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Early Career Leaders in Early Learning and Childcare

Settings: Perspectives and Experiences

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Abstract

Within the early learning and childcare (ELC) sector, there is great emphasis placed on the value of leadership (Siraj and Kingston, 2015). Understanding the early career experiences of ELC leaders can guide efforts to develop high quality support mechanisms which will enable effective professional development for new managers and leaders in the sector. Drawing on data from online discussion groups featuring seven ELC managers, this practitioner enquiry provides a ground-up perspective on the initial experiences of leadership. It is argued that support mechanisms must be developed to minimise professional isolation, to enable collaborative dialogue and to provide mentoring for new leaders in order to ensure the best outcomes for the youngest children.

Contents

List of Acronyms

BERA – British Educational Research Association

CCUO – Coalition of Childhood Umbrella Organisations

CLPL – Career Long Professional Learning

ELC – Early Learning and Childcare

EYP – Early Years Practitioner

GTC – General Teaching Council

ODG1 – Online Discussion Group 1

ODG2 – Online Discussion Group 2

OOSC – Out Of School Club

PLS – Plain Language Statement

SCP – Standard for Childhood Practice

SSSC – Scottish Social Services Council

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Codes for Research Participants

- All participants have been provided with a code in order to identify them.
- Each code will identify an individual. Codes will be Participant (P) and a number (in order of their participation in the discussions), in order to identify them, followed by ODG (Online Discussion Group) 1 or 2 to specify which ODG the quote originated in and Discussion number (D 1- 18).

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Introduction

In this paper, I present my research, entitled: Early career leaders in early learning and childcare settings: perspectives and experiences. Firstly, I aim to outline my professional context and detail my interest in exploring the early experiences of new leaders in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings. In doing so, I will discuss the rationale of the practitioner enquiry, and give consideration to how it may influence my working practices. In Chapter Two, I will go on to consider literature which is relevant and significant within the broad area of my study and identify any gaps in knowledge or existing research. Following this, in Chapter Three, I situate my research within the relevant paradigm and discuss the methods used to execute my research before detailing the findings from my research and evaluating their impact on my working practices in Chapter Four. Finally, I will offer recommendations for future research and consider ideas to develop my own practice.

1.2 Rationale for the project and justification in light of my professional context

I work with a national ELC membership organisation. My role is varied, encompassing, but not limited to, support for individual ELC services, design and delivery of professional learning to the ELC workforce and the creation of documentation and guidance to support the sector. I work closely with lead practitioners and managers in ELC services offering mentoring and coaching, practical and strategic guidance, advice and a range of professional learning opportunities in order to support them to be more effective in their leadership roles. Support and development of high quality services for our youngest children will ultimately improve outcomes for the youngest children in our society (Scobie and Scott, 2017; Scottish

Government, 2015; Siraj and Kingston, 2015; Sosu and Ellis, 2014). This view is supported by recent findings within the Scottish Government's Quality Action Plan, which attest that a high quality workforce underpinned by strong pedagogical leadership and professional collaboration are among the essential characteristics of quality which will support the closure of the attainment gap (Scottish Government, 2017a). This is corroborated also by international evidence (OECD, 2017; Melhuish et al., 2015) which report that low quality ELC services impact negatively on a child's wellbeing and learning. In order to offer more effective services to the colleagues and settings I work to support, following Wolcott (1992:15), I aim to use this research to enhance my own practice. I hope to develop a better comprehension of the experiences and perspectives and to understand more profoundly the challenges faced by ELC leaders in their settings and the strategies and support they may need, particularly in the initial stages of their leadership journey where, in my professional experience, mentoring, professional learning and support needs are most evident. By doing so, I hope to support and develop the self-efficacy of the leaders I advise by pre-empting the challenges they may face and designing effective professional learning opportunities that meet the needs of the individual and respond to the evolving needs of the sector as a whole. However, the benefits of undertaking an enquiry into one's practice extend beyond the opportunity to develop professional practice, it also offers the opportunity for personal which is important for my own development growth (Ragland, 2006) and the creation of 'local knowledge' (Mockler, 2013) which contributes to the professional community of which I am a part.

Practice-based expertise and knowledge is valued and respected within the ELC sector (SSSC, 2014; SSSC, 2015. In my own day-to-day work, my professional knowledge, coupled with the ability to reflect on circumstances, events and experiences allows for effective facilitation of professional learning and collaboration. Reflective practice is paramount for educators of all levels (Craft and Paige-Smith, 2011) and following Reed (2011), reflection has allowed me to consider my own understanding of professionalism in the workforce (Forde et al, 2006), the importance of

personal career long professional learning (CLPL) (Gilchrist, 2016), and how these beliefs and values impact the support and advice I offer. It has been some time since I worked directly with children in settings and, in order ensure my practice knowledge remains relevant and current, and professional learning and guidance up to date, I undertake regular practice visits, and engage in collaboration and debate with managers and practitioners both online and face-to-face, discussing pressing issues in their settings. During these conversations, senior practitioners and managers have often engaged in dialogue about the challenges they face as a leader, of the emotional intensity they felt as they learned their craft and of the lack of support available to them to bolster confidence and support decision-making. This led me to investigate their experiences and perspectives of their leadership journey, co-creating meaning and 'making sense' of the data uncovered (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2002: 2007; Heron and Reason, 2001).

Having detailed my practitioner enquiry and the rationale underpinning it, I will now situate it within existing literature. This will identify how my study and findings will add to the wider body of research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter offers a review of literature, exploring some of the dominant research and thinking within the field of leadership in ELC. The interpretive paradigm, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3, defines this project. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), within the interpretive paradigm, participants' perspectives and experiences of leadership can only be explored by giving voice to their thoughts and opinions and encouraging discussion and reflection. Underpinning these voices, are theories and studies of leadership, management and ELC legislation along with formal and informal guidance and support mechanisms.

Through my investigations, I exposed a substantive body of literature detailing a number of relevant topics: I begin by considering leadership within ELC, both in the international context and through a Scottish policy lens. This led me further, to explore the concept of professionalism and professional development within ELC leadership. Following this, I explore a significant body of research on the early leadership experiences of principals, head teachers and administrators in the field of education. Although in alternative branches of education, these understandings of the value of professional status and importance of collaborative practice, draw parallels with experiences of managers/lead practitioners in the ELC sector. The next area of interest is the perceived need for mentoring and professional support for new and established leaders (CCUO, 2010:9, Hillman, 2006). In my final area of focus, I will discuss the literature surrounding women in leadership roles. Leaders in the ELC sector are predominantly women (Audit Scotland, 2018) and this may impact the style of leadership employed (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Osgood, 2004, 2011). Before examining these other areas in detail, I will outline the current position of ELC through a Scottish policy lens.

2.1 Early Learning and Childcare within the Scottish Context

Internationally, in recent years, there has been a strong focus on developing ELC services (OECD, 2001; 2006; Gammage, 2006) with the

recognition that high quality ELC is a long-term economic investment (Heckman and Masterov, 2007; Scobie et al., 2017). While excellent ELC and Out of School Care (OOSC) provision cannot eliminate the impact of social and economic disadvantage, it can mitigate against it (Siraj and Kingston, 2015; Heckman, 2012). It is clearly recognised (Sosu and Ellis, 2014; Dunlop, 2015; Bradshaw et al., 2016), that children's early experiences have a profound impact on their attainment and future life chances and throughout the United Kingdom, as a devolved issue, the expansion and development of ELC services has been prioritised by all constituent governments (Department for Education, 2016; Welsh Government, 2017; Scottish Government 2017a). In this paper, my lens will predominantly focus on Scotland, with references when appropriate to other nations.

UNESCO (2004) considered that in order to improve quality and create systemic change in ELC, a strong policy lead from governments must be paralleled by investment in a professional, motivated workforce. In line with this, Scottish Government has displayed a commitment to supporting high quality ELC provision (Wingrave, 2015; Siraj and Kingston, 2015; Dunlop, 2015). The initial driver for this was the economic imperative to encourage women into the workplace (McDonald, 2017), however more recently, the ambition to 'close the attainment gap' (Sosu and Ellis, 2014) has been a consideration. ELC in Scotland provides non-compulsory education and care for children age 0-5. These services are provided by a diverse range of settings, including local authority, private and voluntary sector settings, many of which work in partnership with local government to ensure demand is met. Within the past decade, the Scottish Government has produced a raft of initiatives, including the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008a), the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2008b) and the Standard for Childhood Practice (SCP) (SSSC, 2015), all linking to the overarching drive to increase quality in ELC provision. The Children and Young People's Act (Scotland) 2014 laid out the entitlement for all children of appropriate age, to have 600 hours of ELC; by 2020, this entitlement will be doubled to 1140 hours (Scottish

Government, 2017) in line with similar initiatives elsewhere in UK. Local authorities are required to ensure parents have choice and flexibility in accessing the statutory ELC provision (Ibid). The increased entitlement and broader understanding of the importance of children's early years have resulted in an ongoing review of legislation, policy and ELC guidance and a movement to address professionalism and leadership within the sector (Education Scotland, 2018; Education Scotland 2012; Scottish Government, 2014; Siraj and Kingston, 2015; Wingrave and McMahon 2016; SSSC, 2015). Scottish Government highlights the importance of leadership across all areas of the education workforce, and is backed up by a large body of research which links high quality leadership with high quality children's experiences and better outcomes (Mujis et al, 2004; Education Scotland 2012; Rodd, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2005).

Leaders in ELC settings must register with Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC) or General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) and adhere to each body's published professional standards (GTCS, 2012; SSSC, 2015). At present, lead practitioners who work within local authority ELC settings are not required to hold any degree-level qualifications, as the Head Teacher is deemed to be the manager of the setting. In contrast, leaders within private and voluntary sector ELC settings must achieve a relevant degree level qualification within a time-frame set out by their registering body (SSSC, online a). Leadership in ELC has become increasingly challenging in recent years as external pressures, requirement for degree level qualifications and perceived, increased levels of scrutiny have resulted in extra stress and heavier workload for managers (Forbes, 2017) while lack of change to pay and working conditions and a dearth of opportunities to progress has not matched these demands (McDonald, 2017; Forbes, 2017).

This focus implies that the professional status of the ELC workforce is under scrutiny and strategic planning underway in order to train and retain a high quality workforce in the sector. To that end, I will now consider definitions and understandings of professionalism in ELC.

2.2 Professionalism in ELC settings

In order to locate my practitioner enquiry, I aim to explore published research on leadership and professionalism in ELC. Much of the research, both internationally and in Scotland, focuses on the benefit and impact of degree-level qualifications and the importance of quality professional learning opportunities for staff (Wingrave and McMahon, 2016; Dunlop, 2008; Wingrave, 2015; Forbes, 2017, Stewart et al., 2017). To this end, professional development and academic programmes have been at the core of improvement planning in ELC in Scotland (Wingrave and McMahon, 2016). However, the upskilling and enhanced professionalism of the workforce is not, as yet, supported and understood by school career services and recruitment programmes which often recommend the least academic students to apply for the field (Ibid). The Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008) and National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2018) place emphasis on effective leadership skills and pedagogical knowledge. This is supported by Siraj and Kingston's (2015) Workforce Review which advised that ELC leaders must evidence deeper understanding of leadership practices in order to achieve the required accreditation (SSSC, 2015). While there is no doubt that professionalisation of the ELC sector may result in high quality settings and better outcomes for children (McGillivray, 2008; Osgood, 2006; Sylva et al, 2004; Siraj and Kingston, 2015), the assumption that all managers are willing and able to embark on Level 9/10 studies, often later in their careers is called into question (Forbes, 2017). This view is echoed by Taggart (2015) who addresses the potential for burnout in practitioners juggling professionalism, emotional labour and lack of status and reward (Erdiller and Dogan, 2015; Page and Elfer, 2013). Lester and Costley (2010) consider the view that university study may allow students to develop their skills, knowledge and practice beyond the level required by their ELC setting. However, they suggest that these students may soon look beyond the ELC sector in order to capitalise on the work they have put in to their degree studies and will see the degree as a stepping stone to a role with improved terms and conditions outwith ELC. The need to balance the time and motivation necessary for degree-level studies while working full-time

may also have a negative impact on the morale of ELC leaders (Aubrey et al, 2012). There exists an expectation that managers are both willing and able to take on this extra responsibility. The reality of this is masked by a lack of research into the attrition rate of leaders who step down or change job due to an unwillingness to undertake degree-level study. Following increased legislative focus on the sector as the drive to reduce the attainment gap demands evidence of results (Scottish Government, 2017b), new leaders in ELC services face growing pressures from local authority partners and inspecting bodies(Forbes, 2017), SSSC pressure to achieve appropriate qualifications (SSSC, 2015) as well as raised expectations from parents (GUS, 2016). These conditions can create professional isolation and loneliness and can be overwhelming to these novice leaders (Weindling and Earley, 1987; Earley and Bubb, 2013).

Professionalism in the sector has been analysed and defined by Brock (2012, 2013), who offers a typology encompassing skills, values, ethics, knowledge and professional development, and professionalism. This is echoed by Dalli (2008) who finds three specific areas of importance: pedagogy, professional skills and collaborative relationships. While values and passion are highlighted by EYPs (Early Years Practitioners) as paramount (Hallet, 2013), 'embodied knowledge' (Harwood et al, 2013:6) and pedagogical knowledge (Dalli, 2008) are more often considered important to leaders in the field. Oberhuemer (2005) gave voice to EYP feelings of professionalism noting the persistent division between concepts of childcare versus early education, suggesting that educators are afforded more respect than carers. Despite work to professionalise the sector, many people in society and within the education sector still believe that high quality ELC simply requires caring personalities rather than academic qualifications and professional knowledge and this can be demoralising to those striving to enact the professionalism demanded of them(McGillivray, 2008; Osgood, 2011, Harwood et al, 2013).

Taggart (2011: 85) however argues that professionalism in ELC must encompass not only a focus on education but must take into account the emotional nature of the role and embrace the 'vocabulary of care. This

aligns with the values articulated by the ELC workforce (Elfer, 2012) who support the perspective that emotional experiences underpin quality professional practice. In exploring perspectives and experiences of new ELC leaders, it is necessary to view the sector through a political lens, examining the policies underpinning the current landscape (Dunlop 2015). ELC policy and curriculum are tools which can be interpreted by practitioners and leaders to best meet the needs of children in their care. In Scotland, measures have been put in place to address this, in particular the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which enshrined the term Early Learning and Childcare in law, brokering the divide and attempting to instil an understanding of the dichotomy and importance of both aspects of the practitioner's role. While a proportion of the research into professionalism in education is inclusive of the ELC workforce, much of the literature on early experiences of leadership stems from primary and secondary leadership and comparatively little exists exploring the experiences of ELC leaders as I will now illustrate.

2.3 Leadership in Early Learning and Childcare

As previously stated, a significant body of research has informed the Scottish Government in considering leadership capacity in ELC of paramount importance to improving outcomes for children and families. However, clearly defining the concept of leadership in ELC has been more contentious. Models of leadership often stem from business or large educational institutions (Murray and McDowall-Clark, 2013), and define leaders as having particular skills and characteristics (Covey 2004; Kouzes and Posner, 2017). Often these business models are presented as appropriate for leadership in education however they may be of limited relevance to smaller educational organisations (MacBeath, 2003; Bush, 2011; Aubrey, 2011). Rodd (2006:11) defines a leader within ELC as someone 'who can influence the behaviour of others for the purpose of achieving a goal,' however Aubrey (2011) suggested that EYPs were often unprepared for their roles, and is supported by Mistry and Sood (2015) who suggest that despite their professional knowledge, EYPs may have limited opportunities for professional development in leadership.

Definitions of leadership in education often favour a distributed model (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Aubrey, 2011, Bush, 2015) which encourages leadership by a variety of people at all levels within an organisation. This in itself is paradoxical as, while regulatory bodies expect to see evidence of distributed leadership, the setting manager is ultimately accountable for quality of practice and professionalism (SSSC, 2015, benchmarks: 8, 18, 22, 23; Osgood, 2006) so cannot entirely devolve responsibilities to others. The value of distributed leadership in ELC is however supported by Davis and Smith (2012) who propose that authoritarian leadership, whereby one individual has total decision making power over a team, can obstruct improvement, invention and creativity in ELC. The Nutbrown Review (2012:55) recommends that all EYPs should aspire to leadership positions, whether as leaders of settings or of specific areas of learning and that every EYP should engage in pedagogical leadership. This is defined as leadership underpinned by an understanding of how children learn and a commitment to innovation, expertise and sharing practice (O'Sullivan, 2009; Education Scotland, 2018). This supports the view that all staff at all levels within an ELC setting have the potential to lead and that leadership responsibility should never be left as the sole concern of managers (Waniganayake, 2002:18; SSSC, 2015). This commitment to distributed leadership is evident in participant's comments as will be explored further in Chapter 4.

A precursor to distributed leadership in ELC however, is the need to build a new team (Tuckman, 1965) and develop trusting relationships within. Trust is a key ingredient of a successful education establishment, improving school culture, impacting leadership and supporting collaboration and co-operation (Northfield, 2011; Patterson and Rolheiser,2004). Bartram and Casimir (2007) echo this suggesting that team members must trust a leader before they will work to achieve the vision of the organisation. Trusting relationships within a team are a result of repeated exchanges and the development of relationships underpinned by knowledge, transparency, respect, commitment and confidentiality, among many other traits (Northfield et al, 2006; Northfield, 2014; Mishra, 1996). Northfield (2014)

describes the trust continuum as a journey through which new leaders in education must pass to develop. The trust continuum (Fig. 2.1) details the relationships between individuals in the team: in the first instance, team members trust the role of leader and assume that the legal requirements of this role will be fulfilled, this develops into trust in a leader's practice as relationships are built and actions and responses are made visible. By demonstrating effective practice, this develops into integrative trust where staff can identify the values and principles of a leader before reaching the ultimate aim of correlative trust where staff and leaders share values, understand and respect one another and therefore function more effectively as a team. This journey is explored further by participants in Chapter 4, Presentation of Findings.

Fig. 2.1 Trust Continuum (Northfield, 2014:412)

Stages of Trust	Description of the Level
Role Trust	Staff members expect the principal to function according to the prescribed role and within the legal mandate of the position including abiding by the laws, policies, and regulations that govern education and the position.
Practice Trust	After observing the principal's practice and actions, staff members can predict how a principal will respond/act in a given situation.
Integrative Trust	After observing/experiencing the actions of the principal in a multitude of situations, staff members are able to identify the underlying principles, values, and beliefs on which the principal chooses to act.
Correlative Trust	Staff members understand and share the principal's values and beliefs such that they are able to function in a mutually respectful and supportive manner.

As has been discussed, it is understandable that novice managers may find the complexity and demands of the role to be overwhelming at times, studies have found that early career leaders are often unprepared for the role and the accompanying challenges (Sackney and Walker, 2006; Mujis et al., 2004). As can be seen in section 2.4, there are clear similarities and parallels to be drawn with the early career experience of Head Teachers.

2.4 Early experiences of Head Teachers and Educational Administrators

The parallel between the experiences of Head Teachers and ELC managers is evident: both work in education and both lead teams aiming to support children and young people to achieve their potential. However, an extensive body of research has been undertaken internationally on the early experiences of leaders in schools while little has been published on the perspectives of ELC leaders early in their careers. Broadly, most of this research has been qualitative and allied to the interpretative paradigm, collecting data on the experiences, feelings and perceptions of leaders. Weindling and Dimmock (2006:326) explore the challenges faced by head teachers after taking their first headship post, investigating the positive and negative emotions inherent in 'an exciting, exhilarating, but complex and difficult experience,' and give voice to the main challenges. These include the difficulties of leading change in an established workplace culture, approaching ineffective staff members and managing the transition process from previous leadership to their own. They consider that many head teachers had on-the-job training rather than following a planned pathway, and conclude that one of the biggest challenges of new headship is that of shaping their own professional identity in the shadow of the previous incumbent's legacy. This resonates with my own experience supporting new leaders, and that of the participants in the study, where joining, and thereby creating a new team, assessing quality of provision and managing change were challenging early tests of their leadership abilities. Studies by both Earley and Bubb (2013) and Bauer and Brazer (2013) expand on this notion of leadership as an exciting but challenging journey, echoing the findings of Weindling and Dimmock (2006) but focusing on the professional loneliness, isolation and feeling of separation felt by new head teachers. Their findings intimated that no matter how strong the professional learning, preparation and experience of the new head teacher, the transition to leader requires extensive support and nurture that is specific to the individual's context and responds to the needs of their team and school. They conclude that head teachers must make time for self-evaluation and be afforded the opportunity to reflect on

practice with critical peers in order to be a successful leader. This echoes findings from this study where self-evaluation and reflection are seen to be critical to effective leadership in ELC (Kolb, 1984; Appleby and Andrews 2012; Askew and Carnell, 1998) and where loneliness and isolation were commented on as common challenges.

Similarly, Rooney (2000:1) further draws our attention to a need for professional support, delineating a set of 'survival skills' for the new principal teacher to adopt. He discusses how new leaders often feel overwhelmed and may question whether the workload and pressure is worth the effort. The survival skills suggested include: seeking mentoring, ensuring continuing professional dialogue, taking care of emotional and physical needs and committing to CLPL. Rooney (ibid) suggests that by developing these skills, new leaders can find within themselves the necessary strength to support teacher and student development in their establishments. Wildy and Clarke (2008) and Briggs et al. (2006) add to this discourse illustrating key challenges faced by novice leaders and considering different programmes of support that might to support them, before and during their first year of leadership. Within the Scottish context, support mechanisms are in place for beginning leaders within Local Authorities and through GTCS and SCEL however little formal support is available for leaders within ELC, despite calls for this to be developed (Wingrave, 2016; OECD, online a). Purdie (2014) pursues an autoethnographic approach to her insider research, investigating the key factors in the development of effective head teachers, noting the importance of mentors and high quality role models to head teachers reflecting on their journey to leadership. This resonates with findings from this study which illuminate the need for support structures and mentoring opportunities within ELC. A number of studies illuminate the professional journey from teacher-practitioner to leader. Kelly and Saunders (2010) illustrate commonality of experience in their investigation of three head teacher case studies as they focus on the first year of headship while Northfield (2014) highlights management of leadership transitions, and the effectiveness of succession planning as significant challenges. He suggests

that nurturing new relationships, supporting ongoing projects and building trust with your staff team are at the heart of transitioning to leadership in an established team, as the relationship-building stage of a new leadership position is a critical opportunity to build strong relationships which may help to solidify their role as leader.

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) consider the outcomes when practitioners are promoted within one organisation, changing from working directly with children to managing adults suggesting that this may challenge EYPs. Coleman et al (2015:1) investigated the notion of 'accidental leadership,' in children's centres, discussing the challenges inherent when leaders are promoted internally. This is common practice within ELC where managers often find themselves promoted from within with little or no leadership preparation in advance of taking on the role (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2006). SSSC registration for Managers and Lead Practitioners allows 5 years before completion of a degree-level qualification therefore many leaders may find themselves learning leadership skills 'on the job' (Yarrow, 2015; Poster and Neugebauer, 1998). Mistry and Sood (2017) examine the transition from practitioner to leader, experienced by EYPs at different stages in their careers, finding that younger practitioners who have recently achieved a degree level qualification were more equipped to take on a leadership role than more experienced practitioners whose degree studies contained little leadership training. This aligns with findings (Education Scotland, 2012) that the Scottish Childhood Practice Award is making a difference to the quality of ELC available throughout the country. In addition to research on newly promoted managers, there is a body of work examining early career teachers, considering the support and guidance they may require and examining reasons why they may leave the profession or express dissatisfaction with their work (Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Veenman, 1994). These highlight job satisfaction, high quality support networks and mentorship as effective anchors to the profession.

The ELC sector has long been undervalued and considered less important than compulsory education (Mujis et al., 2004; McGillivray, 2008). Reasons

for this include the level of qualification required to work in the sector and the non-compulsory nature of care (Sharp et al, 2012, Wingrave, 2015), however a recent focus on making Scotland 'the best place to grow up' (Scottish Government, 2014), and reducing the attainment gap (Sosu and Ellis, 2014) has allowed a renewed examination of the importance of the ELC sector and the leaders and practitioners therein. Leaders within the non-compulsory ELC sector, under the spotlight of legislative and social foci, have broadly stepped up to the requirements laid upon them by their registering body (SSSC, 2015; GTCS 2014), developed their practice, their pedagogical leadership and their understanding of the broader context in which their work is placed (Wingrave and McMahon, 2015). However, according to the research, (Forbes, 2016) this appears to be a one-way street wherein managers and leaders have stringent requirements regarding qualifications and training, yet the demands on the sector have not been met with financial support and advocacy that is afforded other sections of the Scottish education workforce. This has contributed to the high turnover of staff within the ELC sector (OECD, online b; Siraj and Kingston, 2015; Scottish Government, 2016). While a support network of mentoring and post-appointment training exists for head teachers (SCEL, online), and a framework was designed to provide ELC managers access to leadership resources (SSSC, online b), there currently exists no formal professional learning pathway available for all ELC leaders and managers in Scotland (Forbes, 2017).

2.5 Mentoring and Professional Support

Mentoring and professional support are identified as valuable structures to support individuals focused on professional development and leading change within education (CCUO, 2010; Clutterbuck, 2004; Odell and Huling, 2000). Research into mentoring within the education sector (Le Cornu, 2007; Lipton et al., 2003) illustrates the benefits that can be reaped by offering this manner of professional support to practitioners at all levels. Benefits to educators include; increased job satisfaction (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011), improvements in practice (Hagger and McIntyre, 2006), increased practitioner confidence (CCUO, 2012) and improved outcomes

for children and families (CCUO, 2012; Grossman and Thompson, 2004). Within the Scottish ELC context, the value of, and requirement to provide mentoring is expressed explicitly in the SCP benchmarks (SSSC, 2015:20):

Mentoring is also a requirement of those undertaking any study in Childhood Practice. Mentoring has been described as an approach to 'self-managed learning, empowerment and maximising the potential of individuals' (CCUO, 2012:12) and aims to support the professional development of both mentor and mentee (Healy and Welchert, 1990; Hobson et al., 2009; Lopez-Real and Kwan, 2005).

Teachers often benefit from mentoring and coaching programmes (Donaldson, 2011; Lofthouse, 2016) and these have been found to be of value to whole school communities (Crickmer, 2007). However, at the current time, ELC managers in Scotland do not benefit from formal mentoring or coaching support despite extensive research advising on the value (Wingrave, 2015; Waaland, 2017; Robins, 2006).

Alongside mentoring and coaching, other forms of professional support exist which can develop the skills of individuals and build professional learning communities of practice. Access to professional learning frameworks and learning opportunities, online and face to face forums and supportive networks in which to share practice would offer further support to the sector (Lindon and Trodd, 2016).

2.6 Women in leadership roles

Although within the findings of this practitioner enquiry, the issue of gender did not arise, when considering leadership in ELC, it is impossible to overlook the fact that almost 100% of leaders in ELC settings are women (Audit Scotland, 2018). The overwhelmingly gendered nature of ELC mean it can display particular qualities that are not common to the broader education sector. To this end, a focus on women in leadership is necessary. Current discourse around leadership in ELC suggests a deliberate move from the framing of leadership as a set of skills and abilities to leadership as a democratic and collaborative approach, build on strong relationships and a shared value system (Robson, 2013; Dunlop, 2008). A considerable

body of research investigates the nature of the female ELC workforce and their seemingly favoured 'distributed leadership' model (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2006; Osgood, 2004). Hallet (2013) investigates this further, exploring how reflective practice and shared values can drive improvements in professional practice through a collaborative or distributed leadership style. Osgood (2011) explored the notion that women's professionalism is tied up with emotional commitment and an ethic of care. She proposes that women resist being viewed as business leaders as this suggests a hierarchical, autocratic style of leadership which is at odds with the nurturing role they identify with (Osgood, 2004). Whalley (1999) agrees, suggesting that women in ELC lead through facilitation and co-operation rather than authoritatively while Robson (2013:338) takes this view further seeking new methods of interpreting ELC leadership through narrative strategies and collaborative approaches finding ultimately that women in ELC developed ethically sensitive distributed leadership practices. Through reviewing a cross-section of the literature concerning leadership and gender, it appears that ELC leaders demonstrate a particular set of behaviours and attitudes, Rodd (2006) suggests that these may be unique to the ELC sector.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter identifies the principal areas of literature relevant to my practitioner enquiry. It considers the importance of leadership in ELC, against the backdrop of Scottish legislation and guidance. It also discusses the value of professionalism in ELC and highlights research on the impact of high quality leadership on outcomes for children and families. It presents the experiences of novice head teachers and principals in schools as a parallel for the experiences of ELC leaders in order to extrapolate potential issues that may be experienced. Professional isolation and quality support mechanisms have been identified as noteworthy factors impacting the workforce and the value of mentoring and coaching programmes to counter this have been identified as a significant in comparison. Through my investigations, I uncovered relatively little research focusing on the specific experiences and perspectives of new leaders in ELC. This review of

literature has had encouraged me to believe that this practitioner enquiry could be of value and may add data to the body of work currently available.

Having outlined the literature significant to my practitioner enquiry, I will now situate the study within an appropriate paradigm.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed a range of literature within the context of my study, the following chapters will detail the findings of this research project with the aim of exploring managers' experiences of leadership and illuminating any commonality of experience. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to examine a range of paradigms, consider the methodology which best relates to this study and to outline and evaluate the research methods determined by the paradigm chosen. I will outline the approaches I will assume in this small-scale investigation, viewing my study through an ethical lens and will take in to account limitations and delimitations of the project.

Following Campbell et al (2004), I determine that my study lies within the description of 'Practitioner Enquiry.' It is a small scale investigation, which explores my own professional understanding and, as explained by Dadds (nd.), aims to create new knowledge through systematic inquiry that can be immediately put to practical use in the context of my day-to-day work (Stenhouse, 1975). Until recently, research and knowledge-creation existed predominantly within the realms of science and academia (Cohen et al. 2011; Guba, 1990). A movement encouraging practitioner enquiry in education, health and social work has encouraged professional development through reflection and self-evaluation and produced practitioners who consider their own impact on outcomes (Heron, 1996; Ragland, 2006). Stenhouse (1975) and Schon (1983) pioneered the views that reflective practitioners use research skills in their professional context every day and that they should be encouraged to investigate them ethically, systematically and with a view to changing their practice through this reflective investigation. Having reflected upon my own role in this practitioner enquiry, following Gibbs (1988), and supported by a body of research (Merton, 1972; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007 and Gallais, 2008), I determine that I will be conducting 'insider research'. In partaking in this research, I must take cognisance of the complexity and potential for bias that is inherent within (Sikes, 2006), ensure fidelity to honesty and

goodness is evident throughout (Tobin and Begley, 2004) and, in line with Clarke and Braun (2013) ensuring reflexivity as I reflect on my own role within the enquiry (Gallais, 2008). As researcher, it is possible that I will rely on knowledge and insights developed through my experiences supporting leaders and managers in ELC (Winter, 1996:18; Heron, 1996) and in light of this, I must ensure transparency and critical reflection underpins the entire process (Taylor, 2011).

3.2 Methodology

Before contemplating research methods for my enquiry, it is imperative to give consideration to the paradigm and methodology underpinning the research. According to Guba (1990:17), a paradigm is 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken with a disciplined inquiry.' Lincoln and Guba (1985:15), contend that a paradigm effectively summarises the way we should think and behave as researchers and gives the structure in which to work. This is supported by a number of theorists, including Khun (1970), Reason (1998) and Burrell and Morgan (1979:23) who view a research paradigm as a set of rules and approaches designed to influence theorists and researchers. Khun (1970, 1977) informs us that all research must take place within a paradigm which he describes as a research culture defined by commonality of purpose. Indeed, Denzin and Giardina (2017), suggest that in the current research field, paradigms are being reinvented and changing faster than ever, and much debate rages about the dichotomy between positivist and interpretivist approaches of methodology and the quantitative versus qualitative methods (Holloway and Galvin, 2017:22). Due to fields of enquiry experiencing constant change, and the appearance of new fields of study, e.g. hybrid sciences, big data, digital analytics, 'new geographies of knowledge' are emerging (Denzin and Giardina, 2017:7) and global communities of researchers must support paradigms to adapt and evolve in order to support this. Within the field of practitioner enquiry, it is critical that researchers understand and objectively assess the range of paradigms and choose a theoretical framework in order to appropriately situate their work (Weaver and Olson, 2006; Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

3.3 Spectrum of Paradigms

Within the wide spectrum of competing paradigms, the two extremes are considered to be Positivism and Interpretivism (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cresswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Burrell and Morgan (1979), argue that the paradigm will directly influence the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the research. In practice, ontology refers to the nature of truth and reality in our research, epistemology, to our relationship with the knowledge we are exploring and axiology to the role of values inherent in our work (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:108). Researchers must interrogate these philosophical questions in order to position an enquiry within an appropriate paradigm and determine suitable research methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018; Creswell et al., 2007).

3.3.1 Positivism

The positivist paradigm can be described as a search for a single truth, believing that reality is fixed and the individual researcher is immaterial to the outcomes (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). This paradigm is based upon the belief that reality is stable and that a singular truth can be found and verified (Mertens, 2005; Somekh and Lewin, 2008). The ontology of this approach means that positivist researchers aim to formulate, then measure or prove a hypothesis in order to demonstrate a singular understanding of the world, often using quantitative methods that are easily replicated in order to provide verification of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Trochim, 2006).

Within the positivist paradigm, the axiology determines that the researcher is assumed to be objective and unbiased and their values, opinions and personal feelings to have no bearing on the results of their research (Cohen et al., 2011; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The epistemology determines that the research simply presents a record of the results obtained without interpretation from the researcher, the objectivity of the investigator is paramount and no relationship with the researched is considered.

A 'top down,' deductive approach to research underpins the positivist paradigm (Campbell et al., 2004:4). This method of reasoning is based on

scientific principles and moves from the creation of a hypothesis, to the collection and examination of data and finally, the confirmation of results using specific observations and analyses (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Traditionally, a deductive approach requires the collection of quantitative data and demands that the researcher is totally independent of the research.

3.3.2 Interpretivism

The opposite end of the paradigm continuum is interpretivism. Holloway and Galvin (2017) consider interpretivism to be concerned with the notion that there is no single truth and that there are as many meanings as there are individuals. Guba and Lincoln (1994) attest that reality is a social construction and that each individual produces their own individual reality and thereby their own individual truth. The ontology of the interpretivist paradigm therefore considers that there is not one singular truth and that experiences exist relative to their context. Proponents of the interpretive paradigm indicate that within this paradigm, no theory can ever be confirmed (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Walsham, 2006). Researchers within the interpretive paradigm predominantly use qualitative methods to understand, interpret and re-present the 'lived experiences' of individuals (Holloway and Galvin, 2017:3). This determines the epistemology of the paradigm, as the researcher has a relationship with the researched and will be subjective, viewing findings through their own lens (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005:270; Somekh and Lewin, 2005). This also illuminates the role of values within the interpretive paradigm, axiologically, the research provides data that can never be free from interpretation by the researcher and therefore cannot be value-free. The interpretive approach has an emphasis on 'bottom-up,' inductive reasoning (Campbell et al., 2004:4). This propels the research from specific observations to a search for patterns and finally to the development of theory or ideas. Within interpretivism, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), the understandings of each individual are of paramount importance and their shared experiences should directly impact the nature and

direction of the research and results. The results of any research will be valid only within their own context.

3.4 Positioning my research

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the choice of paradigm frames the research and allows the researcher to make appropriate decisions about the methods used while Dadds (nd:2) suggests that being transparent about the beliefs held evidences the 'philosophical validity' of the research. By considering the ontology, epistemology and axiology of my own practitioner research, I aim to situate my own research within the most appropriate paradigm (Weaver and Olson, 2006; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Although no one methodology relates to practitioner research, or is considered to be superior (Cohen et al., 2011) social science research most often lies within an interpretive paradigm due to its concern with people and their experiences (Holloway and Galvin, 2017). My practitioner enquiry aims to uncover the feelings, perceptions and experiences of a group of ELC managers. Ontologically, there can be no single truth when eliciting the knowledge and experiences of a group of diverse individuals (Guba, 1990) and I must be prepared for myriad understandings to be disclosed (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, I consider that participants will be engaged in creating and exploring their own knowledge, in addition, my own previous knowledge and understanding of the experiences of the participants and their roles will shape my interpretation of the findings. Axiologically, following Clarke and Braun (2013) I value the experiences and perspectives of the participants and aim to honourably share their contributions.

Following Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) and having analysed the ontology, axiology and epistemology of my research, I believe it to be best situated within the interpretivist paradigm. I intend taking an inductive approach to the research and can now consider data collection and analysis through the lens of interpretivism.

3.5 Methods – Data Collection

Lincoln and Guba (1989:227) suggest that interpretive research is concerned with exploring the notion that there are 'multiple and divergent

truths' built by social actors based on their own experiences. Within the ontological parameters of the interpretive paradigm, the predominant aim is to develop an understanding of the participants, their individual truths and their lived experiences and ultimately to amplify their voices (Forde-Gilboe et al, 1995). The aim of my practitioner enquiry is to investigate commonality of experience between participants and explore how the participants feel about their early experiences of leadership within the ELC sector. Only primary, qualitative data has been collected (Erikan and Roth, 2006) which allowed descriptive, contextual evaluation and the production of 'thick' or detailed data (Holloway and Galvin, 2017:7).

Initially, participants were recruited, who are currently or who have recently worked as managers in ELC settings. These managers come from establishments I have worked with during my professional role as Professional Learning Officer for a national ELC charity. The participants come from a range of professional backgrounds. Participants were contacted by email and invited to participate in two online discussion groups. In the email, I enclosed a Plain Language Statement (PLS) and Consent Forms (Appendices 2, 3), requesting that they were returned within two weeks. The first eight participants who responded were then invited to take part in the research. Although there is no ideal number of participants, Holloway and Wheeler (2013) suggest that eight participants can provide rich data if they inhabit the same area of speciality and knowledge. I wrote to the other invitees, thanking them for considering my invite informing them that I had met my target.

Two online discussion forums were provided where participants were able to chat anonymously about their experiences as a manager in an ELC setting. I aimed to construct 'collaborative knowledge' (Moanes, 2016:88) allowing participants to discuss and exchange information, and comment on each other's input. Im and Chee (2006) contest that password-protected internet forums are safer than other types of online research and that online discussion groups offer credibility and dependability through their high participant response rates and the automatic transcription of participants' comments. All participants were invited to engage in both

forums. Each forum was open for four hours during an evening and participants were provided with a login to the forum and asked to join in a discussion while the forum was open. The forums were asynchronous in order that participants were able to join in at a time and in a place that suited them best (Fawcett and Buhle, 1995). The participants come from a geographically wide area. With this in mind, an asynchronous online forum was chosen as, viewing methods through an ethical lens, it was felt that this would be the most straightforward means for participants to take part in a collaborative discussion while demonstrating respect for their time and personal commitments. Further, research suggests online forums can also provide opportunities for participants to engage in social interaction and collaboration, and to negotiate personal interpretations and develop a richer understanding of the subject matter (Gao et al., 2013; Markel, 2001). Following their participation, a number of participants commented on the forum as a valuable tool which enabled them to take part in the project without having to travel from their geographically diverse workplaces.

Participants were given a code to use instead of their name in order to protect their identity and provide anonymity, thereby ensuring confidentiality was afforded them during and after the research. The discussion forums were held two weeks apart in order to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on the initial discussion and clarify any input they wished and for the data to be reviewed. By taking part in an online forum, participants transcribed their own input. While no clarification of a transcription was necessary (as in a face-to-face discussion) misinterpretation of meaning was still possible. In order to mitigate against this, and in line with Braun and Clarke (2006) and Poynter (2010), participants were offered the opportunity to revisit their input and change or clarify data before analysis took place.

A selection of 'prompt' questions were prepared (Appendix 1) in order to start a discussion. Participants were encouraged to share their ideas and experiences with others and respond to questions and comments made by other participants. During this, I monitored the entire discussion remotely and in real time. In line with the paradigm, I assumed that discussions were

concerned with individuals' lived experiences and personal understandings (Putman, 1983; Cohen et al, 2011) and that honest reflective discussion of these would provide credible data (Barbour, 2005). Face to face discussion groups may face challenges regarding confidentiality and group dynamics however, concerns have been raised that online data collection presents its own challenges, including the elimination of non-verbal data and the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of information shared (Stephens, 2007). It is possible however, that quieter participants may be more willing to join in and less likely to be intimidated during discussions thereby providing richer results (Christopher et al., 2004; Holt, 2010) and communications before and during the forums supported this with all participants taking part enthusiastically in the debate and one participant suggesting that regular anonymised discussion groups would be a welcome support to her in her professional role. Anderson and Kanuka (1997) support this opinion, suggesting that safe online discussion groups are easy to monitor and will provide a level of confidentiality and anonymity for participants, which can allow a degree of comfort if there are any discussions of delicate issues (Kramish et al, 2001).

Although, some argue that online forums precipitate more in-depth discussion (Hawkes, 2006, Preece, 2000), other researchers have reported that interactions are less meaningful, the subtleties of communication are lost and that some participants would only give their own ideas and views without engaging or responding to those of others (Larson and Keiper, 2002). I aimed to mitigate this by using effective facilitation skills (Dennen, Delahunty, 2018; Andresen, 2009), and by careful use of question types (Bradley et al., 2008). During the ODGs, participants did engage with each other answering and responding to questions and prompts and rich data was accrued due to this extended discussion (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

3.6 Analysis of Data

Thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used in order to identify themes and patterns within my research findings. The process was broken down into six clear stages (ibid) which encourage rigorous analysis of data. This allowed me to identify patterns within the

research data. In choosing themes that reside within the data, I, as researcher, become a tool for data collection (Holloway and Galvin, 2017:4). As such, my relationship with the participants, rapport, evaluation and interpretation of their input demands critical subjectivity (Etherington, 2004) and self-awareness in order to limit any distortion of the data through personal bias, indeed subjectivity and reflexivity are considered essential to qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Thematic analysis encourages organisation of data and allows us to effectively interpret the subject being researched (Boyatzis, 1998). Clarke and Braun (2013:121) have identified thematic analysis as an ideal approach for new or inexperienced researchers, as its practical approach enables 'leaning by doing'.

In considering the analysis of qualitative data, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) suggest participants are encouraged to review and extend their input, in doing so, creating research that is valid, transparent and ethically 'good'. A body of research (Silverman, 2012; Corden and Sainsbury 2006) supports this, stating that when participants are afforded the chance to change or extend their contributions, the data becomes more authentic. As there were two phases to my research, I considered the initial findings following the first online forum and completed some preliminary analysis before carrying out the second online forum. I shared my findings with the participants in order that they could clarify or reconsider their input and responses. Following this, I coded the responses to the online discussion groups (ODGs), see Fig. 4.2. The coding was administered to the data within the ODGs, after which codes were grouped thematically in order to analyse commonalities and differences in the responses. The systematic coding and analysis of the data ensured that each participant's input was valued (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and used in the final write-up of findings.

3.7 Limitations and delimitations of the research

While planning this research, potential limitations of the study were taken into consideration. This evidenced transparency to participants and allowed me to risk-assess and mitigate any concerns. Limitations are issues

that arise within the practitioner enquiry that are outwith the control of the researcher (Simon and Goes, 2011).

As anticipated, a range of limitations affected the outcomes. Group size, remote location and busy work lives of the participants had an impact on the research, a spell of unseasonably good weather prompted one participant to take a last minute holiday and therefore was not available to join the discussion groups, and others found their ability to take part was limited due to unexpected plans or forgetfulness.

As discussed, an online forum was used to carry out the research, allowing participants who live in remote areas of the country to take part without having to travel to a central location. This however, relied on participants remembering to take part at the appropriate times when the forum is open and engaging effectively with the online discussion (Im and Chee 2006). A high degree of computer literacy was essential in the group as well as a commitment to make time for the procedure. Sikes (2006) identifies the possibility of research participants having other priorities, such as family or work at the time of the data gathering and being unavailable, despite their original commitment to take part. I attempted to overcome this by ensuring regular communication with participants. I emailed them to remind them of the time and date a week before and a day before each forum. I followed these reminders up with a text message the morning of and an hour before the forum opened. This was a non-invasive way to ensure they were prompted to join the online forums without disturbing their working and home lives significantly. A body of research (Im and Chee, 2006; Redlich-Amirav and Higginbottom, 2014) assessed the limitations of online forums and identify absent-mindedness as one of the most prevalent, along with issues of security and trustworthiness. This resonates with my own experience where one potential participant 'forgot' to join in, despite regular reminders. Another limitation is the possibility that practitioners will leave the sector or get new jobs during the research process. This occurred during the ethics application process and affected the project time-management as new participants had to be recruited late in the research process.

Delimitations define the scope and boundaries of the research and are a direct result of the decisions made by the researcher (Simon and Goes, 2011). In my practitioner enquiry, I have deliberately limited the participants to ELC leaders I have worked with and know to be computer literate and interested in taking part in the study. I have also limited the sample to leaders in the non-compulsory sector in order that they and I can reflect on the specific responsibilities they are placed under both within their job and through registration requirements of their registration body (SSSC).

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount within the interpretive paradigm and must permeate all aspects of the research due to the focus on individuals and their lived experiences (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007). During the research, I focused on ethics on two levels. The first is the understanding that 'goodness' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018; Tobin and Begley, 2004) must be evident throughout the research project, and the second, that the regulatory requirements of the University of Glasgow's ethics department must be adhered to.

3.8.1 Goodness

Tobin and Begley (2004:391) assert that the concept of goodness must be an all-encompassing principle that must permeate an entire qualitative research project. They are supported by Arminio and Hultgren (2002) who identify six distinct areas of a qualitative research project where 'goodness' is found. These include the approach taken, the collection of data and the interpretation of the views of those participating. According to Dzurec (1989) and Weaver and Olson (2006), values and ethics within research are of the utmost importance, particularly in light of the relationship between the participants and researcher when undertaking research within the interpretive paradigm. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2002, 2007) follow this view placing ethics as an overarching consideration and one of three tenets of quality for any practitioner enquiry. Groundwater Smith and Mockler (2007) published five guidelines demanding adherence to appropriate protocols, commitment to transparency, evidence of

collaboration, visible creation of outcomes and a commitment to openness and engagement with one's community of practice. In viewing my practitioner enquiry through an ethical lens, I aim to follow their criteria for ensuring quality in my research. In adhering to these guidelines, I must ensure my research is good from a moral perspective as well as high quality (Sikes: 2006:106). Axiologically, I also aim to ensure that my practitioner research reflects not only my values and moral purpose but also those aligned to the sector (Fullan, 1993; Dadds, nd). Within the interpretive paradigm, and during my practitioner enquiry, it is important to establish a trusting relationship between the participants and myself in order to create high quality research (Toma: 2000). Further, Toma (2000) indicates that subjective researchers must embrace the iterative nature of research and use their relationships to fully develop the data. These close relationships demand a high degree of ethical awareness. My knowledge of the participants and their backgrounds means there is the potential for bias or assumptions being made (Mercer, 2007; Winter, 1996) and I must be careful to adhere to the guidelines as discussed above in order to ensure maximum transparency and authenticity. I do not work in the same organisations as the participants and have no defined power relationship over them, however, the participants are members of the organisation I work for and I support, mentor and deliver training to them so it is possible that they will perceive an asymmetric relationship with me (Smyth and Holian, 2008).

In order to moderate this, I have followed University of Glasgow ethical guidelines, ensuring, through use of PLS and Consent Forms, as well as all other communications that participants understand their participation is entirely voluntary and they can withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reason. They will be assured that if this occurs, it will not affect our working relationships in any way. According to Groundwater Smith and Mockler (2007) it is vital that contributors are offered the opportunity to alter or extend the data they provide at any time. To this end, they will be offered opportunities to review their input and my initial findings and clarify any points they wish to. The wellbeing and

confidentiality of participants is paramount and every discretion will be afforded them in order to ensure anonymity within the data.

3.8.2 University of Glasgow Ethical Guidelines

The second ethical consideration is to ensure compliance with BERA (British Educational Research Association) and University of Glasgow's ethical requirements. 'Do no harm,' is the paramount principle with which all research must comply (Cohen et al 2007: 58) as research is neither 'neutral or innocent practice' and has the power to impact those who are involved as well a far wider audience (Sikes, 2006:105). To ensure this principle is strictly adhered to, University of Glasgow has a rigorous ethical review process under which all proposed research must comply. I have completed an application to the Ethics Board which has been reviewed in accordance with University of Glasgow requirements and found to be compliant. This application was approved the School of Education Ethics Committee allowing me to carry out the research and approving the methods proposed.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has defined the concept of practitioner enquiry and situated this project within. It has detailed the methodology and methods considered, interrogated two contrasting paradigms, positivist and interpretivist, and outlined where this research lies. The project plan has been described, detailing how the data was collected and analysed and an explanation of the ethical considerations and processed followed given. Following completion of the data collection, the ideas generated from the data have been linked to theory and in the following chapter, I present my research findings.

Chapter 4 Presentation of Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this research study and offer an analysis of the data accrued. It aims to explore participants' input and illuminate three significant themes that appear to reside within the data. The potential impact that may emerge from the enquiry will be discussed before going on to evaluate implications for my professional practice.

As described in 3.4, the study enlisted the support of eight leaders in ELC who were willing to discuss their early career experiences in a leadership position however only seven were ultimately able to attend the discussion groups. Each ODG featured a different cross-section of members due to scheduling and availability of participants.
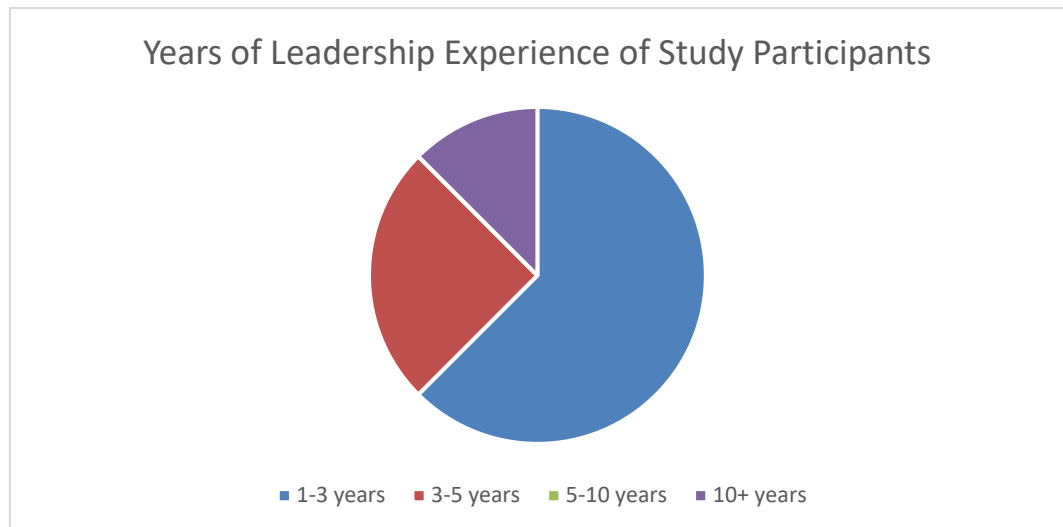
Fig 4.1 Leadership Experience of Study Participants

The participants in this study varied with regard to the level of leadership knowledge and experience they held, as can be seen in Figure 4.1. In light of this, all participants were asked to reflect on the initial stages of their career as an ELC leader through expressing their 'Journey to Leadership'. This illustrated that participants had experienced different pathways to their leadership roles and came from diverse sectors (see Fig 4.2).
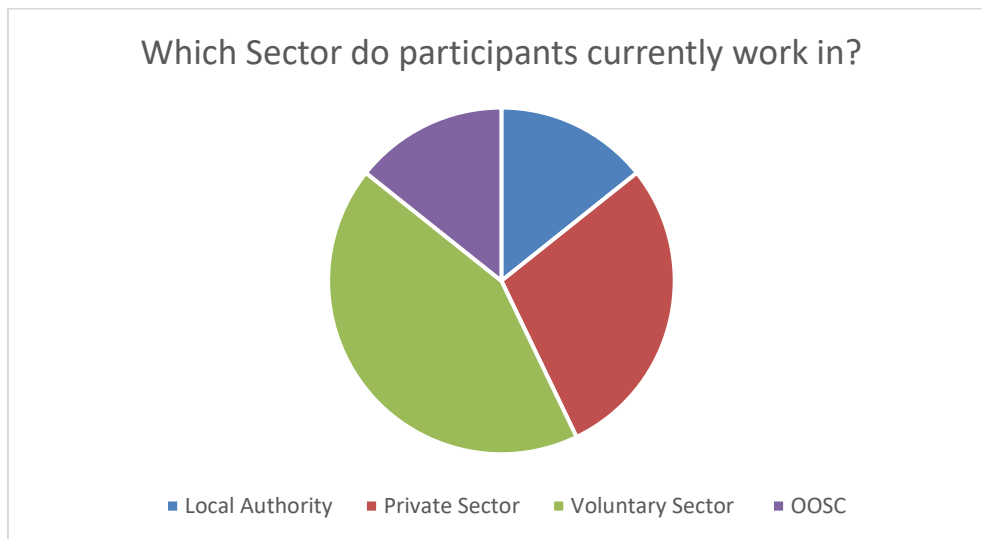
Fig 4.2 Workforce Analysis

Four participants had trained in ELC immediately after finishing high school and had enjoyed long careers in the sector, while three others had worked or volunteered at their child's setting and 'fallen' into the career as a second or third career. Coleman et al. (2015) suggest that the training and development needs of participants from these varying backgrounds are different and is supported by Mistry and Sood (2012) who agree that 'accidental leaders' require a different approach to leadership development than those who have taken a more deliberate route to management, and require individual support and bespoke professional learning opportunities. In common with many female leaders in education, few of the participants had planned a career in leadership (Coleman, 2007; Purdie, 2014) and this was reflected in the discussions.

As previously discussed, online discussion forums can be limited, in that participants cannot discern nuance through reading body language and facial expressions while online (Stephens, 2007). They can however provide anonymity and safety, allowing participants to speak freely and express their views in the knowledge that they would not be personally judged based on the statements they made, offering an authenticity and honesty of experience (Johnson, 2010). As researcher, I prompted the participants using selected questions in order to facilitate discussion, however, following Holloway and Wheeler (2013), was careful to allow the discussion to ensue without interruption from me whenever possible. Further,

following Kirkby et al (2006), and consistent with the iterative process of the interpretivist paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), I allowed the discussions to follow directions that were not anticipated or planned, showing respect for the experiences and perspectives of the participants.. As reported in the review of literature, and echoed by participants, novice leaders in education report facing a range of key challenges early in their careers (Wildy and Clarke, 2008; Briggs et al 2006) and these will be explored further throughout this chapter.

4.2 Themes emerging from Discussion Groups

Marshall and Rossman (2011:207) purport that analysis of qualitative findings is a 'messy ambiguous, time consuming, creative and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion: it is not neat.' To this end, following Braun and Clarke (2006), I sought clarity and substance in the findings by analysing the data collected through a process of thematic analysis. In keeping with the iterative nature of the interpretive paradigm (Miles et al., 2014; Kim, 1999; Srivastava and Hopwood 2009), the findings were presented to the participants for confirmation and if necessary, alteration or clarification before being published (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Further, in light of the paradigm, Holloway and Wheeler (2013) note that any findings will be available and open to individual interpretation by anyone who reads or analyses them and are not limited to this researcher's interpretation. All discussion group responses were grouped into emergent themes related to the experiences and perspectives participants discussed (see Figure 4.2).

Coding and Themes

Discussions	Individual Codes Arising	Themes Emerging
• Your journey to leadership • Inspiring leaders you have worked with • Perceptions of the ELC sector • Meeting your team for the first time • Setting priorities • Specific challenges • Support available • Happiness in your job • Work/Life balance • Trust in your team • Effective Leadership • What advice would you give? • Professional Learning • Professional Isolation • Empowering others • Managing change	• PL – Professional loneliness • IV – Importance of values • EI – Emotional intensity • CP – Challenging practice • TB – Team building • PR – Professional relationships • C@C – Child at the centre • TS – Trust • MC – Managing change • R – Respect • PD – Professional development • EIL – Emotional intelligence • AL – Accidental leadership • IV – Articulation of values • GW – Gendered workplace	• Emotional Intensity and professional isolation • Team Building: Developing trusting relationships • Personal development • Importance of Values in ELC

Figure 4.3 Data Analysis Codes and Themes

Prompt questions (Appendix 1) were offered to participants and their interpretation of the questions and subsequent discussions were analysed through an inductive process seeking patterns, commonalities and differences of experience. As illustrated in Figure 4.3, discussions centered around sixteen interconnected subjects initially informed by the prompt questions. Statements made by participants were then broken down, analysed and assigned individual codes according to content before being grouped together into distinct themes (Braun and Clarke, 2007), fifteen codes were identified. These were considered in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the iterative nature of the paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and three granular themes were identified in the research data:

- The importance of developing trust within a new team
- Personal development in a leadership role
- The emotional intensity and professional isolation experienced by early career leaders

Although these three coherent themes are evident, the importance of values underpinning practice of leaders and decision-makers in ELC is

evident throughout ODG1 and 2, in the comments of all participants, and throughout the data, as is exemplified by this comment…

> 'Lead kindly and be as supportive of everyone in the team as you can be. You'll have a happier team that achieve more if they all feel valued'.
> (P1, ODG2, D12)

Denscombe (2014: 243) suggests that in order to accurately reflect themes arising in a dataset, the data must be described, analysed and interpreted by the researcher. The following interpretation comes in light of my immersion in the data and frames the content of this chapter.

4.3 Presentation of Findings

I will now offer my interpretation of the findings co-constructed with the participants, in line with Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2007:205) ethical guidelines. The findings from the research reinforce the need to provide more advice and support for novice leaders in ELC and highlight the emotional intensity felt by the participants in the early stages of their careers. I will discuss the three main themes, offering supporting evidence from the two ODGs.

4.4 Building trust within the team

A body of evidence, (Rodd, 2006, 2015; Siraj and Kingston, 2015) argues that effective team working is essential in ELC in order to build a community with shared values, and evident professionalism and to ensure high-quality services for children and families. This is recognised within the SCP (SSSC, 2015) which explicitly requires managers to develop a culture of collaboration and distributed leadership (Rodd, 2015; Siraj and Kingston, 2015; Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003). When discussing their first meeting with their team and the preparation done for this, the need to develop a sense of community within a new ELC team was articulated by one participant…

> I think it's really important for staff to see that you join in, value their input (really, not just lip service) and that its ok to make mistakes… it makes a safe environment for everyone to collaborate and learn.(P1, ODG1, D4)

Participants expressed the need to be inclusive and embrace a distributed leadership approach (Jones, 2005; Aubrey, 2011, Rodd, 2015) in order to build relationships, ensure everyone feels valued and ultimately to develop leadership capacity across the team (SSSC, 2016b) with this comment being indicative of participants' views…

> Honesty is very important and giving everyone the chance to speak their mind/give their opinion and listening to what they say. Sometimes you have to run with something even if you are not initially sure yourself as it's about teamwork. (P3, ODG1, D3)

Carter (2000), supports this need for effective teamwork, highlighting that practitioners must have sensitive, visionary managers who provide trust, resources, and when necessary, support to allow them to effectively perform their roles. This illustrates my earlier argument in the literature review, that building trusting relationships with the established staff team is key to success as a leader. This will be explored further in section 4.4.1.

4.4.1 Trusting relationships

In my experience supporting new leaders, the first few weeks in post are critical to establishing a culture of openness and trust. Baier (1986:234) determines that 'we notice trust as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted'; participants agreed with one commenting on the importance of building trust and the dangers of losing it.

Browning, (2014: 397) cites ten key practices which must be developed by leaders within a successful educational establishment to build effective teams and gain the trust of their colleagues. These practices echo those articulated by participants during ODG1 and ODG2. They include keeping confidences, mentoring and coaching staff, being honest about own performance and being consultative in decision-making.

The discussion group identified the need to develop trust early in their leadership careers. There was also a consensus from participants who articulated the need to model their principles and beliefs and ensure all

staff feel valued in order to develop practice and integrative trust (see Fig 2.1) as is illustrated in Vignette 1.

> I think being fair and professional. Standing up for what I believe in and just generally showing I can cope with the job. (P1, ODG2, D10)

> I think in the beginning, you have to build the trust of your colleagues by being as open and transparent as possible... always listen to what they have to say. (P3, ODG2, D10)

> ...they were involved in the decision making and given the respect they deserve as people with skills and knowledge, I always believe things are stronger when looked at with different perspectives. (P5, ODG1, D5)

Vignette 1 - Developing Trust

The introduction of a new leader, along with any changes to environment or practice they may encourage can bring with it the challenge of gaining the trust of staff but also can provoke further issues as will be discussed throughout this chapter. Change has been highlighted as a potential challenge for any educational organisation (Education Scotland, 2016; SSSC, 2015; Patterson and Rolheiser, 2004) and the arrival of a new leader can promote significant changes as is illustrated in the following analysis.

4.4.2 Teambuilding through change management

How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare? (Education Scotland, 2016) is the self-evaluation framework designed for the ELC sector. It features a particular focus on leadership and management, including indicator 1.3, Leadership of Change. Through a body of research, (Askew and Carnell, 1998; Appleby and Andrews, 2012; Fullan, 2002; Lukacs, 2015) there exists an understanding that effective management of change is a crucial skill in an ELC leader, and that critical reflective practice must underpin this. In Vignette 2, participants reflect on the challenges they felt in building a new team.

I wanted them to be part of a new journey and have my visions influencing them but at the same time let them feel valued to continue the new journey alongside me. (P2, ODG1, D4)
I too have tried to manage change slowly, at least in the beginning. I think my team have become more open to trying new ways as time goes on but I have one particular member I still have to pace myself with. (P3, ODG2, D16)
… practitioners must have an understanding themselves about why change is necessary. We are trying to create an environment where practitioners are ready for change and are part of the changes in our nursery. (P6, ODG2, D16)
My latest role involved a lot of 'fixing in the first year to meet requirements of Care Inspectorate and building relationships with the team who were very unwilling to accept change. (P4, ODG1, D5)
I wanted to establish a vision that all staff were involved in developing. We researched this together, looking at visions, values and rationales from different settings… looking at current practices and modernising our approaches and thinking. (P5, ODG1, D5)

Vignette 2 Team-building and Change Management

Introducing change is rarely straightforward, Fullan (2005) contends that downwards innovations are not effective and that leaders must ensure their team members are fully engaged as partners in order to achieve effective change. As can be seen, there was a consensus that change must come about through collaborative practice (Ephgrave 2018) and valuing the knowledge and competency of those around.

As is illustrated in Vignette 2, challenging and modelling practice and creating an enabling environment for colleagues are seen as core responsibilities of a leader in ELC (SSSC, 2015; McDowall-Clark and Baylis, 2012). Changing ingrained practice and encouraging criticality and reflective practice, while necessary, (McDowall-Clark and Baylis, 2012; Appleby, 2010; Appleby and Andrews, 2012) can be challenging to introduce. A number of participants described having issues with ingrained culture, echoing the findings of Purdie's (2015) research into the early experiences of head teachers with one sharing…

> Previous management discouraged projects and had a very
> negative impact on the team… I would like to work alongside

staff to enable them to feel confident in themselves to take on
new challenges and follow their interests. (P6, ODG2, D15)

Patterson and Rolheiser (2004: 2) discuss the challenge of 're-culturing' an organisation offering a framework of strategies that may support change management. These include developing a positive working environment underpinned by values and care, collaborative working and building distributed leadership. Leading the team to develop the values and vision of a setting is seen to be a core leadership responsibility (SSSC, 2015; Gronn, 2003; Education Scotland, 2016). It was clear from discussions that participants had to create similar strategies in order to impact the dynamic of their teams and to drive forward improvements…

Building those relationships is at the heart of management. I think… creating shared values and aspirations for the setting and the children is really important. (P1, ODG1, D5)

The development of a new team is paralleled by the extensive personal development participants experienced in their first months and years as a leader in ELC, as will be explored in the following analysis.

4.5 Leadership Development

Developing as a leader is a personal and professional journey particular to each individual (Mistry and Sood, 2012). Participants discussed their working history reflecting on what led them to pursue a role as ELC leader. They focused on the importance of professionalism to their self-image and on the value of mentoring and coaching they had experienced.

4.5.1 Professionalism

Taking responsibility for personal development is one of the tenets of professionalism in ELC (SSSC, 2015; GTC, 2012). This is evidenced by the professional standard for the ELC workforce in Scotland (SSSC, 2015) which requires that leaders in ELC take responsibility for their own professional development and that of the staff they are responsible for. Discussions centered on the meaning of professionalism in ELC and participants agreed that the responsibility is incumbent on the leader to support all staff to

achieve and develop their professional status and knowledge as illustrated in Vignette 3.

'I'll be by their side but they will be taking responsibility for things like planning... this is essential for them to further develop' (P2, ODG2, D15)
Developing the practitioners to be more ambitious in their expectations for the children. (P1, ODG1, D5)
...The more you do in your role, the more you want to do... as, if you love the job, you just want to do better and better and this in turn creates more vital work. (P2, ODG1, D3)
'I have tried in the past to encourage others to take the lead, however this hasn't been successful. In hindsight, I think I chose the wrong people...I think you accept that you are always learning too and that's ok. ' (P2, ODG2, D15)

Vignette 3 – Professional Development

The final comment indicates that a deeper understanding of reflective practice and a serious commitment to consider honestly one's own role and responsibilities as a leader may be needed by some novice leaders. Leadership is more than simply taking responsibility for the setting but about developing the setting in every way. Dalli (2008) and McMillan and Walsh (2011) support this, adding that ELC leaders must evidence their professionalism using specialist knowledge, collaborative working practices and pedagogical leadership and professional standards.

Osgood (2011) defined professionalism in ELC as passion for the role and a deep commitment to service users, yet, EYPs have in the past been observed to devalue their profession, whether through lack of confidence in their skills or lack of professional body to be associated with (Moyles, 2001; Harwood et al., 2013). Professionalism requires more than knowledge of the sector, but also controlled entry to the professional body, (Fromberg, 1997) a role absorbed by SSSC as they implemented the SCP (SSSC, 2015) and the Codes of Practice for practitioners (SSSC, 2016a).

One participant commented on this comparing their current leadership role to that of practitioner...

> When I first became a practitioner, I thought it was solely about the experiences for the children. This is still the case but I now have a better understandings of everything that goes along with it in the background. (P5, ODG1, D3)

Participants reflected on the ways in which they conceptualise themselves as professionals in comparison with how others' view them, being of the view that others outwith the sector, including parents, carers and other educators had little understanding of the importance of their role and that these perceptions often devalued the ELC staff. They intimated that the perception of them as 'only looking after the weans' (Mooney and McCafferty, 2005:1) persists and that there still exists an assumption that they are focused purely on babysitting rather than care and education. Day et al. (2008) found that head teachers who nurtured staff through distributed leadership responsibilities, enabled collegiality and focused on relationships were found at the helm of high-quality establishments with excellent outcomes for children. This collegiate approach was echoed by one participant as a key route to excellence and respect…

> I think one of the most rewarding things for me… has been seeing the changes I have implemented, grow and develop… getting good feedback from parents and other professionals… and observing the impacts we have had on the children's learning and development. (P5, ODG1, D8)

While nurturing professionalism and working to develop their staff teams, managers can find support for their own role to be in short supply.

4.5.2 Mentoring

Colleagues and line managers often serve as role models for practitioners as they develop their careers (Lofthouse, 2016). While mentoring is rarely formalised, in Vignette 4, participants reflected on those who inspired them and whose influence they aspire to echo within their own practice.

> I've worked with a flexible, compassionate team who taught me about valuing the workforce and it's something I've carried all through my career. I also aspire to be like some of the old school nursery heads I worked with as a student... advocates for the families at all times. (P4, ODG1, D2)

> She truly inspired me with her love for the children but also the trust and responsibility she gives the children. This really made me reflect on my own practice and changes have since been put into place for the children to have their voice heard. (P7, ODG1, D2)

> Her calm, nurturing nature...inspired me... she pushed me to do my best and progress and develop. (P2, ODG1, D2)

Vignette 4 – Mentors and Role Models

This discussion evidences the potential impact of a mentor on their practice, however not everyone who participated had the opportunity to learn from knowledgeable and experienced colleagues and this was reflected upon as a potential area for development and improvement. The participants in the discussion group understood that being self-aware, and developing reflective practice (Schon, 1983) are both valuable and required skills for ELC leaders (SSSC, 2015; Hughes and Menmuir, 2002) and some expressed that the support of a mentor would have been valued in their first months as ELC leader. However, whilst the need for mentoring and the desire for professional development was discussed by participants, I had anticipated a more prolonged discussion about the benefits of these. Given that much discussion centered around professional isolation perhaps the role of mentor or coach needs further consideration. A number of participants expressed that the safety and anonymity of an online group gave them confidence to share their experiences in a way that other social media chatrooms do not and that they enjoyed the collaborative experience. Given than the participants enjoyed and felt benefit from the chat room perhaps this is a form of mentoring that would allow new managers a forum to discuss problems and receive supportive feedback. In my role as facilitator of professional learning, the implications for practice are wide. Understanding the isolation and lack of available support leads

me to consider new and innovative forms of professional learning that may address this perceived shortfall (see Chapter 5 Recommendations).

4.6 Professional Isolation

Weindling and Earley (1987:121) in their study of new secondary head teachers, suggested that a sense of isolation and loneliness is inherent in the post of senior leader, particularly where public scrutiny requires that quality is ultimately the responsibility of an individual, as can be seen in Vignette 5.

It can be lonely, I have a great team but you still have to make the final decision on things. It can be hard juggling everyone's needs and trying to make sure everyone is happy. (P1, ODG2, D14)

I can relate to you feeling lonely in the beginning... there were times I felt completely overwhelmed with some of the paperwork but knew it was down to me to do it. (P3, ODG1, D6)

I was a bit like a rabbit in the headlights for the first few months. Everything is so new that at first it's information overload... There should be more training for a new-to-role manager. (P3, ODG1, D1)

Vignette 5 Loneliness

These responses illustrate a commonality of experience across the participants' responses. Feeling overloaded in the early stages of a career reflects the experiences of leaders across education services (Flintham, 2003; Purdie, 2014) and was a common thread throughout ODG1 and ODG2.

Novice leaders in education are often overwhelmed with issues of professional loneliness, lack of confidence and inexperience in leadership (Male, 2006; Miklos, 2009, Earley and Bubb, 2013). Many studies on leadership within education focus on pedagogy and the need for effective training, few focus on the professional isolation experienced by early career leaders (Tahir et al, 2017) or offer solutions to support integration, sharing of practice or networking. Leadership studies suggest that isolation or loneliness occurs when the leader perceives they are separate from the

other individuals in the organisation, have ultimate responsibility for decision-making and don't feel they can share their issues and concerns with others in their workplace (Abrams, 2007; Marshall et al 2007) as is illustrated by Vignette 6.

I think I hide a lot of the challenges and difficulties from the staff... that's why I am manager, to shield them from that and allow them to do their job... it's really tough being the manager as you have got to keep a strong head all the time when some days you are ready to burst. (P2, ODG1, D8)
I cried so much that first year. It sometimes felt like an impossible task and you'll never get on top of everything. Now I know I'll never get everything done but I'm more aware of what I can afford to miss and how to prioritise. (P1, ODG1, D8)
I think there are also issues with competition. It's hard to open up to someone locally who might be in competition with you. It would be good to have someone to talk to who doesn't have a relationship to your setting. (P1, ODG1, D6)
I'm often left feeling professionally isolated in my setting at present. I maintain a professional distance between myself and staff but sometimes the lack of another person to share a chat with is really difficult... the need for a good cry and moan is often still there. (P4, ODG2, D14)

Vignette 6 Professional Isolation

The importance of informal networks has been considered important to leaders in education (Hall et al., 1986; Gillborn, 1989; Purdie, 2014) and participants articulated that these have been of value, however, competition for resources and in attracting children can make these relationships difficult. This isolation was seen to be challenging and caused novice leaders to look elsewhere for support.

Despite, in some cases, significant support from staff teams or external agencies, the emotional intensity of the early career leadership experience was evident. Hochschild (1983) offers a debate on 'emotional labour' illustrating the emotional tally of work in a range of fields, arguing that, unlike work which is perceived as physical or intellectual, emotional labour is not valued. A body of research exists (Taggart, 2011, Osgood, 2004; Murray and McDowall Clark, 2013) suggesting that the emotional labour illustrated by staff in ELC is a result of the good will and nature of the staff

who inhabit ELC. Elfer (2012:130), describes emotional labour in an early years context as 'ubiquitous' discussing the challenges faced by those in the sector in supporting children, parents and colleagues in an ELC setting and the emotional demands of a role in ELC. This was echoed within Vignette 7 where issues of work/life balance were described by a number of participants, thus adding to the emotional strain.

This role is exhausting and we need passion and drive to keep coming into work every day. The children need and deserve people to be inspiring and happy and allow and understand them to enjoy learning in the way best to them. (P2, ODG1, D1)
… it has proven difficult to manage my time from being hands on as well as keeping up to date with the paperwork, emails etc. There are struggles that still exist and probably always will. (P5, ODG1, D6)
Sometimes it can be very hard juggling work/family life. I regularly bring work home with me. In the beginning, it was things that I wanted to do, extra reading for my own benefit/learning, however now it is actual paperwork that I don't have time to do within the working day. (P3, ODG2, D9)

Vignette 7 Emotional Intensity

Further, a number of participants expressed that the job could impact on their family and personal lives in a negative way. Grant (2014), suggested that leaders within education are misunderstood by parents, children and staff teams and that their own wellbeing can be overlooked and must be considered in order for them to be an effective leader. This is supported by Hilton (2016) who warns leaders to avoid burnout, offering a range of strategies to ensure emotional containment. The passion and professionalism demonstrated throughout the discussions was clear and some leaders had created their own strategies to avoid the emotional intensity of the role taking over but almost all participants identified delegation and prioritisation and the emotional toll of the role as particular challenges.

4.7 Conclusion

This practitioner enquiry has provided an insight into the experiences of early career leaders with ELC. From the responses to the research questions and discussion that ensued, participants expressed a need to create boundaries and achieve a work/life balance as an ELC leader. They reiterated the importance of open and trusting relationships with colleagues and reflected on the lack of preparation, training and support afforded them in their leadership roles. A DOES analysis (Wingrave and Kenney, 2010) has been completed (see appendix 4), in light of the literature review and findings from the research. This identifies drivers and obstacles to effective early career leadership in Scotland. The predominant finding from these analyses is the need to design and make available effective support measures for novice leaders in ELC, providing equity of access throughout the country as will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This practitioner enquiry has afforded me the opportunity to share the perspectives, experiences and personal reflections of a group of ELC leaders in Scotland. Through this insider research, I sought insight into these reflections uncovering 'thick description' (Brannick and Coughlan, 2007:60) and offered my interpretation of these experiences pursuing both personal development and the opportunity to develop my working practices (Ragland, 2006). My recommendations, within the parameters of practitioner enquiry, must relate to the development of my own practice (Dadds, nd) but in viewing the findings through a broader lens, in line with Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007), I will also consider a wider scope.

In order to respect and amplify participants' views, a consultative and collaborative approach was taken, (Fine, 2002; Benner, 1994) in line with the paradigm. As a result of this collaboration, a range of findings were uncovered. In reviewing their early career experiences as leader, participants have been vocal in their respect for professionalism and dedication to children and families, and have repeatedly communicated the importance of values within the sector and this has been noted throughout. The findings suggest that developing trust in ELC teams is vital and can be challenging to new leaders, and that professional and personal development through the development of high quality support systems is an important and often unfulfilled need.

5.2 Links to previous research

These findings are consistent with earlier studies showing the importance of high quality professional learning and development to leaders in educational settings (OECD, 2013; Wingrave, 2015). In some sectors of education, e.g. primary teaching, there has been a historical requirement for CLPL and a commitment to the funding and provision of this by local authorities, professional bodies and higher education. However in ELC this

is a more recent expectation (SSSC, 2009; 2010) and it has taken time to fully impact the sector.

5.3 Limitations of this study

This study does not claim generalisability but aims to contribute to the wider published conversation about leadership in ELC and the needs of new managers in the sector. That said, the scope of this study has been limited to a small group of leaders and their experiences and perspectives, therefore their experiences may not be indicative of the wider workforce in Scotland. If I were to undertake this research again outwith the scope of a Masters dissertation, I would consider consulting with a wider research group. Participants came from three local authority areas and the support mechanisms in place for them may differ to those in other regions. In addition, in line with Ragland (2006) and Campbell et al. (2004), my analysis of the data concentrated on the support needs of the participants, aiming to impact my own practice as a professional learning officer, and did not seek to explore the wider experience of leadership in ELC.

5.4 Recommendations and implications for my practice

Given the expansion in ELC currently taking place in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017a), an unprecedented rise in childcare places is imminent and a high quality, qualified, well-respected and supported workforce must exist. While mechanisms are in place to support leaders in pursuit of academic qualifications (SSSC, 2009; SSSC, 2010), no mandatory support, and limited informal support has been available to provide professional learning, knowledgeable support, emotional containment or a safe space to share practice for leaders who are developing their services, leading staff teams and ultimately responsible for the wellbeing, safety and happiness of children and families in their care. With the creation of a new professional learning team in my workplace, (of which I am a part), a commitment to developing the ELC workforce and building a professional learning community has been realised, in line with Benchmarks 22 and 23 of the SCP (SSSC, 2015). My engagement in this research process, collaboration with participants and interrogation of findings has cemented my personal commitment to this.

Consequently, the following recommendations are made with regard to the continued support and development of leader agency and capacity within the ELC sector.

5.4.1 Development of professional learning and support

A community of practice encompassing professional mentors, and offering guidance and coaching should be available for managers, lead practitioners and aspiring leaders to access in line with previous recommendations (SSSC, 2015; Robins, 2006). As illustrated in the review of literature and backed up by findings in the research, this would be a valuable support for those who wish to have a collaborative and respectful opportunity to share practice, gauge opinion and request advice from peers facing similar issues (McMillan and Walsh, 2011; Lofthouse, 2016). It is important however not to assume that effective managers or teachers will make effective mentors. Training and development of potential mentors is essential as mentoring skills and approaches must be taught (Feiman-Nemser and Crarver, 2012) in order that programmes are effective, sustainable and make a measurable difference to quality of services. Development of mentors will ensure that they are empowered to create responsive, individualised programmes that will foster improvements in mentees' performance and practice (Bower-Phipps et al. 2016). Our Professional Learning service could consider the creation of learning opportunities and supportive mechanisms to enable effective mentoring programmes to be developed both in individual settings and across local authorities.

5.4.2 Provision of Collaborative Online and Face-to-Face Discussion Forums

Professional collaboration and networking opportunities can play a valuable role in forging professional learning communities (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2016). Collaborative groups can be both supportive and challenging demanding participation and reflection. I propose the creation of collaborative online and face-to-face discussion forums based on the 'Action Learning Set' (ALS) methodology (Shepherd, 2016). ALS is a structured method allowing small groups to share practice and collaboratively address issues. This approach, as a pedagogical practice, values the experiences of group members, promotes the integrity of their

shared experiences and prioritises them as leaders of their own learning by facilitating group discussion and problem solving (Hewison et al., 2011). They can encourage relationship-building, improve reflective practice and support members to develop more nuanced understanding of situations and creative approaches to problem-solving (Shepherd, 2016; Brockbank and McGill, 2003) and may be a valuable support to practitioners and managers.

Reflecting Groundwater Smith and Mockler's (2007) observations on the mutual benefits of research, two participants contacted the researcher after the study to express thanks for the opportunity to take part in the enquiry, intimating that the anonymity afforded them had allowed them to reflect honestly on areas of their working life that they found challenging and that they felt stronger and more confident and emotionally resilient knowing that other leaders had experienced similar emotions and feelings in their ELC leadership role. One participant compared anonymous discussion with social media groups which, while valuable, can expose a manager or setting to harsh judgements based on the questions asked or advice sought and suggested that a similar vehicle to discuss concerns or ideas would be of great value. Therefore the creation of regular, moderated, anonymised, online discussion groups would support the need highlighted by the respondent.

Further, opportunities for face to face conversation and debate would be recommended as professional learning opportunities to support leaders in ELC. This may help to address issues of professional loneliness. Peer-to-peer support relationships can have significant benefits in developing all participants (Le Cornu, 2007) and, while already in place informally in some areas, equity of access would be preferred.

5.4.3 Development of professional learning opportunities

The continued development of professional learning opportunities is a priority for our service. In particular, in light of the literature and participants' discussions, a toolkit and professional learning framework for new leaders in ELC promoting professional knowledge and support could be developed. Comprising information, advice, policy and practice updates,

and with a strong focus on developing effective reflective practice, this could be made available through local authorities to every novice service leader in ELC.

5.4.4 Sharing of research findings

In line with Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2007) expectation that practitioner research findings are shared widely within one's community of practice, I intend sharing the findings of this research with colleagues from our professional learning service to help inform our plans for the coming year and with Development Officers who routinely spend time with managers and practitioners, sharing their professional knowledge, encouraging, advising, and guiding practice. Early years teams who support providers in two local authorities have also requested access to the findings in order to inform their development planning, I have also applied to present these findings at the SERA annual conference and hope to write an article for my organisation's magazine, detailing the findings and future professional learning plans.

5.5 Wider implications for the sector

As noted above, this study appears to support the development of coaching and mentoring programmes on a large scale. In many regions of the UK, head teachers, new in post, are assigned a mentor to support their leadership development (Anderson, 2017; Donaldson, 2011). In the initial stages of a leadership journey, having the opportunity to contact someone more experienced in the field to gain insights, support and advice can be of significant value (Purdie, 2014). Through ODG1 and ODG2, it was apparent that ELC managers felt levels of anxiety and isolation at times expressing that having someone to speak to who would be supportive, knowledgeable and non-judgemental would be welcomed. While local authority teachers could offer some support, and membership organisations such as Early Years Scotland offer value in this arena, no equity of access exists across the country and across different types of provision. As there is no national, planned approach to this, the benefits are at best patchy and depended largely on the specific supports available in each area of Scotland. A cohesive, national strategic plan for this would be advised.

5.5.1 Opportunities to engage with SCEL Leadership Framework

Practitioners and leaders working in private and voluntary services in Scotland should be afforded access to the SCEL Leadership Framework and this should be promoted widely in line with Recommendation 7 in Siraj and Kingston's (2015) Workforce Review. Currently leaders require a Glow Email Account (principally available to local authority staff) to join SCEL. Although, recently a small number of private and voluntary leaders have been invited to join, wider and more equitable access would be valued.

5.5.2 Practitioner enquiry as CLPL

In light of my own experience of practitioner enquiry and the community of practice that I have accessed in order to complete it, I would welcome the opportunity to embark on regular, supported practitioner enquiry in my day-to-day practice. While this is encouraged by GTCS (online), promoted in teaching (Donaldson, 2011) and required during college and university study, there is currently no framework encompassing support, guidance and ethical review to encourage Childhood Practice practitioners to continue this form of professional learning in the workplace. It is my recommendation that a practitioner enquiry framework, in line with the recommendations of Mockler (2013) would be of value for the continued development of the ELC workforce.

5.6 Further research

Future research into leadership in ELC will be ongoing given the current expansion in provision and plethora of relevant qualifications available. This small-scale study has explored the perspectives of new leaders in ELC, however, given the range of professional learning opportunities and qualifications in development, a full evaluation of the support and professional learning needs of established, experienced and highly qualified leaders with ELC could be considered. Having focused for a number of years on the professionalisation of the sector, there is now the need for opportunities to be developed for those who have completed degree level studies and who are committed to undertake CLPL. This would both evidence commitment to the role and keep SSSC registration valid. Further exploration of the experiences of Childhood Practice graduates

working across different sectors would be of value. Comparison of the provision and outcomes of Local Authority, Voluntary and Private settings would elucidate valuable data to ensure each receives the targeted support they need.

5.7 Conclusion

Fig 5.1 ODG Word Cloud

While leaders in the Scottish ELC sector have huge demands on their time, their professionalism and their skills, there is a dearth of support measures available for them to access when guidance, information and emotional support is required. What limited support is available, has been subject to local authority priorities and location. As an advocate of, adviser to, and supporter of ELC managers, I have observed a number of talented and qualified practitioners transition to the role of manager. In my experience, many feel challenged by the lack of understanding and appreciation of the complexity of their role and unsupported in their pursuit of improvement and excellence. Figure 5.1 details a word-cloud summarising the main topics of conversation which dominated ODGs. It is reflective of the values held by the participants and of the supports they identified as necessary in order for them to continue to develop their practice.

In light of the proposed expansion in ELC (Scottish Government, 2017a) of this traditionally undervalued sector, wherein a significantly expanded workforce is required, it seems imperative that considerable investment be made to address both the CLPL and the personal support needs of this burgeoning workforce and to enable shared practice through collaborative professionalism.

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Appendix 1: Prompt Questions for Online Discussion Group

<u>Themes/Questions for Discussion Group*</u>

*Please note these are starter questions and maybe rephrased if required. Other questions may emerge from the discussion that will follow.

1. How long have you worked as a manager?

2. Did you actively seek promotion or do you feel it was a natural progression?

3. Have there been any managers/leaders (within any field, not necessarily ELC leaders) you have worked with who you consider to be role models for you in your current post? Why?

4. What were your perceptions of the job before you took the post and how do they compare to your understanding of it now?

Early months working as manager in your setting

1. Please describe your first meeting with the staff team as manager. Discuss the preparation for the meeting, and consider how you wanted to be perceived.

2. How did you feel afterwards?

3. What did you consider to be the biggest priorities in the first months/year of your role as manager?

4. During that first year, what were the biggest challenges you faced?

5. On reflection, was there any training or support that could have been offered to mitigate these challenges?

Working as a manager now

1. Based on your experience, what do you consider to be the main principles of effective leadership in the ELC sector?

2. What gives you greatest satisfaction in your role?

3. What advice would you offer a new manager starting their first management role?

4. What professional learning opportunities do you think should be available to a new manager or lead practitioner starting in an early years setting?

Plain Language Statement

Researcher:

Marie McQuade

Supervisor:

Dr Mary Wingrave mary.wingrave@glasgow.ac.uk

Degree Programme:

MEd in Childhood Practice

School / Subject area:

College of Social Sciences/School of Education

Project title:

Early career leaders in Early Learning and Childcare Settings: perspectives and experiences

Invitation paragraph:

You are being invited to take part in a Masters research study. Before you decide to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done, what it will involve and your role, should you choose to participate. In order for you to gain a clear understanding of this research project, please take some time to read the following information carefully

and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask me questions if there is anything that is not clear of if you would like more information before you make any decision regarding your participation. You can contact me, Marie McQuade, or my supervisor, Dr Mary Wingrave, via the contact details above. I request that you respond two weeks prior to the date of the research (a date will be inserted once ethical approval is received) in order that all consent forms are submitted to University of Glasgow before the research begins.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study will be conducted for the purpose of my Masters dissertation. The focus of the study is to explore Managers' experiences during their early months and years as a leader in an Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of an early career leader in an ELC setting in order that I can develop strategies to support new managers in their roles.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this study because you are a manager of an Early Learning and Childcare setting. Your involvement in this study will give you an opportunity to discuss your experience as a new manager during the early stages of your managerial career progression and the support and training that you think has been or would have been valuable. As a Professional Learning Officer, who seeks to support new managers, I hope this research will inform my professional development and practice as well as that of a wider ELC community.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you whether you decide to take part; participation in the study is entirely voluntary and will not impact on my professional relationship with you or affect your career progression in Early Years Scotland. You do not need to take part in this study. During the course of the research project, if you do decide to take part, you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason and this will not affect our working relationship or career progression

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, I will contact you with details of an online discussion forum. As part of the online forum, you will be asked to respond to some questions. The responses given to these questions will form the basis of further discussion. There are no rights or wrong answers and as the researcher my role will be to facilitate the discussion. Choosing to take part or not will be your choice and your responses will not impact in anyway on our working relationship or your career development.

Please note that in this research project I do not look to explore any issues pertaining to individual children and if the discussion starts to move in this direction, I will redirect.

The questions asked will relate to your practice, however should any of the discussions leave you feeling upset or distressed, you may leave the forum at any time. I will be monitoring the discussion and in the event that the discussion makes you feel upset, I will be available to offer support if you need it.

The transcripts of the discussions will be analysed to look for common themes. Following initial analysis of the data, you will be sent a copy of my initial analysis by email and you can then take the opportunity to add to/further explain/comment on the data before a final analysis takes place. This will support the authenticity of the research and clarify any ambiguities.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Applicants can agree to take part by reading and signing the attached consent form. Any data collected will be kept confidential and anything that can identify you will be removed from any writing arising from this project. While participating in the online forum, you will be given a code to use in place of your name that will ensure your comments will be confidential. Any written data collected will be kept on computer: files stored on computer and will only be accessible using a password. At the end of the research period, December 2018, all documents and files containing data collected will be deleted.

Complete confidentiality cannot be assured and in case of evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered, the researcher may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be used in my submission for my Masters in Education dissertation. Further to this, they may be used for a for a presentation, book, journal or magazine article or at a conference.

What has reviewed the study?

The research study has been reviewed by the School of Education Ethics Forum.

Contact for further information

Marie McQuade at

or

Dr Mary Wingrave at mary.wingrave@glasgow.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project you may contact:

The College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer:

Dr Muir Houston muir.houston@glasgow.ac.uk

The school of Education's ethics officer:

Dr Kara Makara Fuller: Kara.MakaraFuller@glasgow.ac.uk

University
of Glasgow

School of
Education

Consent Form

Title of Project:

Early career leaders in Early Learning and Childcare Settings: perspectives and experiences

Name of Researcher: Marie McQuade

Name of Supervisor: Dr Mary Wingrave

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I consent and acknowledge the following clauses relevant to the research project:

- The research project will explore views and experiences of managers in a range of early learning and childcare settings.
- Research will be carried out via an online forum.
- The online forum will be monitored.
- The research project explores views and experiences of managers in Early Learning and childcare settings and will not discuss individual children or families at any time.
- Each participant will be referred to by code in any publications arising from the research
- Complete confidentiality cannot be assured and in case of evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered, the researcher may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

4. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

_____

Name of Participant   Date

Signature

_____

Researcher   Date

Signature

Appendix 4: DOES Analysis

DOES Analysis (Wingrave and Kenney, 2010)

Early Career Leaders

DRIVERS: Extrinsic

Girfec (Scottish Government, 2008)
Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Early Intervention and prevention
Starting Strong
Standard for Childhood Practice
Building the Ambition
Local Authority requirements
Relationships with staff
Relationships with children and families
SSSC
Care Inspectorate
Government guidance
Local Authority review

DRIVERS: Intrinsic
Professionalism
Support for families
Personal values
Vision/Values of setting
Pride
Commitment to CLPL
Job satisfaction

EMOTIONS – Positive
Pride in setting
Conscientiousness
Motivation
Connectedness
Pride in role
Commitment to families
Job satisfaction
Recognition (feel valued – Herzberg)
Conscientious
Caring
Seeking respect for EY role
Empathy
Accomplishments/success

EMOTIONS – Negative
Overwhelmed
Lacking in confidence
Lacking in time
Lacking support
Status
Work/Life Balance
Challenge
Security

OBSTACLES
Time

Money

Local authority pressures

Differing priorities

Implementing change

Legacy issues of previous

manager

Staff reluctance to take on

leadership roles

Need to further develop

reflective practice

Staff shortages

Heavy workload

Paperwork

Family commitments

Steep learning curve

STRATEGIES

Enter a professional learning community

Develop relationships with staff and other managers/leaders

Develop knowledge of frameworks and guidance

Ensure access to support structures

Strong communication links

Seek out opportunities for reflective practice