but does not explain why some are effective in particular situations; nor does it suggest solutions when there is a clear mismatch between the leader and the situation (Northouse, 2013).

Within this interactional group, situational leadership theory, such as that of Hersey and Blanchard (APS, 2013) proposes that effective leadership is more likely to result from an alignment of the leader’s approach with the experience and maturity of the follower or

employee. Thus, a leader might be more directional in his/her approach with an inexperienced employee, but could then adopt a coaching stance with an experienced employee; this could even extend to delegation where appropriate, depending on the situation.

Two interactional leadership approaches that are sometimes linked and even used interchangeably by leaders are transactional and transformational. Transactional refers to the concept of an agreement or an exchange, the most basic of which would be payment in return for work. By contrast, a transformational approach depicts the leader convincing the employees of the value of the task and its potential outcomes so that they are motivated to perform beyond expectations and beyond self-interest. Bass (2008) suggests that transformational approaches can supplement and elevate transactional approaches and, in some cases, have been used interchangeably by leaders such as Presidents John F. Kennedy or Abraham Lincoln. The negative concerns around these two theories are that transactional leadership approaches relate to a very basic level; that is to say, if an employee performs as required then an agreed reward of some sort is forthcoming, but this performance frequently does not progress to higher level thinking or additional voluntary effort. Transformational, on the other hand, does attempt to motivate workers to perform at a higher level and with a degree of personal commitment. The drawback of this approach is that when managed by a skilful, unprincipled leader, employees may be manipulated or even deceived into performing beyond expectations, to their own disadvantage. However, Best (2011) very sagely notes:

> The expectation is that by attending to the motivational needs of followers, better outcomes are likely to ensue. However, despite the soundness of this premise, translating these theories into practices that deliver consistently superior results remains a challenge for most practitioners. (p. 14)

In 2006 Bolden and Gosling elaborated on the observations from their earlier research as they described “numerous studies that reveal individual leaders achieving similar results via different approaches and leaders managing to be successful despite significant personal flaws” (2006, p. 150). They then went on to warn against a reliance on measures of competence as a distraction from relational aspects of the leadership role which they felt could inhibit a more inclusive leadership approach (Bolden & Gosling, 2006, p. 159). Probert and Turnbull-James (2011) even describe leadership development as in crisis because of a dominance by and dependence on, objective measurable aspects of leadership such as competence, while down-playing the importance of relational aspects. Certainly, leadership

definitions abound and as the complexities of leadership have developed so have the theories and frameworks within which they operate.

Perceptively, Aubrey, Godfrey and Harris (2012) point out that most of these leadership styles have emerged from the 20th century or earlier, and from a top-down, bureaucratic, male-dominated model at that. They posit that a knowledge-oriented economy such as exists in today's twenty-first century, in a constantly changing global environment, needs a leadership approach typified by "a complex interactive dynamic from which adaptive outcomes, for example, learning, innovation and adaptability, emerge" (Aubrey et al., 2012, p. 7). Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that these leadership practices are only the prerogative of the twenty-first century as this astute observation from Landis, Hill and Harvey (2014) about one of the earliest known leaders illustrates:

> Time and again, Moses demonstrated leadership traits that are highly prized today. Because we live in the information age, where 'facts' evolve daily and the global marketplace is constantly shifting beneath our feet, the skills Moses used to lead his people through the wilderness are extremely relevant: being flexible, thinking quickly, sustaining the confidence of your people in uncertain times, and creating rules that work for individuals from widely diverse backgrounds. (p. 97)

Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) perceives the changes somewhat differently, commenting that leadership theories focussing on traits, practices, and situations were appropriate in an industrial time when leaders were expected to achieve production and efficiency. The newer ways of leading within today's complex, technological, knowledge-based society are moving towards a more principle-centred leadership approach characterised by co-operation, values, moral purposes, and leaders who empower followers towards self-fulfilment. Similarly, Ancona (2012) describes the effects of the global changes currently influencing today's business world as 'massive', with the move from command and control to that of collaboration and teamwork.

Again, the question of 'what is leadership?' is a reminder that although various people in positions of authority may possess excellent traits and display outstanding natural talents, and although they may practise a wide variety of skills, effective leaders appear to have a common factor of being able to motivate some people to follow the particular course of action which they espouse. Without this ability to attract followers and influence their actions, these leaders would not function as leaders (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). However, the question arises whether leadership is in fact a 'position' or a 'practice'; perhaps it can be both.

Within the concept of adaptive leadership, Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009, p. 9) define leadership as a practice in this comment: “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive”. While Heifetz et al., (2009) define adaptive leadership as a distributed leadership approach, that is, able to be shared across different levels within an organisation, they still view leadership and management as two separate but essential and interlinked entities. Management is seen as dealing with the intensity of complex, routine matters, while leadership requires the ability to adapt and lead change in response to difficult challenges (APS, 2013). Heifetz et al., (2009) suggest that there are three central aspects of adaptive leadership: firstly, observing and gathering data about the context, then the formation of initial, tentative hypotheses, progressing finally to the development of possible solutions. Heifetz et al. did not perceive this approach as a particularly easy or comfortable style of leadership and later commented: “Leadership, when seen in this light, requires a learning strategy … the adaptive demands of our time require leaders who take responsibility without waiting for revelation or request. One can lead with no more than a question in hand” (Heifetz & Laurie, 2011, p. 78). It should be noted that Heifetz and Laurie were not advocating for this to be the only leadership approach, or that it should be used all the time, but rather that this approach was a useful tool in times of challenge and necessary change.

There is also a totally different perspective on leadership, which depicts leaders using their position to dominate others and to punish unsatisfactory performance by employees. Within certain organisations such as the military, this is more likely to occur than in the average business in Australia where the ability to leave is much less complicated. Yukl (2010, p. 159) notes that within the last two hundred years there has been a decline in legitimate coercion and mentions the earlier right of managers to terminate staff, and of seafaring captains who could apply the lash to indolent sailors.

Woestman and Wasonga (2015) researched ‘the dark side’ of school leadership, finding that although there was a plethora of research on the positive aspects of leadership, there was comparatively little on the negative aspects. These authors (p. 148) contend that these negative behaviours are not just a lack of positive leadership qualities but rather they are actually specific, overt, harmful activities which may be “verbal or nonverbal, direct or indirect” and that directly affect the employees to whom they are directed. Woestman and Wasonga (2015) found that these damaging actions affect both the attitudes and the work performance of those employees to a deleterious extent, resulting in fear, anxiety, depression and other health issues.

The success, or not, of a bullying or coercive approach today greatly depends on the willingness and strength of the individual to refuse to be intimidated or to even retaliate by formal or informal means (Johnson, 2009). Day and Antonakis (2012, p. 189) describe this trait of power-plays and bullying as one of the leadership costs, explaining that most leadership traits have their 'bright' sides or benefits as well as the alternative, their 'dark' sides or costs. While in Australia a bullying approach may be ostensibly tempered by industrial protection such as the Fair Work Act (2009), nevertheless the reality is that only a small percentage of perpetrators actually face negative consequences for their actions (Australian Public Service Commission [APSC], 2011). Dollard, Bailey, McLinton, Richards, McTernan, Taylor, and Bond (2012) investigated workplace bullying in Australia and found that 6.8% of the working population had recently been bullied or still were; given the complexity of the project the researchers considered this a 'conservative' estimate. Certainly the 'dark side' of leadership is still functioning. Northouse (2013, p. 11), on the other hand, reminds the reader of his definition of leadership as "someone who influences a group of individuals towards a common goal" and therefore discounts coercive leaders who have existed throughout history.

Yukl (2010, p. 151) describes influence as "the essence of leadership", and while the issue of power in leadership is closely linked with the opportunity to influence someone, in many instances this is a legitimate role, such as the use of expert power or positional power. Nevertheless, the reality is that some leaders do use coercive power and influence or drive groups towards a goal that may not be what they really want.

"The changing nature of work and society, it is argued, may demand new approaches that encourage a more collective and emergent view of leadership and leadership development and of sharing the role of "leader" more widely within organisations" (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014, p. 93). Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014, p. 93) summarise this as the "maximization of human potential within an organisation". Terms such as 'density of leadership' popular in the 1990s have given way to the currently emerging terminology of 'distributed leadership' or 'shared leadership'. Wassenaar and Pearce (2012) describe the change towards shared leadership as a move from the traditional concept of leadership - the hierarchical model, to a 'dynamic social process' (2012, p. 363). In fact, they use the analogy of leadership as being no longer in one person's hands but more exactly as "in the group's arms as they move together toward common objectives" (2012, p. 364). However, Hairon and Goh (2015, p. 694) note that the exact definition of the term 'distributed leadership' may be

perceived as ‘unclear’ for it has been used by many writers in the field of leadership interchangeably with shared leadership, delegated leadership and democratic leadership. Distributed leadership is a term predominantly used within education and will be dealt with in greater detail in the next section.

Despite these directional changes and variances in style over the years, emerging from within the field of leadership are many calls for greater moral and spiritual leadership. In 2003 Michael Fullan referred to “principled behaviour connected to something greater than ourselves that relates to human and social development” (p. 1). This theme has been promoted by many leadership authorities and the reasons for this emergence are fairly obvious as summarized by John Ragozzine cited in Hester and Killian (2008):

> Ours is an age of inordinate moral confusion. Every day’s headlines report big-picture dilemmas with no clear solution: international terrorism, regional warfare, global warming, energy shortages, corporate scandals, nuclear proliferation, and endemic corruption. At a more granular level, this bewilderment appears in a litany of national and local ethical lapses, where values are subverted, integrity is abandoned, and moral courage is given short shrift. (p. 1)

Patrick Duignan (2012) reinforces the reality of these comments when he says:

> Unfortunately, too many leaders, especially those in politics and the business world have not lived up to such expectations in recent times. Many in our communities doubt the credibility, especially with regard to ethical and moral behaviour, of leaders of many of our public and private institutions. There is a growing public chorus demanding ethical and authentic leadership. (p. 6)

Another group of leadership behaviours or theories attempt to address these issues. These include ethical leadership, authentic leadership, spiritual leadership and servant leadership (Yukl, 2010). The number of voices calling for ethical leadership is increasing as scandal after scandal is aired in the tabloids, but where does ethical leadership come from? Kouzes and Posner (2008) maintain that our behaviours come from the ‘inside out’, from the values we believe in, passionately. Authenticity in leadership necessitates having its base within the leader’s core beliefs and values. According to Kouzes and Posner (2008), knowing those core beliefs and values, and more importantly, reviewing and refining them comes about by self-examination and reflection. These authors go on to explain why it is important to ‘know’ what we believe and why we believe it: “Clarity of personal values matters greatly to our feeling motivated, creative, and committed to our workplaces. When we’re clear about our personal values, we feel empowered, ready and prepared to take action” (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 6). Kouzes and Posner are not the only authors emphasising core values.

Duignan and Cannon (2011), commenting on the complexity of educational leadership, note: "when all seems to be in constant crisis and when strategic direction seems to be swamped by short-term emergencies, leaders need to focus on core values and moral purpose" (p. 26).

Greenbaum, Quade and Bonner (2015), while acknowledging the increasing calls for ethical behaviours from leaders as well as the accepted benefits from ethical leadership, conducted a study to explore the reasons for ethical impediments that might influence leaders to conduct their business in an amoral manner. This 'amoral' or ethically neutral (but not illegal) behaviour has been described as: "a self-centred leader who lacks ethical awareness and cares mostly about himself or herself and the organisation's bottom line rather than other people" (Greenbaum et al., 2015, p. 3). Greenbaum et al., (2015) posit that the difference between how a leader views him/herself and adherents' perceptions may be due to a lack of communication on the part of the leader. Their research found that ethical leaders endorse and actively communicate the importance of ethics, also displaying it in their behaviour and practices. Conversely, the leader who does not actively promote ethical practices or communicate the importance of that perspective may be judged critically by employees despite good intentions and a personal view of their own practices as ethical. Greenbaum et al., (2015, p. 7) go on to also note that two personal goals are usual for most people working in organisations. These are the desire to financially support themselves and their families, and the desire to work towards harmonious relationships with their fellow employees.

However, research by Fiske, Cuddy and Glick (2007) found that two dimensions underlie most people's perceptions of others – warmth and competence. Further, 'warmth' was associated with 'moral' and those judged to be warm and moral were also perceived to be less competent and less powerful. Herein can lie the difficulty for some leaders who do not wish to be considered as less competent, or less powerful and may therefore be less overt in their support of ethical behaviour lest they be perceived as weak.

Within this context a very valid observation is made by Perryer and Scott-Ladd (2014) who, while also noting the call for increased ethical behaviours in organisations, suggest that the distinction between following the 'letter of the law' against following the 'spirit of the law' is particularly evident with regard to leadership behaviours in organisations. They go on to note that although some unsuccessful organisations have all the required legalities in place such as audits, reconciliation checks and formal processes, they lack what Perryer and Scott-Ladd (2014, p. 123) term the 'soft controls' of managerial values and practices that require leaders to act with honesty and honour. These authors further

comment that these soft controls are subjective in nature and are rarely scrutinised by organisations or even supervisory bodies (Perryer & Scott-Ladd, 2014).

So what then is authentic leadership? Northouse (2013) describes authentic leadership as one of the newest leadership theories; its focus is on the authenticity – the genuineness of the leader. Smith, Bhindi, Hansen, Riley and Rall (2008) commented on the newly emerging trend of 'authentic leadership' which does have similarities with Christian leadership:

> It is not dependent upon the position, power or authority of the leader but upon the recognised integrity and credibility of the leader overtime. Thus authentic leadership is about the integrity of the leader and the uncompromising adherence to a high moral code or ethical standard of conduct. (p. 7)

When considering the unethical behaviours outlined previously with which people are all too familiar, it is easy to see why authentic leadership might be very appealing, even viewed as a panacea for these problems. Northouse (2013) proposes two angles from which to understand authentic leadership. First, the intrapersonal perspective on authentic leadership, or what is going on in the leader's head; which also parallels the earlier comments by Kouzes and Posner (2008). The second angle is the interpersonal perspective which describes the relational quality that exists and is developed reciprocally between the leader and followers. Yukl (2010, p. 424) describes authentic leaders as having a "strong self-awareness about their values, beliefs, emotions, self-identities and abilities" as well as: "positive core values such as honesty, altruism, kindness, fairness, accountability and optimism." Northouse (2013) cites research into authentic leadership by Bill George (2003) who identified five dimensions of authentic leadership together with relevant characteristics as displayed in Figure 2.2.



Figure 2. 2

Dimensions and characteristics of authentic leadership (adapted from: Yukl, 2010; Northouse, 2013).

Additionally, Walker and Shuangye (2007) identify another important aspect of authentic leadership, that is, the ongoing interaction between the leader and his/her learning and understanding of the needs of students, staff and/or community, particularly in an intercultural context. Within this relational category of leadership theories is the Servant Leadership approach which is perhaps the most closely aligned theory with a Christian leadership ethic, first described by Robert Greenleaf in 1977 who has been designated as the 'grandfather' of servant leadership (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Epitomised by some of the world's greatest humanitarian leaders such as Mother Theresa and Gandhi, the core belief of servant leadership is that of serving others, based on Jesus Christ's example of the ultimate in service to others (Parris & Peachey, 2013). While Greenleaf did not specifically link his theory with the life of Jesus Christ or leave a clear definition of servant leadership, he did emphasise that the well-being of staff, their health, autonomy and the development of their own desire to dispense with self-interest in order to serve was the ultimate goal (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015) also acknowledged that due to the lack of an empirically authenticated definition of servant leadership many different versions of this theory have developed from various researchers and writers suggesting a variety of different behaviours. This difficulty, together with the corresponding lack of organisational detail about successful operation, has limited its actual implementation.

In developing the Servant Leadership Survey-questionnaire, van Dierendonck together with Nuitjen (2011) listed a range of eight attributes: standing back, forgiveness, courage, empowerment, accountability, authenticity, humility, and stewardship. Van Dierendonck (2011, p. 1232) then went on to synthesize these into six key characteristics of servant leadership: "Servant-leaders empower and develop people; they show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and are stewards who work for the good of the whole". These characteristics of the servant-leader are displayed diagrammatically in Figure 2.3.



Figure 2. 3
Dimensions and characteristics of the Servant Leader (adapted from: van Dierendonck, 2011).

The difficulties associated with the servant leadership approach relate to the dilemmas in which the leader may find him/herself if a need to downsize or outsource in order for the organisation to remain financially viable, arises. In this situation the conflict is between the welfare of the employees, a vital priority within this theory, and the leader's own career or even the future of the organisation. Yukl (2010, p. 421) comments that this possible impasse may be the reason why the theory is somewhat vague in this type of situation; further, that the servant leadership approach may be more suited for humanitarian, religious or other

organisations where profitability is not the imperative. However, Sun (2013) has investigated servant leadership from a slightly different perspective. He contends that the critical factor is the way that leaders view themselves and has identified four attributes that contribute to their 'self-identity'. The first is 'calling', which Sun (2013) defines as a vocation to be of service and which is "deeply spiritual and provides purpose to life" (p. 547). The second attribute is humility, "a stable attribute that orients the leader to consider others above self" (p. 547). Empathy is the third attribute that Sun identifies as a moral attribute with the ability to understand the real position of others; finally, the fourth attribute is "a form of love which is selfless and unconditional. It is a type of love referred to as agape love and is deeply spiritual" (Sun, 2013, p. 547).

Spiritual leadership is another approach in which the leader focusses on the employee's desire for a greater relevance and meaning in his/her work. Johnson (2009, p. 120) notes the "recent explosion of interest in spirituality in the workplace…the increasing number of academics who are studying spiritual values, practices and organisational performance". He then cites more than six academic journals that have published whole editions on the subject. Two aspects are critical to spiritual leadership. First, the creation of a vision that transcends the everyday and translates into a calling, a sense of high moral purpose and making a difference which leads to giving life and work, meaning. The second aspect is acceptance and valuing within the workplace, a sense of membership, fellowship and altruistic appreciation. Fry (2003) suggests that "religion usually involves spirituality, but spirituality does not need religion to be meaningful" (as cited in Yukl, 2010, p. 422). Spiritual leadership is not aligned with any particular faith tradition or denomination although within a religious organisation or setting, spiritual leadership may be more comfortable for both leaders and followers. However, as with servant leadership, specific processes are not detailed in the theory (Yukl, 2010) which makes its applicability and implementation more challenging.

This section has considered leadership in general terms, and certainly leadership behaviours and styles have changed over the years. Further, in today's complex and rapidly changing world the 'ideal' approach to leadership is not easily achieved or even defined. Consideration of leadership within an educational context, takes these leadership issues to a new level with ever increasing demands from government, society and parents coupled with the high duty of care expected for students. The focus of this research project is leadership within the context of CECEC centres, and so from consideration of leadership in a general

sense the attention now turns to leadership within the early childhood education field as discussed in the next section.

2.5 Early Childhood Education Leadership

Echoing the comments made by many researchers in the field of early childhood education Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow (2007) comment:

> The context of early childhood is continually changing and becoming increasingly complex. Roles are changing and expanding. Old solutions to issues and problems do not always work. These 'change challenges' suggest a real imperative for the field to develop new and robust frameworks for leadership that can support people in facing, grappling with, initiating and facilitating change rather than simply reacting. (p. 232)

In addition to the complexities and changes that are currently shaping early childhood education (Sims et al., 2018), the field of early childhood educational leadership is unique for the following three reasons: the employed personnel in ECEC centres are predominantly female (Hard & Jonsdottir, 2013), the majority having a lower level of qualifications than teachers (Waniganayake et al., 2012), and the students are very young, from birth to age five thus increasing both the level and the duty of care required from both staff and administrators (Rodd, 2013). Within ECEC centres the relationship between the service and its staff members and the families is close and often intense as parents are aware of the vulnerability of their little ones; and for many parents this is the first time they have given their children into the care of an outside-the-home agency. Further, the positive interactions within the family-staff relationship are particularly critical to the welfare and development of very young children (Jones & Pound, 2008; Whalley, 2008).

A distinguishing feature of early childhood education leadership research has found that (a) many experienced early childhood education administrators do not perceive themselves as 'leaders' (Rodd, 2013) but simply as part of a 'team'; (b) many are not confident in publicly advocating for Early Childhood Education (Osgood 2004); and (c) many early childhood educators find themselves in a leadership position with little or no professional development in leadership and management (Aubrey, 2011; Waniganayake et al., 2012; Fenech, 2013). The cause of some aspects of this last issue is highly likely to be contextual. ECECs tend to be small with correspondingly small staff numbers, many of whom work shifts and are not qualified teachers. Therefore, the director/leader frequently has the dual role of both teacher and administrator, working alongside, but also directing staff (Hallett, 2013) and will probably tend to relate more easily to the team member role.

In addition, the gender stereotypes of men with strong leadership behaviours and women with caring, nurturing, supportive roles (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallett, 2014) can provide role-confusion for some early-years leaders. The traditional female values of care and support are often incompatible with the widely accepted perceptions of successful leadership behaviours (Hard & Jonsdottir, 2013). As the importance of early childhood education has been more widely recognised over the last few decades, there is an emerging change towards leadership in this sector (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallett, 2014). McDowall and Murray (2012) suggest that leaders in the early years should merge both feminine and masculine leadership approaches; while Chrisholm (2001) advocates for a "strong woman" approach which incorporates "being nurturing, democratic and assertive" (p. 398).

Within early childhood education and care remuneration is poor and there is a high turnover rate of staff (Ang, 2011; Waniganayake et al., 2012). Fenech (2013) noted that a third of ECEC staff in Australia leave the sector every year, while Graham's research (2018) highlights low wages as the main contributor. Thus, for educational leaders within this sector of education the challenges are quite unique.

Two additional research findings are extremely important for pre-service teachers studying in the Early Childhood area. From January 2013, new federal government mandates required an increased presence of qualified teachers in ECEC centres therefore the current shortage of qualified early childhood teachers means that those with university qualifications are more likely to be fast-tracked into Director/Leader positions in this rapidly expanding sector (Waniganayake et al., 2012). These findings demonstrate the importance of leadership knowledge, skills and understandings for graduating early childhood pre-service teachers. The importance of these attributes has been emphasised through a concerted drive by both federal and state governments to raise the status and quality of early childhood education in curriculum, facilities, staffing and qualifications (Waniganayake et al., 2012).

It is obvious from all of this information that leadership within early childhood education has many factors that differentiate it from other educational sectors. Further, many of these factors greatly increase the complexity of the leadership role; however, research has demonstrated again and again that the leadership role within early childhood education and care is critical to the development and future success of very young children. Jorde-Bloom (2005) comments that: "Good leadership is one of the strongest predictors of high-quality early childhood programming" (p. 1). Confirming this perspective on the importance of early childhood education leadership to young children's development Rodd (2013, p. 33) also

notes: “effective leadership is associated with quality early childhood education service provision”, although she also goes on to observe: “Leadership remains an enigma”. This difficulty in finding a precise early childhood education leadership definition is echoed by Hujala (2013): “Although EC leadership is understood as a key issue for improving quality, in practice it is still a quite indistinguishable phenomenon” (p. 48). The introduction to ‘Researching Leadership in Early Childhood Education’ (2013), attempts to provide an explanation: “Leadership is not easily dissected and understood because it is essentially a holistic, multidimensional, multi-layered phenomenon that is embedded in the context in which it is enacted” (Hujala, Waniganayake, & Rodd, 2013, p. 29). These comments neatly sum up the complexity that is leadership; one size does not fit everyone, nor, as these authors note, is every situation the same.

Ang (2011) noted that the results of a research study undertaken by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2008) into the importance of early years leadership revealed that minimal staff turnovers and the sharing of vision and pedagogical practices were characteristic of effective preschool settings, led by effective leaders. Ang (2011) also conducted her own research in the United Kingdom, investigating the perceptions of 359 early childhood education leaders about leadership, together with the impact of their professional development training in leadership from the National College of Leadership. Three main topics arose from the research. The first was that these participants, all leaders in ECEC centres, perceived the ‘integrated, multi-agency’ approach as a significant aspect of their role. This need to be able to successfully work across and with, a variety of external agencies and stakeholders, was seen as vital to the success of their centres as it greatly broadened their understanding and ability to collaborate successfully for the benefit of the children, staff and parents. A second important result from Ang’s (2011) research was the greatly increased understanding of the importance of reflective learning and practice. Participants commented that they found this deliberate activity empowering for themselves and that it enabled them to be more empowering for their staff teams. The third and final issue that arose from this study was the perennial problem of status and pay with participants noting, somewhat unhappily, that the lack of status and inadequate pay scales within the early childhood education sector remained an ongoing deterrent to leadership aspirations (Ang, 2011).

While high-quality early childhood education has been established as critically important to the holistic development of young children, it has also been perceived as the solution to many social problems including child poverty, low income, gender inequality and

women's labor market participation (White & Friendly, 2012). For many working within this sector, early childhood education has also been seen as a vehicle for implementing social justice (Jenkins, 2014). Social justice in the early childhood education and care context is about providing young children and their families with the opportunities and support to develop a life with better living standards, improved educational opportunities and achievements, and a sense of their own intrinsic value. Fenech (2013) notes: "children who have access to quality ECEC will be better equipped to gain higher qualifications and skills later in life" (p. 89). However, it must be noted that Woods, Mackenzie, and Wong (2013) point out that social justice has been used to support reductionist policies in ways that do not always give precedence to the most vulnerable children's needs. In fact, these authors comment that: "The diversity of ways in which 'social justice' as a term is used has resulted in a situation where the concept is under threat of being everything and nothing at all" (p. 285).

An important aspect of leadership within Early Childhood Education is the ability to manage dilemmas (Reynolds, 2011). Shared values and understandings could diminish leadership dilemmas in ECEC centres. However, staff members may have different philosophical and worldview perspectives from the Director/Leader. A leadership dilemma develops when the leader must adhere to organisational expectations while preserving constructive working relationships with staff members (Cardno & Reynolds, 2009). Therefore, it is vital that the leader communicates a clear understanding of expectations of staff members by example, by oral communication, and in writing through policy and written directives. It is essential that where there is a difference of opinion the leader must listen, consider the atmosphere and be able to communicate valid, evidence-based reasons for his/her perspective (Reynolds, 2011). The leader needs to be able to debate and discuss the dilemma, persuade with logic and policy or even legislation, but do so collaboratively with trust rather than in a defensive, controlling manner.

Waniganayake (2011) observed that workplace bullying is rare within the early childhood education sector. However, Hard's (2006) research found that "despite the prevailing ethos of niceness and team work within the early childhood education sector there was evidence of a 'culture of horizontal violence' where some educators were made to suffer at the hands of others who were more powerful" (cited in Waniganayake et al., 2012, p. 14). In 2013 Hard and Jonsdottir together published their research on early childhood education leadership based on studies they had individually conducted in Australia and Iceland

respectively, addressing issues of conflict. This highly feminised educational sector has been described by some as a 'pink ghetto' (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003) and even possessing a culture of 'niceness'. However, Hard and Jonsdottir (2013) also found within the ethic of care and the discourse of 'niceness' an avoidance of argument, silencing of debate, micro politics and even horizontal violence existed. Horizontal violence is here described as psychological harassment rather than physical abuse, verbal abuse, criticism and intimidation (Hard & Jonsdottir, 2013). Consequently, the need for early childhood education leaders to possess the ability to anticipate and forestall issues by adroit skills and perceptive inter-personal communication and relationships, is vital. In addition, the capacity to develop a strong culture of collaboration and respect, which has been advocated within the early childhood education literature, will greatly assist in preventing negative interactions from arising.

As noted, the majority of employees in ECEC centres are women (Rodd, 2006), but, the majority of leaders are as well. Why is this preponderance of female leaders in early childhood education and care significant? The significance lies in the style of leadership that research tells us women typically demonstrate. As Eagly and Carli (2003) note, leadership expectations and organisations themselves have continued to change to the point where collaborative, communicative and empowering practices in leadership are perceived as both appropriate and desirable. These characteristics were found to be predominant for females in a meta-analysis of leadership styles (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

While there is considerable research into early childhood education, there is far less on the topic of leadership in early childhood education as it attracts few researchers (Bush, 2012; Fenech, 2013; Rodd, 2013). Stamopoulos and Barblett (2018) strongly encourage early childhood education leaders to recognise the importance of research within their sector and to "take up the mantle" (p. 211). These authors quote Rodd (2013) that otherwise decision making will be made by others outside the early childhood education field. Brock (2012) comments that within the field there is a strong perception that leadership models in other education sectors do not 'fit' early childhood education. Further, Brock also noted that early years practitioners commented on the complexity of young children's learning and expressed their concerns that an outcomes-driven approach did not adequately address these needs.

In summary, early childhood education leadership is continuing to develop as it attempts to keep pace with this complex and rapidly changing sector. However, serious issues and lack of research in this sector need to be addressed; this research project will examine early childhood education leadership and focus on this within CECEC centres. Are the unique

issues associated with early childhood education and care as outlined here, equally relevant for leaders of CECEC centres or do their particular philosophical perspective alter these in some way? Continuing to lay the foundation for the topic of Christian early childhood education leadership, this literature review now moves into an examination of educational leadership in the next section.

2.6 Leadership in the Educational Context

A section on generic educational leadership is appropriate at this point, given that there is a paucity of research on early childhood education leadership (Zinsser, Denham, Curby, & Chazan-Cohen, 2016). In previous years the focus within educational leadership has been on the importance of the individual leader, the concept of the leader-hero or the 'great-man' theory (Manning & Curtis, 2012, 3) with emphasis on skills (Northouse, 2013) and strategic thinking (Yukl, 2010) as described within an earlier section. However, in recent times within education, this focus has started to move towards shared or distributed leadership. Distributed leadership had its origins in the pragmatic need to share the workload of those in positions of educational leadership. As education became seen as the conduit for social, technological and academic innovation to meet changing world and societal needs, so too the leader's role became more demanding, fragmented and often chaotic. During a 2014 interview for Teacher Magazine, Harris commented: "If we think about leadership as being confined to only those in positions of authority then we are willfully ignoring the leadership talent and capability of many others …It equates with shared, collective and extended leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement" (2014, p. 1). In fact, Harris described distributed leadership as "The dominant leadership idea of the moment" (2012, p. 7); which has had benefits such as wider involvement of stakeholders as well as increased involvement contributing towards their professional development. However, while distributed leadership has been espoused by the leadership theorists in response to perceived needs within today's educational field, it is still a comparatively recent approach and may not be the perfect answer in all educational leadership situations.

Silcox, Boyd and MacNeill (2015) address some concerns that may come with distributed leadership being seen as the panacea for all leadership needs in today's schools. These authors recognise that some educational administrators mistakenly substitute delegation, which is a top-down sharing of tasks among staff members to reduce the workload, for distributed leadership which is a bottom-up, genuinely responsible leadership

function. The example is given of a deteriorating school with a negative, dominant sub-culture where the introduction of a distributed leadership approach would not be effective. In fact, Silcox et al., (2015) remark that distributed leadership is not the silver bullet that many think it to be, and that a perspective such as this is naïve and short sighted, lacking in understanding of the realities that occur in many schools. Silcox et al., (2015) go so far as to state that the Australian Professional Standards for Principals (AITSL, 2011) which claims in its documentation that: "leadership is distributed and collaborative with teams working together to accomplish the vision and aims of the school led by the principal" (p. 2) is flawed, in that it makes no allowance for the wide range of school situations in which principals may find themselves. Effective principals will adjust their leadership and management approach as the context of the school changes over a period of time.

Nevertheless, pressure continues to increase on school leaders for improved outcomes and greater accountability (Duignan, 2012). It is within this context that a large study of schools was undertaken based on a multi-national approach: "Performance Beyond Expectations" (PBE) (Hargreaves & Harris, 2011). From this study, Stone-Johnson (2014) has analysed and identified leadership behaviours that enabled a number of failing schools in particularly low socio-economic, difficult communities to perform beyond expectations. The improved performances were found to align with a focus on developing and strengthening relationships through the authentic inclusion of the school community: parents, staff and students. This principal-driven leadership throughout the school community and the authentic inclusion of parents and community members, Stone-Johnson calls 'responsible leadership' and a 'collectivisation' of leadership. Stone-Johnson (2014) observes that schools do not exist in a vacuum, and that "excellent leaders need to weave all stakeholders into a strong relational network between schools and community members which will promote and maintain change" (p. 645).

The critical leadership skill of needing to motivate employees or followers found within business organisations is no different within education. The educational leader must be able to motivate staff members to achieve the aims of the educational facility and produce the required educational outcomes (Marotz & Lawson, 2007). In fact, Leithwood and Mascall (2008) found a strong positive link between school leadership and educational outcomes and that leadership was second only to classroom teaching in its degree of influence upon student educational outcomes.

The role of the educational leader today, is far more complex than just having staff members 'follow your lead'. According to White-Smith and White (2009), the educational leadership role in any educational sector (early childhood, primary, secondary or tertiary/ vocational) is a highly complex, multi-tasked and multi-skilled activity, while Buchanan (2013, p. 141) describes school leadership as a "diverse and complex role". School leadership frequently requires leaders to facilitate an atmosphere of cooperation and to provide opportunities and resources for staff to work together in a collaborative manner, rather than assume the total leadership role themselves (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). Because of the importance of the role, Bush and Middlewood (2013) go on to argue that inadequacy in school leadership affects curriculum delivery and school tone.

A major impact on the role of educational leadership in the 21st century is a constant, relentless pressure for improvement in educational outcomes. This force has led to the development of changing approaches to the way that schools are run. The complexity of educational leadership and its accompanying stress was noted by Barnett, O'Mahoney and Miller (2002), who commented that fewer and fewer teachers wish to move into leadership positions and that worldwide, education systems were finding it increasingly difficult to fill leadership positions. The situation has not improved, with Robbins (2013) recently attributing leadership vacancies to work overload, under-funding and increasing accountability (p. 51).

Not only have different types of leadership undergone examination but the perspective of what is appropriate leadership has shifted. There has been a decided move from the concept of leadership from above – the leader as master, to leadership from alongside – the leader as colleague (Komives et al., 2005). Concepts such as interpersonal networking, team first, valuing the individual, distributed leadership, and power sharing are critical in today's workplace (Rodd, 2013).

As within the field of business there have been increasing calls for a stronger ethical and moral approach to leadership, so too within the field of educational leadership there have been calls for improved ethical, genuine leadership which has been termed 'authentic'. Begley (2007) describes what is meant by this term: "Authentic leadership is a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This is leadership that is knowledge-based, values informed and skilfully executed" (p. 163). Begley (2007) further goes on to say that leadership is more than just correct procedures and implies, "a genuine kind of leadership—a hopeful, open-ended,

visionary and creative response to social circumstances, as opposed to the more traditional dualistic portrayal of management and leadership practices" (p. 164).

While Woods (2007) adds:

> In school leadership literature there is growing concern to emphasise the moral, ethical and emotional aspects of leadership. However, the vast majority of this literature does not address the place of spirituality in how school leaders perceive and enact their leadership. There is relatively little empirical work and nothing which gives attention in depth to the significance of spiritual experience in educational leadership. (p. 135)

The calls for spirituality in schools have also been noted by MacNeil (2009). However, he also observes that most related research focuses on teacher praxis or curriculum topics. MacNeil (2009) goes on to say that while these are important matters for school administrators there is a dearth of research into spirituality in the working lives of school administrators.

Educational leadership is a highly complex and demanding role that is tending to move away from a hierarchical, top down concept to a distributed and collaborative leadership approach. Therefore, an exploration of how this occurs in CECEC centres is both relevant and useful. In addition, the ECEC centres that are the focus of this study also have a Christian orientation, and so a brief examination of Christian leadership is timely.

2.7 Leadership in the Christian Context

Within the Christian context, leadership definitions have much in common with those mentioned earlier in this thesis; however, there are different nuances such as encapsulated by Sloan (2011):

> Leadership is the art and practice of exerting an influence on the behaviour and beliefs of others. Leaders shape and influence people, institutions and events. Leaders and leadership are determined not by the number of followers but by the changes effected over time for the good of God's world. (p. 8)

Here Sloan (2011) is clearly inferring that not only are leaders measured by their results, but also by the good that they effect. Gant (2007) describes this behaviour that leads to 'good': "God revealed to the prophet Micah His requirements of people and His assessment of ultimate good: 'He has shown you what is good…to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'" (Micah 6:8) (p. 26). Gant (2007) further notes that this theme is repeated in the New Testament:

> Upon reproving the religious leaders of His day, Jesus pointed out that they had meticulously engaged in their religious activities but had 'neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness' (Matthew 23:23), justice simply means to do what is right. (p. 27)

The Bible appears to portray leadership as a reciprocal relationship and as a covenant: "a covenant requires that the parties live in a way that fosters the relationship for the long term…Covenantal leadership means caring for the needs of individuals and caring for the needs of the group as a whole" (Cafferky, 2012, p. 391). This 'caring' type of leadership is clearly not for the short term, for expediency to meet a budget or a government mandate, but rather for the well-being of all.

In addition, the Bible (Today's New International Version) gives some very relevant, specific advice to leaders or would-be leaders; for example, in Romans 12:8 Paul speaks of the gifts that God gives mankind, and in regard to leadership, counsels "if it is to lead, do it diligently". Again, Paul gives really sensible counsel in Romans 12:3: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement". In Colossians 3:12, 14 he reminds his readers: "therefore clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience…….and over all these virtues put on love…." The apostle Peter then continues the advice to leaders in 1 Peter 5: 2-3: "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them - not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock". These are high standards that the apostle was upholding, particularly when compared with much that is seen in today's corporate world. However, leaders who take this approach are likely to have a happier workforce.

While the concept of social justice is frequently espoused by governments and corporations, the reality may not match the rhetoric. However, leadership or taking an active role in social justice is mandated in Proverbs 31: 8 and 9 for everyone who purports to be a Christian: "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves...speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." Again, the standard of leadership required in scripture is clear, social justice is not an option, but a command.

While there is a lack of research on leadership in CECEC centres there is considerable research on Christian leadership although this is usually within a church context (Stewart, 2008) and sometimes within a business context (Banke, Maldonaldo & Lacey, 2011) rather than in education. Consequently, this foundational section of leadership examines Christian

leadership from a general perspective. Stewart (2008, 301) notes that while the notion of business-based leadership theories being transferred to values-based organisations such as churches, may seem to be a mismatch, many churches are urgently looking towards business practice in order to achieve improvements in organisation and pastoral leadership practice. Therefore, within a church context, while charismatic leadership (Banke et al., 2011) which is closely linked to the leader's strong, influential personality, is frequently observed, the use of transformational leadership and to a lesser extent, transactional leadership approaches, first introduced by Burns' seminal work in 1978, are also popular. The transformational leader clearly articulates a desirable vision for the future and individualises support for followers, thus transforming the individual and desirably, the whole organisation. By contrast the transactional leader provides rewards as motivation for the follower to achieve the particular goal the leader wishes to achieve. These rewards may include special benefits, job promotions, favourable postings or as for many of us, regular financial remuneration.

Alongside these leadership theories, a distinctive theory of leadership in the Christian context is Greenleaf's seminal concept of 'Servant Leadership' (Greenleaf, 1977). Within this theory the leader's first priority is to serve others; spirituality is an essential component of servant leadership and is based on the model of leadership portrayed by Jesus Christ (Banke et al., 2011). Greenleaf (1977) measured leader effectiveness by criteria such as: "Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p 13, 14). Hence, this study also investigates whether the servant leadership model is reflected in the leadership beliefs and practices of Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres. This concept of service within Christian leadership is echoed by Cafferkey (2012) with this comment:

> leaders will be fully oriented towards persons in the community while fully committed to foster the community's interests. Such leaders will not need to grasp for power but will be willing to serve by sharing power with others, in humility, realising that others have been given gifts that the broader community needs. (p. 391)

It is interesting to note the definition of Christian leadership from the Leadership Centre at Andrews University, a Christian University in the United States: "Christian leadership is a dynamic relational process in which people, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, partner to achieve a common goal - it is serving others by leading and leading others by serving" (Andrews University, 2018). Not only does this quote emphasise the necessity of serving others, it also highlights the essential dependence upon God intrinsic to Christian leadership.

Another leadership model, which has gained acceptance within church contexts, is the leadership capabilities model (Stewart, 2008). In this model leaders need certain capabilities in order to successfully lead an organisation. These include the leader's ability to analyse and deal with ill-defined, non-routine problems creatively, rather than managing routine problems with routine processes. The leader will need to have effective social and professional interactions that will guide and maintain the team. Finally, the leader must have a deep personal knowledge of the organisation and his/her own domain (Stewart, 2008).

Clearly there are many differing viewpoints on what constitutes Christian leadership; the comments from practising leaders of CECEC centres in this study will provide data in an as yet un-researched area and provide a depth of understanding as well as useful practical guidelines on how Christian leadership is practised in these centres. An important concept relates to the definition of Christian, and how it is framed within this thesis in particular. Christian or Christianity is almost universally understood to mean adhering to the teachings and counsel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible. However, within recent years several other terms have been introduced with subsequent overlap in understanding and interpretation to the extent that clarification is appropriate at this point and these include religiosity, spirituality, faith, sacredness and so on. Spirituality is most commonly used in an educational and sociological context and refers to a transcendence, something outside oneself (Gibson, 2014, Woods, 2007); it has no particular faith connection and as such therefore, makes no demands upon the person who espouses or advocates for it. Religiosity (van der Duijn Schouten, Graafland & Kaptein, 2014) on the other hand may be associated with a number of faith traditions, not necessarily Christian, and is understood and used in this thesis to focus on the 'rules and regulations', the traditions of a particular religious/cultural affiliation. By contrast, Christianity as understood and used in this thesis refers to a faith relationship, Protestant or Catholic, which is linked with and based upon, the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity as used here also has its basis in Christian values such as love, compassion, forgiveness and care, as is explained now.

Predominant amongst Christian teachings and values is love, for this was the core of Jesus' teachings: "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22: 37-39, KJV). Manning and Curtis (2012) comment that: "Whether based on Christian teaching or not, a belief in love is the ethical ideal of millions of people" (p. 111). Beyond the popular, media-

driven concept of love lies this different, unselfish level of caring for another. This unselfish 'love' implies relationship and 'good' towards others in that relationship.

The concept of 'loving God' can seem difficult to understand, particularly for a non-Christian. However, Jesus himself modelled the way to have a relationship with God, by taking time to spend alone with Him in prayer and meditation. Other Bible leaders such as Moses, Samuel, and John also took the time to spend with God. Writing of the concept, particularly in reference to leadership, Morton (2015) explains:

> Christian leaders should not be making decisions related to vision, strategy and execution but instead through spiritual practices and spending prolonged time in personal intimacy with God through which they not only see the world through His eyes but are also able to listen and discern His voice. God will inform Christian leaders accordingly, and they will be able to implement His will faithfully in His church, in His timing and way. (p. 3)

This critically important advice for Christian leaders clearly states the importance of spending time with God in a personal relationship which will provide the guidance they seek. Without doing this, Morton (2015) reminds us, leaders have a natural propensity to rely on their own judgement and expertise and even that of others, rather than listening for God's guidance. The lives of leaders are incredibly busy. Nevertheless, when they take the time to spend in prayer with God, not only is there a calming, focussing effect but: "Through such prayer God guides the Christian leader to see the world differently. The leader hears God's still, quiet voice clearly even in the whirlwind of daily activity" (Morton, 2015, p. 17). Personal prayer and Bible study were listed by Morton's (2015) research participants as indispensable foundations for spiritual intimacy with God. However, it must be realised that this reaching out to God must be authentic, and no amount of prayer and Bible study will lead to a close relationship with God unless the 'seeking God' is done genuinely. This involves a humble attitude and a willingness to learn and respond. The Bible frequently mentions seeking God with Jeremiah 29:13 as one of the best-known verses: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Closely parallel to the concept of love is the concept of care, and it is within recent times that this notion is beginning to creep into the vocabulary associated with educational leadership. Louis, Murphy and Smylie (2016) focus on the identified outcomes of caring leadership and a caring environment for students such as a sense of belonging and personal wellbeing, while admitting that the concept in schools is often vague and ambiguous and that

there is no definite consensus on its exact meaning. However, various authors are cited to illuminate the idea, particularly Noddings (2005) as a "way of being…rather than a set of specific behaviours" (p. 313). Louis et al. (2016) go on to identify a set of five core elements of caring: Attentiveness – paying close attention to the recipient of care, which Louis et al. (p. 313) describe as "grounded in empathy"; Motivational displacement – putting the needs of the other ahead of one's own in a selfless way; Situationality – providing the care in a dynamic, variable context as needed by the other; Mutuality – the role of carer is not fixed, and may be cared for themselves; Authenticity – characterised by genuineness, openness and honesty. Further, these core elements are enabled when located within an environment of trust and continuity (Louis et al., 2016, p. 315).

Also intrinsic to Christian beliefs is that of creation by a loving God. This perspective deeply affects the way that Christians perceive their fellow humans, and in particular, the way that Christian leaders regard those whom they lead. In his book, *The Challenges of Christian Leadership* (2014), Stott addresses the issue of relationships and comments that "the basis for good relationships is respect, and respect is based on worth" (p. 50). He goes on to explain that looks, money and social status are not the deciding factors for determining worth because "human worth is intrinsic"; and it is this concept that he describes as the differentiating factor between Christian and secular thinking (Stott, 2014). Further, many secular humanists are outstanding in their compassion, but, according to Stott, the basis for Christian beliefs is the worth of humans because of their creation, rather than evolution. Stott also adds: "Christian leaders know that the Lord is the one who trains, nourishes and accompanies them" (2014, p. 63). The link between God and Christian leaders is the motivating factor for the way they perceive their fellow humans and lead them, their worldview.

As a counterpoint to this positive perspective, however, it must be remembered that leadership in almost any field carries additional responsibilities and stress. Stott (2014) described pressures on Christian leaders as "intense and often unrelenting" (p. 19) and in this group he included fatigue, busyness, responsibilities and criticism, issues that most leaders face. He went on to add disappointment and the loneliness that comes with leadership. However, Stott saw discouragement as the likely result which could lead to "loss of vision and enthusiasm" (2014, p. 20) and reminded his readers that in 2 Corinthians 4, because of the discouragements he faced himself, the apostle Paul advised believers "not to lose heart". Indeed, this is a reality for many in leadership positions who experience physical and mental health issues in the face of discouragement.

It must also be remembered that, as in the section on generic leadership which revealed the 'darker side' at times, Christian organisations are not exempt from unchristian behaviour at times. Nunez and Gonzalez (2009) investigated this phenomenon and commented:

> While one might think that churches and religious entities organized with the purpose of disseminating ethical values and principles based on the Bible would be exempt from mistreating employees, no human enterprise is free of workplace harassment-not even organizations that by definition and vocation should manifest more ethical behaviors. (p. 37)

Nunez and Gonzalez's (2009) research identified many subtle means of bullying which destroyed self-esteem and led to break-downs and resignations. In light of this research it is vital that the leader 'practices what he or she preaches' – that staff supervision is committed to equity, consistency, Christian principles of social justice and open, honest communication. Further, that systems ensuring accountability and transparency are in place and are implemented rigorously at all levels of the organisation.

Within comparatively recent years, a number of publications have started to address Christian Educational Leadership within both the Catholic and Protestant sectors, providing useful perspectives on an expanding field of educational provision. Therefore, moving on from Christian leadership, the focus now moves to exploring the topic of Christian Educational Leadership.

2.8 Leadership in the Christian Educational Context

The background to Christian education in Australia has a history parallel to the country's settlement, as Christian schools were some of the earliest educational facilities established. Buckingham (2010) notes that these schools were founded by the Anglican Church in New South Wales in the 1770s, to assist the fledgling British settlement and in the following years, free charity schools were also developed by other denominations. Buckingham (2010) goes on to explain that these Christian schools provided most of the education available in the early colony until the 1840s when government schools began to be set up to provide an alternative education.

However, governments were concerned that sectarian conflict might develop, mainly between Anglicans and Catholics, and so from the 1880s a secular approach was promoted which also denied public funding to faith-based schools (Symes & Gulson, 2008).

Nevertheless, faith-based schools continued to develop and increase although by the end of the 1960s the Menzies government was providing some public funding to non-government schools that were struggling financially (Symes & Gulson, 2008). However, two significant policy changes occurred in the 1990s during the Howard Government. These were the removal of the New Schools Policy, which had been very restrictive, and the introduction of a new funding arrangement for non-government schools, which saw increased funds go to non-government schools, particularly the newly established Christian schools from non-traditional denominations (Buckingham, 2010).

Currently, approximately 1.336 million students, just over a third of the total population of school age students in Australia attend non-government schools, the majority of which are faith-based schools. Additionally, approximately 2.558 million students (or 65.7%) attend government schools (ABS, 2018). Etherington (2008) provides what he terms a "working definition of what is meant by Christian education. Christian education can be defined as instructing children about faith, teaching Christian doctrines, and conducting religious practice" (p. 113). Etherington also notes that the difference between Christian education and other educational philosophies is the centrality of Jesus Christ. However, it should not be assumed that Christian schools are only focussed on the Christian aspect. As Lumb (2014) reminds the reader, "both academic standards and spiritual education are central to the mission of church schools" (p. 42). It is this dual aspect of Christian values and academic excellence that is both appreciated and desired by the increasing numbers of parents who want this for their children.

However, Hekman (2007) makes an interesting observation that "Christian schools are too often vulnerable to the charge that they look just like public schools – with a frosting of spirituality" (p. 5). He notes that their marketing information frequently trumpets their excellence in academic and sporting achievements rather than their Christian practice; however, Hekman believes that instead Christian schools should be "places where visitors clearly see God at work in the way relationships are conducted" (p. 5). Put simply, the importance of a curriculum that is excellent and also reflects a Christian worldview is essential, and the practical demonstration of Christianity in the way that the leaders and teachers treat each other and their community, delivers the veracity of the 'Christian' rhetoric. A dynamic, empowering Christian worldview can be the enabling force behind authentic Christian practices. Philip Eaton (2011), late in his 17-year tenure of leadership at Seattle Pacific University, voices a similar perspective when he writes: "Building

communities of grace is at the heart of what Christian leadership is all about" (p. 231). Eaton (2011) comments, rather wryly: "I know all of this might sound a bit soft headed in our day…especially given our current climate of leadership" (p. 232). He goes on to explain that leadership today is largely focussed on financial outcomes and this approach is held up as the ideal, with each person trying to get the best they can for themselves. In fact, leaders often lead with such an emphasis on the 'bottom line' that the individual may seem dispensable. Instead, he suggests that leaders need to articulate a vision in which people will invest and which will give purpose to their efforts. When people feel personally valued and when they believe that what they are doing has value, then they will function effectively and the organisation will experience the benefit. The underlying perspective of Eaton's (2011) approach is that Christian leadership is to "intentionally gather in community around a compelling purpose" (p. 233). Valuing people and articulating their value as well as keeping the purpose of their roles central is what sustains communities of grace. Only as staff members feel valued and are impelled by their mission or goal, are they able to articulate, model and encourage this development in those around them. Leaders set the tone and trajectory, they sustain an authentic Christian approach by modelling, articulating, guiding and affirming.

Etherington (2008) noted that Christian schools may endeavour to demonstrate their Christian commitment by mission statements, scripture reading or school prayers, but unless the students actually develop an experiential relationship with Jesus Christ these actions are only so much 'window-dressing'. Sullivan (2006) echoes this viewpoint and maintains that "if the faith perspective is restricted to a slot on the timetable or relegated to the realm of the private option, on a par with a hobby the whole difference of Christian education is lost" (p. 78). If young people are experiencing the kind of 'faith perspective' that is a meaningless, optional ritual then it is little wonder that they reject religion as reported in the media (SBS, 2018). Similarly, Prior (2018) found that the leaders in his study believed that Christian faith needed to be integrated holistically across all aspects of the school, rather than just limited to Bible classes or a Chapel program. Further, Prior (2018, p. 134) noted that modelling alone, was insufficient to integrate faith.

Nielson (2007) translates this advice into a picture of leadership in the twenty-first century: "In healthy Christian educational communities, leaders lead biblically – with servant hearts, open and effective communication, and the willingness to be accountable for outcomes" (p.136). In this quotation, 'healthy' is pivotal, for the ingredients for a healthy

Christian Education community are listed and result in effective working environments. The topic of the necessary elements for effective Christian educational leadership has also been investigated by Thompson (2017, p. 3) who found three essential components: "development of their relationship with God, effective leadership, and their ability to apply God's Word to their daily life."

This issue of congruence between profession and practice within a faith education system, in this case the Catholic Education system, is also addressed by Schuttloffel (2005), when she observes that it is *contemplative practice* that makes the difference. Here, contemplative practice is described as a metacognitive process and refers to a conscious decision making method which is undertaken by Christian educational leaders within the Catholic Education system to ensure congruence between decisions they make and their espoused faith. The distinguishing feature of *contemplative practice* as opposed to generic or *secular reflective practice* is the consistency that is required between belief and practice (Schuttloffel, 2005, p. 160). Buchanan (2013) also addresses this issue within the religious school context when he observes that the "words and actions of the leader must be aligned" (p. 131) and goes on to note that inconsistency between these two is likely to reduce morale and motivation and probably lead to distrust and cynicism. While this is true for any secular leader as well, within religious organisations it seems to cause greater concern and attract the label of hypocrisy (Mazereeuw-van der Duijn Schouten, Graafland & Kaptein, 2014; Robertson, 2012).

The leadership example for Christians of course, is Jesus Christ, and His method and manner of leading has been analysed by many (Drexler, 2007). A study by Brown (2007) of 111 instances of teaching and learning by Jesus Christ discovered that *demonstration* was the most frequently used approach where Jesus modelled what He wanted his followers to learn. Modelling, or the way we live (whether we are aware of it or not) is a reflection of our values and beliefs. Brown (2007, p. 87) points out that Jesus confirmed this in the New Testament: "for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34) and this statement is paralleled in the Old Testament: "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). The way we are 'inside' – our fundamental beliefs and values, will be revealed by our words and actions whether we realise it or not.

A vital aspect of Christ's leadership includes service for the good of others; similarly, a willingness to serve reveals the depth of the leader's faith commitment. Brown (2007) describes "leadership as a service function" (p. 87) and uses Biblical examples such as the

Apostle Paul's instructions to masters to treat their servants well (Ephesians 6:9); to church leaders to serve "God's flock with tenderness" (1Peter 5:3); and Jesus' own comment: "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27) which provide admonition and examples for would-be Christian leaders.

Effective Christian educational leaders, following Christ's example have a strong focus on service to their communities. Brown (2007) comments: "truly effective leaders view themselves as serving the organisational community in pursuit of its mission. The organisational community does not serve the leader" (p.103). Brown goes on to explain how the leader can action this service in practical terms: through empowering the school community by scheduling, budgeting and mentoring to develop its members' capacity to contribute to the school's mission and ministry.

Striepe and O'Donoghue (2014) note that research within Christian educational leadership and faith-based schools is 'remarkably underdeveloped' (p. 134) and suggest that one of the reasons for this is that faith communities have not fostered this research, so as a result, secular schools have become the dominant research focus. Striepe and O'Donoghue's (2014) research centred on leadership within three Catholic schools in Western Australia, modelled on the theory of 'servant leadership' and perceived by the leaders of these schools as closely connected to their Catholic faith. These leaders envisaged their roles as that of servants called to lead, and as such, parallel to the pattern set by Jesus Christ.

Building strong Christian leadership in faith-based schools requires a change of focus for the leader on the underlying purpose of their Christian role. While academic, cultural, artistic and sporting development is part of the holistic educational 'package' so too is spiritual growth and development for their students, their staff and for themselves as well. Intrinsic Christian values necessitate a focus on service, personal commitment and authentic relationships with God and mankind for leaders and staff as well as for students.

Lucock (2007) takes up this challenge, reflecting on three leadership styles recommended by the Anglican Church and linking them to three dimensions in ministry. Lucock (2007) first notes servant –leadership: "working to encourage the educational and spiritual growth of pupils" (p. 16) and links this to practical acts of service and listening to others. Second, transformational: "nurturing the development of a Christian community, encouraging its spiritual growth and awareness and offering a clear and recognizable sense of Christian purpose" (Lucock, 2007, p. 16) which is linked to a "collegial duty to care for the

strategic purpose and identity of the community, enabling the ministry of others as well as pastoral oversight to provide support and guidance". Third, invitational leadership: "welcoming all into the school, offering reassurance and affirmation, recognizing the value of individuals" (p. 16). Leaders who take this approach – the servant, the nurturer and the welcomer, ensuring people know they are valued, are authentically modelling the Christian approach.

Unfortunately, the topic of Christian educational leadership is severely under researched. While Rodd (2013) and Bush (2011) comment on the paucity of early childhood education leadership research, and this thesis addresses Christian early childhood education leadership, Beckman, Drexler and Eames (2012) note a similar lack in Christian educational leadership. As mentioned in the previous section MacNeil (2009) noted that while more and more writers are promoting spirituality in schools the application relates to curriculum matters and teacher praxis rather than in the context of educational leadership. Current research into educational leadership does not explore spirituality in the professional lives of school leaders. The next section addresses leadership within Christian early childhood education settings and in particular, the characteristics which make it quite different from other educational sectors.

2.9 Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership

This is the final layer in this examination of early childhood education leadership related literature and is the objective of this research project for little is known about it. Extensive searches in a wide variety of databases have not discovered any studies or publications on the topic, therefore it is appropriate to ask what does it look like and how much is known about it? That it exists in practice is without doubt, given the increasing numbers of CECEC centres. Therefore, the research questions in this project are extremely important; what is the leadership of such centres like and is that leadership intentionally Christian? Further, in application, what are the features of this type of leadership and is the special character, the Christian aspect, reflected and if so, how?

For newly appointed early childhood education leaders who wish to adopt a Christian perspective there is a dearth of research data or guidance on this approach (Woods, 2007). As a result of this lack there is also a dearth of resources available to support these early childhood education leaders, usually known as Directors/Leaders, on how to integrate faith into their daily practice (Woods, 2007).

However, Dantley (2003, p. 273) noted that educational leadership is being challenged to include a spiritual voice which led him to describe it as having a 'multidimensional context'. Dantley (2003) goes on to explain that "Spirituality is the grounding for the values and principles we espouse that inform our personal and professional behavior" (p. 264).

Smith et al. (2008) commented on the newly emerging trend of 'authentic leadership' which does have similarities with Christian leadership:

> It is not dependent upon the position, power or authority of the leader but upon the recognised integrity and credibility of the leader over time. Thus authentic leadership is about the integrity of the leader and the uncompromising adherence to a high moral code or ethical standard of conduct. (p. 7)

While Woods (2007) adds:

> In school leadership literature, there is growing concern to emphasise the moral, ethical and emotional aspects of leadership. However, the vast majority of this literature does not address the place of spirituality in how school leaders perceive and enact their leadership. There is relatively little empirical work and nothing which gives attention in depth to the significance of spiritual experience in educational leadership. (p. 135)

Writing about spirituality and the need for it to be intentionally included in the workplace, Perrin (2007) comments:

> To draw out people's best qualities in the workplace, to enhance the workplace so it is a meaningful place to be, and to engage individuals so they contribute to the common good – outcomes that are all supported by healthy spirituality – artful leadership is required. The capacity to awaken creative and imaginative participation in the workplace means that leaders must pay careful attention to the spiritual dimension of human living – whether one is a believer in God or not. (p. 303)

All of these appeals for the development of spirituality and its inclusion by leaders in schools, businesses and workplaces in general do not, however, address the core value within the Christian paradigm, that is love - agape, altruistic, self-sacrificing love. Gant (2007) comments that "all the ills of society are rooted in two basic violations: a failure to love God and a failure to love others" (p. 25). Although the previous writers indicate a strong need for a moral, ethical approach to leadership together with genuine spirituality, the central tenet of Christianity – love – is missing. The Apostle Paul's exhortation to love unselfishly is found in the Bible in first Corinthians chapter 13, verses 4-8 and verse 13 where both a broad description as well as a definitive positioning of its importance are given:

> 4. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8. Love never fails……..13. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Despite the fact that the concept of romantic love has almost eclipsed a recognition of any other kind of love (Fehr, Harasymchuk & Sprecher, 2014), it must be acknowledged that the Bible is saturated with calls for agape love to be a cornerstone of practice for Christians and an example of believers' reflection of Jesus Christ (Matthew 22:37-39, Mark 12:31, Luke 6:35, John 15:13, Romans 13:10, Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:14, 1 John 3:16-18, 1 John 4:7, 8, 18-19, Proverbs 17:17).

However, it is not only within a Christian perspective that the concept of love is valued; Aslanian (2015) discusses the foundational needs of children in early education, noting that neuroscientists attest to the foundational role of loving interactions in young children's development in cognitive, physical and emotional areas. She goes on to comment that while care is common in ECEC, love is often dismissed as being associated with romance or family relationships; further, that this is particularly strange given the importance attached to loving relationships in the 1800s and 1900s by pioneers such as Maria Montessori during the development of the early childhood education and care movement. Aslanian (2015) also notes the tension between the strong social-equality, feminist roots of early childhood education and the discourse of care, love and 'women's work' of the maternal aspect within the highly feminised workforce of ECEC. The diminution of the caring/loving approach within ECEC reflects the emerging scientific approach of the 19th and 20th centuries within the western world where beliefs were valued for their alignment with 'reason' rather than spirituality (Wainright, 2009).

A particular style of love, termed 'compassionate love' has been identified by a number of researchers (Fehr et al, 2014; Reis, Maniaci and Rogge, 2014) as a form of altruistic, caring love that emphasises concern for the other's wellbeing. These researchers also note that compassionate love has much in common with agape love. This concept of compassionate love would appear to fit very well within the Christian worldview, but it appears that the agape love of the Bible takes the meaning of love a step farther. Agape love carries with it not only the meaning of 'for another's well-being' but also the implication of 'self-sacrifice'. That is, providing love and care for someone else at a possible cost to oneself. Nor is agape love reserved only for those with whom we are closely associated such as family

members. This perspective is also supported by the dictionary definition of agape love as "Love as revealed in Jesus, seen as spiritual and selfless and a model for humanity" (Freedictionary.com). Agape love then, would appear to be an essential aspect of genuine Christian early childhood education leadership beliefs and practices.

Turkel (2014) shares similar insights from leadership in the nursing sector and describes this approach as "leading from the heart: caring, love, peace, and values guiding leadership" (p. 172). She notes:

> When we carry caring, compassion, love, and peace we radiate, vibrate, and give out caring, compassion, love, and peace...A leader who is holistic and self-caring vibrates harmony and peace, actively listens, and practices authentic presence in the caring moment with colleagues or staff. (p. 175)

Turkel (2014) also comments (p. 176) that she intentionally reframes her language in situations where blame or a focus on regulations not being followed might be taken; instead emphasising caring and support. Although little has been written about Christian early childhood education leadership, the issue of practical differences between humanistic care and Christian care of young children is examined in a paper by Neimetz (2014). In it, she reflects on a Christian approach contrasted with a secular approach within the setting of orphan care in China. Using a grounded theory approach, Neimetz observed and interviewed extensively, eventually identifying 24 codes. From these, three specific themes emerged: God as provider, family affiliation and transmission of faith. Of particular interest in relation to the current study is the concept of 'transmission of faith'. Given that formal religious instruction was forbidden until 2005 within this communist regime (Neimetz, 2014), a strong dependency on the integration of Biblical principles into everyday life became the medium of transmission of Christian faith. Neimetz records that the expectation was that the caregivers would 'live out their faith' (p. 72), that they would model "forgiveness, love and self-discipline" (p. 73) and that several caregivers were fired from their positions because "they do not have good faith and love" (p. 72). This then is the crux of what the Directors/Leaders of the orphanage perceived as critical to the mission of the agency and the transmission of faith. In day-to-day practice, the caregivers used Biblical principles such as forgiveness, kindness and love, in teaching the children the way to live. Neimetz (2014) comments that by contrast, American children often know Bible stories and the characters in them, but not how the Biblical values outlined in the stories could be incorporated into their own lives. Douris and Cox (2009) comment that "secular programs do provide care for the physical, cognitive, social and emotional needs of the children but lack the ability to truly mentor children in their

spiritual lives" (p. 23). Neimetz (2014) sums up the essential understanding that "unmerited love and forgiveness are foundational principles for the Christian faith and are difficult to understand or implement apart from a Biblical framework for doing so" (p. 74). Christian care goes beyond the humanist provision of all the essential physical and emotional needs, to incorporate the spiritual dimension of faith and love, and that to a self-sacrificing extent.

2.10 Relationships within Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership

Early Childhood Education is an area in which a number of writers are recognising a need for a spiritual voice within leadership and practice. However, Christian early childhood education leadership takes this approach to a new level. The core Christian value of agape love is an essential ingredient of any leadership that purports to be 'Christian'. Christian early childhood education is clearly an area that needs investigating in order to establish what actually constitutes Christian early childhood education leadership from the perceptions of those who practise it. Further, there is also a need to determine whether the praxis actually reveals the core Christian value of agape love. The concept of human geographies as a way of understanding the relationships within Christian early childhood education leadership is now considered as another part of the foundation for this study.

Although physical geography has been studied for millennia, over the last hundred or so years, a way of looking at things, a conceptual framework, has developed within the fields of educational research and social science known as human geographies (Hay, 2016). Researchers and writers have extended the understanding of geographies to all aspects of human existence such as economic, political and social. For example, Hargreaves, (2001, p. 1056) writes: "Emotional geographies describe the patterns of closeness and distance in human interactions that shape the emotions we experience about relationships to ourselves, each other, and the world around us." In the context of this research project then, the use of the concept of geographies is most appropriate given that Christian early childhood education leadership is predominantly about relationships, interactions and spirituality.

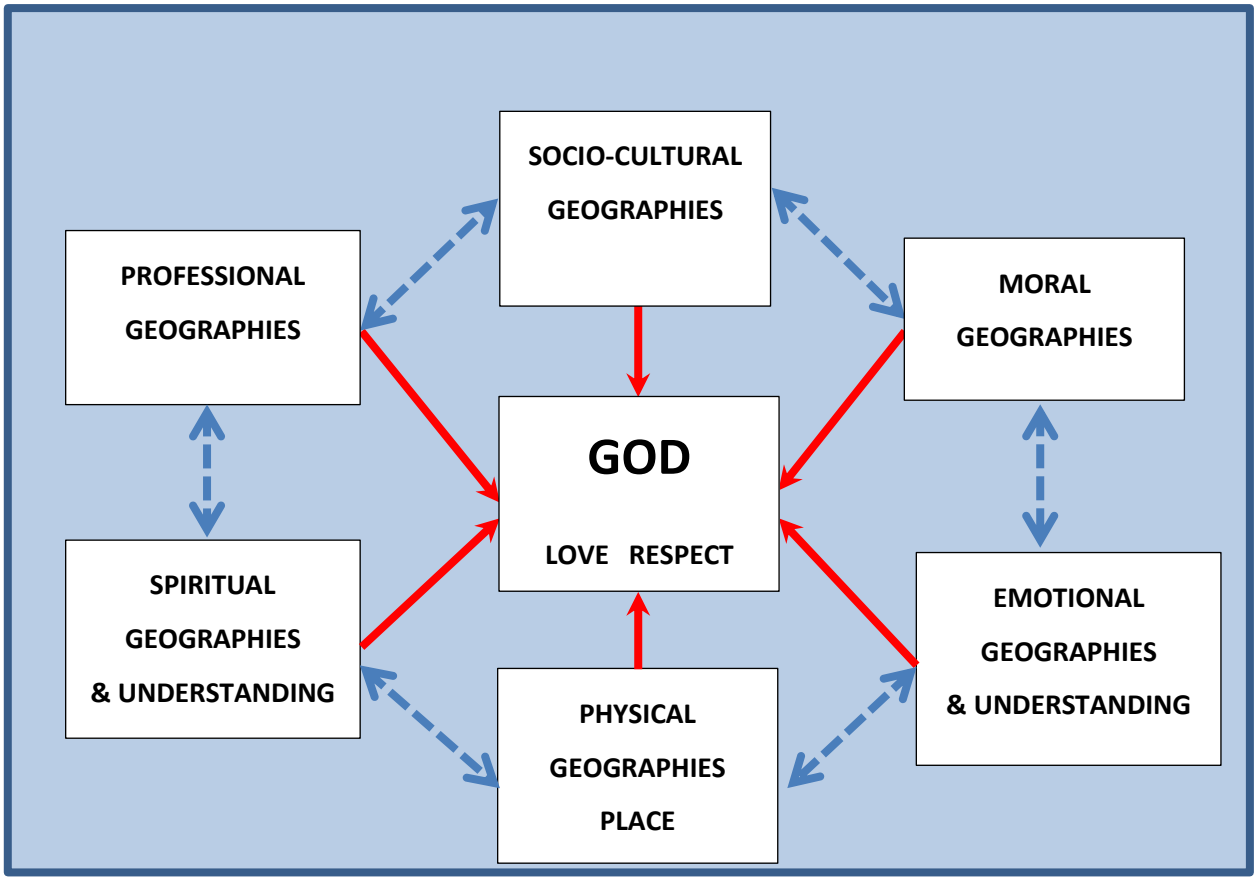


Figure 2. 4

Interrelationships of the varying geographies in the current study

Figure 2.4 has been designed to show the interrelationships of various geographies together with the dynamic relationship with God as described in this study. As can be seen from Figure 2.4, God is the central pivot for this framework as indicated by the red arrows, and is viewed with love and respect. Each of the various geographies is connected to God and to each other interactively as indicated by the two-headed blue arrows linking them. This diagram presents a view of the vibrant and comprehensive relationships interacting in the educational dynamic from the perspective of human geographies.

Thus, another foundation for this study was found to be grounded in spiritual/emotional geographies as described by Hargreaves (2001), Jupp (2013), Olson (2015) and Bartolini, Chris, MacKian and Pile (2016). As leaders attempt to understand and interpret the emotions, behaviours and conversations of others, they depend upon their own emotional experiences to make meaning in various situations (Hargreaves, 2001).

Other relevant geographies are included in Figure 2.4 such as moral geographies and professional geographies. These additional aspects provide a glimpse of some of the other factors that leaders address every day in their work and interaction with those around them.

Further, in this thesis and the context in which it is situated, spiritual/emotional geographies are extended to include spiritual/emotional understanding, a term that is Biblically derived. Within both Old and New Testament writings the concept of 'understanding' is mentioned more than two hundred times. Elwell (1996) explains that the basic Hebrew word gives a meaning such as discernment, that is, having insight into a particular matter and being able to evaluate its various aspects. Daniel 2:21 (RSV) indicates that this understanding is a gift from God and that it should be sought, for Proverbs 3:5 states: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight". 'Understanding' is also seen as having a moral aspect: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28), which also includes a cognitive aspect: "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom and whatever you get, get insight" (Proverbs 4:7). Achieving this understanding is the path to happiness as noted in Proverbs 3:13 – "Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding." Turning to the New Testament, the word 'understand', translated from the Greek, has a meaning of inner consideration or reflection (Elwell, 1996).

These two, spiritual/emotional geographies and spiritual/emotional understanding, are linked throughout the Bible. The land is an integral part of almost every Bible story. The earth, the place, the people and their inter-relationships constitute the geographies while the moral, cognitive and meditative reflection are interwoven throughout each story to portray the guidance and insight that God wants to give His followers and the relationship that He wants to have with them. As the concept of Christian early childhood education leadership is examined and explored throughout this research project, and through its emergent design, spiritual/emotional geographies and spiritual/emotional understanding contribute to the foundation for understanding this concept.

The focus of this research study is Christian early childhood education leadership; while the literature does not specifically address Christian early childhood education leadership, it does describe and explore the foundations for this concept. In this chapter these underpinnings for Christian early childhood education leadership have been examined to understand their contributions and application. Beginning with the context of the Early Childhood Education and Care sector, leadership beliefs and practices throughout the

nineteenth, twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries are examined. The focus then narrows to educational leadership, then to Christian educational leadership along with the framework of human geographies, including the relationship between the leader and God. This provides the reader with the background to understand the concept of Christian early childhood education leadership. By examining the various perspectives on leadership this chapter has laid the foundation for an exploration of Christian early childhood education leadership. The next chapter, ‘Research design and method’, explains in detail the planning and implementation of this research project. The choice of paradigm, method and tools are described and explained as well as the data collection and its analysis.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

3.1 Overview

As noted in Chapter One, there is a serious gap in early childhood education leadership research in the area of Christian leadership. Despite an increasing number of CECEC centres opening in Australia, the leadership of these centres does not appear to have been studied. Further, in my role of providing education and training about Christian early childhood educational leadership for tertiary pre-service teachers a thorough investigation of the concept was necessary, which became the impetus for this research project. Chapter Two explored the foundation areas of leadership, again indicating the lack of research into Christian early childhood education leadership. This chapter therefore, addresses the methodology, the research design in detail, the sources and processes used in the collection of the data, as well as its treatment and analysis. In addition, the context – that of a Christian worldview, is a vital part of the study and is addressed in detail in section 3.2.1.

The underlying purpose of this study was to explore Christian early childhood education leadership: what is it? Are there guiding beliefs and philosophy? How was it implemented? Information thus discovered would be used to generate a grounded theory and framework of Christian early childhood education leadership. Therefore the research question needed to address these issues was designed as follows:

> ***What do four Directors/Leaders of Christian Early Childhood Education and Care Centres perceive about the praxis of their Christian leadership?***

As the study progressed, newer elements of significance became added to my original thesis question, which extended into a deeper understanding of the scope of my research. Morrison (2012) describes research enquiry as "full of challenges and uncertainties, not the least of which is "where to start'?" (p. 14). Morrison (2012) goes on to explain: "Crucially, then, methodology provides a rationale for the ways in which researchers conduct research activities" (p. 15). Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) additionally describe methodology as a process used to find new knowledge. While Corbin and Strauss (2008) provide an even broader definition: "A way of thinking about and studying social phenomena" (p. 1). Methodology then, is the foundation, or if you like, the overarching frame within which, and from which, researchers conduct their research. Methodology for the researcher derives from several sources including the way the researcher regards knowledge (epistemology) and the

real world (ontology) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Morrison, 2012). Of course, those perspectives also reflect the researcher's background, experience and attitudes towards the research topic.

The methodology for this study therefore was motivated by a number of factors, including the dearth of any existing research or theory about the topic and the need to find out about the phenomenon in a real-world setting. The first decision to be made was that of the actual design and according to Creswell (2014) this includes three parts: the selection of a worldview, the choice of the inquiry strategy to be used, and the research method or approach to achieve the desired outcome. Not only do these three aspects interact as part of the research process, they also need to align with each other and with the project being investigated. Thus a bricolage of a constructivist worldview (Creswell & Poth, 2018), within a qualitative paradigm (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) using the tools of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) in the context of a Christian worldview, were chosen to form a solid platform from which to explore this unresearched concept of Christian early childhood education leadership. This brief overview will be unpacked in detail later in this chapter.

Given the contextual background of scant information about Christian early childhood education leadership in the literature, the choice of particular methods to search out and find this information through data gathering was critical. Therefore the second decision (Creswell, 2014) to be made addressed the question of what to use in the gathering of data. The survey tool used here was deliberately selected to investigate the phenomenon as broadly as possible. A questionnaire survey was used in Phase One of the data gathering to gain a broad overview, as well as to provide a foundational understanding of the early childhood education sector. This preliminary data gathering then led into the selection of participants for the next phase.

Phase Two methods included the main detailed, deep exploratory investigation through the semi-structured interviews as well as observations and document examination. Throughout the interviewing process of Phase Two, recording and transcription, and the grounded theory actions of initial coding, constant comparison, memoing, member checking and further question preparation, occurred. From this accumulated data, the processes of on-going coding, comparison and analysis led to the emergence of concepts, categories and themes.

The actions and concepts described above are now unpacked in the following pages with detailed descriptions and explanations for the purpose of each step.

3.2 The Research Design

The specific objective of this study was to explore how four Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres within New South Wales perceived the praxis of their Christian early childhood education leadership; and how this was implemented. Information thus gained would be used to generate a grounded theory and framework of Christian early childhood education leadership. Beginning a major research project such as this necessitates planning and organisation. Creswell (2014) discusses the issues that researchers must consider when beginning to conduct research as shown in Figure 3.1.

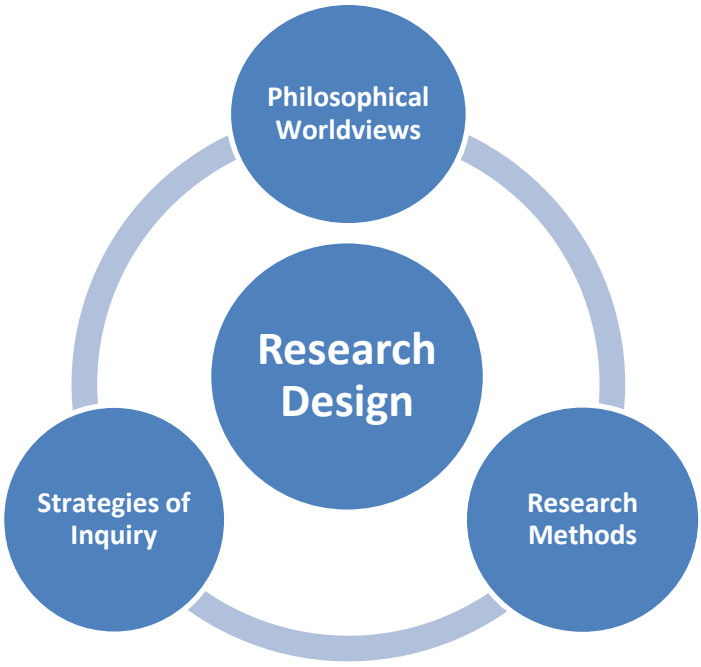


Figure 3. 1

Essential components of research design (adapted from: Creswell, 2014, p. 5)

According to Creswell (2014) the researcher has first to consider and establish his/her own philosophical worldview, then select the inquiry strategies suitable to a particular topic and finally choose the specific methods to gather and analyse the data. I will now take each of

these components from Creswell and use them as headings to identify my philosophical worldview, strategies of inquiry, and research methods for this study.

3.2.1 The Philosophical Worldview for this Study

In reality, a worldview is not something an individual actually chooses. A worldview, put simply is the way an individual perceives and relates to everything and everyone around him/her; it is a lens through which one attempts to understand and make sense of everything within and beyond oneself. Thomson (2012) explains that this does not relate to philosophy and theoretical ideas alone, as this would discount the value of the journey, the experiences to a particular point in time, or the culture and family within which one developed. Nor does it accommodate the interaction between the person and others. Therefore, a worldview is an entity that develops over a period of time and must be seen as an holistic concept based on culture, background and experiences which influence understandings, interactions, practices and decision making. Within a community or culture many aspects of a worldview are shared or held in common. However, from person to person there will be differences based on individual experiences and influences.

Creswell and Poth (2018) cite five worldviews that qualitative researchers may bring to their work: Post positivism, Advocacy/participatory, Pragmatism, Critical and Constructivism. It is the latter which Creswell and Poth (2018) describe as including multiple realities, co-construction of meaning, social and historical construction and theory generation, all of which align particularly well with the research project addressed in this thesis. Mertens, Sullivan and Stace (2011) also note "Constructivists' view of reality is that there are multiple social constructed realities wherein the researcher and researched co-construct meaning" (p. 231). It is this co-construction of meaning, this hermeneutic dialectic that deepens and broadens the understanding of both researcher and participant to arrive at new knowledge.

The researcher holds a Christian worldview and is investigating a Christian model using a constructivist approach. These two perspectives are not incompatible for this is where some of the 'bricolage' approach of this study becomes apparent. It would be a mistake to assume that every individual's interpretation of 'Christian worldview' is identical and that every researcher's implementation of a constructivist approach to research is exactly the same. Christianity is based upon a belief in the absolute existence of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Constructivism is about constructing one's own reality, undergirded by one's knowledge, beliefs and skills (Brooks & Brooks, 1993) and so often Jesus himself used an

inductive, constructive approach to help people, including His own followers, to think through relevant issues and construct their understanding of what was real for them. In the use of parables to develop values and beliefs, Jesus led his followers to think about issues and construct an understanding of Christian principles for themselves. An example of this is found in the Bible in Matthew 5: 18-22, where, as the crowd sat around Jesus on the darkening shores of the Sea of Galilee listening to His parable of the light on the hilltop, and seeing the lights in the surrounding villages, the story built on their knowledge of their everyday oil lamps and integrated the underlying meaning in a way that was relevant and memorable (Robertson, 2008). The Bible records that Jesus was asked 183 questions during His ministry and that He only chose to answer three of them directly; the rest were given another question in response. The practice of thinking through issues, relating them to one's own experience and evolving worldview, and from this, making sense of them is an important part of developing understanding and perspective on life. Robertson (2008) describes Jesus as "the greatest constructivist educator ever" and notes "He (Jesus) centred His instruction on developing conceptually correct understandings that had to be discovered and personalized by the learner" (p. 1). Developing a conceptually correct understanding of Christian early childhood education leadership is the goal of this research project which aligns well with a constructivist approach.

A critical question in this thesis is: 'What is Christian early childhood education leadership?' Currently, there is no clearly articulated theory of Christian early childhood education leadership and therefore construction of such a theory, is central to the research aims of the project. Understanding aspects of what actually constitutes Christian early childhood education leadership is vital; how it is done and what it looks like in reality, why it is done – the motivation for such an approach. Then the context in which it is done and with whom and all of the characteristics that distinguish it from generally good early-childhood leadership are essential understandings for this research undertaking.

3.2.2 Choice of an Inquiry Strategy

Strategies of inquiry, is the second component that Creswell (2014) cites for consideration when planning research and it offers three options. One option is 'quantitative' – focussed on objective measurement, instrument – based questions such as surveys, questionnaires, and mathematical, statistical analysis, used to test or verify theories. Another option is 'qualitative' in which the focus has a greater emphasis on language. Seidman (2013)

notes: “At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolise their experience through language” (p. 8) with open-ended questions, interview and observation, text analysis and emergent techniques which permit in-depth understanding of people’s thoughts, reasons and motivation. Alternatively, a final option is known as ‘mixed methods’ and is a combination of quantitative and qualitative procedures.

In many research projects a quantitative procedure is first used to establish guidelines and parameters; this is then followed by a qualitative approach such as interviewing or focus groups which is used to broaden and enrich the data from the initial phase (Palinkas et al., 2013). Although the data gathering in this study commenced with a short survey-questionnaire to develop the researcher’s understanding of the field and context, even within the survey the emphasis was qualitative, exploring language and ideas. Within the major section of the data gathering – the in-depth interviews, the over-riding approach is that of language – the hermeneutic dialectic (Honkavuo et al., 2018). This language emphasis is reflected in the in-depth conversations and considerations with the interview cohort, leading to a deep understanding of the phenomenon that is ‘Christian early childhood education leadership’. Thus, this research project was firmly situated within the qualitative paradigm.

Within research, qualitative is often coupled with paradigm. Therefore, it is appropriate to explain the meaning of the word ‘paradigm’ and its place within this study. Corbin and Strauss (2008) begins an explanation of ‘paradigm’ by noting that qualitative research derives from complex data consisting of numerous concepts all interacting within multifaceted relationships. Analysing this material to discover important information by the researcher is not without its difficulties. Corbin describes the paradigm as a tool that can be used to detect contextual elements and link them to process. Corbin (2008) notes: “the paradigm is a perspective, a set of questions that can be applied to data to help the analyst draw out the contextual factors and identify relationships between context and process” (p. 89). Further, Corbin (2008) describes three aspects of the paradigm: (a) circumstances (why, where, how and what); (b) interactions (responses) and (c) consequences (outcomes). This very simplified explanation of the components of ‘paradigm’ given here in this thesis, conceals the multiplicity of actions and interactions, responses and emotions that are in constant interplay in any given situation, the exploration of which constitutes the body of this research project.

Yin (2009) summarizes the distinctive features of the qualitative paradigm from five aspects. First, the research is about “studying the meaning of people’s lives under real world

conditions" (p. 8); in this case the predominant focus is the leadership role in a natural setting. Yin (2009) goes on to note that the second important aspect of qualitative research is that it can provide the perspectives of the participants (p. 8), which is precisely the aim of this study. In addition, qualitative research also includes contextual aspects such as the participant's background and the environment, i.e., the natural setting in which their roles are enacted. By contrast, quantitative research controls out these elements, presenting a limited aspect of the participant's life. Further, an essential aspect of qualitative research is the intention to explain a phenomenon, to understand and or discover a concept, rather than just recording facts or events. Finally, qualitative research incorporates a variety of sources of data including interviews, documents and artefacts, all of which contribute to a credible conclusion (Yin, 2009). Patton (2015) provides a similar but deeper explanation with seven examples of the features of qualitative inquiry. These include: "illuminating meanings; studying how things work; capturing stories to understand people's perspectives and experiences; how systems function and the consequences for people's lives; understanding context; unanticipated consequences; and comparing cases to discover themes" (p. 13). It can be seen from these examples how the qualitative approach goes beyond 'facts and figures' and instead explores lives holistically and in-depth. Clearly, the qualitative paradigm was the best fit for this unexplored area of Christian early childhood education leadership.

3.2.3 Choice of Research Methods

The third area that Creswell (2014) uses in Figure 3.1 as contributing to the research design is the research methods which refers to the ways relevant data will be collected and analysed, and how the validity of the analysis and interpretation will be ensured. In determining the choices of research strategies of inquiry and research methods for this study several aspects were considered.

The first aspect was that given the lack of published material on this topic there was a need to gather information from the people actually undertaking this work, that is, the leaders of CECEC centres. As these participants provide data about the integration of Christianity into their leadership and management, the construction of a framework of Christian early childhood education leadership practice may emerge.

The second aspect was that in order to gather authentic information, it seemed essential that this information come from the participants themselves rather than from any preconceived ideas of the researcher, system authorities or policy makers. Literature was also

not an option for finding this information as numerous searches failed to find material on this Christian leadership aspect of early childhood education and care. This is to say the project was to be a journey of discovery rather than one of confirmation and was thus inductive in its approach (Strübing, 2007).

The third aspect was that the examination of conversations and observation of behaviours by the leaders needed to be undertaken through a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The aim was to capture CECEC centres' Directors/Leaders' thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs and attitudes about the integration of faith and beliefs in Christian leadership practice in general, and in their own practice in particular. Kempster and Parry (2011) describe the benefits of using a qualitative approach in leadership research: "It enables the emergence of nuanced and contextualised richness within organizational structures, relationships and practices" (p. 108). This aligned with the goal of attempting to find an understanding of Christian early childhood education leadership. Following consideration of these varied needs, the tools of constructivist grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) were chosen as the best approach for mining data in grounded theory.

3.2.4 Grounded Theory

Briggs et al. (2012) advocate for the use of grounded theory in situations where there is no existing theory that underpins the practice being investigated and particularly because it has the "ability to offer a theory or explanation of complex interactive situations involving human beings in their natural or organisational settings" (p. 189). Charmaz (2011) describes grounded theory as: "a method of qualitative inquiry in which data collection and analysis reciprocally inform and shape each other through an emergent iterative process" (p. 360) thus supporting the implementation of a grounded theory methodology. Creswell (2014) further describes grounded theory as, "a design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants. This process involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information" (p. 14). Given that this project investigated a 'concept, action and interaction' that had not been previously explored, grounded theory aligned exceptionally well.

Although qualitative research was being conducted in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, Charmaz (2014) notes that it lacked clear guidelines or analytic strategies. However, Glaser and Strauss (1967) published '*The discovery of grounded theory:*

Strategies for qualitative research' which revived and reinvigorated the analytic aspects of qualitative research through a focus on methodology and the development of theory from qualitative data. Since Glaser and Strauss (1967) published their definitive work on grounded theory the original concept has continued to develop with various researchers emphasising different aspects and, in some cases, refining the theory further. Briggs et al. (2012) describe three differing approaches to grounded theory which are now in use. First, *the systematic* design which is quite structured and allows the literature review and research questions to be undertaken before the data collection. The second approach is the *emerging* design in which the research questions emerge during the data gathering and analysis, with the literature review being conducted after the data gathering. The third approach is the *constructivist* design, which adheres to some structure but expects a more interactive role from participant and researcher as they explore the topic under consideration. This approach is designed to prevent the researcher from having too much control of the data which may occur in a highly structured process, and instead the data is co-constructed together with the participant through interview dialogues, member checking and emerging understanding and concepts (Charmaz, 2014).

3.2.5 Constructivism and Constructivist Grounded Theory

Writers such as Scott and Garner (2013) maintain that grounded theorists go into a research project and produce outcomes that are in fact "foregone conclusions" (p. 96). They contend that the researcher already has a "blueprint in mind" (p. 96) and that the theory does not just emerge from the data. To a certain extent this may be true. However, in the current study, in the absence of theory or literature about Christian early childhood education leadership, the initial questions from both Phase One (the survey questionnaire) and Phase Two (the in-depth interviews) were extremely open-ended and the data was remarkably similar. Charmaz (2014) acknowledges the issue when she writes, under the subheading of 'Wrestling with Preconceptions', "Every researcher holds preconceptions that influence, but may not determine what we attend to and how we make sense of it" (p. 156). Because of my experience of leadership and management over many years, I was very alert to the multitude of aspects within these concepts, both positive and negative. Therefore, I listened carefully for the cohort's perspectives and having recorded the interviews, was able to interrogate the transcripts many times to determine the praxis.

Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) note the distinguishing feature of constructivist grounded theory: "Epistemologically, constructivism emphasizes the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant, and the co-construction of meaning" (p. 2). That is, together, the researcher and the participant discuss the issue that is of significance to both and together they examine, question and discuss the issue in depth, and over a period of time, leading to both understanding and theory.

Writing about a constructivist approach to research Corbin and Strauss (2008) comments:

> I agree with the constructivist viewpoint that concepts and theories are 'constructed' by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and to themselves. Out of these multiple constructions, analysts construct something that they call knowledge. (p. 10)

Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) analysed the basic beliefs – ontological, epistemological and methodological of several postmodern research paradigms including constructivism. According to Lincoln et al., (2011, p. 101) constructivism holds the following positions on a number of issues as outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3. 1
Constructivist Positions on Research Issues (Adapted from Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 101)

Issue	Constructivism
Nature of knowledge	"Individual and collective reconstructions sometimes coalescing around consensus".
Ontology (the nature of existence or being)	"Relativism – local and specific co-constructed realities. To me this means that as we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society….we must ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality"
Epistemology (the study of knowledge)	"Transactional/subjectivist; co-created findings. This means we are shaped by our lived experiences, and these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects."
Methodology (the process we use to find new knowledge)	"Hermeneutical/dialectical. Hermeneutic cycle: actions lead to collection of data, which leads to interpretation of data which spurs action based on data".

As can be seen from Table 3.1, constructivism is an approach which meshes well with the intent and context of this research project in that the data derives from each participant's

own experiences, beliefs and motivating values which are shared and the understanding is co-constructed with the researcher throughout the interviews.

Historically, grounded theory's unique contribution was to bypass the accepted approach of developing a theory and then researching to prove or disprove it by quantitative or qualitative methods. The grounded theory approach generates theory by researching a topic and then from the mass of data, emerging similarities, themes and concepts are revealed. "Grounded theory combined the depth and richness of qualitative interpretive traditions with the logic, rigor and systematic analysis inherent in quantitative survey-questionnaire research" (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 548). Which is why grounded theory is becoming better known and more frequently used.

An early qualitative approach to analysis of data involved coding the data and then evaluating whether it proved or disproved an original theory of the researcher. Another approach involved examining the data for themes and concepts and from these developing a theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) concerned that neither approach fully met the needs of generating theory from data, suggested a blend: "One that combines, by an analytic procedure of constant comparison, the explicit coding procedure of the first approach and the style of theory development of the second" (p. 102). The methodological process is cyclical with the creation of data, member checking, analysis and further interviews, leading to a deeper understanding of the concepts being researched. However, it must be acknowledged that during the process of developing and constructing the data researchers bring a wide variety of perspectives to the activity. The cyclical, back and forwards, knowledge creation between the researcher and the participants is also known as hermeneutic dialectical and is now examined in greater detail.

3.2.6 The Hermeneutic-Dialectic

This study also used the research-tool of a hermeneutic-dialectic (Honkavuo et al., 2018) which is derived from the name of a mythical Greek god –Hermes, who acted as a messenger between the gods and mortals bearing understanding and knowledge (Patterson & Higgs, 2005). While the adjective 'hermeneutic' has frequently been used in reference to biblical research (0nline Oxford dictionary, 2014), the Collins English dictionary defines hermeneutic philosophy as "the study and interpretation of human behaviour and social institutions". Denzin and Lincoln (2011) relate the term hermeneutic to the research process in this note: "An approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and

prejudice shape the interpretive process" (p. 16). Expanding this comment further, Spence (2004) noted that prejudice need not be just negative, and in fact can be positive as well. In the constructivist methodology of the current study, hermeneutic is coupled with 'dialectic' to indicate the reciprocal dialogue inherent in this study. Fagerstrom (2006) has 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. 13). Above all, the contextual understanding is central. 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 what the Directors/Leaders of CECEC Centres perceive about their leadership role and practice that this study explored. Patterson and Higgs (2005) also note "three key philosophical assumptions or constructs that inform hermeneutics as a strategy for knowledge creation" (p. 342). These are: (a) "Hermeneutics refers to the shared understandings that we already have with each other and this sharing occurs through language. (b) Knowledge is constructed through dialogue: meaning emerges through a dialogue or hermeneutic conversation. (c) The experience of moving dialectically between the parts and the whole. The researcher becomes part of this circle moving repeatedly between interpretations of parts of the text and interpretations of the whole text, representing an emerging understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 342). Of course, these 'texts' to which Patterson and Higgs refer are actually shared understandings between each participant and the researcher. During the hermeneutic dialectical process the researcher and the participant work together to share and deepen their understanding; this is illustrated in figure 3.2 showing the development of this relationship as understanding increases.

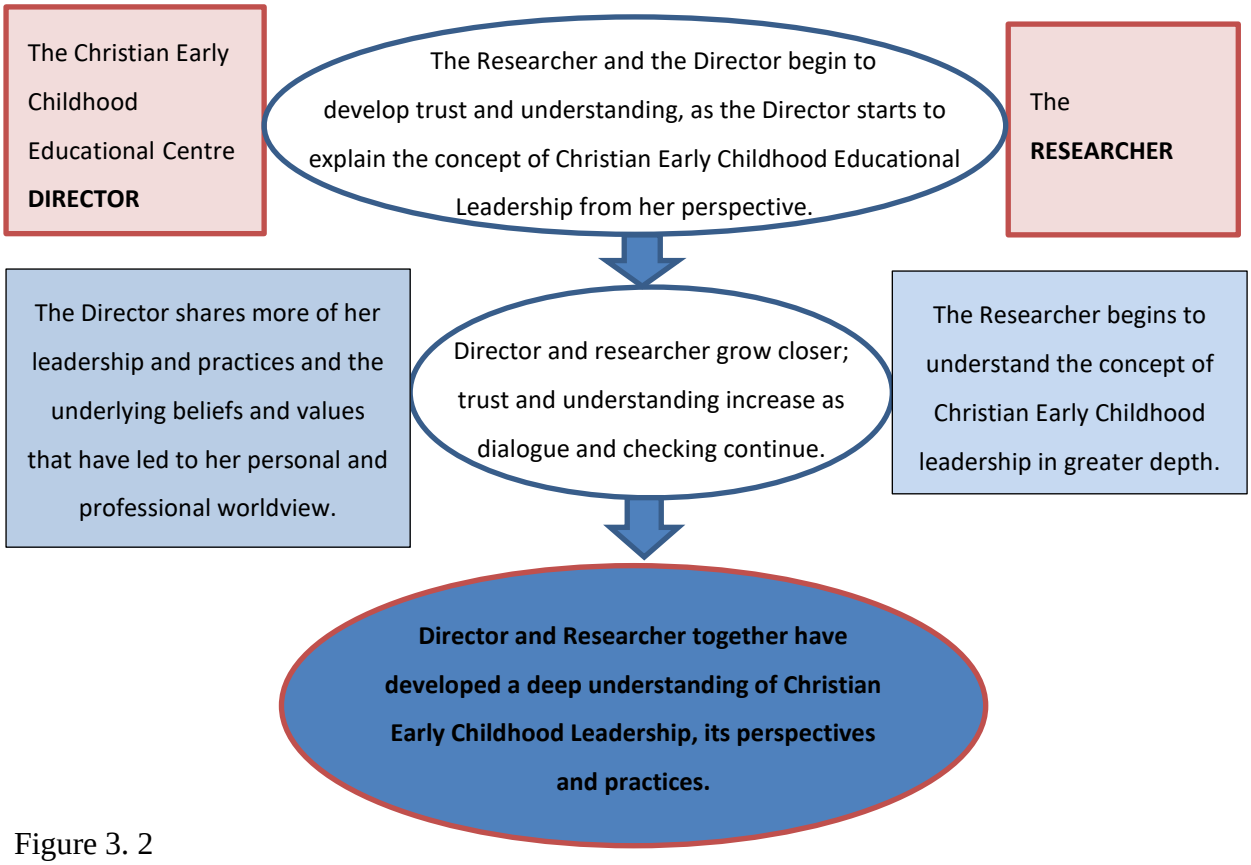


Figure 3. 2

Diagrammatic interpretation of the relationship aspects of the interview phase.

A concern that has been expressed about constructive grounded theory is that in the co-constructing interview process the researcher may interpret what the interviewee is saying from his/her own perspective rather than really listening to the interviewee and finding the information from the transcribed data (O'Connor, Carpenter & Coughlan, 2018). This was certainly a reality for this researcher during this project. With over 30 years of experience in educational administration and a resulting solid base of administrative experience it was all too easy to anticipate problems, provide explanations and even attempt to provide solutions rather than analysing what the leaders were saying, that is, the data, carefully, and allowing *it* to provide the information. Following this realisation, strenuous efforts were made by the researcher to focus on the actual data, to listen more carefully to what the participant was actually saying, and to check regularly with the participant that the perceptions, conclusions and developing concepts were indeed what the participant meant and intended. In addition, the researcher focused on the need to be aware of making 'a priori' assumptions and making sure that this did not occur. Charmaz (2013) comments that it would be naïve to assume that

‘people leave aside everything’. However, by being aware of the potential problem and adopting a strict personal discipline during the process, as well as frequent member checking, this trap for the unwary researcher can be avoided.

This issue and an additional issue were recognised by Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) who describe two possible dilemmas when analysing data: first, that the researcher’s analysis might conflict with the perceptions of the interviewee, and second, the researcher’s subsequent reticence to share the findings. When the researcher is co-constructing the data with the participant (Charmaz, 2014) there can also be a real trap for the researcher to retain what might be described as a professional balance. There is a possibility of privileging the participant’s comments and downgrading the analytical perspective of the researcher. The researcher must remain empathetic and simultaneously objective in making meaning out of the interviewee’s thoughts and ideas. During the co-construction process, the researcher is often perplexed by a concept known as ‘multiple realities’.

3.3. Concepts within the Research Design

3.3.1 Multiple Realities

Multiple realities (Yin, 2018), put simply, means that there may be several different perspectives on the one topic and that each may be equally valid depending on the perceptions, background, understanding and values of the observer. Within this study the four interview participants and researcher had very similar perspectives, beliefs and values regarding so many aspects of Christian early childhood education and care leadership. However, the approach taken by one participant during a conflict situation was very different to that taken by the other three members of the cohort in their respective centres, as will be explained in the case studies. Nonetheless, she perceived her approach as the only suitable way of proceeding; thus, her approach was her reality.

3.3.2 Emic and Etic

Achieving a balanced, honest understanding of a concept, in this case a Christian leadership framework within an early childhood education setting, warrants differing viewpoints such as described by the terms ‘emic’ and ‘etic’. Emic is a term used to describe the perspective about a particular object or concept by someone from within that culture who can comment as only an ‘insider’ can. “The two terms borrow from a linguistic parallel, whereby *phonemics* represent sounds based on their internal function within a language, and

phonetics represents the acoustic or more external properties of words" (Yin, 2010, p. 12). It must be remembered that the emic can differ between cultures. However, as this study was conducted with leaders of CECEC centres it was reasonable to assume that issues of (a) Leadership, (b) Early childhood education, and (c) Christian (all within New South Wales) would produce some depth of commonality.

By contrast, an alternative term, etic, describes the perspective of an 'outsider' who may be considering the same issue or item, but brings a different viewpoint which may possibly be more objective (Hoare, Buetow, Mills & Francis, 2012). Frequently research has explored cross cultural examples (e.g. Steiner & Gilliland, 1996) to gain an etic perspective. In the current study the researcher, an outsider, provided the 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 leaders themselves (emic) as they talked about their values, beliefs, practices and underlying reasons for these, together with the voice of the researcher (etic) who brought a questioning, perhaps challenging, and certainly exploratory perspective, to the investigation based on experiences as a school leader, Christian and someone with knowledge of teaching leadership

3.3.3 Interpretivism

Interpreting what the researcher sees, hears and experiences is a critical part of understanding and meaning-making during the qualitative research process. In the current study, the researcher and the participants dialogued together over a period of time to investigate the praxis of Christian early childhood education leadership. The quality of the findings from this process was strengthened by the iterative, backwards and forwards approach of constructivist grounded theory. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) comment, "The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting" (p. 5). Thus, interpreting comments by the participants, checking with them to ensure that the interpretation was accurate, and aligning these with the established data was effective in discovering the praxis.

3.4 Reflexivity

Within grounded theory the term 'reflexivity' is frequently used to emphasise the role and practice of the researcher to be aware of his/her own background, prejudices and values (Creswell & Poth, 2018) while conducting research. The practice of interpreting what one

sees and hears is always influenced to a greater or lesser extent by one's own experience. In fact, Charmaz (2014) comments, "We must guard against forcing our preconceptions on the data we code during every phase of coding" (p. 155)… "Our preconceptions may only become apparent when our taken-for-granted standpoints are challenged" (p. 156). Which is why member-checking, de-briefing with a colleague and taking the time to reflect and develop theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2014) is essential.

3.5 Settings of the Study

Within the state of New South Wales, and indeed, Australia, facilities that care for very young children aged from birth to five, bear a number of different names. These include preschools, early learning centres, early childhood education centres, kindergartens, long day care centres and childcare centres. However, the term used by the Australian Federal Government is early childhood education and care centre (ECEC), and so this term will be used throughout this document.

While there are a great many ECEC centres in New South Wales, the insertion of 'Christian' in an ECEC centre's title or in a description of the service, served as the initial criterion for inclusion in this research study. Further, individual CECEC centres were approached, rather than preschool classes in a school that caters for the same age group, in order to be able to examine the leadership of the early childhood education section individually. That is to say, the Director/Leader of a separate ECEC centre will have a number of staff employed within the centre and will therefore have responsibility for staff management and financial accountability in a way that a teacher of a class of preschool children in a larger school, would not. These are essential and challenging areas of leadership.

Consideration was given to exploring centres across Australia; however, purposeful selection (Creswell, 2014) was undertaken and the centres chosen were all in New South Wales in order to minimise travelling and costs. Moreover, given that each state has slightly different variations and requirements for its educational facilities it was also decided to research only within New South Wales to remove this differentiating factor and the possibility of adding further irrelevant complexity.

Table 3. 2

Christian ECECs approached for involvement in the research project

Independent Community Christian ECECs	10
Roman Catholic ECECs	4
Seventh-day Adventist ECECs	4
Baptist ECECs	2
Anglican ECECs	2
Pentecostal ECEC	1

Twenty-three centres were approached as displayed in Table 3.2. The choice of locations related to the numbers of centres available. It was perceived as highly desirable to have a range of responses from different systems as noted previously, in order to explore the beliefs and practices in relation to Christian early childhood education and care leadership. This variety would then provide a breadth of experience and beliefs about the best way to lead and manage CECEC centres.

3.6 The Participants

In the first phase of data gathering using the survey questionnaire, twenty-three Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres were initially contacted by phone by the researcher. These participants were selected on the basis of three factors. First, their role: as Director/Leader of an early learning centre in New South Wales. Second, the affiliation or title of the centre: that it should be Christian. Third, the diversity of the centres: these were chosen from the ACECQA database, the internet and the Yellow Pages telephone directory, and included a variety of religious denominations in a variety of locations. At that point in time, these were the only CECEC Centres in New South Wales that the researcher found.

The researcher contacted each centre by phone and introduced herself to the Director/Leader, briefly explaining the project – its purpose, potential time-involvement of the participant and asked if they would be willing to be involved. If they indicated they wished to participate, they were then mailed a copy of the explanatory letter which explained the project in detail, the institutional ethical approval, their anonymity in any subsequent publications and their option to contact the researcher's supervisor and/or withdraw at any time. The survey-questionnaire, the consent form (see Appendix D) and a stamped addressed envelope were also included. Eventually, nineteen survey-questionnaires were sent out.

During the initial phone calls by the researcher, it was enlightening to note the reaction from many ECEC Directors/Leaders. On learning the purpose of the call and the object of the research project there were several reactions of laughter or a wry chuckle, accompanied by wishes of 'Good Luck!', as they had personally been unable to find any guidelines to support them in their own early days of attempting ECEC Christian leadership. The Directors/Leaders also indicated their interest in receiving findings from the research that would help them in their own practice.

Fourteen, completed survey-questionnaires were returned, and from these three participants were chosen for the second phase of in-depth interviews in order to limit the quantity of data that was likely to emerge from three rounds of interviews. These participants were chosen on the basis of four factors: (1) The director/leader needed to have indicated on the survey that she would be willing to be further involved in the project through the interview Phase. (2). The director/leader needed to have indicated strong support for both Christian leadership, excellence in early childhood education and the research project. (3). Their centres also needed to have been accredited by ACEAQA at a 'meeting' or 'exceeding' standard. (4) A diversity of religious affiliations was highly desirable, to provide as broad a perspective as possible.

However, before the second phase occurred, the researcher attended the national Early Childhood Conference in Melbourne, Australia in 2014, and gave a presentation on Phase One of the project. Following the presentation another Director/Leader from New South Wales, who had been in the audience, subsequently returned to her centre and discussed the project with her centre's Board of Management. This Director/Leader had not received a survey-questionnaire in Phase One as her centre did not have 'Christian' in its title, although it actually was a Christian-based early learning centre. Both the Director/Leader and her Board of Management were extremely interested in the project and wrote, requesting to be included. This additional participant was included in the interview cohort for a number of reasons: her enthusiasm and strong belief in the value of the research project, the denominational diversity she brought to the group, her centre's rating, and the very different location and community she represented, thus increasing the overall diversity of the research cohort. This additional person then took the cohort of Directors/Leaders to four, who were subsequently interviewed in depth.

The four participants were given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity (Fran, Darlene, Denise and Maree). The reader will also notice that in some sections of this thesis

the word ‘church’ has been used rather than the actual denominational name to similarly preserve anonymity.

During the initial survey approach of the first phase and throughout the interviews of the second phase it was likely that the researcher’s background contributed to the interviewees’ sense of empathy and willingness to disclose. This background included three factors: first, as an educational leader with over 30 years experience; secondly as a lecturer in early childhood education administration; and thirdly as a practising Christian. In addition, of course, most of the participants were also keen to contribute to the development of a research project which would address and investigate excellence in ECEC Christian leadership. However, it was interesting that during the initial phone calls to two of the early learning centres who had advertised their facilities as ‘Christian’ centres to be told by the director/leader that they actually did not do anything that was particularly Christian and that they were not interested in being involved in the project.

The choice of the term ‘participant’ is significant in this research project as the members of the interview cohort were very involved in developing the researcher’s understanding of the concept, that is, Christian early childhood education leadership. Seidman (2013) explains how language and the use of particular words such as ‘subject’ or ‘interviewee’ may give the impression of a hierarchical relationship in a research interview dialogue, or even a passive relationship on the part of the person contributing the information. In addition, some may also use ‘informant’ as the person is providing information. However, this does not account for the reciprocal relationship in a constructivist dialectic method which openly acknowledges the ‘back and forwards’ aspect of the dialogue between the researcher and the participant as together they extract the detailed meanings in their discourse. The sense of equity and empathy which existed between two Christian educators, trying together to define an ‘as yet’ undefined concept (Christian early childhood education leadership) was also an important aspect of the researcher / participant relationship.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

- Ethics approval
  - Ethical approval for the research project was sought and approved by the institution’s ethics committee in June 2014.

- Anonymity
  - Survey participants who chose to respond were able to have the option of remaining anonymous and providing data through the researcher's supervisor.
- Confidentiality
  - The names of participants who chose to respond and were willing to engage in an interview and/or site visit by the researcher, remain confidential. Identifying names and pictures of participants and sites have been suitably obliterated. The use of pseudonyms will be used in any publication as necessary.

3.8 Collection of Data/Evidence

Mills et al. (2006) note that a critical aspect of grounded theory is achieved through:

> a process of data collection that is often described as inductive in nature in that the researcher has no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove. Rather, issues of importance to participants emerge from the stories that they tell about an area of interest that they have in common with the researcher. (p. 2)

The process that Mills et al. (2006) describe was precisely the experience of the researcher in this project. The question of whether faith was integrated into the practice of these Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres and how it might be done was revealed as each participant described their practice, their beliefs and values that contributed to their practice, the underlying foundations and the motivation for that particular approach.

In order to gain as holistic as possible range of data, three methods of collecting data were chosen for this study: survey-questionnaires, a three-round series of semi-structured interviews (the hermeneutic dialectic) and field observations of personnel and documentation. These methods were divided between two phases of the project and are explained in the following pages.

3.8.1 Phase 1. The Survey-questionnaires

The first data collection method was the survey-questionnaire (see Appendix E) (Fink, 2017; Mujis, 2012) used in this study to begin to discover the Directors/Leaders' personal opinions and beliefs about Christian early childhood education leadership and to deepen the researcher's understanding of the early childhood education field. There were several reasons for having a survey-questionnaire as part of this research design. The survey-questionnaire approach allowed the researcher to conduct a preliminary investigation with a wide range of Directors/Leaders within a variety of CECEC centres. Several of the Centres were conducted

as independent, Christian community-based organisations, while some operated under the auspices of a particular church denomination or even an educational philosophy as well as a Christian approach, such as some Montessori centres. Whether there were any significant differences between the different groups in relation to Christian leadership beliefs and practices was explored. The survey-questionnaire also permitted the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants, through their stated perspectives and opinions, as well as their defining comments about Christian early childhood education leadership. This was of great value in selecting the exemplars to form the cohort for the interview phase as explained in 3.6 'The Participants'.

Criticisms of the questionnaire approach (Charmaz, 2014) include the researcher's inability to modify or re-word the questions after they have been sent. Further, the clarity and intimacy of face to face communication is lacking. However, the purpose was to upskill the researcher and to prepare for the interviews, which were by far the major part of the data gathering, therefore these potential disadvantages were not perceived as critical.

As part of developing the survey-questionnaire, informal discussions were held with two experienced and interested Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres, who had a wealth of knowledge and experience in independent ECEC centres. The general concepts and aims of the research were discussed and explained and time was then spent discussing questions and issues, which subsequently led to the construction of the survey-questionnaire. Some of the issues were identified from relevant literature (Bush, 2012; Mujis, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004; Rodd, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford, & Hallet, 2014; Waniganayake et al., 2012); others were mentioned from the Directors/Leaders' own experiences as well as the researcher's knowledge of educational leadership.

As noted earlier, leaders' beliefs and attitudes are pivotal to their leadership practice. Hallinger, Noorivah and Hashemi (2017) researched leaders' beliefs, especially self-efficacy, finding that: "Foremost among the personal antecedents of leadership identified by scholars is 'self-efficacy' or the belief that 'I can make a difference' " (p. 802). "Research indicates that leaders with stronger self-efficacy tend to communicate and model higher performance expectations to both teachers and students" (Lucas, 2004, p. 4). Thus, the effects of positive self-efficacy upon a leader's behaviours and the benefits for both teachers and students necessitated questions in the survey questionnaire that were related to leader self-efficacy. For example, Section B, Question 2 asked the participant to score (1-4) "I feel confident about my ability to lead in my Director's role".

The survey-questionnaire (see Appendix E) was therefore designed to explore Directors/Leaders' attitudes towards their work, their levels of enjoyment and their sense of self-efficacy in the role of Director/Leader. Additionally, negative aspects were explored to provide a balance in the reported experiences. The Directors/Leaders' perceptions of the 'Christian' expectations of the role by various stakeholders were examined, as for example by this question: "I believe that my leadership reflects a Christian perspective". In addition, situations for conflict with these expectations were investigated as in this example: "Sometimes my Christian values are in conflict with staff members' beliefs and practices". Simple four-point Likert scales were used throughout for participants to record their responses, and these all ranged from 'not important' to 'extremely important' and from 'not at all' to 'always'. In deliberately choosing a four-point scale, no option was provided for the participant to give a neutral response or to 'fence-sit'. Space was allowed for participants to provide additional comments following each question to expand on the rating they have given and to ensure that their intention was understood. Finally, opportunity was also given for comments on the leadership role within a CECEC care centre including their recommendations. As explained earlier in this thesis, some Directors/Leaders may have strong convictions about what they believe excellent Christian leadership should be, but for them it is a 'work in progress' and this gave them the opportunity to share these aspirations. Overall, the survey questionnaire could take 15 minutes to complete if the respondent simply ticked the boxes. However, the extended responses could take longer depending on how much the respondent wanted to say.

The purpose of having completed survey-questionnaires before the interviews were conducted was so that I could gain an overview of the participants and understand their particular locations, experience and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study the survey-questionnaires also provided information about sector-specific issues, an estimation of how serious these issues are for the cohort as well as useful recommendations from current Christian early childhood education and care leadership practitioners in New South Wales.

Specifically, the questions were designed to set the scene for the interviews by providing information about the participants' perceptions of the leadership role; how confident they felt about their effectiveness, i.e., their self-efficacy (Hallinger et al., 2017); and how much the participants enjoyed the role (Aubrey et al., 2012). Charmaz (2013) comments that researchers need to prepare themselves by gaining an understanding of the world of the participant, not just listen to what they are saying in the interview. The reason

for this preparation is that during an interview there is insufficient time for the respondent to *teach* the interviewer about their world (including all the complexities and nuances); there is really only enough time to talk about it and so preparation to enhance understanding was essential. Therefore, both the design of the survey in the pilot study as well as its implementation during Phase One were particularly useful in developing my understanding.

Definitions of 'Christian early childhood education leadership' by the participants were important, including their perceptions of the importance of varying aspects of Christian early childhood education leadership practice. Participants' comments and recommendations about the role of leadership and management in a CECEC Centre contributed to a clearer understanding of this area as well as their beliefs about expectations of the Christian aspect of their leadership roles by staff, parents and the employing system. Participants' experiences of difficulty in maintaining Christian practice within the leadership role were also investigated as this not only provided useful information, but also a balanced perspective in the overall role of the Director/Leader. Themes and issues emerging from the survey-questionnaires were also used as a part-basis for the initial semi-structured interviews (Rabionet, 2011).

An additional function of using a survey-questionnaire as the first method of data collection was that the survey-questionnaire enabled participants to reflect on the various aspects of their leadership roles over a period of time before the interviews. The results of this reflective process are provided in the leaders' reflective comments in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 in the next chapter. It was anticipated that this approach would stimulate interest in the project, a desire to be further involved and deeper reflection on the concept of leadership within a CECEC centre.

Following receipt of the completed survey-questionnaires, they were collated and analysed section by section to determine points of commonality, as well as issues and themes that emerged from the data. Upon investigation clear themes began to emerge from the survey-questionnaire responses and these were scrutinised to discover links, definitive statements, unanticipated issues, and even contradictions. These themes were then used as the basis for developing the interview questions.

3.8.2 Phase 2. The In-Depth Interviews

In the second phase following the return of the fourteen completed survey-questionnaires and their analysis, three participants were chosen for the interviewing phase. The selection was made on the basis of interest shown by the survey-questionnaire responses

for a greater involvement in this research project, a diversity of denominational groups, and a clearly-articulated strong commitment to excellence in both education and a Christian approach. The overall quality of leadership and management of each centre was verified by ratings on the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website to ensure that none were in the 'serious improvement needed' category. Due to the grounded theory approach which required in-depth investigation and data collection, and on the advice of my supervisor, it was decided to limit the number of participants for Phase Two, to three Directors/Leaders of ECEC centres. Following this selection, the Directors/Leaders individually confirmed their willingness to continue their involvement with the project into the interviewing phase.

However, as explained in section 3.6, a fourth participant joined the cohort providing increased diversity in denominational affiliation as well as location and ethnicity of her centre. The following table displays some information about each of the four centres for which these four Directors/Leaders were responsible. Further, the four centres have each been given a very general geographic location to assist in distinguishing them from other institutions represented in the study.

Table 3. 3

Demographic information about the 4 Early Learning Centres (ACECQA website 2016)

	Early Learning Centre 1.	**Early Learning Centre 2.**	**Early Learning Centre 3.**	**Early Learning Centre 4.**
Location	Regional – Country town	Suburban- City	Inner City	Rural – Coastal
Hours of operation	7.30-17.30. 5dpw	7.45-18.00. 5dpw	8.30-15.30. 5dpw	8-14.50. 5dpw
Number of Places	50	40+	40	60
Current ACECQA Rating	Exceeding NQS	Exceeding NQS	Exceeding NQS	Meeting NQS
Service Approval Granted	03 Mar 2007	12 Jan 2008	22 Aug 2009	25 Jan 2012

The second phase, interviewing, involved three rounds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (see Appendices F, G and H) conducted separately with each of the four Directors/Leaders of a Christian early childhood education and care centre, at their own ECEC centre. In each case the interviews were held in the Director's/Leader's office. In-depth interviews, also known as intensive interviews (Charmaz 2014) involve a rather one-sided interview with the aim to gather as much information as possible from the interviewee. In this research project the desired information was about the Directors/Leaders' beliefs, values and practices in the leadership of a CECEC centre. While the interviewer may ask open-ended questions to guide the conversation, this should be to explore, not to interrogate, and should permit the interviewee to feel relaxed and freely able to share their information and perspectives. The sequencing of the data collection is displayed in Figure 3.3

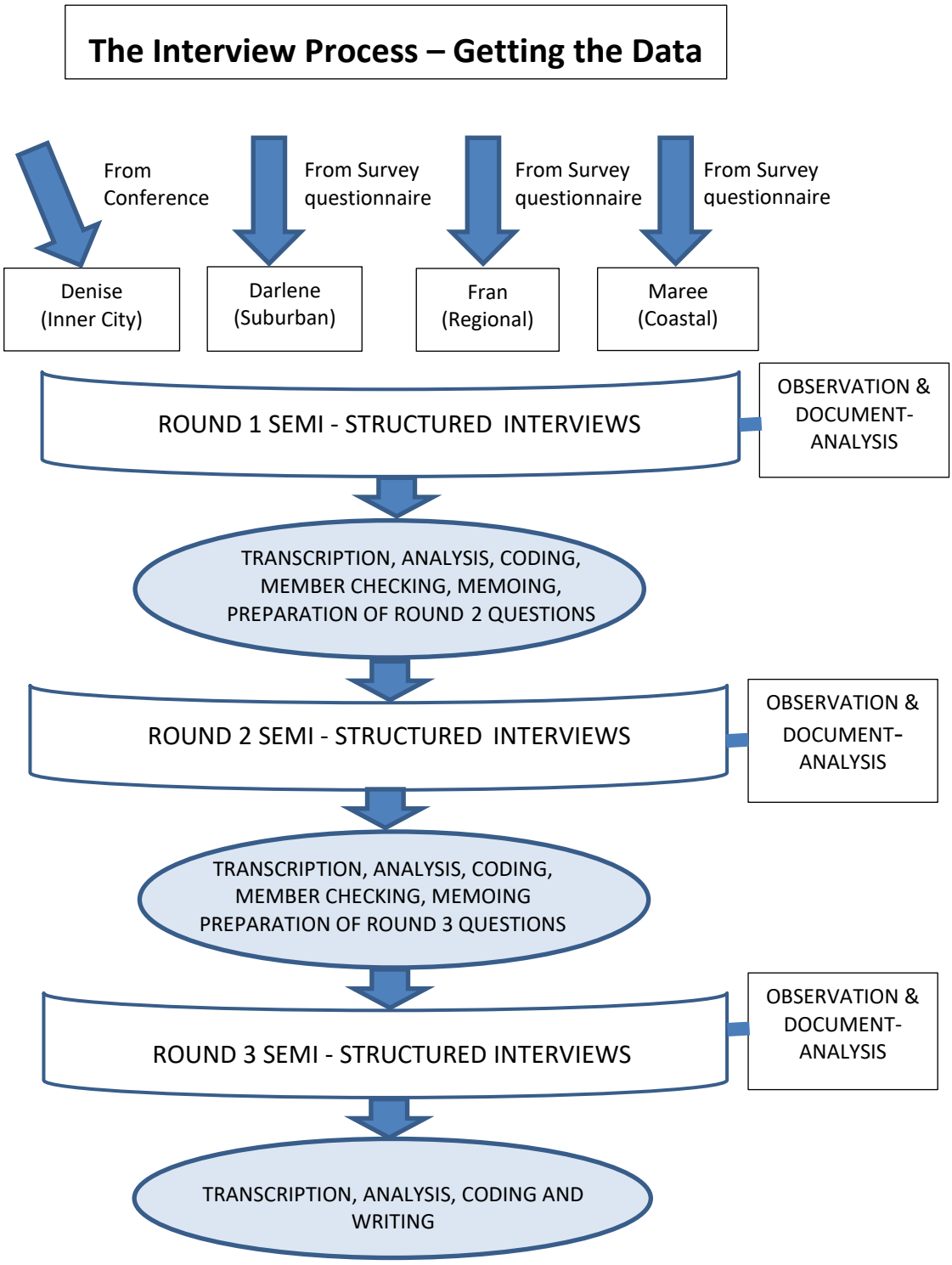


Figure 3. 3

Diagram of the interview process of the project.

Figure 3.3 provides a visual display of the sequencing and processes used to gather the interview data in this study. From the survey responses three participants were selected/

self-selected who, as explained earlier, were joined with a fourth participant from the Melbourne conference some months later. Three rounds of semi-structured, in-depth interviews were held separately with each participant. Each interview also included observations and document analysis. Between each round of interviews, the interview recordings were transcribed, member checked and memos were written. At the same time the transcripts were analysed and coded, leading to the creation of the next round of questions following interview one and interview two. The conclusion of this part of the study involved further analysis and refinement of the codes and then documentation of the findings.

Interviewing as a data gathering process is not without its critics. Charmaz (2014) mentions some of the relational issues that may cloud or distort the information being provided by the interviewee. These include race/culture, gender, power and status, age and of course, personal worldviews. Racial and gender were not problematic issues in this research project as both interviewer and interviewees were all female and from Australian/European backgrounds. Power, status and age were also not issues as the four interviewees all held positions of responsibility and the interviewer expressed the desire and need to learn from them on numerous occasions. It was made very clear to the interviewees that they were the experts, the ones with the specialised knowledge and understandings and that I considered it a privilege to be able to tap into their experience and opinions. The most apparent unifying factors in these relationships were the Christian-faith bond and the common desire to identify the characteristics of Christian early childhood educational leadership. In essence the research project became a shared task and the interviewees were the ones with the expertise, with the researcher in the role of investigator and facilitator.

The semi-structured interview approach in this study was chosen because it has the capacity to provide detailed data that captures human perspectives in-depth and explores the perceptions, feelings, values, beliefs and attitudes of Directors/Leaders about their work and the beliefs and values that guide it (Rabionet, 2011). The benefits of the semi-structured interview are that while the information is being gathered by the interviewer it is also acceptable and possible for the interviewer to expand and probe the responses given by the interviewee; emerging leads may also be explored at this time (Rabionet, 2011).

The use of semi-structured interviews with the researcher is conducive to a frank and in-depth discussion of the interviewee's experiences, thus revealing aspects which might otherwise be overlooked in a written survey-questionnaire, as well as clarification of issues as they arise. Interviews are also useful because they permit deeper probing than survey-

questionnaires into beliefs and values relating to, in this case, desirable systemic and procedural activities and even changes (Morris, 2015). Semi-structured interviews have the added advantage of encouraging the interviewees to describe their experiences without placing any limits on, or restricting, what they might wish to express. An interview also provides an opportunity for the interviewee to mention negative experiences associated with their work experiences if so desired. The advantage of allowing negative experiences to be included is that recommendations about systemic programs, policy changes, or procedural changes can be tailored to address any such issues raised.

The interviews were digitally recorded with the participant's permission and then later transcribed by the researcher. Charmaz (2014) strongly recommends coding from transcription, commenting (2014) that even trained ethnographers can quickly forget fine details. Further, she contends that it is very likely the researcher will miss some ideas and understandings without the full transcription to subsequently interrogate and review more than once (Charmaz, 2014, p. 136).

In this study, the first round of interviews lasted between 40 and 55 minutes each. While the researcher had a prepared list of open-ended questions (see Appendix F) for the participant, invariably the participant was enthusiastic about the project and passionate about sharing information and her perspectives on Christian early childhood educational leadership. Thus, although the interviews used semi-structured open-ended questions, the reality was closer to an unstructured interview in the first round of interviews. This was invaluable in broadening and enriching the data beyond expectations by revealing additional aspects of the leadership role and the individual's beliefs and practices.

These expanded semi-structured interviews thus provided a larger quantity of data than had been anticipated. Further, a greater depth of understanding about what constitutes Christian early childhood educational leadership from the perspectives of current practitioners, was gained.

Following each interview and the subsequent interview rounds (see Appendices G and H), during the transcription and open-coding processes the researcher wrote memos to assist in the linking of codes and the further exploration of some, as well as the developing generation of theory. For example, as the transcribing proceeded, certain themes were repeated. Clearly these were going to have to be explored in depth which led to this memo: "*start exploring additional areas for my lit review that have 'emerged' from the data: heart/*

love/ service/ ministry/ mission" (February, 2015). The transcripts were then returned to the interviewee for verification – "member checking" in order to ensure accuracy.

The interviews took place over a nineteen-month period from the end of 2014 to the middle of 2016, with an additional interview outside that time as shown in Table 3.4 as well as a group lunch following the last interview to close the interviewing section. I visited Denise for an additional interview as I sensed she felt uncomfortable during some of the discussions at the group lunch, and this will be discussed further in the case studies in Chapter Five.

Table 3. 4

Interview Dates

Name of Participant	**Date of first Interview**	**Date of second Interview**	**Date of third Interview**	**Additional Interview**
FRAN	21.11.14	12.10.15	19.02.16	
DARLENE	14.07.14	26.10.15	12.02.16	
DENISE	02.12.14	24.11.15	23.02.16	29.08.16
MAREE	03.12.14	09.12.15	17.02.16	
GROUP LUNCH AT A CENTRAL VENUE			11.4.16	

Towards the end of the third interview for each participant, as we discussed and summarised Christian early childhood leadership, I became aware that although we were discussing the concept with continued interest and enthusiasm, no new information was emerging to extend the theoretical concepts – we had reached 'saturation'.

3.8.3 Saturation

This term is used to describe the point at which the "theoretical categories are saturated with data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 213). This expression does not mean simply that the participant was now repeating themselves, nor does it refer to the quantity of data the researcher may have amassed. Rather, it indicates that the complexity of the theoretical categories was not being extended.

3.8.4 Phase 3. Concurrent Observations and Documentation [including webpages]

Observation, has been a feature of qualitative research for many years (Walshe, Ewing & Griffiths, 2011) and can help to understand what people actually do, as well as where and when their actions are undertaken. While interviews are usually less time-consuming, they provide limited information in that they largely reflect the participants' perceptions. Walsh et al. (2011) in their study on the use of observation as a data collection tool, found that "skills and actions that had not been described were revealed, which had not been shown by other interview-based studies" (p. 1049); Walsh et al., (2011) further commented succinctly: "an interview allows someone to say what they do; an observation allows you to see directly what someone does" (p. 1049). This supports earlier comments by Corbin and Strauss (2008) who noted: "The reason why observation is so important is that it is not unusual for persons to say they are doing one thing but in reality they are doing something else. The only way to know this is through observation" (p. 29). Using observation provides another area of data collection that serves to triangulate and verify information gained from the survey-questionnaires and interviews (Carlson, 2010; Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013).

Nevertheless, using observation as a data collection tool may involve far more than just 'watching what goes on'. Walshe et al. (2011) noted a number of serious issues which must be considered, these included:

(a) The role of observer – how involved should the researcher be? At one end of the continuum is complete observation which could lead to an inspectorial impression, or so participatory that he/she changes the dynamic of the environment and observed action. In this situation I simply tagged along as the Director/Leader moved from room to room, interacting with staff, and I was very conscious of facial expression – friendly interest, with no comments.

(b) How threatening could this visible intrusion of the researcher be for the participant being observed? To what extent might it change the observable behaviour? Obviously, this could be an issue, but over a period of time with repeated interviews and in the bustle of daily activities with staff this reaction was not apparent.

(c) If the researcher assumes a highly participative role, albeit attempting to create a collegial atmosphere, how might this affect his/her ability to actually observe and take notes? This did not occur in the study as I quietly waited while the participant

spoke to a staff member, parent or child, again, very conscious of a friendly, interested facial expression.

(d) If the researcher is perceived as an 'insider' with personal knowledge and expertise in the area being investigated, how might this trigger stress for the participant? This could include a sense of power imbalance or even be threatening to job security for the participant. However, this was not an issue in this research project as the researcher was not an 'insider' nor linked to any of the employing organisations.

Walshe et al. (2011) observed very wisely: "Participatory roles may create difficulties with maintaining the role of researcher" (p. 1051). For this reason, I elected to just quietly observe what was happening around me as well as between the participants and the people in their environment.

Earley (2012) notes that only a small number of studies have examined the work of education leaders by observation; and in particular, cites a study by Horng, Klasik and Loeb (2010) that observed 65 school principals using a 'silent shadowing' approach. The principals undertook 43 different activities within six categories and these were recorded by the researcher every five minutes. Earley (2010) also notes additional studies in which the categories were very similar with leadership, management, administration, professional development, teaching and personal time as common factors, albeit with slightly differing names in the various studies (Earley, 2010, p. 21).

Notwithstanding the time required and possible complications as outlined above, observations were chosen as the third method of data collection for specific reasons. Recording how the participant behaved (facial expressions and body language); communicated (words and tone of voice); as well as the type of communication such as instruction, comment, encouragement etc., together with what they actually did, is vital for two reasons. First, that this evidence could then be triangulated with their written comments and interview statements. Second, because the research goal is to gain a deep understanding of the applied practical aspect of Christian ECEC leadership (as well as the theory), in-situ words and actions are particularly relevant.

In this study, all of the participants were observed as they were involved in their daily routines, interacting with administrative and educational staff members before, after and even during the interview sessions. In addition, observation or investigation of printed and/or

digital material which incorporated brochures and web pages that had been constructed by the leader, was included, as these also gave insight into the beliefs, practices and intentions within each centre. Further, the choice of wall hangings and posters as well as displays intended to portray Christian values or cultural beliefs were also examined. Importantly, although observation of the participants and documentation has been termed Phase Three to distinguish it from the other aspects of data gathering, it did in fact occur concurrently with Phase Two. The documents examined included: (a) any signs, banners or posters in front of the centre and the entrance area, including the foyer; (b) the centre's web-page and (c) printed material such as prospectuses and staff handbooks. As with the information gleaned from the in-depth interviews, the observations and documentation will be described in the case studies and discussed in Chapter Five.

3.8.5 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling, which has already been mentioned, is a process which involves sampling and selective coding "to theoretically saturate the core and related concepts" (Holton, 2007, p. 265). According to Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, and Blinkhorn (2011) "By carefully selecting participants and by modifying the questions asked in data collection, the researchers fill gaps, clarify uncertainties, test their interpretations, and build their emerging theory" (p. 128). Theoretical sampling is about following emerging ideas and leads as they appear during the analysis of the data. Interestingly, Charmaz (2013) regards theoretical sampling as a key aspect during data collection and analysis; she explains that this can 'prevent mistakes'. Put simply, important information can emerge during interviews that may not totally align with the original research question, but is in fact more important and relevant than the earlier concepts and needs exploring. Thus, the researcher follows these emerging leads with questions to encourage the participant to expand on the triggering comment.

So for example, in this study, Darlene started by focussing on families, how they could be supported and that in order to provide a really good early childhood education, the centre had to be run very professionally with rigorous standards. All very true and extremely important, but little mention of faith and her worldview as a Christian – the focus of this study. On reflection I now think that she assumed this was a 'given'. Nevertheless, I then specifically questioned her about spiritual matters in a subsequent interview and it was as if I had opened the 'flood gates' on this topic. With long, in-depth discussions on the Christian aspect of her worldview and work, she revealed her deep commitment to core Christian

values and practice. The original definition by Glaser and Strauss (1967) still holds true: "the process of data collection for generating theory, whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (p. 45). From this quotation, the adverb 'jointly' was pivotal in this study as together the participants and the researcher worked to discover the emerging theory.

3.9 Methods of Treating and Analysing the Data/Evidence

Within an overall qualitative paradigm, this project utilised the tools of grounded theory which Charmaz (2011) describes as "a method of qualitative enquiry in which data collection and analysis reciprocally inform and shape each other through an emergent iterative process", and again, "Fundamentally, grounded theory is an iterative, comparative, interactive and abductive method" (p. 360).

While Creswell (2014) describes it as:

> 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)

Iterative (Charmaz, 2014; Walker and Myrick, 2006) is sometimes described as repetitious but it is this 'backwards and forwards' reflexive process that characterises qualitative analysis and leads to the emergence of theory from the data. Further, Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) point out that it is the researcher's approach to the data, the 'looking beneath the surface' that steers the development of understanding the data:

> From our experience, however, patterns, themes, and categories do not emerge on their own. They are driven by what the inquirer wants to know and how the inquirer interprets what the data are telling her or him according to subscribed theoretical frameworks, subjective perspectives, ontological and epistemological positions, and intuitive field understandings. In short, rather than being an objectivist application of analysis procedures, the process is highly reflexive. (p. 77).

However, it must be acknowledged that when examining the data, the researcher may not have to delve too deeply to find many of the major themes and patterns when the clues found in statements are repeated many times by various participants. In fact, the repetition of beliefs was very evident in the present study.

As the data is being gathered, first through the survey-questionnaires and then through the hermeneutic-dialectic of the semi structured interviews, a key component is emergent design, a process of constant comparison (Walker & Myrick, 2006), adjustment and further exploration to ensure authenticity and from the interviewee's perspective, that it is trustworthy (Briggs et al. 2012).

3.9.1 Trustworthiness

Briggs et al. (2012, p. 202) go on to outline specifically what is meant by trustworthiness, by quoting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. Credibility is about the honesty of the findings and as mentioned earlier, extended time for data gathering and member checking are two ways of ensuring credibility (Anney, 2014). Dependability is determined by an audit trail and triangulation (Anney, 2014) and refers to "the stability of findings over time" (Bitsch, 2005, p. 86). Further, according to Bitsch (2005), the "researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through "thick description" and "purposeful sampling" (p. 85). Confirmability is about whether similar results could be replicated by other researchers, that the data and findings are not just imaginary (Anney, 2014).

Briggs et al., (2012) also note that "triangulation of data collection, member checking and the keeping of an audit trail are three powerful and common ways of ensuring trustworthiness" (p. 202). Additionally, the researcher was very aware of the need to really listen to what the participants were saying, rather than overlaying personal experiences in leadership. In the current study, these strategies were constantly used not only to ensure trustworthiness for the reader, but also as effective methods by which the project was steered towards the emerging theory. Closely linked to trustworthiness is the assurance of quality as explained in the next section.

3.9.2 Assurance of Quality

As noted earlier, a very important part of research and the recording and analysis of that research, in this case a thesis, is the need to ensure the quality of the product. Over time the language changes, but the intent remains. Thus, words such as reliability and validity have given way to trustworthiness and now tend to focus on 'quality'.

Guba and Lincoln (2013, p. 70, 71) state that ‘quality’ can be achieved by meeting five criteria, and in this project these are demonstrated as follows:

1. Fairness: Lincoln et al. (2011) describe this concept as a “quality of balance; that is, all stakeholders views, perspectives, values, claims, concerns and voices should be apparent in the text” (p. 122). A lack of this balance was seen to be a form of bias. Participants in Phase One (surveys) and Phase Two (interviews) were informed of the purpose and procedures of the project prior to participation and gave their consent to the data from their survey returns and interviews to be used in this thesis and any subsequent publications. Further, as was noted earlier, the participants from both phases were extremely supportive and keen for the project to go ahead, commenting that they looked forward to receiving any ensuing publications.

   Phase Two participants were interviewed on at least three separate occasions, providing both interviewer and interviewee opportunities to consider and reconsider conversations over a considerable period of time, in order to arrive at an agreed meaning. In addition, Phase Two participants were given the opportunity to check transcripts individually; and at the close of the data-gathering process, the interview cohort met with the researcher for lunch, group member checking, and discussion about the outcomes.

   Fairness also includes the researcher presenting all the value differences and even conflicts. In this study there were no conflicts, but there was a disconnection between what Denise (from the inner-city centre) was saying and then sometimes appeared to be implementing. This was a strong example of ‘multiple realities’ as explained in that case study. Lincoln and Guba (2013) summarise the conditions for fairness as “informed consent procedures; prolonged engagement and persistent observation by the inquirer; explication of the inquirer’s etic position; individual and group member checking; and use of a peer debriefer” (p. 71). Each of these conditions occurred in this study and therefore contributed to the sense of fairness as well as contributing to a sense of completion.
2. Ontological authenticity: This refers to an increased understanding of the research topic and involvement by the participants. Perhaps one of the most enjoyable aspects of this research project was during the group lunch at the close of the interview phase when the four participants were able to meet together with the researcher, share experiences, discuss the emerging themes and how others managed a particular issue,

develop an ongoing network and affirm each other. A second and equally important aspect of this research project is the information it will provide for those wishing to implement a Christian foundation to their early childhood education and care programs, following publication of the findings and practical examples.

3. Educative authenticity: This refers not only to the dialectical conversations between the researcher and the participants which lead to greater understanding and credibility, but also the debriefing between the researcher and a colleague or supervisor which may raise issues, even conflicting issues, of which the researcher was unaware. This certainly occurred during the course of this research project, with in-depth collegial discussions following the interviews, especially in regard to the disconnect that was becoming obvious for the inner-city case study and the concern this produced for the researcher.
4. Catalytic authenticity: this relates to change and to action and it occurred as a result of the discussions and sharing at the group lunch where participants discussed and shared issues, new programs, or funding opportunities with each other. Offers were also made to visit each other's centres to observe programs and facilities.
5. Tactical authenticity: protocols of ethical approval were followed, together with member checking, and confidentiality. As previously mentioned the interview relationship was collegial, with the researcher in a learner's position and the participants in the role of experts sharing their experience and wisdom with the researcher.

3.9.3 Triangulation of Data

When Creswell and Poth (2018) describe strategies for validation, triangulation is one of the most commonly used and logical to implement. Simply, the data is acquired from a variety of different sources and when in agreement or alignment this corroboration from different sources indicates its authenticity. In this study triangulation was effected by (a) survey-questionnaires; (b) interviews; (c) observations including inspection of documentation and digital media; as well as comparisons between participants to ensure alignment with the research question (Carlson, 2010). Scott and Garner (2013) advocate "using different methods to improve the researcher's understanding of contexts and introduce triangulation into the study" (p. 185). In this study data were obtained from different sources, but also from within each source, such as comparison of comments from the interviews (Patton, 2015) as well as comparison of web sites, and documentation.

3.9.4 Member Checking

A critical feature of the authentication process is member checking (Carlson, 2010), where the interviewee provides feedback to help improve the accuracy and credibility of the study. This process substantiates the honesty of the data and more importantly, the interpretations by the researcher. This feedback can occur at various times through the process and can focus on various aspects of the study (Carlson, 2010). Carlson also recommends that member checking, particularly in the reviewing of transcripts by the interviewees, be handled with sensitivity, providing careful instructions as to the purpose and how to respect the participant's dignity and voice (Carlson, 2010, p. 1112). The issue of the 'researcher's voice' within this process as well as the issue of honesty is both important and complex, as Kempster and Parry (2011) note:

> A further epistemological dilemma of grounded theory is associated with 'remaining within the data' in the development of theory. This dilemma has consistently been an issue for grounded theorists ever since – dealing with issues of objectivity in tandem while allowing personal experience to make sense of the data. (p. 107)

Clearly, member-checking is critical in ensuring the authenticity of the interpretation of the data, lest the researcher interpret the participant's comments differently to their original meaning and intention. Member checking need not be limited only to the checking of the printed transcript by the participant following transcription. It may frequently occur during the interview, as the researcher seeks to clarify what the participant really meant by a particular expression as in the following interchanges between the researcher (R) and a participant (P):

R: So when you say you 'live it', what do you mean by 'live it'?

P: It's a meaning that I now have a definition because a staff member gave it to me, she said 'you live and breathe it'. And I asked: what do you mean? And she said: you always treat staff with respect, you're always accepting of families, you make everybody feel that you literally do what Jesus says in the Bible to do, you do it to other people.

Figure 3. 4

Member checking: requesting clarification

Alternatively, the researcher attempts to paraphrase, and the participant extends the answer for further clarification as in this interchange:

R. Practising what you preach?

P. Yes, but more than that. In those moments being comfortable to say 'this is my line' because even though you're with these Christian people, there are different interpretations of Christianity.

Figure 3. 5
Member checking: clarification through paraphrase

Sometimes the researcher does the apparent clarifying based on what the participant has said previously and the participant agrees as demonstrated in this interchange:

P: That's what drives us. How we can extend this ministry, how we can help the community? How we can serve Jesus?

R: OK. So part of that would be to bring people who come along who don't know ***Jesus*** *to a knowledge of Him?*

P: Exactly!

Figure 3. 6
Member checking: interpretation

Each of the previous three extracts taken from different interviews illustrate oral member-checking, during the semi-structured interview before any transcription occurred. However, Birks and Mills (2015) note that while asking participants to check the analysis of qualitative data with the intention of validating the findings sometime after the interviews, the researcher needs to be aware that participants' beliefs may change and be influenced by the current context, which could possibly make the feedback unreliable. Carlson (2010) also shares a number of vignettes from her own experience with member checking to illustrate the

thought and care that need to accompany the process. Examples relevant to this research project include the decision, or not, to leave oral grammatical mistakes in the final script which might then be published and embarrass the participant; a participant's embarrassment over his/her innocent honesty during the interview and a desire to subsequently withdraw from the project; or, even the return of a transcript to an academic who had been interviewed and who had then returned the transcript in a totally unrecognisable form due to the quantity of alterations. Therefore, while member checking is really important to verify the authenticity of what the researcher has written, the process should be carefully considered and implemented with forethought. In the current study the participants were aware that the transcripts were recordings of what they had said. Perhaps because these four participants were very experienced and confident in their beliefs, they found little need to change anything as they checked the emailed transcripts.

3.10 The Audit Trail

This is the third of Briggs et al's. (2012) three methods of ensuring trustworthiness and authenticity. As noted by Walsham (2006, p. 321) and cited by Carcary (2009, p. 12): "we are biased by our own background, knowledge and prejudices to see things in certain ways and not others". While this is perfectly logical, the detailed record of an audit trail permits the reader to trace the development of the research project, any changes and the events influencing these, which all confirm the honesty of the research. During this project the researcher maintained a reflective journal detailing events, interviews, issues and challenges – as shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3. 5

Samples from the reflective journal

2014 April 22	Relevance is such an important concept. Yes, a particular thing is important, is part of the field, but does it really relate to my question? There is a strong sense of never being complete, of always wanting to discover and read another article that will tell me more or broaden my perspective on the topic
2015 February	I am amazed at what a spiritual uplift the interviewing and dialoguing with these four Godly women has been to me personally. I never anticipated it would be so wonderful, encouraging and inspiring.
2015 August	I am noticing particular aspects of Denise's perspectives – talks about ministry team, but it's the ministers and herself, not her staff. Doesn't call them a 'team'. Also with Darlene am noticing that there seems to be a strong business/ commercial perspective rather than ministry, mission and social justice that Maree and Denise talk about all the time. Doesn't mention praying about issues or a personal relationship with Jesus…?
2015 August 26th	Had fierce argument with Phil over my level 1 coding He made me realise I had completely forgotten/ignored member checking for my second round of interview questions. I was focussing on MY agenda, not the data. I was seeing everything through my 30 years of educational administration
2016 June	I'm reflecting on the themes I've identified from the data. Have I still looked at them too much through my own eyes? Have I tended to pick out only administrative/leadership type words? But surely this is valid in terms of my research question which is about leadership anyway?
2017 March	In writing up the case studies. I realise I need to ensure that the research sub questions are included and tied into each case study more carefully. I keep ploughing on with the writing in between teaching, writing special education papers, marking, teaching in winter school. I feel as if everything is very disorganised with gaps.
2018 February	Starting to think more deeply. How much do the practices reflect the philosophy? Practices must reflect the espoused philosophy to be perceived as authentic from an outside perspective. How do you record people's comments and also be non-judgemental?

As can be seen from Table 3.5 while the aims of the research project and the early decisions about methodology and methods seemed clear and logical and were established fairly quickly, the interactions, reflections and decision making in Phase Two were far from simple.

3.11 Coding

An essential element of grounded theory requires the ongoing analysis of data which involves coding the data. Coding in a grounded theory approach is a precise method that moves from transcription of basic details to categories and thus to theory (Charmaz, 2014). A grounded theory approach is far more than just an organisation of data per se; rather, it leads to the generation of theory. The iterative process of coding the data and member checking leads to the emergence of theory. Walker and Myrick (2006) comment that coding is an "iterative, inductive, yet reductive process that organizes data, from which the researcher can

then construct themes, essences, descriptions, and theories" (p. 549). For Corbin and Strauss (1990) coding is the "fundamental analytic process used by the researcher" (p. 12) the tool that converts data to theory. Holton (2007) describes the coding of the data as far more than just a "discreet stage" (p. 274) but rather as an ongoing process. In this research project, several levels of coding were used to identify the critical elements in Christian early childhood education leadership. Charmaz (2014) describes coding as: "the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 113). Charmaz (2014) goes on to explain that there are at least two stages of coding, the first initial code followed by a second more focussed approach. The latter may be supplemented by theoretical sampling which allows the researcher to explore specific aspects of the data through additional questions.

3.11.1 First level coding [Also called initial coding (Charmaz, 2014); first cycle coding (Saldana, 2013); open coding (Holton, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008)].

Following the transcription of the interview, the researcher reads through the data to revise and gain a general appreciation of the thoughts, beliefs and opinions of the interviewee and to continue the process of subconsciously connecting these with similar themes from the other interviewees as well as relevant literature before commencing the actual coding process. Saldana (2013) describes twenty-four first cycle coding methods, explaining that these fall into seven sub categories and depending on the type and purpose of the research, more than one may be chosen to assist in analysing the data. For example, while undertaking research that involved children, Saldana used In Vivo Coding in order that the children's voices would be given prominence (2013, p. 61).

In the current study, Initial Coding, In Vivo Coding and Process Coding were all used concurrently. Descriptions of these approaches and the reasons for choosing them are outlined in the following paragraphs.

3.11.2 Initial Coding

Initial Coding is described by Saldana (2013, p. 101) as "a starting point" and is in fact the first attempt at breaking down and deciphering the data found in interview transcripts to detect similarities, repetitions, contradictions and differences. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and analysed line by line (Licqurish & Seibold, 2011) for emerging themes. These categories and the information were re-analysed during further

interviews and member checking. Simultaneously the researcher was writing memos, reminders and comments to guide further exploration.

3.11.3 In Vivo Coding

In Vivo Coding is described by Saldana (2013) as particularly appropriate for "beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honour the participant's voice" (p. 91). In simple terms, it is using the actual word or words of the interviewee as a code. In this study the voices and language of the four interviewees were extremely important in attempting to capture the essence of Christian early childhood education leadership. Further, the specific words used were critical in identifying the nuances of meaning and therefore the In Vivo Coding approach was used.

3.11.4 Process Coding

- Saldana (2013, p. 96) notes that Process Coding has also been called 'action coding' in some literature, as the focus is on action. Process Coding makes use of gerunds in the coding process and Charmaz (2013) recommends the use of gerunds during coding to try to answer the question of what is actually happening in the data. She points out that the reality of our world is that it is constantly changing, and is not a set, static structure. The use of gerunds allows the analysis to be a more fluid, active process. Charmaz quotes Glaser (1967) as having described grounded theory as 'the sociology of gerunds'. An example of a gerund, is used by Maree when she says "*promoting your faith to others by the way you lead"*. This concept of a dynamic approach to the data is reflected in Charmaz's recommendation of line by line coding initially which is also active and kinaesthetic. Charmaz (2013) describes this approach as a 'heuristic device' which may also be defined as a practical method for problem solving, often involving trial-and-error (Merriam-Webster, 2016) for learning about the world that is being researched.

Having chosen the particular approaches to coding, and having read the transcript through more than once, the researcher starts to summarise each line with a word or phrase. Beginning with 'substantive' coding, that is, *open coding* leading to the discovery of topics or categories and related concepts by direct analysis of the data, the researcher compares line by line, incident with incident and is 'forced' to verify categories (Holton, 2007, p. 275). Charmaz (2014, p. 124) defines line by line coding as "giving a name to each line of the written data" and explains that this process, albeit apparently arbitrary, actually forces the

researcher to adhere to the data rather than succumbing to his or her own preconceived ideas. Further, she comments that this process also sparks new ideas from the data that can and should be explored. Charmaz also goes on to explain that it is not unusual for professional people, conducting research within their own field to be so immersed in the information and perspectives they are being given through the interview process that they unquestioningly accept the worldview and assumptions of their participants, rather than critically analysing what the data is saying (Charmaz, 2014, p. 125). Creswell (2009, p. 186) suggests that topics be given an abbreviated 'code' during the open coding phase and then further reading and analysis will permit the codes to be re-grouped into categories and reduced in number where possible.

Kelle (2007) commenting on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) methodology, notes that there are two basic imperatives in relation to category building in grounded theory:

1. "Categories must not be forced on the data, they should emerge instead in the ongoing process of data analysis.
2. In developing categories, the sociologist should employ theoretical sensitivity, which means the ability to see relevant data and to reflect upon empirical data material with the help of theoretical terms" (p. 193).

The central topic of this study is leadership which is both complex and wide ranging in its application. It was therefore anticipated that a great many topics or categories would emerge from the data and that grouping and reduction would be essential in order to keep the material manageable. This did indeed occur and necessitated considerable reading and re-reading of the data and the resulting categories. The illustration of a swirling, muddy pond could be used, which, after some concentration, (in this case frequent reading and analysis), begins to settle and clear, whereupon the larger stones (the more obvious, core categories) start to emerge and become obvious to the researcher.

While the coding begins with the researcher reading the transcript carefully and alongside each line writing a label, it should be noted that this 'label' might be a single word, a phrase or even a clause. This label might describe what is happening, what the participant is feeling, what the participant is doing as in the following samples:

Table 3. 6

Samples of first level coding

Raw data: what the participant was actually saying.	Summary by the researcher
Fran: Interview 3 I started in year 5 and midway through year 5 we had a new teacher come in and he had a huge impact on me about becoming a teacher. The way he taught, the way he engaged.	Reflecting on year five Feeling greatly influenced by new teacher His way of engaging students influenced her strongly towards teaching
Darlene: Interview 1 So what I'm looking at now is survey questionnaireing (sic) our families to actually find out in this context how do they engage tightly, connect and communicate with their children.	Wanting to find out more about parents' relationships with their children (Because she wants to support that)
Denise: Interview 1 For some of our families, filling in documents is almost impossible and they need help with that. When they've been through difficult times, they KNOW they can come here and someone will hold out a hand to them. I've had parents just come and drop themselves on my steps and just sit there. 'Cause they know they can. And just hang. If they want to talk they can talk, if they don't want to talk they don't have to talk	Satisfaction at being able to offer practical support to families and community members Satisfaction at knowing families feel they can come there for comfort and kindness Being able to give emotional support to families and community members
Maree: Interview 1 The cornerstone of everything we do is based in social justice!	Social Justice

The samples displayed in Table 3.6 demonstrate how the researcher tries to capture the content AND the way the participant was feeling about what they were saying. Sometimes the initial codes used are summaries of what the person has said, if the actual words are used as the code, which is termed: 'in vivo code' (Gorra, 2016). Charmaz (2006) points out that using the participant's actual words is useful in preserving not only the words themselves, but especially the participant's meaning and their perspective on what is happening. A term that summarises what the participant is thinking or doing may also be used such as in the example found in Table 3.6. with the use of the word 'satisfaction'. Here the participant (Denise) has not used the actual word 'satisfaction' but that is clearly what she is feeling from being able to offer the particular support she is describing. While in the fourth example, the participant's (Maree) actual words are used in an In Vivo approach.

Although a quantitative approach is not usually associated with qualitative research another practice may be to count the actual instances that a particular word or concept that is significant to the participant, is used. Counting quickly demonstrates the importance of that word or concept to the person who is spontaneously using it during an interview (Morgan, 1993). The ultimate purpose of any of these processes or activities by the researcher is to dig deeply into the data to understand what is going on, the reasons for this and how it may all come together to increase the depth of understanding. Such is the case with Table 3.7 that records the incidence of the use of some of the words that the participants viewed as important, across the cohort of interviewees. Saldana (2013, p. 63) cautions that "word frequency in the data corpus does not necessarily suggest significance, but it is nevertheless worth exploring as a query to explore any emergent but as yet undetected patterns" (p. 63). This process also serves to identify significant aspects that one interviewee might have omitted.

Table 3. 7

Numerical recording of significant words

Concepts (all from participants' own words) grouped with like	Fran	Darlene	Denise	Maree
Our	11	15	25	30
We	20	46	61	40
Us	12	6	7	15
Team	19	18	10	0
Christian	31	16	54	12
Faith	4	5	3	21
Jesus, God or Christ	19	1	22	13
Ministry	0	12	21	0
Mission	0	0	6	1
Social Justice	0	0	0	9
Families	10	51	27	18
Parents	3	11	11	1
Community	2	13	4	24
Service	10	12	3	11
Value, values, valued	7	2	3	41
Respect	21	4	2	7
Think or reflect	16	16	12	24
Heart	0	10	1	0

The various colours in the first column indicate the way these words are grouped together to reflect similarities. The items that scored 15 or more were circled with red, while anything over 10 received a yellow highlight to indicate the importance placed on the concept by the participant. Numerical recording is yet another method of analysing the data to investigate emphasis and significance of comments by the participants, thus leading to the possible emergence of theory.

Table 3.8 provides a sample of the cross comparisons between the four participants during the level one coding. However, this is only a sample and although some of the codes are not recorded for every participant in this particular sample, they appear later in the conversation or in the next interview.

Table 3. 8

Samples of cross comparisons between the four participants at level 1 coding

Denise	**Darlene**	**Fran**	**Maree**
Ministering	Talking about her Research project	EC perspective	Reflecting on the source of Christian EC Leadership
Teaming with ministers	Rolling out parenting programs	Sharing faith	Believing that faith produces a strong values base
Sharing faith	Wanting to support families more	Non-Christian protocols	Seeing a difference between leadership and management
Mission focussed	Giving Christmas gifts to parents every year	Being able to have other faiths but not share	promoting your faith
Coming from Jesus	Reflecting whether this was really meeting families' needs	Being superficial but not personal	to others by the way you lead
Christian decision making	Wanting to find out how to strengthen families	Storying not faith	Leading rather than managing, inspires staff to copy
Pastoral caring	Deciding to do research to get info	Embedding Christian faith into whole daily program	Living those values in everything you do: (relationships)
Facilitating support	Survey questionnaireing (sic) all the families for that information	Not just token moment	Perceiving faith-based values as the source of Christian Leadership
Bridging the gap	Feels it's a blessing	Embodiment of what / why they do	Reflecting on the relationship between leadership and management
Welcoming families	It's developing	Children, relaxed with concept of God.	Seeing management as routine, but leadership as from the core of your being, that faith being.
Accepting families	feeling it's a passion in her heart	Main aim for the child	
No judging	Wanting to think outside the square and use the resources		

Families returning	Providing resources to strengthen families	Families knowing this is part of the dynamic	Acknowledging that people look to her as a role model
Families feeling safe	Extending support to wider community	Dispelling fear about Christianity	Explaining these are her expectations of staff
Being part of the mission	Confident as to how to do it	Dispelling misconceptions about program & curriculum	Stressing the importance of living up to those expectations
Offering support	Wanting best way to serve busy families	Openness at orientation	
Driven by Jesus' love		No pretence	
		Children hearing about God	

The comparisons highlighted in Table 3.8 strengthen the researcher's ability to compare and notice the gaps in the data. For example, in the sample displayed in this table, and during these first-round interviews it can be seen that Maree in the right-hand column does not mention families, her focus is on her staff; while the other three participants have a strong focus on families and do not mention staff. This permits the researcher to listen for these topics in further interviews and even ask specific questions in relation to these topics.

3.11.5 Second Level Coding

The coding process then moves into a further refinement known as axial coding whereby core categories are identified and related to subcategories as a further level of theory development (Creswell, 2014). In theory, coding should be a fairly easy process, but the reality is that it is not. Saldana (2013) notes that few will "get it right" at their first attempt; and states: "Qualitative enquiry demands meticulous attention to language and deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meanings of human experience" (p. 10).

Table 3.9 displays the previous samples from the first round of interviews (Table 3.8), now colour coded to show the similarities and differences across the cohort and demonstrating the possible grouping into connecting relationships. For example, those coloured aqua relate to ministry and mission with a spiritual focus and general support and at this point are only mentioned by Denise and Darlene. However, Fran and Maree mention this focus later in the interview and in subsequent interviews. Those coloured pink relate to families and family issues and again Maree makes no mention of family related items at this point, but does later in the interview and in subsequent interviews. Similarly, at this point in

the first round of interviews, Maree's focus is on leadership and management, faith and values and staff relationships, and in fact Maree is the only one talking about her staff at this point.

Table 3. 9

Samples of cross comparisons between the four participants at level 2 coding

Denise	Darlene	Fran	Maree
Ministering	Talking about her Research project	EC perspective	Reflecting on the source of Christian EC Leadership
Teaming with ministers	Rolling out parenting programs	Sharing faith	Believing that faith produces a strong values base
Sharing faith	Wanting to support families more	Non-Christian protocols	Seeing a difference between leadership and management
Mission focussed	Giving Christmas gifts to parents every year	Being able to have other faiths but not share	promoting your faith
Coming from Jesus	Reflecting whether this was really meeting families' needs	Being superficial but not personal	to others by the way you lead
Christian decision making	Wanting to find out how to strengthen families	Storying not faith	Leading rather than managing, inspires staff to copy
Pastoral caring	Deciding to do research to get info	Embedding Christian faith into whole daily program	Living those values in everything you do: (relationships)
Facilitating support	Survey questionnaireing all the families for that information	Not just token moment	Perceiving faith-based values as the source of Christian Leadership
Bridging the gap	Feels it's a blessing It's developing feeling it's a passion in her heart	Embodiment of what / why they do	Reflecting on the relationship between leadership and management
Welcoming families	Wanting to think outside the square and use the resources	Children, relaxed with concept of God.	Seeing management as routine, but leadership as from the core of your being, that faith being.
Accepting families	Providing resources to strengthen families	Main aim for the child	Acknowledging that people look to her as a role model
No judging	Extending support to wider community	Families knowing this is part of the dynamic	Explaining these are her expectations of staff
Families returning	Confident as to how to do it	Dispelling fear about Christianity	Stressing the importance of living up to those expectations
Families feeling safe	Wanting best way to serve busy families	Dispelling misconceptions about program & curriculum	
Being part of the mission		Openness at orientation	
Offering support		No pretense	
Driven by Jesus' love		Children hearing about God	

Key to colours:

Supporting and Ministering
Faith, faith-based values
Families and family relationships
Jesus, God and spiritual
resource – related
Leadership and management
Educational, pedagogical, cognitive matters
Passion, heart

From a quick glance at Table 3.9, it becomes obvious that there is a considerable overlap between the codes. For example, one of Darlene's line-by-line summaries is: 'wanting the best way to serve busy families'. This has been coded pink as it mentions the word 'families' and is focussed on 'families'; at the same time it contains the word 'serve' which is in the 'support' category. Therefore the researcher has to look carefully beyond the actual words, look at the context of what has been said before and what follows, before allocating that phrase to a particular code. Even then there has to be a level of flexibility rather than dogmatism.

3.12 Development of Theory

At this point it is appropriate to ask where the theory is situated in this process. The development of theory from the hermeneutic-dialectic process occurring during the in-depth interviews is not something that suddenly occurs. Figure 3.6 attempts to graphically explain the sources of information that lead to the emergence and development of understanding and thus to theory. In this diagram the documentation (including websites), the literature and earlier research together with site visits and observation are portrayed as an incoming source of data. However, the interviews are a larger source, and more importantly, are an interactive source of data as portrayed by the two-way arrows.

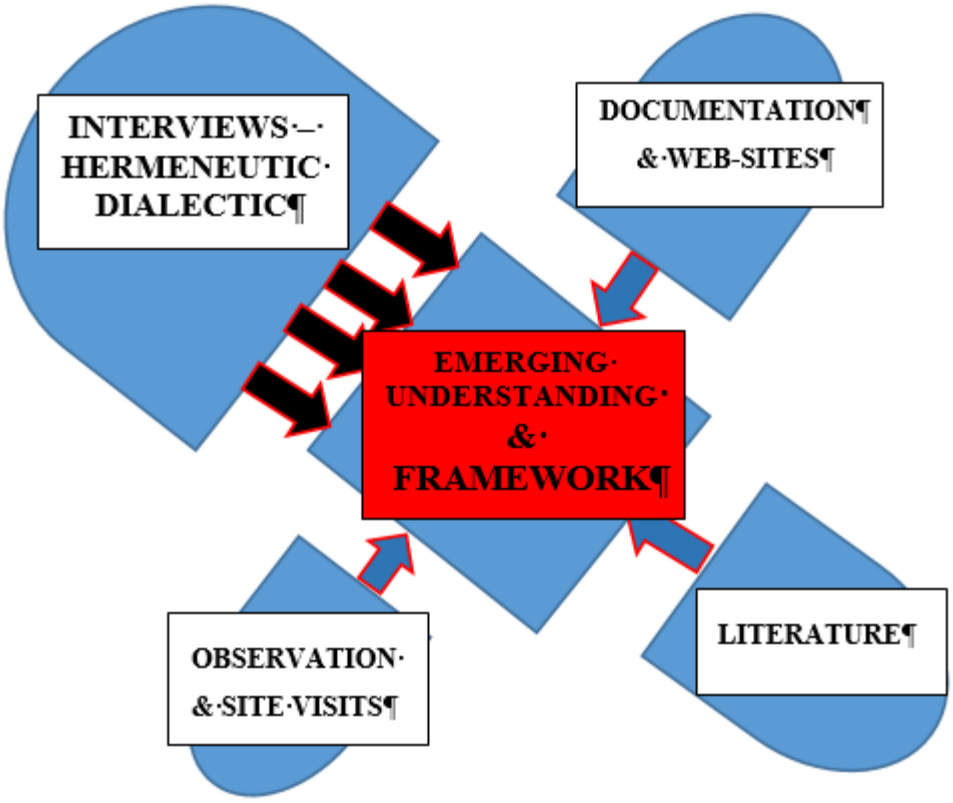


Figure 3.6

Diagram of the factors leading to the emergence of theory

Therefore, as these four types of information are considered and analysed, as they align with each other and corroborate each other, the theory emerges. This theory, grounded in all of the data will be discussed in depth in Chapter Six.

Each of the four Directors/Leaders in Phase Two came from a different Christian church denomination, led centres in different geographic and socio-economic locations and had different personal and educational backgrounds. However, through all four sets of interviews there is a common thread. This core thread is far more than work similarities, but in fact relates to their personal worldview about Christian early childhood education leadership, which then impacts their leadership role and practice. Each director's/leader's narrative is presented in the form of a detailed case study in Chapter Five and the following section explains the reason for this choice.

3.13 The Case Studies

Yin (2009, p. 2) suggests that case studies are the preferred research vehicle in relation to three aspects: "(a) 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context". All three of these points were particularly relevant in the current study. Woodrich (2010) has also commented on the case study approach: "Case study research (CSR) is an inquiry that focuses on describing, understanding, predicting and/or controlling the individual (i.e. process, animal, person, household, organisation, group, industry, culture or nationality)" (p. 1). Woodrich (2010) went on to note that this was an intentionally broader definition than some used earlier. Both of these statements provide a depth of understanding regarding the use of case studies in research. Importantly in this current study, the phenomenon is considered in the real-life context, while Woodrich's definition adds the value of the diversity of investigative approaches together with the broad range of possible subjects for the study. More significantly, Woodrich's statement makes it quite clear that a case study is more than just a description and in fact 'digs deep' into the phenomenon.

In addition, Lincoln and Guba (2013) note: "the case study provides the thick description needed to apprehend, appreciate and understand the circumstances of the setting, including most importantly its physical, social, economic and cultural elements. The case study is perhaps the only format that can remain true to the moral imperatives of constructivism, that is to serve as a credible representation of the various local constructions ….that can adequately identify and reflect the voice or voices that influence the outcome" (p. 80).

Although a survey approach was used initially in the current project to gain a quick overview of the phenomenon of Christian early childhood education leadership, it must be recognised that there are serious limitations if this were to be the only approach used. By contrast, while investigating fewer participants, the case study approach permits the researcher to interview the participant several times and in-depth. This repetition allows the exploration of emerging information; knowledge gained can be cumulative with each succeeding interview; and face to face discussions about particular aspects of the research questions can occur. In addition, differentiation and comparison between the participants and their approaches take place, and significantly, a depth of personal empathy and understanding is able to develop. As also noted in Chapter Three, the extended interview phase contributes to the trustworthiness of the research.

3.14 Organisation of the Case Studies

In order to be able to clearly discern the differences and similarities within each of the four cases studies a structure was used to systematically address the themes emerging from within the data. Each aspect about the leader, her centre, her beliefs and practices is listed together with the reason for its choice. Additionally, this standardisation contributed to the need for rigour while the aspects reflected the contexts from within which the codes emerged.

While case studies are a very useful vehicle for exploring the 'how' and 'why' within a contemporary context, there has been criticism that they may lack rigour (Yin, 2018). To address this genuine concern, Houghton et al. (2013) noted strategies they had used to ensure rigour: "prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, audit trail, reflexivity, and thick descriptions" (p. 16). Chapter Three described these same strategies that had been used in this study to ensure rigour. However, Yin (2018) also noted that part of the concern over the conduct of case studies was a "lack of systematic procedures" (p. 18). As explained earlier, to address this issue, a set of seven aspects was designed to standardise the approach taken with each of the case studies as described in the following section.

3.15 Case Study Structure

As noted earlier, Case Studies have at times been criticised for lacking rigour and structure. Therefore, a structure was developed to assist in examining the stories of each of the interview participants. The seven aspects and the reason for their selection are now unpacked in detail.

The seven aspects used to standardise and examine each case study

1. **The Christian Early Childhood Education and Care Centre (CECECC) and its location**

   The CECEC Centre, its location and the families it serves, greatly influence the approach taken by the leader. The socio-economic level of the locality and the socio-economic level of the families whose children attend the centre will guide the quantity and type of support that the centre will offer. In addition, the cultural and religious backgrounds of the children will influence some of the activities and the way they are presented. Staff may find there is less work pressure in a larger centre where there are more staff members to share the workload. The proximity of the centre to a church with which it is affiliated, or to a primary school which the children may attend in the

future will also influence the atmosphere and ethos of the centre. Finally, the design and age of the centre itself, as well as its facilities will have both practical and even emotive influences on those who teach, learn and visit its precincts.

2. **Leading the Practice**

This perspective, 'leading the practice', focuses on the Director/Leader of the centre. Her life history and culture are explored together with her educational background and experience in early childhood education and leadership. Next, her pathway to becoming the leader of a CECEC centre is recounted together with her personal faith and worldview. Finally, her life as a Christian and the maintenance of her faith are explored and discussed.

This very personal incursion into the life of the director/leader is essential in helping the reader understand the perspectives she shares and the contributing factors that have led to this point in her life.

3. **Foundation for the Practice**

This section addresses the underlying foundations for the programs and practices in the centre. What are the fundamental bases for the centre's activities?

4. **Motivation for her Practice**

Why does the leader do what she does? What is her motivation? What are the underpinning values and beliefs for the programs? Is it only a legal requirement? How important are some of the core Christian values to this leader, such as Social Justice, Compassion, Love and Care, Service, Respecting, Accepting, Welcoming and Reflecting Jesus?

5. **The Practice**

So much of effective leadership depends on successful relationships. This section examines those relationships in the particular context of a CECEC centre. These include: Relationships with children and spirituality and God; Relationships with families (positive and negative); Relationships with staff (positive and negative); and Relationships with the community

6. **Challenges of the Practice**

Within the practice of a CECEC centre two major challenges were identified. The first is common to all school leaders, and that is the workload; the sense of being responsible to everyone for everything, including meeting all the administrative and government demands.

The second challenge is particularly relevant in Christian centres where there are tensions of philosophical difference. This may emanate from parents, although this is less likely if they have made the decision to enrol their child in a Christian centre. On the other hand, a staff member or members may reject the Christian ethos of the centre and seek to undermine the Christian practices and activities as well as the leadership. A minor challenge was identified as 'the community' – meaning the local community, however, for three of the leaders this was actually reversed in the support and involvement they provided to the community.

7. **Summary of the Practice – what's it all about?**

   Each leader adds her final comments on Christian early childhood education leadership, her perspective and sometimes her advice to would-be leaders.

This chapter has addressed the research design of this study, the collection of the data through three phases and the analysis of the data. The choice of case studies has also been addressed, together with the structure. The next chapter now describes and discusses the results from the first phase – the survey questionnaires.

CHAPTER 4: SURVEY-QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS (Phase 1)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and discusses the outcomes of the first phase data gathering activity - the survey-questionnaires. The concept of having a written survey-questionnaire was designed to develop more deeply the researcher's understanding of the Christian Early Childhood Education field. There was a need to gain a deeper understanding of both beliefs and issues surrounding the practical implementation of leadership within a Christian ECEC Centre and to provide each leader with the opportunity of sharing their thoughts and concerns about the role of leading a Christian ECEC Centre. Finally, the survey-questionnaire responses would help to determine the level of interest by the participants in being involved in the next stage of the research – the interviews.

4.2 Phase One Process

The names of CECEC centres in New South Wales were found through the Yellow Pages telephone directory, the ACECQA data base and Google Search. Each centre was phoned by the researcher with a request to speak with the Director/Leader. Following the phone conversations with the centre Directors/Leaders, survey-questionnaires (see Appendix E) were posted out to those who had agreed to participate in the research project. Nineteen survey-questionnaires were posted out with an additional three being emailed upon the request of the participants who said they preferred to have a digital copy. Four weeks later, Directors/Leaders who had not returned their survey-questionnaires were given a phone reminder by the researcher, usually through the office receptionist.

In total, fourteen survey-questionnaires were returned (74%). The fourteen centres had a variety of locations: country, regional, city and suburban with the latter comprising just over half of the group. In addition, a variety of faiths and organisations were represented including: Church of Christ, Montessori Christian, Integricare, Uniting Church, St Philips Educational Foundation, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist and Pentecostal.

The challenges to maintaining a 'Christian' attitude that these Directors/Leaders found particularly difficult were issues related to integrity such as disloyalty, lying and gossip, or conflict management with staff and/or parents. Mandatory reporting regarding possible abuse by a parent or carer was another area which caused considerable stress, as

invariably the parents resent being reported and the possible consequences that may follow. Further, this can be a very divisive process for staff who may have varying perspectives.

When asked about various aspects of their role, all of the Directors/Leaders replied that they perceived the 'Christian' aspect of their role to be very important. Further, when specific aspects of this were considered, pastoral care towards the children and practical demonstrations of Christian values were seen to be the most important. Examples of this included '*demonstrating a love for the children and families'* and '*showing the fruits of the spirit-patience, gentleness, kindness etc., in all circumstances'*. While one participant wrote that this item – pastoral care and welfare of children (Item D3) was '*beyond a four'* (the highest mark allowed). While having Christian resources or other visible evidences of faith were seen as less important. This may reflect the perspective that outward appearances may not be genuine, and that what is done in an authentic Christian manner is more important. As one participant wrote: "*Actions speak louder than words".*

4.3 Demographics

The first section of the survey-questionnaire addressed demographics. As can be seen from Figure 4.1 the results from five areas of demographics are displayed horizontally, beginning with years of experience in early childhood education and care.

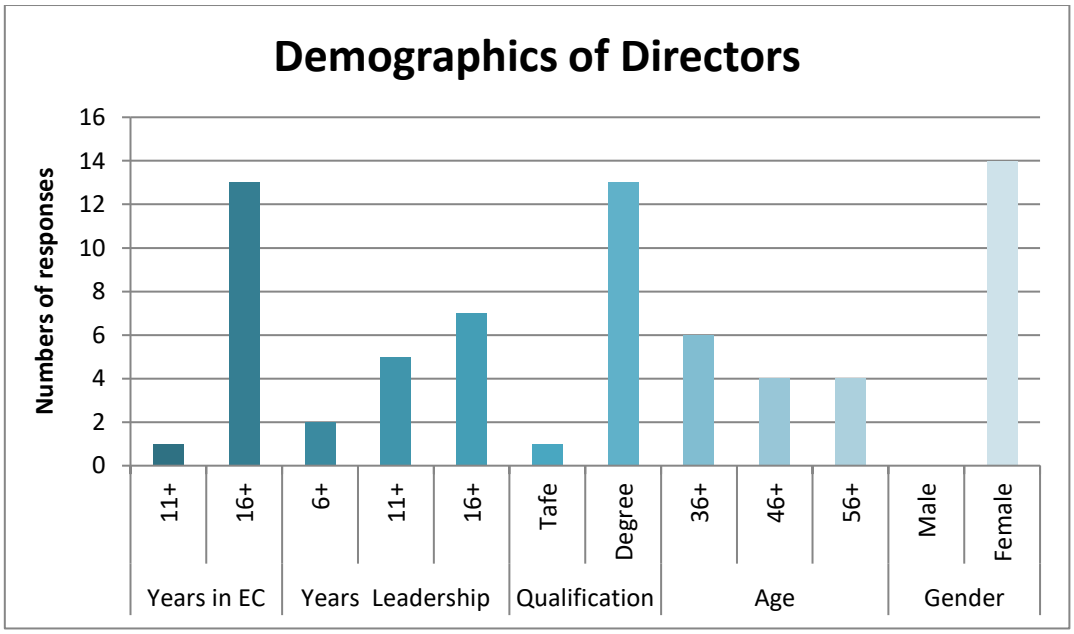


Figure 4. 1

Demographics of the fourteen ECEC Directors/Leaders from the survey-questionnaire

Thirteen of the fourteen Directors/Leaders (93%) who returned the survey-questionnaires, had worked within ECEC for 16 years or longer, while 12 of the fourteen (86%) had been in leadership positions within ECEC for 11 years or longer. Clearly these were experienced educators and leaders. They were also well qualified with thirteen of the fourteen having degree qualifications, with four of these at masters level. The Directors/Leaders were all female as is common in the early childhood education field, and over half were aged over 46 while none were younger than 36.

4.4 Leaders' Beliefs About Their Practice

The second section of the survey-questionnaire was designed to explore the Directors/Leaders' beliefs about their role as a Director/Leader and included the following ten statements which they were asked to rate as they felt the item applied to them using a four-point Likert scale:

Table 4. 1

Ten items to explore Directors/Leaders' perceptions and beliefs about their role

1	I enjoy my work as Director of this centre
2	I feel confident about my ability to lead in my Director's role
3	I feel confident about my ability to manage the day to day running of the centre
4	I enjoy working with my staff
5	I feel confident about communicating effectively with my staff
6	I feel confident about communicating with the parents
7	I feel confident about advocating for Early Childhood Education in the community
8	I feel confident about managing conflict & problem solving
9	I feel confident about strategic planning
10	I feel my approach is 'collaborative'

The ten items in Table 4.1 explored how the Directors/Leaders felt about their role and the work they were doing. The items addressed the basic professional tasks of a Director/Leader of an ECEC, encompassing both leadership and management including human resource management, strategic planning, communication, conflict management, public relations, and advocacy. The individual's sense of efficacy and enjoyment as well as a

perception of his/her style of interaction with staff was also investigated. Each of the ten items displayed in Table 4.1 was given a four-point Likert scale with (1) indicating ‘not at all’ through to (4) Always. The responses were averaged, so that a response of ‘always’ for each of the ten questions would result in a score of 4 points. The results of this section of the survey-questionnaire are displayed in Figure 4.2 where it is clear that the majority of replies were very positive, with 93% indicating a ‘most times’ or ‘always’ response.

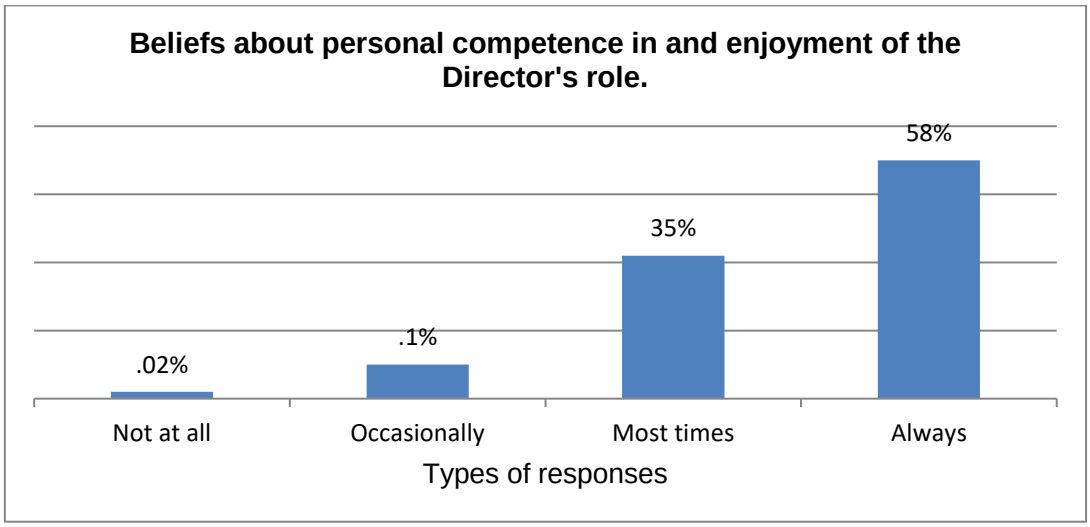


Figure 4. 2

Beliefs about personal efficacy in the Director’s/Leader’s role

When each aspect of the Director’s/Leader’s role is examined in detail it is interesting to note that although the majority of responses were strongly positive as in Figure 4.2, within the categories there was an indication that some areas were less enjoyed or addressed with less confidence than others (see Figure 4.3)

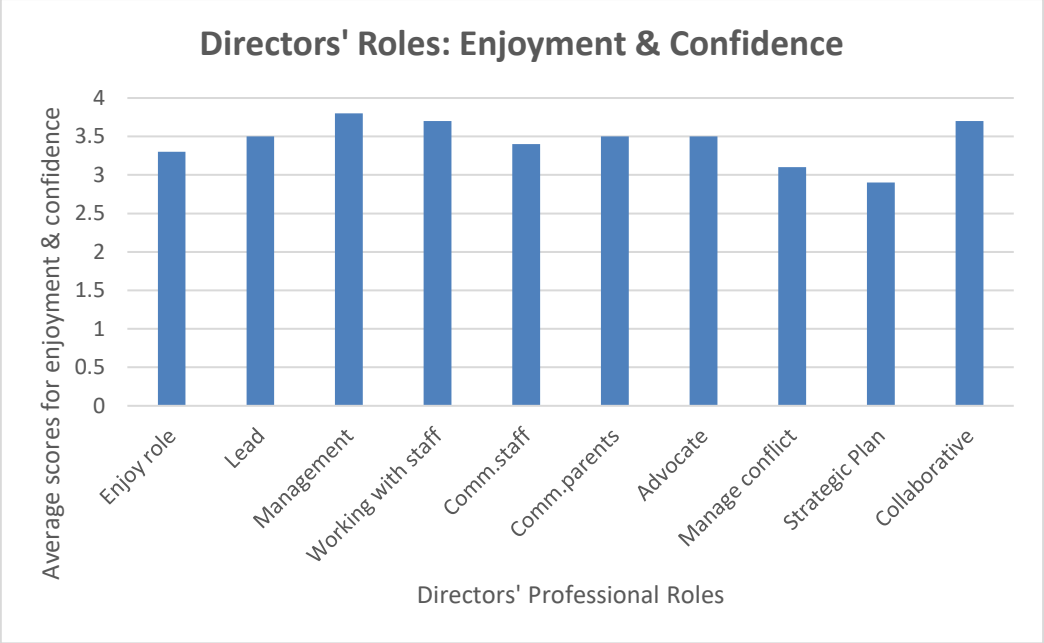


Figure 4. 3

Directors/Leaders' perceptions about their confidence in and enjoyment of, the various roles

For this analysis the responses from the fourteen Directors/Leaders were averaged to provide an overall perspective. From Figure 4.3 it can be noted that the management aspect of the Director's/Leader's role, working with staff, advocating for early childhood education and those less fortunate, and collaborating with staff and parents received higher marks, while managing conflict and dealing with strategic planning were viewed less favourably.

Comments regarding the management of conflict included:

"Managing conflict is never easy" D2

"Not confident!" D5

and strategic planning….

"I struggle with this!" D13

These results are not surprising given that research (Fenech, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2012) has found that many early childhood educators find themselves in leadership positions with little or no training in leadership and management. Further, the tendency to avoid conflict when dealing with staff members or parents is not unanticipated given that many of the responses from these Christian leaders related to showing compassion towards staff and parents and showing fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). However, the effective early childhood education workplace pivots on harmonious social interaction and many leaders avoid conflict perceiving it to be a failure on their part or even that of staff, rather than viewing it as inevitable as well as a possible catalyst for "new ideas, growth and change" (Rodd, 2013, p. 103). The way that the leader approaches and deals with workplace conflict in a positive, constructive manner is the critical factor.

There is also an increasing demand from parents for increased availability of care, which leads to longer hours (frequently 12-hour days) and therefore a need for staff to undertake shift work. This in turn has a roll-on effect of reduced time for staff to meet together, communicate easily, reflect together on issues and share information (Aubrey, 2011; Rodd, 2013). To be able to address this need there are serious budget implications for leaders, all of which increase rather than reduce the likelihood of stress, communication and conflict difficulties.

Strategic planning can be viewed as a fairly enjoyable, logical process for the leader who has collaborative, harmonious staff relationships and wishes to plan ahead with his/her team. However, if the leader lacks confidence and experience or has antagonistic or uncooperative staff members he/she may view a strategic planning process as one hurdle too many and avoid the experience altogether.

Many admit they are 'doing' the role that includes leadership and management, but lack the confidence that what they are actually doing is 'best practice' as they would wish (Fenech, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2012). Waniganayake (2014) notes that the expectations of early childhood educators have changed considerably over the last 30 years, with the focus on management issues and the education and care of young children moving forward to additionally meet the demands of the various skills of leadership and business management.

4.5 Recognising Christian Leadership

The next section of the survey-questionnaires asked the Directors/Leaders how they would recognise Christian leadership in an early childhood education setting. This was completed by all of the Directors/Leaders, with eleven adding written comments as well (See Table 4.2). The responses emphasised communication and behaviour based on Christian values such as respect, compassion, kindness, patience, honesty, integrity and love, together with a personal faith relationship with God. These are the Christian ideal known as 'the fruits of the Spirit' as outlined in Galatians 5:22, 23. Some Directors/Leaders also wanted it noted

that although these were the ideal, they were not always achieved, and that they considered themselves to be a ‘work in progress’.

A variety of responses were provided and these are shown in the following table with each row of cells displaying responses from a particular director/leader. In the right-hand column the responses have been summarised to provide focus and clarity:

Table 4. 2

Written comments by the Directors/Leaders on how to recognise Christian Leadership

RECOGNIZING CHRISTIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEADERSHIP	
COMMENTS by the Directors/Leaders	**SUMMARY**
Director/Leader 1. • Words: I would hope that how and what is said as a leader would convey the leader is Christ led. • Actions: I believe in many cases actions speak so much stronger than words • Affirmation/Support: I believe it is important that a leader is confident to affirm staff and support them where appropriate • Respectfulness: I strongly believe a Christ led team should feel that their leader respects them, the children, management, parents, stakeholders.	Using Christian words Christian Actions Giving affirmation Giving support Giving respect to all
Director/Leader 2. • valuing all staff and families • I really couldn't give you a specific definition however, I would be looking for the 'leader' to demonstrate a Christ-like approach e.g. – recognising where they are on life's journey.	Valuing staff & families
Director/Leader 3. • By being a role model for staff demonstrating Christian values and attitudes and utilizing these in the workplace.	Being a role model for Christian values and Christian attitudes at work
Director/Leader 4. • Christian principles and practices are evident in day to day activities and discussions • Open with staff prayer and include aspects of Christian stories/ songs as relevant to what is being discussed at groups • Read Bible story daily	Showing Christian principles daily in activities & discussions Showing Christian practices (staff prayer, stories, songs, daily Bible story)
Director/Leader 5. • Compassion to staff and parents • Showing fruits of the Spirit – patience, gentleness, kindness etc. in all circumstances • Fostering Christian content in programming – Grace at lunch; Bible stories taught; less focus on Santa, Easter Bunny, No Halloween. • Christian perspectives in the philosophy, policies, aims and objectives of the centre • Managed by church-based committee who uphold the ethos strongly	Compassion towards staff & parents Showing fruits of the Spirit (patience, gentleness, kindness, always) Having Christian content in program Christian aims & objectives, in centre's policies
Director/Leader 6. • Someone who acknowledges that Jesus is Lord and their personal Saviour. • I would expect to see actions and behaviour that reflected that personal relationship	Having a personal commitment to Jesus with behaviour reflecting the relationship with Jesus
Director/Leader 7. • No, not off the top of my head. My faith is integral to who I am...I have the mind of Christ...I just hope my mind and my mouth work as one.	Having a strong personal faith demonstrated by life choices

• Remember that being a Christian doesn't necessarily make a Good Child Care Worker. • I look for staff whose life choices are a testament to their own values…I let God do the rest.	
Director/Leader 8. • The leaders (Committee, Director) must be Christians who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. • The leader must demonstrate spiritual maturity, a servant heart in leadership, and a willingness to do any task they ask their team members to do. • They need to demonstrate a love for children and families in how they plan their service provision.	Christians who acknowledge Jesus as Lord Servant leader Lead by example Demonstrate love for children & families
Director/Leader 9. • As a Christian I believe in leading by example. I care deeply for my staff and their lives. • I also care deeply about the families at our centre. • I lead with honesty and integrity. We do not lie or deceive families about issues – we face them and discuss them openly. • We are very accepting of children with disabilities and different cultures and religions. We believe part of Christian witness is in accepting and loving all children and families. • Staff and families should feel loved and valued and accepted.	Lead by example, honesty & integrity Face & discuss issues openly Accepting Staff & families should feel loved, valued & accepted by the leader
Director/Leader 10. • As we look at valuing people and their strengths and show grace and favour over areas for improvement	Value people Show grace over areas for improvement
Director/Leader 11. • Decisions made are based on Christian principles • Create links with the church and families e.g. joint events • Pray for the centre, staff, children, families • Always looking for outreach opportunities to families • Pastoral care is an important part of the role	Christian-based decision making Create links with the church Praying for staff, children, families Giving pastoral care
Three Directors/Leaders ticked the boxes but did not add further comments.	

It is interesting to note that not one of these respondents mentioned doctrinal or denominational aspects of their particular faith tradition; instead they focussed on core values and attitudes: love, acceptance, grace, affirmation, support, respect, compassion, honesty, integrity, patience, gentleness and kindness. These values and attitudes are summarised in the Christian textbook, the Bible, as the 'fruit of the Spirit'. In the Bible Galatians 5:22-23 tells us, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These leaders also specifically identified how, where and to whom these values and accompanying behaviours should be directed including children, parents and staff through behaviours, language, pastoral care and even forgiveness.

Leaders who use these values as guidelines for their own behaviour reflect the Christian spirit that the titles of their Christian Centres proclaim. However, several openly recognised that while these attributes and behaviours are the ideal, consistently demonstrating them every day may not be easy as in the comments by Director/Leader No. 7. Nevertheless, the comments by Director/Leader No 5 indicate that a high standard is the goal.

4.6 Challenges of the Role

Respondents were also asked if there were any areas with which they found difficulty and had the potential to cause conflict with their Christian beliefs and intentions. These are shown in the table below with each section displaying comments from a director.

Table 4. 3

Areas which the Directors/Leaders find difficult to maintain a Christian practice

COMMENTS	SUMMARY
Director/Leader 1 • Disrespectful parents (not following policy or procedure) –constantly • Disrespectful staff: not considering other staff or thought patterns of children.	Disrespectful parents Disrespectful staff (towards parents or children)
Director/Leader 2 • Pastoral care and the wider school campus tends to overlook this Service/team as needing that kind of support or collaboration. This creates a difficulty in that staff often feel this is not a reflection of 'Christianity' they would like to be part of – balancing out their understanding with their questioning/anger towards this can be difficult.	Being overlooked by main school administration Managing staff reactions to this
Director/Leader 3 • Mandatory reporting – notification of child abuse (in relation to the parents).	Mandatory reporting about parents
Director/Leader 4 • Awareness of staff member lying (not addressed) • Gossip and hear-say	Staff member lying Gossip
Director/Leader 5 • There can be times when you see/hear others doing things you can't approve of such as parents' discipline or lack of; and staff talking inappropriately about parents, children other staff or management. I think I can stand up or stand against situations that go against what I believe to be right or 'Christian' – it's how you go about it that can change the situation and still glorify God.	Ensuring the language and approach reflects God when having to address parent's inappropriate discipline or staff talking inappropriately.
Director/Leader 6 • I do find it hard to be patient with parents who do not read the information that is provided for them!	Having patience with parents who don't read provided information.
Director/Leader 7 • Managing Christian content versus government expectations • Dealing with issues with Management- particularly if I feel it conflicts with my goals	Maintaining Christian content Dealing with Management over goal conflict

• When I hear other centres profiting by lying or being misleading – find it very frustrating and disappointing	Unethical practices by other centres.
Director/Leader 8 • Staff devaluing service • Meeting parent expectations	Disloyalty by staff towards the centre Meeting demanding parent expectations
Director/Leader 9 • When my staff appear to get lazy • When parents don't pay their fees on time	Staff management issues Having to deal with Non-paying parents.
Five of the Directors/Leaders ticked the boxes but did not add any written comments.	

It is obvious from Table 4.3 that the 'issues' that these leaders tried to address in a 'Christian' manner covered a very broad range of issues with similarities throughout. Further, some of the issues appear to be towards managerial tasks rather than so-called leadership tasks. However, this is often the reality in small establishments such as preschools and small primary schools. With a restricted number of staff members, the leader is obligated to multitask and address both leadership and management roles and issues. Further, in small establishments privacy and discretion are difficult to maintain, so invariably information, positive or negative, is quickly passed around. It can also be noted that the challenging issues raised by these leaders largely relate to relationships rather than tasks. In relation to conflict within early childhood education centres, Jillian Rodd (2013) comments: "Where a workplace depends on harmonious social interaction, conflict is inevitable" (p. 102). She goes on to point out that many early childhood education leaders mistakenly believe that disharmony should not arise if people would make the effort to get on with each other, instead of realising that disagreement is a normal part of the working life. In fact, differences of opinion can be extremely useful in stimulating discussion and developing improved practices. Perhaps one of the most difficult areas that early childhood education leaders have to address is mandatory reporting when they have evidence that a child is being mistreated as Director/Leader No 3 listed in Table 4.3. Nevertheless, this reporting must be done and invariably it fractures relationships between the leader and the family, and possibly other staff members. Issues of staff disloyalty, gossiping, staff speaking disrespectfully to parents or children relate closely to management issues of communication, conflict management, team building and staff morale, collaborative reflection and group strategic planning which will be addressed in depth in the discussion section.

4.7 Perceptions about the Christian Aspect of the Role

The third section of the survey-questionnaire explored the Directors/Leaders' beliefs and perceptions about the 'Christian' aspect of their role. Possible difficulties in its implementation were explored such as how often they thought the Christian aspect was important. Further, whether they consciously tried to resolve conflict in a Christian manner and if so, how often was this their practice? Did they consider that the system within which they worked or the parents, expected them to demonstrate a Christian approach and if so, how often? Finally, whether their own Christian values were ever in conflict with staff members' beliefs and practices and if so, how often and about which issues? By giving each of the four options (not at all, occasionally, most times and always) to this question a score, it was possible to determine how the Directors/Leaders felt about these issues and how frequently they felt this way. In the diagram (Figure 4.4) the scores for each area have been averaged to indicate its comparative importance within the cohort.

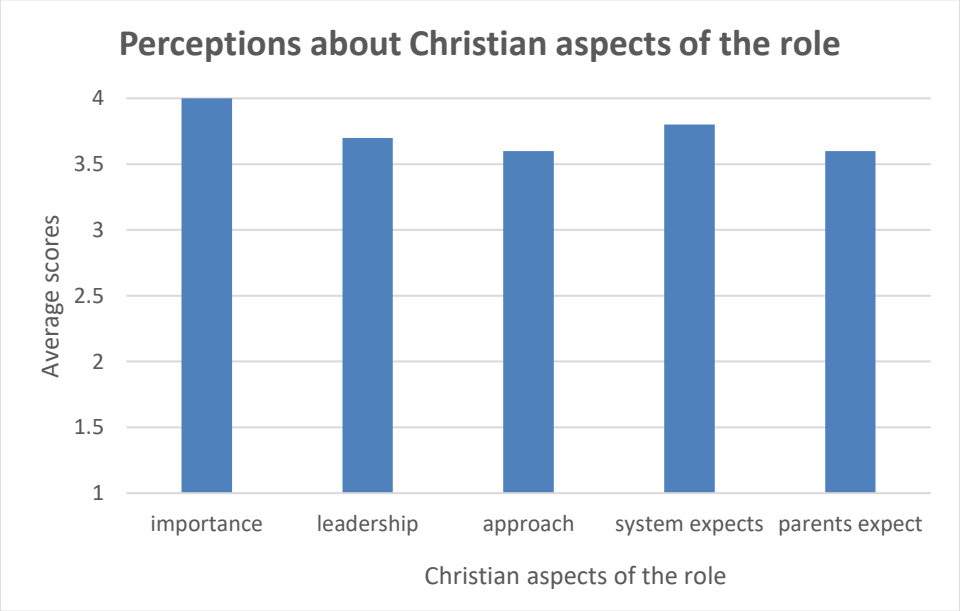


Figure 4. 4

Directors/Leaders' perceptions about the Christian aspects of their role

As can be seen from the first column in Figure 4.4 clearly all of the Directors/Leaders had committed and strong views about the importance of the Christian aspect of their role almost all of the time with comments such as:

> "While I think there are some great Directors/Leaders who aren't Christian, I do believe it influences how we feel about others." D1

> "My work is my ministry, so it is very important to me." D10

> "Totally guides my daily role." D 13

Parental expectation of Christian behaviour and approach, received a lower emphasis from the Directors/Leaders. As one explained:

> "The bulk of our parents come from religions that are actually not Christian, so perhaps they expect a respectful approach." D1

Whereas the Director/Leader of another centre commented:

> "That is part of the expectation of bringing their children to this centre." D2

While the previous section addressed perceptions and beliefs of the Directors/Leaders, the fourth section of the survey-questionnaire focussed more on the practical aspects of their work and how important they thought they were. The options for the Directors/Leaders to indicate the extent of their beliefs were: 1: not important; 2: somewhat important; 3: quite important; 4: extremely important. The following table (4.4.) outlines the 10 questions from this section:

Table 4. 4
Ten questions about the importance of various roles of the Directors/Leaders

1.	The general Christian aspect of my role
2.	Pastoral care and welfare of my staff
3.	Pastoral care and welfare of children
4.	Pastoral care and welfare of parents
5.	Christian communication with staff
6.	The practical demonstration of Christian beliefs and practices
7.	Selection of resources (books etc) to reflect a Christian perspective
8.	Visible evidences of Christian beliefs: posters, welcome signs, foyer etc
9.	Adhering to system expectations
10.	Other

Leadership within a Christian organisation carries with it an expectation that the leader will display Christian attitudes and behaviours that include a concern for the welfare of

those within that community (Buchanan, 2014). The questions in this section were designed to explore that perspective, and also the importance of visible evidences of Christian beliefs. Figure 4.5 displays the results from this section and shows that all were seen as important, some more so than others.



Figure 4. 5

Directors/Leaders' beliefs about importance of roles and responsibilities

Using the same calculation as in the previous table, the averages were displayed in a histogram. As can be seen from Figure 4.5 the ECEC Directors/Leaders considered all of the listed aspects of their role as important. Foremost in importance were the pastoral care and welfare of the children and the practical, everyday demonstration of Christian values. However, visible aspects such as posters, or resources such as Christian books were considered to be less important. Even adhering to system requirements, while understood to be necessary, were considered less important compared with the welfare of children and the everyday outworking of Christian values. There were few written responses to this section. Possible reasons could relate to the participants having already indicated their thoughts numerically.

4.8 The 2014 E.C. Conference Presentation: Addition of the 4th Participant

In 2014 the Early Childhood Australia biennial conference was held in Melbourne at the Exhibition Centre. This was a large venue which accommodated both the large plenary sessions with international speakers, as well as many breakout rooms for presentations and workshops on a variety of early childhood topics. At this conference, during one of the breakout sessions I presented information about, and early results, on the survey-questionnaire phase of my research.

Apparently, from comments made to me by attendees, this was the first time that a session on a Christian topic had been presented at an Australian Early Childhood conference. Initially I wondered whether anyone would even attend this session, as some of the international speakers were holding workshops, and other researchers from Australian Universities were sharing their research on a wide variety of themes. However, about fifty people came to the session, and while walking into the room together, one or two commented to me how surprised and pleased they were to see a 'Christian' subject being presented. I shared information with the group using power point slides regarding the goal of my research project and the background reasons for it, my process of selection of participants to approach for involvement, comments made to me during the initial phone conversations about appreciation for my research goal, and then the actual information received in the returned survey-questionnaires (See Appendix E).

Following this, the chair opened the session for questions and comments from the floor. It was somewhat of a surprise when I was informed that an assumption I had made was incorrect. That in fact all Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres were not necessarily practising Christians, and many were not Christians at all. I began to wonder if this might have explained the perceptible hesitation from two Directors/Leaders of 'Christian' ECECs that some did not return their survey-questionnaires and even that one director/leader said they did not do anything 'especially Christian' such as talking about God, praying with the children, saying grace before meals, reading Bible stories or singing Christian songs.

At one point during the discussion/questions one person in the audience questioned whether there was any difference between a Christian leader and a good non-Christian leader in what appeared to be a rather sceptical tone. Initially I replied that probably many of the non-Christian leaders were displaying Christian values of which they were not even aware.

However, before I could say much more a number of audience members raised their hands to join in the discourse. These were their comments:

- "As Christian leaders we pray for our children and families and staff."
- "We include Jesus throughout the day – eating, singing, reading the Bible, caring for each other because He cares for us, and praying. We try to follow and model His example of love and care and unselfishness."
- "As a Christian you view children from a different perspective from non-Christians. You see them as made in the image of God, not as having emerged through evolution."

This last comment reflected the perspective of Sullivan (2006) who noted in his study on leadership preparation for faith-based schools, the fact that while students should be treated with respect anyway, more importantly they were also made in the image of God and as such, this changed the whole stance of the leader's relationship towards them.

At the end of the presentation I asked the chair if I could close the session with prayer to which she graciously agreed and so I was able to pray with the group for their work and their leadership roles. As the session broke up several came forward and spoke to me confirming the value of my project, affirming me, and encouraging me to keep going. They encouraged me to produce documentation such as a practical manual or similar, which would share ideas and help guide them in their day to day practice. Finally, they said that they would pray for me personally as they believed the project was so important.

Following the conference I was contacted by one of the ECEC centre leaders who had been present. She had returned to her centre and had spoken with her Board of Management, and was phoning to ask if she could be included in the study. Accordingly, I sent her a questionnaire-survey, and after completing it, she also asked if she could be included in the interview phase, to which I agreed. This director/leader (whom I named 'Denise') then became the fourth member of the cohort for Phase Two.

Phase Two, the in-depth interviews, was a deeper, more detailed exploration of Christian early childhood education leadership through the perceptions of four Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres. What these leaders believed, their motivation and their daily practice was investigated over a nineteen-month period, through three rounds of interviews. In the next chapter, the 'stories' of these women are presented as narrative case studies as they share their beliefs, thoughts and actions with the reader.

CHAPTER 5: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FINDINGS – THE CASE STUDIES (Phase 2)

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share the stories of each of the four interview participants with the reader. Their contexts –the CECEC Centres, their personal backgrounds, their motivating beliefs, their daily practices in their leadership roles and their challenges were examined to answer the research question:

What do four Directors/Leaders of Christian Early Childhood Education and Care Centres perceive about the praxis of their Christian leadership?

It has been said: "Christian leadership is a dynamic relational process in which people, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, partner to achieve a common goal - it is serving others by leading and leading others by serving" (Hanna, 2006, p. 23). How true is this for these early childhood education and care Directors/Leaders? This question aligned with the research question and was also explored during this study.

Some research projects focus on a particular, tangible outcome. In this thesis the focus is on the thoughts and perceptions of four Christian leaders. It is therefore both logical and fitting that the comments, responses and actual words of the four participants come to the fore in these case studies, thus providing the answers to the research question. All over Australia, and internationally, CECEC centres are being developed, in a rapidly expanding educational sector. However, they do not appear to have been examined through research to find out the significance of 'Christian' in the Centre's name, and how this might be reflected in the Centre's practices or the leaders' perspectives about the praxis in their Christian leadership.

In order to try and arrive at an understanding of what constituted Christian early childhood education leadership I specifically asked the survey respondents and later, the four interview participants, for their personal definitions. Initially, the results tended to be a mixture of vague platitudes together with dogmatic specificities. However, as the in-depth interviews progressed and the participants shared with me their values and beliefs and how these translated into practice, specific themes began to emerge. Through the stories of their experiences through the years, how their practices evolved and developed, the elements of Christian early childhood education leadership became apparent and thus the stories are presented as narrative case studies.

5.2 Case Study 1 ~ Fran's Story

5.2.1 Introduction

The reader will notice that the case study has been titled 'Fran's Story', for this is the story of her background, her experiences, values and beliefs that have shaped her leadership and the practices she has developed in her centre. Not only is 'Fran' a pseudonym, but also, several of the photos have sections that are obliterated to preserve anonymity.

5.2.2 Location of Fran's Centre

This Early Learning Centre opened in 2003 and is a purpose-built, modern, substantially-constructed centre alongside a large, Christian K-12 school in a semi-rural setting (see Figure 5.1.). The centre has approval from the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] for 50 places and is open five days each week (Monday to Friday) for long-day care from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. Children aged three to five attend and the centre has currently expanded to include an additional third room for children within the same age group and to allow greater differentiation between the age groups. Plans are also being developed to expand again to include a 'babies' room for younger children to meet many requests from current and potential parents. The Centre also has a 'Meeting National Quality Standards (NQS)' (see Appendix C) rating from ACECQA.



Figure 5. 1

Fran's Christian Early Learning Centre and its carpark

The facility has three large rooms fronting a courtyard with wide covered play areas immediately outside the buildings and a large outdoor play area incorporating garden, sandpit and climbing equipment with a soft-fall surface beneath. This in turn backs onto a large bush paddock where there are horses grazing (Figure 5.2).



Figure 5. 2

The outdoor playground

During the period of this research project an additional room was constructed at the rear of the playground to accommodate the request for extra places. The oldest group of children are now in the new building and are also able to overlook the kindy playground in the school next door, which offers an opportunity for interaction as well as providing greater ease of transition to the main school at the end of the year.

The foyer is bright and welcoming, with a constant stream of pictures and video clips of the children on the large screen. On each side wall are posters, clearly outlining the values and Christian beliefs integral to the centre's programs (Figure 5.3; 5.4).



Figure 5. 3

The foyer of the Christian Early Learning Centre with its posters and values displayed



Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matt 19:14

Figure 5. 4

Some of the posters displayed in the entrance foyer



Figure 5. 5

A classroom in the early learning centre

Throughout the purpose-built classrooms in this centre, Christian values are displayed on the walls together with Bible and Christian-oriented story books on tables and in reading corners (Figure 5.5).

Although this early learning centre is a Christian-institution, the children who attend are not all Christians and there are no restrictions on religious affiliation or the lack of it. The children come from the surrounding suburbs which are a mixture of suburban and semi-rural and most are from a Caucasian background. The socio-economic levels similarly range across a wide spectrum, although a sizeable proportion appear to be from the middle class if the cars in the carpark are used as an indicator.

5.2.3 Leading the Practice

5.2.3.1 Personal background

Fran is the Director/Leader of this Early Learning Centre and the first impression gained when meeting her is that here is someone with a bright personality, sparkling brown eyes and a ready chuckle. However, Fran comes from a potentially combative background: Mauritian, with a father from one denomination and a mother from a different denomination. Born in Sydney, with her parents coming to Australia a year or so before that, she talks about the benefit that this has been: *"So that's given me a good scope……what it brings to the table*

here is that I know that the politics of family are not always good" *(12.2.16).* She goes on to explain… *"there've been family clashes with my strong Mauritian background and strong denominational background, there have been big family clashes in my life. But I think overall that's given me a lot of skill with adapting to people who just don't necessarily share my beliefs" (12.2.16).* Fran perceives this as an important skill set for her role in working with young families and understanding difficulties within families as well as divergence over religious beliefs. She explained that when parents are distrustful of formal religion she understands the negative aspects and can explain that the approach taken in the centre is not doctrinal, but rather focuses on the values and love of basic Christianity.

Reflecting on her start in public schooling, Fran perceives this as having given her a big advantage in opening her eyes to a world outside her family and her church life. She says: *"I started my schooling in the public system, so I think that has also given me …..like, as I say, if you just go on one path I think it limits your understanding of the perspectives of others" (12.2.16).* Fran also reflects on the benefits of her mixed cultural background which has given her a deep understanding of different cultures as well as some of the conflicts that can emerge from this 'melting pot'. With grandparents from Scottish, Australian, German and French backgrounds, the various flavours and traditions have refined down to a very open and accepting attitude in Fran. So, with much amusement she comments that she could not be a racist because "*there's a drop of 'that culture' somewhere in me." (12.2.16).*

Similarly, Fran's educational background from early schooling to adulthood has been in a diverse range of locations and systems. "*I didn't start in the faith-based school until year 5. And that move was big….in the Mauritian culture the extended family has a lot of say in your personal family decisions" (12.2.16).*

However, midway through year five a new teacher started at the school, who was to have a tremendous impact on Fran. In her own words: "*The way he taught, the way he engaged had a huge impact on me about becoming a teacher. He was one of those people… he was another good example, a Christian person who embraced everybody, he was the best teacher" (12.2.16).* Fran goes on to explain that as well as teaching grades five and six at the school, he also went on to run the children's recreational club at the church which further reinforced the authenticity of his faith and practice in her mind. Even today, she sees his teaching style reflected in her own style, particularly in the way that he related to children. She explains: "… *because he's always stood out as THE teacher to me" (12.2.16).* It is clear

from listening to Fran that this man had a huge positive influence on her life, her teaching practices and her attitudes towards children.

Moving into high school became another big debate again in the extended family. However, with her father's support she attended a faith-based secondary school in Sydney and it was here she met her future husband in their circle of friends. At this point in her life Fran really wanted to study psychology and was utterly devastated when she did not get the Tertiary Entrance Score she needed. She comments: "*But Mum said 'let's see what else you can do' and they were very good not letting me wallow in that" (12.2.16).* So instead, Fran went to TAFE (Technical and Further Education), learning about welfare and at the same time working in the city and learning all the office skills that she would use later in her role as Director/Leader of an ECEC Centre. In fact she firmly believes that God guided her into that field for she undertook studies in counselling, early intervention, and AIDS liaison….She says: "*I grew as a person from interacting with so many people who were from such different backgrounds. So those two years were so empowering to me becoming an adult" (12.2.16).*

Tertiary Education

After Fran had expressed her interest in children she was regularly sent off by the organisers from TAFE to look after the children while their parents went to meetings, such as Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. She found their notion that she had a 'real affinity' with children somewhat amusing, for as the oldest girl in her extended Mauritian family she was automatically expected from age eight to look after all the babies. She recalls the shock of finding out that some of her friends had never held a baby and she would end up helping and counselling them. As she says: "*Babies were just a natural part of my existence!" (12.2.16).*

During this time at TAFE Fran found herself enjoying working with young children in early intervention more and more and one day asked the Director/Leader how she could get employed in this field. The reply was that she would need to study 'Early Childhood'. Laughing, Fran says she did not even know there was a subject called 'Early Childhood', and if she had, she probably would have done it; but in fact while she was learning all the supportive people-skills at TAFE, she was also doing the office studies and desk top publishing which later proved to be so useful in her Director's/Leader's role. As Fran says: "*So then when I got into early childhood I realised how much I loved it, and I find I still use those skills here with the children who need early intervention, so it's kind of a weird journey to get here" (12.2.16).*

University (Macarthur, University of Western Sydney) came next with a pilot program that was only offered that year and not again. Again Fran reflects on how she feels God led her along the path*: "The course I did was a pilot program that they didn't offer again, but it meant my degree covered birth to 12. So I got a lot of learning and extra things that I wouldn't have got had I been there the year before or the year after. I often laugh and go wow!" (12.2.16).*

Fran's first practicum was at Laurel Tree House in Glebe in Sydney which is the Sydney University Kindergarten Union Childcare Centre for children of lecturers and students, and is situated just across the road from the University. She loved working there and stayed for seven years, and when she had finished her degree she was given a permanent position. Recalling that time she says: *"I loved that space, I had great mentors. If you think about Sydney University and the diversity of people that I met that I had to learn to communicate with, engage with… and so all my people skills were taught in that dynamic, because I didn't have a choice – you sucked it up or you had to go, and so I got to know the really wealthy families, the really low socio economic, the challenging…."(12.2.16).*

In 2000, Fran finished university, then married her high school sweetheart and moved to the coast. She did casual teaching for a while and found she did not like teaching in the public school system. She made two discoveries: first that she really liked early childhood teaching, and second, that she did not like the way that teaching was structured and taught in the public system. Her concerns revolved around the philosophy which she perceived as "*just how to get information into this vessel rather than a holistic approach." (12.2.16).* For Fran, an essential aspect of early childhood education is that it addresses the needs and potential growth of all aspects of a child's life; and for Fran, this has to be done in a caring, loving, Christian manner.

She concluded that she just could not be in a space that did not 'facilitate' every child and was concerned that teachers were under such pressure they just could not give each child enough individual time. She recalls how she struggled when sitting in staffrooms, listening to people dis-respecting and condemning children. Fran admits that some children can be very challenging, even causing committed staff to come close to despair, but the next step is always trying to find ways to deal with the issues and to consider suitable strategies that might be effective for that particular child. This perspective of dealing with issues, empowering and moving on is central to her outlook on life in general and to early childhood education in particular.

5.2.3.2 Pathway to ECEC leadership

Having decided that she really wanted to work in early childhood education, Fran started looking for a position in that field and found a new centre that was just being built. The owner gave her a position as an educator; however, the newly appointed Director/Leader could not cope and so Fran was soon offered the position of Director/Leader. It was not a position that she had wanted to have, but circumstances were such that she was the most likely candidate with the owner very willing to mentor her into the role.

Sometime later the ECEC Centre was taken over by another group and Fran found she had to be the Director/Leader but this time with no support. This became a very difficult time for her, "….*when you're young you buy into every little problem that goes on; I'd go home bawling, [husband's name] would say 'quit that role', but me being stubborn that I am, said no, I need to fix it. So I pushed through and they were hard years" (12.2.16).* As Fran talks you realise that she is very determined to support and nurture children in her care as well as the staff with whom she works.

Much of the difficulty of those years related to the industrial conditions being imposed by the new owners: *"I would try to defend staff. Staff were quitting. We were often understaffed, often not given the resources, not paid correctly, all of these dramas. They wanted every one of the two hundred policies on every wall in every room. It was a horrible time" (12.2.16).* Compounding all the difficult industrial and human resource issues that were confronting her, it was also the time of major flooding on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. She describes the situation*: "In that time I'd also come back from maternity leave from having [name of child]; we'd had the massive June floods and we were flooded out and the centre had to be evacuated" (12.2.16)*. Fran's determination and stubbornness came to the fore over the next few weeks as the part of the building that housed the nursery collapsed and it would have been illegal to have children in that section of the facility. The owners promptly instructed her to put the babies in with the toddlers all in the one, overcrowded room. This was where Fran felt she really had to go against her employers, and told them that she would not do it, saying: *"I'm not doing it. Fire me!" (12.2.16).* As well as the disagreement over the health and safety issues associated with the rooms, the employers wanted to still charge parents for childcare at that time even though the parents were not using the service; again she refused to comply and refused to put it into the fees. Fran recalls that the experience of openly disobeying instructions from her employers because of her

beliefs in doing what she perceived as honest and fair, served to strengthen her in leadership and management situations for future roles she would undertake.

The following year Fran opted out of the Director's/Leader's position as she was pregnant with her third child and a staff member took over the role. However, although the replacement was a lovely person she did not cope well in the role and so staff members would still come to Fran, who would redirect them back to the new leader. Frustration ensued and the new leader came to her for counselling. *"I was still that person that when someone's coming to me in tears, I couldn't say go away" (12.2.16).*

The situation moved from bad to worse with ongoing staff and management conflict, Fran was feeling exhausted and so put in her resignation. The director/leader pleaded with her to stay and help her, to which she finally agreed but ended up giving birth on the Sunday, with the director/leader ringing her at the hospital and asking for help, even then! Fran admits that that was a huge learning experience that has affected her philosophy, attitudes and practice ever since:

"That situation taught me what's a priority in life. It taught me to stand on my own two feet, and since [names child], every time I'm going to give in, I go: No! Actually I'm not. It cost me too much that time. And God got me through that and my baby could have been dead" (12.2.16). From that really stressful, unpleasant experience a major shift in Fran's attitude to leadership developed, she comments: *"That was a really big life lesson to slow down, to put things into the right priority, to understand my role in leadership a lot better" (12.2.16).*

Fran admits that the previous owner was someone who had enjoyed being a rescuer and so that was the model that she saw and followed, believing that approach was good leadership and was what good leaders should do. The critical weekend when her child was born was a turning point in both her understanding and practice of leadership. She reflects: *"I always think there's the director/leader I was before that incident and the director/leader I was after that incident. I'm still compassionate and empathetic, but now I'm much more able to go: I'm going to empower you to solve your own problem whereas before I would take on the burden thinking that's what leadership was" (12.2.16).*

5.2.3.3 Personal faith and worldview

Eight years ago, Fran became the director/leader of her first and current CECEC Centre, which she clearly loves. Fran's relationship with God is very much embedded in her

daily life. She says her main priorities in life are her three girls, her daughters, but that God is right in there too. Her connection with God could be described as an experiential relationship; it is honest and authentic, based on Biblical beliefs and frequent daily conversations with Him and she is passionate about the importance of sharing that faith. Fran mentions that a staff member described Christian leadership as living and breathing your faith, and explains how she came to understand what this means. The Centre was being appraised by the [names denomination] auditing team and her own staff appraisal was occurring. Her superiors asked her staff one of the standard questions about whether they felt she was a good spiritual leader. She recalls having a chuckle and wondering how that would be answered. One of the staff members came to her afterwards and said: *"but you don't realise how much you are' I asked 'what do you mean?' and she said 'you live and breathe it'. And I asked: what do you mean? And she said: you always treat staff with respect, you're always accepting of families, you make everybody feel that you literally do what Jesus says in the Bible to do, you do it to other people. They always feel valued, they always feel nurtured, they always feel special" (28.11.14).*

Fran does not have a 'traditional/conservative' view of how she relates to God. He is so much part of her life and her conversation. Sometimes her conversation is very contemporary, such as when she is describing God as "*obviously a really good Early Childhood Person!"* accompanied with much laughter.

She remains very conscious of her very personal relationship with God and her sense of accountability to Him. For example, she firmly believes that God brings families, parents and children to the centre for them to have a relationship with Him, and she says: "*I as a leader try not to let Him down*" *(28.11.14).*

When designing the webpage (see Figure 5.6) for the Early Learning Centre section of the whole school website, Fran ensured that it is overtly Christian and that the 'voice' is that of the whole team. It has a caring, loving tone and reflects the ethos that Fran has worked on developing with her team, as well as the actual words that Fran and her team members regularly use.

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” Matthew 19:14.

- We want to engage, challenge and motivate your child.
- We want to encourage wonder, curiosity, initiative, creativity and imagination.
- We want your child to feel safe, supported and loved.
- We want your child to develop a positive sense of self, respect for others, social skills and a desire to learn.
- Above all we want your child to take pleasure in the freedom of being a child and to reach his or her own potential at an appropriate rate.
- We want to work in partnership with you and for your time with us to be an investment in your child’s future.
- We want your child to be prepared for primary school feeling secure and confident.

Figure 5. 6

Webpage for the Regional Early Learning Centre

Apart from the posters on the foyer walls, Fran also has some extra-large posters on her office walls with photos of some of the students and clear statements of her philosophy about educating children (see Figure 5.7):



Figure 5. 7

Poster in Fran’s office

These and other posters are overtly Christian displaying Bible texts and Christian values. They also reflect the loving, caring approach taken by all staff in this centre that results in a particularly happy centre.

5.2.3.4 Foundations for the practice

For Fran and her team there are two main foundations to their practice. The first is that the core values that undergird their practice are Christian values. Her perspective is: *"the more I dig into it the more I realise what is wanted in Early Childhood, even though they don't want to call it Christian, it's actually Christian (chuckle). It's ethically the morals and values of Christianity" (28.11.14).*

The second foundation is the standards outlined in the National Quality Framework [NQF] which provide clear and explicit guidelines as to how all aspects of the centre should be conducted. As already mentioned, much of the NQF reflects the Christian perspective, so there is no conflict, but rather, a very logical alignment.

5.2.3.5 Motivation for the practice

In order to investigate the director's/leader's motivation for leading a CECEC centre, each participant was asked to draw her personal concept of Christian early childhood education leadership. While drawing her diagrammatic representation of this concept, Fran explained that God is in the middle, He is the centre. She admits that as the leader she sometimes forgets this, and when she is busy and things are going well it is easy to see the centre as hers. She says that in one way that is good – to be proud of the service, to feel satisfaction at knowing you are managing the centre well. But she also believes that "*As soon as you start forgetting who really owns the joint you start side-tracking into more problematic things. It happens…".* Fran also has a strong belief "*that whoever's been brought into here there's been a journey of their own and God's put them here for whatever reason…staff, children, families…it's not personally driven by me" (28.11.14).*

Fran has found, by experience that when she acknowledges God is in charge she keeps a more even balance in her mind and thus in her daily practice and there is a sense of peace. As she draws her diagram of Christian early childhood education leadership she comments on the various relationships within the centre and in particular her interactions with each different group. Fran perceives the interactions between adults, children, staff, families and community as all having a common element of acceptance. However, she

comments that some adults come to the centre with a preconception of her as a Christian and that a lot of adults believe "*Christians are closed off."* So, for some of them it is a very pleasant surprise to find a welcoming, accepting approach from the Centre's leader and from the staff as well. Fran relates a humorous incident from that morning: "*I've even had some of the groundsmen say today how much they like coming in here because I accept them. And I was laughing and having a joke and saying "What, because I'm not an ogre?" (12.10.15).*

Fran mentions the importance of interactions with children, but explains that in early childhood education, young children are so genuine it would be impossible to be 'fake' with them. She says: "*so to me it's really been a living embodiment of, 'we say children have the right to know Christ'. That's been happening in every interaction, in every engagement, everything, and you're already valuing and accepting it" (12.10.15).*

Following that comment, however, she ponders and observes that: *"a critical issue is that so often educators are good at doing that with children, but that with adults the same rules are not applied when they should be" (12.10.15).*

Figure 5.8 is Fran's first attempt at drawing her concept of Christian early childhood education leadership.

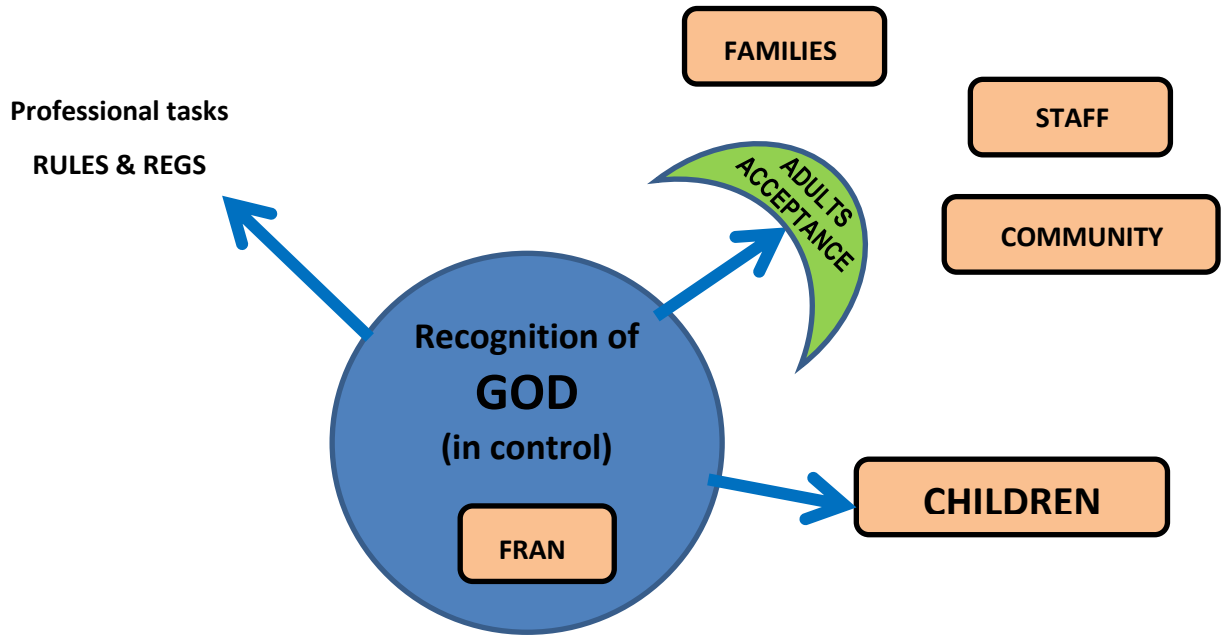


Figure 5. 8

The Director's/Leader's Perspective (first drawing) of Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership

To the left of the diagram are the rules and regulations. Mandated by the Federal Government and regularly assessed by a team of inspectors, these rules and regulations have been developed, as explained in Chapter Two, as a move by the Federal Government to improve the standards of both curriculum and management in Australian ECEC centres. As Fran explained, God is central and He is the one in control, to whom she constantly refers and with whom she constantly communicates. To the right are the various groups with which she interacts, and it should be noted that she has placed 'children' nearest to her and in larger print, indicating their importance.

On reflection, after a week, Fran asked if she could change her diagram (See Figure 5.9). The components are the same: God central and in control. However, Fran expanded her role in this diagram considerably to illustrate how she perceives her role under God's guidance towards each member of the Early Childhood Education community. Accepting, valuing and loving children and families (as well as her staff) are very high on Fran's agenda. The second diagram encapsulates Fran's philosophy of genuine love and commitment towards children, staff, families and community. She sees her leadership role in terms of using Jesus as the example of mentoring, educating and nurturing the children so that they understand they are loved and valued. Fran also applies this approach to her staff, and adds the extension of promoting positive collaboration and respect for each staff member. In addition, she mentors them to engage with the centre's families in a Christian way and also to hold her personally accountable as a Christian example. For Fran it is similarly important that families are engaged in such a way that they feel valued, accepted, educated and nurtured.

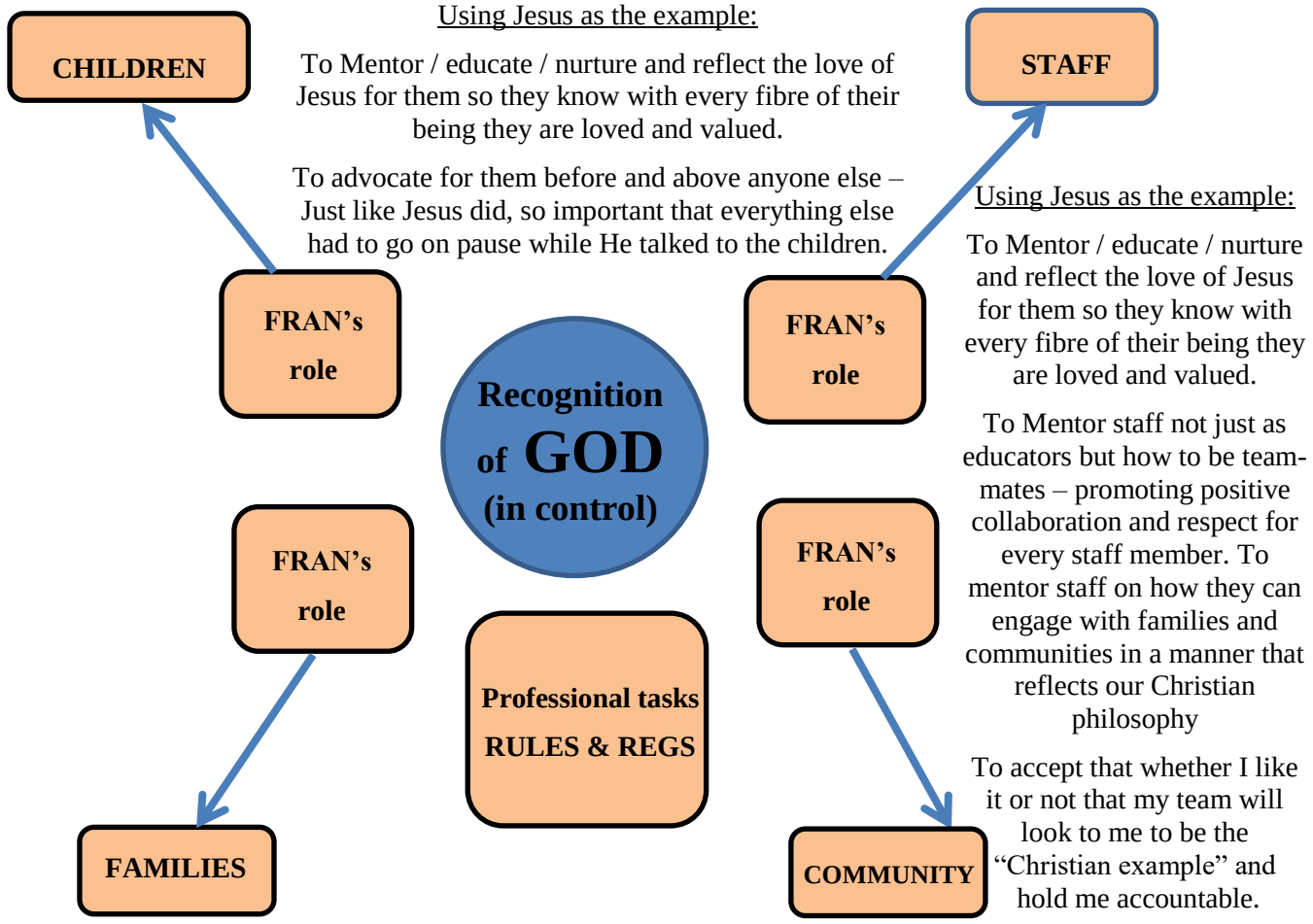


Figure 5. 9

The Director's/Leader's perspective. Version 2

In Figure 5.9 the professional tasks and rules and regulations are still present, but they have been placed in the centre of the diagram, and should be perceived as part of the underlying foundation to the work of the centre. The updated diagram emphasises how Fran

perceives her role, in particular the nurturing and valuing of the various people as well as her own accountability.

While waiting to speak to this leader, I chatted casually with the receptionist about the purpose of my visit. She responded immediately: *"I feel so blessed to work here; we all get on so well".*

I asked her for some examples, *"We often text each other at night*" and, *"I saw someone on Facebook saying you couldn't be friends with your boss; but I look on Fran as a friend. I mean, we have our professional relationship, but we all get on so well too".*

Figure 5. 10
Casual conversation with the receptionist

These comments helped confirm the impression of a caring, supportive culture within the centre.

5.2.4 The Practice

Consideration of the Christian practice at the Regional Centre revolves very much around understanding the various relationships. First, the leader's relationship with God, a reciprocal relationship of Fran communicating frequently with God and being open to the daily guiding of her life by Him. Stemming from that relationship is a worldview that crafts the relationships between the leader and the children, the leader and the staff, and the leader and the families.

5.2.4.1 Relationships with children and spirituality and God

For Fran this is one of the first opportunities in her working life that she has had to share her faith with children. She contrasts this with working in a secular environment where protocols strictly forbid the sharing of personal faith with the children and so with obvious joy she comments: "*In this context I can very much embed the ideas and philosophies of my Christian beliefs into my whole daily program, so it's not just a token moment in the day but it's the whole embodiment of what we do and why we do it" (6.2.15).* Because of this approach she notices that the children are quite relaxed and comfortable about the concept of

God and talking about Him. However, she has also noticed that sometimes parents are fearful about what may happen at the centre in relation to faith, spirituality and teaching; and so she is very intentional about fully informing the parents and talks to them quite openly at orientation: "*We're not pretending we're anything else. Your children will hear about God. They will hear about Jesus. They will hear the Bible stories. If there's any problems, let me know. Right now. This is the time to sort that out" (6.2.15).* She ensures that parents understand from the beginning that it is a Christian-based service and there is no deceit about that. At the same time she clarifies that their children will not be indoctrinated with particular denominational beliefs, but rather the fundamental essence of Christianity: love, joy, peace, kindness etc. *"It's about being a Christian; it's about knowing that God loves them*". An important aspect of Fran's relationship with children relates to her responsibility for them and towards them. She clearly loves the children in her care and is fiercely protective of them, directing her staff in the ways she believes the children should be educated and managed: *"I guess I'm old enough to feel very comfortable in saying: I don't like what you're doing and it's my responsibility to look after every single child here…"(6.2.15).* Within the centre, other people such as pre-service teachers and work experience students from high schools also interact with the children from time to time. In this relationship she is very direct: *"…so I will even go up to the college students – the fourth years or the year elevens before they come in, and I suppose it's one of those things that earlier in my industry career I wouldn't have had the courage to do. You learn and you grow. I'm over 40 and these are the rules when it comes to my babies here; you don't mess around with my children (big chuckle), these are all my surrogate babies" (6.2.15).*

5.2.4.2 Relationships with staff

During the time spent at the centre for interviews and observation, it was very obvious that genuine respect and appreciation characterised Fran's relationship with her staff. She explains that she felt somewhat inadequate as a 'Christian' leader in the beginning; she says, *"I hadn't experienced Christian leadership in the sense that I didn't have anyone to model it off and in this context that has been challenging, because what am I supposed to do?" (6.2.15).* Fran notes that in the early childhood education context, the staff work very closely together both physically and pedagogically, as well as socially. Because of this, there is a strong sense of accountability from her towards her staff, they are very open with each other, and she perceives treating staff members with respect as critical to the development of an effective team. She says, "*they're coming from different Christian walks, so I think it's a*

really huge example of how different Christians can collaborate so beautifully and so all those aspects of their Christianity have come together to make the team as a whole, this beautiful Christian dynamic" (6.2.15). Fran is clearly so appreciative of her staff: *"I have staff that go: 'I really want to share Jesus with the children, better' (6.2.15).*

Fran is also very intentional about valuing her staff. For example, when planning rosters she is conscious of individual situations. *She says, "We were talking about rosters for next year and I'm really conscious of meeting family requirements, like who's got childcare requirements, who's got holiday requirements, and because I know they're spending the majority of their day in this setting, away from life, away from families, away from all these….so I'm really conscious of keeping them balanced in home life – it makes them happy staff by keeping them valued*" *(12.10.15).*

However, there are times when a staff member might not be behaving as professionally or speaking as kindly to a child as is expected. Fran has a firm but understanding approach: *"I would look at the context in the most respectful way in front of the children and other staff specifically; depending on the circumstances, often the best thing to do is to go: 'You might need to just go and have a cuppa right now and we'll have a chat in a minute', and deal with that context …If it's something I've not observed a lot with that staff member I would go: 'So, you're not being yourself, what's wrong?' (6.2.15).* If on the other hand the staff member indicates early on that they are not coping well that day and would prefer support work rather than direct interaction with the children, Fran's reaction is: "*I will respect you and support you, but if you walk in and take anything out on the children, there's no respect and support here! You've shot yourself in the foot! So I have had to bring up a staff member on that and address it and go: 'You know you might need to have a look at where your life choices are at the moment, whether this industry is where you still want to be'. They're not comfortable conversations, but I have them. In the past as a 25-year-old director/leader I would have gone home and lamented it and bawled my eyes out. But as a 40-year-old director/leader, you know what? It's my job!" (*6.2.15). While Fran may have found these situations difficult in her earlier days as a leader, she realises that she has learned to work through that discomfort and maintain her values and standards. Her direct manner in addressing difficult situations with parents or staff members, courteously but honestly, has contributed to an open, trusting atmosphere at the centre.

There can also be the situation where an error has been made by the staff member. There might have been no serious repercussions affecting a child, but the family was upset. In

those circumstances, Fran quickly calls a meeting with the family, the staff member and herself. *"The staff member owned that she had made a bad call, and explained how she was going to handle the situation in future. But I still backed up my staff member, and reinforced to the parents that we wanted to support them and this was how it was going to be managed in the future. It all had to be put on the table and dealt with, but without demeaning the staff member. She is a great staff member and this was one moment in time" (28.11.14).*

Regarding faith, Fran explained that there had been some really serious discussions about spirituality at the Centre. During a recent staff meeting she had asked the staff what they felt they needed, which then led into a major discussion on what spirituality actually was. Half the team identified as Christian and it became a really deep session. Fran commented: "*Everyone was so respectfully discussing their own journey with God, their own personal beliefs. Whether they actually believed in a God or not and why they still want to be in a service like this, even though that's not necessarily where they've come from in their life's journey, they have realised that their personal life goals and philosophy fit with this".* Fran has said to her staff: "*Well you actually practise Christian values all the time, you don't even know it' (28.11.14).*

With a certain degree of amusement and satisfaction Fran notes that one of her non-Christian staff members commented to her: *'I can't believe how much Christianity aligns with my personal philosophy' (28.11.14),* even though that staff member did not identify as a Christian at all.

Fran is very obviously happy in her work at the Early Childhood Education and Care Centre, her face lights up when she talks about the interaction she has with the children and how much she appreciates the staff. "*One of the things I love about this space, and I'm so glad God brought me to this space, is 'it's such a shared philosophy here' I haven't had to defend my values here because everybody……there's not a staff member here that doesn't go an extra mile" (28.11.14).*

At times this appreciation of staff, their work ethic, commitment to the children and the Christian ethos of the centre has led her to remind the administration team in the main school of how outstanding her early childhood education team is. She reflects on the persistent myth that early childhood education is just random, non-directed play: *"So I think as a teaching entity and as a team, they're really becoming known out there, because I keep putting it out there; people are starting to realise how much to value this team and these*

women. These are women who come in on their days off, who never leave and start actually on their shift times, because they're always doing extra time" (28.11.14). Then she proceeded to give examples of individual staff members with whom she had to argue to insist they went home at the appropriate time. With much laughter Fran described a ridiculous argument she subsequently had with the staff member, insisting that she was not to come in to the centre to make up the time she was taking for a medical appointment, as she had already worked many extra hours that week.

5.2.4.3 Relationships with parents, caregivers and families

As Fran was drawing her diagram of Christian early childhood education leadership, she started to talk about the different relationships within the diagram….."*The core of what we're trying to do….is this idea that we speak to children and families with openness and empathy…..all the different cultures, we embrace those things, that's the Christian perspective" (12.10.15).* Fran freely admitted that communication with parents is not always as successful as desired. In those circumstances she believes that she and her staff as Christian early childhood education professionals must be the ones to take the initiative and bridge the gap in communication and learning with the parents. When discussing with her staff the difficult situation that this interchange can become, she reports that she says to her staff: "Y*es, the parents might react a particular way, and that's not the right way, so how are you going to change them doing that? It's how you engage with them, and you mentor them into how they need to engage with you" (12.10.15).*

A particularly difficult situation with parents relates to issues around accepting that their child may have disabilities. Fran explains that so often that is a very difficult conversation, particularly if the parent breaks down as they come to terms with the fact their child is not going to grow up as they had hoped and planned. *"Those are big journeys to ride with families, but it also cuts staff and so I always think it's important to spend time reflecting with them. 'Hey we're doing the best we can, you're doing an awesome job and we're going to move forward……Yes, this parent's upset but that's a natural thing' so that is vital to helping that educator walk back into their classroom and function normally" (28.11.14).*

Fran is also very conscious of the way people react towards her once they know she is a Christian. *"You're judged on your values when families know that you are a Christian…way more so I think than if you were in another service"* (28.11.14).

Respect and acceptance are critically important values for Fran in the way that she treats families and has established as a cornerstone of the ethos of her centre. She says: *"because our team is such a respectful, collaborative one and we are so accepting of how the children and families come in. It doesn't matter how they present, we are united in our acceptance and our showing of that. To us it's the Christ love aspect. He has respect for everybody. We're going to demonstrate that respect and acceptance of everybody and make them feel it. Not just be polite. But to me that's part and parcel of early childhood – we always treat our families with respect" (6.2.15).* At the same time, Fran expects this to be mutual, for her staff and herself to be treated with respect, as she says: "*With parents….if something goes wrong they say:…aren't you Christians? And I go: 'Yeah we are, but we're not pushovers. Yes 'turn the other cheek' doesn't mean that I let you abuse my staff. We'll respect you as family, you're welcome to come back but this is the behaviour I expect' " (6.2.15).* The concepts of mutual respect, collaboration, support and care are essential aspects of Fran's approach to working with people in ECEC; at the same time, she expects and gives courtesy.

5.2.5 The Challenges of the Practice

5.2.5.1 The tensions of philosophical difference

In each of the four centres in these case studies, staff members are employed from diverse backgrounds. The ideal of recruitment in a Christian ECEC centre is that staff members are practising Christians, in keeping with the Christian ethos of the centre; however, this is not always possible. In some cases the staff member may have been the only qualified person available at the time. Thus the leader, the Centre Director, may have a very diverse staff to manage with some being very committed, practising Christians, while some may be rather nominal Christians, and others may not be Christian at all.

All four participants in the case studies in Phase Two experienced the difficulty of staff members with a different philosophical perspective. Fran comments: "*We had one particular staff member who stood out – she identified as: 'I'm an atheist'; and she really had it in for Christians and church" (12.10.15).* Eventually that staff member left for employment in another non-Christian centre. Fran found that once she left, the whole staff was able to have constructive discussions during morning worship with respect for different perspectives and for each other. *"….we unpack it as adults: what does God mean by this, what does the church say about this, how do we teach this to children, and how does*

Christianity fit to us as a centre?" (12.10.15). Fran explains that what made the situation more difficult was that this person was an excellent educator, but as a member of the Centre's team, she constantly undermined anything to do with the Christian aspect of the practice. In Fran's words: *"She was looking for the war; and that's really hard and a few times I had to step in and go: 'We're not going to make this into a war. I know that's your opinion and I respect it, but I've been asked a question and I'm going to answer it' " (12.10.15).*

Clearly, from the previous vignette, the philosophical difference may come about for a variety of reasons including religion, personality and worldview. In Fran's case she remained calm and respectful, but maintained her requirement of compliance with the ethos and Christian practices of the centre. Eventually the particular staff member found a position in another centre which was a secular centre. Nevertheless, these issues are not usually managed and finalised quickly and so the leader must constantly communicate with all of the staff in a positive way, upholding their values and practices and striving for a harmonious workplace.

Evidently, Fran was able to do this and in so doing, retained the respect and loyalty of the rest of the staff. Being 'Christian' and in particular being a 'Christian leader' does not equate with avoiding confrontation. As a way of minimising some of these staffing issues, Fran is very particular about selection of new staff. So instead of interviewing people for casual work she gets them to come and spend three hours at the centre, do some volunteer hours, then*: "We as a staff team collectively watch, and the whole team has to OK that person, before I let them in this space. And I tell that person outright, that this is a really collaborative team, I'm really proud of them, they have really good, high expectations. I mean, the poor casual, they've got to jump to it, but they all know, those that have made it to the casual list, know that they've actually achieved something" (6.2.15).*

5.2.5.2 The tensions of workload and administration

Within the field of early childhood education most centres tend to be small in comparison with schools, comprising two or three rooms. However, because of the vulnerability of such young children there is a much higher duty of care. In addition, with fewer staff, each one carries a very full load. Further, linked to budget constraints, the majority of Directors/Leaders of early learning centres also teach part-time. These issues can all add up to a potentially burdensome workload. In discussion, Fran admitted that sometimes

the workload was quite difficult and so she was quick to comment on how much she appreciated the committed staff and their support.

5.2.5.3 The tensions of community

In a small, semi-rural community information is often passed around quickly, whether it is true or not. Fran commented, "*I think Christianity so often gets presented in such a negative way, and particularly with the Royal Commission, people have a lot of difficult adjustments to Christian institutions. So when parents come in here, who hear what a good reputation we have…one of the things that I think helps them on the parent info evening that we do is that I say: 'We are going to pray with your children, we are going to do worship with your children', and I let them know that's as far as it goes".*

5.2.6 Final Comments

Summing up her attitude about the leader's approach to staff members Fran commented: *"I think when it relates to staff… I saw this quote on Facebook……it was Richard Branson….he said his primary leadership role: you look after your employees, if your employees are well looked after, your employees look after your clients. And that's how I feel…" (6.2.15).* Regarding her personal faith journey, Fran admits it's not all smooth and easy: *"I think it is important, and it's tricky like when you're on your personal Christian journey. Because I have times where….you know…I sometimes say to [names the school principal], God's not my friend today (chuckle), I'm not friends with Him either…….But I think if you have a solid faith, as much as I'm cross, when I say to God I'm cross with You right now, I can't walk away – if that makes sense? So I think it ultimately gives you a foundation to what….how you're moving forward regardless of how you're feeling at the time" (6.2.15).*

"The more I dig into it the more I realise what is wanted in Early Childhood, even though they don't want to call it Christian, it's actually Christian (chuckle). *It's ethically the morals and values of Christianity. Not that every Christian practises those values and morals every moment of the day, but it's the core of what we're trying to do… so this idea that we speak to children and families with openness, with empathy, you know…all the different cultures, we embrace all those things: that's the Christian perspective. It's literally what Jesus has practised here on earth, and set the example of. So really you're just putting that into practice. So it's Christian……but it's not JUST Christian, if that makes sense? It's an Early Childhood ethos" (19.02.16).*

5.2.7 Summary

In this first of the four case studies, the leader is Fran, who has an extensive background of experience in the early childhood education sector as an educator, a tertiary (TAFE) lecturer and as an early learning centre director/leader. For Fran the essential elements of Christian early childhood education leadership are not about rules and regulations, nor about church or doctrinal issues, but rather what she sees as the essential core of Christianity. She constantly refers to Jesus as her example and as the real leader in charge of the centre. Fran summarises this Christian essence in terms of values linked with behaviour: acceptance, respect, love, care, authenticity. This perspective guides the way that she interacts with her staff, the parents and students, and the staff and administration in the main school next door. As Fran's final statement in her case study indicates, for her, Christian early childhood education ethos and authentic, practical Christianity are one and the same.

5.3 Case Study 2 ~ Darlene's Story

5.3.1 Introduction

The Sydney suburban centre is the second of the case studies and it is led by Darlene who shares her story, faith and beliefs here. As with the first case study, 'Darlene' is a pseudonym and specific references have been deleted for anonymity.

5.3.2 Location of Darlene's Centre

Darlene's suburban ECEC centre is located in the north-west of Sydney in an area labelled the 'Bible Belt' by some with 15 Christian churches in the vicinity. The Centre is purpose-built and is well laid out. A wide corridor curves into the building from the front entrance with offices on the left and the classrooms on the right. The large rooms each lead through to an outdoor area set up with play equipment. The homes in this area are mainly in the middle to upper middle-class range and the suburb is also known for its family-friendly reputation with quality schools, parks and shopping.

The ECECC itself is located on the ground floor of a very large Christian church with its own separate external entrance (see Figure 5.11); and is able to tap into the many social welfare programs and community facilities that are also housed there as part of the church's community service. The Centre has approval from the licensing authority for 40 places and is open five days each week (Monday to Friday) with long day care from 7:45 am to 6:00pm. The Centre has received an 'exceeding NQS' rating from ACECQA. The socio-economic

levels are mainly middle and upper middle-class. However, many of the families struggle with debt as they seek to enjoy the affluent style of living to which they aspire.



Figure 5. 11

The exterior of Darlene's centre

5.3.3 Leading the Practice

5.3.3.1 Personal background

Darlene is probably one of the most dynamic people you could ever meet with a life that seems to revolve at hurricane speed. A black belt in Martial Arts, and a PhD student, she runs a large early learning centre in Sydney, one in suburban Brisbane and is developing another in Melbourne all under the auspices of the church in which her Centre is situated.

Aged 57, Darlene is the middle child in her family with an older brother and a younger sister. She has strong memories of a very happy childhood: "*Growing up, I remember vividly my kindergarten experiences and dramatic play in the home corner in kindergarten*" *(12.2.16).* Darlene believes this had a great influence on her future life: *"So I'm quite blessed in that I have delightful memories of early childhood which have probably guided me in going into early childhood*" *(12.2.16).*

Darlene was also blessed with loving parents who instilled into their children the importance of hard work. Her parents and grandparents had experienced the economic depression years in Australia and so the children were brought up to value and appreciate everything. From an early age she was linked into Sunday School and by age 15 was teaching classes there each week.

Darlene enjoyed high school and involved herself in the study with her typical enthusiasm: *"In high school, I went to a selective high school. I remember the pressure on us by our parents who wanted us to succeed, wanted us to have more, and the value of education" (12.2.16).* Reflecting on her father's influence she says: *"I would say my father was quite a firm disciplinarian. I mean I remember as a child if we mucked up we got the clothes brush! You know? So I went to that high school, loved English, loved History. I was quite social and loved mixing with people. I then did music teaching, piano. Finished year 12, I knew beyond a shadow of doubt I wanted to teach…..I got a teachers' scholarship to Macquarie University and did a Bachelor of Arts majoring in behavioural sciences. Enjoyed every single subject!" (12.2.16).*

Her father continued to instil the work ethic into his children, for after her 15th birthday her father said to her: 'Darlene, you're going off to get a job today'. She remembers: *"He took me through Parramatta Northmead (a Sydney working class suburb). Mum and Dad both said: 'You'll get a job before the end of today and we will come and pick you up at the end of the day'. They let me go and by the end of that day I had walked into Thompson Ford Car Company, they gave me a clerical job and I was working all school holidays from the age of 15. Every holiday after that I was working somewhere. My brother was the same" (12.2.16).* Darlene smiles as she says: "*And as a response to that in some ways I think we have…….by some I may be described as a workaholic, because I have an absolute passion in what I do. I don't see that. I think it's more around being absolutely passionate in what you're doing, and knowing the foundation of early childhood and the influence that has and the importance of lifelong learning" (12.2.16).*

5.3.3.2 Pathway to ECEC leadership

Darlene finished her degree with a combined diploma specialising in early childhood education which is recognised by ACECQA. She then wanted to work in the early childhood education field and says: "*Everyone tried to talk me out of it because of the conditions of employment, looking ahead, but I believed in early childhood, so I finished in 1981. Because*

I was overqualified for the sector, I packed my bags and went down to the south coast of New South Wales, to an early childhood centre there run by a licensee who didn't have a clue. She was tossing up as to whether she would run a milk business or a childcare centre, and she chose the childcare centre. I had 40 children a day; I had one other full-time person helping me and a part-time assistant. That was it! and I used to clean, even the toilets, at the end of my shift" (a 50 hour week) *(12.2.16).* Looking back, she remembers how concerned her parents were for her and so they found her room and board in a home with a Salvation Army family, from where she commuted home each weekend to family, church and her fiancée whom she had met at Friday night church youth meetings. They were together and engaged for six years. "*I commuted each week for 6 months, and it was really challenging, I used to live and breathe that. I used to write my programs in my bed until I fell asleep" (12.2.16).*

I asked Darlene how she had initially felt about taking on the leadership role. The answer was fairly typical of this positive, energetic woman: *"After having gone through a four-year university degree, I thought I could take on the world and change the world. Not a problem at all! Bring it on! I'm gonna change the world! That's why I got exhausted, that's why I lived and breathed what I did" (26.10.15).*

Darlene then moved to a community based early childhood education service in Western Sydney. This was a church-based service which meant it had to be packed up at the end of each week, ready for church groups to use the facilities over the weekend. She started working there as an early childhood teacher, loving it and looking after the three to five-year-old room as well as doing music. However, after six months the committee called her in. They wanted her to take over as Director/Leader of the service. Darlene felt very unprepared as her predecessor had left under unsatisfactory circumstances. That situation prepared Darlene well for later issues in managing staff, as she says: "*So it was a quite challenging situation. But I focussed on the regulations*" *(12.2.16).* This little aside, about that particular situation, typifies Darlene's attitude towards her work and life in general. She likes to get things done and can seem to be a workaholic to accomplish all that she does; but at the same time she realises the value and importance of regulations and rules. Despite her challenging initiation into leadership in this particular centre she was able to make a fresh start with the staff, and together they formed a strong team. Darlene still remains in contact with some of them. During this time she also married and had her first son, staying at that Centre for eight years.

Through that time Darlene developed expertise in an area she would have preferred to avoid – child abuse. During group time children would every now and then disclose some fairly horrendous abuse experiences which she had to address, and so throughout the years she has also been regularly involved in child protection training with many different groups.

When Darlene and her husband moved to Melbourne with his work she then took on a position in a local government childcare centre affiliated with the Department of Immigration in the building next door. Many new families came there that did not speak English, and the Department of Immigration would help them. She remembers: "*That really positioned me well to learn about cultural inclusiveness and various issues like that; assimilation, and ultimately my second son was born and he actually came to work with me. He was the only Anglo-Saxon child in the service" (12.2.16).* After some time her father-in-law, living in Sydney, became very ill and the family made the decision to move back there; they bought land and built a home. Darlene then worked in local government for some time overseeing a number of services, and was seconded to the University of Western Sydney and then to the Department of Community Services. It was during her time working on reviews of services, which included validation, reviewing licensing and prosecution, that one experience caused her to reflect deeply on what she was doing. She had spent hours working on a prosecution, in which the owner was simply fined and then re-opened for business the next day. As she reflected she came to a very strong conclusion. In her own words: "…*and I thought this just isn't right. In my heart I just know I have to set up a high quality, Christian based service. I just knew!" (12.2.16).* But how?... and where?

Even as she was pondering how to accomplish this vision, a friend remarked: *There's a childcare centre starting down the road, they've got nobody to set it up"* and she has been there ever since.

5.3.3.3 Personal faith and worldview

Darlene has a strong personal faith relationship with God. Initially I was unsure of this as she shared so much about the business and community awards the Centre has received. Therefore, on the second interview I asked her directly about her faith. It became immediately apparent that she had perceived her faith as a 'given' and that I would see it that way as well. So Darlene set out for me how important her faith is, and particularly how aware she is of what she sees as the need to keep this relationship with God strong and alive. Her viewpoint is that, as the leader of a Christian Centre, she needs to be spiritually strong. First

through church attendance. Each Sunday she and her husband start with an early morning 8:00am service at her local church, where she is a member. She describes this as a beautiful, traditional, quiet, reflective prayerful service in which she often serves by playing the harp or the piano. She also worships at the church at her worksite, a contemporary service which she may attend on Saturday evening or after her Sunday morning service. Darlene portrays her world as being 'spiritually based' and by this she explains that she does more than just go to a particular building and sit inside it listening to a speaker. Instead she constantly serves within two church communities through youth ministry, music ministry, safe-training, leadership training in children's ministries, talking, praying, and networking with many people. In addition, she meets with a group mid-week to study the Bible together and pray. She comments: *"It is wonderful to have a group in which you can pray together, in which God is the centre, and you know you're supported" (12.2.16).* Rather than declaring there is only one way to go about developing and maintaining one's spirituality, Darlene believes that the importance lies in daily communication with God through reading His word in whatever form that suits the individual, as well as reflecting and talking with God – call it prayer or whatever you like, as she says: . "…*because it is important to be spiritually strong as well as physically and emotionally strong" (12.2.16).*

5.3.3.4 Foundation for the practice:

Given Darlene's commitment to detail and doing everything correctly, it is not surprising that adherence to the National Quality Framework and its Standards figures high in her priorities. Subsequently, as might be expected, Darlene's centre has recently received an 'Excellent' rating from ACECQA. This is actually a level above the rating of 'Exceeding' and is only awarded after application by the Director/Leader and a very stringent selection process. Darlene explains that although for many other Christian centres she suspects that relationships and keeping the parents happy might be the focus, for her it is compliance with the government requirements – the legislation. She believes that ensuring that the legal responsibilities are met and that the programs they are providing are lawful "has" to come first. She is very conscious that the daily practice at her centre is actually governed by at least twenty-one different pieces of legislation which include industrial law, and Education and Care Services National Law. The centre's accountability to the government is measured by its compliance to the legislation, and its standard of excellence is similarly measured by that compliance.

Darlene goes on to explain that these standards of education and care are delivered on the foundation of a faith-based context, the Christian faith, which is the cornerstone of belief and practice in this centre. She says that her goal is to deliver the best quality care on a day to day basis with excellent outcomes for children.

5.3.3.5 Motivation for the practice:

As stated earlier, much of Darlene's motivation for the establishment of her Christian Early Childhood Education and Care Centre came about from observing poor practice elsewhere and the lack of an early childhood education centre based on a Christian approach and practice. As recorded earlier in this case study she thought: "*In my heart I just know I have to set up a high quality, Christian based service" (12.2.16).*

One event that was not so pleasant, from her childhood, has profoundly shaped the way she behaves towards both the children in her care and the staff with whom she works: *"I do remember the naughty chair in primary school. I still have a vivid recollection, we used to sit in these desks next to each other and there was always a boy in front of you, and you used to have inkwells, and I still remember this boy. I was a very dedicated student and I wanted everything right. I remember clearly this incident where this boy took my lead pencil and my pencil broke and I must have got terribly upset, I don't even remember what happened, but the outcome was that I had to sit on the naughty seat at recess! And it was just terrible! I felt so degraded! (much laughter) because it was my fault. But it stuck in my mind, all these years… I still remember my naughty chair and I don't want that for anybody! People don't learn through criticism and domination, people learn through collaboration and encouragement. Not to say you don't be strong, but in terms of teams on the floor, people have to be empowered to rise up" (12.2.16).* This positive empowering attitude towards working relationships typifies Darlene's approach to leadership. Collaboration, encouragement and empowerment are the underlying values to her daily practice, which she perceives as a ministry.

"It's a matter of heart. I know here whenever we do our performance things, it's your head, your heart, your hands. I think your heart has got to be in it 100%, your heart has got to be in it over and above, so I'm like….for me,… I'm absolutely committed to the service" …." and it's a ministry! I think you've got to come from a ministry perspective and see this almost as a ministry to your community and your families because it's not just a job" (13.7.14).

The Centre's web page clearly outlines the philosophical and practical aspects of the way the Centre operates. It is overtly Christian, outlines the importance of quality early childhood education and provides a statement of commitment to that purpose.

The website provides the following information:

> "_____ Child Care Centre aims to provide a high quality Christian Child Care service promoting a harmonious environment that fosters children's learning and development built on a foundation of secure and respectful relationships.
>
> The National Quality Framework outlines the vital role that education and care plays in the lives of Australian children and the families and the need for the best possible outcomes for our children. There is now a wide body of evidence showing that early childhood education and care impacts on a child's health, wellbeing and competence across their life span. The early years are therefore critical in laying the foundation for children's achievement in schooling and for the future.
>
> We believe Early Childhood forms a foundation for the development of skills needed for life. As such, we aim to provide each and every child with the best possible stimulation, education, development and care".

Figure 5. 12

Webpage for the Sydney Suburban Centre

Darlene regularly flies to Brisbane for meetings with staff there to lead and support them in their work. She also conducts staff meetings regularly with the executive team in Brisbane and with her own local team from her office in Sydney via Skype on a large computer screen.

Video conference staff meeting

On 26.10.15 I was privileged to attend a regular leaders' video-conferencing staff meeting. This was held in the Director's/Leader's office and was a two-campus meeting. The Director/Leader was responsible for the development of the Sydney Early Childhood Education program approximately eleven years ago and within the last year has developed another Centre in Brisbane. She oversees the Brisbane campus program with visits on a weekly/fortnightly basis interstate and with regular video conferencing as I was able to observe on my visit.

To one side of her desk was a large screen on which we could see the Brisbane Centre's leadership team sitting around their leader's desk, while they could see the Sydney Director/Leader and her leadership team seated around her desk. Interaction and conversation were conducted as if they were all in the same room. Also present in the Sydney group was the Centre's secretary who recorded important information, actions to be taken and by whom, as for a normal school staff meeting. This was a focussed and busy meeting with both teams sharing their preparations for the Christmas programs – actual programs, personnel, advertising and recording of the events. In addition, discussion also addressed the involvement of university students undertaking practicum as well as particular pedagogical aspects with cross-campus discussion and sharing of ideas. As with all of their meetings time was also spent in prayer and reflection about their work. When I asked about motivation and how they felt about their work, Angie, in Brisbane commented, "*The heart is the substance of the educator, for themselves and for the rest of the team"* going on to explain that caring and love were the essential bases for both their daily work with children and families, but also towards each other in a Christian environment.

While Sam, in Sydney, further explained to me: *"NQS implementation – the integrity of a service – genuine care and program – we love Jesus and want to reflect this. This underpins everything educators constantly reflect on, to improve. We're working for God" (26.10.15).*

When I asked what they felt made their Centres, as Christian Centres, different from secular ECEC centres, Sue, from Brisbane replied: "*It allows us to freely share our faith. We conduct ourselves in community/ pray with each other to support each other" (26.10.15).* Sue then went on to give an example of how this influenced the children in their care. The children at the Brisbane Centre are used to observing the staff pray together about something, or with an individual child. On this particular day one of the children tripped over and bumped her leg and was quite distressed. Before a staff member could intervene one of the other children came over to comfort her and pray with her. He then used his initiative and called other children nearby to come over, which they did, putting their hands on her leg and asking Jesus to make it better.

Other staff members from both campuses agreed that this was normal practice, as Livia (from Brisbane) remarked: *"It's in your head all the time; embedded practice, staff modelling praying with and for each other."* Vanessa (from Sydney) added: "*It's about being*

in Christ, becoming in Christ, part of your daily life, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit" (26.10.15).

I asked Darlene to draw for me her impression of what were the essential core elements of Christian early childhood education and leadership. Without hesitation and with considerable speed and confidence she drew her concept of Christian early childhood education leadership (see Figure 5.2.3). When I asked Darlene to describe what she was drawing, her first comments were: **"***Faith-based, God centred, faith in practice and action"* As she drew she elaborated on what she meant: "*Faith-based, God centred in the middle. You have to have a personal relationship with Christ, as a leader, in order to live, breathe and express that. From that comes your position and planting in an early education and care centre, because that aligns with your philosophy and personal expression of that. Within that what you express from there is all the practices that are faith-based within that philosophy*" *(26.10.15).* This statement typifies Darlene's perspective on her leadership role. In the same way that she outlined her personal faith earlier in this case study, here she totally incorporates it within her work and her leadership responsibility in particular.

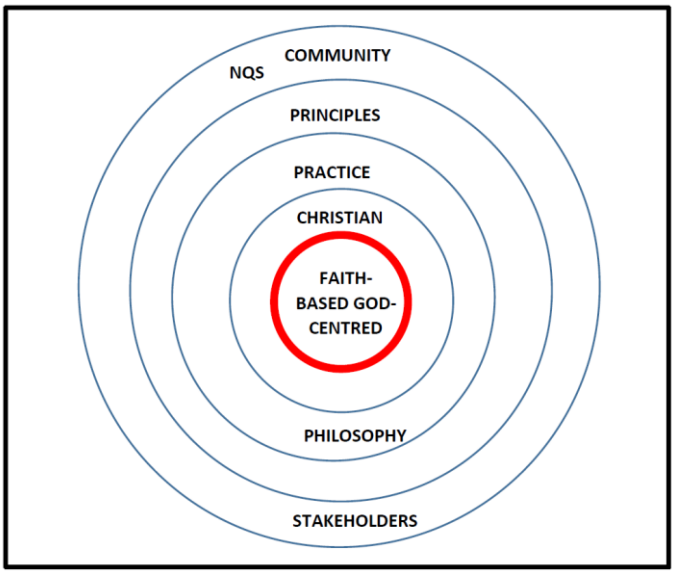


Figure 5. 13

The Suburban Director's/Leader's concept of early childhood education leadership

As can be seen in Figure 5.13, Darlene's concept of Christian early childhood education leadership radiates outwards from the core of a faith-based/ God –centred approach to encompass the practice and quality learning outcomes, underpinned by a Christian philosophy and mandatory legislation and policy. These are then all linked to the various stakeholders and the community.

Then, some time later, I received a more detailed second edition of the diagram. (See Figure 5.14). This time there are far more elements that expand the original items, clarifying and developing understanding.

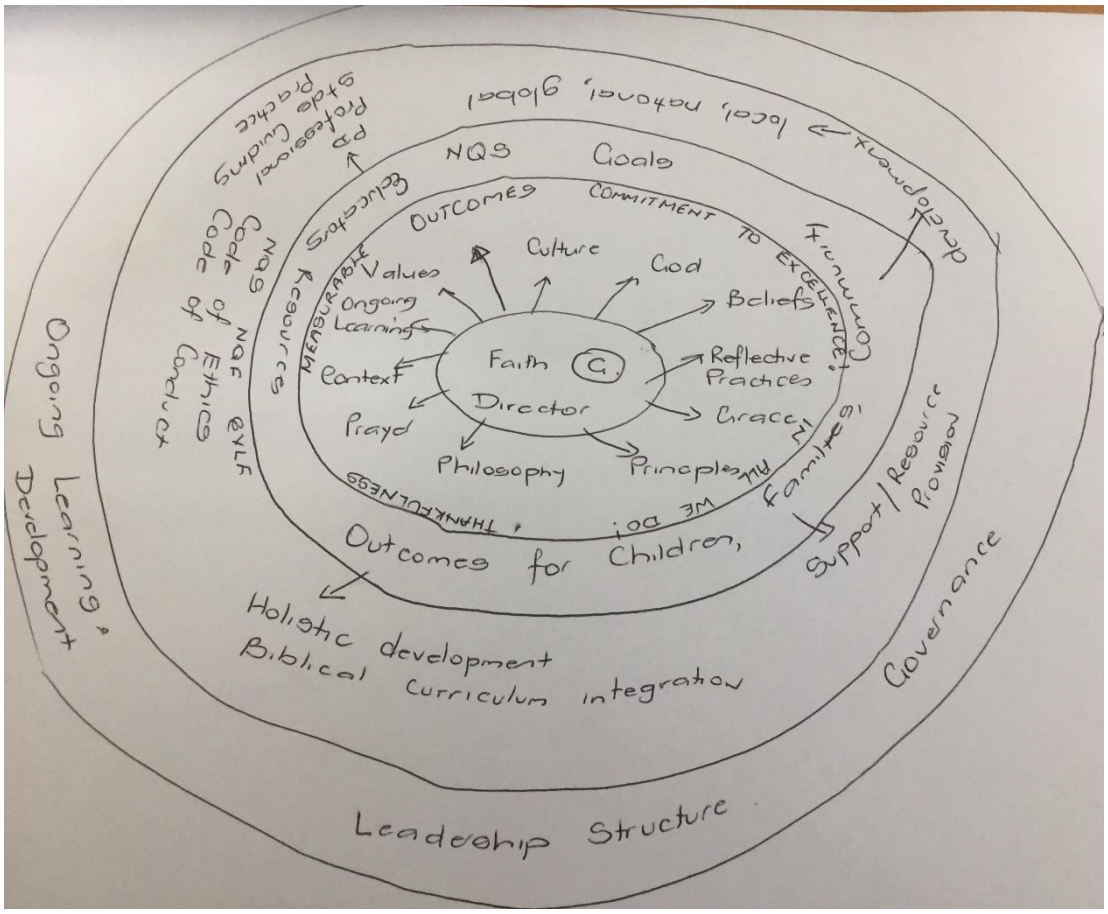


Figure 5. 14

The Director's/Leader's perspective, Version 2

5.3.4 The Practice

Over the years Darlene has seen changes in the way that CECEC centres are managed. She says: *"In my Mt Druitt days, it was just saying grace, whereas now it's exploring how our Christian philosophy is delivered in a framework that's what we need to deliver and have documented and outworked so that it's defined for everybody. You come to this service, this is what's going to be delivered. Yes, we tell families we'll celebrate Easter and Christmas, and say grace and have Christian literacy materials, but it's far deeper than that and I don't think anybody has worked out the specifics of the framework and aligned that with the national quality standards. So when we talk about spirituality, when we talk about children's sense of belonging we're seeing a lot in early childhood now around yoga and meditation and a whole range of different….sense of awe, presence of God. So we're in a much better position to articulate what that means" (26.10.15).*

5.3.4.1 Relationships with children and spirituality and God

Darlene started to share about her approach to children's spirituality: *"The Early Years Learning Framework talks about the EYLF learning outcomes. If we look at the key EYLF learning outcomes I would argue that in terms of children's spiritual development they should be integrated in all the elements of each learning outcome. How that is represented, be it music and movement, creative expression, communication, children's sense of self-identity or connection it will be presented in this world as part of a God-centred universe" (26.10.15).*

5.3.4.2 Relationships with families (positive and negative)

So do families expect a Christian place would offer a more nurturing, loving environment? *"Correct! Because that's the foundation of the philosophy behind the service which is made very clear to any family regardless of what religious background they are when they enrol in the service, because we make no excuses that this is the philosophy and the position where we come from. Having said that we've got Muslim children involved in our service, Buddhists, Sikhs, a range of faiths and cultures, it's a service for that" (26.10.15).*

Regarding respect towards families, Darlene's comments continue to reflect her belief that excellence in professionalism is the best way to reflect Christianity. *"…it's around levels of professionalism; because if you're not getting issues of respect with parents, it's around*

what is the level of professionalism and code of ethics in terms of how we respond to parents and to children" (*26.10.15).*

5.3.4.3 Relationships with staff (positive and negative)

What did Darlene like most about her staff? *"I love their heart. Because they understand…..it's made very clear if somebody is going to work here, what the expectations are in terms of the role of the child care centre. So I think knowing the educators' hearts is really important because whenever you've got someone who is teachable and willing to learn and understands the faith context and embraces the philosophy, the rest will flow in terms of head and hands" (26.10.15)*. Collaboration was mentioned by others in this project, how important did she feel it was? Darlene's immediate comment was: "*I would say yes! Absolutely! And collaboration is reflected through partnership and I think embedded critical reflective practice is foundational to the National Quality Standard and you can't achieve collaboration or collaborative partnership unless you have that foundational practice embedded" (26.10.15).*

So how much independence does she give her staff? *"It's about actually sitting with an educator and finding out what are their interests, what are the needs of the service and matching the needs of the service with what their gifts, talents, strengths are. So in terms of empowering leadership what I've done is to actually say: you have to work as a team, it's not me. I can't do the National Quality Standard on my own. I think some educators might have become dependent on a director/leader saying you do everything, right!? But this is about empowering your leaders and actually saying: well hang on, let's change this. I'm equipping you. I'm empowering you. So I'm setting the broad direction and I'm empowering you to do the specifics. Then when we come to assessment and rating you're going to sit in here with me supporting you and you're going to say: these are all the wonderful things 'I've' done, and I'm going to validate that. So you're going to be equipped, empowered and feel great!" (26.10.15).*

5.3.4.4 Relationships with the community

How important is the relationship with the community? *"You have to live and breathe it, and know your families and get involved in your local network and community group and look at the needs of your community" (26.10.15)*. I wondered whether Darlene had experienced some of the wariness that Fran had experienced when people had found out that she was a Christian. For Fran, this caution had related to the context of being a leader of a

CECEC centre. Darlene commented: *"Sometimes in external professional development situations with other particular professionals there might be certain topics that come up where you actually have to articulate the faith that guides your practice. And sometimes that can bring quite some challenge" (26.10.15).*

Another aspect of a leader's relationships with families and community is that of social justice. Not only is social justice intrinsic to Christian values, but frequently it falls to the early childhood education leader to advocate for vulnerable families in order to obtain support for these children. However, given the affluence of the area in which Darlene's Centre is located was this an issue for her? Darlene replied: "*Here, in the demographic in this particular service it's a rather high demographic. That's not saying there are not challenging issues, it has one of the highest domestic violence rates in terms of the stats coming out. So you've got issues like that to be aware of and to respond to, which are sometimes quite hidden but they're very real issues. Child protection is an issue wherever you go, it's not hidden by particular demographics. You've got domestic violence, you've got child protection issues in this demographic, and one of the other issues that I deal with all the time is financial pressures. People living in Sydney, two parents working, sometimes additional jobs, sometimes additional travel time on that, people are time poor. That also brings with it a whole range of other stresses"* (*26.10.15).*

5.3.5 The challenges of the practice

For Darlene, as with each of the other leaders, people management issues can be the biggest challenge: "*I think it's really important in terms of staff and team dynamics that you position your team with mature, experienced staff and young people so you've got that balance. Sometimes that is easier said than done, because I think one of the biggest challenges for us in a Christian-based service is attracting committed Christian people. And I know sometimes I've talked to recruitment agencies in regard to what is the definition of a committed Christian, and I know for some recruitment agencies that's been a very difficult concept. And I've actually had to spell it out and say: a committed Christian person looks like this…" (13.7.17).*

5.3.5.1 The tensions of philosophical difference

Darlene explained that communication is the essential factor to working effectively with staff and being open and honest. She commented "*So if there's particular practices or standards of behaviours that occur, you would have seen for example in our leaders' meeting*

today where I identified an issue. It's around our code, it's around our expectations. If we're delivering the best, we have to live and breathe it. And we have to carry that together, that relates to everything we do in terms of our philosophical practices. If I don't want to go to a particular meeting, what are the reasons for that? It gets back to the heart" (26.10.1).

5.3.5.2 The tensions of workload.

Darlene's approach to this perennial problem is to ensure that she and her staff work as a team; the work is shared collaboratively and effectively delegated. Darlene undergirds the collaborative partnerships with her staff through critical reflective practice. She says: *"I think embedded critical reflective practice is indicated as foundational to the National Quality Standard and you can't achieve collaboration or collaborative partnership unless you have that foundational practice embedded" (26.10.15).*

5.3.5.3 The tensions of community

What about the broader community*? "This year, only two weeks ago, we won the [prestigious award]. That was delightful, and a beautiful intimate ceremony in which we were presented. Even more delightful that we didn't know we were going to receive it. And I think as a leader, I am very involved in the church context; I am very involved in the local community context; and I'm very involved in supporting other local services in building and developing services, helping equip educators and supporting the local community. I know this local community, I'm also involved in the [suburb] mentoring program and have been for a number of years. I initiated the local Directors/Leaders' network meeting which has been running now for a number of years. So there's so much in the local community that you live and you breathe and you do without even realising it. The impact that you have. Because the more we work as a community the better it is for our children and our families…and ourselves!" (26.10.15).*

5.3.6 Final Comments

Darlene describes herself as a 'very positive person' and after further probing commented: *"I believe the best of people. Life's to be enjoyed. I think you're here for a purpose. God has a plan for you. God places value on people. You have a contribution to the world to make and you should make it; and everybody has different strengths, abilities and interests, and I think that if you can offer that to help grow others" (26.10.15).*

What were the experiences that gave her that outlook on life? *"I had a miscarriage. So I think you love and appreciate all that you've got. And things can change in the blink of an eye, particularly as regards your health. I was going interstate to train up people and ended up in hospital with a gallstone operation. I'm rarely sick. I'm very strong. Having done 20 years of martial arts, training to become a black belt, actually helps you to push through. All your life experiences shape who you are and cause you to be positive. You are who you believe you become. If you're saying I can't do this, you'll never be fulfilled, you'll never achieve it. But if you believe you can change the world and set your heart and mind to that, you will! I still remember my naughty chair and I don't want that for anybody! People don't learn through criticism and domination; people learn through collaboration and encouragement. Not to say you don't be strong, but in terms of teams on the floor people have to be empowered to rise up." (26.10.15). "….You can have terrible Christian leadership. The issue that I think… is the key issue, if you want me to honestly say …It's a matter of heart. I know here whenever we do our performance things, it's your head, your heart, your hands. I think your heart has got to be in it 100%, your heart has got to be in it over and above" (13.07.14).*

What would I look for in a Christian Director/Leader of an early childhood education and care centre? How is it different from anywhere else?

"It's about that person having, displaying the right heart, being passionate and looking at investment in their children, families and community. It's about looking at linkage integration so that if you have a family who have a pastoral need, then the leader can make those links and connections and understand the ministry context……"(13.07.14).

5.3.7 Summary

Darlene's story reflects a passion for whatever she does, in this case it is her total commitment to excellence in leading an early childhood education within a faith-based context. She creates the perception that hers is a more business-like, even corporate approach than that of the other three participants; however, this is also a reflection of the large organisation within which she works. Nevertheless, the unifying cord of a commitment to Christian service and love remains strong.

Through experience, Darlene, and Fran from the previous case study, have learned similar lessons about empowering staff to serve, rather than controlling or doing it for them.

They also both place God at the centre of their practice and admit that frequent communication with Him is the essence of their Christian leadership.

5.4 Case Study 3 ~ Denise's Story

5.4.1 Introduction

This is the third of the four case studies, and again, a pseudonym has been used. As with the other case studies, the name of the denomination has been withheld for purposes of anonymity. Here, 'Denise' shares her story:

5.4.2 Location of Denise's practice

Situated in a bustling, multicultural section of Sydney's inner city, this Early Childhood Education Centre is accommodated in nineteenth century buildings, built in 1874 adjacent to a heritage-listed church built in 1880. The buildings, of weathered sandstone, feature the main sanctuary building with stained glass windows and ornately carved stoned doorways, and a spire and bell tower. Entering the site from the street, additional buildings to the right of the church accommodate the community hall, the [minister's] study and a number of offices.

To the rear of the property and directly behind the church is the building which houses the pre-school. Although this structure has been converted to meet mandated modern government requirements for a preschool, it is nevertheless fairly antiquated with poor lighting, limited areas, narrow passageways and tiny administration office space as shown in Figure 5.15.



Figure 5. 15

The administration area of the preschool

The actual classroom area is a large double room with a group operating at either end as shown in Figure 5.16. Farther back into the property is a play area with artificial turf and a number of activities for the children such as ball games and water play. Behind that again is a large, grassed area which the children are now not able to use, due to adjoining building developments and health and safety concerns (See Figure 5.17). In summary, it is cramped and not ideal, unlike some of the purpose–built facilities in the other centres.



Figure 5. 16

One end of the classroom area



Figure 5. 17

Partial view of the rear play area

The church is hemmed in on either side with shops and cafes, while busy traffic and hurrying pedestrians pass its entrance. The church's motto is: "Growing life-changing communities who love, learn, and serve in Jesus Christ". This Centre has approval from Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], the Australian national licensing authority, for 40 places and is open five days each week (Monday to Friday) from 8.30am to 3.30pm. The Centre is full and has gained an 'exceeding NQS' rating from ACECQA.

This inner-city centre is located in a predominantly multicultural area, as mentioned previously, and the students cover a wide religious and racial spectrum including Korean, Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern and Vietnamese. Although the Director/Leader and the two senior educators are from a European background, the rest of the staff are from various ethnic backgrounds similar to the children's which is a great advantage in facilitating conversations with parents and children.

5.4.3 Leading the practice

This inner-city CECEC Centre is led by Denise.

5.4.3.1 Personal background

Quietly spoken, and having just turned 55, Denise has led this Centre for fourteen years. Born a city girl, she is a single parent with a grown son. Denise began her education at Fort Street National Primary School, established in 1849, one of Australia's first schools. She then attended Girls High at Pyrmont. Having taught Sunday School and realising that she enjoyed working with children, she undertook studies in Early Childhood Education at Sydney Teachers' Kindergarten College. As she laughingly recalls, at 17 she thought the holidays would be good!

5.4.3.2 Pathway to ECEC leadership

Denise continued with her work, then undertook her graduate degree in additional needs in the late 80s. Currently, as Director/Leader of this inner-city CECEC centre Denise works as an educator in the Centre for two days a week, and then for the remaining three days she undertakes administrative work. Some of the work is in her office in the main educational centre, and some is within the church offices and community centre where she provides morning teas for parents and family members, and sometimes even community members who wander into the centre from the street.

5.4.3.3 Personal faith and worldview

Although she is the Director/Leader of a [Church] ECEC, Denise was brought up as a [different church]. She attends her church currently and sees herself as 'very much middle of the range church member'. She comments that she is very comfortable with both her own and the preschool Church faiths, although she feels it is better for her to have a break from her current location for weekend worship and so attends her own church. She recalls that she gave serious consideration to joining this church and talked it over with the [minister], in fact was very open with him explaining that if she had a problem with him during the week, she would find it very hard to leave the issue aside and have him as her minister. She finally concluded that working in the preschool all week and then attending church there would make it almost impossible to leave preschool issues aside. Denise has a strong personal faith and is very convicted that leading this preschool is where God wants her to be. She says: "*What is faith to me?...see, this comes back to Jesus… and the word committed…how committed I am to my faith. If I don't have it, it can make me fall off the course…..My faith?...It's me and my relationship with Jesus! How do I sustain it? Personal prayer. I pray all the time; throughout the day. I don't read my Bible as much as I should. But I pray a lot"* (2.12.14).

5.4.3.4 Foundation for the practice

Denise firmly adheres to the guidelines of the National Quality Foundation, and ensures her staff members maintain a high standard as evidenced by the centre's "Exceeding" rating. However, for Denise, the real foundation for her practice is an absolute belief in, and devotion to, sharing Jesus and Christian values with the community. Clearly, Denise's concept of 'the practice' includes a particularly strong commitment to the community.

5.4.3.5 Motivation for the practice

Denise has a strong commitment to share the love and values of Christianity with the community through kindness, hospitality, acceptance and welcome. She perceives this as a ministry and that this practical service exemplifies genuine Christian ministry far more than just words could do and truly believes God has placed her there for that purpose: *"I believe God's put me here. I believe it's a ministry. It's wonderful. It's absolutely driven, it's a 'calling'…..um…..it's not seen as work…it's a mission field, you know… I'm not in a country somewhere else; it's a mission field here for me. And these families need us"* (2.12.14).

This ‘community’ includes the children, their parents and extended family members, the staff at the Centre and the wider, local community. Due to the low socio-economic status of this inner-city area, there are many people who live on the streets and border on destitution. These people drift in and out of the church facilities, seeking support, welcome and kindness. This broader concept of ‘community’, beyond just the preschool, Denise perceives as her ‘mission field’. “*And people walk in off the street, we get a lot of families here, passers-by, there was a gentleman in the morning tea, he was here early this morning. I said: ‘if you come back at nine o’clock’, as I put the water on to heat. And he did come back and he was welcomed and he had a cup of tea and some food and I introduced him to one of the ministers. Now, I did that because it’s a ministry”* (2.12.14).

When asked if she could sum up Christian early childhood education leadership Denise expressed it this way: “*the first word I’ve just thought of is ‘commitment’. You must be committed to what the actual role means. We talk here about ‘keep the main thing, the main thing’. What’s the main thing? Jesus and where He wants us to go. That keeps us focussed. So, in my role I’m committed to making sure the preschool ministry is going towards Jesus. What He wants. So it’s not just ‘I’m committed to get us through the National Quality Standards’ …or… ‘I’m committed to everyone being able to write their name or whatever’…It doesn’t mean the early childhood outcomes are not important, but we have a bigger base for why we’re doing it, and it is holistic, I am an advocate for the child, but we look at the child in the whole with their family and as Christians, what are we doing to support that family? And if it’s something that we don’t think Jesus would want then we have to re-look. So it’s an absolute commitment to the ministry” (2.12.14).*

I pressed her further and she responded: “*The very first thing, when I leave the house of a morning, it’s who I’m accountable to. The very, very first thing because it’s going to impact how I make my decisions as a leader every day.” When I asked her who that was, she replied: “It’s Jesus. I’m accountable to Jesus” (2.12.14).*

As Denise began to draw her concept of Christian early childhood education leadership, and of her perspective on her own role in particular, she first drew the church as central. I questioned her on this, asking: You’ve got Christ in there? Somewhat surprised, she replied: *“Well yes, I just assumed that’s what the church means”.* She continued: …..”*We all link each other……..is that too simple?”* I said that was fine, then I asked her where she saw herself in the diagram.

She explained: *"I see myself in the centre, it's part of the link, I'm kind of the bridge……and again (as she draws) I'm in everything…very much in the community…but my role is to ensure that bridge stays up…..OK?" (2.12.14).*

Thus, in the diagram (Figure 5.18), Denise has positioned herself to the edge of the centre with a very strong link (thicker yellow line) to the Preschool and additional, although lesser links (thinner yellow lines) to the other ministries of the church as well as the wider community.

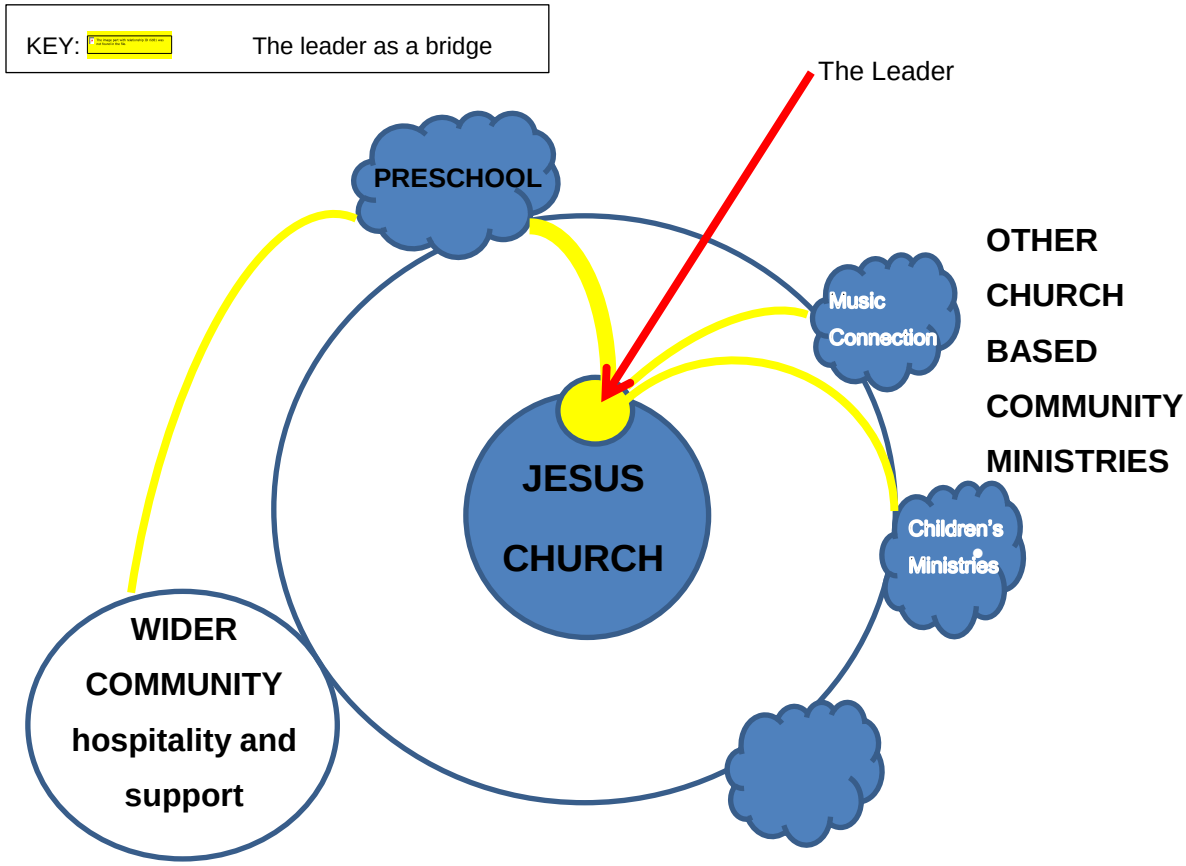


Figure 5. 18

Denise's concept of Christian early childhood education leadership

The Director/Leader appears on the website listed with the Ministry team. Another section of the website provides a picture of the ECEC staff where she is also listed. The website goes on to describe the Centre as follows:

"[redacted] [redacted] Preschool is a community-based not-for-profit service which is locally managed by [redacted] and is part of [redacted] Children's Services".

"The service cares for children from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, reflecting the multicultural flavour of [redacted] itself. A high proportion of Mandarin and Cantonese speaking families led to the employment of a worker speaking these two languages

Our Philosophy

Our Philosophy at [redacted] [redacted] Preschool is to respect individual children and base our developmentally appropriate programs on children's needs and interests.

We value children and their families from all cultural backgrounds and beliefs.

We believe every child should have access to high quality early childhood education.

Figure 5. 19

Webpage from the Inner City centre

[redacted] [redacted] Preschool are proud to reflect the diverse community we serve by respecting the values of children and their families from all cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Our commitment to this diversity is reflected through our team of multilingual educators to support the sense of belonging that is so important to children and families. The Early Years Learning Framework drives our program, which responds to the individual abilities and interests of all children. We work closely with families to build a sense of curiosity and wonder in learning through early literacy and concept development as children prepare for school.

As part of the [redacted], we offer regular community events for families to meet and opportunities to be involved in the life of our preschool. We also have strong links to outside agencies within the community and will work as a team with families to ensure all children are receiving quality education and care.

The journey of learning for every child is recorded through a personal documented portfolio which reflects the achievements and challenges faced throughout the year in relation to the Learning Outcomes.

Figure 5. 20

Inner City webpage

As can be seen from these extracts from the website, although the statements are useful and positive, there is no mention of Christianity, of Christian values or Christian faith. The only reference to anything religious is the statement that the centre is 'managed by [name

of Church]' and that the centre is 'part of the [name of Church]'. Denise perceives the 'environment' which includes the language, care, attitudes and practices, is the best way to display Christianity and she sees it almost exclusively as 'the church'.

5.4.4 The practice

5.4.4.1 Relationships with children, spirituality and God

Denise's perspective on relationships is through a 'bigger picture' frame; she says*: "I don't mean the educational outcomes are not important, but we look at the big picture for why we're doing it, and it is holistic. We look at the child in the context of their family and as Christians, we ask, what are we doing to support that family?" (2.12.14).* Denise mentioned several times that the primary goal of the Centre's 'ministry' was not conversion to [name of Church], but displaying Christian love through loving actions so that people would come to understand more about Jesus and be attracted to Him that way.

5.4.4.2 Relationships with families

Denise explained some of the community and family activities and the underlying reasons and motivation for it: "*We have two parents' morning teas every week and that's to bridge the gap between the ministry team and the families, and so they feel they have a place to go and they can be whatever they are. There's no judgement, over a cuppa, having a chat, and it can go further, if they need that. And that's parents, grand-parents, past parents come back. You saw that this morning. One of those parents doesn't have children here now, they come back to us – they feel safe" (2.12.14).* As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of children attending this centre are not from an Anglo background. Denise comments: "*We attract a lot of families from overseas, many different religions, everyone's welcome. For some of them this is their first experience with a Christian church; even just the building is new for them" (2.12.14).* She explains again that the goal is not to convert the parents but to accept them and show them Christian love; *"However, families will ask particular questions, we've had some families ask for Bibles, we've had some people learn about Jesus through their children because of the songs the children have learned" (2.12.14).* So I asked her about the difference between being a leader in a Christian centre and being a leader in a secular one. *"When you're in a secular place you're more of a stand-alone leader. There is a limit on what you can do because you're looking at the politically correct side of it. If I said 'I'm going to pray for you' you're seen as not professional or something. But we can do so much*

more for the staff and the children and the families because we're a team and Jesus is our centre, so we're very pastorally aware that we can actually help more people by doing that". So what are some of the practical things you do to help the families? They'll (ministers) go to meetings with them as support people. For some of our families, filling in documents is almost impossible and they need help with that. When they've been through difficult times, they KNOW they can come here and someone will hold out a hand to them. I've had parents just come and drop themselves on my steps and just sit there. 'Cause they know they can. And just hang. If they want to talk they can talk, if they don't want to talk they don't have to talk. And I'm given licence to do that because it's part of our ministry" (2.12.14). The difference is …some of the decisions we make …why….we always ask 'why are we doing this'…… why are we doing it this way……. why do we need to look at this family in a more compassionate light …what's going on? They're behind,… they're struggling….do they need some extra assistance,…. one of the other ministries of the church – would that be suitable for them?" (2.12.14).

5.4.4.3 Relationships with staff

I asked Denise about her relationships with her staff and she replied: *"I have to be accountable to the staff, the reasons why we're doing it this way, because the staff are not always behind it. But without doubt it's part of the ministry. This is the reasoning behind it. And a lot of it is explaining to the staff why this is important. Why it's part of the preschool. A lot of it is being the bridge to educate the staff how we are a part of the church, why we see ourselves like that" (2.12.14*). Prayer for students, parents and staff is an important aspect of the daily and weekly program for Denise. She comments: *"…I go to a ministry team meeting every Tuesday. We actually pray for different people, that's families as well and as the ministry team we will pray for them, and will highlight pastoral issues" (2.12.14).*

5.4.4.4 Relationships with the community

Denise is very focussed on the community in its broadest sense. For her the community includes the preschool children, parents and staff as well as the broader local community. She says: *"Before we make any decisions, we are prayerful about it, and we think, OK, how are we representing Jesus in this community? They need to know about it. It's fine to do good works, it's wonderful, but if people don't actually know that we're representing Jesus, that it's Jesus' love that's doing this, it doesn't really mean much. That's*

what drives us. How we can extend this ministry, how we can help the community. How we can serve Jesus? (2.12.14).

5.4.5 The Challenges of the Practice

5.4.5.1 The tensions of philosophical difference

For Denise, these challenges, featured in each interview, and were mentioned more frequently than by the other participants. In general conversation Denise could not be described as a negative person and the problem related only to one issue – the philosophical difference between nominal Christian and authentic Christian. Factors that may have influenced this situation include Denise being the only one of the four interview participants who did not start her own Centre. As mentioned earlier, the buildings are not purpose-built, instead dating from the 19th century and thus suffering the inconveniences of 'heritage listing' with labyrinthine offices, ancient plumbing and limited space which must be made to adhere to government early childcare regulations and requirements. The accommodation is certainly cramped which can exacerbate any tensions between staff members. Denise took on the leadership of a CECEC centre that was only nominally Christian. That is, although the Centre occupied buildings within the church grounds and next to the church itself, and was supposedly Christian, there were no practices in the daily program for the children that could be labelled as particularly 'Christian'. As mentioned earlier, with the arrival of a new [minister] and his wife, (who is also a [minister]), some years ago, they together felt that this was the time to make the 'Christian' aspect of the title authentic and to incorporate Christian practices into the program, such as singing Christian songs. Unfortunately, of the existing staff, many of whom had worked there for a long time, two of the educators were quite opposed to this change and resisted strongly.

Where this leader has tried, unsuccessfully, to incorporate comparatively simple Christian practices into the daily programs of the Centre, due to staff resistance, she says that she has given up trying to take her team with her. Nor has she adopted force d compliance. Instead she has used a show-you-by-my-actions approach, supported by the pastoral team. This is very reminiscent of the approach used within the Christian orphanages in China described by Niemetz (2014) as mentioned in Chapter Two.

Unfortunately, her desired approach of an authentic, experiential Christian approach is also not supported by [name of church], the Centre's administrative group, which does not publicly espouse a practical Christian approach to its child-care programs. As can be seen in

the excerpts from the website advertising the Centre (Figures 5.19 & 5.20), there is no mention of Christian or Christian practices.

Denise says: "*Sometimes it feels like I'm the leader of the ministry, but I'm not bringing my team with me. Some of them, yes, but not all of the team. So it would be silly of me to say my whole team is behind Christian ministry here, because it's not true" (2.12.14).*

Complicating the process of transformation to a genuine CECEC centre, the original staff members were not required to be practising Christians nor even adherents of the [name of Church]. Instead, their appointment letter simply required them to respect the ethos of the [name of church]. The two leading educators subsequently viewed Denise's proposed changes (Bible stories and songs for the children, prayers etc.) as unreasonable and un-enforceable within their employment conditions, and so they avoided compliance at all opportunities. Denise goes on to explain: "*The preschool was always here, but it wasn't always seen as part of the church's ministry. And I've spent 14 years bridging that gap. And a lot of that is explaining 'this is why this decision is being made'. And reiterating that 'we are the church'. It's not them and us. We ARE the church."* So I asked Denise how she coped with this ongoing situation*: "I have to say, and I have to be very honest about this, it's probably one of my biggest challenges. One of my biggest challenges, and I, for respite in my head, will go over to [the pastor] office and have a tantrum or something, just say a couple of words,…vent" (2.12.14).*

Regardless of her frustrations she says: *"I believe in it, and when I'm singing with my children with their little Christian songs, I'm worshipping. I love it! I wish those particular staff had that, and I pray for them, but that doesn't mean we stop it. And we've had talks about this. It will continue, because it's God's work, through Jesus, we're not stopping" (20.08.16).*

The lack of alignment with the Christian philosophy by some of her staff strongly flavours her attitudes towards them and even extends to lack of trust, as this comment about future staffing plans reveals: "*They've (the Board) agreed to pay casuals until we can find the right people. That's also why there's no one from the staff on the interview committee. It's me, and the chair of the board, I don't trust their (the two senior staff members) agenda, and it's certainly not a Christian agenda."* Denise explains why she feels this way: "*They're not looking towards the ministry; they want someone to fit in with them. And if I'm very honest, that's not the team I want to take forward. They aren't looking at the wider picture, and*

that's what I struggle with because it's very much the wider picture. We'll be going into new premises in the next few years, the church is doing that because we're a major ministry and I still can't get some of my staff on board with that. It's all about……sometimes I think they came to preschool for a rest. But instead of resting we're actually going further, and that's the ministry. It's holistic; it's the families as well. We support the families, the church supports the families, and that's what's missing at a certain level with some of my staff. And that's the frustration" (20.08.16).

It is this ongoing, underlying conflict between some staff members' values and perspectives and her own commitment to Christian service that leads her to further comment: *"Some days are much harder than others. I get a little dejected and sometimes it's nice to just do my two teaching days. I'm with the kids, the families, but we need to look at the bigger picture and it's hard when you don't have all the staff on board with the Christian practice" (20.08.16).*

5.4.5.2. The tensions of workload and administration

Again, the main tension in Denise's administrative role relates to the previous issue of philosophical difference. Denise is totally committed to her role. She says: "*It's not a 'job' it's a ministry! I'm very mission-minded. If you don't have that person leading, it won't work, because you need to be ministry-focussed. It doesn't fit into my hours, you know. It doesn't fit into my 8-hour day" (2.12.14).* Denise does not perceive her workload as a problem, rather as a necessity in her ministry; she went on to comment about the hours she works: *"I put in whatever I deem is necessary to put in".* Denise repeated these sentiments some time later at the next interview: "*So it's an absolute commitment to the ministry. It's not….you know…a 'start at 8 o'clock and finish at 4' job. I spend a lot of extra hours making sure that we're part of this ministry and that we're going with it…and that it's for the right reasons" (24.11.15).*

5.4.5.3. The tensions of community

For Denise there seem to be very few tensions with the community. She is constantly looking for opportunities to serve the wider community. Denise understands and values the ethnic mix of the local community and enjoys interacting with them.

5.4.6 Final Comments

Denise sums up her work this way: "*I can do what I do because the church is so supportive. And they recognise preschool as a major ministry of their church. I get that all the time 'preschool is a major ministry of the church; you're doing the right thing' so I push on ahead with that. My job is to make the preschool a going concern in the ministry. I know I'm doing the right thing" (20.08.16).*

5.4.7 Summary

For Denise, in contrast with the other three Directors/Leaders, her role as a Christian leader seems to be one long struggle. She passionately believes in her ministry of holistically caring for the children and their families, but there is a lack of support from two of her senior staff members verging on opposition. This issue permeates every interview and at times seems to wear her down and discourage her a great deal. Nevertheless, she retains her personal faith and her determination to continue and develop the work of a Christian holistic ministry. Further, despite all this difficulty her Centre received an 'exceeding' rating at the last accreditation, even though these same staff argued with her that the 'Christian' aspects would severely endanger the Centre's rating. That rating vindicated Denise's stance and buoyed her morale and determination to stand firm for the values she espouses.

5.5 Case Study 4 ~ Maree's story

5.5.1 Introduction

This is the last of the four case studies, and identifying names have been removed to preserve anonymity. Similarly, the centres have each been given a location name; and so this centre is named the 'coastal centre' even though it is not near the coast. This is Maree's story.

5.5.2 Location of Maree's Centre



Figure 5. 21
Maree's Christian Early Learning Centre

Situated in the lowest socio-economic area of the four case studies (ABS.SEIFA, 2011) this CECEC Centre is adjacent to a modern primary school established in 1989. The street in which the Centre is situated is in a fairly low socio-economic, rural suburb with a Government high school, Government primary school, Government Pre-school, Independent Preschool and Primary school and Independent High school all located spaciously along both sides of the same road. The Centre itself is situated in a large, attractive, purpose-built building.



Figure 5. 22

A classroom at the Centre

The rooms are generously proportioned, modern and attractively decorated; the building incorporates features of sustainability such as lighting, which is activated when you enter a room and switches off when you leave.



Sustainability is an essential concept in current early childhood education as indicated in this excerpt about the National Quality Standard from the NSW Department of Education

Figure 5. 23

Foyer decorations with children's names displayed

"Quality Area 3 of the National Quality Standard focuses on the physical environment, assessing that it is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences that promote children's learning and development, and children becoming environmentally aware and responsible. Standard 3.3 of the National Quality Standard requires services to take an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future. For a service to be meeting the National Quality Standard element 3.3.1 requires that sustainable practices are embedded in service operations." (NSW Department of Education, 2016). Sustainability is an important feature of this Centre and the children are encouraged to be aware of what this means and how they can contribute. To the side of the Centre a playground has been developed by the parents and staff which also incorporates a number of features designed to increase the children's awareness of the environment (water, trees, gardens etc.) and the importance of its sustainability (See Figure 5.34).



Figure 5. 24

Part of the garden area

This Centre has approval from the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], for 60 places and is open five days each week (Monday to Friday) from 8:00am to 2:50pm. It has gained a 'meeting NQS' rating on five of the seven standards with an overall rating of 'working towards NQS'.

5.5.3 Leading the Practice

This Coastal CECEC Centre is led by Maree.

5.5.3.1 Personal background

Maree is aged forty-six; she is divorced, with four children of her own who have all been through the school where she is currently leading the ECEC Centre. She has three of her children still at school, studying at (Independent) College. Maree comes from a [church] background, born into a [church] family in the Southern Tablelands city of Goulburn, New South Wales; she attended [church] primary and secondary schools there. She says: *"I was brought up in the [church] faith, and went through [church] girls schools and here I am back in it. It feels like home."* Originally she started nursing and quite enjoyed it, but for her final placement in her third year of training she needed to experience a paediatric setting and was sent to the [name] Nursery School. This was to be quite a startling experience for Maree as she quickly came to the conclusion that something was not quite right! She says: "*and I went: I am in the wrong profession!!!"* She had discovered an enduring love of working with young children that was to continue throughout her career. Nevertheless, she went on to complete her nursing qualification which was a Diploma of Health Science as it was called then. Maree subsequently undertook casual work and then completed her Diploma in Early Childhood Education at Hunter TAFE. Following this she started her degree at Macquarie University while she was working, and then finished her degree at University of New England. By then Maree had been working in different children's services and thought she would explore primary teaching as well, "*I had my three-year early childhood degree, and I wanted a better grounding in K-6"* so she went back to University and did her Diploma of Education in primary. She says: "…*and I still ended up in Early Childhood!"* For Maree, her 'discovery' of early childhood education seems to have been a 'Eureka!!' moment, or even a 'Damascus Road' experience (in Biblical terminology) for from that moment she knew with absolute clarity that this was what she wanted to do. This enlightening experience saw her leaving her chosen career of nursing and subsequently retraining to move into early childhood education, where she has remained ever since.

5.5.3.2 Pathway to ECEC leadership

I asked Maree about her perceptions of leadership within the Early Learning field. She says: "*In my experience, I find you are thrust into a leadership position, particularly when you see things that you feel could be done better or with more meaning. It is easy to become frustrated. Leaders should know why they do what they do and why they don't do certain things. They should be able to articulate this clearly to others. We need to reflect on meaning and values and really think about why. The inspiring leaders I have had in the past had strong values, deep knowledge and understanding. They took me and other staff with them in exploring those uncertain ideas, subsequently strengthening all staff practice and skills through the sharing of values, knowledge and understanding" (3.12.14).*

Maree reflected further on this leadership theme, remembering when she had tried to encourage the children to be grateful for their food, and was told that she couldn't do this because it was 'religious'. She argued with her supervisors, but they were unable to give a clear explanation for the ban. She reiterates her belief that leaders should know what they believe and why. She says: "*That's something that I've struggled with in the past and why I've probably come into a position of leadership" (3.12.14).*

5.5.3.3 Personal faith and worldview

Maree describes her faith as 'embedded in her life'. She says: *"I think sometimes it can be a habit, a comforting habit, but when you have challenging situations in life, it's that place that you go to. It's that comfort and acknowledgement that God gives you. And while rituals and traditions are lovely, it's a deeper meaning. Because you're raised in it, it's always there, but in times of crisis, those are the times when God is truly present for you and that sustains you."*

Maree reflects on something her grandmother, her father's mother, said, who she describes as having had no faith. She remembers that when her grandfather died, her grandmother told her daughter-in-law, Maree's mother: *'I envy you your faith'.* That comment has always remained with Maree because it confirmed Maree's perceptions that *"in times of need, God is always there with you".*

It is very apparent that for Maree her faith has a strong relational, practical base as this comment illustrates: "*It's how you feel about yourself and your place in the world and it gives you the ability to have purpose and meaning and know where you're headed in this world and what you do for people in it. I think it's because our faith comes from being with*

others. Jesus was with others. That's how His being was, – to serve others. My being is to serve others – that's my faith-based being, and it gives me strength too."

But couldn't that be said by an atheist? I asked.

"*No… their faith is in the humanistic point of view; my faith is in God's point of view. You can have a person professing to be this faith or that faith, but my interpretation of my faith is to be a wonderful, helpful, welcoming individual inspired by God. And I'm human too and I believe this is a heart-based profession, and where does the heart come from? The heart comes from God."*



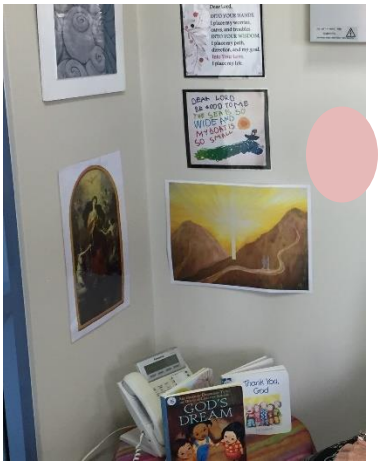


Figure 5. 25

Maree's prayer, meditation and reflection corner with her picture prayer

So then I asked Maree about how she sustained her personal faith. With much laughter she replied: *"I have many discussions with God. We're on good terms!" (Much more laughter). It's in the difficult times where you have the deepest most authentic talks with God……and call on His help. I think it's sad…to think that of course everybody calls on God when it's hard, but forget God when things are going well. But you do tend……and I think that for many people …… when you really need God…….that's when you have your deepest reflective discussions with God. But I don't want anybody to think that we shouldn't be very thankful for all the wonderful things He does for us. Look, we get up in the morning, we live in a great society, a great community; we live a good life; we should be very, very grateful….. you know what I mean? It's a busy world we live in and we need to make time for*

God; faith will come from that. So stop, turn to God and reflect. God will show you, God will guide you. You can't force it. You have to open yourself up to it" (9.12.15).

5.5.3.4 Foundation for the practice

As with the other leaders in the cohort, Maree has totally incorporated the NQF into her Centre's operations. In addition, there is a strong [church] Christian faith tradition underlying its policies and practices. Maree commented: "*All my staff understand that when you walk through the preschool doors you are here to promote and express* [church] *values and the Mission Statement of the preschool. We work in a* [church] *preschool, we freely talk to the children about God, we all respectfully express the value system of our preschool and* [church] *community, and that value system is not necessarily negated by specific religious affiliations…. That's why we exist, to provide Christian values-based support to all families in our community" (3.12.14).*

5.5.3.5 Motivation for her practice

When Maree was questioned about the stereotypical days where one thing after another goes wrong, and asked what motivated her to keep going, there was much laughter and then she replied: *"Because I feel value and satisfaction from what I do and the things that are important to me, such as social justice. Thinking of the community and being there for my community are what my job entails. Jesus was a leader. He was there for the community. He was there to provide all the people with a sense of belonging. I try to do the same thing. I want everyone to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of kinship with us. If I can give that to anyone, someone, everyone….I will make a positive difference in people's lives".*

The lower socio-economic suburban environment in which the Centre is located is reflected in Maree's attitude towards the families that come to this Early Learning Centre. She says: *"Social justice is HUGE for us! The cornerstone of everything we do is based in social justice. As a* [church] *preschool that is a significant part of our mission statement. These families need us. They are why we are here. There might be doors slammed in their face elsewhere, but not here. Here all families are valued, respected, and made to feel welcome. They belong to our community and that's how we treat them. When one of my staff recently questioned, 'Why were we going over and above for this family that are so challenging?' I told that staff member – 'but that's why we exist, to provide Christian values based support to all families in our community' ".* In talking about social justice and in particular in relation to her staff, Maree commented "*I think that's why the staff are so great*

here; no matter what their belief system is, social justice and caring for others is why they are here. That is something they're all really passionate about" (3.12.14).

Maree has worked as the Director/Leader at this Centre since it opened. She says: *"I've worked here for three years and I love it".* She explains how she has tried to bring in the values she believes to be important in other services where she has worked in the past. Maree clearly summarises the values that are the basis for the Centre's operation and daily program, the way that the children are treated, the way staff treat each other, and the way that Director/Leader and staff treat the parents and families. These concepts are outlined on the website and were collaboratively designed by Maree and her staff. The website describes the Early Learning Centre, its mission and values:

WELCOME

We are a purpose-built preschool on the grounds of [redacted] School. We have an outstanding reputation amongst our families, other services and educational institutions within the local area.

We pride ourselves in providing a safe environment, where play and discovery provide opportunities for children to explore new interests, problem solve and think creatively. Our playground is engaging and has lots of room to explore.

Our [redacted] Early Learning Centre is a haven for creativity, fun, laughter and enjoyment. We value a routine that is relaxed and flexible and responds to children's aspirations. We believe that children have an unquenchable curiosity and are intrigued by anything and everything. They are eager explorers with an intense desire to make sense of their world.

We respect and value all children for their unique qualities, individuality, diversity, interests, abilities and characteristics. We aim to support children as they begin their educational journey so they can grow and develop into strong and confident beings.

Figure 5. 26

Website information about the Coastal Centre

Our Mission

- To serve in justice and love.
- We live out the Gospel by walking alongside people to find and build solutions to their needs; to deliver evidence-based services; and to do so with commitment, regardless of the difficulties faced.
- To this mission we bring a long history of service and faith, the resources of dedicated staff, volunteers and partners, a willingness to go beyond essential care, and persistence in supporting justice and well-being for all.

Figure 5. 27

Website information about the Coastal Centre's Mission

Our Values*:*

- *Respect*
- We respect the dignity and worth of all people and embrace difference
- *Hope*
- We see strengths in each person and believe that every individual can grow and build a positive future. We respect each person's right to shape their own future.
- *Commitment*
- We build relationships with those we serve and stand in solidarity with them through tough times and joyous times. We dedicate ourselves to their rights and interests.
- *Professionalism*
- We are ethical and act with integrity in all we do. We are accountable to the communities we serve, to our funders and to each other. We take responsibility for continual learning and improving.
- *Excellence*
- We learn from and act on evidence that works. We maintain high standards and pursue innovative and best practice approaches to effecting change in people's lives.
- *Social Justice*
- We take time to care. We strive for equity and opportunity for all. We speak up for and give voice to those who are vulnerable.

Figure 5. 28

Website information about the values of the Coastal Centre

Maree is passionately supportive of the families, particularly those from very low socio-economic backgrounds. In order to openly support and make families feel welcome, she and her staff have developed a ‘Family Board’ on the foyer wall, where the various cultural groups, together with representative photos and paintings, are displayed as shown in Figure 5.29.



Figure 5. 29
The ‘Family Board

Maree has a very clear concept of what Christian early childhood education leadership is all about. When she started to draw her impression of ECEC she began immediately, drawing with confidence and conviction, explaining what she was doing as she drew (Figure 5.30).

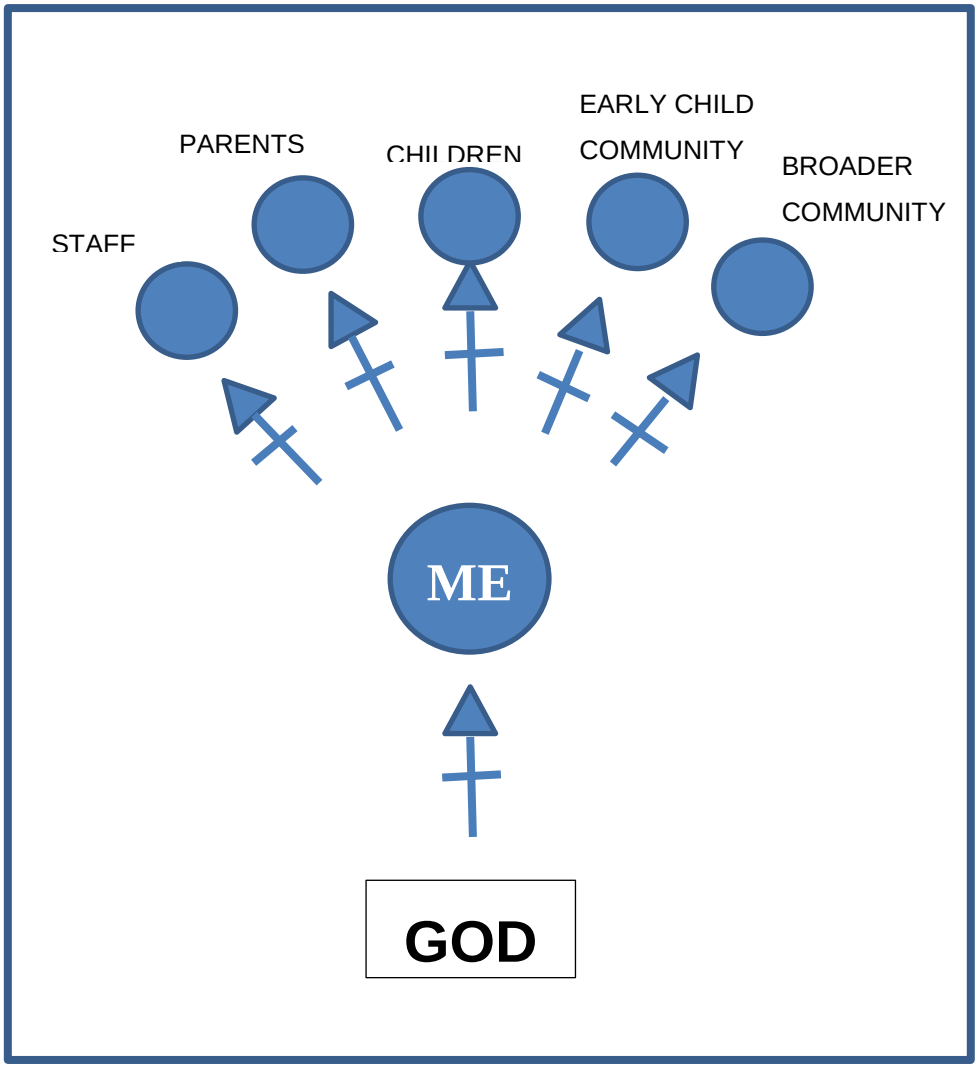


Figure 5. 30

The first drawing of Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership by Maree

She said: "God, me/faith, in the middle, the way I project my leadership to my staff, and you would have a child/parent layer as well. You could do it in circles, but God is the centre…… Always…… Has to be."

Sometime later, as she reflected on this representation, she realised that two elements were not shown; hence the second diagram (Figure 5.31).



Figure 5. 31

The second drawing of Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership, by Maree, after reflection

About her second diagram, Maree commented: *"The initial diagram, on reflection, didn't symbolise God's Omnipresence nor the reciprocity of God's spirit between people when they deeply connect with each other."* In the second diagram it is possible to see God throughout the process as shown by the strong golden circles connecting each layer. While this leader sees herself as central, each level is bound by, surrounded by, and totally includes God with reciprocity between each layer.

As with her drawing of the ECEC concept, Maree was able to articulate strongly, clearly and passionately her beliefs about the basis for values and hers in particular:

"I think it [Early Childhood Christian Leadership] comes from a values base, so I believe that faith gives you a strong values base. Christian leadership is having a values base, based in your faith that you live and breathe every day. You are an advocate for your faith in your leadership" (3.12.14).

Maree went on to reflect on her faith, commenting: "*Because it's embedded in everything we do as a* [church] *household".* Maree stayed with her faith even when going through the difficult time of divorce.

Maree also went on to explain more about these values that she and her team espouse. She explained that when she began the Centre, she sat down with her staff and together they discussed what was important to them, and crafted out the values that were to be the core of practice, as displayed in Figure 5.13. *"My staff members have identified values that we hold important as a* [church] *community, so this is what I need to embody every day when I communicate with my staff, my community, my colleagues, with my centre's families: Love, hope, friendship, compassion, respect, joy, peace, kindness, curiosity, wonder, social justice."*

Maree frequently returned to her theme of values based on and intertwined with Christian faith, and went on to address the issue of staff who work in her Centre but who may not be Christians. She explained that not having a traditional faith didn't mean that you couldn't be a moral person or be suitable to work in a [church] preschool. The essential criteria were a willingness to respect and to embrace the philosophy and practice of the Centre. She commented: *"We embrace everybody. Jesus embraced everybody. It's not a barrier, if you share our values – you are welcome here."*

In fact, these values that Maree described are an interesting mix of Biblical fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22), and also include descriptors from the EYLF.

Maree reflected on the difference between Christian and non-Christian ECEC centres: *"This is the first Christian based organisation I've been able to work with, in 25 years. I've been here for three years and I love it. I've tried to bring values I believe to be important in other services that I've worked in, in the past. In my experience, I find you are thrust into a leadership position, particularly when you see things that you feel could be done better or with more meaning*." Maree remembered how she had tried to teach the children to be thankful at a previous centre where she had worked as an educator but it was viewed as 'not appropriate'. *"I've wanted children to have a deeper understanding, or an appreciation for the good things in their life. As an example, I once taught a group of children the following appreciation before they ate lunch, 'For our family, friends and food we say thank you'. I was told by another staff member at the service that I couldn't say that appreciation with the children. That it was religious. While I argued the point that the children are just giving thanks for the good things they have in life, to no one in particular (it could be to their parent, it could be a God) the other staff member would not be swayed. The value I wanted to expose the children to was 'aren't we lucky? We are so blessed with what we have'*. This is an attitude that Maree frequently displays casually in her conversations – a sense of gratitude

to God, an appreciation for the blessings she counts in her life and in the lives of those around her.

"You are an advocate for your faith in your leadership, and if you are a true leader, as opposed to a manager, your staff will follow your example. You live your values system through yourself, your teaching, your community and your relationship with all stakeholders" (3.12.14).

Regarding leadership, Maree began with: "*Christian leadership comes from faith-based values*." Regarding the practical, everyday aspects, and the management aspect of the role she said: "*Management and leadership do work hand in hand. You manage your children's service, and your staff and your families and the routine of the day, BUT leadership comes from your being, your being of faith, your being of value….. Colloquially I regard it as 'Don't do as I say, but do as I do'. I manage my staff and I do rosters and all the things that are needed; but it is HOW I do it which shows Christian leadership*" (3.12.14).

Maree reflected on the difficult times that happen from time to time for all leaders and said: *"Christianity doesn't get pushed to the back when dealing with management issues; it enhances management. My practices of management reflect my Christian leadership*". She went on to explain the importance of careful recruitment and selection to ensure that an intentional caring, supportive environment, that is the heart of a Christian preschool, is able to continue and is supported by all staff members. *"I'm very careful with employing people. When new staff tend to come on board, I will have them as a casual or for a probationary period for a good while to see if they suit our preschool and whether our preschool suits them. As an example, we did have a casual member of staff who challenged our social justice ethics and values. I don't think the 'fit' in that case was quite right."*

Maree believes that when someone wants a job they may say what they think you want to hear and even "*put on a good front"* for a while when working with you, but she has noticed in the past that they could not maintain those artificial behaviours indefinitely and sooner or later they will demonstrate or say something that clearly shows they do not really support the caring, Christian ethos in which the team believes. Therefore, selection is always managed very carefully and probation is always for a substantial time period. Maree admits that human resource management is critically important: "*HR management: for every director/leader, it's our number one expense, it's our number one issue, it's the make or break of your philosophy, your field, your way of being. So if there's anyone who has*

difficulties around general staffing, and then you have difficulties around your philosophical way of being – that's an extra on top. You see, I built this [Early Learning Centre] and it's been very clear to any staff who come here, of our philosophy, and what we expect, what the requirements are ……..Even when we recruit staff, my staff sit on the panel……..Unless the staff are unwilling…….and have deep reflection in the area of what you do, and the part that is your performance, and everyday you're going: how could I have done better? What child did I miss, what parent did I miss?" (9.12.15)

Maree makes it clear that this does not only apply to the staff. Aligning with her strong belief in modelling and setting the tone for the Centre she has regular meetings with her manager, where she self-reflects, identifies anything that is of concern to her and works through the issue, thinking of possible strategies. She finds this particularly helpful and notes that the manager is especially supportive in helping her achieve and implement those strategies. Maree also values the location of her Centre – next to the [church] School. She says: *The school principal and the deputy are phenomenal women and they are always a listening ear for me, and support me and help me. Well, it's our community. That's where it all comes from: what community do you serve? Whether you're a* [church] *entity, or another Christian entity you must reflect on what you reflect to the community" (9.12.15).*

Early childhood education leadership literature (Rodd, 2013; Waganayake et al., 2012), and the NQF itself, recognises the importance of reflection as a critical part of effective practice. What were Maree's perceptions about this concept? She replied: "*Oh God! Every minute of every day and twice on Sunday!! (Much laughter!). We do. We're a very reflective staff. And we know that from when we go to workshops with other services that maybe aren't as reflective as we are, and I also think that's a faith-based thing because we spend time in mindful prayer…" (9.12.15).*

I asked Maree about what she meant by 'mindful prayer'. "*When we go to spirituality training a lot of it is about stopping and praying together as a group… mindfulness for those that want to call it mindfulness, ……. reflection…….that's time spent with God. There's too much hustle and bustle in this world today, there's not enough time spent with God and whether you want to call it mindfulness if you're not religious, or prayer if you are religious, it needs to happen. And no matter what angle you see it from, it brings peace. It brings a special way of being to yourself and it brings happiness and contentment to life, no matter what you like to call it." (9.12.15).*

5.5.4 The Practice

Assuming that a secular preschool and a Christian preschool were both led and managed professionally to a good standard, Maree shared what she considered to be the differences. "*I think it's from where you start or define your individual meaning or values as a Centre. Where is the meaning? What is the meaning? Where do you derive that from? For us, it comes from our shared values and our faith. Where in past children's services I had been told that I couldn't instil a sense of appreciation in children as it might appear 'religious', or that I couldn't explore children's musings and wonderings about spirituality and faith. That is the difference I've personally found. My current* [church] *preschool embraces these values. I had long been perplexed by the perceived taboo nature of spirituality and religion amongst some children's services staff I have worked with in the past. Good practice insists that diversity should be discussed and celebrated as part of children's sense of self. Spirituality is part of diversity. People have different belief systems and they are all valid and important to a person's being. I don't know how there's any understanding of inclusion or exploration of diversity if spirituality is not acknowledged. Children will still ask questions and express their ideas and understandings whether staff are comfortable with them or not. We would never want the children in our care to think that they couldn't do so."*

5.5.4.1 Relationships with children, God and spirituality

As with many aspects of her leadership, Maree has firm convictions about the importance of relationships, particularly between children and God. She says: *"We want to talk about God, and it's something that children wonder deeply and want to look into and discuss. That's part of their whole experience; they want to share that with us. Maybe if I wasn't at a* [church] *based preschool I wouldn't be able to. But isn't that excluding that part of that child's life that could be so very important to them? Gives us freedom. Freedom to fully share in the children's lives, every aspect of their life which includes their faith. God is integrated and included into everything here, and the children want to have those discussions" (9.12.15).*

Maree has a passion for opening up the world of spiritual things for children, for helping them to know about God and understanding His role in their lives. Maree has a joyous faith in God which she expresses in her voice, her face and in her spontaneous affirmation of God's goodness. She says: "*Faith and spirituality is also between the known*

and the unknown and is, for the most part, a shared experience. Children <u>are</u> spiritual beings, there is no better time in their life for them to be curious, wondering, thinking about who they are, where they come from, where they belong in their community. Spirituality and faith have an integral place in that. Children's 'being' does not occur in isolation but rather in a social context with shared knowledge and understandings. Supporting and extending shared values, knowledge and understanding should occur within all facets of the early childhood experience, starting from the leadership of the Director/leader, down to the environment and daily experiences of the children" (3.12.14).

Earlier in this case study, Maree had mentioned that any discussion of spiritual things, even in response to children's questions, or even a simple expression of gratitude for their food and general blessings, was strictly forbidden in non-Christian early learning centres. Maree then went on to discuss another faith- aspect – that of spiritual iconography. She continued: *"To further explain – prior to working in our [church] preschool, I wasn't really allowed to have 'spiritual' discussions with children; and spiritual iconography in the learning environment was not prevalent."*



Figure 5. 32
A handmade crucifix from Ecuador

The CECEC Centre has several beautiful pieces of religious iconography about the preschool – handmade [church] crucifixes from Ecuador and so on. Maree commented: "*We believe that faith symbols inspire curiosity and inspire the children to wonder."*

Maree then went on to share a personal experience: *"An example of a daily exploration of 'being' and wondering, occurred between myself and a young child just last week. A young child at our preschool pointed to the Ecuadorian crucifix and said to me, "That guy up there…" pointing to Jesus on the cross. I said, "Who do you think he is?" The child replied, "He's like the one at my church", and I said, 'Which church?" and the young child said to me "I go to [Name] church". We then had a conversation about the church he attends and how it is not the church on our school grounds. This child went into great detail about the furnishings inside the church, the differences in the crucifixes and what the ritual and routine is before, during and after his church service. Obviously, his church is an important part of his being. It is very important to my staff that as supportive teachers, we acknowledge and celebrate the entirety of the children's being. It is important to the children's being that we can have those conversations and I can listen to their ideas about being, belonging and becoming. If we're not having those conversations, are we truly supporting children in their holistic growth and development? We believe that faith symbols inspire curiosity and inspire the children to wonder. The important thing to note about this is, that we can freely have those discussions of wonder and awe…we talk about God's creation…..I want to have those conversations, children want to have those conversations. Spirituality is part of children's being and it comes from listening to children and recognising what is meaningful to them" (3.12.14).*

5.5.4.2 Relationships with staff

Whenever Maree starts to talk about her Centre and her staff, invariably she cannot give them enough praise. She says: *"I say it far and wide and in front of them too. They need to know that I value them and I am fortunate to have them. Their being is here, their belonging is here. That huge sense of belonging that my staff have in this service. We're very protective of it, we're very invested in it… and I think the investment in and commitment to,… it's more than 'a job'. All the staff are that way… and I'm very picky too. My families and my community deserve nothing less. That's what every centre should have…"* However, is this applicable for all of the staff members? What about those that are not Christians? Do they share the same attitudes towards the children and their families?

As frequently happened, Maree responded eagerly: *"They're marvellous staff. They're caring staff. When they do sit at spirituality meetings and have these discussions about what it means to be a [church] preschool they are really invested in it. I'm really proud*

of my staff. My staff that are of a different faith background or no faith at all, they totally respect. A deep respect for what my beliefs are; of what our service's beliefs are; of what our school and community beliefs are and they would not get through that front door without. And they know it. But that's the kind of people they are, they're great people, they're respectful" (9.12.15).

"My permanent and regular casual staff are excellent. They are so mindful of everything they do. Their approach to work is meaningful and purposeful. They are here for the right reason - to support children and families on their educational and life journey" (3.12.14).

Addressing the issue of staff members who may not be Christians or who are struggling with the caring concepts towards parent, children or other community members who may not be easy to love, Maree shares a process she finds is a great asset to her leadership and management*: "We do professional development – spiritual development. All of our ELC staff in this region attend spirituality development training."*

I questioned whether Maree thought that this was an effective process. She replied: "*It's key! It is the cornerstone of where we work!! You know we found it really hard going to start, because there was nothing existing anywhere!! We have supervision too. It's a monthly meeting you have with each staff member; it's confidential, and you just give them the floor to tell you anything that's concerning them. It's to help the staff member find solutions, for them to find their solutions to their issues, with your support. The solutions must come from them and they must feel that they, themselves, are self-identifying areas. For them to self-identify is most important" (9.12.15).*

"Do you know what? They're kind. They're kind people and I knew that when I met them and I knew that when I interviewed them. I knew that when I saw them and I talked to them. Like this morning, I had a staff member who's not working today, bring me a coffee. Isn't that lovely? She knows I needed it this time of the year. I've got a staff member not rostered on today who's in there doing paper work. Because she knows that it needs to be done. I've got another one in there who took some of my work. She came in this morning and said, 'Ohhh my goodness, look at your desk. I'm taking some of this'. I said, 'N..n..no you don't have to take that.' She goes: 'You've got too much work to do. I'll take it in and I'll do it for you' " (3.12.14).

I questioned Maree as to her perceptions of critical factors in relating to and working with her staff. She replied: *"The most important thing I do is listen. People need to feel heard. And I need to be able to understand. I need to listen; and then I reflect. Listen, reflect and respond. But respond with a deep understanding of what has been shared. And sometimes I have to say 'No'. Explain no. Explain why it's no. You know, I think communication is key. It's key for our staff. It's key for our philosophy. It's key for what we do. It's key for having good relationships. For spreading our philosophy to our community. But you can't just talk. You've got to see where everybody's understanding is coming from. Cause everybody will be at a different point in their understanding, experience and knowledge and we need to be able to be open to different places they are on their journey, where people are and what they need and respond to that. We're not blanket, we're not generic, everyone is unique and we respond to that uniqueness. We have to. I've got families here that are so diverse. Not multicultural. But definitely socio-economic. It's huge here. Everyone is welcome here. Some people need that more than others. But everyone is very welcome. But I need to adjust what I do, how I lead, how I interact, and what I know about people to where they are" (9.12.15).*

Again, I pressed Maree on coping with conflict situations, particularly when it affects staff members. She responded: *"I couldn't have anybody being horrible to my staff. I couldn't bear anyone being horrible to my staff. I just couldn't hack it, and they know that. I would actually ask the parent to not speak to my staff member again like that, or really you need to reflect on whether this is the correct place for you to be. That's not how we speak to each other" (9.12.15).* So I asked Maree to explain how she sets the standard of communication that she wants from parents.

Maree explained: *"I have a high expectation of people. I believe people will rise to that expectation. I really do. That's an expectation that's set very early on. And I think it draws in like-minded people, and even difficult people, and everywhere has difficult families, difficult children; even our difficult or challenging families have deep respect for my staff and myself. And I know that those are families that are sometimes very disrespectful to other people outside of here, or face many different challenges, but, you know what, they are deeply respectful when they walk in these doors. I have parents and families that perhaps in their home they might swear and God knows what else goes on there, but when they enrol I let them know 'we don't have foul language here and while I respect what goes on in your house, it's your decision, when we walk through here, this is our social community and these*

are our expectations', and it's amazing how families are very happy…..you know, even the other day we had a lovely family, a lovely family really, but their home life is very different to their experience here, but that's OK, we welcome all families. And the little fellow and the family quickly realised that that language is not for school, and that's OK" (9.12.15).

5.5.4.3 Relationships with the community

Again and again Maree reiterates the importance of service to the community and care for that community's needs. This is particularly relevant, given the low socio-economic context in which the Centre is situated. She says several times: *"These families need us. They are why we are here. When one of my staff recently questioned, 'Why were we going over and above for this family that are so challenging?' I told that staff member - but that's why we exist, to provide Christian values-based support to all families in our community" (3.12.14).*

5.5.5 Challenges of the Practice

5.5.5.1 Tensions of philosophy

Maree strongly perceives modelling as a necessary aspect of her leadership role: *"……and I think that's where I come in. I set the tone, as the leader, of what we believe, what we reflect. We do have such a diverse range of children. We may have families that are challenging to be in partnership with. I have, in the past, been given quite a hard time by some staff who don't have these values or don't live these values…compassion and understanding; those children from challenging backgrounds need us more. Those families need us more. That's how I live my Christian leadership, by saying to my staff 'All families and particularly families in need, they're what we're here for' " (3.12.14).*

"I am the role model for my staff and my families and my community and I am held up to that position and I need to show what I want from and for others. What I want from my staff, what my expectations are and what we are as a community, as a faith community in a [church] pre-school. I think that's really important. I am the public face of my preschool and our [church] community. I am the person that sets the context for how it feels. That is something that is constantly being reflected back to me by a wide variety of people – the feeling that they get when they come here – the peacefulness and welcoming nature of our preschool. That's what I want. That's why I work here. I want people to say 'It's peaceful, it's welcoming, we feel so happy here, such a sense of belonging' ".

I asked Maree about the difficulties associated with staff members whose philosophy might not align with the loving, Christian ethos of the Centre. She replied: *"As an example, we did have a casual member of staff who challenged our social justice ethics and values. I don't think the 'fit' in that case was quite right. That casual staff member was then passed over for shifts in preference of other casual staff who are a better 'fit' with our beliefs and values. That casual staff person was slowly transitioned out of our service. And when you don't share our identified values, our preschool is not really a place you can really work comfortably in. I find that is just how it works every time – it's a natural kind of process" (3.12.14).*

5.5.6 Final Comments

So Maree returned to the theme of Christian leadership: *"You need to live it. You must live what you believe. I've always believed it's to treat other people the way that Jesus treated other people. I've always taken it as: 'Do unto others as you would have done unto you'. And I think we need that. And I don't think that's being judgemental, it's being tolerant, being welcoming and helping, never see a need without doing something about it. You live it. You can't just say you do it and don't do it. You must live what comes out of your mouth.*

That's the way I govern. That's the way I lead. If I'm asking them to do it, by God I'd better be able to do it ten times better!

When I think about the kind of leader I strive to be I look back to inspiring past leaders that I have had and also the ones that didn't inspire me. The uninspiring ones couldn't tell me why I couldn't do or say something, but also they did not want to discuss it or explore it further – I feel that it's because they didn't really know or understand themselves why they were saying 'no'. The inspiring leaders I have had in the past had strong values, deep knowledge and understanding, but were also not afraid to say they may not be quite sure about something. Those inspiring leaders took me (and other staff), with them, in exploring those uncertain ideas, subsequently strengthening all staff practice and skills through the sharing of values, knowledge and understanding. I think the key here is the 'deep knowledge and shared understandings centred in clearly articulated values'. This is a very powerful thing. I find the concept resonates through the entire learning environment and underpins good practice by staff and high-quality outcomes for children.

I think that when people come to leadership positions……. because of things like this, because of having the values that they have, especially in a Christian-based

organisation, that is how you get to a leadership position, by having those values, sharing them very blatantly with everybody. People see that you mean what you say, say what you do, and you lead it truthfully. That's where the respect comes from to you, living it truthfully. If you're not living it truthfully it's very apparent to all and sundry and you quickly lose respect. And I think that's the values that makes a good leader, is to be truthfully living your faith and what you are promoting in your community and how you are serving your community. Are you selling yourself or are you selling your community, because people will see through it in a heartbeat"(3.12.14).

Maree summed up her beliefs about Christian early childhood education leadership by saying: *"Live your beliefs. Make it visible. As Early Childhood professionals we make learning visible. As Christian leaders we make our faith visible – and that is how we lead.*

My advice for a newly appointed director/leader is to look for meaning in what you do. Reflect on meaning and values and really think about why?".

5.5.7 Summary

Maree combines her intense, joyous faith and Christian style of leadership with a strong sense of firm management that she has developed through years of working in the early learning profession. For example, she knows the critical role of careful recruitment and selection in choosing staff who will work with the current team and who will respect and value the ethos of this Christian Centre. At the same time she also knows that some people may not be honest and authentic at their interview or even through the first weeks and months during the probationary period of employment. For this reason she involves her staff in the initial selection which affirms their value and increases their sense of responsibility. As an added safety-net she ensures that the probation is long enough to really get to know the potential employee. As she says "*They may be able to keep up a front for a few months, but usually not for 12 months!"*

Not only does Maree believe passionately in social justice herself, but she frequently makes the time to talk to her staff about this concept; why they should embrace it and demonstrate it when working with some of the families who may not be easy to accept. Some of the families are really struggling to stay together and their lack of education and their poverty means that the Centre has become a real place of welcome and acceptance for them. The leader's role and that of the staff members in ensuring that welcome is critical to displaying the authenticity of their spoken and written philosophy.

Maree also knows the importance of effective supervision, of being prepared to regularly sit with each staff member individually and talk with them about their practice, their underlying beliefs, and their need to reflect on what they are doing and whether they could do it better. Maree takes her role of 'setting the example' for her staff very seriously. She believes that if she requires her staff to do something then she should be willing and able to do it even better. She does not ask them to do something that she would not be prepared to do herself. She is very conscious that staff and families look to her to 'practise what she preaches', to be authentic, and that her actions must mirror her words. She knows that the community watches what she does and the way that she runs the Centre, whether her behaviour aligns with the Centre's published values and practices. At the same time, it does not seem to be something she has to force herself to do but rather this is her personal philosophy on life.

Final Comments on the case studies

The first round of questions in the interview stage had been designed to address general questions about Christian early childhood education and care leadership (see Appendix F) and each director's/leader's personal perspective on the role. These questions reflected many of the questions on the survey-questionnaire, and therefore functioned as both revision and verification. However, it appeared that this was the first occasion that anyone had asked them about their role in-depth, their beliefs about it, and their personal perceptions about how it should be practised. All four participants were so enthusiastic about this research topic and the opportunity to talk about it, that the information just 'poured out of them' during the first round of interviews. Thus, the intended 'semi-structured interview' evolved into being an 'unstructured interview' where the participant was able to guide the interview by sharing the information that they considered to be important (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The passionate commitment of these four women to the role of a Christian early childhood education leader and their perspective of a ministry of service was incredibly inspiring. Further, each of the four women in the interview cohort was extremely experienced in her leadership role and spoke with both confidence and authority about her beliefs and practices; this greatly influenced the case study records. Rather than the researcher questioning to try to gain the information needed to answer the research questions, these four women spoke with knowledge and assurance and only needed a word or two to trigger full and comprehensive, passionate statements.

Perhaps one of the most surprising and interesting discoveries during the first round of interviews was that none of the four participants focussed on or even mentioned doctrinal aspects of her particular faith tradition. The various denominational names were mentioned in passing, but in each case the participant focussed on what she perceived as the essence of Christianity: love, faith, unselfish ministry, social justice, kindness, care, compassion and a desire to share this with her staff, the children, the parents and the community.

The first round of interview recordings were transcribed and carefully analysed, line by line, summarising and writing summary gerunds as well as memos. It quickly became apparent as the transcribing and analysis progressed that some themes were very common and the participants repeated them frequently. Conversely, it also became apparent that in some of the interviews there appeared to be a gap where a participant did not mention something that the other three had, and which one would have reasonably expected to be included. Consequently, this allowed selective sampling to occur in the second and third round of interviews with specific questions to individual cohort members about that particular topic that appeared to have been overlooked.

5.6 The Themes that Emerged

The reader will notice that each theme, together with its cluster of sub-themes, has been given a relational name, indicating the centrality of relationships within a Christian context. As each one of the final themes is described, it is accompanied by a diagrammatic illustration. These diagrammatic sections build to reveal the overall picture as shown in the following pages and concluding in *Figure 5.43*.

5.6.1 Theme 1: The Importance of the Two-Way Relationship with God

When the four interviewees were asked to explain this praxis as a Christian early childhood education leader, all four interviewees placed God at the centre of their leadership practice (as illustrated in their leadership drawings, with God as the centre) and then went on to talk about the crucial importance of this relationship to them personally and professionally. They all supported the idea that there is a central, core, reciprocal relationship between the Director/Leader and God. This is a dynamic, interactive relationship. It is ongoing and the participants used the words ‘Jesus’, ‘God’ and ‘Christ’ interchangeably throughout the interviews when talking about God.

For example, Darlene testified to the importance of a personal relationship with God and the need for spiritual strength when she said: "*You have to have a personal relationship with Christ, as a leader, in order to live, breathe and express that. It is so important to be spiritually strong."* Maree stated: "*God is the centre…always…has to be! My faith is embedded in my life."* While Fran seriously declared: *"God is central and He is the one in control, I try not to let Him down."* Diagrammatically this represented by the central circle with the two directional arrows between God and the Director/Leader as shown, and constitutes the central core of the holistic diagram shown in *Figure 5.43*. Morton (2015) stresses the critical necessity for leaders to spend time with God in an intimate, personal relationship in order to be able to discern God's voice and guidance.



Figure 5. 33

The two-way relationship with God

As the participants talked about their relationships with God and their work as Christian early childhood education leaders, two areas emerged from the data. These areas were dynamic and strong and they were also linked to each other and to the central core relationship with God, I have called them **focussing and empowering**.

5.6.2 Theme 2: Focussing that Facilitates the Relationship

Focussing occurs when the Christian Early Childhood Education Leaders communicate with God. All of the participants repeatedly mentioned a variety of ways that they focussed on God and regularly communicated with God, identifying Him as the real leader and their daily Guide in the centre.

5.6.2.1 Praying:

The specific, intentional communication with God, audible or silent as in meditation, formal or informal, praising, thanking, requesting, conversing or simply sharing thoughts was

most often described by the participants. Granqvist, Mikulincer and Shaver (2010) note, "The most direct and salient means of attaining closeness to God is probably prayer" (p. 51). This was certainly the experience of these participants as they commented that prayer was an essential ingredient of every day. As Denise said: "*My faith is my relationship with Jesus, I pray throughout the day",* while Fran added: "*Daily conversations with God and the importance of sharing that faith."*

5.6.2.2 Reflecting:

All four participants stated that they reflected as they communicated with God. An indispensable part of Christian leadership, in fact a critical part of all effective leadership, is thinking through current plans and future goals, as well as reflecting on past actions and events and how they might be improved in the future. Sincerely involving God in this process lifts the thinking beyond the mundane. Kessler and Kretzschmar (2015, p. 5) note: "Ethical reflection is essential to the credible practice of Christian leadership". Maree saw reflection as intrinsic to her leadership: … "*When you really need God…….that's when you have your deepest reflective discussions with God."* Fran also saw that reflection needed to include staff: *"I always think it's important to spend time reflecting with them."*

5.6.2.3 Reading:

The Bible itself provides the answer to 'why?' Bible reading focuses the mind towards God (Peace, 2015; Maddix, 2018). Reading faith-based books including the Bible has demonstrated the calming, focusing effect that scripture has on the human brain (Maddix & Andrews, 2018). Darlene linked her ministry with Bible reading: "*My world is spiritually-based – serving in my home and work churches through several ministries and talking and praying with people. Daily communication with God through reading the Bible".*

5.6.2.4 Worshipping:

The joy of communicating with God through word, action or music with reverence and adoration, frequently with others, sometimes alone was mentioned several times. These Directors/Leaders did not portray prayer, reading or worshipping as a duty or obligation; for them it was a joy. Denise said: "*I believe in it, and when I'm singing with my children with their little Christian songs, I'm worshipping. I love it!"* For Darlene, worship included her family as well. "*Where my family worships, that's where we remain strong, that's where God is the centre."* The crescent shape below displays the aspects of focussing on God and will

contribute to the final holistic diagram portraying Christian early childhood education leadership.

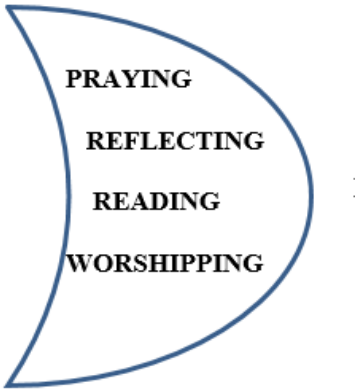


Figure 5. 34

*How the participants **focussed** on God*

5.6.3 Theme 3: Being Empowered Through the Relationship

As each of the participants talked about God as the centre of their lives, how they focussed and reached out to communicate with Him in different ways, they were sure that God reached back to them in various ways. I have named this area **'empowering'** for they felt that God empowered their lives in the following respects:

5.6.3.1 Compelling:

All of the participants spoke of a sense of compulsion to serve God by helping people, particularly those in need in their communities. These words are used in relation to the dynamic, impelling motivation that compelled the participants to act and speak in particular ways. It is a positive force, not negative, and enables them to go beyond the call of duty with joy in serving. This sense of God-inspired compulsion (Rutherford, 2018) was used in relation to the ministry of sharing God's love, sharing education, and providing social justice for needy people in the school community as well as the wider community. This undeniable compulsion that the participants sometimes felt, was in fact comforting to them, as Denise said: "*I believe God's put me here. I believe it's a ministry. It's wonderful, it's absolutely*

driven! It's not a job, it's a ministry!" For these leaders, the need and desire to serve was very strong, in fact, a force to respond to God's guidance – servant-leadership.

5.**6.3.2 Values-driven:**

For the participants in this study, '**values**' are the essential core Christian beliefs and attitudes that guide their behaviours and conversation. Faith-based values are the foundation for the knowledge, attitudes and practices in Christian ECEC centres. As Maree said several times: "*Christian leadership comes from faith-based values."* For Fran, Christian values were integral to quality early childhood education programs, "*So that's part of Early Childhood which is to practise Christian values."*

5.6.3.3 Sustaining and guiding:

For many leaders, loneliness and the load of responsibility they carry together with the quantity of work they must accomplish can easily lead to burnout and break down. However, for the leaders in this study the sense of being able to take their problems to God and trust Him to bring out a successful conclusion according to His plan, provided great comfort and support. Fran commented: "*When I look back on it now, God deliberately guided me into that."* Darlene added: "*I believe the best of people. Life's to be enjoyed. I think you're here for a purpose. God has a plan for you. You have a contribution to the world to make and you should make it!"*

5.6.3.4 Faith filling:

Faith is perceived as a particular relationship with God, a relationship of confidence and trust in God as well as the implementation and outcome of that relationship. Maree described it as: "*You are an advocate for your faith in your leadership."* Faith is the centre of Christian belief and for the participants in this study it was the foundation for their early childhood education and care practice. Darlene's response was immediate and emphatic "*Faith-based, God centred, faith in practice and action".* Again the crescent shape has been used to display the ways that the participants felt that God had empowered them as shown below.



Figure 5. 35

*How the participants felt that God **empowered** them*

5.6.4 Theme 4: A Christian World View Perspective

An important theme that was repeated by the participants was to have a Christian world view, as was illustrated by this comment: "*As a Christian you view children from a different perspective from non-Christians. You see them as made in the image of God*." The reader will notice in the diagram (Figure 5.43) a red circle surrounding the relationship between God and the Director/Leader. This red circle represents the outward view of authentic Christians – the effect of their relationship with God influences the way they perceive their own practice and their purpose in life. This is then reflected in the way they relate to others, their values, their communication and their attitudes. While individuals may have somewhat differing perspectives on what 'a Christian worldview' means, there is nevertheless a core of similarities that reflect a Christian perspective. Of particular significance is the relationship between God and the individual – the focussing and the empowering resulting in a caring, loving perspective. Johnson (2019) describes a Christian worldview as a "matter of the heart" (p. 84). Some of the comments from the survey questionnaires also reflect this Christian worldview in the way that these leaders perceive themselves and others as shown in Figure 5.6 below.

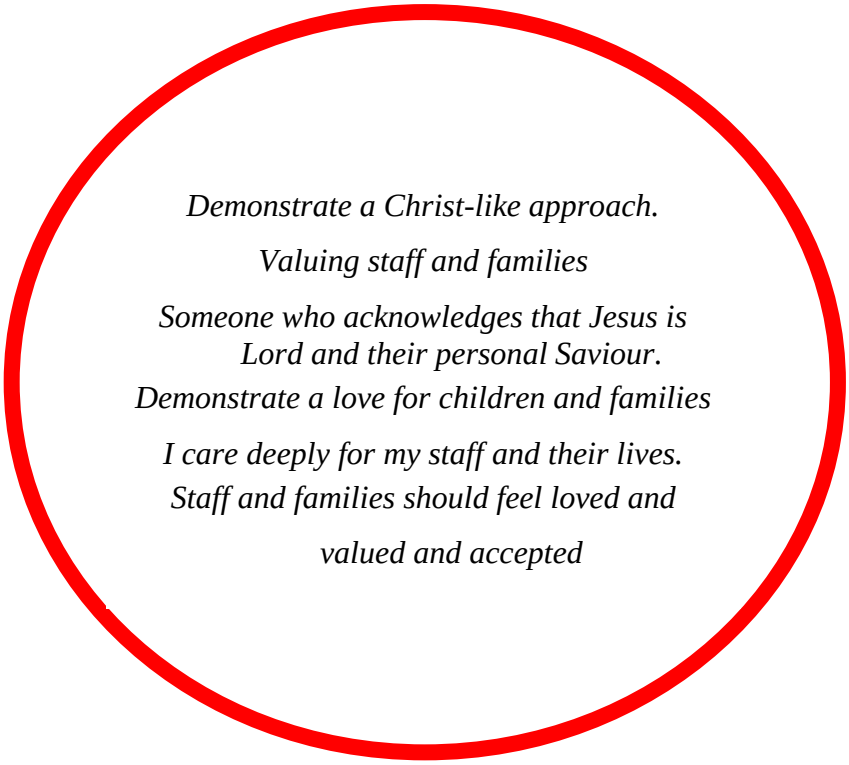


Figure 5. 36

The Christian worldview and supporting comments

5.6.5 Theme 5: Relational values through a relationship with God

Stemming from the interactive dynamic reciprocal relationship with God – the constant focussing, empowering and responding - the leaders continually described how they felt about people, what they valued, their attitudes and beliefs. The underlying values, attitudes and beliefs listed here, gave the foundation and the impetus for translation into action. These values were applied again and again to children, their families, staff members and the wider community as they discussed their programs during the interviews. The interviewees constantly mentioned Christian values, particularly the ones mentioned here, and that their relationship with God enabled them to have these values. They also mentioned the sense of feeling impelled; as Fran said*: "God's going to hold me accountable for treating them like a human being and with respect. Like I 'have' to".*

5.6.5.1 Accepting:

A willingness to accept, without judging, children and families that come into the CECEC centre. This non-judgemental approach is essential to developing the basis for working together with parents. All of the participants mentioned the importance of accepting children and families without judging. Fran commented: "*It's a Christian philosophy anyway, acceptance, tolerance, all those sorts of things."* While Maree added: *"I want everyone to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of kinship with us. If I can give that to anyone, someone, everyone…..I will make a positive difference in people's lives."*

5.6.5.2 Welcoming:

This attribute takes acceptance to the next level, where body language, pleasant facial expressions, tone of voice and smile in the eyes indicate to the families and children that the leader and staff are pleased to see them and to have them in that place. Constantineanu (2018) comments "hospitality and welcome represent the very heart of the mission of God and the essence of the gospel" (p. 109). Maree said: "*Living your faith means being welcoming, kind, understanding and being accepting to make you feel welcome."*

5.6.5.3 Loving:

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, love is the basis of the Christian gospel. Children and families sense when they are loved for themselves and respond accordingly. All the participants mentioned the importance of love as an ingredient of genuine Christian care, acceptance and welcome. Denise noted: *It's Jesus' love that's doing this. That's what drives us."* Fran: *"To nurture and reflect the love of Jesus for them so they know with every fibre of their being that they are loved and valued. Promoting collaboration and respect."*

5.6.5.4 Respecting:

Many families come from very different backgrounds to those who work within or lead, Christian ECEC Centres. Treating children and families with respect encourages dignity, a sense of self-worth and a willingness to rise to those perceptions. This aspect was often mentioned as an essential attitude from the Director/Leader and staff towards families. Maree said: "*There might be doors slammed in their face elsewhere, but not here. Here all families are valued, respected, and made to feel welcome."* Fran took the concept of respect even further when she replied to a question about what was important in leadership:

"Respecting, whether it's a staff member, whether it's a family, I mean you do it for children all the time"

5.6.5.5 Empathising:

Early childhood education can be a very demanding time for families with a higher level of care required, sometimes with additional issues such as cognitive difficulties, health problems, family dynamics and financial issues. Mothers valued having a kind empathetic leader with whom they could share issues and receive understanding and support, as Denise said, *"They come back to us – they feel safe".* For Fran it was essential that empathy was integral to the conversation. *"We speak to children and families with openness, with empathy."*

5.6.5.6 Caring:

Kindly, helpful and supportive attitudes and actions are vital in providing holistic support to children and families (Cafferky, 2012). Denise noted: "*Social justice and caring for others is why we are here."* The crescent shape below, displays the relational values that emerged from the data.



Figure 5. 37

*The relational **values** that guided the participants*

5.6.6 Theme 6: Relational Practices Through a Relationship with God

Relational practices are the outcomes from the dynamic relationship with God that leads to relational values. As a result of the values, attitudes and beliefs these Christian

leaders spoke about how they felt specifically enabled and impelled to act in the following ways:

5.6.6.1 Empowering:

Perhaps because of the vulnerability of the very young children in the Early Childhood Education sector, educators and parents have a far closer relationship than in other educational sectors. Much of the leader's role is not only to work with the children but also to empower the parents in their parenting role. This empowering extended to staff members as well, training, guiding, encouraging and affirming to enable them to perform their roles to a continually improving standard. Fran shared the need to inform and empower parents: "*If they're questioning and they need support it's because they don't have that learning and so you share your knowledge with them."*

5.6.6.2 Supporting:

Providing support can come in several contexts; perhaps the most common is that offered to staff, expressed colloquially, the sense that someone 'has your back'. These leaders repeatedly used terms such as, 'team', 'we', 'us' and 'our' when talking about their staff members. The significance relates to the leader's attitude towards her staff: they are included, there is mutual respect and equity here, and they 'work together'. Fran spoke about it: "*I feel like my role is to awaken staff to that it's part of their role to do that, and then support them when they've done it."* Darlene commented: "*People in this area are time poor, financially stressed, with additional jobs and travel time. Having someone who cares and is supportive is important."*

5.6.6.3 Modelling:

As used in this context, modelling is about setting a standard that is representative of Christ. Within a Christian ECEC Centre the language used, the tone of voice, the attitudes and behaviours displayed by the leader reveal the authenticity of the advertising. The Directors/Leaders spoke of the critical importance of 'walking the talk'; as Denise said: *"I take it back to the word 'accountability'. I have to live it, I can't just talk it."*

5.6.6.4 Providing social justice:

This is an area about which Maree was really passionate: "The cornerstone of everything we do is based in social justice! There might be doors slammed in their faces

elsewhere, but not here!" Similarly, Denise explained that she and her team consciously make decisions to support families in need – "*What else is going on with that family that they might need assistance with?"* Ensuring that children, parents, families and staff are treated fairly and kindly and given opportunities is an essential aspect of Christian early childhood education leadership. This aligns with Proverbs 31:8-9: "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy".

5.6.6.5 Ministering:

Ministry and/or mission reflect the specific action of sharing God's love. The Greek word *diakoneo*, meaning "to serve" is the basis of 'ministry' (Thayer, 1995) so that it also carries a sense of supporting people. This supportive ministry and service from the leader is in relation to children, parents and families and also staff. Darlene felt strongly about this aspect: "*And it's a ministry! I think you've got to come from a ministry perspective and see this almost as a ministry to your community and your families because it's not just a job."* Denise echoed Darlene's words when she said, "*It's my ministry. I see it as a calling, not just a job."* And then, *"This ministry is serving the community through early childhood, it's a holistic approach to our families."* This is servant-leadership in the community.

5.6.6.6 Helping:

Simply providing kindness and care as needed (Louis et al., 2016). For example, Denise said: *"When they've been through difficult times they KNOW they can come here and someone will hold out a hand to them. As Christians, we ask ourselves, what are we doing to support that family?"*

5.6.6.7 Serving:

These leaders spoke about the 'joy of service'. For them it was a pleasure to serve others in a variety of ways, which gave them great satisfaction (Sun, 2013; Striepe, & O'Donoghue, 2014; van Dierendonck, & Patterson, 2015). Maree expressed it this way: *"…and I think that's the values that make a good leader; to be truthfully living your faith and what you are promoting in your community and how you are serving your community."* This was indeed, servant leadership. The relational practices that emerged from the data, throughout the interviews, are displayed in the crescent shape below.



Figure 5. 38

*The **relational practices** that were integral to the participants' daily procedures*

5.6.7 Theme 7: Relational being: Reflecting Christ

Relational Being in this context can best be described as a holistic way of living with a pattern of characteristics and behaviours that are seen to reflect Christ, such as kindness, love, forgiveness and care. It stems from the individual's relationship with God and the resulting Christian relational values and relational practices. It is about 'Living for Jesus'.

5.6.7.1 Being accountable to God:

Each participant in this study expressed her personal sense of accountability to God in her role as a Christian leader. In regard to her attitude, language, care and reflection of Christian beliefs and practices, each leader was very conscious of her accountability to God; as Fran said, "*I try not to let Him down".* Denise also perceived her accountability very seriously: "*The very first thing when I leave the house of a morning, it's who I'm accountable to - I'm accountable to Jesus."* While Maree applied this to her staff as well as herself: "*And it's the standard to which you hold yourself and you hold everyone else to! I think there's nothing here that I would ask of my staff that I wouldn't do myself."*

5.6.7.2 Having humility:

A consciousness of the importance of their role as a Christian leader to their staff, parents and children, along with being a role model in their community, helped these women to see themselves and their roles with humility. They recognised that sometimes they were not 'enough' personally, and were grateful for the sense of God's support and sustaining power. Darlene noted: "*You have to reflect fruits of the Spirit in terms of gracefulness and in*

terms of what we reflect and work through with children." Fran pointed out the need to be prepared to be humble: "*I came back and really tried to show that humility and that I'm really sorry*."

5.6.7.3 Being thankful:

Each participant shared her gratitude to God for many things: the opportunity to serve and minister to individuals in need; to have employment that predominantly involved serving God; for faithful staff who shared their passion and love for children and the work they were doing; and for their own personal salvation and relationship with Jesus Christ. Maree summed up these thoughts: "*We should be very thankful for all the wonderful things He does for us."* While Fran personalised her perspective: *"And I'm so glad God brought me to this space."*

5.6.7.4 Joy of service:

All four participants commented on the joy that Christian early childhood education leadership brought them. For example, Maree said: *"Jesus was with others. That how His being was – to serve others. My being is to serve others – that's my faith-based being….I love it!" For these leaders, Servant-Leadership was an essential part of their 'being'.*



Figure 5. 39

*How the participants **responded** to God. This was their **Relational Being***

5.6.8 Theme 8: Managing the Tensions of Leadership

5.6.8.1 Tensions of administration

Perhaps one of the best, and at times, most challenging areas of leadership particularly in the early childhood education context, is the constant interaction between the leader and staff members. The ability to lead in a supportive, empowering, inspiring way is the cherished aspiration of all of the participants. Maree mentioned experiences that had guided her leadership: *"When I think about the kind of leader I strive to be I look back to inspiring past leaders that I have had".* However, administration, planning, professional development, communication and the promotion of a Christian ethos and climate can be a massive task (Stott, 2014). The reader will note that the three sets of tensions identified by the participants are represented here by blue arrows. Arrows have been used in this diagram to demonstrate the active, ongoing issues associated with potential tensions. These tensions are from outside and can even be perceived to be pushing against the Christian Early Childhood Leadership approach. The arrows below are taken directly from the diagram to illustrate this. As with the crescent shapes they will combine to form the holistic diagram 5.33.



Figure 5. 37

Tensions of Leadership, Workload, Management & Administration

5.6.8.2 Tensions of philosophical difference

Most work-related stress in educational leadership is linked to relationships. Early childhood education leadership, especially in a Christian context, is no different. From time to time, as noted by all four participants in this study, there will be a difference in the philosophical viewpoint between a staff member and the director/leader in relation to the Centre's practices and philosophy. Sometimes this may relate to social justice issues where the staff member begrudges support given to a particular needy family and the leader has to very firmly outline the Centre's policy and the values underlying that policy. Sometimes the

issue may relate to a philosophical difference in relation to the incorporation of Christian practices such as Bible stories and Christian songs. This was particularly evident at the inner-city centre, where the leader was trying to develop the Centre's practices into being more authentically Christian, from a previously nominal approach. Two staff members in that context could not see the value of the changes that were needed to meet the Centre's purported philosophy and constantly challenged the need for change. This tension was also evident for a while at the regional centre with a staff member who publicly declared her atheism and constantly challenged the values and practices of that Christian Centre.



Figure 5. 38

Tensions of Philosophical Difference

5.6.8.3 Tensions of community

As can be noted from the interviews, community issues can vary considerably. Community issues were not particularly problematical for any of the early learning centres in phase two. However, this can change especially if there is a safety issue which is serious enough to become a public matter such as faulty playground equipment, any kind of abuse or even miscommunication.

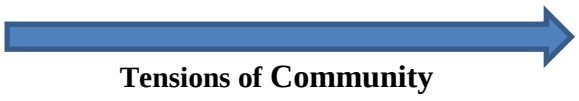


Figure 5. 39

Tensions of Community

5.6.9 Summation of Themes.

The themes outlined in this section represent the axiology of leadership in Christian early childhood education and care. That is to say, these eight themes interlock in the being of Christian early childhood leaders, at the core which is their transforming relationship with

God. God enables and empowers them to lead in a Christian manner in thought, language and action.

5.6.10 Overview

The themes, as displayed and described here, are now displayed in a different format in *Figure 5.43*. The composite diagrammatic format permits a deeper understanding of the dynamic aspects of, and relationships between, the various concepts. The reader will notice that the crescents, representing the themes of focus, empowerment, response, values and practices have now been amalgamated into a holistic diagram portraying the essential aspects of Christian early childhood education leadership. As the reader can observe, in the composite diagram, there is a sense of movement, change, action as inferred by the curving lines and arrows. This approach accurately portrays the reality of Christian early childhood education leadership: dynamic not static.

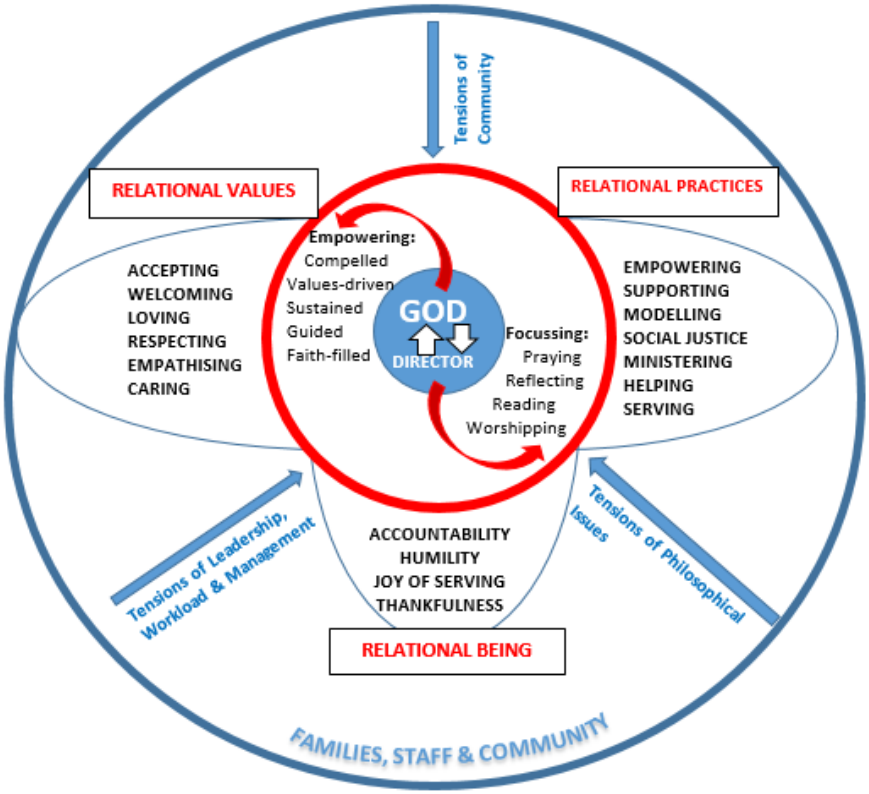


Figure 5. 40

Diagrammatic display of the final themes

As explained in the previous paragraph, diagram (Figure 5.43) has been designed to demonstrate the relationship between five overlapping components. At the heart of the diagram is a central circle; in this circle are two identities. The first, main, superior one is God; beneath this, smaller and dependent, is the Christian Early Childhood Education Director/Leader. This is where each of the four participants began their Christian early childhood education leadership drawings, indicating its centrality and importance philosophically, as well as to them personally. Between the two are arrows in both directions indicating the strong relationship that exists between the Director/Leader and God through the Director's/Leader's communication with God and His reciprocal inspiration and empowerment. The arrows serve to indicate the two-way aspect of that communication. On numerous occasions each Director/Leader spontaneously mentioned the frequency of communication that she had with God.

Curving red arrows that come out from this central relationship indicate the dynamic, active processes that are occurring within two sections. In the section to the right of the centre is the focussing of the Director's/Leader's communication with God through worship, prayer, reflection, meditation and Bible/devotional reading, all of which help to focus and nourish the ongoing relationship between the Director/Leader and God.

In the second section, to the left of centre are the reciprocal effects of God's empowerment: faith-filled, values driven, guided, sustained and feeling compelled to serve. All of this is encased in a red circle representing two concepts: First, God's upholding love, providing security and nurture. Second, from the Director's/Leader's perspective, this red circle also represents the individual's worldview stemming from their dynamic relationship with God. This worldview causes them to view their purpose in life and the people with whom they interact, with Christian values.

A Christian worldview underlies the individual's perspective on the world. However, outside the red circle are three blue arrows representing some challenging aspects of the Director's/Leader's role. The first blue arrow is common to all Early Childhood Directors/Leaders – the tensions of leadership, management and workload. These include managing the day to day tasks and responsibilities; leading the group forward in continuous improvement; and dealing with the dilemmas that are a regular part of educational leadership and management such as personality conflicts, occasional poor performance, communication misunderstandings, government and system mandates. The second blue arrow is specifically related to Christian early childhood Directors/Leaders – the tensions of philosophical

differences particularly in relation to Christian values and practices. For example, a staff member or a parent may not be philosophically aligned to the Christian ethos and seek to avoid or even denigrate Christian practices. The third blue arrow represents the tensions that can come from the community, particularly towards the 'Christian' aspect of the centre, reflecting a lack of understanding and empathy towards the Christian faith, a fear of indoctrination or even rejection towards any children who might come from a non-Christian background. However, where the red circle is strong these tensions can be endured and worked through.

Coming out from the core of the diagram are three ellipses (oval shapes). The first represents the Relational Values held by Christian early childhood education Directors/Leaders that result from their relationship with God – the way they think and feel about those with whom they interact. These include but are not limited to: Accepting, Loving, Respecting, Empathising, Welcoming and Caring. The second ellipse represents the Relational Practices that also result from the director's/leader's relationship with God and these include, but are not limited to: Empowering, Supporting, Modelling, Providing Social Justice, Ministering, Serving and Helping. Finally, the third ellipse encompasses the other two as well as the central core and represents Relational Being. These leaders acknowledge God as the absolute core of their being, and seek to live for Jesus, striving to reflect Christ-like practices in all that they do, and having an overwhelming sense of accountability to God, humility and thankfulness. All of these representations are in the context of the large blue circle which represents the staff, the families, including the children and the broader community whom they serve.

A critical leadership skill is the ability to be able to relate easily to people from diverse backgrounds and to be able to communicate with them effectively, particularly when they do not share your worldview. This is especially important in the early childhood education setting, for ECEC services are very much 'people' services (Rodd, 2013) with an imperative for positive communication and personal relationships, which are essential for a harmonious working environment and excellent outcomes for children. This ability to easily and clearly talk and engage with people was a strength of each of the participant's leadership approaches.

Charmaz (2006) notes: "The advantage of diagrams is that they provide a visual representation of categories and their relationships… Diagrams can enable you to see the relative power, scope, and direction of the categories in your analysis *as* well *as* the

connections among them." The reader will note that in Chapter Six, Figure 6.1 encapsulates these comments as the relationships, reciprocal interactions, and the constantly evolving geographies of human interaction with the spiritual are displayed there.

5.7 Summation

The Directors/Leaders of the four CECEC centres who were part of the interview cohort in this research project, all came from different religious denominations both personally and corporately. Each had a very different personal background, different educational path, and managed a different centre in different communities. Yet through each of their stories there is a central, unifying cord about which they are passionate and to which they are deeply committed. This is their dedication to a mission of authentic Christian love and service towards staff, children and families which is demonstrated in their attitudes, practices and conversations. This 'cord' involves more than knowledge or even pedagogical practice, and is more about their 'being' and goes right to the heart of the person – the love, care and sense of responsibility towards students, staff and families. For each, their passion about Christian early childhood education is also accompanied by a very healthy dose of determination – these four women are not 'wimps'! The next chapter, the Discussion, considers and analyses the findings of the study in the light of the research questions.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The introduction to this thesis identified an area of educational leadership that did not appear to have been researched – Christian early childhood education leadership. Little attention in the research has been given to this, despite the proliferation of 'CECEC Centres' throughout Australia. Christian early childhood education leadership became the focus of this study and the following research question was developed:

What do four Directors/Leaders of Christian Early Childhood Education and Care Centres perceive about the praxis of their Christian leadership?

Data was collected from leaders of CECEC centres in Australia. This culminated in four leaders being selected as exemplars of best practice for authentic Christian early childhood education leadership. The interview data was analysed adopting the principles of constructivist grounded theory, following the strategies outlined by Charmaz (2014).

6.2 Implications for Practice

So, what are the factors that make a practice Christian? Chapter Two clearly established that it is the leader that sets the tone and standard for an educational facility (Stone-Johnson, 2014), together with the critical skill of being able to share leadership with, and amongst staff, as well as the ability to function as an effective team. The data from this study indicates that authentic Christian early childhood education leadership is composed of a number of interconnected and interacting elements as depicted in Figure 6.1 (which summarises *Figure 5.43*).

As each of the themes (illustrated in Figure 6.1) is explored in the following pages it is followed by a red-framed "Practice Box" that outlines the essential practices that have emerged from this study that should be observed in an authentic Christian early childhood education leader's practice. These are the major research outcomes of the study and each will be discussed in turn.

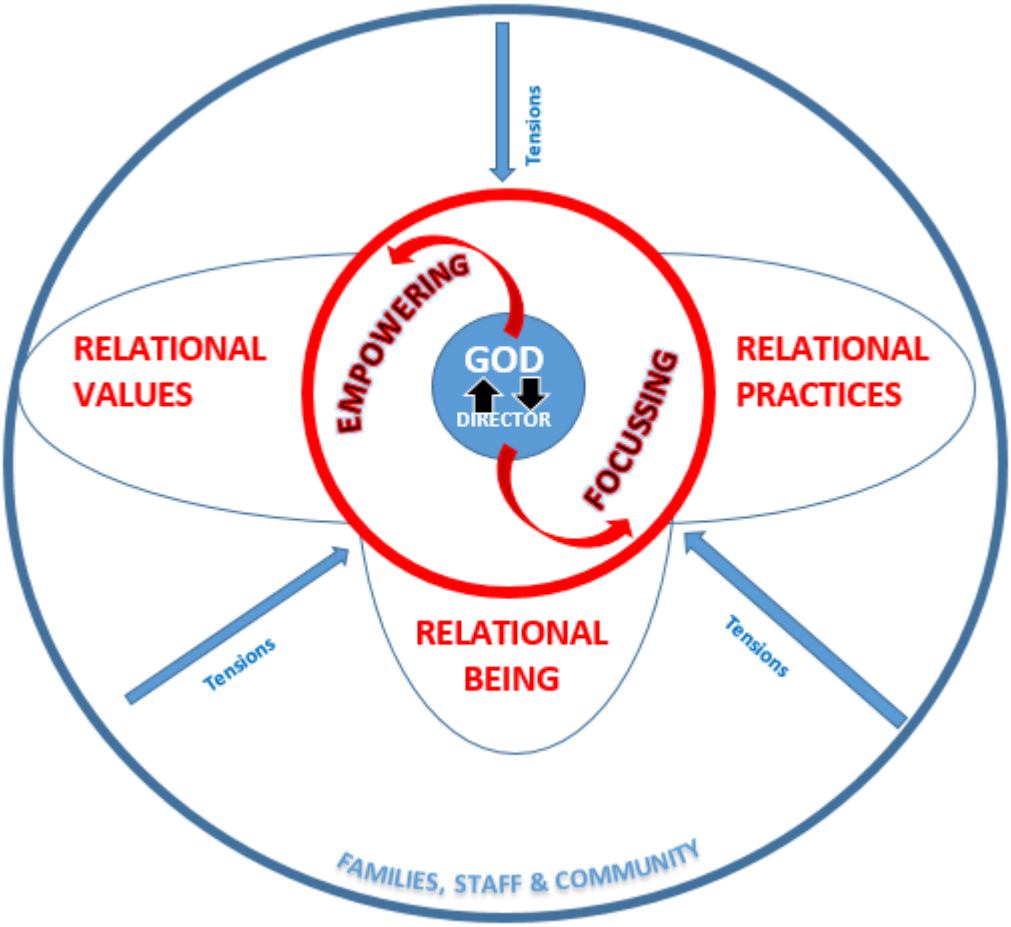


Figure 6. 1

A Paradigm of Authentic Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership

6.2.1 Research Outcome 1: A Relationship that Focusses on God

Firstly, central to a Christian early childhood education leader's practice is his/her relationship with God. As previously identified, a number of researchers are calling for the inclusion of spirituality (Begley, 2007; Woods, 2007) in leadership practices. Spirituality has been described as "an individual's inner experience and/or belief system, that gives meaning to existence, and subsequently allows one to transcend beyond the present context" (Kamitsis & Franscis, 2013, p. 137). As each leader in this study drew her diagram of Christian leadership, she started with this concept of God being central to her leadership and indeed to her life. Why was this so important to these leaders? As they explained, this is all about relationship. As Darlene said as she drew her diagram of Christian leadership: "*Faith-based,*

God centred in the middle. You have to have a personal relationship with Christ, as a leader, in order to live, breathe and express that". Maree echoed the same thought: "*God is the centre. Always. Has to be.*" While Denise added: "*What is this faith? –It's me and my relationship with Jesus".* As previously noted in the literature review Thompson (2017) also found that a relationship with God was essential for effective Christian leadership.

The reader will notice in Figure 6.1 that within the central core of God and the Director/Leader, there are arrows between them going in both directions. The arrows from the Director/Leader to God are about **Focussing on God.** Focussing describes the various ways by which the Director/Leader reaches out to God. This is the way by which the Director/Leader seeks and maintains a relationship with God which is dynamic and ongoing. All of the leaders mentioned that prayer was frequent and essential. As Darlene said: "*It is wonderful to have a group in which you can pray together, in which God is in the centre".* When asked about her relationship with God, Denise replied: "*Personal prayer. I pray all the time; throughout the day*." Hall (2007, p. 53) also noted: "A prayerful life is the only way to lead in authentic dependence on God". As noted in chapter two, Morton (2015, p. 17) elaborated on this concept: "Through such prayer God guides the Christian leader to see the world differently. The leader hears God's still, quiet voice clearly even in the whirlwind of daily activity.". Again, Darlene spelled it out: "*You're going to have your daily reflections, you're going to study your word in whichever way that looks like for you. There's no right or wrong way, but what is important is that you take the time because it is important to be spiritually strong as well as physically and emotionally strong."* The participants in Morton's 2015 research perceived reading and reflecting on the Bible as another essential factor in building a relationship with God. Music and song were another way of focussing on God for Denise: "*When I'm singing with my children with their little Christian songs, I'm worshipping. I love it!"* These leaders made it very clear that communicating with God, reaching out to Him through prayer, reading, meditation and music were essential parts of their personal lives, and critical to their Christian leadership. Maree's comment sums this up: "*I have many discussions with God. We're on good terms! (Much laughter). It's in the difficult times where you have the deepest most authentic talks with God".*

RESEARCH OUTCOME 1.

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Leaders, a strong relationship that focusses on God is the first essential in their practice - through prayer, worship, reflection and reading.

Following the focussing on God the next section addresses the results of that focus – how God responds.

6.2.2 Research Outcome 2: A Relationship that is Empowered by God

However, relationships are two-way things as illustrated by how the arrows in the diagram (Figure 6.1) also come from God towards the Director/Leader. These Directors/Leaders are **empowered by God.** The leaders in this study were certain that God encouraged, supported, empowered and even compelled them to reflect Him in their work. Denise said: *"It's absolutely driven, it's a 'calling'*". While Maree added: *"but in times of crisis, those are the times when God is truly present for you and that sustains you"*. Brown (2007) emphasises the importance of Christian values: "The embodiment of values and purpose within leaders is the basic biblical criterion for leading others" (p. 86). Christian values were the theme that Maree returned to many times throughout our discussions. I asked her what was important in Christian early childhood education leadership, and she replied, *"I believe that faith gives you a strong values base. Christian leadership is having a values base, based in your faith that you live and breathe every day. You are an advocate for your faith in your leadership"*.

Further, the holistic concept of Christian leadership and especially Christian early childhood education leadership is not static, but is a dynamic, constantly evolving and developing phenomenon. This fluid dynamism is illustrated in Figure 6.1 by the red arrows curving out from the centre. These indicate the reality of the human interaction with God – the reaching out to Him through the means of focussing, interwoven with His response of empowerment and guidance. Keener (2019) reminds us that when Christians "call upon God" (p. 38) He will empower them for service and the mission of sharing His love. This love, that is from God, is the agape love that enables authentic Christians to share God's love, even in challenging circumstances as Keener (2019) notes.

RESEARCH OUTCOME 2.

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Leaders, a willingness to listen, to allow themselves to be empowered by God and to respond to God's guidance is the second essential in their practice.

This second research outcome is the basis for the third research outcome, the way that God enables Christians to view the world and the people around them.

6.2.3 Research Outcome 3: A Relationship with God that Enables a Christian Worldview

All of this action is encased within a red circle, which represents a **Christian worldview**, that is, the way that Christian leaders view the world around them. Johnson (2019) writes:

> A biblical worldview is not simply a moral or a political statement, or even a doctrinal statement. Although these are all good, a biblical worldview is much more. Worldviews are a matter of the heart, meaning the defining element of a person. (p. 84)

As Johnson (2019) writes, the biblical worldview is the defining element, it is the axiology of being, a 'matter of the heart'; it is the agape love that enabled these leaders to reach out to their children, staff, families and communities. In the case of these leaders, their Christian worldview led them to perceive the people in their communities – children, staff and families – from a Christian perspective. This perspective was demonstrated by their attitudes and their actions. As Darlene said: *"This is to help resource and strengthen our families…I see this as a ministry to our community and our families."*

RESEARCH OUTCOME 3.

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Leaders their faith, their worldview, sense of mission and willingness to listen and respond to God's guidance is the third essential in their practice.

This leads into the next aspect of the diagram – relational values.

6.2.4 Research Outcome 4: The Importance of Relational Values

Relational values are important for Christian early childhood education leaders and impact the way that these Directors/Leaders perceive and relate to those with whom they interact in their leadership role. When discussing the need for all staff to reflect Christian values, Maree said quite firmly, *"Here all families are valued, respected, and made to feel welcome", and then continued, "They're marvellous staff. They're caring staff".* Darlene expressed a similar perspective about her staff: *"I love their heart. Because they understand".* Fran explained that some parents are very wary of 'Christian' centres and so she tells them: *"That's the philosophy here; we believe there is a God and He does love us all. Where the Christian ethos comes in, is in our daily practice setting the example of love and respect and empathy".* When I asked Maree the basis for her values, she replied: *"Jesus was a leader. He was there for the community. He was there to provide all people with a sense of belonging. I try to do the same thing. I want everyone to feel a sense of belonging".* Gant (2007) cites Luke 10:27 as critical for Christian leaders: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (p. 26) and goes on to say "to love others is to seek their highest good" (p. 26). Hall (2007, p.49) expands this further: "Effective leaders embody the life they advocate…it is a life that embodies the truth of the gospel, valuing all people as created in God's image". Connectedness is a term used to describe a level of relationship. Campman (2018, p. 51) comments: "One of the fundamentally important dimensions of school climate is relational, i.e., how 'connected' people feel to one another in school". Campman goes on to elaborate: "Connectedness: a positive, caring relationship(s) between a child and an adult that engages the student cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally to facilitate student success" (p. 55). For these leaders, Christian values are the basis for the connectedness they want displayed in their centres: the acceptance, welcome and empathy for those from all socio-economic levels, together with love and care in their daily practice.

RESEARCH OUTCOME 4.

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Education Leaders, relational values, the way they feel about, and are connected to their staff, the students, the families and the community – welcoming, accepting, respecting, caring and loving is the fourth essential in their practice.

As a result of these relational values, early childhood Christian leaders behave in particular ways: relational practices.

6.2.5 Research Outcome 5: The Importance of Relational Practices

Admittedly, there is a degree of overlap between the **Relational Practices** of Directors/Leaders and their Relational Values**.** However, the focus of a Director's/Leader's Relational Practices is on how these perceptions, attitudes and values translate into specific actions. Many of the families in Maree's and Denise's centres are from low socio-economic groups, lacking literacy skills and often feeling a sense of rejection in other environments. Both of these leaders are very aware of these issues and perceive the provision of support, social justice and practical help to these families as an integral part of their Christian service. Denise describes the practical support they offer: *"We are very mission focussed. It all comes from Jesus. We make our financial decisions on a Christian basis. Not so much in terms of a profit, but in pastoral care for our families".* Other practical support is offered. "*For some of our families, filling in documents is almost impossible and they need help with that. When they've been through difficult times, they KNOW they can come here and someone will hold out a hand to them."* As each leader spoke of the sense of being empowered to do their work, they viewed it as a calling from God. Park, Lee, Lim, and Sohn (2018, p. 14) explored the concept of 'calling' and concluded: "Our results provide insights into an extended role for calling by showing that employees are influenced by the extent to which others view their work as a calling, and the effects of calling can reach beyond those who endorse callings." As Darlene said at the first interview: "*I have a passion in my heart to establish a beautiful Christian place, committed to quality."* Darlene's staff were also very open about their own sense of calling, commitment and their perceptions of a team ministry.

Maree spoke about being a role model, not in terms of superiority, but rather as setting the example for what she expects of her staff. She says: *"I am the role model. I manage my staff and I do rosters and all the things that are needed; but it is HOW I do it which shows Christian leadership"*. Maree goes on to say, *"Social justice is the corner stone of what we do. These families need us. They are why we are here. There might be doors slammed in their face elsewhere, but not here".* On the other hand, Darlene's centre is in an apparently affluent area. However, those families have somewhat different issues. *"You've got domestic violence, you've got child protection issues in this demographic, and one that I deal with all the time is financial pressures. People living in Sydney, two parents working, sometimes additional jobs".* Darlene and her staff provide the different care and support that these families may need. *"It's about saying I know, I'm here to talk to, I understand. I can actually support you".* Relational practices also include empowerment of staff members as well as families, as Darlene says: "*People don't learn through criticism and domination, people learn through collaboration and encouragement. Not to say you don't be strong, but in terms of teams on the floor, people have to be empowered to rise up".* Hudson (2019, p.1) sums up this process very neatly "Genuine growth in relationship with God evidences itself for the most part in an ever-deepening capacity to love and to care for others" p. 112. Relating this quote to the model of Christian early childhood education leadership, as leaders focus on God, they are empowered by Him to value people in a loving way, so this develops into loving and caring practices.

RESEARCH OUTCOME 5.

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Education Leaders, relational practices, what they do for their families and staff – empowering, supporting, modelling, providing social justice, ministering, helping and serving, their commitment and calling, their ministry – is the fifth essential in their practice.

When considering the various aspects of early childhood Christian leadership and the research outcomes noted so far, the next outcome encapsulates all of these into a holistic summary of relational 'being'.

6.2.6 Research Outcome 6: Relational Being: A Commitment to God

The question could be asked: Is being Christian revealed by doing or being, by actions or attitudes, or by both? From this research project, as revealed in Figures 5.43 and 6.1, it is the individual's commitment to God (the being) that impels the person to respond by 'doing'. Thus, the answer is unmistakably 'both'. Being Christian is about who you are and also, what you do. Philippians 2:13 is a Bible text that illustrates this concept: 'For it is [not your strength, but it is] God who is effectively at work in you, both to will and to work [that is, strengthening, energizing, and creating in you the longing] and the ability to fulfil your purpose' (AMP).

The Bible clearly outlines what you are to do if you want to serve God. Jesus himself provided the answer in Matthew 22:37-40. In the New Testament, the apostle Matthew reports on an interchange between Jesus and the Pharisees who wanted to trap Him. They asked: "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40). Applying this text to early childhood Christian leadership as displayed in the diagram, the parallel is clear: Have a close relationship with God and apply those Christian values to the way you treat people.

Therefore the third ellipse in Figures 5.43 and 6.1, brings the two sides together with the core and is entitled **Relational Being.** In this section, the Directors/Leaders have shared some of their personal thoughts about what it means to them personally to be a Christian leader. A sense of accountability came through strongly in these comments: *"So I may not agree with everything everybody does, but I do believe God's going to hold me accountable for treating them like a human being and with respect"* (Fran).

All four Directors/Leaders spoke about their leadership role as far beyond just being a job. Darlene spoke passionately: "It's a ministry! I think you've got to come from a ministry perspective and see this almost as a ministry to your community and your families because it's not just a job". Marie mentioned how difficult it had been working previously in secular early learning centres, where speaking about faith was taboo. She said: *"When I worked in those centres I knew never to mention it. I remember being taught sometimes you just have to live and breathe it".* Even though Marie now leads a CECEC centre, where faith is discussed freely and it is the rule of practice, she still adheres to the concept of living and breathing

one's faith as an expectation of herself and her staff. She says: *"You can't just say you do it and don't do it. You must live what comes out of your mouth"*. Similarly, Denise spoke with enthusiasm when she said: *"But we can do so much more for the staff and the children and the families because we're a team and Jesus is our centre".*

The Old Testament in Micah 6:8 provides very specific requirements: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). The biblical excerpts from Matthew 22 and Micah 6 summarise the themes that emerged from the data in this study. The faith of these leaders was a close, dynamic relationship with God, which guided, sustained and impelled them to value people (children, families, staff and the community) and to demonstrate this through their actions. In an earlier article, Hudson (2013) notes, "Real change is always an inside work of the Spirit, a transforming gift of grace to those who live with open hands before God—never a human achievement that we bring about on our own" (p. 67). Manala (2018) comments that for the Christian, gratitude is an essential response to God, and that this gratitude is "the shaping and compelling force behind acts of compassion" (p.4). Manala (2018, p. 7) goes on to say that "the life of gratitude promotes good health and a joyous existence." These comments closely parallel the data revealed in Relational Being. A Christian worldview enables the individual to perceive his or her own inadequacies and to value and want the transforming power of God, of which Hudson (2013) speaks.

RESEARCH OUTCOME 6

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Education Leaders – Relational Being –a holistic approach to life that embodies a sense of accountability to God, humility and gratitude for God's goodness, and the joy of service is the sixth essential in their practice.

Nevertheless, the participants all found that their roles were not without difficulties and challenges as described in the next outcome.

6.2.7 Research Outcome 7: The Challenges of Leadership

The daily practices of prayer, Bible stories, Christian songs, and thanks before meals were present, but the impetus for all of this was the core of Christian love. It was this

Christian love that enabled these leaders to continue their practice despite the challenges that are always part of leadership.

These leadership challenges invariably seem to be linked to relationships. Duignan (2012) comments on this very issue: “Often, however, educational leaders face the problem of dealing with unprofessional behaviour while balancing their professional responsibility for ensuring the smooth operation of their organisation, with their personal feelings for those staff acting unprofessionally” (p. 38).

Nielson (2007) warns against the misconception that “tolerating poor attitudes and institutional weakness and avoiding conflict” (p. 140) is somehow the Christian thing to do; whereas addressing these issues in fact “serves students and families well and honours Jesus Christ” (p. 140). Addressing issues, empowered by agape love, can ease the stress of these situations. In Chapter Two, the literature review, the definition of Christian leadership was described by Andrews University’s Leadership Centre as a dynamic, relational process. The specific definition noted that “people, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, partner to achieve a common goal - it is serving others by leading and leading others by serving.” The responses revealed in the case studies, those in the surveys and in the diagrams clearly demonstrate the truth of this statement. Maintaining the Christian character of a centre, its ethos, is critical. Youlden (2008, p. 25) writes: “It (Christian ethos) can only be fostered and preserved by an intentional and ongoing commitment to integrate it through the entire operation of the school. It will not occur automatically. Rather, success is dependent upon thoughtful effort and careful planning.” It is upon the Director/Leader that this responsibility rests.

RESEARCH OUTCOME 7.

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Education Leaders – establishing and preserving the Christian character of their centres, managing the tensions and challenges of philosophical difference, dealing with workload, administration, and community issues, with God’s help and guidance comprise the seventh essential in their practice.

Given the prominence of relationships in the model (Figure 6.1), derived from the data: emphasising relational values, relational practices and relational being, it is important to consider the underlying context as identified by the participants.

6.2.8 Research Outcome 8: Relationship Foundation– Biblical Agape Love

Hadley (2012) maintains that the extended family supports, traditionally available to families with young children, are becoming less available in the last few decades and it is in this vacuum that the love, non-judgemental acceptance and support offered within CECEC centres can be invaluable. The traditional Christian daily practices were present in the CECEC centres, but the stimulus for all of this was the core of Christian love. The Bible uses several different words to describe the English word 'love'. These include 'eros' – romantic, passionate love; 'storge' – family love; and philia – deep friendship, brotherly love (Zavada, 2019). "However, 'agape' is the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. This term defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind. It is the divine love that comes from God. Agape love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure" (Zavada, 2019). Other writers add to an understanding of the kind of love described by agape. Oord (2010) defines agape as love "in spite of" which emphasises the undeserving aspect of the recipient. Agape is also a step beyond altruism 'doing all the good you can do' for it is based on love not effectiveness or efficiency. Chalwell (2016) notes that agape is an unconditional love that conjures images of 'compassion and kindness' (p. 126). For some, 'love' represents just a warm feeling; however, Sosler (2017) argues that this is not representative of agape love. Sosler (2017) writes:

> Love demands an object. Unlike the modern, New Age, Oprah sentimentality, love is tangible. It never exists merely ethereally as some type of feeling. Love does not thrive as theory. Jesus ties love to Himself and to people. A love for Jesus executes itself in a concern for His sheep. Jesus provides an example of love. This is not abstract teaching; it is concrete demonstration. To love means to serve in an ordinary way: like washing the feet of a weary guest. Love is active; it takes the initiative in day-to-day moments. (p. 11)

Here, Sosler (2017) puts action with the rhetoric, and this is what the leaders in this study did every day. Motivated and compelled by their relationship with God they embodied agape love in their language, decision making, supervision, and all aspects of their leadership and management practices. Peterson and Strauch (2004) expressed it this way:

> The love that we are talking about here is God's love, as supremely expressed in Christ's self-sacrificing love on the cross. To express this wonderful love, the first

> Christians chose the noun, agape, and filled it with their new concept of love: God's deliberate, self-giving love that is expressed irrespective of a person's worth or merit. (p. 9)

Sophocles provides his perspective on love which parallels the Christian view:

> 'One word frees us from all the weight and pain of life: that word is LOVE'. Sophocles

As does the Bible:

> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

RESEARCH OUTCOME 8.

For authentic Christian Early Childhood Education Leaders, the eighth, final and most important essential is that their professional practice is established upon a foundational ethic of agape love.

6.2.9 Conclusion

So, what are the essential ingredients of early childhood Christian leadership? In a recent editorial, Bush (2018) notes that the concept of 'one size fits all' is particularly inaccurate for educational leadership given that each educational facility has its own unique characteristics and the leader's particular abilities may not match the local context well. Certainly, in this study it quickly became apparent that these four interviewees were unique in their own leadership styles, contexts and backgrounds. However, in Christian early childhood education leadership while a necessary common thread is administrative and educational competence, the critical leadership commonality revealed in this research project has been the all-pervading embodiment of authentic Christian love and values in the beliefs and practices of the leaders. These eight outcomes that represent the praxis as perceived by the leaders, embody Christian early childhood leadership.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This research project began with the need to identify and describe 'Early Childhood Christian Leadership'. While the leaders of numerous early childhood centres describe them as Christian, the question remained – what did this actually mean? What did this mean about the leaders and their leadership? Twenty-three CECEC centres in New South Wales were contacted and nineteen were sent a survey questionnaire. Fourteen of these were returned and analysed for Phase 1 and then four Directors/Leaders were selected for Phase 2 – the in-depth, three rounds of interviews. The results of Phase 1 were described in Chapter Four and the results of Phase 2, in the form of four case studies were described in Chapter Five.

Strong clear themes emerged from both phases and these were identified, analysed and discussed in Chapter Six. For each leader, these themes present as: God is central to their beliefs, practices and being. This relationship with God supports, guides, encourages and even impels them to relate to people in a particular way, both in thought and in actions. The daily actions and even the challenges to leadership that occur are addressed through a lens of agape love that reflect the Christian worldview. The research findings from this study provide the definitive characteristics of authentic Christian early childhood education leadership, the beginning and end of which is agape love.

7.2 Outcomes of the Study

Christian early childhood education leadership goes far deeper than running an early learning centre efficiently, effectively, including grace at mealtimes, having a Christian poster on the wall, or perhaps even singing some Christian songs. The data from this study have shown that it is a holistic perspective and an approach to leadership that governs the way that the leader relates to God and then regards and interacts with children, families, staff and the community. This leadership is grounded in the leader's personal relationship with God that shapes their worldview and influences, guides, and even impels them to lead in a particular way. This relationship moulds the way they articulate the vision and values, relate to children, families and staff, make decisions, communicate, and manage the challenges of the workplace.

Hall (2007) concurs when he writes:

> Leadership is a personal matter. It is not personal in the confidential sense, but it is personal in the sense that it is rich with persons. The person of the leader and the persons of those being led are central to the shepherding of schools. Although a comprehensive theory of leadership must include a consideration of authority structures and organisational contexts, much of the influence of leaders resides in who they are and how they embody vision, values and character. (p. 43)

This concept of embodiment, the incorporation of Christian beliefs and values in a holistic sense, is what Fran is saying in her first interview: "*In this context I can very much embed the ideas and philosophies of my Christian beliefs into my whole daily program, so it's not just a token moment in the day but it's the whole embodiment of what we do and why we do it" (6.2.15).* Embodiment was again echoed by Maree when she noted that all of her communication with children, families, staff and community should embody the Christian values which she and her staff espoused.

Therefore, an essential understanding about authentic Christian early childhood education leadership is that it is not a 'frosting' of Christianity or spirituality which Hekman (2007) accused many so-called 'Christian' schools of having. Nor is Christianity some sort of add-on. Rather, authentic Christian early childhood education leadership is an embodiment of Christianity that pervades all aspects of leadership: relationships, communication, supervision, planning and management as well as the personal worldview and perspectives of the leader. It is a deep, spirit-led approach from a holistic perspective that enables the leader to view people – children, staff and parents – as 'made in the image of God' (comment from conference participant, p. 169). Leaders need leadership skills and perspectives as well as Christian beliefs. Christianity does not guarantee a good leader or effective leadership practices. However, to be authentic, Christian leadership cannot be a 'veneer' of spirituality because it must permeate everything. This can only happen as the leaders have a close, dynamic relationship with God, allowing Him to guide and control their thoughts, attitudes and actions.

Therefore, the theory of Christian Early Childhood Educational Leadership is characterised by the following features:

1. A central, dynamic ongoing two-way relationship between the leader and God.
2. The Leader's communication to God is about reaching out to Him through prayer, praise, reflection, reading and meditation.
3. God's response to the leader is guiding, faith-filling, empowering, sustaining, impelling for service.

4. The results of this relationship are fourfold: (a) The way the leader thinks and feels about people; (b) The way the leader behaves towards people; (c) The way the leader manages the tensions of leadership; (d) The way the leader lives his or her life. This is their Christian worldview, grounded in agape love and it governs their 'being'.

Data relating to the Christian early childhood centres leaders' perceptions of Christian leadership praxis are summarised in the four points above. This research data generated the essence of Christian early childhood leadership; a holistic embodiment of Christian values and practices (being) in the lives of the leaders – the Directors/Leaders of CECEC centres. This means the leader is totally committed to God, by communicating with Him and being empowered by Him. As a result the leader is inspired to value the children, staff, parents and community members with whom he/she works. Further, this Christian worldview perspective enables the leader to ensure that the centre practices reflect this worldview and while negative tensions often occur in the lives of all leaders, the essence of Christian early childhood leadership enables the director /leader to accept these tensions and deal with them in a Christian manner.

Despite the previous lack of research in this area this study has clearly demonstrated the existence, the value and the importance of Christian Early Childhood Education Leadership: An Axiology of Being.

7.3 Limitations

Research projects such as the current study, which investigated a topic about which little is known, are inherently tempting to explore as comprehensively as possible. This was certainly the case in this study as investigations of staff members' perceptions of their leader's performance would be a legitimate triangulation of the data. However, this deeper exploration was deliberately omitted for a number of reasons. First, the depth and quantity of material thus generated would extend the size of this project beyond what is a reasonable length and would in fact, likely result in a second thesis and an unreasonable amount of time. The second reason is the potential to cause discord amongst staff and staff/administration relationships. The focus of the research question was on the Director's/Leader's perspective and so for these reasons, this valid aspect of staff perceptions of leadership was omitted in this study. However, there would be considerable value in exploring this expanded aspect of early childhood Christian leadership in further research.

Similarly, a wider application was also tempting. However, Glasser (2007, p. 107) notes that the pressure to generalise is strong and 'hard to resist', but nevertheless cautions against this approach. While the survey-questionnaire section of this project did investigate some aspects of fourteen Christian early childhood education leaders' perspectives on leadership in this context, the in-depth section explored the concept of Christian early childhood education leadership with only four participants. Interestingly, there were remarkable similarities in the language, beliefs and practices of all four leaders indicating common beliefs, values and practices amongst the group. Within qualitative grounded theory there is no intention to generalise, rather, the four case studies are presented as exemplars.

My personal background and experience are closely linked with the topic of this research project. As mentioned earlier, I spent over 30 years as a school principal of both small and large schools and for the last ten years I have taught and researched leadership theory and practice at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In addition, I am a practising Christian, as also mentioned in this thesis, which has undoubtedly influenced my perceptions about the importance and values of Christian leadership. It is possible therefore that my background reduced the 'etic' perspective in my interviewing, veering more towards an 'emic' viewpoint.

The gender perspective cannot be ignored. The participants of Phase One – the survey-questionnaire and Phase Two – the in-depth interviews were all women. Given that the vast majority of leaders, educators and support staff in ECEC are women this is not surprising. Further, alternatives, that is men in these positions, were not found in the Christian ECEC centres that were approached for involvement. In addition, the researcher was also female. Therefore, it would be of value to explore a male perspective on the topic of Christian early childhood education leadership, with participants able to be drawn from a geographically wider catchment area such as all Australian States and Territories and New Zealand.

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Because the topic of Christian early childhood education leadership does not appear to have been researched, the information that emerged from this study is extremely valuable, particularly to those working in CECEC centres. Therefore there is a need to further research this topic through the perceptions of a wider group of participants. Broadening the perspective of Christian early childhood education leadership through staff members and

through parents would provide a greater depth of understanding. The possibilities of increased examples of applications of the concept would also be enhanced.

As one of the participants in the study discovered, changing a centre from a nominal Christian approach to an authentic Christian approach can be quite demanding. Therefore the data from this study need to be made available to early childhood educators and staff who would like to implement a Christian approach to their work, with a dissemination of the model and the accompanying theory.

From the survey returns, it is apparent that a need exists for professional development in aspects of Christian leadership, particularly conflict management and strategic planning. The leaders admitted to having less confidence in dealing with conflict management and strategic planning which is understandable given the lack of leadership and administrative training in most early childhood qualifications. This clearly is an area in which the provision of Christian professional development is needed and also reinforces the findings of the literature that the majority of early childhood education leaders have not received training in leadership (Aubrey, 2011; Waniganayake et al., 2012; Fenech, 2013).

There also appeared to be a need for an additional aspect of professional development in the area of spirituality. Maree was the only one of the four interviewees who mentioned that her staff attend a spirituality development program annually. Maree and her staff had found this very helpful in maintaining their Christian focus in the day to day activities of their centre. Given that from time to time some staff are employed who do not have an understanding of spirituality or a Christian focus, professional development in this area would be very valuable.

All of the participants in this study acknowledged that they were Christians. It would be of interest to have a study with a comparison group of non-Christian, but excellent, ECEC leaders.

One of the issues identified by the participants was the need for more networking and ongoing professional development opportunities. Following the interviews, the researcher was involved with an informal network group of CECEC centre leaders and University College early childhood lecturers that was organised to give further consideration to the topic. From these deliberations a three-day Christian early childhood education conference was organised with a number of Director/Leaders from CECEC centres in both New South Wales

and other Australian states. This conference culminated in the inauguration of the Australian Early Childhood Christian Education Association (ACECEA).

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APPENDIX A: THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The National Quality Framework (NQF) was the result of an agreement between all Australian governments to work together to provide better educational and developmental outcomes for children.

The NQF introduced a new quality standard in 2012 to improve education and care across long day care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten, and outside school hours care.

The NQF includes:

- the National Law and National Regulations
- the National Quality Standard
- an assessment and quality rating process
- national learning frameworks.

- See more at: http://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework/explaining-the-national-quality-framework#sthash.A1syHs13.dpuf

APPENDIX B: THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR AUSTRALIA (EYLF)

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia was produced by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the Council of Australian Governments in 2009.

The EYLF was designed to "assist educators to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning. In this way, the Early Years Learning Framework (the Framework) will contribute to realising the Council of Australian Governments' vision that:

"All children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation."

Fundamental to the Framework is a view of children's lives as characterised by *belonging*, *being* and *becoming*.

Experiencing *belonging* – knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence.

Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children's lives.

Children's identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. They are shaped by many different events and circumstances. *Becoming* reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow.

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN BIRTH TO 5 YEARS

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Children feel safe, secure, and supported

Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency

Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities

Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation

Children respond to diversity with respect

Children become aware of fairness

Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing

Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity

Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating

Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another

Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes

Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts

Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media

Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work

Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking

APPENDIX C: THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

The National Quality Standard (NQS) is a key aspect of the National Quality Framework (NQF) and sets a high, national benchmark for early childhood education and care, and outside school hours care services in Australia.

It gives services and families a better understanding of a quality service, helping families to make informed decisions about the services providing education and care to their child. The NQS brings together the 7 key quality areas that are important to outcomes for children.

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management

The NQS contains 18 standards with two or three standards in each quality area. These standards are high-level outcome statements. Under each standard sit elements that describe the outcomes that contribute to the standard being achieved. There are 58 elements in total.

THE STANDARDS

Quality Area 1 - Educational program and practice The aim of Quality Area 1 of the National Quality Standard is to ensure that the educational program and practice is stimulating and engaging, and enhances children's learning and development. In school age care services, the program nurtures the development of life skills and complements children's experiences, opportunities and relationships at school, at home and in the community. -	
Standard 1.1	**An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development.**
Element 1.1.1	Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.
Element 1.1.2	Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.
Element 1.1.3	The program, including routines, is organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning.

Element 1.1.4	The documentation about each child's program and progress is available to families.
Element 1.1.5	Every child is supported to participate in the program.
Element 1.1.6	Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and to influence events and their world.
Standard 1.2	**Educators and co-ordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.**
Element 1.2.1	Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluation.
Element 1.2.2	Educators respond to children's ideas and play and use intentional teaching to scaffold and extend each child's learning.
Element 1.2.3	Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the program.

Quality Area 2 - Children's health and safety

The aim of Quality Area 2 under the National Quality Standard is to safeguard and promote children's health and safety, minimise risks and protect children from harm, injury and infection.

All children have the right to experience quality education and care in an environment that provides for their physical and psychological wellbeing and provides support for each child's growing competence, confidence and independence.

Standard 2.1	**Each child's health is promoted.**
Element 2.1.1	Each child's health needs are supported.
Element 2.1.2	Each child's comfort is provided for and there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation.
Element 2.1.3	Effective hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
Element 2.1.4	Steps are taken to control the spread of infectious diseases and to manage injuries and illness, in accordance with recognised guidelines.
Standard 2.2	**Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children**
Element 2.2.1	Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided by the service are nutritious and appropriate for each child.
Element 2.2.2	Physical activity is promoted through planned and spontaneous experiences and is appropriate for each child
Standard 2.3	**Each child is protected.**

Element 2.3.1	Children are adequately supervised at all times.
Element 2.3.2	Every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and any hazard likely to cause injury.
Element 2.3.3	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
Element 2.3.4	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are aware of their roles and responsibilities to respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect.

Quality Area 3 - Physical environment

The aim of Quality Area 3 under the National Quality Standard is to ensure that the physical environment is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences that promote children's learning and development.

The way that the environment is designed, equipped and organised determines the way that the space and resources are used and has the potential to maximise children's engagement and level of positive experience and inclusive relationships.

Standard 3.1	**The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.**
Element 3.1.1	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.
Element 3.1.2	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
Element 3.1.3	Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.
Standard 3.2	**The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.**
Element 3.2.1	Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
Element 3.2.2	Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number, organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program and allow for multiple uses.
Standard 3.3	**The service takes an active role in caring for its environment and contributes to a sustainable future.**
Element 3.3.1	Sustainable practices are embedded in service operations.
Element 3.3.2	Children are supported to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.

Quality Area 4 - Staffing arrangements

The aim of Quality Area 4 under the National Quality Standard is to ensure the provision of qualified and experienced educators, coordinators and nominated supervisors who are able to develop warm, respectful relationships with children, create safe and predictable environments and encourage children's active engagement in the learning program.	
Standard 4.1	**Staffing arrangements enhance children's learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing.**
Element 4.1.1	Educator-to-child ratios and qualification requirements are maintained at all times.
Standard 4.2	**Educators, co-ordinators and staff members are respectful and ethical**
Element 4.2.1	Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.
Element 4.2.2	Educators, co-ordinators and staff members work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills and to improve practice and relationships.
Element 4.2.3	Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other's strengths and skills.
Quality Area 5 - Relationships with children The aim of Quality Area 5 under the National Quality Standard is to promote relationships with children that are responsive, respectful and promote children's sense of security and belonging. Relationships of this kind free children to explore the environment and engage in play and learning.	
Standard 5.1	**Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child**
Element 5.1.1	Interactions with each child are warm and responsive and build trusting relationships.
Element 5.1.2	Every child is able to engage with educators in meaningful, open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.
Element 5.1.3	Each child is supported to feel secure, confident and included.
Standard 5.2	**Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.**

Element 5.2.1	Each child is supported to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.
Element 5.2.2	Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.
Element 5.2.3	The dignity and the rights of every child are maintained at all times
Quality Area 6 - Collaborative partnerships with families and communities The aim of Quality Area 6 under the National Quality Standard is to recognise that collaborative relationships with families are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children and that community partnerships that are based on active communication, consultation and collaboration are also essential.	
Standard 6.1	**Respectful and supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.**
Element 6.1.1	There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families.
Element 6.1.2	Families have opportunities to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.
Element 6.1.3	Current information about the service is available to families.
Standard 6.2	**Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about childrearing are respected.**
Element 6.2.1	The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child's learning and wellbeing.
Element 6.2.2	Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.
Standard 6.3	**The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children's learning and wellbeing.**
Element 6.3.1	Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.
Element 6.3.2	Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.
Element 6.3.3	Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.
Element 6.3.4	The service builds relationships and engages with the local community

Quality Area 7 - Leadership and service management

The aim of Quality Area 7 under the National Quality Standard is to support effective leadership and management of the service that contributes to quality environments for children's learning and development. Well-documented policies and procedures, well-maintained records, shared values, clear direction and reflective practices enable the service to function as a learning community.

An ongoing cycle of planning and review, including engagement with families, creates a setting for continuous improvement.

Standard 7.1	**Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.**
Element 7.1.1	Appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the service.
Element 7.1.2	The induction of educators, co-ordinators and staff members, including relief educators, is comprehensive.
Element 7.1.3	Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and co-ordinators at the service
Element 7.1.4	Provision is made to ensure a suitably qualified and experienced educator or co-ordinator leads the development of the curriculum and ensures the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning.
Element 7.1.5	Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper.
Standard 7.2	**There is a commitment to continuous improvement.**
Element 7.2.1	A statement of philosophy is developed and guides all aspects of the service's operations.
Element 7.2.2	The performance of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.
Element 7.2.3	An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place.
Standard 7.3	**Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service.**
Element 7.3.1	Records and information are stored appropriately to ensure confidentiality, are available from the service and are maintained in accordance with legislative requirements.

Element 7.3.2	Administrative systems are established and maintained to ensure the effective operation of the service.
Element 7.3.3	The Regulatory Authority is notified of any relevant changes to the operation of the service, of serious incidents and of any complaints which allege a breach of legislation.
Element 7.3.4	Processes are in place to ensure that all grievances and complaints are addressed, investigated fairly and documented in a timely manner.
Element 7.3.5	Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Project:

Faith and practice in the work of Directors/Leaders of Early childhood Christian Centres,

I agree to participate in the above research project and I give my consent freely.
I have read and understand the information provided in the Information Statement.
I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have been given to keep.
I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.
The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to:

Complete a questionnaire
Participate in an interview(s) that will be audio-tape recorded (optional)
Be observed while undertaking regular work-related activities (optional)

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researchers [if applicable in the case of illegal behaviour, add 'except as required by law']

Print name_____Signature_____Date_____

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College of Higher Education Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale requires that all participants are informed tat 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 Avondale's HREC Secretary, Avondale College of Higher Education, PO Box 19, Cooranbong NSW 2265, or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au

Return of the questionnaire indicates consent to participate in this study.

Dr Marion Shields,
Avondale College of Higher Education
Email: marion.shields@avondale.edu.au Phone: 0419811817.

APPENDIX E: SURVEY-QUESTIONNAIRE

There are a number of sections in this survey-questionnaire, please answer to the best of your ability. This survey-questionnaire is anonymous as I want you to feel you can be honest in your responses:

SECTION A:

1. Years working in the Early Childhood industry: 0-5 ☐ 6-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16+ ☐

2. Years working in a leadership position in EC: 0-5 ☐ 6-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16+ ☐

3. Qualifications: TAFE ☐ Diploma ☐ Degree ☐ Masters ☐ Other……..

4. Age: 20-25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36-45 ☐……46-55 ☐……..56+ ☐

5. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

SECTION B:

Scoring: 1 = not at all; 2= occasionally; 3= most times; 5= always

This section is designed to explore your beliefs about your role as Director. To what extent do the following statements apply to your experience?

No.	Item	1	2	3	4
1	I enjoy my work as Director of this centre				

Comments:

2	I feel confident about my ability to lead in my Director's role				

Comments:

3	I feel confident about my ability to manage the day to day running of the centre				

Comments:

4	I enjoy working with my staff				

Comments:

5	I feel confident about communicating effectively with my staff				

Comments:

6	I feel confident about communicating with the parents				

Comments:

7	I feel confident about advocating for Early Childhood Education in the community				

Comments:

: 1 = not at all; 2= occasionally; 3= most times; 4= always					
8	I feel confident about managing conflict & problem solving				
Comments:					
9	I feel confident about strategic planning				
Comments:					
10	I feel my approach is 'collaborative'				
Comments:					

SECTION C. This section is designed to explore your beliefs about the 'Christian' aspect of your role. To what extent do the following statements apply to your experience?

1 = not at all; 2= occasionally; 3= most times; 4= always					
1	I believe the 'Christian' aspect of my role is very important				
Comments:					

2	I believe that my leadership reflects a Christian perspective				

Comments:

3	I believe I have a Christian approach to my conflict management & problem solving with staff				

Comments:

4	I believe the system expects me to demonstrate a Christian approach				

Comments:

5	I believe the parents expect me to demonstrate a Christian approach				

Comments:

6	Sometimes my Christian values are in conflict with staff members' beliefs and practices				

Comments:

Please indicate any areas within your role in which it is difficult to maintain Christian practice				
Example: unpunctual staff / angry parents/ etc				
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

SECTION D. Some questions now to measure the <u>extent</u> of your beliefs about aspects of your role:
1= not important; 2=somewhat important; 3=quite important; 4=extremely important.

No	Item	1	2	3	4
1	The general Christian aspect of my role				
2	Pastoral care and welfare of staff				

3	Pastoral care and welfare of children				
4	Pastoral care and welfare of parents				
5	Christian communication with staff				
6	The practical demonstration of Christian beliefs and practices				
7	Selection of resources (books etc) to reflect a Christian perspective				
8	Visible evidences of Christian beliefs: posters, welcome signs, foyer etc				
9	Adhering to system expectations				
10	Other?				

Are there any problem areas that you find particularly challenging within your role in general?
(Examples: Staying up to date with frequent government policy changes; financial management)

No	Item	1	2	3	4
1.					
2.					

Do you have a mission statement (or part of it, etc), that refers to the Christian goal(s) of your centre? – Write here or attach.

Optional: General Comments about the role of leadership and management in a Christian, Early Childhood Centre:
Recommendations:

Thank you so much for taking the time to do this, it is greatly appreciated.
I am also interested in talking with you in greater depth about your work, the strategies you use to lead and manage, and the findings from the survey-questionnaires. **This is optional.**
Yes I am interested in talking with you about this topic ☐ (Please tick or leave blank)
If you have ticked the box: Name…….
Contact phone……
Contact email……
When you have completed the survey-questionnaire, please send it to my supervisor (Associate Professor Phil Fitzsimmons [phil.fitzsimmons@avondale.edu.au]) in the stamped addressed envelope to retain confidentiality.
The return of this questionnaire will be understood to indicate your consent to involvement in the project. Please feel free to write more on the back of the survey-questionnaire, if you wish.

APPENDIX F: ROUND ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Can you talk to me first, about your role as Director of this Centre?

1. What aspects of your leadership role, do you enjoy most?
    a. Why?
2. Are there some areas of your role where you lack confidence?
    a. Why is this?
    b. Are there some areas you find really difficult?
3. I notice on your survey-questionnaire you wrote……, can you tell me some more about that please?

- Now, can we look at the 'Christian' aspect of Early Childhood Educational Leadership?

4. How would you describe 'Christian Leadership' in a Christian Early Learning Centre?
5. In the survey-questionnaire I asked about some particular aspects of your job in relation to Christian leadership such as conflict resolution, parental expectations, can you tell me some more about that?
6. Are there any areas where you find it's really difficult to maintain a Christian practice?
7. How important do you think some aspects of 'Christian' leadership are?

- I really appreciated your comments and recommendations – can we talk about them some more?

APPENDIX G: ROUND TWO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. If you were trying to describe Early Childhood Christian Leadership in one or ten words, what would you say?

2. Do you think you could draw a diagram of that, for me?
   (prompts: where would you be in this, What is the core/what are the core elements?)

3. What are the most important things that you do in your leadership role, and where do they fit in?

4. As I've been going through the interview transcripts I think I've found some common themes, I'd like to know whether you agree and what you think of them. Tell me a bit more about them: (some may have been covered in 3)

    a. Faith as the basis for Christian leadership
        i. So what is 'faith' to you?
        ii. Some said you live and breathe your faith? What does this look like?
        iii. What are the facets of this?
        iv. How do you personally, sustain your faith?

    b. Values, where do they fit in to Christian leadership?

    c. Role modelling, do you see yourself as a role model?

    d. Appreciating/affirming your staff,
        i. What do you most like about them?
        ii. Do you do things collaboratively with them?
        iii. Empowering staff to be leaders and use initiative
        When do you expect them to check with you?

    e. Respect: (prompts: towards children, parents, staff)

    f. Reflection (prompts: when? How? on your role, your leadership)

    g. Do you find you have to defend your values to parents? To staff members? In what contexts would you advocate for your faith and values?

    h. Social Justice: what does this mean to you as leader of this centre? (prompts: How important is it to you? Give examples).

i. Community & Parents
    i. Do you do things differently here because of your local community ?
    ii. Do you do things differently here because of the students that come here?
    iii. Do you know why parents chose this centre for their children?
        - Do you have any data?

APPENDIX H: ROUND THREE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Age, family background (growing up and now)
2. Educational background
3. Other employment?
4. Faith background
5. Why did you go into early childhood?
6. Where have you worked in Early Childhood (places, dates, roles)
7. When and why did you take on leadership
8. How did you get to be a director? Did you want that role? Why?
9. When did you first become a director of a Christian Early Learning centre?
10. How would you describe yourself as a person- personality, outlook on life?
11. Think about the person you are now. What things/experiences have made you the person you are now
12. Have you seen any major changes towards Christianity in ECEC over the years?