Recently Appointed Leaders in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand: The Quest for Useful Knowledge and Social Connection

Foster, R.

Recently Appointed Leaders in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand: The Quest for Useful Knowledge and Social Connection

Submitted by

Rachel Foster

Dip Tchg (ECE), B.Ed (ECE), M.Ed

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

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Statement of Appreciation

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Abstract

This research examined the support and professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders in New Zealand early childhood education services. Prior to my study, not much was known about the support and learning needs of recently appointed leaders. The main aim of this research was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. The participant cohort comprised of 10 individuals from a variety of early childhood education service types who lived in various locations throughout NZ. This study used a qualitative methodological approach with an exploratory orientation to the study. A Pragmatic conceptual framework underpinned the research. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 recently appointed leaders who indicated their interest in participating. Findings emerged through deductive and inductive analytic processes.

This study established that recently appointed leaders have specialised learning needs. The findings show that the participants were challenged by the distinct situations they were navigating. Participants could have experienced transformations in their knowledge and practice if they had a range of robust social connections. Key evidence were participants' expressed need and desire for additional support to address their professional learning. This thesis contributes to the field of early childhood education as it provides insights into how to support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders.

The findings show that recently appointed leaders require learning experiences that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. This has implications for organisations, professional learning providers, and those supporting recently appointed leaders. The need for useful knowledge development and social connection should be incorporated within professional learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders. Further research into recently appointed leaders should investigate transition and support processes. Larger-scale research is required to create a more extensive understanding of the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Emphasis and effort to design and carry out ongoing learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders is also required.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the support and professional learning needs of ten recently appointed leaders within early childhood education services in New Zealand . It documents an investigation that argues that recently appointed leaders require specialised support and learning opportunities. Currently, support for recently appointed leaders is limited. Two principles from Pragmatism (McCaslin, 2008; Rumens & Keleman, 2010), *useful knowledge* (Phipps & Ozanne, 2017; Sharma et al., 2018) and *social connection* (Rumens & Keleman, 2010; Sharma et al., 2018), were adopted to fulfil the aim of this thesis. That aim involved generating sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Useful knowledge involves addressing the knowledge gap in participants' current knowledge and the knowledge they were seeking. Social connection represents the connections participants were seeking to support and guide their practice. I present the two principles alongside the idea that participants were on a quest that involved seeking opportunities for knowledge creation and social relationships to help support and address their learning needs. I weave the two principles throughout the thesis and further discuss them in the conclusion chapter. In the concluding chapter, I present these principles in a model that represents the main outcome of this research.

Alongside the two principles, four overarching concepts (distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection) represent the findings of this research. Each of the four findings chapters is framed by one concept. Distinct represents the uniqueness of the individual participants, their services, and their experiences. Navigation represents the demands of their roles that participants were experiencing. Transformation addresses the turning points where participants could identify changes in their knowledge and practice. Connection represents the current and desired professional relationships of participants.

The findings of this research are summarised in one main claim. That claim is: *Recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection*

that characterise this career stage. This claim is explained further in chapter eight, the final chapter of this thesis.

In the chapters that follow, I provide an account of the current early childhood education leadership literature, followed by the methodology and methods that guided this research. The analysed findings of the study are presented over four chapters. Each chapter outlines one of the four concepts representing these findings. The thesis concludes by exploring the pragmatically influenced principles for supporting the learning needs of recently appointed leaders, and the main claim of the research.

1.2   Leadership in Early Childhood Education

The quality of early childhood education programs impact on positive outcomes for children. Leadership has been identified as influential in the overall quality of early childhood education services (Edwards, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018; Rodd, 2015; Shore et al., 2021). Both nationally and internationally leadership in early childhood education is receiving more attention. Leadership in early childhood education does not have the same history of investigation as that found in the business leadership literature or even the school leadership literature (Layen, 2015; Thornton et al., 2009; Weisz-Koves, 2011). Early childhood education leadership is a relatively newly explored phenomenon. There is a lack of leadership understanding and leadership literature in early childhood education, especially concerning recently appointed leaders. Interest in early childhood education leadership internationally is increasing (Lund, 2021; Moshel & Berkovich, 2020), however, there is a need to conduct further research to better understand leadership and the learning needs of early childhood education leaders. One area of focus to address this gap is research with those who are new to their roles to build an understanding how to effectively develop leaders. This thesis contributes to understanding this problem by exploring the profile, experiences, and learning needs of the ten recently appointed leaders who participated in my study.

The qualitative data gathering method used within this study involved ten semi-structured interviews. The rationale for using semi-structured interviews was to build a picture of who the participants were and to ask questions that allowed for the investigation of participants' accounts of their experiences. This included factors and conditions participants believed influenced their experiences. The data collected was analysed to look

for patterns and draw together common themes specific to early childhood education leadership.

Philosophical pragmatism informed the analysis of the interviews in which the profile, experiences, and perceived learning needs of recently appointed leaders were examined. The data analysis showed participants had varied and haphazard forms of preparation and support before assuming their roles. This preparation and support was not sufficient to support participants with the expectations and realities of their roles.

Participants discussed elements of support they received once they assumed their roles, but like their preparation prior, it too, varied and was haphazard. The perceived learning needs of participants were mostly related to day-to-day tasks, the running of their service, and the support they desired. There was little discussion of the teaching and learning for children, and the leading, supporting, and mentoring of staff.

Consequently, there is a need to address suitable ways to develop more robust processes for supporting recently appointed leaders. The needs of participants in this study showed professional learning opportunities concerning how to prioritise the teaching and learning of children and how to lead and further develop the capability of adults are required. Unless these needs are addressed, they will present issues for the early childhood education sector, given the role leadership plays in experiences for teachers and the quality of programs for children.

This chapter begins by providing definitions of common terms used within this thesis and then introduces and explains the research problem. How leadership is defined within this study precedes an explanation of the context of the study. This is followed by an explanation of my personal position as the researcher. This research is then positioned concerning the previous literature which explains the attention early childhood education leadership has received, the road to leadership, including reluctance, skills, and preparation, and the importance of leadership learning. Relevant elements of the New Zealand early childhood education context are then explored including pathways to leadership, qualifications, and the leadership-focused documents that are emerging. The chapter concludes by outlining the research aims, the significance of the study, and the research questions.

1.3   Common terms

Within this thesis, some common terms are used repeatedly. For clarity the following definitions are provided for these key terms:

- **Early childhood education:** the extra-familial education and care of children up to the age of six years. This includes kindergarten, preschool, and nursery.
- **Leader/leadership:** individuals holding a formally designated role with expectations and responsibility for "the learning and teaching programme" (Ord et al., 2013) of an early childhood education service.
- **Recently appointed:** participants who were new to, or inexperienced within their role, as they had been appointed to their leadership role within the last two years.
- **Learning needs:** the gap between participants' present knowledge and the needs or requirements that their role requires of them.
- **Services/contexts:** licensed early childhood education settings or sites that are responsible for the education and care of young children.
- **Sector/field:** refers to the early childhood education sector or field of education, unless otherwise stated.
- **Leadership postgraduate study:** early childhood education-specific leadership study

1.4   Research problem

Currently, there is a lack of sector-specific knowledge and understanding of the appropriate support for those holding leadership roles. In chapter 2 I show how understandings of the expectations, activities, and needs of leaders, especially recently appointed leaders, is limited in the early childhood education leadership literature. Further, New Zealand research into this area is timely, given the recent investment in leadership development in early childhood education nationally and internationally.

The effectiveness of leadership is important in ensuring the quality of early childhood education programs (Edwards, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018; Rodd, 2015; Shore et al., 2021). However, research also shows high-quality programs remain an aspiration, rather than a reality. This has led to tremendous pressure being placed on the sector to raise service quality (Austin, 2014).

1.5   Defining leadership in this research

Because of the complexity of the sector, defining effective leadership is challenging (Ryan, 2010; Waniganayake et al., 2012). Early early childhood education leadership literature (Thornton, 2019) reported a lack of consensus on what leadership entailed (Klevering & McNae, 2018). With the complex and diverse nature (Rodd, 2013) of the sector, the relevance of whether a universally accepted definition of early childhood education leadership is appropriate has been questioned (Waniganayake et al., 2012). Early childhood education leadership research is emerging and notions of leadership are changing. This has allowed for a greater understanding of the practice of leadership (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018).

Defining leadership practice in the early childhood education sector is subject to a range of concepts (such as shared, distributed, and hierarchical leadership), and the recognition that everyone can exercise some form of leadership. Currently, in the New Zealand context, the idea of everyone in an educational setting enacting leadership practices is expected. The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand document, Our Code Our Standards (2017) (discussed further later in this chapter) which is the code of professional responsibility and standards for the teaching profession outlines that all teachers should "show leadership particularly in areas of responsibility" (Education Council, 2017, p. 18). To understand what leadership means within my research, I have defined two forms of leadership: *contributing leadership* and *role-specific leadership*.

I argue that contributing leadership and role-specific leadership cannot be defined together. I acknowledge all teachers can exercise leadership and contribute to their service. Contributing to areas of a service through things such as inquiry or innovation (Denee & Thornton, 2018) (contributing leadership) is not the same as someone who has role-specific leadership responsibilities. Role-specific leadership includes individuals who were appointed to roles that have additional leadership-focused responsibilities and expectations. These responsibilities could include, but are not limited to: leading the service, leading the program, and overarching responsibilities for the service that are over and above what is expected of a 'standard' teaching role. Responsibility for "building and sustaining thriving teams and institutions that support ongoing professional learning" (Education Council, 2018b, p. 8) and promoting supportive learning and working conditions are the Teaching Council's expectations of leaders**.** Crucial to this is influencing, encouraging, and further

developing those they lead to actively participate in a relationship that allows the service to continue moving forward productively (Weisz-Koves, 2011). Therefore, in this thesis, when leadership or leaders are referred to, it refers to those individuals holding roles with specific leadership responsibilities. This research focuses on those who recently assumed role-specific leadership responsibilities.

1.6   Context statement

This research was conducted within the New Zealand early childhood education context. Globally, New Zealand has demonstrated its ability to set an example in the field of early childhood education in areas such as curriculum development. The New Zealand curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996, 2017), was first published in 1996 and later updated in 2017. The New Zealand sector requires a minimum of 50% of staff in an early childhood education service to hold a Teaching Council-approved three-year level-seven (on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework) Diploma of Teaching (ECE) or a Bachelor of Education (ECE) as a minimum qualification. Other staff can be unqualified. There is an expectation that qualified teachers will hold teacher registration and a current practising certificate. Many centres aim for 80% or 100% of their teaching staff to be qualified and certificated, attracting greater government funding. Current levels of funding for early childhood education services are challenging for services to maintain 100% qualified and certificated teachers. A more recent initiative of the New Zealand government has been to attempt to support pay parity for all early childhood education teachers. This involves closing the pay gap between teachers in education and care services and teachers in state-funded kindergartens. Many early childhood education services have been challenged by the shortfall between government funding and the costs of the initiative.

Recognition and development of leadership practice in the New Zealand early childhood education sector have largely been unsupported. The importance of leadership is beginning to be acknowledged (Lund, 2021) and understood by practitioners. As the sector continues to change and develop at a fast pace, scholars have argued that leaders must receive support for their roles that builds their capability to carry out their roles in the long term. Currently, there are no requirements for leaders in New Zealand to hold specific leadership qualifications. Professional learning opportunities for leaders in New Zealand have:

largely compromised of programmes at the individual organization level, one-off courses by outside providers, postgraduate leadership programmes,

and sometimes individual support programmes through national bodies such as the Education Review Office, Teaching Council Aotearoa New Zealand (formally called the New Zealand Education Council), or Ministry of Education. There has been no state-funded programme to support leadership development in on any sustained basis (Edwards, 2018, p. 15).

The New Zealand early childhood education sector is challenged by less attention to leadership than NZ's compulsory education sectors. The New Zealand compulsory schooling sector has had a focus on leadership for some time with earlier initiatives such as the *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* program (Ministry of Education, 2008), and the Best Evidence Synthesis on *School Leadership and Student outcomes: What works and Why* (Robinson et al., 2009). More recently professional standards for primary (elementary) and secondary school (high school) principals have been developed. Additionally, the educational leader's website provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, educationalleaders.govt.nz, offers information for middle and senior leaders, aspiring principals, first-time principals, experienced principals, and ngā-tūmuaki-ā-kura (Māori language settings) leaders. This website states that, in their first two years beginning principals can access leadership advisors. Additionally, there are study awards available for school leaders. Early childhood education is a glaring omission from this website and these support provisions.

Leaders in early childhood education have received little government-supported guidance concerning the expected responsibilities of their roles or support and incentives to develop their leadership practice (Thornton, 2019). Despite this absence of opportunities for leadership professional learning and development (Thornton, 2019) for early childhood education leaders "there is a willingness and commitment by many in the sector to continue to conceptualise and enact leadership in ways that enhance their practice and endeavour to fulfil the aspirations of their communities" (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018, p. 1).

There is a particular gap in current early childhood education literature relating to recently appointed leaders, so understandings of their experiences are limited. Even though the literature was lacking, exploring the available literature provided some insights into early childhood education leadership. However, the shortage of literature on recently appointed leaders meant there were limits to following the work of others.

The aim of this research, discussed in more detail later in this chapter, was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Leaders appointed to their roles within the last two years were invited to participate in this research through semi-structured interviews. The rationale for inviting participation from leaders appointed to their roles within the last two years was that it was more likely that a clear understanding could be constructed of the current policy and practice climate within the New Zealand sector, as it is perceived by recently appointed leaders. The findings of my research contribute to an understanding of some challenges participants faced, expectations of their roles, what their needs were, and suitable ongoing support for recently appointed leaders.

1.7   Personal position as a researcher

This reflexive statement is provided to create an understanding of my position as the researcher within this study and the wider early childhood education context. Much like Ryan (2010) "because of my own journey" (Ryan, 2010, p. 76), I became interested in researching early childhood education leadership, specifically, recently appointed leaders. After completing my initial early childhood education teaching qualification in 2003, I have spent time in the New Zealand early childhood education sector in teaching and leadership roles in community-based, private, school-based, and institution-based settings. In addition to this, I have spent time in an Australian-based not-for-profit service.

I assumed my first leadership role less than two years after having graduated with my initial teaching qualification. While this was a head-of-a-room role, because of attrition in the higher leadership roles over the next few years, the responsibility I held increased. As my career progressed and in moving across settings, my skills as a teacher and previous experiences saw me gaining further leadership roles when incumbent leaders resigned, or where roles were created for me. While I knew that my previous experiences provided me with a platform to carry out these roles, I still found myself seeking further support and knowledge to fulfil the roles to their full extent.

My leadership experiences and previous postgraduate study provided me with time and opportunities to form my own beliefs regarding support for recently appointed leaders. Those beliefs were based on personal experience and perspectives. This led me to further explore and gain a deeper understanding of a wider group of leaders' preparation and support

opportunities within the field to determine their views on their learning needs, specifically, recently appointed leaders.

When completing my Masters of Education (MEd) at Victoria University of Wellington | Te Herenga Waka, I completed a research project entitled: In what ways are early childhood education teachers prepared and supported for positional leadership roles? The report reviewed the literature concerning how early childhood education teachers were prepared and supported for leadership roles. It was this short project that was the catalyst for this current research. In drawing conclusions from the literature, the report identified some challenges and possible ways to support leaders' development. It was clearly evident that understanding leaders' learning needs required more research (Hayes, 2012; Layen, 2015). Understanding the sector-specific needs and expectations of leaders (Weisz-Koves, 2011; Thornton et al., 2009) including influences, practices, and conditions, was timely and therefore provided the basis for this research.

1.8   Positioning the research in relation to the literature

A thorough exploration of the literature revealed factors contributing to the conditions relating to the support of early childhood education leaders. Featured in the literature were themes of the lack of attention or focus on leadership within the sector, how leaders were assuming roles and their leadership learning. These are elaborated on in chapter two, the literature review chapter.

With the focus on early childhood education leadership having only been recent (Ord et al., 2013), leaders in early childhood education have looked to other sectors (Klevering & McNae, 2018) including business (Education Review Office (ERO), 2020; Nicholson et al., 2020) for guidance. There is an abundance of literature sources related to general leadership practice (West-Burnham, 2003) and leadership within the schooling sector. Leadership is about people (Fullan, 2011) and the relationships that leaders have with them (Binney et al., 2012). In the early childhood education sector, there are complex (Lund, 2021) and context-specific elements to leaders' roles that require a more specific understanding.

The challenge is that the sector "must graduate its own researchers and it must push to document and define what it does, or the unique voices of those doing the work may become lost in efforts to become like everyone else" (Wise, 2011, p.127). For leaders to become competent and meet the increasing demands of their roles, it is necessary for the

sector to engage in researching, learning about, and further developing leadership practices (Robertson, 2012; Thornton, et. al., 2009).

1.8.1   Leadership attention

In both national and international contexts, early childhood education policy and practice has changed and developed over the past 20 years (Nuttall, 2013). Over this time, the study of early childhood education has become an academic field (Nuttall, 2013). However, there is still a lack of appreciation of the importance of leadership in the literature. The lack of emphasis on early childhood education leadership is reflected in a current lack of understanding, lack of knowledge, and reluctance to engage in leadership practices. Early childhood education leadership has been previously described as under-theorised and under-conceptualised. However, as leadership research is expanding (Cooper, 2014; Lund, 2021) it has created an increased understanding of leadership within the field.

The rapid change and expansion of the sector has more recently led to increased focus on effective leadership and the role of the leader (Klevering & McNae, 2018). The "current interest in the development of leadership capacity" (Nicholson & Maniates, 2016, p.66) provides opportunities for the sector to critically examine ideas around leadership. More examination of leadership within the sector could allow for leaders' experiences to be understood, which could develop leadership capability. It is likely that teachers who have completed their qualifications in recent years have, to some extent, had leadership incorporated within their qualifications. Leadership learning in initial teacher education programs is likely to have been included to the extent that it would raise initial awareness of leadership (Waniganayake et al., 2012). While it is positive that leadership is being incorporated into initial teacher education, awareness of leadership does not involve having a thorough knowledge of how to enact leadership practices.

1.8.2   The road to leadership

The lack of teacher interest in, and reluctance to identify with, leadership was previously reported as concerning (Cooper, 2014; Fenech, 2013; Rodd, 2013). This has impacts on the ongoing development of leadership within the sector. There are several reasons for reluctance to engage in leadership, including the range of interpretations and understandings of leadership. Traditional views of leadership that were more focused on management and governance (ECE Taskforce, 2011) and the collaborative nature of early

childhood education work (Ryan, 2010) are also reasons identified for this reluctance. Stronger and more active identification and recognition of aspects of leadership roles are necessary (Rodd, 2013).

Leaders often assume their roles because they demonstrated their skills and worth as a teacher or because of their longevity in their teaching roles (Pemberton, 2009). While "teaching in early childhood education supports a strong base for future leadership capacity" (Ryan, 2010, p.82), it does not provide sufficient knowledge for a leadership role. Leaders follow various routes (Ryan, 2010; Wise, 2011) and may not have prepared for their roles with formal qualifications (Sciaraffa, 2004). For some teachers, after moving into a leadership role it is challenging to separate teaching from leading, especially given that many leaders also teach while leading. A participant in Baldwin's (2013) study mentioned that, even though they had been a leader for eleven years, they "never stopped feeling like a teacher" (Baldwin, 2013, p.2). Similarly, when articulating her personal journey, Scott (2005) made the thought-provoking statement, "I'm a leader… but just when did this happen?" (Scott, 2005. P.42). The likelihood of this being a question that perhaps many leaders have asked themselves is an assumption in this research. Participants in the present study discussed aspects of their connection to teaching and the contrasting responsibilities and expectations of a teacher and a leader (discussed in chapter five in the section on *Assuming leadership: The shift in mindset and practice*)

A focus on preparing those in leadership roles (Fenech, 2013) has been called for. Inexperienced and newly-qualified teachers have previously ended up in leadership roles when they have not had the time and space to learn about and practice leadership (Thornton et al., 2009). This can be due to the limited availability of qualified and experienced teachers and leaders. Ryan's (2010) study showed no participants "deliberately set a career path in motion that would result in them being in positions of leadership" (p. 44). Encouragement from "mentors, role models and people of influence in their own life" (Ryan, 2010, p. 80) and opportunities that were offered influenced Ryan's (2010) participants to become leaders.

1.8.3   Learning about leadership

Leadership is crucially important and underpins the quality of practice in early childhood education services (Rodd, 2013). As "one of the main distinguishing factors between the most and least successful programmes" (Muijs et al., 2004, p.161) leadership matters if the current state of early childhood education is to be transformed (Austin, 2014).

There is a need to understand challenges related to leaders' contexts, expectations, experiences, and needs (Austin, 2014) to understand the impact of and components of their roles. Given the complexity of the field, leaders "cannot learn to lead in our field by following a set of guidelines or procedures" (Nicholson & Kroll, 2015, p.23). Leadership learning and development should not be "limited to role modelling and on-the-job learning" (Ryder et al., 2017, p. 3).

Professional learning and development opportunities specific to early childhood education leadership are necessary to support aspiring and current leaders (Davitt & Ryder, 2018). These learning opportunities need to be purposefully developed (Davitt & Ryder, 2018), contextually relevant, progressive (Klevering & McNae, 2018) and sustained (Davitt & Ryder, 2018) over time. Chapter eight discusses, two principles, useful knowledge and social connection, adopted in this research, arguing that these are significant principles underpinning learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders.

1.9   The New Zealand early childhood education context

The New Zealand early childhood education context is complex with considerable diversity of services (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018; Robertson, 2012; Ryder et al., 2011). This leads to a diversity of service structures (Robertson, 2012), and diversity in leadership roles (Ryan, 2010). The unique histories and purposes of early childhood education services (Lockie, 2010) "has generated emergent and collaborative leadership models that make the conceptualising of leadership complex" (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018, p. 1). This diversity challenges the sector in how to best support leaders.

The role titles of early childhood education leaders in New Zealand are also complex. Role titles for New Zealand leaders most commonly used are 'supervisor', 'manager', 'director', 'team leader', 'senior teacher', and 'head teacher' (Ryan, 2010; Thornton et al., 2009). While some leaders may hold the same role title, their role may mean different things in different settings:

> As an example, a team leader in one service may have the same role as the director or manager in another service, however because of the title given, may appear less experienced because they are called a team leader and the title appears less likely to include managerial decisions (Ryan, 2010, p.10).

The profile of leadership in early childhood education has increased over the past ten years (Thornton, 2019). The rapid change in the sector has required greater professionalisation and accountability, subsequently requiring more from those in leadership roles (Klevering & McNae, 2018). Early childhood education leadership research has increased and this has begun strengthening understandings (Thornton, 2019). However, professional learning opportunities focused on leadership have not kept pace with increased expectations, and support is required to implement guiding documents and policy reform.

Initiatives in the field have been launched and then often, later removed or discontinued. For example, following a change of government in 2008, the early childhood education sector in New Zealand saw budget cuts and the abandonment of the strategic plan *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki (2002)*. Due to this "as a consequence, leadership in ECE remains largely devoid of policy direction and resourcing initiatives" (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018, p. 1).

1.9.1 Pathways to leadership

As well as a lack of leadership-focused learning opportunities, there is a lack of clear pathways to leadership roles (Klevering & McNae, 2018) in New Zealand. Leaders could benefit from leadership-specific professional learning and development for current and aspiring leaders (Davitt & Ryder, 2018).

Some New Zealand services have a structure with an assistant (or similar) to the person holding the highest leadership role. In these settings, it may be possible for assistants to gain leadership experience, knowledge, and an understanding of the leader's role before embarking on the role themselves. Although, from experience and in conversations with those in the field it seems that whilst some centres have an assistant role, these seem to be less common, particularly in smaller services in New Zealand. In the current climate for the sector, centres can be financially restricted and 'flatter' leadership structures can become more desirable. These points raise the question: without assistant leadership roles (or similar), are potential future leaders getting enough of a chance to learn from their predecessors and practice role-specific leadership-related experiences and responsibilities?

1.9.2 Leadership qualifications

In recent years, in the New Zealand context, there has been the emergence of leadership-specific qualifications. These qualifications include the Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) offered by the private training entity Te Rito Maioha-Early Childhood

New Zealand. New Zealand Tertiary College, another private training entity, offers an early childhood education Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Leadership and Management).

1.9.3   Leadership-focused documents in the New Zealand context

The profile of leadership in the New Zealand sector is growing. Research on leadership practice (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018; Thornton, 2019) is increasing and leadership is becoming prominent in guiding documents. There has slowly been an emergence of documents focusing on leadership for general educational settings in New Zealand, although early childhood education specific documents still tend to focus on the improvement of the wider early childhood education sector, rather than leadership.

Here, I discuss New Zealand government documents including the *Report of the Advisory Group on Early Learning* (Advisory Group for Early Learning, 2015), the revised early childhood education curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017), *Our Code Our Standards* (Education Council, 2017), *The Educational Leadership Capability Framework* (Education Council, 2018), *The Leadership Strategy for the Teaching Profession of Aotearoa New Zealand* (Education Council, 2018b), *He Taonga Te Tamaiti Every Child a Taonga: Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029* (MOE, 2019), and *Te Ara Poutama: Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most* (ERO, 2020) and explore their leadership considerations.

The Advisory Group on Early Learning (2015) discussed the importance of leadership and recommended that a cost-effective investment for the overall sector would be to invest in leadership development. Leadership in the New Zealand sector could be strengthened by initiatives that contribute to the direction and resourcing of the overall sector (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018). However, "up until very recently there has been no significant change in the Ministry of Education's engagement with the issue of leadership in the early years despite the greater emphasis by the Teaching Council and ERO [Education Review Office]" (Thornton, 2019, p. 48), the latter being responsible for reviewing and reporting on all early childhood education, primary, and secondary education services in New Zealand. Coordination and collaboration by each government entity could strengthen the development and understanding of leadership practice.

Leadership considerations are also offered in the revised Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017). Provocations offer prompts to support thinking about pedagogical leadership practice

(Thornton, 2019). Cooper (2019) argued these provocations reflected mixed messages about how leadership practices are enacted and by whom. Educational leaders, according to Te Whāriki (MOE, 2017), are responsible for "promoting and supporting the ongoing learning and development of kaiako" (teachers) (MOE, 2017, p. 59). However, Te Whāriki "does not provide any other guidelines for the leadership of ECE services in terms of practical application" (Edwards, 2018, p. 4).

Our Code Our Standards (Education Council, 2017), the Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession in New Zealand endeavours to support the improvement of the quality of educational leadership. One purpose of this document, while not early childhood education specific, is to "promote high-quality teaching and leadership for all learners" (Education Council, 2017, p. 16). Additionally, there is an expectation all teachers will "show leadership, particularly in areas of responsibility" (Education Council, 2017, p. 18). The document describes that is designed to assist professional leaders with their professional learning conversations.

The *Educational Leadership Capability Framework* (Education Council, 2018) and *The Leadership Strategy for the Teaching Profession of Aotearoa New Zealand* (Education Council, 2018) were both released in 2018. No professional learning opportunities were offered alongside these documents. These documents, like *Our Code Our Standards* (Education Council, 2017) are not specific to early childhood education but intended for the entire education sector. The *Educational Leadership Capability Framework* (Education Council, 2018) involves core capabilities that are "intended to provide high-level guidelines for leadership development" (Education Council, 2018, p. 3). The purpose of the leadership strategy is to "support the growth and development of leadership capability for all registered teachers" (Education Council, 2018b, p. 4). Focused on a systems-level approach, the intention of this document is to provide a guiding framework for developing leadership capability across the education sector.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education released *He Taonga Te Tamaiti Every Child a Taonga: Strategic Plan for Early Learning* (MOE, 2018). This draft strategic plan for consultation referred to leaders or leadership three times in the entire document. Initially, leadership is mentioned once in the foreword from the Minister of Education, then once in reference to professional learning and development being provided, and finally concerning the Teaching Council Leadership Strategy. In the final copy of *He Taonga Te Tamaiti, Every*

Child a Taonga the *Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029* (MOE, 2019), leaders or leadership while still not a major feature, are referred to more frequently. However, the recognition of "the significance of effective leadership practice" (Thornton, 2019, p. 49) was, not realised within *He Taonga Te Tamaiti Every Child a Taonga,* the *Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029* (MOE, 2019). Most often in *He Taonga Te Tamaiti Every Child a Taonga,* the *Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029* (MOE, 2019) leaders or leadership are referred to alongside teachers or in headings that are then not elaborated on. The one section where leadership is elaborated on explains that:

> A national programme of PLD [professional learning and development] will also be designed to grow the leadership capability of teachers, kaiako and educators in leadership roles. The content of this will be informed by research evidence about effective leadership and the Teaching Council's *Leadership Strategy for the teaching profession and Educational Leadership Capability Framework (2018)* (MOE, 2019, p. 26).

The New Zealand sector is currently waiting to see the full implementation of this plan. The previous strategic plan *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (MOE, 2002) intended to "provide leadership development programmes to strengthen leadership in ECE services" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 15). *He Taonga Te Tamaiti Every Child a Taonga: Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029* also promised, "resourcing for leadership PLD [professional learning and development]" (Thornton, 2019). This resourcing is yet to be provided.

The Education Review Office (ERO) developed *Te Ara Poutama: Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most* (ERO, 2020). The initial draft was released in 2019, followed by a revised version in 2020. While focused on the early childhood education sector as a whole, this document also outlines expectations of leadership responsibilities and practices. Five process indicators are included within *Te Ara Poutama.* Each indicator provides examples of effective practice and refers to the role of the leader and how leaders can enact these practices. There is also a consideration for how leaders and teachers can work collaboratively to ensure positive outcomes for children. Two indicators, Whakangungu Ngaio: Collaborative professional learning builds knowledge and capability *and* Kaihautū: Leaders foster collaboration and improvement, explicitly focus on the responsibility of leaders and the practice of leadership.

The emergence of the documents discussed here is positive in the sense that the importance of leadership is becoming recognized. However, as a recently appointed leader, this is a collection of documents providing guidance according to general principles. The challenge for recently appointed leaders remains regarding how to make decisions about which documents to prioritise, use, refer to, and when and how to utilise each document.

1.10   Research aim

The initial motivation for this research was to explore what recently appointed early childhood education leaders' roles entailed. In particular, I wanted to understand how aspiring and recently appointed early childhood education leaders had been and could be supported. The need for this research was confirmed through the gap in available literature relating to recently appointed leaders. The specific aim of this research was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. This was an important aim because of the increased attention to the role of the leader (Klevering & McNae, 2018) and the reluctance of teachers to engage in leadership roles (Cooper, 2014; Fenech, 2013; Rodd, 2013). Early childhood education leaders may not have planned to go into their roles (Wise, 2011), instead, finding themselves in their roles after encouragement, opportunities (Ryan, 2010), or being chosen by their predecessors (chapters five and seven discuss how participants in my study assumed their roles). The literature showed that sometimes leaders end up in these roles a little reluctantly (Wise, 2011), similar to participants in this research (as discussed in chapter four in the theme of grasping convenient opportunities).

I explored recently appointed leaders' perspectives on what professional learning and support, would have benefitted them the most. From exploring these perspectives, I have developed two core principles (useful knowledge and social connection) framing how to best support recently appointed leaders. The principles are elaborated on in chapter eight. Alongside this, the main claim of this research is made: Recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection that characterise this career stage. Throughout this research, I have identified insights into the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. The findings of this research provide initial understandings, that can inform suitable practices tailored towards preparation and ongoing support for recently appointed and aspiring leaders.

1.11   Significance of this study

Research reflecting on early childhood education leaders' "life-story perspective is very limited" (Layen, 2015, p.277). Studies of real situations and problems are beginning to be conducted and are motivated by scholars' own experiences, much like the motivation for this research. In her 2010 work, Ryan noted, "because of my own journey I have become interested in the qualifications of leaders in education" (p.76). Similarly, when reflecting on her study's findings, Wise (2011) noted that "I realize that the story these women tell is my story in many ways, but it also is not my story" (Wise, 2011, p.119).

My research documented the experiences and reflections of those who have moved from a teaching role to a leadership role. Specifically, the focus was on leaders appointed to their roles within the last two years. This was to ensure that the information being gathered was as current as possible and relevant to recently appointed leaders and the current early childhood education climate. Participants' experiences offered important ideas about recently appointed leaders' development needs, why they take on leadership roles, and how their needs change over time. The findings of my research contribute to an understanding that suitable support and learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders and aspiring leaders require useful knowledge and social connection.

While I can speak from my own experiences, which I elaborated on in my personal position as a researcher earlier in the chapter, I wanted to discover what other leaders' experiences entailed.

In this thesis, I describe the experiences of the participants who were recently appointed to leadership roles and how they coped with their new roles. I developed an understanding of participants' general experiences leading to assuming their roles, and the support they received after assuming their roles. This helped to determine what their current learning needs were.

1.12   Research questions

The overall aim of my research was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. To answer this aim, the research questions that guided this research were:

– RQ1: What is the professional profile of recently appointed early childhood education leaders in New Zealand, and to what extent is the profile shared?

– RQ2: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles?

– RQ3: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders?

My findings contribute to an understanding of how to inform practices for the ongoing support of recently appointed leaders and how teacher professional learning can be customised to an early childhood education context.

1.13   Conclusion and overview of the thesis

Given the lack of early childhood education leadership research, there is a vast opportunity to examine early childhood education leadership with a critical lens. While there are many facets to leadership, this chapter provides an introduction to further exploration of recently appointed leaders' experiences of leadership. There was room in the research to understand the influences, practices, and conditions leaders have already experienced. Understandings of these aspects are needed to inform the development of appropriate sector-specific support and learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders. As the early childhood education landscape has changed and developed haphazardly, so too has early childhood education leadership. Knowledge and documentation of recently appointed leaders' experiences are lacking. The qualitative research design, adopting the pragmatic framework used within this study (discussed further in chapter three), provided the opportunity to explore recently appointed leaders' experiences and the support they received concerning their roles.

This introduction chapter has introduced and outlined the importance of the research problem. Leadership, and other key terms used within this research, were defined to provide clarity within the thesis. The chapter also locates the study in relation to the research context and my personal position as a researcher. Initial descriptions of the attention to early childhood education leadership, how leaders assume their roles, and leadership learning were introduced before the New Zealand early childhood education context was explained. The chapter concludes by discussing the research aims, the significance of the research, and the research questions.

Chapter two describes the literature search process and reviews the literature related to the research problem. The chapter establishes knowledge of the current early childhood

education leadership literature. A feature of this chapter is the lack of literature concerning recently appointed leaders, highlighting the importance of this research.

Chapter three explains the qualitative research design that used a pragmatic philosophical framework and an exploratory methodological framework. Processes involved in participant recruitment, data management, and data analysis are explained in this chapter. The methodology and methods of this research were informed by the lack of literature relating to recently appointed leaders. Thematic analysis using both deductive and inductive processes supported the development of themes, which helped build foundations for understanding the experiences of recently appointed leaders.

Chapter four presents the findings and discussion related to the first research question: What is the professional profile of recently appointed early childhood education leaders, and to what extent is the profile shared? This chapter also addresses the first of four concepts, (distinct), that represent the findings of this research. The distinct participants and their standpoints from which they assumed their roles are discussed in this chapter. The overall argument of the thesis is advanced in this chapter by establishing that there was no consistent profile among participants, which meant that their learning needs were idiosyncratic.

Chapter five presents the findings and discussion related to the second and third research questions: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? This chapter addresses the second concept (navigation), used to represents the findings of this research. The overall argument of the thesis is advanced in this chapter by establishing that the participants' prior leadership learning opportunities were minimal. Because of the lack of foundational understanding of what their roles entailed, participants were seeking useful knowledge to help them navigate the challenges of their roles.

Chapter six continues the findings and discussion related to the second and third research questions: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? This chapter addresses the third concept, (transformation), conceptualizing the findings of this research. The overall argument of the thesis is advanced in this chapter by establishing that

early transformations were occurring out of necessity for participants. For useful knowledge development to occur, participants required more support than what was provided. Structured learning through early childhood education leadership-focused postgraduate study provided considerable support for the transformation of participants' knowledge and practice.

Chapter seven presents the final contribution of findings and discussion related to the second and third research questions: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? This chapter addresses the fourth concept, (connection), which represents the findings of this research. Participants' appreciation for the connections they had and their desires for further connections are discussed in this chapter. The overall argument of the thesis is advanced in this chapter by establishing that multiple social connections are important for the development of useful knowledge.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis and summarises the inquiry in relation to the research questions. This chapter provides models for the theorisation of early childhood education leadership and the principles (useful knowledge and social connection) for supporting and addressing the learning needs of early childhood education leaders. Besides this, I provide an overarching model representing the findings of this research. This overarching model is framed by the main claim of this research. That claim is that recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection that characterises this career stage. The model also incorporates the concepts and principles that represent the findings. Together, the components of the overarching model represent the understanding that participants in this study required more support and professional learning opportunities to enact the expectations of their roles. The lack of understanding of the needs of recently appointed leaders is highlighted throughout this thesis and is reiterated in the section on further research opportunities.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

The introduction chapter presented the research problem, research questions, and intentions of this doctoral research. This chapter argues there is a lack of documented sector-specific knowledge and understanding of the appropriate support for recently appointed leaders.

The review of the literature reported in this chapter provided themes that helped guide and inform the organisation of the findings chapters. However, the scarcity of literature challenged the ability to conceive appropriate learning opportunities to support leaders in a practical sense. This scarcity of literature highlights the importance of my research.

This chapter describes the process the literature review took and outlines the findings of the review. Initially, I describe the strategies used to search the literature. While the literature was limited concerning recently appointed leaders, the strategies for locating the literature, inclusion criteria, and limitations of the available literature are explained. Following this, the themes identified across the available literature are outlined.

The discussion of the literature and themes initially begins with exploring how conceptualising early childhood education leadership is challenging. This theme discusses the absence of early childhood education specific leadership models and the current notions of leadership within the sector. The theme of early childhood education leaders are not systematically prepared for and supported in their roles follows. It is this theme that addresses the unstructured nature of career progression, the limited opportunities for leadership development, and the common occurrence of on-the-job leadership learning. The literature indicated early childhood education leaders' work often involved multiple roles and responsibilities. How they spend their time is often challenged by conflicting demands. These demands are explored under the theme of the multidimensional nature of early childhood education leadership. The chapter then turns to the last theme of the review, what is known about supporting learning for early childhood education leaders. This theme explores leadership learning in initial teacher education and postgraduate study. Besides this, the learning and development opportunities that have shown benefits to participation and the

importance of contextually relevant learning are explained. The implications of my research in relation to the reviewed literature are summarised in the final section of the chapter.

2.2   Literature search strategy

In this section, I discuss the processes for locating the literature and the criteria used for including the literature. The databases used in searching for the literature and the limitations of the available literature are outlined. I finish this section by discussing the tentative themes that were drawn from the literature.

2.2.1   Locating the literature

The literature for this review was chosen from the Education and Arts subject guide on the Australian Catholic University (ACU) library database. Guides used included the Early Childhood Education *and* Educational Leadership *guides*. Within the Early Childhood Education guide, A+ Education, ProQuest Education, and PsycINFO databases were the primary search platforms. From the Educational Leadership guide, the Taylor and Francis database was searched. The Australian Catholic University library catalogue was also utilized. Advanced searches were conducted on each of the search tools. Full-text articles from peer-reviewed journals from 2008 (within the last ten years, at that time) onwards were sought. The rationale for this was to access literature that reflected recent and current developments in the sector. Key search terms used included lead*, 'early childhood' OR preschool OR kindergarten. Using the terms preschool and kindergarten within searches widened the scope and returned a substantial number of articles. However much of the literature was irrelevant due to not being specifically focused on leadership, so the use of these search terms was discontinued. Finding literature on novice or recently appointed leaders within the early childhood education field proved challenging. Using the terms 'novice leader', 'new leader', and 'recently appointed leader' returned no results. However, when conducting the searches detailed above in relation to school settings it was evident that literature relating to recently appointed or novice leaders in those settings was abundant (Krieg et al., 2014) when compared to early childhood education.

2.2.2   Criteria for inclusion

The initial rationale and justification for choosing literature from within the last ten years was to ensure that the literature was current. It was also important to ensure that the literature reviewed was inclusive of and relevant to the current early childhood education

context. Peer-reviewed work written in English was sought. Leadership in early childhood education does not have the same extensive history as business leadership literature or even the school leadership literature (Layen, 2015; Thornton et al., 2009; Weisz-Koves, 2011).

Given the lack of available literature, it was challenging to impose relevance criteria on the literature aside from the requirement for it to be published in peer-reviewed sources. Within early childhood education the requirements of leaders have changed over recent years both nationally and internationally, so earlier work does not necessarily hold the same relevance as more recent literature. However, some older literature was included if it had been cited multiple times within other works, dictating its significance. Following the completion of the critical appraisal of the literature, a key information summary was written for each article comprising of the abstract, the research question/topic, the research design (including the sample and methods), main findings and any issues, implications, and conclusions.

2.2.3   Databases used

A key reason for choosing the A+ Education database was the potential to find New Zealand and Australian research. In particular, I was interested in accessing New Zealand literature given its relevance to my context. Australian literature was sought for possible similarities to the New Zealand context. The ProQuest Education database was searched using the same search terms as the other databases and returned a small number of results, but none were relevant and searching this database was abandoned. The PsycINFO database produced one article that had not already been accessed. The Taylor and Francis database returned some relevant results with some articles already having been accessed on A+ Education. Given that the searches on the databases returned a small amount of relevant literature the Australian Catholic University library catalogue was then searched using the previous search terms. The resulting search included some literature that had already been sourced.

The initial literature search was concluded because articles continued to appear multiple times. The searched articles were supplemented with previously sourced articles from prior coursework research and my own Master of Education research. The justification for this was the relevance they held to the research focus. Ancestry searching was used when the literature of interest appeared in articles, books, and book chapters that had already been sourced, which led to some salient literature over ten years old being included.

2.2.4 *Limitations of the available literature*

Initially, in writing this chapter, I could not access enough literature to identify dominant themes. As this study progressed, while still limited, increasing literature on early childhood education leadership was emerging. Periodically throughout this study, the same search terms and databases were used to search for newer literature. This newer literature has been included and summarised to provide insights relevant to my study.

The apparent lack of literature regarding recently appointed leaders indicates that little is known by researchers about their experiences of support for their roles. This lack of empirical evidence highlights the need for more to be understood about support for leaders and their learning needs, therefore justifying my study.

Many of the studies reviewed in this chapter were small scale. Conducting a large-scale study to provide extensive data and an in-depth understanding of leaders' experiences was beyond the scope of my study. This is discussed further in chapter three, the methodology and methods chapter. Instead, my focus was on gaining an in-depth perspective on the specific experiences of recently appointed leaders. Descriptive accounts of many leaders' or researchers' experiences were provided in the reviewed studies and most studies involved leaders providing self-reports of their experiences. This gave insight into processes and practices that other studies used, which informed my study. While the self-report approach also has its limits, it is the approach I have taken in this study in keeping with the study's scope and the focus on the perspectives of recently appointed leaders.

Given leadership is a relatively new phenomenon for exploration within early childhood education, concerns have arisen about a lack of relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Research into early childhood education leadership has been described as lacking (Austin, 2014; Stamopoulos, 2012), there is a paucity (Krieg et al., 2014), and it is weakly theorized (Stamopoulos, 2012; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Given the infancy (Sims et al., 2015) of attention to early childhood education leadership, it is not surprising that there are few theoretically based studies (Aubrey et al., 2012). Therefore, work on further theorizing early childhood education leadership has been called for (Waniganayake et al., 2012). The level of detail provided within many of the reviewed studies does not offer a well-detailed articulation of the research process. This means it is challenging to recreate or be well-guided by these studies. Therefore, this study provides a detailed account of the processes performed to conduct this research.

Notwithstanding the general limitations of the available literature, the following tentative arguments drawn from my review of this literature begin with the claim that conceptualising early childhood education leadership is challenging. The lack of systematic preparation for leaders is outlined and followed by a discussion of how early childhood education leadership is a multidimensional role. The chapter then turns to discuss what is known so far about supporting learning for early childhood education leaders.

2.3   Conceptualising early childhood education leadership is challenging

This is the first of four themes within this literature review and discusses challenges with conceptualising early childhood education leadership. There is confusion in defining early childhood education leadership as "terminology and definitions used to describe the early childhood field are inconsistent in the research" (Nicholson et al., 2020). Leaders' roles often encompass core functions relating to leadership, management, and administration (Aubrey et al., 2012). Historically, this diversity of roles has contributed to confusion, along with the lack of clear distinctions between leadership and management (Klevering & McNae, 2018). Current definitions of leadership lack clarity and coherence (Aubrey et al., 2012) and omit the all-inclusive nature of early childhood education leadership. Leaving leadership to chance and adopting models of leadership outside of the field is no longer enough for the advancement of the sector (Douglass, 2018; Hard & Jònsdòttir, 2013). Further research is required to understand if a clear definition of what constitutes early childhood education leadership can be formulated.

2.3.1   *The Absence of early childhood education specific conceptualisations of leadership*

Leadership in early childhood education requires more theorising (Nicholson et al., 2020) as there are "few theoretically based studies identifying and testing different models and characteristics of leadership" (Aubrey et al., 2012, p.5). The small but growing body of literature specifically focused on early childhood education leadership has resulted in leaders looking to other education sectors and business for useful knowledge to guide them (Nicholson et al., 2020). However, leadership theories from other sectors do not acknowledge the complexities of early childhood education leadership (Klevering & McNae, 2018) so can be limited in their usefulness. For knowledge to be most useful, the early childhood education sector must create its own understanding of leadership, as many of the current educational leadership definitions or guidelines are grounded in compulsory school education (Nicholson & Kroll, 2015). The lack of leadership research is attributed to the

early childhood education sector receiving less attention (Layen, 2015) than the compulsory education sectors.

In attempting to define early childhood education leadership it is important to acknowledge the relationships between theory, action, and practice (Palaiologou & Male, 2019) as early childhood education leadership identity is challenged by the complexity of the field. The lack of understanding of leadership is generating "feelings of inadequacy and resistance towards notions of leadership in many early childhood teachers" (Klevering & McNae, 2018, p. 7). The absence of strong early childhood education leadership models and the current poor understanding and theorisation of leadership has provided challenges for those who are navigating leading in the sector (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013; Sims et al., 2015). Therefore, thorough research and investigation are required to formalise how practitioners conceptualise leadership (Aubrey et al., 2012). A flexible leadership approach is called for, due to the diversity of the sector (Aubrey et al., 2012). Extending and progressing debates around values, purposes, and priorities for best practice is one way this could be achieved (Aubrey et al., 2012).

Numerous barriers are challenging early childhood education leaders from re-conceptualising their roles (Sims et al., 2015). The complexities and ambiguity concerning sense-making about leadership were evident in Aslan-Bilikozen's (2011) small scale research that involved three participants who were transitioning from teaching to leading in a university in the United Arab Emirates. Participant responses showed leadership is a combination of reflective and active processes, which involved effort to understand challenges or situations when making decisions. In their small-scale studies, Grarock and Morrissey (2013) and Klevering and McNae (2018) found that how leaders view leadership and enact leadership is not always aligned.. Participants in Klevering and McNae's (2018) study "struggled to explicitly define or conceptualise leadership in their own practice, or even espouse leadership ideals linked to their ECE contexts" (Klevering & McNae, 2018, p. 9). Whereas Ryder et al. (2017) found several participants were able to articulate the leadership approach that guided their practice, which was reinforced by the researchers' observations and in talking with participants' teaching teams in the second phase of their research based in New Zealand which involved seven teacher-led early childhood education services.

2.3.2   *Notions of leadership within the early childhood education sector*

The challenges in conceptualising leadership have led to those in the sector exploring different types of leadership. In Grarock and Morrisey's (2013) Australian study of educational leaders, traditional notions of leadership have been found to be dominant with hierarchical structures in decision-making evident. Yet culture and operations were found to be collaborative in Aubrey et al. (2012) study conducted in England. As research in early childhood education has continued, a shift from traditional notions of leadership has seen distributed leadership become prominent in the early childhood education field in recent years (Lund, 2021). While the theory offers promise, the functionality in practice can be challenging. Distributed leadership "does not guarantee better performance" (Harris, 2013, p. 552) and "the term 'distributed leadership' is often used to mean distinctively different things" (Harris, 2013, p. 547). Some scholars argue that variations in understanding have caused distributed leadership to be misunderstood and misrepresented. For example, a frequent misuse is using the term distributed leadership for shared and collaborative leadership practice (Harris, 2013). Robinson (2008) who conducted research in New Zealand schools proposed that distributed leadership had two main facets; task distribution and a process of influence. Better enactment of distributing leadership responsibilities could contribute to ongoing improvement and build the capacity to enact leadership responsibilities (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). However, the theoretical promise of distributed leadership does not necessarily align with the practical aspects of enactment. Developed forms of leadership distribution are scarcely used as "ideas about distributed leadership are evolving, and there is limited understanding of this concept in practice" (Heikka & Hujala, 2013, p. 578).

As early childhood education leadership is evolving, it is being stretched (Aubrey et al., 2012). More contemporary notions of leadership, including relational practices, are becoming prominent (Douglass, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Ryder et al., 2017). Relational leadership has recently attracted interest as it aligns with complexities and rapidly changing systems within organisations. Klevering and McNae (2018) who conducted their research in New Zealand argued relational characteristics such as trust, communication, and collaboration are attributed to effective leadership. Henderson (2017), in an Australian article described three action research projects conducted in early learning services in three independent schools. In this article, Henderson (2017) explained that for the field to move

on from a focus on managing to more relational forms of leading, it requires a shift in professional identities and a change of perspectives on leadership.

In drawing on some aspects of distributed leadership and in understanding that there are role responsibilities required of staff in leadership roles, Bøe and Hognestad (2017) who conducted their study of early childhood education leaders in Norway, discuss hybrid leadership. Bøe and Hognestad's (2017) study involved six leaders who had at least five years of formal leadership experience. The exercise of positional and distributed leadership, labelled hybrid leadership, could be considered a new leadership identity that could offer an alternative and a way forward for the early childhood education sector. Bøe and Hognestad's (2017) research showed hybrid leadership involves taking responsibility to facilitate and direct staff. Hybrid leadership, Bøe and Hognestad (2017) argued, allows for a new conceptual space to understand how leaders identify and view their actions and respond to the complexity of their practices. For recently appointed leaders to enact these practices, they would need time in their role and support to develop an understanding of how to enact these practices.

Like Bøe and Hognestad (2017), Abel et al. (2017) from the United States, drew on different notions of leadership to create their Whole Leadership Framework. This framework helps to understand different aspects of early childhood education leadership and how these aspects interconnect. Designed as a practical and meaningful approach to leadership development, the framework outlines leadership domains and the inter-connected nature between the domains. The domains of the whole leadership framework include pedagogical leadership, administrative leadership, and leadership essentials. Each of the domains outline relevant facets of leadership.

In summary, there is some awareness of types and aspects of leadership within the early childhood education literature. However, the currently fragmented nature of information and theorisation of leadership does not provide sufficient useful knowledge to fully conceptualise leadership practice, making it is challenging for early childhood education leaders to know where to turn for guidance in enacting their roles. This leads to the next theme of early childhood education leaders are not being systematically prepared for their roles.

2.4   Early childhood education leaders are not being systematically prepared for and supported in their roles

This is the second of four themes within this literature chapter and it discusses the haphazard nature of assuming and learning about leadership roles. When learning to navigate leadership responsibilities and transform practice, on-the-job leadership learning is a common occurrence for early childhood education leaders. In this theme, I discuss unclear career progression for leaders, the limited and haphazard nature of leadership learning opportunities, and predominance of on-the-job learning reported in the literature. Not being systematically prepared and supported leads to confusion in constructing and enacting leadership. Early childhood education leaders are often unprepared and assume their roles unwillingly and without the professional learning opportunities they require to carry out their roles (Mistry & Sood, 2012; Moshel & Berkovich, 2021). Even though learning opportunities are lacking for most leaders, they transform their knowledge and practice by developing a "field-based understanding of their roles" (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020).

This lack of leadership support and lack of relevant leadership professional learning and development can lead to negative experiences and perceptions and can contribute to a reduction in the quality of services (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014; Edwards, 2018). To support leaders' ability to navigate their role responsibilities "practice-based leadership support that goes beyond a theoretical understanding of leadership" (Edwards, 2018, p. ii) is required.

2.4.1   *Career progression is largely unstructured for early childhood education leaders*

As there are no clear career pathways for early childhood education leaders (Klevering & McNae, 2018) they often find themselves ill-prepared for leading, and find themselves in their roles without advance planning (Sims et al., 2015) and with little or no training (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014; Edwards, 2018). Edwards (2018) in her New Zealand study, found leaders mostly ended up in their roles by being asked and feeling obliged to move into the role for either stability, to fill a vacant role, or for career progression. Edwards's (2018) interviewees had limited leadership development before taking on their roles and three of the four participants expressed that their limited learning did not practically support them in their roles. This was similar to the experiences of participants in this research. Chapter five, the second findings chapter takes up this theme of the foundations for leadership, which outlines the paths participants travelled and the types of experiences participants had as their careers progressed towards embarking on their leadership roles.

Historically, early childhood education has a high proportion of young and inexperienced staff in leadership roles. Cartmel et al. (2013) Australian's research, Mistry and Sood's (2012) English research, and Moshel and Berkovich's Israeli research (2021) report that leaders are often significantly unprepared for assuming leadership roles. It is likely leaders have participated in little if any leadership learning experiences. This, along with a lack of useful knowledge, including a lack of role descriptions and defined responsibilities (Moshel & Berkovich, 2021), is creating "considerable stress and multiple workplace issues" (Cartmel et al., 2013, p. 407) for early childhood education leaders. Barriers to leadership in Douglass' (2018) study involving 43 educators included: a lack of clear pathways to new roles, a lack of ongoing advanced learning and development opportunities, isolation, and lack of resourcing, and poor conditions. There was frustration from the participants in Douglass' (2018) study at the lack of opportunity for career progression.

All interview participants in Edwards' (2018) study had some on-the-job learning after assuming their roles and were required to "seek their own knowledge/support" (p. 46), similar to that of participants in my study. Chapter seven discusses how participants in my study were seeking further support through the forms of peer connections. Feelings of aversion and incompetence have resulted from the lack of professional learning and development (Mistry & Sood, 2012) and leaders often find they end up leading to the best of their ability. However, this tendency to lead in the best way they know how without the requirement to return a financial profit (Klevering & McNae, 2018) has become a challenge for some leaders with the privatization of the sector. Chapter five discusses the participants in this study who felt responsible for what they described as business-related responsibilities. Where centres are run as a business, some leaders felt restricted in what they could provide for children (Klevering & McNae, 2018). Klevering and McNae (2018) found that participants who had the opportunity to lead in different settings had a preference for not-for-profit and community-based settings.

In Edwards' (2018) study one participant applied for their role after having worked at the centre previously. This person had the vision to change the team, structure, and culture. One participant felt obligated to step up into a leadership role after being left in charge of the service they had been working in for five weeks, when the leader resigned. Another participant was appointed without a formal selection process to take on the highest leadership role in their service, after having held a more minor leadership role. An additional participant

was offered a temporary leadership role at her service during the first year after graduating. She felt obligated to take on the role given the lack of qualifications of the other staff. Building on this literature, chapter four discusses how participants in this study came to be in their roles and categorises them as aspirant, hesitant, or ambivalent in assuming their roles.

Quality improvement in early childhood education is typically attributed to pedagogical and educational leadership. Rouse and Spradbury (2016) argue such leaders need to make a conscious choice to accept their roles. Yet, they found in their small-scale study that educational leaders in Australian settings came to their roles "without making that conscious decision" (p. 507) to take on their role. This assigned leadership was overwhelming initially for participants, but they were able to outline their thinking of what the role should be. Yet many educational leaders were struggling with their role, including ways to implement required standards. Most educational leaders were focused on compliance (Sims et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2017) with some focus on developing their skills. However, they were yet to challenge current understandings or discourse to drive improvements in the profession and engage with critical pedagogy. The focus on compliance shaped the way educational leaders mentored and guided the work of their teams (Sims et al., 2017). By contrast, for early childhood education to evolve as a profession "we need leaders who excel in quality improvement at the service level, and who are willing to advocate for the ongoing development of professional understandings of quality" (Sims et al., 2015, p.149). The New Zealand context does not have a designated educational leader role. Depending on the structure of a service, the responsibility for leading the educational program could be assigned to the highest appointed leader or another person with role-specific leadership responsibilities.

2.4.2 *Leadership learning opportunities are limited and haphazard*

In the New Zealand context, there is an absence of early childhood education leadership-focused professional learning and development opportunities and there is no national early childhood education leadership development model. The effectiveness of early childhood education leadership-focused professional learning and development opportunities that are available is variable and not necessarily linked with best practices or sector needs (Edwards, 2018). What is available in pockets across the country often focuses on administration and management (Douglass, 2018) rather than what knowledge could be useful. Davitt and Ryder (2018) called for professional learning and development

opportunities to support emerging and current leaders. Davitt & Ryder (2018) found leaders had participated in little leadership development, if at all, before assuming their roles. Sector-wide professional learning and development opportunities for New Zealand early childhood education leaders are called for (Edwards, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018). The findings of my research show (discussed in chapter five in the section on Inconsistent opportunities to learn) the nature of the learning opportunities that participants experienced.

Edwards (2018) discussed the all-consuming nature of early childhood education leadership roles. Even after participating in their organisation's leadership program, a participant in Edwards' (2018) research explained they were still not prepared for the day-to-day reality of leadership. Over time, some organisations have developed their own emerging leaders' programs (Ryder et al., 2017). As a leader in a stand-alone service, one participant of Edwards' (2018) study was unsuccessful in trying to build supportive relationships with umbrella organisations in their area. This is similar to Leigh (all participants names are pseudonyms), a participant in my study who stated that service owners were not always willing to share information (discussed in the section on Horizontal connections in the theme of the desired relationships in chapter seven).

When exploring participants' experiences concerning leadership development opportunities, Edwards (2018) found some participants acknowledged they would have liked more experience before assuming their roles. There was a sense that leaders wanted to grow in their roles and an acknowledgement that ongoing learning is important (Edwards, 2018). Based on her survey, Edwards (2018) found:

> almost half of all respondents identified as having had no opportunity to participate in leadership training/development. Nearly a third selected participating in a one-off leadership professional development, a quarter had attended linked sessions of professional development, and one third had one on one mentoring by another leader. After taking on their leadership role 10% selected still not having participated in leadership training or development. The remaining 90% selected having participated in either one-off leadership professional development event or a sustained leadership development programme (e.g., 2-5 linked sessions), having one on one mentoring by another leader, or completed a postgraduate leadership programme (p. 34-35)

In an open-ended survey question, participants in Edwards' (2018) study were asked what they would do differently if they restarted their leadership journey. Overwhelmingly they identified the need to have some sort of leadership learning either before or early in their role. Having a mentor and support network was also identified. These opportunities could provide leaders with knowledge useful to their role and a sense of social connection. A small number of participants in Edwards' (2018) study acknowledged they would have liked more experience before taking on their role.

Early childhood education leaders in New Zealand want to be afforded the same level of national government-funded support as leaders within the compulsory schooling sector (Edwards, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018). It has been argued that this support should be for current and aspiring leaders (Edwards, 2018; Ryder et al., 2017). Government support, Klevering and McNae (2018) argued, could help create a contextually specific leadership identity. This support is overdue for the New Zealand sector. Edwards' (2018) study highlighted participants' desire for leadership development opportunities, before taking on a role, involving both theoretical and practical attributes. Participants in Edwards' (2018) study believed this program should provide opportunities for all leaders that involve: ongoing mentoring, addressing current needs within the sector, building a leadership network, and developing practical skills

2.4.3   Leadership learning on-the-job is a common occurrence

Edwards (2018) and Ryder et al. (2017), both New Zealand studies, discussed that leadership professional learning and development opportunities are limited, therefore, on-the-job learning is the dominant approach to leadership learning in early childhood education. Early childhood educationleaders often navigate their roles with self-taught leadership out of necessity and with little support, guidance (Edwards, 2018), or knowledge to enact their roles. Self-initiated experiences such as seeking literature, seeking support networks, and observing previous leaders (Edwards, 2018) were all identified as informal ways of learning.

Leaders in Aslan-Bilikozen's (2011) study that was conducted in the United Arab Emirates, identified that even within a six-month period, their skills, knowledge, attitudes, and awareness of leadership had changed. The three participants identified transformation at a personal and a professional level. In my study, Sophie (pseudonym) discussed (in chapter five in the section on operational demands) how she had grown as a person. Even with

challenges and personal sacrifices, the participants in Aslan-Bilikozen's (2011) study had a positive view of their experiences overall. However, when asked if they would still take on their leadership role knowing what they knew at the time of their interview, participants had mixed feelings (Aslan-Bilikozen, 2011, p.159) regarding whether they would still take on their roles.

In summary, early childhood education leaders often find themselves in their roles without advance planning and with little support. This lack of systematic preparation and unstructured career progression is not supporting the professionalisation and development of the sector. Once in their roles, leadership learning opportunities are limited at best and not thorough enough to address leaders' learning needs. While there is a place for on-the-job learning, this alone does not address leaders' learning needs. I now move to explain an example of the lack of systematic preparation and support for leaders in the Australian early childhood education context.

2.4.4   The importance of systematic preparation and support

The Australian early childhood education context provides an example of leaders not being systematically prepared for and supported in their roles. This example is from the Australian early childhood education context, as the New Zealand context does not have a mandated educational leader role. New Zealand expectations concerning leadership are outlined in the licensing criteria and state that "the service is effectively governed and is managed in accordance with good management practices" (MOE, 2022, p. 27).

In the Australian context, policy reforms are supporting a slow and steady professionalisation of the sector (Nuttall et al., 2018). The establishment of the educational leader role was mandated in 2010 (Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016) "under regulation 118 of the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA, 2011)" (Nuttall et al., 2018, p. 82).

This policy shift, instead of providing clear career progression, prompted swift changes. It propelled people with suitable qualifications into roles they may not have desired (Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016) and changed their role requirements. This largely untried role (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013) lacked guidance and information (Sims et al., 2017) in terms of expectations and how to navigate and enact the role. Understandings

of the role are only beginning to evolve and have sparked considerable interest, prompting research on the impact, challenges, and outcomes of implementing this policy change.

The reason for the establishment of the role was to support quality improvement. Challenges in fulfilling these expectations have been found to include establishing these positions several years after introducing the policy reform and a lack of clear role descriptions (Fleet et al., 2015; Rouse & Spradbury, 2016; Sims et al., 2017). There is no specific state or national overarching role description for the educational leader role (Fleet et al., 2015). Some educational leaders were not provided with role descriptions before assuming their roles. Rouse and Spradbury (2016) reported that one of their participants waited six months before receiving one. Similarly, Fleet et al. (2015) found more than half of the participants in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and New South Wales (NSW) did not have a role description to help them navigate their roles. Working without a role description could only add to the challenge of what is expected of these educational leaders, meaning a lot of on-the-job exploration and learning would be occurring.

Widely divergent approaches have been taken to making educational leader appointments. A participant in Rouse and Spradbury's (2016) study read of their appointment in the service's newsletter. Other educational leaders have been selected or appointed to their roles because of their experience or capacity, which was seen as more important than qualifications (Fleet et al., 2015).

These practices are particularly concerning because expectations of those in the educational leader role are high and being assigned this leadership role has been overwhelming for some educational leaders (Rouse & Spradbury, 2016). This has caused some anxiety and confusion concerning the role expectations, technical knowledge, and professional experience required to enact the role (Fleet et al., 2015). It was found that the responsibilities of an educational leader have been found to include "being a mentor, role model, support person, trainer, community linker and advocate" (Fleet et al., 2015, p.36). Other responsibilities include coordinating the curriculum while developing goals and expectations related to teaching and learning (Rouse & Spradbury, 2016). Rouse and Spradbury's (2016) findings highlighted that educational leaders need to have suitable expertise to enact their role. They advocated for funded leadership learning opportunities involving specialised training for the educational leader role. It was suggested that learning opportunities involve the chance to engage in supportive dialogue. Sims et al. (2017) found

their data also suggested educational leaders were new to their roles and there was no evidence they were thinking about longer-term issues.

The mandating of the educational leader role has raised issues because of the time required (but not designated) to enact the role (challenges with time for participants in this study are discussed in chapter five in the section on temporal demands), the authority this person holds not being stipulated, differences in how the role is enacted in different settings, and whether educational leaders are supported by a centre coordinator or director (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013). Not all educational leaders are given time away from their teaching responsibilities to carry out the role and there is no official mandate for this (Sims et al, 2017). A possible limitation of the realities of the educational leader role identified in Grarock and Morrissey's (2013) study was that, when their research interviews were being conducted, one participant was in the auditory range of the centre coordinator. Two other participants were in rooms where the coordinator was coming in and out to collect files. This lack of privacy could have constrained the responses from these participants, leading to potential limitations on the results of the study.

Fleet et al. (2015) believed it was unclear whether adequate support would be available for the success of the role and called for further investigation. Imposing policies such as implementing an educational leader role within all services could be seen as positive. However, the question could be asked about the support and professional learning that was offered and available to those enacting the educational role. In theory, the educational leader role could be a worthwhile addition to the early childhood education sector. However, giving or designating this title to an individual does not necessarily mean they instantly have the skills or suitable knowledge to navigate the expectations of the role. The role itself is more than a title and requires opportunities for leadership learning to develop knowledge useful to the role. Programs such as the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Leadership Program, are being established to support educational leader's with how to enact their roles.

A benefit of having a role such as the educational leader within a centre is that overseeing all operations of a service can be too much of a burden for the highest appointed leader, such as a director or coordinator. So, while acknowledging and advocating for the importance of the educational leader role, there is a need for support and professional learning for those in the sector to carry out and enact new policy initiatives. Rouse and Spradbury (2016) comment on the high turnover within early childhood education, which raises questions about how policy implementation can impact turnover.

In summary, policy reform is not enough for significant sector development. Reforms require support to implement and carry out change processes to ensure practitioners can make sense of and implement expectations. Ryder et al. (2017), a New Zealand study, discussed how the impact leaders have on teaching and learning is limited and they cite managerial tasks as the reason for this. They conclude that having both managerial and pedagogical responsibilities challenges the ability to effectively lead. This finding indicates how implementing a role, such as the Australian educational leader role, can share the load of leadership responsibilities (noting that in many Australian early childhood education services the two roles are held by the same person). I now move to discuss how early childhood education leaders operate in tension with the multiple roles and responsibilities they undertake and how they are challenged by time.

2.5   The multidimensional nature of early childhood education leadership

This is the third of four themes within this chapter. Determining what is important and navigating which responsibilities to attend to when and in which order can be challenging for leaders to determine. While leaders are required to carry out a diverse range of responsibilities within their roles, they are also required to enact them in a diverse range of settings (Krieg et al., 2014). The multiple and diverse roles and responsibilities leaders carry out can cause them to feel tension with the competing demands expected of them. Leaders navigate a range of dimensions including working as part of the teaching team while having the accountability of the leaders' role, balancing their role in leading in the service, fulfilling organisational expectations, and growing leadership capabilities in their team (Ryder et al., 2017). In addition, feeling torn between their teaching and leadership responsibilities (Hognestad & Bøe, 2016; Ryder et al., 2017), fragmentation and interruption to their work (Hognestad & Bøe, 2016), and aligning managerial tasks with leadership aspirations (Klevering & McNae, 2018) can be other tensions for leaders. The role-related demands that participants of my study were negotiating are discussed in the theme of the complexity of competing knowledge demands in chapter five.

Leaders have been found to "consider themselves responsible for a great many tasks" (Franzén & Hjalmarsson, 2018, p. 9). In Franzén and Hjalmarsson's (2018) Swedish study, participants placed considerable demands on themselves. These demands included carrying out tasks alone and handling potentially unpleasant situations or tasks that could be managed by staff. The performance pressure, the emotionally demanding nature of the

role, and being in "an 'in-between-position' when facing various expectations from different parties" (Franzén & Hjalmarsson, 2018, p. 11) add to the challenge of a leader's role. An area of dissatisfaction for leaders in Franzén and Hjalmarsson's (2018) study was feeling like they were not able to sufficiently support and lead teachers' learning. In addition, participants also found needing to be available to parents outside of traditional working hours, including evenings and weekends, blurred the lines between work and leisure.

Tension is created through the multiple roles that leaders play. This includes how they are required to lead some of the time and, at other times, expected to manage (Mistry & Sood, 2012). Similarly, Argyropoulou and Hatira (2014) discussed the duality of teaching and leading and Klevering & McNae (2018) discussed the combination of leading and managing. Aubrey et al. (2012) found that early childhood education leaders' roles encompassed functions of leadership, management, and administration. The multiple roles and responsibilities that participants in my study were navigating are reflected in chapter five in the theme of the complexity of competing knowledge demands. It is in this theme that I discuss the range of demands that the participants were experiencing.

Argyropoulou and Hatira (2014) found that leaders in their study also usually had to teach as a part of their roles. This adds more challenges and additional responsibilities to navigate for leaders, especially given they are often required to shift between teaching and leading at a moment's notice (Hognestad & Bøe, 2016). This is reflected in chapter five (in the section on assuming leadership: the shift in mindset and practice) where a participant, Sophie, discussed an example of taking mat time for children and then "someone comes and taps you on the shoulder" to address leadership responsibilities. Edwards (2018) found full teaching responsibilities were expected of seventy percent of participants in her study. The remaining participants had "limited or partial teaching responsibilities suggesting shared teaching and organisational elements" (Edwards, 2018, p. 31).

Dual roles and responsibilities of leaders are believed to contribute to the unwillingness to assume leadership roles (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014). These complex and contradictory demands (Aubrey et al., 2012) can affect leaders' perceptions of and their attitudes towards their roles (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014). Klevering & McNae (2018)

found there was tension and complexity between managing a service and the leading of learning. Participants in Argyropoulou and Hatira's (2014) study discussed their responsibilities without distinguishing between management and leadership. They saw their primary task as teaching children with leadership or management tasks being an extra burden. Two justifiable reasons for this included leaders being initially trained as teachers and rarely having leadership or management learning opportunities before assuming their role, and they may be appointed to a role they did not aspire to. The aspiration, hesitancy, and ambivalent feelings of participants in my study about assuming their roles are discussed in chapter four. Leaders' perceptions of themselves within their role impact how they carry out or enact their roles. The internal struggle between a leader's view of self, including how they articulated this belief, and the leadership practices that they were required to enact, was evident for a participant in a study by Ryder et al. (2017).

Within Ryder et al. (2017), some leaders viewed the management component of their role as a 'necessary evil' and often felt torn between their teaching and organisational commitments. Featuring strongly within Ryder et al. (2017), was the sense of incongruence leaders experienced. This was explicitly discussed by participants and became evident through analysis that indicated to the researchers that leaders were possibly not aware of other areas of incongruence. Areas of incongruence included:

> Working 'as part of the team' versus being the person others are accountable to; upholding the overall role of leadership of the team whilst still allowing others to come through and take on areas of leadership which they may perform in a different way to the designated leader; how leadership was articulated by designated leaders and then having to take on quite a different leadership role at times; and being in ratio whilst needing to attend to pressing organisational tasks as well (p. 51-52).

In addition to leaders' multiple responsibilities creating tension (such as children's needs and staff's needs), allocation of time can also create tension.

2.5.1   How leaders spend their time

Navigating time is a challenge for leaders as their time is not always spent where they would like it to be spent. Grarock and Morrissey (2013) in their Australian study, discuss lack of time as a barrier to leadership. In another Australian study that was

conducted by Rouse and Spradbury (2016) time was discussed as a factor that can influence how leaders feel about their roles. The complexity and challenge of their work gave leaders a sense of "loss of time" (Mistry & Sood, 2012, p. 28) in supporting teaching and learning in Mistry and Sood's (2012) study conducted in England. The privatization of the sector in New Zealand has also meant many leaders in services are required to manage a business while providing educational experiences for children (Klevering & McNae, 2018). What participants in my study described as business-related responsibilities are discussed in chapter five in the section on operational demands. Lack of release time from teaching children (Sims et al., 2017) can also be a challenge, with many leaders 'stealing time' when they could (Ryder et al., 2017) to carry out the expectations of their roles.

The primary responsibilities of leaders can vary. The relational, pedagogical, and improvement responsibilities of leaders (Franzén & Hjalmarsson, 2018; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Hujala et al., 2016) were significant in the reviewed studies. However, the daily management tasks, such as allocating places for children, finding relief teachers, and managing finances, buildings, and security can use a significant amount of leaders' time (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). This challenges their ability to stand back to reflect on their practice (Aubrey et al., 2012).

In summary, leaders often find the complexity of their roles means they have conflicting demands on their time and can be pulled in different directions at a moment's notice. With time lacking to enact all facets of their roles, leaders find themselves having to determine which responsibilities and priorities to attend to. This includes what *does* take precedence versus what *should* take precedence. How participants in my study were challenged by the complexity of their roles is discussed in chapter five.

A further challenge for the sector is how to support leadership learning when the diversity of services means responsibilities can be considerably different in different settings.

The complexity and multidimensional nature of early childhood education leadership mean there is a range of challenges that can occur for leaders. Participants in Edwards' (2018) study discussed their advice for aspiring leaders advocating for leaders to think seriously about whether a leadership pathway was one they wanted to take. One participant advised leaders to be both professionally and personally ready to assume their roles while also having a good support system outside of work. Another participant believed leaders needed to have basic leadership knowledge and to understand themselves as a

leader. This participant suggested new or aspiring leaders should assume roles, but be intentional in what they are doing and understand, that they will need support in the form of leadership training, a mentor, and reading about leadership. This participant felt, "there are not a lot of perks in taking on the extra work and responsibility as a leader aside from learning and growth as a professional and person" (Edwards, 2018, p. 46). The participants in my study also offered advice for aspiring leaders, which is discussed in chapter five. I now turn to explore the theme of what is known about supporting learning for early childhood education leaders.

2.6   What is known about supporting learning for early childhood education leaders

This is the final of four themes within this literature review and discusses what the current literature can tell us about possible leadership development opportunities. The ways early childhood education leaders have engaged with leadership learning vary and the most suitable ways to support leaders remain contested (Layen, 2015). Development of knowledge and skills relating to early childhood education leadership (Hard & Jònsdòttir, 2013), as well as more leadership professional learning (Reynolds, 2011), have been called for. In this theme, I explore the impacts of formal study on transforming leaders' knowledge. I then move to discuss how participating in learning and development opportunities shows benefits before discussing the importance of contextually relevant learning.

Professional learning opportunities and support for leaders have been deemed vital (Reynolds, 2011) for quality improvement in the sector (Douglass, 2018). Professional learning focused on leadership is valued by leaders. However, it has been found that leaders are "viewing professional learning and development from a more generic perspective rather than from a specific leadership lens" (Ryder, et al., 2017, p. 42). Leadership quality is related to successful professional development, including programs that are practical and targeted (Cherrington, et al., 2013). While professional development is vital and impacts the quality of a service, more research is required to understand the best support for leaders.

One-off courses in New Zealand have been found to not to meet the deep learning needs (Klevering & McNae, 2018) early childhood education leaders require even though these are still regularly attended (Ryder, et al., 2017). By contrast, service-led courses or external short courses with in-depth leadership professional learning and development are not common (Ryder et al., 2017).

Networks and connecting with others were identified by participants in Edwards' (2018) New Zealand study as beneficial. The participants in Edwards' (2018) study felt that these connections were important to their success while allowing them to discuss challenges and further develop their skills and ideas. However, networks can be limited (Edwards, 2018). Similarly, Douglass's (2018) American study found leaders identified relationships and networks as supporting their leadership. The social connections and desired connections of participants in the present study are discussed in chapter seven.

2.6.1   Formal qualifications

In this section, I discuss the literature on both initial teacher education and postgraduate study in relation to leadership. Leaders often do not have much teaching experience before taking on leadership roles, which impacts their readiness for leadership. For example, 80% of Edwards' (2018) participants reported not feeling prepared for their first leadership role. Initial teacher education programs have been identified as possible learning opportunities to develop leadership capacity (Aslan-Bilikozen, 2011; Aubrey et al., 2012). Some initial teacher education programs have been reported to provide a limited understanding of leadership (Mistry & Sood, 2012). However, because these programs remain principally child-focused (Edwards, 2018; Layen, 2015), they do not offer sufficient preparation for leadership roles.

Transitioning from managing children to managing adults has been found to worry those taking on leadership roles (Mistry & Sood, 2012). This could be because of the "potential disconnect between the ability to teach young children and the ability to lead adults, as these tasks encompass different skills and purposes" (Edwards, 2018, p. 14). Leadership learning requires more complex and sophisticated learning opportunities than initial teacher education offers (Layen, 2015). Therefore, a progression structure for qualifications that progresses to leadership qualifications has been advocated for (Aubrey et al., 2012).

In recent years, there has been some development in the understanding of the benefits of postgraduate study. In 2012, Mistry and Sood (2012) explained that there is "limited literature linking the role higher education is specifically playing in the preparation for EY [Early years] leadership" (p. 32). Later, Klevering and McNae (2018) found that postgraduate study was beneficial if it is of a sustained nature. Further research on the benefits of leadership-focused postgraduate study has been called for (Edwards, 2018).

Postgraduate programs can allow leaders to make connections between theory and practice. However, they can be expensive and challenging for new leaders to attend whilst struggling with the demands of their role (Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016). Similarly, poor pay hinders some leaders from their ability to engage in further study (Cartmel et al., 2013). Ryder et al. (2017) found only a few of their participants had undertaken higher qualifications. Yet, postgraduate study can affect the way leaders consider their capabilities (Edwards, 2018).

In the New Zealand context, specific early childhood education leadership qualifications have been introduced in recent years through private training entities. These include the Graduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) through Te Rito Maioha | Early Childhood New Zealand and New Zealand Tertiary College's Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Leadership and Management). It has been argued that people who graduate with leadership qualifications move from leading with instinct to having knowledge and understanding of effective leadership (Ryder et al., 2017).

2.6.2 The absence of leadership learning

The literature indicates leadership learning for many leaders starts after assuming a role (Edwards, 2018). Participants in Edwards (2018) study believed that a leadership style is constructed over time. These participants discussed that new leaders should seek professional learning opportunities, hold strongly to their vision, and seek practical courses related to tasks involved in their roles. Yet, the literature is silent on the need to support the immediate professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. In the absence of specific leadership development programs, leaders turn to what is available, such as support at an individual organisational level, one-off courses, and postgraduate study (Edwards, 2018).

The awareness of the need for leadership development programs within the sector is growing (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016). The benefit of longer-term leadership development options, such as action research, higher qualifications, mentoring and coaching, and development programs specific to leadership, have been acknowledged as important (Layen, 2015). Edwards (2018) found there was overwhelming support for learning opportunities before or soon after assuming leadership. The suggested learning opportunities included mentoring, networks of other leaders, and some participants indicated a desire to have more experience before assuming a role.

2.6.3 Leadership learning and development opportunities show benefits to participation

In this section, I explore a range of learning and development options that supported the transformation of leadership practices. In the literature that reports on studies that offered participants opportunities to grow and develop useful knowledge and their practices, successes were noted. Ang (2011) found leadership development programs had a strong impact on leaders' perceptions and practices. Hadley et al. (2015) suggest that academic experts' and practitioner leaders' collaboration can have long-lasting impacts, a claim that requires further longer-term study.

Multiple studies have documented a range of international initiatives that have supported the transformation of leadership practices. The New Zealand early childhood education sector and the New Zealand government could take some lessons from these initiatives. Successive English governments have placed a focus on qualifications and quality in the early childhood sector. This has led to increased interest in leadership and the development of training such as the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) and the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) award, now called Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS).

Programs that involved learning opportunities that focused on the direct experiences of participants have shown benefits. Significantly, these programs offered a range of different aspects and opportunities for learning for participants. Providing a range of opportunities for learning offers the ability to better meet the needs of participants. The program in Carroll-Meehan et al. (2017) study included coaching related to the four domains (specialist knowledge, professionalism, recognition, and qualifications) of "the Sustainable Early Childhood Leadership Model (Meehan, 2011)" (p. 12). Doctoral-level courses, including academic content and practical real-world issues, were the focus of Douglass's (2018) study. Krieg et al. (2014) program involved "three core learning days, mentor visits and telephone calls and an individual participant-driven inquiry project" (p. 73). The programs documented in Shore et al. (2021) study focused on leader responsibilities and challenges, connecting with others, and ongoing support.

Exploring participants' specific tensions through guided interventions were features of Carroll-Lind et al. (2016) and Nuttall et al. (2018) research. These programs involved the researchers mirroring participants' tensions back to them (Nuttall et al., 2018).

Researchers worked with participants "to move beyond simply stimulating discussion, to ask different sorts of questions based on elements of the[ir centre] activity systems and the relationships between these" (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016, p. 33). Mapping tensions using the activity system of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) framework supported participants in bringing conscious awareness to their challenges (Nuttall et al., 2018). This research highlighted the importance of exploring the lived experiences of participants and using these experiences as learning opportunities.

Layen (2015) took a different approach to exploring the lived experiences of leaders by analysing and reflecting on personal narratives. Participants in Layen's (2015) study valued the opportunity to engage with this approach, finding it beneficial to focus on themselves. Layen (2015) concluded that while research from a life story perspective is limited, this approach could be beneficial in early childhood education given the diversity of the sector as it allows for context-specific exploration and reflection.

Edwards (2018) advocated for a national program in the New Zealand context to support leadership development to strengthen emerging leaders and support all services to strengthen leadership capabilities. A combination of both theoretical and everyday leadership practices was advocated for by Edwards (2018) as were ongoing mentorship and support networks. Participants in Edwards' (2018) study suggested a leadership development program "should meet individual needs" (Edwards, 2018, p. 36) and include sustained development opportunities, individual mentoring, and regular national or regional meetings (Edwards, 2018). Similarly, Klevering and McNae (2018) concluded learning opportunities for early childhood education leaders need to be revisited, arguing for "ongoing and contextually relevant learning opportunities" (Klevering & McNae, 2018, p. 14). They also advocated for increased government support for leadership development programs for early childhood education leaders.

This section has shown that successful leadership development programs and opportunities are detailed in the literature. The programs, while offering different forms of learning opportunities have contributed knowledge towards understanding potentially useful opportunities for recently appointed leaders. A key strength of the programs discussed was that they focused on the direct experiences of participants. Carroll-Lind et al. (2016) is an example of a New Zealand-based study influenced by international work but there have been few other options of this type available in New Zealand.

2.6.4   The benefits of contextually relevant learning

Leadership development is more effective when planned (Aubrey et al., 2012) and is contextually relevant (Klevering & McNae, 2018; Mistry & Sood, 2012). For effectiveness, an intentional approach (Edwards, 2018) that considers the individual and their work context is important (Edwards, 2018). There is a need for approaches to be progressive (Klevering & McNae, 2018) and to develop the mental schemas of leaders (Mistry & Sood, 2012). In summary, what is useful knowledge for the individual should be considered within learning opportunities.

Edwards (2018) found leaders need learning opportunities that are relevant to their role. These opportunities should be long term, where development is tracked, and the focus should be relationship-driven. Over time, leaders in Edwards' (2018) study began to see themselves as being more effective in their roles. One participant identified she had grown stronger over time in her role and that self-belief was important. Participants in Edwards (2018) study explained that leadership-focused professional development, experience, and on-the-job learning had supported them to become more effective in their roles. Recommendations for future aspiring leaders from the participants in Edwards' (2018) study show the importance of different aspects of learning. Their suggestions included leadership training before assuming a role, a mentor or leadership network, asking questions to understand the scope of their role, and developing self-belief.

In summary, despite a few positive examples, the benefits of the support leaders have received from professional learning opportunities require more research. This research should include exploring what leaders think they needed or still require. However, benefits reported in previous research have been based on assessments at the completion of the program. This means further research is required to understand long-term benefits and transformations for participants. For example, were these opportunities only 'successful' at the time, or were they embedded into leaders' ongoing practice once they completed the intervention? The learning opportunities described in the literature indicate there is recognition of the need for leadership learning opportunities that go beyond one-off courses.

The four themes of this literature review (Conceptualising early childhood education leadership is challenging, early childhood education leaders are not systematically prepared for their roles, the multidimensional nature of early childhood

education leadership, and what is known about supporting learning for early childhood education leaders) have guided the development of the methodology and methods of this study as well as informing development of themes within the findings. I now discuss the implications of this review for the research aims.

2.7   Implications for the research aim

My research aim was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. There is a gap in the current literature concerning recently appointed leaders. The sector does not have evidence to support an understanding of their learning needs. There is an urgent need for recently appointed leaders' experiences to be thoroughly researched. Indeed, it is an injustice that leaders often receive minimal support for the roles they have found themselves thrust into. Early childhood education leaders end up in roles when they may not have wanted the role and perhaps had some reluctance or resistance towards accepting (Krieg et al., 2014; Woodrow & Busch, 2008).

Supporting the methodological choices made in this study, the literature reviewed attests to the value of the use of interviews in early childhood education leadership research. Similar to the research of Aslan-Bilikozen (2011), Grarock and Morrissey (2013), Klevering and McNae (2018), and Layen (2015), semi-structured interviews were employed in my research. Semi-structured interviews allow for detailed responses to be obtained with the flexibility to follow up on interesting responses from participants. This is discussed further in the justification for using semi-structured interviews in chapter three.

2.8   Conclusion

This chapter described the identification and selection processes for securing relevant literature for this study. The limited literature provided some insights that impacted the design of this research. The review of the literature also helped in identifying gaps in the current literature and justified the need to conduct my research to understand the needs of recently appointed leaders.

Exploring the literature highlighted the challenges in conceptualising early childhood education leadership. More research is required to support the development of the conceptualisation of early childhood education specific leadership models that are not only

theoretically but also practically relevant. The lack of systematic support for leaders highlighted in this chapter included the lack of structure in career progression and opportunities to participate in leadership learning opportunities. While on-the-job learning is a common occurrence for early childhood education leaders, the literature indicates this is not sufficient preparation. The multidimensional nature of early childhood education leadership was unanimously described, spanning the range of responsibilities expected of leaders. While learning opportunities in the available literature indicated some benefits of participation in structured professional learning and development, the long-term effects of these interventions are unknown. Contextually relevant learning has shown promise, but more research is required to understand the extent and effectiveness of what is currently available. In contributing to these debates, I now move to chapter three, where I explain and justify the methodology that guided this research, and the chosen methods.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The literature review findings in the previous chapter, while limited, helped determine the methodological approach taken in this research. In this chapter, I explain how my study adopted a qualitative methodological approach and exploratory orientation to explore and draw some conclusions about the preparation, support, and learning needs of recently appointed leaders. A pragmatic conceptual framework underpinned the research and supported analysis of participants' experiences.

This chapter also discusses ethical considerations in the participant recruitment process, as well as across the research. The criteria for inclusion included that participants were appointed to their roles within two years prior to being interviewed. The use of interviews and the structure of the interview schedule are explained and justified. The way the data was managed is explained before the data analysis processes are explained. Thematic analysis, using both deductive and inductive analysis, was used to analyse the data. These processes supported the development of two pragmatically influenced principles to support the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. The two principles of useful knowledge and social connection are further explained in chapter eight.

3.2 Research design

The following section discusses and justifies the research design, which was underpinned by qualitative methodology to support an overall exploratory methodological approach. A key strength of this design was the exploratory power offered by the qualitative data (Creswell, 2014) and subsequent qualitative analysis guided by a pragmatic conceptual framework.

In this thesis, pragmatism was combined with an exploratory methodological approach to use the best methods possible and to provide the foundation for a combination of deductive and inductive analytic strategies. The deductive and inductive analysis took a thematic approach, which allowed for the exploration of themes including interpreting patterns, and looking for similarities, themes, and emerging ideas within the data. Due to the lack of transparency in previous studies, this thesis thoroughly documents the details of the processes undertaken in this study.

3.2.1   Qualitative research design

The objectives of this research included understanding the support recently appointed leaders had experienced, and what their current support and learning needs were at the time of interviewing.

Qualitative research has become more than an alternative to quantitative research. Becoming "a field of inquiry in its own right" (Denzon & Lincoln, 2013, p. 5) qualitative research reports on data that produce knowledge that is relevant for practice. In my research, it was important to produce practically relevant knowledge concerning participants' support and learning needs. The literature review showed that the support and learning needs of recently appointed leaders are not a well-researched problem. This is despite the importance of effective leadership in the field.

An exploratory or descriptive approach is most commonly used in qualitative research (Leavy, 2017). In my study, an exploratory approach was important in allowing for meaning to be created from participants' experiences and interpreting what had occurred for them. Qualitative research is characterized by multiple features and principles. Overall, it focuses on understanding the realities, perspectives, and knowledge of those involved in the research.

Seeking to understand human action (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) is an important feature of qualitative research. Interrelated interpretive practices are used within qualitative research to try to better understand the research focus (Denzon & Lincoln, 2013), rather than focusing on procedure-driven ways of working (Twining et al., 2017). Interpretation was important within this research to create an understanding of participants' experiences, as the exploration of the literature showed little has been previously identified about recently appointed leaders. In this research, patterns were sought, moments were explored for importance, and the actions of how people responded in social contexts were explored (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Interpretation and making sense of the phenomena (Denzon & Lincoln, 2013) within this research was achieved through exploring relationships between the data. This was done by identifying patterns that were occurring, such as participants' discussing and referring back to the availability of time to do their work (discussed in chapter five in the section on temporal demands). This was important in exploring and understanding what unified the findings and the connecting interrelationships (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

A qualitative approach was used to give sufficient depth of data and to build rich insights into the experiences and learning needs of participants. To effectively answer the research questions, it was necessary to develop an understanding of who the participants were while also exploring in detail their real and personal experiences (Sims et al., 2017). Qualitative research principles provided a methodological framework for the research, while the conceptual principles for the research were drawn from pragmatism.

3.3   Conceptual framework: Pragmatism

The conceptual framework of this study took a pragmatic approach. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the history of pragmatism as a philosophical movement. The overview includes the founding theorists and their key claims and similarities and differences between the key claims. The rationale for, and benefits of, using a pragmatic framework are then explained.

3.3.1   Pragmatism

Emerging in the United States, pragmatism became known initially through the work of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and was later further developed by William James (1842-1910), and John Dewey (1859-1952) (McCaslin, 2008; Rumens & Kelemen, 2010). These founding pragmatists, while comparable, held some differing views of the philosophical nature of pragmatism (Talisse & Aikin, 2008). Pragmatism was initially introduced in the article entitled *How to Make Our Ideas Clear* written by Charles Sanders Peirce in 1878. However, pragmatism went largely unnoticed till William James delivered a lecture entitled *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results* at the University of California in 1898. In 1907, William James published his book *Pragmatism* (Moore 1961). Described as a prolific writer with complex and sophisticated ideas which were considered to be before his time, Peirce's work is believed to have not been disseminated widely due to his lack of a university post (Plowright, 2016).

Traditional philosophy attempts "to reach a foundation of certainty grounded in sensory or logical particulars" (Hickman & Alexander, 1998, p. x). Pragmatism by contrast emerged from "the rejection of the traditional epistemological divide that pitted rationalism against empiricism" (Plowright, 2016, p. 15). Rejecting absolutisms and opposing dualisms, pragmatism (Rumens & Kelemen, 2010) is described as "a commitment to uncertainty" (Feilzer, 2010, p. 14) which recognises that learning generated in "research is relative and

not absolute" (Feilzer, 2010, p. 14). Putting practice at the centre of knowledge (Rescher, 2016) and seeking to address problems of practice, pragmatism is concerned with relations and conditions (Hammond, 2013). Pragmatism involves everyday meaning (Moszkowicz, 2013) and uses knowledge to help solve real-world problems (Feilzer, 2010). This knowledge is "generated in action" (Hammond, 2013, p. 607) and in reflecting on action. Pragmatism is characterised by the "connection between action and thought" (Plowright, 2016, p. 14) where ideas and theories are founded on experience.

Within pragmatism, science itself is viewed as a social practice (Rumens & Kelemen, 2010) and a form of human knowledge (Danforth, 1999). Being free of methodological constraints (Feilzer, 2010), pragmatism offers flexibility and variety rather than a paradigm or specific research strategy (Hammond, 2013). This flexibility is sometimes viewed as a weakness. With the ability to "be stretched to cover experimental testing but also much more inductive approaches to inquiry – this leaves a great deal of scope methodologically" (Hammond, 2013, p. 614). Pragmatism instead suggests that what is most important is that research helps find out what the researcher wanted to know (Feilzer, 2010). The ability to use "a logical method of inquiry" (Plowright, 2016, p. 22) to create an understanding of "practical outcomes or effects" (Plowright, 2016, p. 22) is an important feature of pragmatism making it ideal as an underpinning epistemological framework for this thesis.

3.3.2   *The differing views amongst the early pragmatists*

While Peirce founded pragmatism, Dewey and James developed their perspectives of pragmatism (Plowright, 2016). These varying views and interpretations, alongside later contributions, mean pragmatism is not always easily defined (Hammond, 2013). Views of pragmatism amongst the early founders were contentious, with Peirce dissatisfied with the writings of other pragmatists (Talisse & Aikin, 2008). James believed Peirce's view of pragmatism was too closely aligned with science and left out other aspects of human experience (Rescher, 2016). At the centre of his philosophical vision, Peirce saw pragmatism as a means to focus on creating meaning from challenging or abstract concepts (Talisse & Aikin, 2011).

Peirce believed it was necessary to develop a method of thinking that increased clarity and supported understanding (Plowright, 2016). In arguing that conceptual understanding is drawn from thinking that includes scientific method and logical reasoning, Peirce argued it was important to consider what we already know to support

finding out what we do *not* know (Plowright, 2016). For Peirce, pragmatism was a theory of meaning that linked observed conditions with observed results (Rescher, 2016), thereby offering the opportunity to look at what works and take guidance from experience (Rescher, 2016). The basic principle of Peirce's pragmatism "of linking theory with experience and practical matters went against the long accepted view that understanding about the world was derived from knowledge abstracted from systematic, rational thinking" (Plowright, 2016, p. 15).

Using the term pragmatism in print was first done by James, although he credited Peirce as having initially formulated the concept (McCaslin, 2008). James, finding Peirce's conceptualisation of pragmatism narrow, proposed a broadened view: from seeing pragmatism as "a logical rule for doing philosophy" (Talisse & Aikin, 2008, p. 14) to viewing pragmatism as a philosophy in itself. James saw his view of pragmatism as offering a perspective on how people relate to their world (Suckiel, 2006) and saw the importance of how thoughts and actions relate to each other (Moszkowicz, 2013).

Seeing pragmatism as a way to mediate between what he believed as flawed and conflicting world-views, James:

> believed that his philosophy of pragmatism, like absolute idealism, could acknowledge the legitimacy of important metaphysical questions; while at the same time, like scientific rationalism, it could offer interpretations of these questions and their possible solutions which were sufficiently concrete to be empirically relevant and meaningful (Suckiel, 2006, p. 31-32).

Dewey's predecessors provided a foundation that allowed him to propose a more comprehensive and systematic (Talisse & Aikin, 2011) view of pragmatism. While crediting Peirce with initially conceptualising pragmatism, Dewey seldom referred to Peirce's work (Margolis, 2006). However, like "Peirce, Dewey sought a way of doing philosophy that was unhindered by the traditional puzzles and problematics" (Talisse & Aikin, 2011, p. 2). Dewey's version of pragmatism was grounded in social ethics, whereas Peirce's was grounded in science and James's was grounded in personalistic psychology (Rescher, 2016). Dewey, however, shared with Peirce and James the importance "of experience and experiment over the indications of speculation and over the urgings of experience-abstractive theorizing" (Rescher, 2016, p. 9). Dewey saw prior experiences,

including ideas, actions and identities as influencing "the constitution and experience of the immediate environment" (Moszkowicz, 2013, p. 325).

Like James, Dewey expanded on Peirce's more modest view of pragmatism. This more modest view became "a full-blown philosophical system whose ambitions and domain extend beyond the more modest Peircean project of making explicit the commitments implicit in our existing practices" (Talisse & Aikin, 2008, p. 24). Where Dewey's views differed from James, yet linked with Peirce, was in viewing pragmatism as "a critical stance toward the traditional positions, arguments, and categories of philosophy" (Talisse & Aikin, 2011, p. 3). This involved showing the lack of viability of nonpragmatic philosophical conceptions.

Peirce, James, and Dewey recognised differences in their conceptions of pragmatism. Peirce viewed "pragmatism as a rule for conducting philosophical inquiry, Dewey saw pragmatism as a substantive philosophical program in itself" (Talisse & Aikin, 2011, p. 3). Regardless of the differences in their conceptualisations of pragmatism, James, and Dewey remained close to Peirce's original principle "that beliefs could only be distinguished by the action" (Rumens & Kelemen, 2010, p. 131) they create. The central connection between the work of Peirce, James, and Dewey was the interpretation and emphasis on natural and whole accounts of problems (Talisse & Aikin, 2011).

For the reasons outlined above, the search to understand human experience (Duram, 2010) is central to research framed by pragmatism. Pragmatic studies probe into the interactions that occur "between people and their environment" (McCaslin, 2008, p. 674). However, pragmatic inquiry does not always lead to certainty. James "noted that a pragmatic study avoids abstract, fixed principles and does not pretend there is only one final truth" (Duram, 2010, p. 1074). A central notion of pragmatism is that truth will always be present: the issue of concern is how we use available truths to create understandings relevant to the current situation (McCaslin, 2008). Truth, therefore, changes as reality changes (McCaslin, 2008), a principle that underpins the later development of qualitative methodologies, which was centrally influenced by pragmatism.

3.3.3 Using a Pragmatic conceptual framework in this research

Pragmatism was an attractive conceptual framework for this research as it stresses a focus on, first, identifying the problem "within its broadest context" (Duram, 2010, p.

1073) and, second, seeking to develop an understanding of human experiences (Duram, 2010). Being open and curious about interesting emerging and unexpected findings (Feilzer, 2010) is central to pragmatic principles. This was important within my research because there is little prior research on recently appointed leaders. Pragmatic principles also acknowledge that the range of participants' experiences, while they were different and specific to them, could also be related to each other. For example, when discussing whether they aspired for their roles (discussed further in chapter four in the theme of grasping convenient opportunities), Areana was clear that she had aspirations to assume her role. Sophie, one of the younger participants, discussed how she aspired to hold a leadership role one day, but not as early as she assumed one. Charlotte was clear about her aspiration for a leadership role but, like Caitlin, was prepared to wait for what she deemed as the right role for her. Maya, however, held a more tentative view and discussed how she did not really aspire to her role because she acknowledged the enormity of the role.

Because people's various realities are given a privileged position within pragmatism (McCaslin, 2008), it allowed for the real and varied experiences of participants to be at the forefront of understanding the research problem. This was important for building an understanding of how participants' experiences could help inform principles to underpin suitable ways to support future leaders. Without theoretical constraints and the need to test a narrow hypothesis (Duram, 2010), pragmatism provided the warrant for an open investigation and the ability to understand the complexities of the research phenomenon.

A further benefit of using pragmatism was that it allowed a practical and sensible (Clarke & Visser, 2019) approach to exploring participants' experiences. It provided the freedom to focus on how to best answer the research questions (Clarke & Visser, 2019). This was especially important given that recently appointed leaders have been subject to little prior research that could guide the choice of research methods. Also, the variety of early childhood services (e.g. sessional or full day) and roles participants held (e.g. owner, working in a large organisation or a standalone community-based service) within the sector added to the confusion or complexity of the research problem. Pragmatism, by enabling "a focus on inclusion rather than adhering to orthodoxy" (Clarke & Visser, 2019) and not requiring a linear investigation (Duram, 2010) allowed for flexibility to explore and incorporate differences. In summary, it allowed for the "ability to select the best possible

methods" (Duram, 2010, p. 1074) to make informed decisions to address the research questions (Clarke & Visser, 2019).

Within the qualitative framework, this research took an exploratory stance. This is justified in terms of the lack of existing research into the experiences of recently appointed leaders, and the support and learning needs they may have. An exploratory approach fitted well with this research because it helps to seek to understand new or under-researched problems (Leavy, 2017). It was therefore a way of learning about the research focus and creating some understanding of participants' experiences.

To ensure the credibility of taking an exploratory approach, a range of literature regarding early childhood education leadership was consulted, even though there is a lack of literature focusing on recently appointed leaders. Some early childhood education leadership literature helped support the development of the methodological approach used in this study (especially Edwards, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018; Layen, 2015; and Weisz-Koves, 2011). It was evident that recently appointed leaders were underexplored. The need to generate new knowledge (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) about their experiences supported the justification for using an exploratory approach.

An exploratory methodological approach fitted well with the pragmatic conceptual framework of this study, as it sought to understand and probe into the research problem. Focusing on what was occurring within the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) and beginning without firm concepts were important aspects of the exploratory approach. This provided the opportunities to make observations, search for patterns, make tentative conclusions (Johnson & Christensen, 2020), and explore similarities and differences to interpret the data. Instead of testing a narrow hypothesis, it allowed for seeking to understand, develop rich insights, and form tentative theory. Understanding was created from sensitising concepts that came from participant stories, rather than *a priori* concepts. An example of this is the way that I identified, that during her interview, that Sarah frequently returned to the issue of time, including lack of time and how her time was used (see chapter five in the section on temporal demands in the theme of the complexity of competing knowledge demands). The concept of 'time' was then looked for within other interviews.

Two deductively driven and pragmatically influenced principles (useful knowledge and social connection) for supporting the learning needs of recently appointed leaders were developed in this research. These principles are woven throughout the findings chapters and

are further explained within the conclusion chapter. These principles reinforced the idea that participants were on a quest for knowledge that would be useful in enacting their roles. Alongside this, participants were also on a quest to develop in-depth and ongoing social connections *to* support them with their roles.

3.4   Ethical considerations

Research contributes to the development of new knowledge and has the potential to contribute new insights (NHMRC, 2015). An objective of my research was to provide answers to my research questions in an ethical manner. Research ethics require "deliberation on the values and principles, exercise of judgment, and an appreciation of context." (NHMRC, 2015, p. 11). To support ethical conduct in this research, the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research was consulted and adhered to.

An informed consent process was developed to ensure participants were provided with clear and explicit (Menter et al., 2011) information about the purposes of the research before they committed to involvement. This information was provided via a participant information letter (Appendix E). An assurance of maintaining participants' confidentiality (Menter et al., 2011) was provided within the informed consent process. In protecting participants' vulnerability (Seidman, 2013) when investigating their experiences, the following points were considered as being integral to conducting an ethical study.

Merit and integrity

Interviews as a method of data collection were suitable for achieving the research aims, ensuring respect for participants, and contributing to knowledge and understanding (NHMRC, 2015). The lack of literature regarding recently appointed leaders suggested the study had merit. Recruitment processes are clearly explained, including the strategies for identifying and selecting participants (NHMRC, 2015).

Justice

Due to the focus of this research being on recently appointed leaders, it was fair that interest in being included in this research was only sought from leaders appointed to their roles within the last two years. There were no other factors and recruitment was open to people of any gender identification.

Beneficence

Care was taken to ensure the welfare of participants, including ensuring they were not identifiable within any reported findings and to reduce harm or discomfort (NHMRC, 2015). Interviews involved exploring participants' personal experiences and stories (NHMRC, 2015), potentially including sensitive or highly personal information. With that in mind, provisions were made for handling any potential distress (NHMRC, 2015). This involved including a statement on the participant consent form that participants could withdraw their consent at any time up until the end of the fieldwork period. At the beginning of the interview, it was explained to all participants that they were welcome to pause or stop the interview at any stage.

Respect

Respect for participants' privacy and sensitivities regarding their welfare, beliefs, perceptions, and cultures (NHMRC, 2015) was important. Inviting participants to check their interview transcripts for accuracy and completeness (NHMRC, 2015) was used as one strategy to ensure transparency in the participation process.

The process of gaining ethical consent involved submitting an ethics proposal with a summary of the project. The HREC approval number 2018-302E was assigned to the project with approval to conduct fieldwork between 26/02/2019 to 31/12/2019. A copy of the approval is included in the appendices (Appendix A). In addition to this also included is an organisation consent form (Appendix B), an organisation information email template (Appendix C), an organisation information letter (Appendix D), a participant information letter (Appendix E), a participant consent form (Appendix F), email to potential participants template (Appendix G), and interview protocol (Appendix H).

3.5   Participant recruitment

This section explains the participant recruitment processes including the criteria for inclusion and how the participants were located.

3.5.1   Criteria for inclusion

When determining the number of participants, it was important to keep in mind the need to gather rich data. Therefore, participant numbers were small enough that detailed accounts of their experiences could be sought and thoroughly examined. Given the scope

of the study, the resources available to conduct the interviews, and advice from my supervisor on a manageable number for doctoral research, the number of participants was limited to 10 people. Participation was invited from people who were appointed to their roles within the last two years.

As I previously discussed in the introduction chapter, initially I was seeking novice leaders. Many participants as discussed later in chapter five (in the theme unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership) had some form of previous leadership experience, for some not always in a formal role-specific sense. Therefore, the study was adjusted to focus on recently appointed leaders. Common amongst most participants was their first experience in the most senior leadership role in their service.

3.5.2   Locating participants

The Ministry of Education Early Childhood Services Directory was used to access New Zealand early childhood services' contact email addresses to invite participation in this research. Participants were initially sought in the Wellington, New Zealand region. This was a practical consequence of my location at the time of interviewing and my desire to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, it was not possible to recruit enough participants within the Wellington region, so further email invitations were sent to services throughout New Zealand.

For early childhood education organisations, the organisation information email template (Appendix C) was used in the body of an email. The additional documents attached to this email included the organisation consent form (Appendix B), the organisation information letter (Appendix D), the participant information letter (Appendix E) and the participant consent form (Appendix F). Organisations were invited to either forward the invitation to participate to people who fitted the inclusion criteria within their organisation or to provide me with the workplace contact details for suitable people within their organisation. For individual services, the email to potential participants (Appendix G) was used in the body of an email. The attached documents in this email were the participant information letter (Appendix E) and the participant consent form (Appendix F).

Willing participants were invited to return a signed consent form. Participation was determined by, and limited to, those who responded to an initial email invitation. People who

sent back a signed consent form and responded to a follow-up email about arranging a time for an interview were included in the study.

Two people returned signed consent forms and did not respond to further contact. Two people returned signed consent forms and were willing to participate, but because of working at the same organisation as other participants, were chosen not to be interviewed. They were emailed to let them know their participation would not be required. The rationale for this was to get a broader understanding of leaders from different organisations or services.

Face-to-face interviews for those in the Wellington region were arranged, where possible, and video calls via Zoom were arranged for those in other areas of the country. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the other seven being video calls. Participants were asked to specify times and dates that worked for them. The interviews were conducted between the end of April 2019 through to the beginning of August 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Later in the chapter in the section on *the interview process* I discuss benefits and challenges of face-to-face interviews and Zoom interviews.

3.6   Data source

The data source for this research was 10 semi-structured interviews. In this section, the benefits of interviews are explained, followed by an exploration of the use of semi-structured interviews. The interview design, reflexivity, and structure of the interview questions are then explained before turning to how the interviews were conducted. This section concludes by exploring researcher safety.

3.6.1   Interviews

Interviews are a common data collection method within qualitative research. The process of meeting with participants for a one-off interview was used to gather and understand the individual experiences of participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Interviews as a mode of inquiry (Seidman, 2013) are encounters, social interactions, or a conversation with a purpose (Berg & Lune, 2012). They are also a powerful strategy aimed at eliciting information (Menter et al., 2011). A strength of interviewing, and the reason for using interviews within this research, is that they can provide an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. They also give insight into participants' perspectives and accounts of interactions within social and organisational contexts (Seidman, 2013). Unlike quantitative methods that focus on counting

and measuring, qualitative analytic methods involve "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p.3). This was important for my research because it allowed for meaning to be sought from participants' stories, rather than imposing meanings and variables in advance.

Asking participants about their career history was one strategy used in this research to develop an understanding of recently appointed leaders' experiences. Examining stories of leadership experiences and recounting these experiences with a researcher can be beneficial for the interviewee. Recounting experiences can support "developing the self-awareness and self-knowledge that support emotional intelligence, clarity about values, clearer moral perspective and transparent relationships" (Layen, 2015, p. 277). Gathering the level of detail in the data afforded by interviews would not have been achievable through a one-off survey, because it would not allow for follow-up of participants' comments. Likewise, in a focus group, there is the possibility that not all leaders' perspectives or stories would have been able to be gathered in detail.

Rich accounts of the needs of participants, their experiences of support, their perspectives on the learning needs of recently appointed leaders, and experiences that had been most beneficial from their personal perspectives were sought through the interviews. Layen (2015) took a similar focus, using interviews to invite leaders to reflect on what had supported their leadership. Layen's (2015) motivation was to understand whether analysing leaders' lives and leadership stories had the potential to support their leadership development. Eliciting similar life story perspectives through this research helped identify what leadership experiences had been like for participants. Seeking participants' perspectives was done in the hope that this knowledge could be used to inform how to best support recently appointed leaders in the future.

3.6.2   Justification for using semi-structured interviews

The choice to use interviews in this study was made to ensure rich qualitative data were gathered about recently appointed leaders' experiences. This was important because not much is known about recently appointed leaders' experiences and needs. Interviewing is a commonly used approach in early childhood education leadership research (e.g. Aubrey et al., 2012; Edwards, 2018; Fleet et al., 2015; Grarock & Morrissey, 2013; Hadley et al., 2015; Rouse & Spradbury, 2015). Although various forms of interviews were used in previous studies, I judged the approach of semi-structured interviews used by Grarock and Morrissey (2013), Klevering and McNae (2018), and Layen (2015) as the best fit for my research.

In this research, semi-structured interviews were determined to be the best possible data collection method. Semi-structured interviews allow for questions closely related to the research focus to be followed as a guide. They also allow flexibility to spontaneously follow up on participants' responses and to probe (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) for greater detail where appropriate.

My interview questions were structured with prompts alongside them. This supported me in eliciting detailed answers to the research questions to be sought. For example, the first question asked participants to tell me about their service. Prompts for this question included: the type of service (e.g., private or community-based), how many children their service catered for (how many children it was licensed for, how many attended daily, how many were in each room), how many staff were employed (full-time, part-time, non-teaching staff), the range of qualifications of teachers, and the leadership structure of the service.

It was beyond the scope of my study to implement possible learning opportunities or confirm how this support could be maintained. Instead, my study provided an opportunity to develop content and design principles for these experiences in the future, which I discuss in the final chapter of this thesis.

3.6.3 Interview design

The purpose of the interviews I conducted was to generate material for the interpretation of the participant's perspectives. Designing the interview schedule involved initially drafting possible questions. Over time, the list of questions was added to. Questions were influenced by discussions with my supervisor, consultation with interview design literature, and early childhood education literature, specifically from the literature review. Questions were continually revisited and refined throughout this process. More questions were written than were needed. Questions were later edited to remove those that were not essential to exploring the research questions. Questions were written with the view that they would allow participants to reflect on their experiences.

The time and effort that would be required of participants to complete the interview were factored into the design of the interviews. In developing an understanding of the time required to complete an interview, my supervisor administered the interview schedule to me, before I conducted it with the participants. This was done to ensure the clarity of the questions and to get an indication of how long it would take me to complete an interview with each participant.

3.6.4   Reflexivity

As I discussed in the introduction of this thesis "because of my own journey" (Ryan, 2010, p. 76) of working in early childhood education leadership roles, I became interested in researching early childhood education leadership. My background shaped my interest in this research. Therefore, I shared experiences, familiarity with the field, and commonalities with participants. I shared aspects of identity and similarities, such as education and employment (Humphrey, 2012) with the participants. I assumed a new leadership role approximately 14 months before beginning to interview participants. Before this, I had held other leadership roles and most recently I had been in a leadership role (with the same employer) when the incumbent leader was on maternity leave for 7 months. This research, however, was to explore beyond my own experiences and perspectives to gain an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of a wider group of recently appointed leaders. Having similar experiences to the participants supported me to develop rapport with them. The rapport that I developed with participants helped to determine their views on the support they received and their current support and learning needs.

There are varying degrees of insider research and Heslop (2018) argued that "the concept should be viewed as a continuum rather than a dichotomy or binary opposites" (Heslop, 2018, p. 4576). In considering my place on the continuum within this research, I was partially an insider. While I drew some similarities to members of the group who were being researched (Savvides et al., 2014), I was, however, detached from participants in the sense that I did not know them before interviewing them. This helped separate any familiarity or connection with participants and helped remove the possibility participants assumed I knew what they were referring to (Hewitt-Taylor, 2013) when they were being interviewed. As a measure of the success of this approach, I noted that one participant even asked during her interview, "Were you a teacher once too?"

It was critical to manage my insider status both in the interviews and in the data analysis to remember participants' stories were their own stories. While being an insider provided challenges, it also had advantages, including having a greater understanding (Heslop, 2018) of possible comparable experiences. This advantage of understanding the context allowed for greater probing of interesting concepts participants raised.

Being an insider can cause researchers to "become desensitized to potential role conflicts" (Humphrey, 2012, p. 573). Therefore, I needed to be mindful of my role

(Humphrey, 2012) in interviewing participants. I was aware, as Hewitt-Taylor (2013) described, "that I would bring personal beliefs and values to the study situation" (p. 34), such as thoughts on support levels for leaders. In negotiating this balance (Heslop, 2018), it was important that I acknowledged the participants' experiences and the stories they told during their interviews. There were parts of the participants' stories that resonated with my own experiences. I was mindful not to go in depth in discussing my specific experiences with participants during the interviews, as the purpose was to collect rich data on participants' experiences. I could see how in a conversation, rather than an interview, I would have followed a different format and likely have shared more details of my own experiences. Maintaining the role of the interviewer and referring to the research and interview questions was important. I have my own experiences in this field, but they were not the participants' experiences. In studying and reporting on the research, it was important to put aside my own experiences and assumptions to not let them unreasonably influence the data (Hewitt-Taylor, 2013).

To increase the validity of my findings and make me more alert to my assumptions about the interview questions, my supervisor interviewed me using the interview questions. She did this before I conducted interviews with the participants. Being interviewed by my supervisor using my interview questions was an opportunity to be sensitised to my understanding of my personal position concerning the research questions. It also drew out and brought forward any assumptions and beliefs I had concerning the research questions. This was important in ensuring I remained transparent in interviewing participants and my subsequent analysis. Understanding how my views could impact the process as a consequence of my own leadership experiences was an important step concerning the research problem. The opportunity to understand what it meant to be an 'insider' to the research topic but also an 'outsider' in other respects was an important part of this process. Following being interviewed with the interview questions by my supervisor, I transcribed and analysed the interview. This supported my consciousness concerning my assumptions. Understanding and reflecting on how I viewed myself, my experiences, and my background concerning the research was an important part of this process.

3.6.5   Structure of the interview questions

The interview questions were structured into four sections. A copy of the interview protocol is included in the appendices (Appendix H). The introduction of the interview was important for building initial rapport with the participants. Initial interview questions, therefore, invited participants to tell me about their centre, staff, children attending, and

qualifications. This allowed participants to discuss what was most familiar to them (basic details of their service or about themselves) and become comfortable in the interview, before turning to more specific questions about themselves and their experiences.

The second group of questions focused on the substantive issue of leadership in early childhood education and involved discussing with participants how they were appointed to their roles. These were important questions, as they narrowed in on the participants' specific experiences as recently appointed leaders. Literature that discussed the experiences of leaders supported the development of this group of questions (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014; Mistry & Sood, 2012; Rouse & Spradbury, 2016). This group of questions focused on asking about: how participants came to be in the role, whether participants applied for their role, and whether it was the same centre participants were working in before assuming their role. Additionally, I asked how long participants had been in their role, their motivation for taking on the role, and what or who might have influenced their leadership. These were important questions because Edwards (2018), who conducted research in New Zealand, found that 80% of participants did not feel prepared for their first leadership role. Klevering & McNae (2018), also New Zealand researchers, found there are no clear career pathways for early childhood education leaders.

The third group of questions was focused on working towards wrapping up the interview and for the participants to look forward. Questions included asking about the broader early childhood education context currently and casting their mind forward to how they felt they still needed to develop as leaders. This was important because the questions explored what had been, what might still be to come, and what participants could envisage.

The final question asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to tell me. This was important for determining if participants had anything else to add that they felt was relevant to the research topic. The questions allowed me to build rapport while learning about the centre context where the participant worked, how they came to their role, their development as a leader, and anything else they felt was necessary to share.

The questions were asked in a predetermined order. This allowed me to maintain a logical sequence while building on initial rapport and steadily moving towards questions that may be less comfortable for participants. I was careful in my wording of

the interview questions to ensure these did not overly frame or pre-judge participants' potential responses.

I was careful about how I ended each interview. After inviting participants to contribute anything else they wanted to share, I checked whether participants had any questions about the research project. I also obtained permission to contact participants again if further clarification was required. Following this, I thanked the participants for their participation. I was intentional about this to ensure that participants felt their contribution was valued. Once transcribed, the interview transcripts were sent back to participants for them to check. This allowed participants to add or remove parts of the transcript. They could also reflect on their initial contributions and determine if they felt any changes were necessary.

3.6.6   The interview process

Interviews of between 40 to 90 minutes each were conducted at a convenient time and location for participants. This was to ensure participants were comfortable in the setting and with the time when the interviews were being held. Some learning and realisations occurred for me in reflecting on the process of conducting interviews. Initial rapport seemed slightly easier to develop during in-person interviews. For me, this was because I found it easier to read people's body language in person. However, using Zoom was beneficial as it provided flexibility and the opportunity to interview people New Zealand-wide.

The challenge of having a fully confidential space to conduct an interview in an early childhood education service was evident. During both in-person and Zoom interviews, other people 'popped' into the room or were seen on screen. The most confidential of interviews were with the three people who opted to do their interviews at home in the evening. This was because they either said no one was in the room with them or no one was seen on the screen. On reflection, a question to ask participants would be whether about if there was anyone in the room with them for Zoom interviews. A question to ask in advance in future would be whether the participant (Zoom) or we (in person) could be in a room where they/we would not be disturbed.

Interviews can be considered brief interactions, so focusing on how I conducted myself and communicated during the interviews was important. The introduction of the interview was important in building initial rapport with the participants (Johnson &

Christensen, 2020). This was to support participation, provide satisfactory information about the interview questions, ensure informed consent, and support participants in feeling comfortable to provide detailed answers. Communicating clearly was important for motivating participants and being able to seek deep information regarding participants' experiences. This information could likely have been very personal and related to their lived experiences (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012).

While conducting the interviews, it was important to refrain from expressing my own views and opinions. I am also aware I am expressive in my facial expressions, so this was something I was intentional about as I was conscious that I did not want to influence participant responses (Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

Conducting research interviews was a new experience for me. Being able to elicit sufficient information from participants during the interviews was something I had wondered about, particularly if I did not initially get sufficient responses from participants. Using semi-structured questions within my interviews added to the challenge. However, I could draw, to some extent, on experience from conducting employment interviews. I considered whether the question had been answered and if the answer formed a complete response. If I did not feel the responses were complete, I used probes (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) to elicit more information. This was supported by having a series of sub-questions within each question, as well as the ability to ask further questions to elicit more information within the semi-structured format of the interviews. As the interviewer, I was also intentional in ensuring I presented the questions in a relaxed manner, to communicate to participants that they did not have to rush their responses.

3.6.7   Researcher safety

While eliciting participation from the participants was critical, it was also necessary to keep in mind my safety as a researcher (Andres, 2012). Therefore, with each face-to-face interview, I ensured my supervisor knew where I was going, when I expected to arrive, and for how long I expected to be there. Upon the completion of each interview, I contacted her to let her know when I had finished the interview and left the destination, and when I returned to work or home.

3.7   Data analysis

The data set for this study comprised transcripts of the ten interviews conducted with recently appointed leaders, the transcript of my own interview conducted with my

supervisor, and my field notes made following each interview. The process of managing the data is explained in this section. Exploration of the data was determined through qualitative analysis, including identification of patterns of speech and keywords in the data, to help explain patterns and expand upon interesting results. This study used thematic analysis, which was conducted in two phases, using both deductive and inductive strategies. The deductive analysis involved referring to the research questions and using sensitising concepts from the literature. The inductive analysis involved exploring the data for concepts that were identified within the data that I judged to be relevant to the research focus.

The use of semi-structured interviews were used and supported the understanding of the research problem and allowed for the inclusion of interesting statements or comments to be explored, although I was conscious that interesting comments or statements could become unwieldy. This was evident in Leigh's interview, where she discussed early career experiences unrelated to leadership that impacted her early childhood education sector experiences. Returning to the research and interview questions allowed me to determine which parts of Leigh's interview were most relevant to include within the overall findings (see the section on *Inconsistent opportunities to learn* in chapter five for Leigh's individualised learning and preparation experiences). To develop an understanding of the learning and support needs of the group, the needs raised by individual participants were explored with subsequent participants to understand if they were relevant to other participants. It was important to understand if there were similarities in participants' experiences and to understand the range of participants' experiences. This information could then be used to inform the development of principles for appropriate learning experiences.

3.7.1   Data management

The process of managing the data involved turning the recorded spoken text from the interviews into written form to allow for analysis (Stuckey, 2014). Interviews were directly recorded on two recording devices: a smartphone and a laptop computer. Interviews were not recorded on the Zoom platform that was used for interviews. Two devices were used to record the interviews to ensure that, if one device stopped working, there was an additional recording. Once transcribed, these recordings were deleted from both devices. The analysis process began while participants spoke during their interviews (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). This included assessing if it was necessary to follow up on participant responses and if it was necessary to generate further detail. Making connections between interviews, including when participants

spoke of similar experiences, and connections between participant responses and the literature were also sought. The additional early analysis occurred during the transcription process. Beginning connections were made with the research questions and the literature, with interesting moments and patterns noted. As I conducted further subsequent interviews, I could also identify initial connections between participants' stories.

Participants were de-identified during the transcription process. A number and a pseudonym were allocated to their transcript as a non-identifying basis for organisation (Stuckey, 2014). Participants could choose their pseudonyms. Due to all participants identifying as female the pronouns of she and her are used. A list of participants' names and their assigned numbers was kept separate from the data to maintain confidentiality (Stuckey, 2014). To further ensure confidentiality, any identifiable features, such as participants' workplaces and colleagues' names, were removed from transcripts. Electronic copies of the transcripts were stored on CloudStor, a secure file exchange repository used by Australian universities, until the completion of the analysis process.

Verbatim transcriptions were made to ensure the quality of the full transcripts (Stuckey, 2014). Once transcribed, the transcripts were read while listening to the audio to ensure accuracy of the transcript. Punctuation was added to the transcripts to reflect pauses. My affirming utterances were eliminated from the transcripts, as these did not support data interpretation (Stuckey, 2014). Following the completion of the interviews and before further analysis, transcripts were sent back to participants. This was done within a few days to ensure participants were receiving the transcripts as close as possible to when they were interviewed. Participants were asked to check the transcript and were invited to remove, change, or add any details. Several participants provided further clarifying details to portions of their transcripts. These additions were minor for most participants. One participant provided some deep reflection on what it means to be a leader and how it related to personality. Participants who did not respond to their emailed transcript were prompted within a three-week timeframe. They then responded by either confirming they were happy with their transcript or made changes or additions. Seven participants changed their transcripts. Once transcripts were returned, individual analysis of the finalised transcripts began. After I finished transcribing the interviews, I took a break from working with the transcripts. This allowed the chance to put distance between the fieldwork and relationships with participants, allowing for new perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

To support the analysis of the transcripts, I formatted each transcript using a landscape view. One-third of the page was retained as white space to allow for notes to be handwritten on printed copies of the transcripts. While each transcript was numbered in order of when the interviews were conducted, a header with the three research questions was used as a reminder of the project's focus. Each transcript also had a footer indicating the participant's pseudonym, the page number, and their interview date. During the analysis process, different coloured highlighters were used to distinguish between research questions. This helped to initially determine which sections of the data related to each research question. These printed transcripts were shredded following the completion of the analysis process.

When reading through the data, I was mindful of taking long, undisturbed periods to read the transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The ability to concentrate supported a thorough exploration of the data. Notes were made while reading for possible codes and categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This was a successful strategy, as these notes acted as prompts and reflective tools when revisiting transcripts. I also took notes of any ideas and thoughts that occurred concerning links between the transcripts. An additional strategy involved revisiting the transcripts multiple times. This was important because it allowed for taking breaks and coming back to the transcripts. I could review previous thoughts, notice new insights, and become familiar with the data to enable successive cycles of deeper reflection on the meaning of the data.

When direct quotes from participants' transcripts are used within this thesis, [ ] are used to signify when words are added to complete sentences or changes have been made to de-identify participants. Changes involved words such as participants role titles (changed to leader or leadership), their organisation name (changed to organisation), or the geographical location of their service (changed to location). Where participants repeated themselves, spoke in part sentences, or information was removed due to low relevance … has been used.

To achieve the overall thematic analysis presented in the findings chapters, transcripts were read using strategies of both deductive and inductive analysis. These approaches are discussed later in this chapter in greater detail. The rationale for using both deductive and inductive analytic strategies was that it allowed for a more thorough analysis of the data than deductive techniques only. A thorough analysis was important given the lack of understanding of the preparation, support, and learning needs of recently appointed leaders.

3.7.2   Thematic analysis

The qualitative thematic analysis principles that guided the analysis process drew on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), Braun and Clarke (2012) and Nowell et al. (2017). In this section, I describe the thematic analysis and explain the importance of using it within this research. This is followed by a discussion of how thematic analysis guided the deductive and inductive analysis within this research.

Thematic analysis has been described as "a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). This was important within my research because not much is understood about recently appointed leaders' experiences. An advantage of thematic analysis is the flexibility of the approach to accommodate a range of different needs and requirements and attend to rich and complex data within studies (Nowell et al., 2017). A disadvantage of thematic analysis, particularly in comparison to alternative qualitative research methods such as ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, is the lack of literature regarding thematic analysis to guide researchers (Nowell et al, 2017). Unlike other qualitative approaches, thematic analysis is a method not constrained by theoretical boundaries (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Because of this, thematic analysis aligns well with the pragmatic conceptual framework and exploratory methodological approach taken in this study.

3.7.3   Thematic analysis within this research

Thematic analysis guided both deductive and inductive analysis in this research. The deductive analysis was important to explore concepts within the literature and responses that directly related to the research questions. The inductive analysis was important because it allowed for creating an understanding of recently appointed leaders' experiences from *within* the data.

Thematic strategies were used to identify specific concepts within the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) and to organise, describe, and report themes from within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of using thematic strategies was to explore central ideas and provide beneficial understandings in answering my research questions. Thematic strategies also helped to understand the accounts of participants' lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and the history (Thomas, 2013) of what had occurred for them. Through careful reading and reflection on transcripts, I could get insights into and develop an understanding

of the meaning of participants' stories (Saldaña, 2013). During the analytic process, it was important that participants' ideas remained at the forefront and that my assumptions were avoided (Johnson & Christensen, 2012), or at least managed consciously on my part. This allowed for clarity of participants' experiences and the ability to look for patterns across participants' stories.

The thematic analysis process provided the foundation for interrogating the data to understand the meaning of, and question, the implications (Clarke & Braun, 2017) of recently appointed leaders' experiences. The thematic analysis allowed for the exploration of similarities and differences within the participants' stories. It also allowed for staying open to unanticipated insights (Nowell et al., 2017) and interpreting meaning from participants' stories (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This resulted, for example, in noticing how some participants used metaphors involving 'water' to discuss how they felt since assuming their roles. Areana discussed "being chucked in a fishbowl" and Sophie discussed 'swimming' in her first month. George, who also discussed 'swimming', gave more context, explaining that she felt like she was swimming out front and being able to hear people behind her but not see them. Likewise, Sarah discussed feeling like being "thrown in the deep end" and "treading water". Amelia also discussed treading along, but this was specifically concerning working with her governing body (discussed in chapter five in the section on emotional demands).

The data were interrogated multiple times. This process involved "moving back and forward between phases" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4) to build familiarity with the data and understand the depth within it. This sense of immersion in the data supported the refinement of the analytic process. I repeatedly asked questions of the data in searching for meaning. This recurring process supported the understanding of patterns within the data. For example, what participants felt comfortable with varied. There seemed to be elements of participants 'feeling comfortable' with what they had previously practised or had experience with. Leigh, Sarah, and Sophie discussed how they felt they were good teachers (discussed in chapter five in the section on assuming leadership: the shift in mindset and practice). Other participants were comfortable contributing to the running of the service, including tasks such as administration (Sarah, Oscar, and Caitlin, discussed in chapter six in the theme acknowledging emerging confidence and growth). George and Amelia were the two participants who were either studying towards or had finished a Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) (discussed in chapter six in early childhood education leadership specific

postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of *early childhood education* leadership). In questioning the data, I wondered whether, how, or if their postgraduate study contributed to their conceptualisations of leadership.

Being driven by what was in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and not trying to organise it to pre-existing codes allowed for the active search for patterns, meaning, and rich descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within the data. Using thematic analysis allowed for "patterns within and *across* data concerning participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices" (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297, emphasis in original) to be explored. I was able to explore participants' accounts of their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Clarke & Braun, 2017) concerning their experiences.

Embracing the complexity of the data supported an understanding of the depth of participants' stories. This included what was significant for individual participants but also what applied to the group or for smaller cohorts within the group. For example, Sophie and Caitlin discussed learning from and alongside their predecessors within their services (discussed in chapter seven in the theme of the context informs and determines support received), and Areana, Sarah, and Oscar all discussed participating in their organisations' programs for developing leaders (discussed in chapter five in the section on planned learning experiences). Leigh, George, Amelia, Maya, and Sarah all discussed some learning from previous experiences (discussed in chapter five in the section on transpired by chance). Various configurations of the participants spoke of areas of learning. However, when drawing the data together, there was an overarching issue that these stories demonstrated feelings of a 'lack of preparation' for assuming their roles. This then provided the challenge I return to in the final chapter, which was to think about, explore, and understand the best methods of support for people assuming leadership roles.

3.7.4   Approach to the identification of themes: the constant comparative method

The approach to thematic analysis used in the study was broadly based on the constant comparative method. This involved moving from small-scale codes attached to elements of the data, to aggregate categories, to the development of themes within and across categories. Comparison was used to support external validity (Boeije, 2002) and to systematically compare and organize the data (Fram, 2013). Portions of the data within interviews were compared for consistency and to interpret parts of the story in relation to the whole story

(Boeije, 2002). Once additional interviews had been conducted, a comparison between the interviews was made (Boeije, 2002). This was done to understand emerging ideas.

Codes were used to organise the analysis, allow for some structure to be applied to the data, and to develop an understanding of what was contained in the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Codes were refined as more interviews were conducted. Transcripts were revisited as these activities increased the understanding of the data. Initial codes were reorganised and reconfigured (Saldaña, 2016) to refine the list of codes. Refinement occurred by consulting grouped data to assess if it still fitted together. Comparison of connections between words and phrases within individual transcripts and then across all the transcripts was conducted. This comparison was conducted to reduce the data (Fram, 2013) and to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions (Boeije, 2002). During this process, data were read and re-read, some codes were combined, and others were disestablished because the data fitted elsewhere. For example, the individual types of support and learning opportunities were initially separate but were later grouped together. This was because the range of different support and learning participants had engaged with varied and some types were discussed by just one person.

3.7.5   *Deductive analysis*

Concepts from the research questions and literature influenced the deductive analysis. The research questions sought to understand the professional profile, the preparation and support, and the current support and learning needs of participants at the time of being interviewed. Broad ideas from the literature, including concepts such as the professional experiences of leaders and professional learning opportunities, also informed deductive analysis processes.

To begin the deductive analysis, I initially looked for direct responses to the research questions, since themes from the literature were used to generate the interview questions. Colour-coded highlighting was used to identify responses to the different research questions. Patterns, commonalities, and keywords were sought. A second deductive strategy involved looking for keywords and concepts identified in the research literature. During this process, notes about commonalities and patterns were made on the transcripts. To enhance the analytic process, the literature was revisited and new literature was sought. This idea came from Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and I found it strengthened the process of analysis in building connections between the literature and the findings.

For example, a sensitising concept from the literature that was looked for was participants' prior knowledge. This included exploring prior studies specifically concerning the professional experiences of leaders and the professional learning opportunities of participants. It was important to determine if participants' professional experiences were comparable to the literature regarding what they had experienced, how they assumed their roles, and their level of preparation. Professional learning for leaders was highlighted in the literature. This influenced the selection of concepts concerning professional learning for leaders, such as 'level of study' and 'knowledge for leadership'. This was explored to help draw conclusions about the best forms of leadership learning.

Exploring how participants came to be in their roles was looked for. This included exploring if participants came to their roles unexpectedly (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014), unwillingly (Rouse & Spradbury, 2016), and if they aspired to, or were intentional about assuming a role. Participants' pathways to leadership (Douglass, 2018) were explored alongside their learning opportunities before and after assuming their roles. The kinds of learning opportunities participants had undertaken were also sought.

The deductive analysis involved looking for these concepts within participant responses and looking for connections within and between transcripts. A deductive approach to data analysis is a top-down approach where concepts are drawn on to interpret data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). However, a deductive approach to exploring the data for concepts from the research questions and literature is not sufficient for an exploratory study, therefore inductive analysis of the data was also conducted.

3.7.6 Inductive analysis

Inductive analysis was used in addition to deductive analysis to thoroughly explore the participants accounts of their experiences. The inductive analysis was driven by participant responses. The bottom-up approach of inductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) means phenomena are understood by what is contained within the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Concepts and themes identified within the inductive analysis are derived from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). These concepts may not strongly link to the questions participants were asked, and are not determined by researcher interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using an inductive approach allows for "research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

The inductive analysis involved condensing and summarising the data (Thomas, 2006). This was based on patterns, reoccurring and dominant ideas, and commonalities within and across the transcripts. Words, sentences, and portions of the data of interest that appeared significant to participants were highlighted. This significance was determined by features such as repetition or emphasis. These were noted on the same printed copies of the transcripts that were used for the deductive analysis.

Particular attention was paid to concepts that participants returned to in the interview. The time taken to discuss particular issues or phenomena and the emphasis put on these issues, was one focus. Who else was involved in participants' stories or if their answers responded directly to the interview question or involved a spontaneous offering of ideas was also sought. Participants' analysis of their own stories when telling them, portions of participants' stories in relation to the whole stories, and what individual stories contributed to the data set as a whole, were considered. For example, George returned to and emphasised a lack of mentor support and guidance throughout her interview (see the section on accomplished connections in the theme of the desired connections in chapter seven), and this impacted how she saw her role. This was similar to other participants' reference to mentors and not always having the support they would have liked. However, George also drew on previous work experiences outside of early childhood education (discussed in chapter five in the section on transpired by chance), something that most other participants did not refer to. Meanings from individual accounts were sought and coherence was looked for within the analysis process. This included seeking to identify if stories formed a whole. Accounts of being a 'recently appointed' early childhood education leader, being 'led', and 'leadership' were also traced through this stage of the analysis.

Interrogating the data multiple times allowed for building familiarity and developing trustworthy interpretations of what was in the data. This was achieved through reading and making notes about the data, and then revisiting these notes on other occasions. Sections of data within transcripts were compared with other sections in the same transcript. At other times, portions of data were compared across transcripts. This interrogation was important as it included exploring what and how portions of data fit together. In stepping back and re-examining connections between the data, decisions were then made whether the connections between the data would remain or if they were to be amended to sit alongside other findings. This recurring process supported the understanding of patterns within and relationships across the data and themes within the data.

Early insights included noticing that the participants were focused on relationships rather than quality improvement in their service, that most of the participants' learning had come from on-the-job experience, that they still required some level of support as they continued to transition into their roles, that ongoing learning opportunities (including coaching and mentoring) needed to be specific to their roles and situations.

In both deductively and inductively coding the data, it was important to regularly refer to the research questions to ensure I was able to provide tentative but comprehensive explanations of what I was seeking to address. Coding of data was also carried out to ensure data were ready for further analysis (Harter & Otrel-Cass, 2017). In addition to looking for patterns in the raw data, second-order patterns in the coded data were explored to allow for categorising, which involved collecting similar data together. For example, the category of 'preparation' encompassed codes including how prepared participants felt, general aspects of preparation, what participants weren't prepared for, and what participants felt was the most effective preparation. Categories were used to represent interesting elements of data and became the building blocks for themes that encompassed shared concepts (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In moving from codes to categories "new discoveries, insights, and connections" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 212) about the phenomenon as a whole were created. Through this process, some groupings occurred not necessarily because they were exactly alike, but because they had some commonalities (Saldaña, 2016). An example of this includes leaders' feelings about their roles, which included, but were not limited to: hesitations, what leaders were comfortable with, contradictions of being the leader, and how they described their experiences in emotional terms.

This then led to the creation of themes that were used to represent responses concerning the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). Throughout this process, the research questions were regularly revisited to ensure that the developing findings were relevant. In developing themes, consideration was given to each theme as well as how they related to each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were created by drawing "together components or fragments of ideas or experiences" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 8) to create meaning concerning the participant's experiences and the research questions. For example, throughout chapter five I report on the range of challenges and demands participants experienced once they assumed their roles.

In using the specific ideas involved within the themes, the four concepts of distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection (discussed further in chapters four to seven) were developed to represent the meaning of the associations and relationships between the themes. Each findings chapter represents an individual concept and the themes are used as headings. The two principles (useful knowledge and social connection) that form the basis of my theory of the learning and support needs of recently appointed leaders developed through this research are discussed in chapter eight.

3.8   Conclusion

This chapter has described and justified the use of a qualitative research design, pragmatism as the study's conceptual approach, and the exploratory orientation adopted in the research. This was determined as the most appropriate design for providing comprehensive answers to the research questions. The ethical considerations and participant recruitment processes are explained to ensure transparency.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method because of their potential for providing depth to the data. The semi-structured interviews offered an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Using constant comparative method supported the identification of themes within the data and allowed for comparing portions of data from within individual transcripts but also across the transcripts.

A combination of deductive analysis, using sensitising concepts from the literature, and inductive analysis was determined to be the most appropriate form of analysis to support meeting the research aims and answering the research questions. Using both deductive and inductive analysis allowed the opportunity to exploring concepts identified within the literature. Given that recently appointed leaders are an under-researched area, inductive analysis allowed for using participant responses to create further understanding. The next chapter presents the first of four findings chapters, where I introduce the concept of distinct, which represents a portion of the data within the research. This initial findings chapter explores and presents the findings related to the first research question: What is the professional profile of recently appointed early childhood education leaders in New Zealand and to what extent is the profile shared?

The Distinct Individuals of the Participant Cohort

4.1   Introduction

The previous chapter presented the methodological approach taken and the methods used to conduct this research. The methodology and methods, along with the literature review, guided this study. This chapter discusses the first of four concepts, distinct, that represent the findings of this research. The following three findings chapters present the other three concepts developed to represent the reality of participants' experiences. The three additional concepts, navigation, transformation, and connection, along with distinct, form the basis of my theory of recently appointed leaders' professional learning needs. Although the four concepts are presented sequentially, participants experienced overlap between them and experienced them simultaneously.

This chapter is a bridging chapter between the methods and methodology chapter and the other three findings chapters. The following chapters are focused on two overarching pragmatic concepts: useful knowledge and social connection. The pragmatic concepts of useful knowledge and social connection provide overarching framing for the findings chapters. This chapter addresses my first research question: What is the professional profile of recently appointed early childhood education leaders in New Zealand and to what extent is the profile shared? In this chapter, the professional profiles of the participants are portrayed and the commonalities between the participants are considered. This chapter illustrates the difficulty of constructing a shared profile of recently appointed leaders. Instead, the analysis presented indicates there was no consistent profile among the participants. This is an important finding for those interested in supporting new leaders as a cohort.

Participants presented with a diverse combination of previous experiences, current knowledge, and a range of workplaces. The undeniable distinct challenges any desire to being able to design 'one-size fits all' professional learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders. However, one common practice between participants was that they all grasped convenient opportunities when assuming their roles. I show this from three standpoints - aspirant, hesitant, and ambivalent - that describe participants' willingness to assume their roles.

Throughout the findings chapters, the participants' role titles, when referred to in direct quotes, have been replaced with the term 'leader' to make participants less identifiable. The terms leaders, leadership, recently appointed leaders, services or contexts, sector, or leadership postgraduate study are referred to within the findings chapters. These terms are referring to the early childhood education leaders, contexts, or study unless otherwise explained.

4.2   The distinct individuals of the participant cohort

The distinct features of the participant cohort meant it was not possible to construct a cohort description. The following two tables detail the distinct individuals of the participants and their services. Table 4.1 provides participant information, including the time participants had been in their role or service, their prior connection to the service, their early childhood education qualifications, and their respective appointment processes. Table 4.2 provides service information, including service type and operational hours. The number and ages of children catered for and the team sizes and roles of team members are also outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Time in role	Length of time in service/prior connection with service before assuming current role	ECE qualifications	Appointment processes
Areana	Assumed role the year before being interviewed	Nine years	Bachelor of Education (ECE)	Applied and interviewed
Sarah	Six months	Three years	Graduate Diploma of Teaching (ECE)	Acting in the role – covering a leave of absence No application process
Oscar	18 months	Worked at another service in the same organisation	Bachelor of Education (ECE)	Applied and interviewed
Charlotte	Five months	Five years	Graduate Diploma of Teaching (ECE)	Interviewed to act in the role and then again for permanent appointment

Pseudonym	Time in role	Length of time in service/prior connection with service before assuming current role	ECE qualifications	Appointment processes
Maya	Six weeks	Two years	Graduate Diploma of Teaching (ECE)	Acting in the role – covering a leave of absence Interviewed for an assistant role
Leigh	14 months	Briefly – became the co-owner due to unforeseen circumstances with the previous owners no longer being able to run the service	Diploma of Teaching (ECE)	Co-owner of service
Caitlin	Eight weeks	11 years	Graduate Diploma of Teaching (ECE)	Applied and interviewed
Sophie	Eight months	Five years	Bachelor of Education (ECE)	Applied and interviewed
George	Almost two years	Worked at another service in the same organisation	Graduate Diploma of Teaching (ECE) Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) (In progress)	No application or interview
Amelia	Five months	None	Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) Masters of Education (In progress – not leadership related)	Applied and interviewed

Table 4.2

Participants' service information

Pseudonym	Service type and operational hours	Child numbers (full time places)	Child ages	Team sizes and roles
Areana	Large organisation Sessional Rural	20	Over two-years	Two qualified and registered teachers Administrator
Sarah	Large organisation Full-day Rural	50	All ages	Six teachers, some qualified, some in-training, some untrained, and relievers
Oscar	Large organisation Sessional Rural	40	Over two-years	Four full-time, one part-time All qualified and registered Administrator
Charlotte	Nationwide provider Full-day Suburban/city-based	70	All ages	A mixture of qualified, in–training and experienced but unqualified. Supported by teachers who held roles of responsibility
Maya	Large organisation Sessional Suburban/city-based	60	All ages	Six full-time, one part-time All qualified and registered Administrator Supported by a teacher who held a role of responsibility
Leigh	Private Full-day Suburban/city-based	51	All ages	Four qualified and registered Two unqualified support staff Supported by a teacher who holds a role of responsibility Business Manager Cook
Caitlin	Community-based Sessional Suburban/city-based	32	Over two-years	Three full-time, one part-time All qualified and registered
Sophie	Community-based Full-day Rural	38	All ages	Seven full-time teachers and a job share One teacher in-training Administrator

Pseudonym	Service type and operational hours	Child numbers (full time places)	Child ages	Team sizes and roles
George	Large organisation Sessional Suburban/city-based	30	Over two-years	Three full-time All qualified and registered Administrator
Amelia	Community-based Full-day Suburban/city-based	43	All ages	Total team size 14 One teacher in-training Supported by teachers who held roles of responsibility Cook Administrator

In line with the pragmatic concept of pluralism, it was possible to conclude there was no definitive profile of recently appointed leaders. The ultimate reality (McCaslin, 2008; Sharma et al., 2018) was that the cohort, the services they worked in, and the working conditions of their services were highly diverse. The length of time participants worked in their service (Table 4.1) was not related to when they assumed their leadership roles. Likewise, qualifications and appointment processes, including whether participants applied, were interviewed, or were directly asked to fulfil the role, also varied. Consistent with the wider early childhood sector, whether participants' services were part of a larger organisation or were standalone services did not determine whether they were full day or sessional. The number of licensed spaces for children or the ages of the children for whom they catered was not determined by whether the service was standalone or governed by an organisation. What was evident was that service sizes, team structures, and role expectations differed considerably.

Participants' roles were not solely leadership focused. Roles involved teaching, administration, and management responsibilities, but not necessarily all of these. While role expectations varied, so did the amount of non-teaching time participants were allocated. Sarah, for example, taught children for approximately 30 hours per week, whereas Maya taught children for approximately 10 hours per week. Balancing and negotiating role demands and responsibilities provided challenges and added complexity for the participants, an issue is taken up in the next section of this chapter. These demands and responsibilities of participants depended on the features of the participants' services.

The consistently shared aspect of the participant cohort was that all participants were appointed to their roles within the last two years, an artefact of the study's inclusion criteria. However, a shared characteristic that was not an aspect of the inclusion criteria was that all participants held the most senior leadership role in their services.

In summary, participants' experiences of how they were appointed to their roles (Table 4.1), their service types including numbers of children and staff (Table 4.2), and role expectations have been outlined. The variety of services and the variations in how services were structured and operated were evident in this cohort of participants, as reflected in previous studies of early childhood education leadership (Aubrey et al., 2012; Rodd, 2015). Understanding the current realities and conditions of the participants, including the distinct nature of their previous experiences and their services, could help inform how to support future leaders.

4.3   Grasping convenient opportunities

This section describes how participants came to be in leadership roles, including their motivation to lead. I argue that in accepting their roles, there was consistent evidence of grasping convenient opportunities. Consistent with the literature, "some new leaders may have aspired to be leaders before being appointed to a leadership role, others not as much or not at all" (London & Sherman, 2021, p. 325). Participants' opportunities were grasped from three distinct standpoints: those who aspired, those who hesitated, and those who were ambivalent about becoming a leader. Aspirant participants were those who described themselves as being or feeling 'ready,' and were waiting for a role to become available at their service or organisation. Hesitance was described by participants who reported they were less sure about becoming leaders and typically had the opportunity to assume a leadership role before they expected. Ambivalent participants were participants who could not be determined as solely aspirant or solely hesitant. Aspirant participants discussed why they wanted to be leaders, whereas hesitant participants outlined reasons they did not think they wanted to become a leader. Ambivalent participants discussed both standpoints. Regardless of the participants' standpoints, they all decided to lead.

Participant aspiration versus hesitancy in assuming their roles became evident in exploring their willingness or motivation to take on their roles. Previous literature suggests leaders in early childhood education often assume roles by accident (Edwards, 2018; Sims et al., 2015), and possibly reluctantly (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014). Participants in my study

had varying reasons for how they came to be in their roles, varying levels of comfort in assuming their roles, and various responses to roles that were presented to them.

The pragmatic principle of interest (Sharma et al., 2018) relates to this theme. This is because, regardless of whether participants were aspirant, hesitant, or ambivalent, they were interested or interested enough to engage in assuming their roles. Second, the concept of pluralism relates to this theme, given there was no one reality (Sharma et al., 2018) or distinct standpoint through which participants viewed the assumption of their roles. An explanation of the three standpoints follows.

4.3.1   Aspirant leaders

Areana, Caitlin, and Charlotte described aspiring to leadership roles. They had a sense of feeling they were ready to take on a leadership role and waited for one to come available at their service. As in Bøe and Hognestad's (2017) study, this contradicts evidence from earlier studies that early childhood education leaders are reluctant to lead.

Areana explained that, when she was first interviewed for a teaching role by her organisation, they asked her "where do you see yourself in five-years-time and I said I see myself as a [leader]". Areana unpacked her desire to lead by explaining:

> I wanted to do it ... Because there's a lack of ... [leaders] that are great role
> models. There's a lack out there having conversations with others … There's
> a lack of role modelling and I wanted … to be that person who could role
> model good leadership skills … Because I never had good role models.

This statement gave some insight into how Areana viewed some of her previous experiences of being led and some leadership practices she had observed. In contrast to this, Areana later explained that she had experienced a leader, her predecessor, who she described as "absolutely amazing". Her predecessor, Areana described was a supportive and influential role model who built Areana's confidence by being open and honest.

Caitlin's experience was markedly different from that of Areana. Caitlin re-thought her career options and direction after being seconded for two days per week to a professional learning and development provider. She described thinking about options such as "I'm going to jump into further study or … look for a leadership role". Also described by Caitlin was an element of planning in assuming her leadership role, in that she thought a role swap with her predecessor might happen. Instead of applying for other roles, she waited to see what

would happen at her service. A range of different ways early childhood education leaders have ended up in their roles is discussed in the literature. However, a role swap between the highest-positioned leader and the assistant leader is not something that appears in current literature.

Like Caitlin, Charlotte was prepared to wait for the right role for her. Charlotte described her intentional approach to becoming become a leader:

> I had expressed it to them and actually for a few years ... I wasn't prepared to just take any [leaders] role. I had seen quite a few pop up in [location], not in [organisation] and some in [organisation]. But I was really keen on picking the right centre for me ... so I just waited and then this opportunity came.

Charlotte explained she could "see potential at this centre. I'm sure there's potential elsewhere too. But I just wanted to take on this role and carry on with what we are doing here".

While Areana, Caitlin, and Charlotte all aspired to their roles, they were all advantaged by way of assuming convenient opportunities within the service in which they worked. Assuming convenient opportunities meant participants had prior knowledge of working in the service. This knowledge allowed them to understand that the service fitted their needs and values. I further discuss the importance of fit at the end of this section where I summarise the theme of grasping convenient opportunities.

4.3.2 Hesitant leaders

While some participants discussed their aspirations for their roles, other participants were more hesitant to assume their roles. Maya and George interviewed as hesitant leaders. Each explained a process of accepting their roles and seeing themselves as leaders. Both Maya and George were initially acting in their roles, which contributed to the challenge of seeing themselves as leaders. For example, when asked whether she aspired to hold her current role, Maya spoke of her prior view of the role. Her immediate response was:

> Not really … I've always sort of seen this role as very intense … There's so much involved in it. I think that it's a huge jump in ... workload and stress … That's always quite intimidating ... On the other hand, ... the aspirations came around the longer I am in the teaching profession, the more I am interested in helping other teachers … That's probably been the biggest motivator.

In reporting that she was interested in "mentoring other teachers because I had such great mentors", Maya described how she could see her role would allow her the opportunity to get mentoring experience. Maya also expressed her love for her team and service, saying "even though it felt kind of like a big jump, I felt like I could do it in this context". I interpret Maya's words "in this context" as pointing to the reassurance that leaders can find in familiar contexts that contribute to a sense of self-belief. Edwards (2018) argued self-belief is important when leaders take on their roles.

George was happy in her teaching role when she was approached by her organisation to take on a relieving leadership role. George had some reluctance towards becoming a leader. Despite her hesitation in taking on the relieving role, George said,

> Eventually, I went, "ok yep" I think I could do that, I felt I could do that ... I
> did not want a [leadership] position because I felt I wasn't ready to do that
> role. It wasn't something I was looking [for] … I was quite happy to continue
> my learning and developing as a teacher and growing my practice. I had [a]
> very competent head teacher … I was learning a lot from her.

George described her relieving leadership role as a "caretaking position". She thought she would only be in the role for 6-8 weeks and believed she had the confidence to act in the role. George explained, "because it was just for a short term, I knew I could do that". Two months later, George became the acting leader when the previous leader resigned. George had the self-belief to carry out her role short term. She could nevertheless be described as an accidental leader (Mistry & Sood, 2012), and perhaps even as feeling obligated to take on the role (Edwards, 2018).

Like Areana, Caitlin, and Charlotte, Maya, and George assumed convenient opportunities to become leaders. The difference was that Maya and George's path to leadership began with being encouraged to assume their roles.

4.3.3   Ambivalent leaders

While some participants aspired to their roles and other participants were hesitant in assuming their roles, there were other participants (Oscar and Sophie) who I have described as ambivalent. This is because they had some aspirations to be a leader but also described some hesitation in assuming their roles.

Oscar had some desire to become a leader, however, during her interview she shared some hesitation. When teaching at her previous service, Oscar explained, "At that stage, I didn't know whether I wanted to be a [leader]. When the opportunity arose, it was like, I need a change and it's time to step up and get out of my comfort zone". While applying for a role at a different service within her organisation required a level of planning, Oscar reported several factors in applying for her role:

> The [service] philosophy sat really well with me ... My children had come through this [service] … I was moving from a job where I was travelling half an hour every day to one that's just down the road from me … right next door to my children's school … I have to admit they were big factors in applying for the job. The big thing was, I was ready to step up into a leadership role. This one became available and things sat really well with me.

It was an accumulation of factors such as the convenient location, values alignment, and prior knowledge that were all determinants for Oscar in reducing her hesitancy and increasing her aspiration to assume her role.

Like Oscar, Sophie's story also involved a combination of aspiration and hesitancy. She discussed having leadership aspirations, explaining "I always wanted to be a [leader] one day". She explained,

> I did [want to be a leader] but not this time, not this fast, I thought [that] in five, ten years I might … I said I'd join the relieving [leaders'] team … But [I] didn't expect to be running the centre (laughs), not that soon.

As Sophie moved into her role to fill a vacant role and for career progression (Edwards, 2018), she fulfilled the historical norms of early childhood leadership in being young and inexperienced (Mistry & Sood, 2012). Sophie reported she was young enough to be the daughter of some members of her teaching team.

Like Oscar and Sophie, Sarah described a sense of hesitancy about assuming her role. Sarah acknowledged the huge nature of her role and expressed how she had wanted to take on her role:

I wanted to do it. I was fully prepared to do it. But … the hugeness of being in charge if something goes wrong … makes me anxious, and it makes me scared ... I put it to the back now, but it scared me going into it.

While Sarah explained that the 'hugeness' of being in charge had lessened over time, this quote explains how the enormity of her role had presented for her initially.

It could not be determined that Oscar, Sophie, and Sarah were specifically either aspirant or hesitant as they shared elements of each notion. What they shared with the other participants was that they too assumed convenient opportunities. Oscar's opportunity showed convenience through staying within the same organisation, and also in the way the new service fitted her lifestyle. Staying in the same organisation allows for drawing on prior knowledge of how the overarching organisation operates. Sophie's convenience relates to assuming the role within her current service affording her prior relationships with staff and understanding of the day-to-day operations and teaching responsibilities.

Although most participants had some degree of aspiration for their role, the key insight is that they each responded to immediate opportunities that were presented to them. Grasping convenient opportunities could be either waiting for a role or assuming a role sooner than expected. However, irrespective of whether participants interviewed as aspirant, hesitant, or ambivalent they were willing to take opportunities. This was even if only filling a vacant role (Edwards, 2018) or assuming a role unexpectedly (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014; Edwards, 2018).

Embarking on their leadership roles required participants to undertake a decision-making process as to whether they should assume their roles. Assuming a leadership role indicates career motivation. London (1983) describes career motivation "as a multidimensional construct internal to the individual, influenced by the situation, and reflected in the individual's decisions and behaviours" (p. 620). Career decisions and behaviours "include searching for and accepting a job, deciding to stay with an organization, revising one's career plans, seeking training and new job experiences, and setting and trying to accomplish career goals" (London, 1983, p. 620). Participants in my study were driven by being a good role model, further professional challenge, the fit of the service, and opportunities to grow practice and knowledge. Assuming roles within the same service or at least within the same organisation allowed participants to assume roles where they knew their values fitted with the service or organisation. This is similar to the work of McCulla

and Degenhardt (2016) who found that school leaders sought opportunities that fit with their values. They also found that assuming roles in schools that were familiar to participants was an important determinant in assuming leadership roles.

4.4   Conclusion

This chapter has provided a bridge between the methodology and methods chapter (chapter three) and the additional three findings chapters (chapters five to seven). This chapter introduced the professional profile of the participants and the three standpoints, aspirant, hesitant, and ambivalent, from which participants grasped their roles. Addressed within this chapter is the first research question: What is the professional profile of recently appointed early childhood education leaders in New Zealand and to what extent is this profile shared? The analysis indicates that distinct features were a salient descriptor for the participant group, due to the variety of services, participants' previous experiences, and the conditions they were working in. It was therefore not possible to construct a shared profile of recently appointed leaders from the data.

The first section of this chapter explained the distinct information specific to the participants. This distinct information related to the length of time in their role and their services. Participants' qualifications, appointment processes, numbers and ages of children, and team size were also diverse. In this chapter, I have argued that, while there were commonalities in participants' service demographics and experiences, commonalities were not consistent, nor were the responsibilities participants were expected to enact. This challenged the ability to construct a shared professional profile of recently appointed leaders.

In summarising the extent to which the professional profile of participants was shared, it was important to understand the distinct nature of the cohort. I argue that, while there is no consistent profile of recently appointed leaders, their services, and conditions, participants can each be located on a continuum, from hesitancy to aspiration. Second, irrespective of whether participants could be described as either aspirant, hesitant, or ambivalent, they all grasped convenient opportunities that were presented to assume a leadership role. This showed many participants were not intentional in assuming their roles, and instead were opportunistic when vacancies were presented to them. Regardless of whether participants were aspirant, hesitant, or ambivalent leaders, this was not related to the types of services they led.

Each participant discussed in the theme of grasping convenient opportunities explained elements of their career motivation where they had hopes of what would happen in assuming their roles (London, 1983). The goals participants set, the decisions they made, and how they carried out their roles (London, 1983) were motivators in assuming and enacting their roles. Inevitably, the decision-making processes that participants undertook involved elements of uncertainty (Bland & Schaefer, 2013; Preuschoff et al., 2013) for participants. This uncertainty concerned what participants were taking on or if they wanted to take on their roles. Determining factors to assume their roles for participants involved personal motivators and some desire to enact a leadership role or parts of a role.

The hesitant and ambivalent participants, in particular, were uncertain that they wanted to assume a role. What we know is that "uncertainty is a common feature of many everyday decisions" (Bland & Schaefer, 2013, p. 6). In this study, the participants made decisions with uncertain consequences (Preuschoff et al., 2013). Participants assumed new roles where the full extent of their responsibilities was not known to them before assuming their roles. However, career motivation or motivation to lead (London & Sherman, 2021) outweighed the uncertainty of becoming a leader. This was even if participants were assuming roles "out of a sense of duty and responsibility" (London & Sherman, 2021, p. 331). London (1983) explained that people spend longer with the consequences of their decisions than in making the decisions. The consequences of their decision to become leaders, including the shifts and learning that occurred for the participants, are discussed throughout the next three findings chapters. The next chapter introduces the principle of useful knowledge and explores the concept of navigation.

Chapter 5

The Quest to Navigate the Complex Knowledge Demands of
Early Childhood Education Leadership

This is the first of four findings chapters that present evidence of how the participants were on a quest to navigate the complex knowledge demands of early childhood education leadership. The argument that builds across this chapter is that participants required further knowledge to inform and guide them as they navigated the complex knowledge demands of their roles. This argument is framed by the concept of navigation and the pragmatic principle of useful knowledge. The concept of navigation explores participants' prior learning that informed their practice and the challenges they were navigating once they assumed their roles. The principle of useful knowledge introduces participants' desire to seek further knowledge to support them in enacting their roles. Useful knowledge is the first of two overarching pragmatic principles developed through the analysis process. In the fourth findings chapter (chapter seven) the second overarching pragmatic principle of social connection is introduced. Together, these principles introduce the idea that participants were on a quest to seek further support within their roles. Developed through the data analysis process, these principles, useful knowledge and social connection, propose a way forward in addressing the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Together, these principles unite the diverse group of participants.

5.1   Introduction

Chapter four (the previous chapter) addressed the first research question. In chapter four, I established that the participant cohort was highly individualised. This current chapter addresses the second and third research questions. The second research question: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? is addressed through the theme of unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership. The third research question: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? is addressed through the theme of the complexity of competing knowledge demands.

The first theme, unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership, reflects the lack of systematic preparation and support participants experienced.

The story that builds across this theme begins with participants thinking they were prepared to assume their roles. I will show that participants did not experience consistent leadership foundations or robust learning opportunities. In keeping with the literature discussed in chapter 2, succession planning and induction of new leaders was not a strong feature of the participants' experiences. A significant part of the participants' preparation for their roles was their experiences as a teacher. Many participants went into their roles feeling they were prepared. They learnt once they assumed their roles, that the reality of their roles did not meet their expectations. This led to participants offering advice to those considering assuming leadership to think carefully about if they want to assume a leadership role. The minimal and haphazard experiences of participants in my study highlight the need for specialised support to address the learning needs of recently appointed leaders.

The second theme, the complexity of competing knowledge demands reflects the new expectations participants were grappling with. I present evidence to show how the competing knowledge demands of participants point to areas of support and learning for the participants. Analysis of findings concerning the competing knowledge demands that participants were navigating are represented within four defined areas. These areas include operational demands, temporal demands, relational demands, and emotional demands. These demands became apparent to participants once they had assumed their roles. The lack of support for managing their competing demands challenged participants. Analysis of the findings indicates participants realised consciously or subconsciously that they required better support to carry out their roles. Participants required systematic learning opportunities to work through their current challenges. As part of these learning opportunities, social connection (discussed in chapter seven) is required to support the development of useful knowledge.

5.2   Navigation: Unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership

This theme explores how participants' prior learning opportunities left them unequipped for their leadership roles. In this section, I show how this was because of insufficient systematic preparation and support. Participants' prior learning experiences were circumstantial and depended on the contexts where they currently worked or had previously worked. This theme contributes to answering the research question: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? The analysis of data in the following paragraphs shows that participants' experiences before

assuming their roles were insufficient to provide them with enough useful knowledge for the realities of their roles. The complexity of participants' roles is reflected in participants' realisations about their preparation. Based on my analysis of the interview data regarding pathways to assuming leadership roles, I found these lacked depth and were highly personal to the individual participants. The pathways to leadership that participants experienced indicate there is a need to develop consistent and robust processes for supporting recently appointed leaders with the complexity of their roles. These pathways, while inadequate and varied, are defined in three ways: planned, transpired by chance, and once appointed.

Participants were navigating the complexities of their new role responsibilities and experienced changes in their realities. The pragmatic framework guiding this research allowed for being open and curious about interesting, emerging, and unexpected findings (Feilzer, 2010). Included in this theme is how participants talked about their experiences, including how their views changed. As they become leaders, participants were creating new values and were being educated (Sharma et al., 2018) on the job about what their roles entailed. From a pragmatic standpoint, this emphasis on the change that participants were navigating meant participants were realigning their aims and values (Sharma et al., 2018) to align with their new responsibilities.

In developing this theme, two sub-themes are identified. The first, is that participants experienced a change in mindset, from teachers to leaders; the second is that participants had inconsistent opportunities to learn about leadership.

5.2.1   Assuming leadership: The shift in mindset and practice

Participants were transitioning from seeing themselves as teachers to seeing themselves as leaders. This transition involved making shifts in thinking and practice. All participants were opportunistic in assuming their leadership roles after having had a foundation in teaching young children. The transition process involved separation from what was known, moving into what was current, and incorporating new learning (London & Sherman, 2021). While other people may have seen them as the leader because of their role title, it took participants time to accept and transition into their roles. As the transition into their leadership roles was occurring, participants were crossing a threshold into new territory. At times, participants were reaching toward their new roles and responsibilities. At other times, they were also reaching back to the known and familiar. Having previously enacted things that were still required in their current role, such as working with parents,

offered a level of comfort for participants. This shows prior knowledge and experience are important useful knowledge when leaders are making the shift from teaching to leading.

Whether participants openly discussed their perspectives of how prepared they were had changed since assuming their roles, at some stage during their interviews, they indicated their mindset had changed. Shifts in their mindset included moments participants were not prepared for, unexpected things that occurred, and how reality was different to perception. Exploring the differences between feeling ready to take on a leadership role and the practicalities of being ready contributed to understanding the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Participants' realisations of not being prepared for taking on their new responsibilities can be attributed to their lack of robust succession planning and induction.

The range of experiences and opportunities participants had leading into assuming their roles varied. These were not always well planned and no two participants took the same path towards assuming their roles. Perspectives on the effective preparation and support participants felt they received varied, which is unsurprising given the variation in their experiences. This makes it a challenge to draw strong conclusions about what is the most useful knowledge for preparing and supporting aspiring and recently appointed leaders. I now discuss the areas where participants could have been supported with shifts in their knowledge and practice and opportunities where shifts in mindset and practice occurred.

Initial teacher Education

Initial teacher education has been identified as a possible opportunity to support leadership development (Aslan-Bilikozen, 2011; Aubrey et al., 2012). Leadership was only covered briefly, if at all, in participants' initial teacher education programs. This corresponds to the work of Edwards (2018), who had a participant that explained leadership was only covered briefly in their initial teacher education program. Maya and Sophie, who had completed qualifications more recently than some other participants, described writing an assignment related to leadership. George explained leadership was "not overtly" covered in her undergraduate program. George explained at the time of her undergraduate early childhood education study, leadership "was not on my radar and I was not focused on leadership or being a leader, so it wasn't overt to me". Sophie expressed that her degree focused on teaching and when assuming a leadership role, you do "not necessarily have any experience developing any of those skills. You're doing teaching stuff and now you're managing people, managing businesses, and overseeing the curriculum. It's very different".

This meant that, in assuming their roles, participants were on a quest to develop knowledge that would help them understand and enact leadership practices.

Succession planning and induction

Robust succession planning or induction was not a feature of the participants' preparation. Participants' prior experiences depended on the contexts they worked in. As discussed in the literature chapter, prior research has shown that leadership learning is haphazard (Edwards, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018) and leaders assume roles in a range of ways (Rouse & Spradbury, 2016). Participants in my study assumed roles left vacant because of their predecessors' leaving or going on long-term leave (Areana, Sarah, Charlotte, Maya, Leigh, and Sophie). Other participants' reasons for assuming their roles varied, including their desire and interest in further developing their skills and knowledge (Oscar, Caitlin, George, and Amelia). Participants were appointed to their roles because of their teaching experience and perceived capacity (Rouse & Spradbury, 2016) to enact their roles. Several participants (Areana, Sarah, Oscar, Charlotte, Maya, Caitlin, Sophie, and George) were identified by their predecessors and professional leaders as having leadership potential.

Instead of robust succession planning that developed the potential and aspiration (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009) of participants, the appointment of a replacement was carried out. At best, succession planning and induction involved taking on some responsibilities of their predecessor or a brief induction period. This lack of specialised support meant participants were taking on roles where they were challenged by the complexities of their roles. Some participants entered this crucial transition period and career stage entirely without support.

Succession planning for leaders in all education settings has been advocated for by Macpherson (2014). It was found that "stepping stoning" (Macpherson, 2014, p. 6) with an absence of role-specific learning often occurred for leaders. Earlier Macpherson (2010) had acknowledged that "ECE directors and aspirants do not appear to have any customised preparatory or succession programmes or access to paid sabbaticals or other study leave provisions provided by the Ministry [of Education]" (p. 6). I maintain participants' accounts show this situation remains.

In discussing how well prepared she was for her role, George responded with "mildly, (laughs) mildly". Sophie's response was similar, "Oh, not very," she acknowledged when asked about how prepared she felt. She further explained, "Even now some days I think oh, I'm very green". Sophie expressed she cared about her service and community,

which inspired her "to turn up every day and do the best I can for the children and the teachers and the community". This finding corresponds with the work of Donald (2019) who found that "a commitment to caring was described by all leaders as a motivating driver" (p. 24).

Beam et al. (2016) advocate for aspiring leaders to have specialised support involving working alongside a mentor or role model well before assuming a role. For half the participants (Areana, Sarah, Charlotte, Maya, and Sophie), the extent of any kind of planning to fulfil their current role expectations was to carry out some responsibilities of their predecessors before assuming their roles. While this built some understanding, participants were seeking further useful knowledge and support for their roles.

Foundations for leadership

Even without considerable leadership learning in initial teacher education or robust succession planning, participants' foundations in teaching lead them to think they were prepared for their leadership roles. After assuming their roles, participants described a mindset shift as they learnt about the complexity of their leadership responsibilities. Participants shared reflections on their perceptions of their expected realities and the actual realities of their roles. I suggest this identifies the need to understand how future leaders' prior knowledge can be constructed.

Oscar and Sarah acknowledged they knew there would be things they would not know and would discover once they were in their roles. They acknowledged that some on-the-job learning would occur. When reflecting on her experience, Oscar mentioned, "I probably felt more prepared than I did when I actually started it. When you actually start you realise how unprepared you actually are". When specifically asked about how prepared she was for her role, Oscar responded with, "I probably wasn't very well prepared ... I think there was a lot more that I probably could have done. But quite often until you actually get that chance to experience it, you can't necessarily be completely prepared". Oscar recognised she would learn on-the-job explaining that "there were lots of things that I could only have discovered when I actually started doing it for myself".

For Sarah, there was a sense of figuring out as she went along. She acknowledged, "I was as prepared as I probably could have been, without stepping into the role". As Sarah's story expanded during her interview, she explained her desire for leadership, saying "I

wanted to do it and I was fully prepared to do it". Yet before this, Sarah was asked how prepared she felt in taking on her role and responded with "No I didn't (Laughs), I didn't".

Anchored in teaching

When asked what they were most comfortable with in their roles, participants gave responses that indicated they were anchored in teaching. This could be because participants were initially trained as teachers (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014) and had very few leadership learning and development opportunities before taking on their roles. Sophie explained that she was most comfortable working with parents and children. She then explained, "But that's something that you do as a teacher anyway". Sophie's comment showed her recognition of understanding the mindset shift between being a teacher and being a leader. It was important to explore how participants felt anchored in teaching as it created an understanding of where participants were positioned concerning transitioning from teaching to leading.

Sarah, Leigh, Sophie, and George all discussed confidence in their teaching abilities or responsibilities. Sarah commented, saying, "I feel like I teach pretty well" and Leigh said, "I'm a good teacher. I have to say, I've got a lot of strengths". When asked about the aspects of her role that she was most comfortable with, Sophie explained some context around her response:

> I guess it's when you have to be a teacher … You get to go and run mat times
> and things and you're like 'Oh this is great' (laughs), then someone comes
> and taps you on the shoulder and is like, 'Um this person needs to talk to you'
> and you're like, 'Oh yeah that's right I'm [the leader]'.

When asked about what she was comfortable with in her role, George explained teacher responsibilities, including "assessment and planning, I really like getting into that nuts and bolts and seeing the children's learning. That emergent learning that's happening and making those connections". George did, however, explain she was working towards the "professional teaching side of it, the pedagogy, the leadership" and "the practice or the art of being a [leader]".

As a way to describe the complexity involved in her role and comfort in teaching, Amelia explained, "Every now and then, I just want to go [out] there and not think about management". Amelia's role was viewed as non-teaching, yet, she described having to teach "if someone is away and I can't get relief". Amelia explained that not teaching

allowed her to focus on things like completing internal evaluation, strategic planning, and dealing with issues and parents.

Negotiating between teaching and leading

The negotiation between teaching responsibilities and leadership responsibilities (Argyropoulou & Hatira, 2014; Hognestad & Bøe, 2016; Ryder et al., 2017) was a challenge for participants. The nature of early childhood education services often requires leaders to undertake a new role whilst also still enacting a lot, if not all, of their previous teaching responsibilities. The negotiation of teaching and leading can be confusing, as there is not always a clear distinction between the two practices. This duality has the potential to detract leaders from enacting leadership practices and from enacting teaching practices when expected to teach. While not discussed openly by other participants, a tension for Sarah concerning teaching and leading was being present when teaching. Sarah was referring to being able to put leadership responsibilities to the side and be completely focused on teaching responsibilities when expected to teach children. Being present was also evident in the work of Hognestad and Bøe (2016) and Ryder et al. (2017).

This sub-theme of assuming leadership: the shift in mindset and practice has shown that considerable shifts in thinking and practice were required of participants. Assuming leadership did not mean that participants had strong foundations or knowledge in leading their teams. The shifts required of participants were necessary due to initial teacher education focusing on teaching young children, rather than how to lead adults, succession planning and induction for participants being minimal at best, and the challenge of negotiating between teaching responsibilities and leading responsibilities. I now discuss the inconsistent learning opportunities that participants experienced.

5.2.2   *Inconsistent opportunities to learn*

The leadership learning opportunities for participants before assuming their roles varied and were mainly circumstantial. The opportunities were circumstantial because they related to the context participants worked in or had previously worked in. Participants attributed the learning opportunities they experienced as offering some elements of support to their leadership practice. However, participants were still seeking further useful knowledge to enact their roles. The learning opportunities participants experienced are viewed from three standpoints: planned, transpired by chance, and once appointed. Planned experiences involved opportunities that

participants took part in before being a leader and were focused on developing leadership practices. The experiences that transpired by chance involved opportunities that occurred through chance and just happened. The experiences of participants once they were appointed to their roles included opportunities they had to learn directly about their service from their predecessors.

Planned learning experiences

Emerging and ongoing leadership development programs were a feature of some participants' learning opportunities. Areana, Sarah, Oscar, and Maya participated in collective leadership learning opportunities that were planned by their organisations. Participants described variations in the processes and practices of these groups. By participating in their organisations' leadership learning groups, Areana, Sarah, Oscar, and Maya could recognise some benefits and the purpose of the organisational leadership programs they participated in. Areana described her program as teaching her the things she needed to know going into a role, including things such as "different dynamics of teams". Sarah explained her professional leader's intention was for everyone who went into the program they saw potential in "so if an opportunity came up then they would be trying to get these people into roles". Oscar explained her program "built up your knowledge and skills around what it took to be a [leader]" and the differences in the role. Maya, once she assumed her assistant leadership role, was offered leadership learning opportunities by her organisation. Maya explained,

> There's quite a few leadership professional development courses that once I stepped into the assistant [leader] role sort of opened up to me. The new [leader] meeting, which I think is great because I think they cover a lot of things that I think people who have been in leadership for a long time might take for granted.

The new leaders' program at her organisation, Maya explained, included the "foundational things that are sort of a mystery" when you assume a leadership role.

There is an awareness of the need for leadership development programs within the early childhood education sector (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016). Some organisations have established programs to support their emerging leaders (Edwards, 2018; Ryder et al., 2017), which is also shown in the findings of my study. Edwards (2018), however, found that one of her participants described their organisations leadership program as having not prepared them for the day-to-day realities of their role. This participant in Edwards (2018) study wanted to learn about the policy, compliance, and leadership aspects of their role, whereas

the program at their organisation was focused on delegation, teamwork, and strategies for dealing with fears. Participants in my study did not attribute their organisations' leadership programs as the most effective in supporting them. These programs did not provide enough useful knowledge to fully support participants in their roles. Further research could focus on the strength, design, and success of these programs in supporting recently appointed leaders to enact their roles.

Transpired by chance

Leigh, George, Amelia, Maya, and Sarah all experienced opportunities they described as helpful in supporting them to prepare for their roles. These opportunities, while they had positive impacts on participants' practice, had occurred by chance and were not necessarily well planned. The context or contexts that participants had worked in determined the opportunities they had.

Leigh took an individual pathway to becoming prepared for her role. She developed useful knowledge while learning about and enacting leadership practices in other services. Leigh's story involved circumstantial opportunities, learning from her experiences, and receiving support from others that were integral to supporting her development of role-specific useful knowledge. These experiences, built confidence for Leigh. Attributing her ongoing success to mentoring, Leigh explained "having them [mentors and professional leaders] backing me and teaching me was where it was at really". In discussing this further, Leigh was asked about what she thought it might be like for people who have not had the same opportunities as her. Leigh said "it must be very difficult, for sure".

One opportunity Leigh described involved a story of others seeing more potential for leadership in you than you see yourself. After taking a break from teaching, Leigh described working at a relief agency and:

> within three months of putting myself on the books [at the relief teacher agency], I was asked to be a team leader [at a service where I had been relief teaching] … I don't know what they saw in me. But then … 'I'm a good teacher. I have to say, I've got a lot of strengths. I play music … I'm good at storytelling … But I never thought of myself as a leader, but within three months, they appointed me as a team leader. I started to see that

maybe there was some more to me than just playing the ukulele and reading good stories'.

In discussing another previous experience, Leigh explained she took on a team leader role in 2008, where she remained until 2011. A circumstantial change in the service saw Leigh agreeing to become the highest positioned leader of the service for one year. She explained, "I told the owner that I would only stay one year and he had to appoint a proper [leader]. He didn't so true to my word one year later… I left". When asked about her thinking behind staying only one year, Leigh explained her desire for more. She explained, "I knew the owner wasn't in a position to give me those sorts of connections and that sort of training and mentoring. I needed to go somewhere that I could do that". Leigh then worked as a relief teacher at a service where she was asked after a month to take on a room leader role and after seven weeks to become the overall leader. The structure of the service included a professional leader who oversaw multiple services. The trust Leigh had in this professional leader was evident. Leigh attributed this professional leader's leadership to her own success. Despite this Leigh explained,

> I wasn't going to be a centre manager. I didn't have what was [required] … I have had really good mentors along the way. I know what makes a good leader because I've been led by some of the best. I've had people that I've met in my career that I really admire.

Leigh had a range of prior leadership-related experiences before buying her current centre, yet still expressed challenges with her current role.

Previous experiences in another profession informed and supported George as an early childhood education leader. George discussed the limited opportunities and support for leadership learning in early childhood education. George came to the early childhood education sector having had considerable experience in social work, including "managing a house for people with physical disabilities with a team of twelve to thirteen [staff]". It was this role that George described as providing her with useful knowledge to inform her leadership practice in her early childhood education leadership role.

Amelia described leadership learning that occurred for her in previous settings. She explained how observing others' practices had been influential in informing her own

practices. Amelia attributed "working under different management systems and structures" and her postgraduate study as supporting her knowledge. She explained that this included,

> seeing what I liked about them and thinking I'll do that one day. So there's those elements, but I definitely think the study was probably the biggest factor for me … In my role at the moment, if I hadn't have had this study behind me, even with the experience at [previous service], I would have really struggled.

Over time, Amelia experienced some opportunities to develop useful knowledge while learning systems and having the chance to ask questions. Amelia said, "I was lucky to have that. I imagine if that ... doesn't happen [and] you show management … ability or leadership qualities and you go into" a leadership role without that kind of experience.

Of her previous leader, Amelia explained, "we had a great rapport and a great relationship". Amelia acknowledged that the context was,

> very different to where I am now. But still, I think that experience, I really needed it. Having her being able to sort of mentor me … [and] show me how to do things. It was a smaller centre. I could get my head around … a lot of those systems that you don't know about when you are just teaching … and dealing with parents, and ... all of the challenges that you have in management. I was able to slowly work and then learn and so I think that was fundamental for me as well as my study going into now this full-time [leader] role.

Amelia's experiences show how useful knowledge can be developed from observing others' practices, having opportunities to enact leadership responsibilities, and from leadership-focused postgraduate study.

Maya experienced periods of time acting in her role because of times when her predecessor was on leave. Being in the assistant leader's role allowed Maya time to work with and learn from her predecessor. Working alongside her predecessor before assuming her role provided Maya with foundational knowledge when assuming her role. When asked if knowing the context in which she was taking on her role in helped, Maya replied,

> Yes, 'cause I knew the team. I knew I could work with them well. I had great relationships with all of them and my [professional leader] is really

supportive. All of that really helped me feel comfortable in taking on that role, especially because it was kind of as an acting [leader].

Even though knowing the service she was assuming her role in was reassuring for Maya, she also acknowledged she was not permanently in her current role. Maya explained, "coming up into an acting role, from the kind of more junior role, there's a lot to navigate. I guess with, sort of feeling like [I'm] not officially in charge a lot of time, which is a little bit tricky". So while being familiar with the service, Maya was contending with the challenge of not being employed permanently in her leadership role.

In a previous role, Sarah was the leader of the over two-year-old area of her service. This role involved coordinating the:

> Day-to-day running of … that area of the centre, but none of the nitty-gritty, none of the hardcore discussions I had to do. So that was kind of a little taste, but in reality, it was nothing compared to this role, nothing.

This prior role gave Sarah some experience in leadership, but the enormity of unexpected aspects of her current role provided Sarah with more challenges. In her current service, Sarah had developed some leadership knowledge. This happened when she was substituting for her predecessor for short periods when,

> She would go on holiday for a week. I would take on [some responsibilities] and be like, 'yeah this went quite well' or 'there was one day that was really crap'. But overall … I felt really good about it.

The participants benefitted from these opportunities but they transpired by chance. These experiences helped develop aspects of useful knowledge and informed participants' current thinking and practice. However, they did not offer sufficient useful knowledge for participants to feel prepared once they started their current roles.

Once appointed

Sophie, Amelia, and Charlotte all experienced elements of support in preparing for their roles after they were appointed. Amelia and Sophie, who did not work as part of a larger organisation, experienced individualised forms of induction into their roles. Sophie explained her leadership learning began as a teacher. During the time she was teaching,

Sophie developed her understanding, confidence, and capabilities around leadership through her job appraisal focus and in being the person in her team who was responsible for leading internal evaluation processes. Once appointed to take on the role from her predecessor, Sophie carried out elements of the role before she assumed it. Sophie's induction period involved one-on-one learning, while working alongside her predecessor two days a week. Sophie did this for three months and described it as a process of "just taking everything in". She attributed "probably just doing it" and having her predecessor "sitting right beside me" to helping her to understand aspects of her role. Working alongside her predecessor for three months was "the best thing that you probably could have done" Sophie explained. Sophie described feeling like she had to work alongside her predecessor, because "I had no idea about all the stuff behind the scenes… I was in a teacher role, fully immersed in that side of the centre". When asked if having her predecessor supporting her had a big effect on taking her role, Sophie responded with "definitely… her saying that if I wanted to do it, that she would be there to mentor me, I wouldn't have done it if she hadn't of said that".

A challenge for Sophie during the time she was learning about her leadership role was the duality of teaching and her upcoming role. Sophie explained, "the thing that was really hard is that ... my role wasn't actually replaced". Sophie's teaching role was replaced once she had taken on her leadership role. As she learnt about her new role, Sophie was still responsible for internal evaluation, supporting children in their transition to school, and assessment of children's learning work during this time. Sophie explained, that she felt "like I was split in two because I was trying to be a full-time teacher … But I was also trying to understand the [leader] role". Sophie had practical experience and developed useful knowledge alongside someone familiar with the role. This sustained learning and mentoring, Edwards (2018) argues, is important for new leaders.

Amelia had not worked at her service prior to assuming her role. Amelia's induction involved working alongside her predecessor (before that person retired) for two weeks. She explained, "I think the intention of having us come together for those couple of weeks was good". The induction of a new leader at Amelia's service had not occurred for 15 years, so there was a need to work out how this process would work. Amelia explained,

I don't know if it was that much prep[aration] other than I knew I had my studies
... I knew that I had [the] prep[aration] of experience. I sort of walked in there
knowing that I had a bit of knowledge about … how it would run. I did a little bit
of research on [governing bodies] and ... looked over … a paper we did on
organisational leadership.

When referring to her studies, Amelia was discussing her Postgraduate Diploma in
Leadership (ECE). Amelia had the combination of spending some time with the previous
leader, her research, and her postgraduate study to help inform her knowledge.

Charlotte, like Sophie and Amelia, had some opportunity to work alongside her
predecessor. However, Charlotte assumed her role after returning from maternity leave. Her
predecessor, Charlotte explained,

was really good, she was well prepared … She asked me if I'd be happy to
meet with her during my maternity leave. I'd come and meet with her … sort
of like a handover. She filled me in on a few things. She left a few reports for
me to read.

While this was not much support or induction, Charlotte gained useful knowledge
from working in her service before going on maternity leave. Charlotte's experience prior to
being on maternity leave included enacting some leadership responsibilities when her
predecessor would be on annual leave. She explained her predecessor "was able to leave me
and go on leave… Then if things didn't work out while she was away, I could ask her, 'hey
this happened how would you have dealt with it?'". Following assuming her role, Charlotte
experienced an additional learning experience from her organisation. Charlotte explained,

Within the first month or so, they sent me on training to [city]. It's called
[leader] essentials. They go through your role, your responsibilities … all the
little bits you've got to do, the paperwork and all that side of things. You get
to meet other [leaders] as well, which is great.

The experiences of Sophie, Amelia, and Charlotte show that there was a level of
intentionality in their preparation experiences. However, given that these experiences
occurred after the participants were appointed, it does not indicate robust succession
planning or thorough induction.

In summary, the leadership learning experiences of participants were inconsistent. Participants' experiences included opportunities that were planned in advance, transpired by chance, and once they were appointed. These experiences contributed elements of useful knowledge towards participants' mindset shifts and practice shifts. However, as is further discussed in the next theme of the complexity of competing knowledge demands, they were insufficient to fully support them in their roles.

The leadership learning experiences of participants provided varying levels of effectiveness. Participants acknowledged that their leadership development programs contributed to their leadership understanding. However, these programs were not identified as their most effective preparation by any of the participants who participated in them. Participants attributed observing the practices of others in similar roles and enacting aspects of leadership roles as being helpful in developing useful knowledge for their roles. The social practice (Rumens & Keleman, 2010; Sharma et al., 2018) of observation allowed the practices of others to be central (Rescher, 2010) to the participants. This also supported the creation of knowledge (Rescher, 2010) for participants. This highlights the importance of how social connection can further support the navigation of recently appointed leaders. Social connection is further discussed in chapter seven. Like participants in Edwards' (2018) study, participants in my study stepped up after being left in charge in their predecessors' absence or after enacting minor leadership roles. Acting in their predecessors' roles or working alongside their predecessors provided participants with the opportunity to develop useful knowledge before assuming their roles.

While participants' experiences were important findings, they show a lack of robust succession planning and induction. From a pragmatic standpoint, while participants' prior experiences were minimal, they helped inform the participants changing aims and values relating to their leadership roles (Sharma et al., 2018). Further, "direct experience gained through immersion in the situation" (Simpson, 2018, p. 56) through robust succession planning and induction processes could have better supported participants.

Induction for leaders does not feature in current early childhood education literature. The literature for inducting beginning teachers (Doan, 2016) can offer some recommendations which can apply to supporting new leaders. Beginning teachers'

experiences of support have been reported to vary, be inconsistent, and be haphazard. However, every new teacher deserves adequate support when beginning their career (Doan, 2016). In referencing the work of Katz (1972), Doan (2016) explained,

> without a formal structure for supporting beginning educators (Doan, 2014) there may or may not be adequate support to mentor them through their survival year, a term Katz (1972) used to describe an early childhood educator's first year, a time when they are simply trying to make it through the day (p. 44).

Through their experiences, participants gained knowledge (Hammond, 2013) about their roles and working conditions. This learning involved the reconstruction of meanings (Simpson, 2018) related to leadership knowledge and leadership practice. However, participants' experiences of preparation did not provide enough useful knowledge to fully support the shifts in mindset and practice shifts required. This left participants on a quest to find the knowledge they required to enact their roles. The lack of systematic support participants received was highlighted in the unprompted advice they offered for those considering assuming leadership.

Advice for aspiring leaders

Oscar, Leigh, and Areana acknowledged the insufficient support and challenging nature of a leader's role. They did this by offering advice to those considering assuming a leadership role. This unprompted advice gave insights into how they felt about their roles, reflected the challenges they had faced and showed the need to address support for leaders. The comments participants made indicate that they were unequipped for the operational demands, temporal demands, relational demands, and emotional demands of their roles. These four standpoints are discussed further in the second theme the complexity of competing knowledge demands, of this chapter.

Towards the end of her interview, when asked if there was anything else she would like to add, Oscar offered some advice for those interested in becoming a leader. Her advice indicated an awareness of what she had taken on and just how challenging leadership can be,

I think that for people out there that are looking at becoming a leader, to really

be aware of what's involved … in becoming a leader ... It's quite a tricky,

tricky thing to do and I don't know if you'd ever really be fully prepared.

Leigh explained, "there's not a lot of support out there for leaders though to get into it". She advocated for professional learning and development and taking any available opportunities. Similarly, Areana advocated for mentors, saying "yes it's a scary situation at the beginning, but look where you can come after that … with mentors".

Similar to the opinions of Oscar, Areana, and Leigh, a participant in Edwards' (2018) study also felt people should seriously consider if a leadership pathway was one they wanted to take. The advice Oscar, Leigh, and Areana offered confirmed the necessity of increased support in building recently appointed leaders' knowledge. From a pragmatic standpoint, participants were seeking to develop a practical and useful understanding of how to continue enacting their roles (Phipps & Ozanne, 2017).

Participants' advice for aspiring leaders showed the learning processes that were occurring for them since assuming their roles, and their advice reflects the complexity of their experiences. This leads to the next theme of the chapter, the complexity of competing knowledge demands.

5.3   Navigation: The complexity of competing knowledge demands

This theme contributes to answering the third research question: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? The analysis of findings shows participants experienced complex and competing demands when they assumed their roles. The gap between the knowledge participants had and the knowledge they required meant participants were grappling with the priorities of their roles. This suggests a lack of systematic support. The multiple demands of their roles caused tensions and challenges for participants. The demands that participants were experiencing showed their current learning and support needs. Participants competing demands, where increased knowledge would have been helpful, can be described in four ways: operational demands, temporal demands, relational demands, and emotional demands. Operational demands are defined as relating to the procedural processes and the decision-making processes required of participants for the operation of their services. Temporal demands relate to the use or role of time. Relational demands relate to the interactions between the

participants and other people connected to their service. Emotional demands relate to the emotions of participants or the people that the participants were leading. Each of these four demands is explored next in this chapter.

The previous theme discussed participants' experiences before embarking on their roles. The current theme, the complexity of competing knowledge demands, discusses what participants, in hindsight, thought they needed to know to successfully navigate the complexity of their roles. This exploration built an initial understanding of useful knowledge of how to systematically support recently appointed leaders. The literature chapter (chapter two) and the previous theme, unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership, showed the commonality of on-the-job learning and the inconsistent learning opportunities participants experienced.

Participants were navigating an array of new demands that became expectations of them when they assumed their roles. In seeking to understand participant experiences (Duram, 2010), the pragmatic framework allowed for understanding participants' individual and varied experiences concerning what was new for them. The analysis of findings shows participants were seeking useful knowledge to support them in navigating their way through new territory, new responsibilities, and new challenges. Much of the participants' focus was on the tasks and responsibilities they faced. The teaching and learning of children did not appear to be at the forefront of their focus. This, potentially diminishes program quality and the overall experiences and outcomes for teachers and children.

It was important to establish an understanding of the professional demands and responsibilities of participants. This contributed to understanding possibilities for systematically supporting leaders and what knowledge could be useful for recently appointed leaders. Participants' experiences showed the complexity of demands leaders encounter (Aubrey et al., 2012) and the "great many tasks" (Franzén & Hjalmarsson, 2018, p. 9) participants were responsible for. Each of the four demands (operational, temporal, relational, and emotional) the participants experienced is now explained.

5.3.1 Operational demands

The operational demands on the participants relate to the procedural processes and the decision-making processes required of participants for the operation of their services. George, Maya, Leigh, Sarah, Charlotte, and Sophie all discussed operational aspects of their

experiences, services, and roles that contributed to the complexity of their leadership roles. These operational demands had little direct connection to the teaching and learning of children but underpinned the operation of their services.

George discussed a shift in the demands of her leadership role. Initially, George saw herself in a caretaker role for a few months. The role then turned into an acting role and later a permanent role. George discussed her shift from initially not wanting a leadership role, to beginning to see herself as the leader. She explored how to enact change in the operations of her service. George explained she could see "that things had to change in the [service] itself". This included how the service was operating and strengthening the engagement with families. George explained,

> I wasn't really prepared for, 'oh now I've got this job and I've got to lead
> some change here, how do I do it in a way that everyone's going to be okay
> with it and get on board with it?' ... I had seen myself in a caretaker role for
> a limited time and knew I could do that. But this was different. I had to lead
> a professional group of people.

George's story shows a likeness to the work of Rouse and Spradbury (2016) who found that their research participants were overwhelmed by having leadership assigned to them. George explained her perspective shifted because "it went from being responsible for holding someone's position to actually being a leader". She explained there was more depth to the responsibility of the role and,

> The narrative has changed and the way of being. I lead in an educational sense,
> meaning I need a degree of knowledge about how to teach and lead others...
> This way of being is now added to because of teaching alongside [current
> leader], what she does as a [leader], and so now I can see that it's a different
> way of being.

George articulated her shifts in thinking that occurred before assuming her role, regarding whether she wanted to assume the role. She also described her shifts in thinking when her role became more than a temporary role. Besides this, George's current leader (in her part-time role while she was studying) impacted her thinking and supported her in developing useful knowledge.

Maya had a more mediated view of feeling prepared to lead her service compared to other participants. She explained she was,

> Somewhat prepared. As the assistant [leader] there had been long stretches where I had to step up. I did get a sense from those times ... what it would be like, so in that sense … I did feel fairly prepared for a lot of what the job would entail.

This experience provided Maya with prior learning and expectations of what was required of her in relation to the operational aspects of her service. Maya explained

> Now that I'm kind of six weeks or five weeks into it, I'm starting to hit a little bit more of a stride. I suppose that feels a bit more comfortable, so I can say I think I was pretty prepared.

She did, however, explain,

> I think I was pretty well prepared. I can say that now. Maybe if I had done this interview the first two weeks, I would have said some things differently … I think for the most part having that assistant [leader] time and stepping up quite often for brief little bits was really, really helpful in preparing me for everything that was going to be involved.

Concerning her current role, Leigh attributed her success as a leader to "I'd had really good training in terms of mentoring up to that stage. But when I bought this centre, all of that went out the window". The enormity of her current role was clear in her statement "there's still so much I should have known". Leigh also explained, "if I'd known now what I've been through, I might not have done it ... because it has been a hard road". Leigh was the participant who described the widest range of prior experiences in leadership roles, yet still reflected doubts and additional areas of learning. However, being the owner of a service that Leigh described as "failing" before she became the leader, indicated broader and more significant responsibilities than other participants.

When asked if her sense of preparation had changed after assuming her role, she said "I thought I was, but I look back on it now and I wasn't prepared". Concerning the operational aspects of her service, Leigh identified needing more knowledge of "regulations and legislation… I had no idea about paying wages, [or] funding". The

operational aspects of her service that Leigh credited herself with knowing about were how to "run a great curriculum, a tight programme, I knew how to roster, I knew how to work staff". Leigh explained that her business partner,

> Took over that stuff I had no interest in. But I needed to nail the curriculum
> stuff, the school stuff … Very early on, right from the word go, it was very
> clear that his role was this and my role was [differentiated].

When asked if she had developed more of an understanding of regulations and legislation, Leigh's response was "oh, heck yes".

An operational challenge for Sarah related to the workload of her role. Sarah was confident in identifying her current learning needs as she had had a recent discussion with her professional leader. She explained, "working smarter and actually getting advice from other people on ... how I manage my workload, and the workload of our teachers" was something she aspired to do. Sarah thought if she could better manage her workload, she would be able "to be more present" when teaching the children. In looking to develop strategies to manage her workload, Sarah had identified what was not working for her and the alternatives she would explore.

However, a struggle for Sarah was the discrepancy between what she felt she needed to operate the service and what was provided by her organisation. She explained, "every [leader] we've had has fought to try and get an admin[istrative assistant]". Sarah's view was "because I'm still like a little baby in this role, I have fought and fought and fought" to get an administrator. She explained "not having an admin was a cost-cutting decision", which perhaps reflects the hardship of the sector. Sarah, however, explained that in the two services that were most similar to hers in her organisation:

> One is getting an admin, and the other one doesn't have an admin. But their
> [leader] has just quit as well through stress and workload. So getting an
> admin, I feel like they should have done [it] a long time ago.

Sarah envisaged that having an administrator, like other services in her organisation, would allow her more time to carry out operational responsibilities other than administration. For Sarah, these included having important conversations, to carry out "procedure development or philosophy development or any number of things that … actually get the centre moving and get the growth happening".

Sarah explained it had taken at least six months "of me going. 'I'm not coping with this'" for the consideration of appointing an administrator. At the time of interviewing, Sarah had some success with an advertisement placed for a short-term administrator. However, Sarah explained, "you give with one hand, but you take with the other. The admin time that I have been given, that then goes to the person who will be admin". As Sarah returned to workload throughout her interview, she gave the impression of her needs not being met and explained "I need to get some things out of my head".

Throughout Sarah's interview, she revisited discussing administration tasks. Not having an administrator was significant for Sarah. When asked if there were any other professional learning opportunities she would have liked to have had, Sarah responded with "an admin straight away [laughs] would have been fabulous. I know that's off-topic". While Sarah acknowledged this issue was not specific to professional learning, she repeatedly returned to the tension of how her time was used. A sense of frustration was evident as Sarah discussed how she felt her time could be better used. Sarah's accounts of her experience highlight how a leader's role may encompass too many demands for a recently appointed leader to take on all at once. This is important for employers to recognise.

While some participants described negotiating between leading and teaching, Charlotte and Sophie were developing knowledge about what they described as the business-related responsibilities of their services. These responsibilities did not relate directly to teaching and learning, yet their services required these tasks to be under taken in order to operate. The non-teaching related responsibilities that Charlotte and Sophie discussed included tasks such as managing finances, including fees, enrolments, and maintenance.

The organisational expectations around the non-teaching related tasks of her service were evident in Charlotte's interview. She described how she had had some training and now held hope that competence would come with practice, including explaining, "hopefully in another year I'll be a pro". Balancing "the management and leadership side" more effectively was something Charlotte wanted to work on. She was focused on "the occupancy of the centre making sure that we're always … fully enrolled and … that side of things". Charlotte also described making sure the service was "performing well ... as well as keeping the team happy". Similar to participants in Heikka and Hujala's, 2013 study, Charlotte was dealing with the daily management of the service and pedagogical leadership responsibilities. This was also was similar to the experiences of participants in Klevering and McNae's (2018) study.

Sophie acknowledged her growth and development in organisational aspects of her role since she had assumed her role. She explained "it's just been such a huge role … In the last six months, I have grown so much as a person … But I still feel quite young to be in such a big responsible role". Sophie articulated a significant range of responsibilities in her role. Like Charlotte, she referred to the business operations of her service, explaining "there's so much stuff to take on". Sophie acknowledged her view that in some other contexts, leaders are not responsible for the same responsibilities as her role. She explained,

> There's so many things you are responsible for, the systems and teachers …
> Then you turn around to the whole budget and, like, business side of things
> and it's a whole other ball game. I'm so glad that we have our administrator
> who does all that stuff because I just feel like my head is too full with all the
> other stuff. It's too much to do.

Regarding budgeting, Sophie explained "the previous [leader] tried to support me with budgets and stuff like that but ... I almost feel like that takes a bit of experience to get your head around all that stuff". Sophie also discussed her responsibility for the "property side of things" and health and safety, including how it was important to her that, when issues arose, she could make informed decisions.

The non-teaching-related responsibilities that Charlotte and Sophie discussed contributed to the complexity and size of their roles. Strategies that Sophie and Charlotte used to support them in increasing their knowledge of these responsibilities included acknowledging it would take time and experience to feel comfortable and competent with tasks like preparing and adhering to budgets. Another strategy was knowing who they could use to access support at this stage of their careers. For Sophie, this was her administrator and her previous leader, and for Charlotte, the professional leaders in her organisation.

Charlotte and Sophie's responses are similar to those of participants in Klevering and McNae (2018), who argued many leaders manage a business as part of their role. This added to the complexity of their roles. What differed between Charlotte and Sophie was that Sophie lead a standalone, community-based, not-for-profit service and Charlotte worked for a nationwide provider. Klevering and McNae (2018) acknowledged the privatisation of the sector meant and found leaders were frequently expected to run a business while providing an educational program for children. Yet, as Sophie's experience shows, leaders in community-based services can also feel responsible for managing a business.

Participants required support in developing useful knowledge relating to the operational aspects of their services. These non-teaching related responsibilities of early childhood education leaders require further research to understand the kinds of responsibilities recently appointed leaders are undertaking. In turn, this understanding could create further knowledge about how to systematically support aspiring and recently appointed leaders.

5.3.2   Temporal demands

The temporal demands on participants related to the use or role of time in their work. This section explores how time restraints impacted participants' views of their roles. All participants described being challenged by enduring time-related demands within their roles. These temporal demands also had little direct connection to the teaching and learning of children.

Caitlin understood that learning on the job would occur after she assumed her role but she was challenged by the use of time

> I knew there was things that I wasn't going to [know or], that I didn't know
> … Maybe if there had been more documentation about what some of those
> little things I needed to do, maybe, I don't know. But, no, I think I was pretty
> well prepared. It's just really that time thing that I wasn't prepared for.

Caitlin also alluded to the unrelating nature of her work, discovering it was "bitsier" (i.e., more fragmented) and took more time than she expected. A story Caitlin shared showed how perceptions of time can change when taking on a new role. For Caitlin, demands included writing assessments of children's learning, pedagogical leadership, administration, replying to emails, dealing with policies, and trying to make sense of how her work continued to grow explaining, "I thought I was prepared for it but … I have found that difficult".

Time to undertake the responsibilities involved within their roles varied significantly for participants. Sarah, Charlotte, Maya, Leigh, Sophie, Caitlin, and Amelia each indicated they had time allocated to carry out leadership responsibilities, although the amount of time allocated varied. Areana, Oscar, and George, who worked at sessional services (services that were licensed for children to attend for a part day only) carried out their leadership responsibilities before or after the children's attendance hours. A significant part of Sarah's

role involved teaching. Caitlin taught for approximately thirty hours per week and had approximately ten hours of non-teaching time, whereas Charlotte, Maya, and Leigh's roles involved less teaching. Charlotte's role involved a mixture of leadership, administration, and teaching. Maya's role involved approximately ten hours of teaching per week, but this varied depending on what else was happening within the service concerning the staffing and the program. Leigh aimed to teach for fifteen hours per week and spent about ten to fifteen hours "doing administration, rostering, changing bookings, talking to parents". She had a two-hour weekly meeting with her team leader, and the rest of the time Leigh described as spending "chatting with staff" and helping the staff with tasks. Sophie had structured her staffing roster so that for a portion of the day she worked in the under two-year-old area and, at a different time of the day, she worked in the over two-year-old area of her service. For the remaining portion of her week, Sophie carried out her leadership responsibilities.

Participants grappled with negotiating time and balancing the volume of work required. Working outside of their services hours or their contracted hours was a feature of Sarah, Caitlin, Leigh, Maya, Oscar, Amelia, George, and Areana's experiences. Leaders in Franzén and Hjalmarsson's (2018) study found they needed to be available to parents outside of hours. While this was not the reason that participants in my study stipulated for working outside of hours, they nevertheless felt required to consistently work outside of hours.

Working during evenings was discussed by Sarah, Caitlin, and Leigh, which shows they were challenged by being able to carry out all of their responsibilities during their 'working day'. Sarah repeatedly described the challenge of balancing her role expectations, saying she was "still trying to get a hang of … managing time". She explained that, when working every evening, she had "no balance" and that she was "still learning to be a bit more stricter" with herself. Sarah was putting in place strategies and habits she hoped would work well for her. This was perhaps complicated further for Sarah because her organisation allowed her to work hours that suited her family responsibilities. She worked 7:30 am-2:30 pm each day in the service, and an additional 1.5 hours per day outside the service.

Working "at home pretty much every night" was common for Caitlin. She acknowledged she was in a time of her life where she had "space to really focus on it". However, she explained, "I'm hoping that's not going to continue". Leigh saw her situation of being a centre owner as slightly different. When asked about turning off from work demands and

working outside of hours, Leigh explained "I can't do all my centre manager jobs" in forty hours per week.

While some participants were challenged by working in the evening, other participants were exploring putting boundaries around their time. Maya had set herself a goal of trying to go home when her team went home and tried to get her work done during her workday. For Maya "the first couple of weeks there was a lot of working from home". Maya also acknowledged, "I think there is working, that I don't necessarily think of as working, like when I'm on the phone with my [professional leader] or the former [leader]".

Similarly, Oscar explained she was aware she would "have to put in extra time" but was not completely prepared for the amount of extra time required. Oscar realised that, when you are the leader, "your pile just gets bigger and bigger". She discussed a conversation she had with another person in her organisation where that person told her,

> You should be setting a good example for your team and showing that you don't take work home with you and … stick within your work hours. But that's impossible. If you don't do that, a lot of other stuff is going to get missed.

Amelia discussed the demands of her role and the additional hours she recognised she was working. Amelia discussed that "some weeks … I clock huge hours. Initially, I tracked it and was like, no, I've got an extra 16 hours I'm going to take". However, Amelia also acknowledged, "I do try to [manage my time]. If I know I've been working really big days, I'll take [time off]. But then … doing that … does affect … other work 'cause I'm not there … It's a juggle".

While Maya, Oscar, and Amelia were trying to put boundaries on their time, they, like Sarah, Caitlin, and Leigh, who were working during evenings, were challenged by being able to carry out all of their responsibilities during their 'working day'.

As noted earlier, Sarah, returned to the issue of how her time was used throughout her interview. She reported that "the first few weeks, I was like okay, this is quite a workload … I'm dealing with it. But, I knew that … you can't just keep going and going". Sarah was getting positive feedback from her professional leader "but the reality was, I was putting in so much work". Sarah had been in her role for over six months at the time of her interview and explained that initially she thought, "I'll just do a bit more this week and then I'll be able to have a relaxed week next week … I'm still waiting for my relaxed week".

George and Areana discussed managing their workload differently from other participants, both explaining that their strategy for getting work done was to arrive at work early. Although, they worked for different organisations, their roles themselves showed some similarities. These included working in sessional services (services licensed for children to attend for a part day) and, like many of the leaders in Edwards's (2018) study, were expected to carry out full teaching responsibilities. Areana explained "there's just not enough time" when asked about her current learning needs. She explained she chose to arrive an hour before her 'start time' because "I was taking work home with me all the time… and I decided that needed to stop". George explained she arrived an hour to an hour and a half early and,

> At least three days a week, I'd work a ten-hour day. Then the last two would
> be eight hours. Then I probably do four hours in the weekend … That doesn't
> mean I feel at peace or at ease with what I am doing.

Sophie discussed her sense of responsibility and the expectations placed on her outside centre hours. She explained,

> It's constant pressure. Even when I go home, I'm always responsible for the
> centre ... With our teaching team, there's been quite a few sicknesses and stuff. I
> can end up spending my whole weekend trying to contact people to … work on
> Monday, 'cause there could be three people over the weekend who are saying
> they're sick. It's just constantly on your mind. It has really hard … I just feel like
> it's really hard to disconnect, 'cause … it stops at you, it ends with you, and it's
> like everything you're responsible for … I find that quite draining sometimes.

Here Sophie is discussing the often hidden responsibilities of centre leaders that only those who have experienced the role are likely to understand.

In summarising the temporal demands on participants, these findings indicate the extent to which these recently appointed leaders found that their responsibilities were not usually achievable within their workday. This is something that employers could be better attuned to. Strategies of working in the evenings and before their workday started were how participants accommodated their workload. Sophie also discussed unpredictable demands on her time, including covering staff absence because of sickness. This gives a sense of participants doing "what is right regardless of the consequences" (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997, p. 130) and at their own personal cost (London & Sherman, 2021). Grarock and Morrissey

(2013) found that time (or lack of time) created barriers to leadership, which is reflected in my study through participants' accounts of the additional work required of them. Time distribution and workload impacted how participants viewed their roles. Interestingly, conditions provided by employers or the impact of conditions provided by the employers do not feature in the current literature.

5.3.3 Relational demands

The relational demands on the participants related to interactions between the participants and the other people connected to their services. The relational demands on participants identified in the data were in three distinct areas: a sense of unity, inducting new staff, and difficult conversations.

A sense of unity

Sophie, Caitlin, and Oscar were challenged by the diversity of people in their teams. They discussed relational demands that could be described as a sense of unity with groups or individuals. All three participants had a vision of the unity or cohesion they desired for their teams, although the focus and strategies for each of these participants were different, as they were at different stages of enacting opportunities. Sophie, for example, had implemented some of her plans, whereas Caitlin was embarking on how she might go about building a team culture.

Sophie discussed the challenge of trying to bring together the different personalities in her team. She explained she had "some people who have been here for many, many years and some people who have just started". Identifying the desire to do what she called team-building exercises, Sophie drew on the experience of the local high school principal from her kahui ako (community of learners) group for support. She explained,

> I didn't have these really good ideas up my sleeve of team-building activities and I actually wanted to be part [of the experiences myself] … But if you're leading it [the team building], you're not actually part of … I wanted to actually be part of it, with the team.

Having not experienced needing to facilitate team-building experiences previously, this was an area of learning for Sophie. Utilising the knowledge of the local high school principal allowed Sophie to be a participant in the experience supporting her to build her knowledge at the same time as participating.

Another relational challenge Sophie experienced was a shift in relationships with the people she previously worked alongside as a teacher. Her first response when it was explained to her that other participants had discussed feeling alone in their role was "definitely". She then explained,

> You've gone from being someone [within the team], especially from my position in the team. [Initially] I was a student, the baby, the only young one. … Then all of a sudden I'm [the leader]. [How] everyone … acted around me [shifted]. I was just, like, 'ok what's everyone's problem?' You know, and they'll kind of come to me a lot more and just treat me quite differently, I've definitely found it a lot different.

Sophie explained the shift in relationships from being a teacher alongside the other teachers in the team to being the leader as "quite tricky". Sophie expressed appreciation for her accomplished connections (accomplished connections involve connections with more experienced others and are discussed further in chapter seven) outside of her service. Not all participants had the same networks and range of support as Sophie, indeed some participants did not have anyone outside of their service to consult for support.

Caitlin discussed her desire to strengthen her team. She explained she wanted to "build our team culture in a really positive way and build our team into a really active and forward-moving team". Caitlin's long-term desire was to work with each member of her team to support them in developing their skills and their leadership. Another relational demand that Caitlin experienced involved swapping roles with her predecessor. She described,

> I felt quite prepared, in that I felt I was ready and needed to take that step
> to challenge myself. But the one thing I was really worried about, was how
> it was going to work between me and the previous [leader], how that role
> swap was going to work.

Swapping roles with her predecessor was a situation unique to Caitlin and was not experienced by any other participant in this study. Additionally, there is no early childhood education leadership literature on role swaps.

Many participants took on leadership roles within their current services, whereas Oscar joined an existing team within her organisation. Oscar discussed the relational

aspects of the leader's role for which she found herself responsible as soon as she assumed her role. She explained,

> I think it's because [it is] not just the role that you are taking on. You're learning all about team dynamics and those other little bits and pieces that go alongside it. All of a sudden, once you've got that leadership role, you're the one that everybody comes to, to ask everything and you're still learning yourself.

Oscar was developing knowledge of how her service operated and how to be a leader at the same time. She explained, "I came over to an existing team. Most of them had been here for a good six or seven years before me. I was the new fresh blood". When asked about how she found joining an existing team, Oscar replied,

> Quite tricky actually. Because not only are you trying to come in within a leadership role, but you've got to get used to how everything already runs within that [service], how the team dynamics already work, while still being the leader.

Oscar described team dynamics as "a huge challenge for me, having that confidence to approach people about issues … actually seeing myself as the leader … and what I say is actually valuable, 'cause I'm, of course, the youngest on the team". Being the youngest and the newest on the team, Oscar thought, "sometimes that has a huge impact on how people see me". Oscar acknowledged that a challenge for her was that there had been a person acting in the interim between her predecessor leaving and Oscar starting. She explained, "I don't think that things were necessarily ... working well within the team at all times". Adding to the challenge was that the person who acted in the role in the interim,

> Found it hard stepping down out of that acting [leader] role. She hadn't wanted to take on the [leadership] role ... So it wasn't as if I'd taken it off her … We had to sort of work alongside [each other] because she was used to having that responsibility and then she had to pass it over.

Initially, Oscar needed to become an accepted member of the group, before being seen as and accepted as the leader to then allow her to enact leadership practices (Branson & Marra, 2019). Oscar's situation highlights how multiple relational challenges can occur at the same time.

As Sophie, Caitlin, and Oscar were settling into their roles, they saw building a sense of unity within their teams as important. Some participants had already enacted what they determined as most important for their service, where other participants were yet to enact their plans. Although they were each at different points of working through their challenges, all the participants were seeking useful knowledge and further support to deal with these challenges. I now discuss the challenges that participants had with inducting new staff.

Inducting new staff

A relational aspect of their work for which several participants were seeking further understanding and knowledge was how to induct new staff. Oscar, Areana, Caitlin, Sophie, and Amelia were challenged by the responsibility of inducting new teachers when they were still learning their roles themselves. Oscar identified inducting new staff as an area of learning for her as she had recently inducted someone. Caitlin, when referring to inducting a new teacher, explained, "I found it quite challenging … I felt like ... I kept forgetting things … I didn't really know everything that I needed to ... talk to her about. Then I ended up feeling bad that I hadn't told her about things". Caitlin acknowledged she wanted to improve induction processes for the next time she would carry them out. Areana described herself as "learning the ropes" as a leader while inducting a new teacher. It was also Areana's "first time being a mentor".

Sophie also discussed the challenge of inducting a new teacher in relation to assuming a new role herself while trying to support a new teacher to settle in. She explained,

> I feel like it would have been really good if my role was filled earlier … I
> was starting as a [leader] … In my first month of [leadership], I had someone
> new coming into the centre. I was trying to induct them and support them
> [to] take on a full-time role. It almost felt like too much. It would have been
> easier if my role would have been filled a bit earlier.

In discussing the induction of teachers, Amelia explained her service had a "big policy on it". In following the policy, Amelia was "meant to meet with them at the end of each week for a month and talk about concerns". While acknowledging this may not always happen as scheduled, Amelia tried her best to reschedule when necessary. Amelia's previous experience motivated her to consider how she wanted to induct people. After

returning from overseas, Amelia accepted a teaching role where on the first day "no one greeted me". She explained,

> I didn't know where the toilet was. I didn't know where the light switches were … It was like I hadn't been welcomed and that was my first day. I was like, 'what am I doing here?' … Teachers just walking past and looking at me, but not saying hello.

This contributed to why Amelia studied for her Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) (discussed in chapter six in the theme early childhood education leadership specific postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of early childhood education leadership). Amelia explained she "didn't want to offer people that, so I've always made a point of trying to make them feel so welcome when they come and ensure that they are being included".

Inducting new staff also did not feature in the early childhood education leadership literature. However, given that five participants in this study raised it as an issue, further exploration should be considered. A further challenge for some participants was engaging in 'difficult conversations', which I now explain.

Difficult conversations

Areana, Maya, Caitlin, Oscar, Leigh, Sophie, Charlotte, and Sarah identified having difficult conversations as an area of learning. Difficult conversations involved conversations during which participants felt challenged, and that were outside of their current levels of relational comfort. Participants discussed difficult conversations in a general sense and did not go into detail about individual situations or scenarios. Participants were seeking knowledge on how to raise with staff issues they considered were problematic. Over time, the practice of having difficult conversations produced knowledge (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020) and participants developed useful strategies for having difficult conversations. The findings in the present study suggest that having success in difficult conversations involves having self-belief and support from mentoring, both of which were also evident in the findings of Edwards (2018). Learning occurred for participants formally through professional learning opportunities and informally through on-the-job learning. In addition, to this regular times to meet with staff were identifed as a strategy that supported participants.

Areana explained that difficult conversations were "the main challenge" for her. She discussed professional learning opportunities that supported her in developing strategies for

having difficult conversations. Highlighting the need for professional learning and development opportunities to have depth to them, Areana explained, "some only touched on it … I really needed examples of how to follow through with it". Areana was the first interview participant, so, during subsequent interviews, participants were asked about their views on difficult conversations. Caitlin, when asked about difficult conversations, explained, "that's one thing I'd like to feel more comfortable doing. Although I don't think anyone feels comfortable, but feel more courageous about".

When told it had been raised in previous interviews, that some participants found difficult conversations challenging, Maya responded "Yep. I have too". She explained, "when people have differing opinions and values and that comes up in their practice, that kind of a thing, I think, can be really tricky".

Oscar, when asked about difficult conversations, explained,

Yeah, very much so. Even though I had professional development in having … courageous conversations … still trying to have them is really, really hard … I've certainly learnt some of the steps to put in place when I have to have them in the future.

While comfortable in having difficult conversations with parents, Leigh identified difficult conversations with staff as more challenging. A strategy that supported her was having a monthly uninterrupted catch-up meeting with each staff member. Leigh attributed these conversations to rapport building and they allowed her to more comfortably "address something difficult". She also explained she used evidence to support her in these conversations when she felt it was necessary.

To support herself in having difficult conversations, Sophie sought useful information from her predecessor and a mentor for guidance on how they might approach situations. Then, "based on ... those two pieces of advice", Sophie decided how to approach situations. Sophie acknowledged, "it's still hard though but ... it's just practice". The motivation for Sophie in these situations was positive outcomes for children.

Like other participants, Charlotte had developed some knowledge and strategies for having difficult conversations. She explained,

It is always a challenge and for me. It's about being prepared. If I'm unsure
about something and … want to sound things off, I'd give my [professional
leaders] a call and say, 'hey this has happened. I just want to get your thoughts
on it before I approach it', so I'm ... prepared before I have that conversation.

Through her organisation, Charlotte participated in learning opportunities, including
coaching, to support her with difficult conversations.

Sarah had developed a new appraisal focus to support her knowledge
development in having difficult conversations. She identified being timely, not being
scared, and being more consistent as areas of growth for her regarding difficult
conversations. Sarah showed awareness of self and recognition of how she could develop
her practice when explaining, "I'm not very good at following up and going 'Hey look,
I set the expectation why didn't you do it?'".

In showing that participants had different learning needs, Amelia and George felt
they had strengths in having difficult conversations. This shows that recently appointed
leaders have differing knowledge, learning, and support needs. Amelia explained, "I've
never sort of had an issue with ... approaching difficult discussions or difficult topics. I've
always been very vocal". She also attributed her study as helping immensely. Amelia was
comfortable challenging her teachers when they come to her with a report such as,

'Someone's doing something, and we don't do that here.' I can challenge
them to go back to that teacher and to ask 'Why are you doing?' that and
really understand why the teacher is doing it that way and have that
discussion with them.

George explained, "I have great confidence in myself when it comes to hard
conversations". She described thinking "I would be lost without … the social work
background". It was clear George valued her previous experiences in social work as they
provided knowledge to inform her current practice. In identifying she would be lost without
her social work background, this is a bold, yet honest statement. It does though raise the
question of what early childhood education leadership is like for people without similar
previous experience. This also shows that George has not received the support she required
from within the early childhood education sector.

While Amelia and George were comfortable with difficult conversations, the eight other participants identified them as an area for further knowledge development and support. The number of participants identifying difficult conversations as a challenge showed systematic learning opportunities focused on difficult conversations for those that need them would be important for recently appointed leaders. The variation in how confident participants felt with difficult conversations locates participants on a continuum from feeling a sense of confidence to requiring or wanting to develop more confidence. Being on a continuum shows that recently appointed leaders have differing support and learning needs. Strategies for developing useful knowledge concerning difficult conversations included accessing professional learning and development, practice, mentoring, and an appraisal focus.

Participants were challenged by a variety of relational demands involved in their roles. The challenges are categorised into three distinct areas, although, participants experienced individual differences in how these challenges presented. These areas of learning for participants highlight how systematic support when challenges are occurring could further increase participants' confidence and ability to enact these responsibilities.

5.3.4   Emotional demands

Some participants experienced significant emotionally taxing demands within their roles. These demands impacted participants' personal time and their ability to separate their work life from their home life. This section shows that assuming their roles has impacted participants in a less-than-desirable way from their previous realities. This is similar to the findings of Donald (2019) who found participants' personal lives were impacted by their work. Aspects of the emotional demands discussed impacted participants' time, views, and well-being.

The emotional demands of participants related to their own needs and well-being, or the needs and well-being of the people they were leading. This section initially begins with the metaphors participants used to summarise and describe how their experiences had been. The metaphors used indicated a lack of systematic preparation and support. Areana, Sophie, George, and Sarah used metaphors to represent, describe, and explain emotionally taxing challenges that had occurred for them. The water or movement metaphors that were used give a sense of emotion that indicates not feeling entirely ready for their role challenges (Rouse and Spradbury, 2016), and "being "thrown in at the deep end"" (Macpherson, 2014, p. 10).

For Areana, assuming her leadership role was "like being chucked in a fishbowl and then trying to navigate". Sophie acknowledged, "even just the first month of it, I was swimming, to be honest. Just figuring out, and I guess that's that how you learn". George described her sense of navigation as a,

> picture of me swimming out the front. I could hear people talking behind me.
> I just couldn't see them. You do feel like you're right out there by yourself
> … You hold on to some faith and some hope that you are going okay.

A mantra for George was "fingers crossed it's going to be okay". George attributed "probably ... not getting ... proactive feedback" as a reason for this thinking.

Sarah explained her predecessor told her it would take at least three months "to feel like you're not treading water and going home freaking out". Sarah explained that, because her role involved acting in the role while her predecessor was on maternity leave, it was discussed "quite early on" that she would take on the role. She explained that her predecessor "prepped me a lot and if she had have left suddenly, I wouldn't have had any of that before starting". However, in using another water analogy, Sarah also explained,

> It meant there was lots of time … I still felt thrown in the deep end. But I
> wasn't ... in a sense because [predecessor] supported me so much. She
> spent time teaching me all the computer work, all the admin stuff, and
> really kind of prepped me for the fact that it is so different being a teacher
> than being in charge. It changes your relationships with your team, it
> changes your relationships with the people at [head office] … [and] all the
> parents as well.

Sarah, alongside Areana, Sophie, and George, shared some thoughts about their realisations of what they were navigating when embarking on their leadership roles. Using metaphors allowed the participants to use forms of language to describe and summarise how they felt about their experiences. The metaphors indicated participants required more useful knowledge to enact their roles. The direct experience of being immersed (Simpson, 2018) in a leadership role meant participants were learning about, reflecting on, and developing knowledge that would in the long term be useful to their roles. Metaphors allowed participants the opportunity to make sense of and summarise how they felt about their roles.

Participants also described experiencing a range of situations that were emotionally taxing for them. Oscar, Maya, Amelia, Charlotte, and Sophie described emotionally taxing situations they felt unprepared for. These situations included unpredictable circumstances and responsibilities required of them, including supporting members of their teams with life challenges. Similar to the work of Franzén and Hjalmarsson (2018), these findings show the enormity of the participants' responsibilities. Meeting the needs and well-being of staff and the emotionally demanding nature of a leadership role is something Donald (2019) found leaders felt ill-prepared for. The emotional labour involved in leading is understated and not always visible (Gallant & Riley, 2013).

Oscar discussed the emotionally taxing nature of leadership concerning resilience and the general responsibilities of being the leader. A clear focus for Oscar was how to develop her resilience and work through the challenges that leaders can experience. She explained,

> How do you be resilient and keep on going when the going gets tough? Because it does get tough, a lot of the times when you are a [leader]. You've got to build up that resiliency and be able to find a way forward.

Maya acknowledged that she thought "more people share information with you because ... you're in a position where … you need to know". A tension for Maya was "what do you take on and … not lose sight of the fact that there's so many other children ... and things that you also need to put your attention to". Maya was realistic in the sense there would be some challenges in her role and had considered some strategies including being incredibly organized. However, she described an intensity and unpredictability to some of the challenges she was experiencing.

Concerning workload, Maya explained, "the workload that's stressful but it's not something that keeps me up. Well, it can keep me up at night". However, when discussing how she felt about taking on her role, Maya discussed how she was unprepared for the:

> Up and down quality of leadership. Where some days are just really awful and also the unpredictability of your day … No matter how organised you are there's going to be things that crop up constantly, that demand your attention … That derails a lot of things … There's days that you just go home and you're just like, oh my gosh, that was horrible but then there's days that I just feel like yes, I nailed it.

Later in her interview, Maya revisited the unpredictability of her role and discussed how "absolutely intense" the unpredictability can be. Maya then explained,

No matter how organised you are … things will always kind of come up ... Whether that be … an operational thing … I wouldn't say I was unprepared for it, 'cause I felt like I knew it was going to happen. Perhaps it's the amount … just all the families and … being that go-to person for a lot of drama that's happening in their lives. But also with the staff … my eyes were kind of opened [to] how much … shit people go through … in their personal lives.

Maya had a conversation with her professional leader about emotional demands the day she was interviewed. She explained,

What is really is hard, [that] takes time to process, is the people management stuff. The dramas that… come up with in the team ... and what your role is in... supporting that, [and] working through it ... How do you not micromanage a team, but also be supportive enough … It is kind of the worst stress if you feel like people are unhappy and there's issues and kind of toxicity happening ... How do you deal with that while dealing with everything else … building up skills around that.

Maya identified her greatest challenges as being around people management and managing the stress that comes from it. She explained she was "learning how to emotionally process … and [that] part of the job is hugely challenging". Maya discussed learning about "how to not take it on too much personally". Maya had considered many aspects of her role that had challenged her and that she was still working through and processing. Upon reflecting on her transcript, Maya later added something that she had recently considered. This was,

The struggle with being a leader and also being naturally introverted. I do love building relationships with families and colleagues and children ... But by the end of the day, my social bandwidth often feels depleted. Also, when you step up to leadership, you are often called on to speak for the team, to be more out there in terms of representing the organisation, and be available for those courageous conversations. or any sort of conversation all the time. When you are someone who tends towards introversion, it can really sap your energy and you feel like that balance and self-care becomes very important. I don't think

you have to be an extrovert to be a good leader, but, I think introversion does
present a challenge, perhaps even more so in the beginning because you have
to figure out how to manage the greater demands on your social energy.

Maya's response was similar to a participant in Donald's (2019) study who identified
with introversion. Donald's (2019) participant looking after others' well-being while being
responsible for the flow of the program as draining and exhausting.

Similar to Maya, Amelia described some challenges regarding people's personal
lives that she described as unpredictable. She explained, "but you wouldn't believe the
things… that happen and I'm sitting there and I'm blown away". Amelia likened the role to
counselling at times:

Dealing with people's personal lives … It's almost like needing to be a
counsellor and needing to be incredibly understanding in the most strange
bizarre situations … Some days I've gone home and been like wow to myself,
you wouldn't believe what I've dealt with today. I don't feel like I'm trained
to deal with this.

Amelia explained the personal impact of this, including being in tears about what she
should do concerning one team member's health. In discussing these challenges Amelia
explained "being gobsmacked and left going what do I do … I'm not prepared for this. I've
never dealt with this". She later explained, "I've never ever ... been in that situation where
… I feel very responsible … I don't know why I feel so responsible".

Amelia likened her experience with her governing body to "treading along". She
described the personal impacts of her role, explaining "I find that my sleep is affected".
Amelia described a situation where, during the evening, she had seen there was an email in
her inbox from a governing body member and explained:

I stopped myself, and I was like I'm not going to read it because if there's
something in there and it upsets me, and there might be, I'm going to have a
terrible night's sleep. Then I was like, but if I hadn't have read it, I'm going
to be lying in bed going what is it?

In this situation, Amelia explained she left the email until the following day, when she felt better equipped to deal with it. Sleep disruption, while important, was not discussed within the literature.

When asked about turning off from things, Charlotte explained: "it is really hard and that's something that I find really difficult. You have to be really careful it's not affecting your personal life". Charlotte explained this as "something I need to work on".

Charlotte described herself as having a sense of self-belief and ambition to be successful in her role. Self-belief was something participants in Edwards' (2018) study felt was important. Charlotte talked about her sense of confidence in feeling prepared, although hesitations were evident during her interview. Towards the end of her interview, Charlotte explained, "I don't think you can ever be too prepared like you know, fully prepared. I felt prepared. I stepped into the role and there were a few things that … sort of hit me". Similarly, Charlotte explained there have been "very few moments [where I have thought], 'oh gosh, what have I got myself into?" yet, she also described "nothing really threw me, but … there were a few things that I didn't know". Charlotte experienced a sense of unexpectedness within her role. The strategy she chose to employ was to problem-solve and work through challenges. She explained, "I just learned to problem solve, and that's what I'll continue to do". Charlotte thought some challenges she faced, such as centre occupancy rates, would be familiar to other leaders.

This section has shown an array of demands that participants experienced relating to their own emotional needs and those of their teams. Internal conflicts were noticeable for participants in terms of how to meet their own needs and the needs of their team members. The extent that these situations challenged participants suggests that systematic support to work through these challenges, as they occurred, could have supported participants learning and practice.

Emotional labour can be significant for leaders and can be "difficult to negotiate" (Gallant & Riley, 2013, p. 94) and process (Franzén & Hjalmarsson, 2018). This emotional labour of leaders Donald (2019) argued is under-recognised and takes a toll on the well-being of leaders. When "leaders persistently put the needs of others over those of themselves, they were likely to experience feelings of stress and emotional exhaustion" (Donald, 2019, p. 26). The necessity to consider teachers' emotional needs has been identified in Te Whāriki the New Zealand early childhood education curriculum. Yet "this recognition, however, falls short on encouraging self-care of the ECE leader" (Donald, 2019, p. 26).

In summary, it was clear participants had not received systematic support to deal with the emotional demands of their roles. While some demands were shared with other participants, other demands were unique to individual participants. It was common that participants were navigating multiple demands across the four different areas (operational, temporal, relational, and emotional) at any given time.

Participants were seeking knowledge on how to manage their demands. From a pragmatic standpoint, participants were doing what worked (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020), even if the position of reality did not make them feel comfortable, such as having to work additional hours. Participants' aims and values were being shifted (Sharma et al., 2018) and redeveloped to align with what they saw as expected within their current context. Participants appeared to want to make changes, yet the knowledge of how to do this was still to be created. The weight of responsibility (Gallant & Riley, 2013) involved in their roles was challenging for participants. While each of the situations discussed in this section relates to only some participants, they are each individually significant. Specific and targeted learning opportunities related to individual situations could help build useful knowledge and support this learning.

Participants discussed aspects of their roles that they were navigating and required further knowledge to help them enact. The classification of the demands into the areas of operational demands, temporal demands, relational demands, and emotional demands shows the areas of complexity involved in participants' roles. The analysis of findings showed participants were seeking increased knowledge to navigate the four areas of demand. These four areas of demand identified areas of learning that participants could have been better supported with when assuming their leadership roles.

5.4   Conclusion

In summarising this chapter, participants were on a quest to navigate through the responsibilities of their roles, having had a variety of inconsistent prior experiences. The theme of unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership addressed the preparation and support the participants had before and after assuming their roles.

The learning and support opportunities and experiences of participants show there is not a consistent way of preparing early childhood education leaders in New Zealand. This reinforces the findings of the literature review, which discussed the unstructured nature of career progression

for leaders. Participants were exposed to some support and learning opportunities, yet these were inconsistent. The leadership learning opportunities for participants depended on the contexts they worked in. The absence of robust succession planning was evident in the accounts participants shared about their induction into their roles. Induction within this study has been looked at broadly, including looking at prior experiences because, for participants who discussed induction, it was brief at best. Current processes for supporting recently appointed leaders to develop useful role-related knowledge, including induction and succession planning, require further development. This is to ensure future and aspiring leaders are better supported and set up for success. If this is not addressed, recently appointed leaders will continue 'stepping stoning' and be moderately prepared for their roles. Understanding the challenges participants experienced as they transitioned into their roles could inform the development of specialised learning opportunities for future leaders (Beam et al., 2016).

Participants were learning on the job about the realities and the expectations of their roles. Pragmatically experience is gained through being immersed in a situation (Simpson, 2018) where action and thought can be connected (Plowright, 2016). For participants, this immersion of being in their roles created reality, understanding, and increased knowledge of being a leader. This meant that when carrying out practices (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020) involved within their roles, change was occurring for participants in their views and knowledge (Sharma et al., 2018). This change could have been better supported to ensure participants were equipped to navigate the competing demands of their roles.

The increased level of accountability that comes with leadership roles (London & Sherman, 2021) can be challenging. The increased accountability and responsibilities of participants contributed to their shifting perspectives on how they viewed their readiness for their roles. Participants showed some awareness that there would be things they did not know and that some on-the-job learning would occur (Rouse & Spradbury, 2016). This aligns with the work of McCulla and Degenhardt (2016) who found that the school leaders in their study could never be fully prepared for their roles. What participants in my study discovered was that the work they were doing was in some ways different from what they imagined. This is similar to the work of Parker and Lewis (1981) who found that usually, aspirants held a positive view of a role they would take on, and the limitations or difficulties of the role were not seen prior. While not necessarily guided, the change from teaching to leading was supporting participants' practical knowledge development to an extent.

There was a reality shift for participants from how prepared they felt before assuming their roles to how prepared they felt once they had assumed their roles. Participants made shifts in their mindset and practice to try to meet the needs of their roles. The preparation and support participants experienced was defined in three distinct areas: planned, transpired by chance, and once appointed.

The planned experiences of participants mostly related to the participants who worked for organisations with multiple services. The processes and practices were variable, but each offered some sort of collective professional learning to leaders and/or aspiring leaders. Ongoing group learning experiences were provided, such as professional learning groups and regular leadership-specific meetings, whereas participants in standalone services were mostly left to find their own avenues of support.

The opportunities that transpired by chance for participants included acting in their roles during their predecessors' absence and working in more minor leadership roles. Having these opportunities supported participants' confidence to take on their roles (McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016). However, it appears to not have been sufficient as a form of developing useful knowledge.

Some participants received support specific to their services once they were appointed to their roles. Participants assumed their roles after indicating their interest or being asked to assume the role. Regardless of how they assumed the role, it triggered some form of learning opportunity.

Regardless of the types of learning opportunities, what unified participants was that more support and learning opportunities were required. At the time of interviewing, some participants were still determining where or how to find support.

The theme of the complexity of competing knowledge demands relates to the ongoing support and learning needs of participants. This theme outlines aspects of useful knowledge that participants could develop to support their continuing learning needs. Having to navigate their new challenges and the responsibilities of their roles provided learning opportunities that were largely unsupported for participants. Many participants were challenged by what was required of them to enact their roles and for their services to operate. Participants' capacity and capability to enact the load of the expectations of their roles were challenging.

Participants discovered aspects of leadership, once they were in their roles that they found challenging. This raised problems for participants while also creating opportunities where learning occurred. The transition process involved separation from what was known, moving into what was current, and incorporating new learning (London & Sherman, 2021). Having prior teaching roles provided a foundation for participants when they assumed their roles, it also gave participants a place of comfort to refer to or return to.

While participants had strengths in teaching young children, as leaders, they were discussing elements of navigating the way into new territory. Being able to lead adults differs markedly from teaching young children. Sophie, when referring to Simon Sinek (author and inspirational speaker), explained how "often people who... do really well in their job… get moved up to a management position. But actually it's not that which they are really good at, they are actually really good at teaching". Participants were seeking knowledge in developing skills in leading adults. Analysis of findings shows participants felt their current learning needs related to operational demands, temporal demands, relational demands, and emotional demands. Participants were challenged by these responsibilities and the personal impacts that came with their roles. The findings highlighted the continuation of the transition period past assuming a leadership role, and that ongoing specialised support and development of knowledge was required.

The taxing nature of leadership has the potential to be challenging even for experienced leaders. What is unique about the recently appointed leader career stage is that having prior useful knowledge to navigate these kinds of challenges is less likely. The areas discussed in the theme of the complexity of competing knowledge demands were areas where participants may not have realised the personal cost of their roles, something London and Sherman (2021) describe as "non-calculative MTL [motivation to lead]" (p. 331).

Learning about operational aspects of their roles were occurring on the job for participants. Through repetition of processes, participants were learning about how to enact aspects of their roles.

Time was also a source of tension for the participants. The distribution of time impacted participants' lives. This created habits of working outside of hours and challenged participants' abilities to disengage from their work. For example, Areana and George were arriving early and Leigh was working in the evenings. However, some other participants, such as Sarah, were experiencing conflict concerning the nature of time. Problems occurred

for Sophie and Charlotte relating to turning off from work and for Maya and Amelia concerning sleep disruption.

Several relational challenges occurred for participants. The need to induct new team members, when they themselves were new to their roles, was challenging for participants. Amelia had taken learnings from her own experience as a teacher to inform her current practice as a leader. Other participants used their on-the-job learning to reflect on the process, including thinking about how they would develop induction processes for subsequent staff inductions. This shows there is a place for knowledge to be developed on the job in learning about leadership. However, on-the-job learning needs to be paired with other forms of learning and knowledge creation to be more effective.

The emotionally taxing nature of participants' roles highlighted the complexity of tasks that leaders might be expected to enact and may not be supported to carry out. The emotional labour involved with their roles that participants discussed was significantly challenging. While knowledge is produced through practice (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020) the significance of some situations discussed by participants indicated needing time and space for reflecting on and processing situations.

In describing what it was like to take on a leadership role, participants identified times when they felt their skills fell short (Aslan-Bilikozen, 2011). Effort is required to further understand and address the gap between what is currently received and the required support of leaders as they transition into their leadership roles. Support to address the learning requirements of recently appointed leaders should be needs-oriented. This support should focus on the current learning needs of the leader and how these needs can be addressed.

Pragmatically, there were multiple realities of leadership experienced. Participants were at different points in navigating through the demands of their roles. While participants were learning by doing (Sharma et al., 2018) they also experienced doubt when carrying out some of their new responsibilities. Participants were seeking further knowledge that would allow them to more confidently carry out their roles and support them with the demands they were encountering. Participants were at varying points in resolving this doubt. For example, Amelia, in relation to induction, had created meaning and reconstructed (Simpson, 2018) her ideas, beliefs, and values concerning ways she would enact induction processes. Whereas other participants who had only just recently carried out induction of new team members identified that there would be other considerations next time they conducted staff induction. Being at

different points shows the importance of individualised and targeted support for recently appointed leaders to develop knowledge that will support them in enacting their roles.

This chapter has shown that, despite their differing needs and differing contexts, participants were united by their quest to find the best sources of useful knowledge, due to trying to navigate meeting their outstanding support and learning needs. Using metaphors offered participants the opportunity to summarise and describe their experiences. Participants learnt their roles had operational demands, temporal demands, relational demands, and emotional demands. These four areas of demand highlight the support and learning needs specific to recently appointed leaders when assuming a leadership role.

The following chapter (chapter six) focuses on the concept of transformation and explains that participants were on a quest to acquire knowledge that would be useful in enacting their roles. It addresses knowledge that participants were still seeking and strategies sought or employed to transform practice and knowledge. The concepts of navigation (in this chapter) and transformation (in the following chapter) underpin the importance of useful knowledge. Useful knowledge was not enough alone to support or address the specialised support and learning needs of participants. Therefore, chapter seven introduces the pragmatic concept of social connection. The concept of social connection alongside the concept of useful knowledge forms the basis of my theory for supporting the development of recently appointed leaders' practice.

Chapter 6

Transformation and the Quest for Useful Knowledge

6.1   Introduction

The previous chapter (chapter five) focused on the knowledge deficit of participants. This chapter focuses on the knowledge development of participants. This knowledge development is explained through the concept of transformation. Transformation was occurring through experiences where useful knowledge was being developed. This chapter includes turning points for participants where, with prompting, they could recognise areas of transformation. These knowledge and practice transformations occurred out of necessity once participants were immersed in their roles.

My description of the concept of transformation explores evidence of two main themes: acknowledging emerging confidence and growth and early childhood education leadership-specific postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of early childhood education leadership. The theme of acknowledging emerging confidence and growth relates to research question two: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and explores the shifts in practice that were occurring for participants as they settled into their roles. Here, I claim that, while others may see participants as leaders because of their role title, it typically took participants some time to transition from their previous roles to their current leadership roles.

The theme of early childhood education leadership-specific postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of early childhood education leadership relates to research question three: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? and describes the experiences of the participants who had experienced leadership-focused postgraduate study. The two participants who undertook early childhood education leadership-focused postgraduate study found it offered useful knowledge to support and address their learning needs. Explored within this theme are the participants' rationales for embarking on further study and the benefits of the useful knowledge they developed when participating in postgraduate study.

In this chapter, I reiterate the idea that becoming a leader takes time. While other people saw participants as the leader because of their role titles, it took participants some time to see themselves as a leader. Participants were at varying stages of transformation and

while on-the-job learning was occurring for them, they were on a quest to seek further knowledge to support them with their role responsibilities.

In line with pragmatic concepts, participants' realities were changing, which encouraged their quest to look for processes and explore practices that worked for them to achieve desirable outcomes (Sharma et al., 2018). Participants were seeking knowledge that they could practically apply within their roles. As participants were developing their image of themselves as a leader, they were developing their self-awareness, confidence, relational abilities, and applying new knowledge (London & Sherman, 2021).

6.2   Transformation: Acknowledging emerging confidence and growth

Participants were on a quest to find useful knowledge to support them in their roles. Some participants could identify areas where their knowledge had already grown or their lenses had shifted since assuming their roles. It was important to explore how participants' lenses were shifting and their evolving views of seeing themselves as leaders. The reason for this was that, while understanding who the participants were, it was important to understand the shifts in their practice that were occurring. This included operational and relational understandings and knowledge that was being created as they carried out their roles. Understanding participants' transformations during the stage of being recently appointed contributed some initial understanding of the principles to address the support and learning needs of aspiring and recently appointed leaders.

Having the opportunity to be interviewed allowed participants to reflect on, identify, and articulate transformations in practice. These transformations included where they had grown in confidence or knowledge. The theme of acknowledging emerging confidence and growth shows that participants were in a period of transition. Participants were beginning to shift their perspectives on themselves as leaders, and recognise what their roles required. In the quest to settle into and understand their roles better, participants were developing their knowledge and beginning to enact leadership practices. There were two distinct areas where participants acknowledged emerging confidence and growth - operational aspects and relational aspects - which I now discuss.

6.2.1   Operational aspects

Caitlin, Oscar, Sarah, Sophie, Leigh, and Maya were on a quest for knowledge development concerning the operational aspects of their services. Caitlin explained, "I'm

mostly getting on top of the admin stuff". She explained her successes involved "printing the day sheets, getting the invoices out", talking with parents and making progress with plans, strategies, and referrals. Caitlin also explained,

> a big success was getting our full license, 'cause … we moved a year ago, so we were on a provisional [license]. After relocation, you have to be on a provisional [license] for a year. We got the full license and we got a new committee for this year. That was a big success, new committee, new people, new start.

Like Caitlin, Oscar described feeling comfortable with "most of the administration tasks that are my responsibility". Administration tasks were contentious for Sarah and she returned to the burden of them throughout her interview. Although, when asked about her greatest successes, Sarah, felt she had "got a hold of a lot of the admin processes, that I feel like I shouldn't even have to do. But I'm getting better at that. I'm gaining a lot of understanding … it's becoming second nature".

Concerning administration responsibilities, Sophie explained feeling more confident over time with,

> The systems things, I just keep learning. Like generating our waitlist, initially, I found that quite tricky. I just really wanted to make sure I was doing it properly, but now I've had quite a bit of practice and I feel more competent with it.

Besides this, Sophie identified successes as "being more organised and open to change". She explained things at her service "have always been done the same way because that's how we've always done them", even down to the placement of furniture. Crediting herself for being reflective, flexible, and improvement-focused, Sophie explained she had made changes "in the best interests of children".

Like Sophie, Leigh could identify individual success which involved continuing and transforming her service. This included,

> Getting a positive ERO [Education Review Office] report ... Meeting all the 22 breaches of license … Keeping families, keeping staff employed. I'm quite proud of everything we've achieved. I've done it ... with good support and … putting those into place right from the start.

These things were integral for Leigh in defining her greatest successes. The Education Review Office (ERO) reviews and reports on all early childhood, primary, and secondary education services in New Zealand, and early childhood education services in New Zealand are required to be licensed by the Ministry of Education to ensure that they meet minimum standards.

Like Sophie and Leigh, Sarah, after thinking about her greatest successes, was able to share some operational transformations. These transformations relate to the service and team rather than Sarah as an individual. Sarah explained she had a generally happy, motivated team and had increased the services occupancy "dramatically and been able to juggle that well". Sarah was proud of the events her team had been able to hold for children and families even though they were "down in staff". She explained it "does make us feel really good".

Similar to Sarah, Maya mentioned some challenges around staffing as an area where she saw some success. She explained having "a real bumpy" and "a very uncertain up and down" time for her service, which required Maya to be acting in her predecessor's role for a lot of the time. An injury to a teacher meant there was one less permanent member of the teaching team for several weeks. Maya explained that coming out of that time she was,

> Feeling quite good about [being] able to keep the transition fairly smooth ... and make sure that the families here, and staff here, and everybody … could still keep going without it falling apart from all this instability.

She explained she felt "people still feel happy and secure here, that's the general sense that I get and the feedback that I get, so I think that is something that I feel really good about".

Both Sarah and Maya were able to think about what was occurring for their teams and what they had contributed to the running of their services when they were challenged by staffing.

Becoming more confident and successful in carrying out administration responsibilities shows that time and practice are key to developing knowledge and feeling competent. There is a certain level of predictability with administration tasks, including that they are carried out in a way that is mostly the same each time. This repetition could be what made participants feel most comfortable with them. Besides this, being able to make changes to how their services ran and accommodate staffing changes and absences were also important operational learning and knowledge development opportunities for participants.

This section has discussed elements of growth in knowledge and practice that had occurred for individual participants; I turn now to learning related relationships with others.

6.2.2 Relational aspects

Amelia, Leigh, Sophie, and Oscar all discussed relational aspects of their roles, where they were comfortable, developing their practices, or considered successes. Amelia's response to being asked what she was most comfortable with differed from some other participants. She expressed her enjoyment of working with teachers, including,

> Working through inquiries, evaluations, strategic plans, planning ahead, and helping the teaching team to really see what they are achieving … [I enjoy] working with the team and helping them to understand what they need to do and supporting them to achieve it. Then seeing them blossom and seeing the results or seeing the frustration and helping them to work through it … I've got a natural empathy, but ability to have those critical discussions … so I think I enjoy that element a lot.

Leigh expressed her comfort in working with parents and elaborated on a shift required of her as a leader. She discussed having multiple children who were receiving learning support and strategies for having these conversations with parents. She explained, "they are hard conversations to have with parents, with ESOL parents [parents who do not speak English at home] ... I approach them from very much a support, assistance and helpful [perspective] as opposed to a deficit".

> Sophie discussed her developing confidence in:
>
> Dealing with people, dealing with staff, dealing with issues, dealing with inductions, having those professional conversations … I think that's really important, and to face things … I feel much more confident with that than when I first started.

Staff happiness was also discussed by Sophie. For Sophie, she felt like "people feel... a lot more relaxed". She explained a transformation in her service was that she had:

> Tried to create an environment where teachers feel relaxed so they can reach their full potential. [I want staff to] be great teachers for the children. If there's

a problem they [the teachers] can feel okay to come and talk to me about it, and we can solve it together.

Oscar took some time to consider her greatest successes and described what could perhaps be seen as one of the biggest transformations and challenges for the participants. She explained:

We got our team out of a really horrible … place last year. We became a lot more positive with being a team again. That's one of my biggest challenges and that was really hard and really challenging for me.

She then explained an important aspect of how she felt about her role, "I guess one of my biggest successes is that I'm actually still here. I haven't given up, yet".

Participants discussed a range of relational aspects that provided them with both successes and challenges within their roles. Regardless of whether they were successes or challenges, they were areas where participants acknowledged transformation in their knowledge and practice. The successes and challenges also contributed to developing useful knowledge related to their roles.

In summarising the theme of acknowledging emerging confidence and growth, it was evident that participants' knowledge and practice was transforming, mostly out of necessity, as situations arose. Participants' transformations included learning about and practising aspects that supported the operational functioning of their services or relational practices. The operational aspects and relational aspects discussed within this theme showed participants' quests for wanting to learn processes, expectations, and practices to improve their services. What was evident as participants discussed these aspects was their lack of reference to induction and specialised support during their period of transition and transformation as they embarked on their roles.

6.3 Transformation: Early childhood education leadership-specific postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of Early childhood education leadership

This theme of early childhood education leadership-specific postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of early childhood education leadership outlines, from the participants' accounts, how leadership-focused postgraduate study showed benefits for them. The benefits included meeting some of the participants' outstanding support and

learning needs. Only two out of ten participants had engaged in postgraduate study, which indicates postgraduate study may not be common for recently appointed leaders.

Both Amelia and George, who had participated or were participating in early childhood education postgraduate study, were on a quest to seek useful information to develop their leadership knowledge and practice. Positive growth and transformation occurred concerning Amelia and George's leadership knowledge, which, in turn, impacted their leadership practice. This is similar to the discussion in the literature chapter (chapter two) that discussed some benefits of postgraduate study. Initial teacher education further develops teachers' teaching knowledge and practice because it supports understanding of and theory behind the practice. Therefore, it makes sense that postgraduate study focused on leadership would further develop leaders' leadership knowledge and practice. The concept of navigation in chapter five discussed how participants had little exposure to, and were not focused on, learning about leadership in their initial teacher education programs.

Throughout their interviews, Amelia and George, who respectively had completed and embarked on a Postgraduate Diploma of Leadership (ECE) expressed benefits to their study. They drew on a wider range of leadership concepts, discussed leadership differently from many other participants, and seemed more confident articulating their beliefs about leadership. They also credited their studies as having been supportive in enacting their roles. This relates to the findings of Klevering and McNae (2018) who found postgraduate study to be highly influential while providing an opportunity to support contextually relevant learning opportunities.

6.3.1   The rationale for embarking on postgraduate study

Amelia had a clear rationale for embarking on her Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE). She explained her desire to study arose from the impact of a previous experience and her aspiration to do better:

> Why I started to study ... was because I was working at a place where I wasn't really that happy. I didn't agree with many of the leadership decisions … that were taking place. I thought they were unethical or … I just didn't agree with it. So I wanted to learn more and I felt like … I don't ever want to put someone through that. Being a new teacher and being in a place where you're not supported and ... not cared for. I [thought] there's no way I ever want to offer

that for someone. That was more out of frustration that drove me to go, well

I'm going to do my study and I'm going to do well.

Reflecting on her learning, being in a leadership role, and completing a leadership qualification transformed Amelia's perspective and provided her with useful knowledge. She explained, "I look back now and I think well did she, that particular [leader], did she have the right support?" Amelia later went on to say, "once you're in it [leadership] you have a little bit more ... understanding for the places that some people might have been in".

When George discussed her current learning needs, she identified her Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) as helping to address her needs. George's drive to part take in this program of study was because:

I wanted and needed to study because I felt I had reached a plateau with my leadership learning. Turns out this was not true. However, it goes back to wanting to deepen my understanding as well as now knowing that having a mentor would have grown my practice. This is a typical behaviour for me when I need to grow and expand my knowledge, I study.

In embarking on postgraduate study, George revisited previous behaviour that she describes as typical for her. The self-identified desire to learn at this stage of her leadership career to further develop her knowledge was the driver for George in embarking on her program of study.

Amelia and George both had clear rationales for embarking on the quest to complete postgraduate study. They were also clear on the benefits of knowledge creation in their study, which I now discuss.

6.3.2   Benefits of postgraduate study

George acknowledged her transformation in embarking on postgraduate leadership study to support her practice and thinking, explaining it was "like a big drive uphill". She described how in the first six months she felt like "I know absolutely nothing … For me personally, I found it quite overwhelming … studying at the different level". George attributed her study to shifting her thinking from "I'll never ever meet this expectation of this perfect leader" to striving to be the best she wanted to be. Studying pedagogical leadership at the time of being interviewed, George attributed being able to see another

leader in action (in her current part-time role, she assumed, while studying) as helping her see another way of being and broadening her focus.

When asked if she thought her study had been the most supportive of her learning, Amelia responded, "I think so, yeah definitely ... it's given me something to grip hold of … That prior study has helped so much". Crediting her Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE), Amelia explained, "I think if I hadn't of done the training, I would be struggling a lot more now". Her perceived benefits of studying Amelia believed were:

> I think what really helped was leading adults, leading teams, working with adults rather than children … conflict resolution ... change management, understanding the organisational structures … roles and responsibilities and… the best way to manage a team of teachers.

Discussing her team, Amelia explained being able to:

> Get them to a space where they feel they can trust decisions I'm making and we're working as a team … It took a while, who's this new person, what are they going do, what are they going to change … There's been moments where I've had to be quite firm … But generally … if I hadn't have had training into looking at change management and looking at managing teams and leading teams … taking the emotion out of it and looking at the theory and looking at how people think ... [This] has ... helped ... immensely … That prior training, and I think if I hadn't have [had that] I would have had conflicts left right and centre. [I] probably would have been a bit more cut throat with 'this is what we are doing and we're doing it this way. That's fine, if you don't like it leave', that probably would have been more of my approach. But it's very different now. I realised I need that buy-in from my teachers and I need to build those relationships and let them lead.

Amelia could see how her quest to further her knowledge through study had many benefits, including how it had helped her develop her knowledge concerning her thinking and practice.

Both George and Amelia shared important realisations of their shifts in thinking and knowledge that had occurred for them since embarking on their study. Macpherson's (2014) research showed that "the concept of skills training prior to service at each level of leadership was strongly supported, with one respondent noting that, "theory before enables you to think and prepare for events"" (p. 12). George and Amelia's experiences support this notion, and

show how their Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) had helped inform, support, further develop, and transform their leadership knowledge and practice.

Amelia and George discussed self-identified learning needs and useful knowledge that their postgraduate study supported them in developing. For Amelia and George, because their realities changed, they sought out (Sharma et al., 2018) and took responsibility for further learning to support them with their roles. Amelia and George's desire to study or quest to further their knowledge to support their practice represents the pragmatic principles of utility and interest (Sharma et al., 2018). Utility is relevant because their course of study relates to their current reality. Interest is relevant because it relates to their current learning interests and roles. Besides this, Amelia and George's desire to engage in postgraduate study shows they were seeking to discover if postgraduate study was a good learning opportunity to build their practical knowledge.

The useful knowledge that Amelia explained her leadership postgraduate study had given her was a broader range of possibilities and ways to deal with the challenges of her role. George explained the useful knowledge that her leadership postgraduate study provided her with was that it supported a shift in thinking for her. Waniganayake and Stipanovic (2016) highlighted postgraduate study is often expensive and challenging for leaders to attend. Amelia or George did not specifically mention cost or time as an issue in fulfilling the requirements of their qualifications. However, George had taken on a part-time role to leave time for her study, which could indicate time was an issue. Other participants who had an interest in postgraduate study cited time as a barrier to further study. Sarah explained she would like to engage in postgraduate study, but that she currently had no time. Caitlin explained she had considered further study in the long term. The ability to study while in a leadership role and being able to balance their roles and personal lives meant further study remained a future goal for Sarah and Caitlin.

In summarising the theme of early childhood education leadership specific postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of early childhood education leadership, while insufficient alone, postgraduate study has shown some merit in supporting and addressing the continuing needs of participants who engaged with it. Studying the Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (ECE) was beneficial in broadening Amelia and George's conceptualisations of leadership and supporting their leadership practices. While postgraduate study supported Amelia and George to develop useful knowledge, the concept of transformation has shown that just undertaking the leader's role itself is not enough. More specialised support is required during this career stage to address the learning needs of

recently appointed leaders. While postgraduate study was helping address learning needs and provide useful knowledge for Amelia and George, more research into early childhood education leadership-specific qualifications could gain a further understanding of the effects and benefits of these programs for a larger group of leaders.

6.4   Conclusion

This chapter addressed and explained the analysis of the findings concerning the second and third research questions: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? concerning the concept of transformation. In summarising the concept of transformation, it was evident participants could identify opportunities and experiences that transformed their practice and provided useful knowledge.

The theme of acknowledging emerging confidence and growth discussed the initial transformations occurring for participants as they continued to transition into their roles. This is in line with Aslan-Bilikozen (2011) who also found that, within a six-month period, leaders identified self-transformation. In their quest to fulfil their role responsibilities, participants were changing their thinking and recognising shifts towards seeing themselves as leaders. As their knowledge increased from learning on the job, the areas of transformation for participants that occurred included operational and relational shifts. Time to practice and revisit contributed to participants' comfort with their responsibilities. It was evident participants' lenses were shifting, and they were beginning to see themselves as leaders, including discussing shifts in practice that were occurring. These transformations were occurring for some participants with very little support as they learnt on-the-job ways to respond to certain challenges.

Much of the theme acknowledging emerging confidence and growth discusses what participants explained as their greatest successes since taking on their roles. Some participants initially offered simple everyday tasks, so it seemed successes were more challenging to acknowledge than their learning needs, which participants seemed able to easily explain when asked. However, participants could articulate successes within their roles after some consideration. Taking time to consider their answers could mean no one had asked participants this before, they had been too busy focusing on the next thing they had to do in their role, or they wanted to be thoughtful in their response. Successes participants identified involved changes they perceived as positive for their service or people in the service and were specific to the contexts in which participants led. Aside from things such as administration tasks, many of the successes participants raised were not specifically

related to recently appointed leaders and could be challenges that more experienced leaders may encounter or be responsible for.

The examples of practice discussed in the theme of acknowledging emerging confidence and growth show that "direct experience gained through immersion in the situation" (Simpson, 2018) had supported participants. It supported them in understanding their role and their quest to develop useful knowledge about their practices. Participants' growth shows the continual change or modification that was occurring for them concerning their new experiences and responsibilities (Dewey, 1938).

A key area where the transformation of participants' knowledge occurred was through early childhood education leadership-focused postgraduate study. For Amelia and George, who had engaged in postgraduate study, it had been a positive experience in contributing useful knowledge to transform their leadership learning and practice. Postgraduate study supported Amelia and George with a broader understanding and range of concepts to draw on. This points to the importance of more research into leadership-specific qualifications. This research could build further understanding of whether these qualifications are beneficial for a wide range of people and what those benefits are for a larger group.

Participants' transformations required reflecting on actions or experiences (Aubrey, 2019) that had occurred for them. It was evident that through their reflections, participants were in the process of crossing a new threshold in how they were thinking about, viewing, and interpreting what had happened and was happening for them. Reflection on action or experience that had taken place for participants showed that knowledge was created through their experiences and reflection (Cattaneo & Motta, 2020). These experiences and reflections created transformation. Being involved in recapturing, thinking about, and evaluating their experiences allowed participants to make sense of what had occurred for them (Cattaneo & Motta, 2020). While there were some shared elements to these transformations, they were also heavily individualised to the participants and their context. This challenges the ability to create a shared profile of recently appointed leaders.

The pragmatic concept of useful knowledge has framed this and the previous chapter (chapter five). The concept of useful knowledge (the first of two concepts representing this research) presented in this chapter and the previous chapter (chapter five) has shown the vast range of responsibilities recently appointed leaders could encounter within their roles. While chapter five discussed participants' learning experiences before assuming their roles, it was clear participants were operating from a place of knowledge deficit and had outstanding learning

needs when enacting their roles. This chapter shows participants had opportunities to develop important knowledge useful to them in their roles, however, this alone was not enough. Therefore, chapter seven introduces the pragmatic concept of social connection, which, alongside useful knowledge, underpins the main claim of this thesis and forms the basis of my theorisation of principles for supporting the development of recently appointed leaders' practice.

Chapter 7

Connection and the Quest for Social Relations

7.1   Introduction

The previous two chapters (chapters five and six) presented the argument that assuming leadership initially involves navigating immediate knowledge demands, followed by a quest for knowledge that will help transform self and context. While participants, their experiences, and learning needs were individualised (discussed in the previous three chapters) what united participants was their quest for social connections. Participants were seeking social connections that would offer them specialised support to help them in creating useful knowledge production and internalization of this knowledge. In this chapter, I introduce the idea that, for learning to occur, social connection and social context are critical.

This chapter addresses the pragmatically influenced concept of social connection. It also introduces the concept of connection that represents the research findings discussed in this chapter. The chapter also addresses the second and third research questions: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders?

The concept of connection is explored in this chapter within the themes of context informs and determines support received and the desired relationships. The theme context informs and determines support received relates to research question two: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and introduces the connections participants had to their service and the range and types of support participants had received. The service connections, historical connections, organisational connections, horizontal connections, and accomplished connections that participants had are outlined. These connections explore who participants could turn to for accessing support while embarking on their roles. Based on my analysis of the interview data, the people participants could access support from depended on the service type in which they worked.

The theme of the desired relationships relates to research question three: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education

leaders? It was evident participants were on a quest to find further and deeper connections than what they had already experienced. This theme addresses participants' desired connections, specifically participants' desire for deeper organisational connections, horizontal connections (with those in similar roles), and accomplished connections (with those who are more experienced or knowledgeable). Service connections and historical connections, discussed in the theme Context informs and determines support received, are not discussed within this theme, as they were not relevant to participants' outstanding support and learning needs. It was important to explore the social relationships participants desired, as it helped to understand the support and connections they felt they required. This theme also discusses the role of the interview as a social connection relating to research question three: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? Hearing participants' reflections when being interviewed highlighted the need for participants to be supported through social connections to help make sense of their experiences. Both themes in this chapter provide a sense of the social relationships that participants were seeking.

7.2   Connection: Context informs and determines the support received

The theme of context informs and determines the support received relates to research question two: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? Participants' feelings of connection were important in the support they had received. The different connections participants had included: service connections, historical connections, organisational connections, horizontal connections, and accomplished connections.

Service connections involved the services or organisations participants were connected to before assuming their roles. Historical connections involved previous professional relationships participants had that they referred to, or that had continued in different forms into their current roles. Organisational connections were the connections that participants had with people based within their organisations who had some responsibility to support them. Horizontal connections involved relationships with peers in similar roles. Accomplished connections involved connections or desired connections with more experienced peers who could offer the participants support. In the theme of the desired relationships (the second theme of the chapter), the concept of connection is explored concerning participants' connections they would have liked to have to receive specialised support to address their learning needs.

To some extent, literature that related to organisational connections, horizontal connections, and accomplished connections could be found. This literature discussed organisations providing learning opportunities for leaders and recognised this as necessary (Edwards, 2018; Ryder et al., 2017). In addition to this, the roles that horizontal connections and accomplished connections played for participants often related to coaching, mentoring, and role modelling. Literature relating to service connections and historical connections could not be found.

Each form of connection is discussed concerning the experiences of participants. Not all participants had experienced each form of connection. The contexts participants worked in or had previously worked in (if applicable) informed and determined the amount and type of support they received after taking on their roles. Exploring the range of connections participants had experienced created an understanding of the possible connections of recently appointed leaders. It was important to understand how these connections informed and supported the development of participants' knowledge and practice.

Participants were beginning to recognise in their quest for support that they had further connection needs beyond their current connections. All participants did not have the full range of connections and options for support, given the distinct nature of the sector. A governing body leader, for example, is relevant to the community-based sector, whereas professional leaders are more relevant to organisations with multiple services.

Pragmatically, it was important to include (Clarke & Visser, 2019) and openly investigate all aspects of participants' connections. This helped to understand the differences in their support. The concept of connection relates to the pragmatic principle of the emphasis on social aspects or practices (Rumens & Keleman, 2010; Sharma et al., 2018). Highlighted within this concept are the social aspects that participants experienced in preparing for and assuming their roles. The relationships participants had offered them some level of support while providing opportunities for learning about or developing useful knowledge. The social nature of these relationships allowed for knowledge to be produced.

The argument that builds across this theme is supported by leadership and pragmatic literature. As the argument builds throughout the chapter, it is shown that what participants were expecting and what they were experiencing were not necessarily the same. Participants were on a quest to develop more knowledge to apply and use within their practice. They wanted to do this through social connections. The current connections that participants had did not address their support needs. Participants were therefore on a quest to learn from their experiences. They wanted to find opportunities to discuss, reflect on, and work through their experiences.

7.2.1   Service connections

Being familiar with the service when assuming their roles was an advantage for participants who had this opportunity. Familiarity with the service meant participants did not have to learn how the service operated on a day-to-day basis while learning about their leadership responsibilities. Working in the service prior to assuming their roles provided participants with opportunities to work alongside their predecessors and possibilities for acting in their roles. Opportunities to learn and experience processes involved in the running of the service and develop relationships with staff were also benefits of working in a service prior to becoming a leader. Acting in a leadership role or being able to work alongside more experienced peers, either in their service or at a previous service, were also beneficial for participants. Assuming a role in a service they had not worked in as a teacher required conjoint learning for participants, which involved how the service ran and how to be a leader.

Areana and Caitlin acknowledged being familiar with their services as helpful in assuming their roles. Having a connection to their service provided Areana and Caitlin with prior knowledge and support in understanding how their services ran. For Areana, after thinking about what was most effective in preparing her for her role, she explained, "I worked really hard to learn the processes and the systems we have". Similarly, Caitlin thought,

> Having been in the centre is actually what has prepared me best. Because I know the team, I know how we work, and I mean that's good preparation. I mean there's obviously downsides to that too, but … I think it's mainly benefits … I know the families and I've got a really good relationships with the [governing body] … I have a lot of support from the [governing body leader] in particular … and from the previous [leader].

Working in their services before assuming their leadership roles was supportive for Areana and Caitlin because of the prior knowledge and connection they gained. While the connection to their service for those participants who had this opportunity was important, more social connections were desired by participants.

7.2.2   Historical connections

Sophie and Caitlin had historical connections that involved established and ongoing relationships with their predecessors. Sophie discussed her ongoing relationship with her predecessor, explaining that,

> It's a huge role. There's so many parts of the job. Even now sometimes I have to ring and go 'where did you put that?' or 'how do I find that?' or 'what did you do for this situation?'".

Sophie also explained, "it's just good … to have someone to contact". Her historical connection also involved meeting with her predecessor monthly after initially taking on her role. Sophie also engaged her predecessor as a relief teacher. Knowing "she'll come in when she's teaching here, she'll just kind of check in with me, that's been really good," Sophie reported.

Initially, after finding out her predecessor was retiring, Sophie explained she:

> asked her, 'do you think I'd be capable of doing the [leaders] job?' She said 'yes'… I kind of thought about it a little bit. Even people in the team said 'oh do you think you'll apply for the role?' I kind of wasn't sure, and I thought about it for a while. She [Sophie's predecessor] said 'you know, if you want to do this then I'll support you … I'll mentor you because … I think you'll be really good in this role'.

For Sophie, there was some hesitation as to when in her career she wanted to assume a leadership role. Having her predecessor say she would support her and having focused on leadership for her appraisal helped Sophie feel able to take on her role.

In making decisions, Sophie described getting advice from her predecessor and one of her mentors. She explained,

> Then I've thought about it myself and how I would like to deal with it. It's been so good being able to talk with different people. I know if I have an issue with staff or something like that, I know I have at least two people I can talk to and get their opinion. They are probably going to be quite different, but then I can go 'what's the best way?' 'What's the right thing to do here?' 'What feels right for me?'

Like Sophie, Caitlin described a current connection with her predecessor. Having her predecessor still in the service, Caitlin explained,

I don't know if there's extra challenges … Certainly, having her there ... is amazing … Especially [with] administrative stuff. I can't imagine having that handed over to me in a week or whatever. There's so much that I didn't know … and I'm still asking now after eight weeks.

The ongoing connections that Sophie and Caitlin had with their predecessors, while each was different, allowed for a level of ongoing support. These connections supported their transitions and the development of useful knowledge related to being a recently appointed leader.

7.2.3 Organisational connections

This section discusses the supportive relationships Maya, Charlotte, Areana, Sarah, Caitlin, Sophie, and Oscar had with people within their organisation or service. Organisational connections involved connections with people based within their organisation or service who had or took some responsibility to support participants. These people included professional leaders and a governing body leader. In addition to this, the encouragement that participants received from people within their organisation is also discussed. Organisational connections were most common for participants who worked for larger organisations with multiple services. While the quality was variable, participants were connected to a support system to some degree.

The hierarchies of larger organisations allowed participants the opportunity to look to and observe their professional leaders as role models (Lanka et al., 2020). Maya, Charlotte, Areana, and Sarah all discussed having supportive professional leaders within their organisations. This support allowed participants the ability to take their masks off (Donald, 2019) and engage in dialogue that led to support and mentoring for participants.

Maya's response to being asked about having someone check in with you was:

Yes, I have had that, so I feel quite lucky … Especially in the beginning, the [professional leader] would just call and make sure I was doing alright. Even just some great ... words of encouragement, like you're doing a great job. I think often times ... you are kind of in this position to boost the morale of the team. But then you're just like 'oh what about me?'

Maya explained feeling like she needed the boost and reassurance from her professional leader. She thought her professional leader did this well, explaining that her professional leader was "incredibly supportive. They're always reaching out and saying 'anything you need please call'".

In support of her organisation, Maya explained, "I feel actually quite lucky compared to many early childhood leaders ... because of the level of support. In … talking with other people, I just feel like they have a lot less". Maya explained:

> I feel like if I had taken a role like this where there wasn't perhaps another
> sort of layer of management and guidance, it would have been a very different
> thing as a new leader. I still feel like there is someone with more experience
> … that I can turn to with really difficult questions … Being new in this
> position [that support] has been invaluable.

When specifically asked about the support she had, Maya said, "I don't have a lot of complaints I have to say … I feel like I've been quite supported".

Both Maya and Charlotte described being encouraged to assume their roles by people in more senior roles in their organisations. Maya was encouraged by her predecessor, who initially:

> Encouraged me to go for the assistant [leader] position. Then when I had to
> cover for her quite a bit, she gave me quite a lot of good feedback … I think
> that … was perhaps communicated to the [professional leader], who then also
> encouraged me or said [they] felt confident that I could take this on.

Similarly, Charlotte's encouragement from her predecessor was confidence-building and "it definitely prepared me for what I'm doing now … That she believed in me, and supported me … made me feel at ease … and that she had my best interests at heart".

Charlotte discussed how this support was important in relation to a sense of isolation. This was similar to Amelia (discussed in organisational connections in the theme of the desired relationships). When discussing her views of feeling prepared before and following her transition, Charlotte mentioned that in a "leadership role you're sort of alone. You're going at it alone. You can't … confide in anyone because you don't want to pass your burdens on to your team". She explained this had been a bit of a challenge and she had learnt to "solve my problems and reach higher if I needed" for support. Working for an organisation

where she could "reach higher" meant the connections helped ease some of the sense of isolation and offered Charlotte a sense of support. Charlotte expressed confidence in the structure of her organisation saying "'I knew I wasn't alone' as well as 'if something were to go wrong, there was someone I could ring and ask 'hey this has happened, what do I do?' and 'help me problem-solve'''.

Charlotte also explained that having someone check in with her was supportive, including saying "it definitely helps and … I did have that" and further:

> [The] reassurance that someone's looking out for you because you step into
> this tougher role. From day one you'll get phone calls, you know staffing
> issues … things falling apart that you have to uphold … Someone saying 'hey
> [Charlotte] how are you going?'

Charlotte acknowledged that leadership raised a sense of isolation for her. She also had some strategies for who to look to for support and felt supported in having her professional leaders check in with her.

Areana too, felt supported by her organisation saying "if it wasn't for them taking that initiative and seeing that ... they could grow me ... I don't think I would be here today. Without that support from the [organisation], I don't think I would be here today".

Sarah also explored her role expectations and the variety of people she was connected with to support her. She discussed her organisation's head office and said "I know that either they can sort it or they can help me with sorting it … There's been some HR issues and I've been able to tell them, and they've been able to just take it on".

Sarah mentioned having "people that have really got my back and are saying that I'm doing a good job ... even if I feel like I'm not, that does make me feel better". So, while Sarah's sense of self-belief might have been challenged in how she felt about her role, having people acknowledge her work was helpful. Sarah's view and the corresponding view of others show how your confidence might differ from how others view you. Specific one-on-one support was offered to Sarah. She explained her professional leaders:

> Worked quite closely with me. They do help me out a lot. Especially if there's
> things they have noticed that I haven't been taught or that … little gap that I
> haven't or don't know something about.

Oscar initially initiated her interest in her role. Following initiating her interest, Oscar received support from her professional leader to apply for the role. Oscar explained her professional leader "was really good with supporting me along the way" with applying and moving across services. Besides this, Oscar also acknowledged being supported by her professional leader, explaining, "when I was going through a few issues within the team last year, I did have some extra support from the [professional leader]. We did sort of fortnightly meetings just to get me back on track".

For Maya, Charlotte, Areana, Sarah, and Oscar, the connections they had with their professional leaders had a positive impact on their individual support needs. George, however, discussed being challenged by not feeling well connected to or supported by her professional leaders or organisation. I discuss this in the section on organisational connections in the theme of the desired relationships.

Caitlin explained how positivity and encouragement from her governing body leader were important to her. She explained, "I have been well supported with people round me … who are encouraging and positive. I have been well supported with someone who I can ask questions to with expertise". In balancing responsibilities when taking on her role, Caitlin had some support from the leader of her governing body with administration tasks. When asked about the most effective support, Caitlin attributed this to the leader of her governing body. This could be because of her service being a standalone service. Caitlin explained,

> The [governing body leader] being positive and encouraging and being there and being willing to listen and work through things that I don't know [has been helpful]. She usually doesn't know either but … I think that it … Rather than any sort of particular thing, it's the support and encouragement and really positive, positive vibes from my employer, I think.

Caitlin also added that the leader of her governing body had,

> Even just sent a text saying … just like, 'thanks so much we've had a great week. We really appreciate everything' ... It's that sort of little thing … I think's amazing. It makes me feel so much better about the job.

Caitlin described a positive experience of working at a service where she had a supportive connection with her governing body leader. Amelia, however, experienced

having a governing body that she did not find supportive, which I discuss in the section on organisational connections in the theme of the desired relationships.

The support received through professional connections related to how their services supported participants with their confidence and self-belief in carrying out their roles. Later in this chapter, in the theme of the desired relationships, it is discussed that George and Amelia found their organisational connections to be fractured.

7.2.4 Horizontal connections

In my study, mentoring has been shown in both formal and informal capacities. Areana discussed some professional colleagues who held the same role as her at her organisation who she explained, "I've just put in as my mentors". These informal mentors supported Areana's learning needs, including understanding the required paperwork and internal evaluation processes. While not assigned, informal mentoring occurs spontaneously (Day & Allen, 2002) through mutually entering a supportive relationship (Ragins et al., 2000). This type of mentoring relationship is often formed due to developmental needs (Ragins et al., 2000) and supports mentees' leadership identity (Lanka et al., 2020).

Since taking on her role, Sophie had found horizontal connections within her kahui ako (community of learners) group. This group involved ongoing collaboration and sharing of information between local early childhood services, and primary and secondary schools. These meetings were "really helpful" for Sophie and she valued the network of support. Sophie described other members of the group as having "a lot more experience than me, so that's been really great". While Sophie acknowledged "they are not specific mentors roles" she got a sense of support from the group members.

Driven to learn more about and develop her leadership practice, George took the lead on her leadership learning and embraced a horizontal connection. This involved moving services and working alongside another leader within her organisation when she took a year off her leadership role to work part-time in another service while she studied. George met the leader of the service she was working in part-time through a professional learning opportunity within their organisation. George explained, "when the opportunity presented itself to work with her, I thought, yes, I want to learn what she does". She described learning from this leader how to meet the organisation's educational goals more broadly. The combination of postgraduate study and the leader where she was working part-time while studying allowed George to view leadership differently, including opportunities and

possibilities for alternative ways to act. Making a difference in George's practice (Edwards, 2018), this learning opportunity was providing her with social connection and a wider range of concepts and practices to draw on when she returned to her full-time leadership role.

Other participants did not discuss having horizontal connections, aside from those that worked in organisations that mentioned professional learning groups they belonged to. Participants desired more horizontal connections, which I discuss in the theme of the desired relationships later in the chapter.

7.2.5   Accomplished connections

Accomplished connections involved connections with more experienced peers who could or had supported participants in their roles. Both Leigh and Sophie discussed positive mentoring experiences, often returning to talking about their experiences with different mentors who impacted their learning and development. Mentor support helped sustain and had positive effects on Leigh and Sophie's development as leaders, much like the participants in Edwards' (2018) study. Having multiple mentors at the same time had benefits for Sophie, as she could draw on the experiences of different people for different purposes. Sophie discussed this by acknowledging, "I think you almost need like a few different mentors. At first lots of people [said] 'oh you have too many mentors'. At first I thought I did, and I'd just stick to one". However, Sophie saw the value in multiple mentors. The benefit of having a range of mentors Sophie explained as:

> I feel like every single mentor has helped me in lots of different ways … I wouldn't have been able to get all of that from one person. It's been really great since I started the [leader] role in January. I've pulled on all of those mentors for lots of different things and I know who I can call.

When discussing having a combination of mentors, Sophie explained:

> I don't know how people do it without mentors … Obviously, I didn't have experience, so it's really helpful to ask for advice … I think it is so good to have people outside of the organisation to talk to.

Living in a small community, Sophie explained having "people out of the community [who are] not related to anyone [and] doesn't know everyone" was beneficial.

Leigh told a specific story about the journey with one of her mentors, where she told her mentor:

To push me … I'm terrified of heights … and I went on one of those wire swing things, absolutely petrified the whole time. I'm up on the tree and I'm shaking and everything. I said to the guy he goes 'are you alright?' I'm going to cry, I'm going to scream … but I want to do it. I'm scared as but I'm going to do it. Well, I did I get on these wires whizzing through the jungle. I'd be yelling and screaming and then I'd be crying at the end of it. Then I'd just be elated, and that's what this journey's been like for me. I have taken the step off the platform. I've whizzed through the trees and I've got to the next platform safe ... I've screamed and yelled and kicked all the way. I knew that on that other platform would be somebody to catch me, somebody that would motivate me on.

Leigh described another connection she had with an employee of the Ministry of Education (MOE). She explained this was the person she telephoned if she had questions. In describing a specific situation where she had someone come in to review their procedures and documentation, Leigh explained that the person:

Couldn't find anything ... wrong ... This just shows the step up this team have had. They have embraced it and they have found the challenges … I'm just so proud of them and ... we're getting outside comments from professionals now … We've so moved on.

While about more than leadership, Leigh's experiences of working with her MOE contact show the benefit of targeted support.

Like Hayes (2019) who documented growth and development for mentees, Sophie and Leigh's stories show the benefits of mentoring. Mentoring is acknowledged as a way to support the development of knowledge, skills, practices, clarity, and satisfaction (Sawiuk et al., 2017). Career motivation (Day & Allen, 2002) can also be increased through mentoring. My research has shown that mentoring offers a sense of social connection to support the development of useful knowledge. Extended mentoring is an established practice in supporting new school principals to sustain effective leadership (Hayes, 2019). However, mentoring of leaders in early childhood education is less common.

In summary, the five types of connections (service, historical, organisational, horizontal, and accomplished) were important for participants. Not all participants experienced all types of connections. This was due to their previous experiences and current service types. The range of people who offered some level of connection and

support to the participants was determined by the context where participants worked. These connections were not necessarily actively sought by participants, but having any sense of connection to their service, organisation, historical relationships, others in similar roles, and those who were more experienced was important for participants in developing knowledge useful to their roles

7.3   Connection: The desired relationships

This theme, the desired relationships, relates to research question three: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? While participants had some forms of connection, they were seeking deeper connections to offer them more robust support in addressing their learning needs.

Much like the participants in Donald's (2019) study, participants in this study recognised "the necessity of support from others" (p. 25). The pragmatic framework of this research allowed for an open investigation of the social nature of participants' experiences and the relationships participants desired. Focusing on the desired relationships of participants allowed for including the breadth of the experiences of the participants and having social contact with others featured heavily in participants' stories. While the quantity of this was variable, so was the quality. Hence, participants were seeking opportunities for deeper connections with someone in their organisation, horizontal connections with others in similar roles, and accomplished connections with more experienced peers. They were on a quest to find these relationships to offer them deep connection, support, guidance, and to check in with them.

Much like the schooling literature (Hayes, 2019) that discusses the loneliness of a principal's role, the participants' role in early childhood education was also one of loneliness and isolation. Amelia, Sophie, and Charlotte were quick to identify the sense of isolation that came with their roles. This is similar to the work of Douglass (2018), who found a challenge for leaders was their sense of isolation. Shore et al. (2021) also discussed the need to add an ongoing connection and support opportunity to their leadership program. This literature and the findings of my study show the need for strong organisational connections, horizontal connections, or accomplished connections. Supportive relationships with others in similar roles and more experienced peers are important for the career stage of being a recently appointed leader. Being able to unpack challenging situations that occur with a trusted and skilled connection could allow recently appointed leaders to make sense of their

situation. Participants were on a quest to access enough support, identify who to go to for support, and understand how to find the support they required as recently appointed leaders. The absence of opportunities for the open dialogue that participants were seeking has the potential to cause feelings of not only isolation but also stress and overwhelm (Donald, 2019).

Participants were asked what they thought might support recently appointed leaders. The range of ideas raised indicated some learning and support needs, including participants desiring more connections with others. Learning through having practices modelled and guided by people such as professional leaders (organisational connections), others in similar roles (horizontal connections), and more experienced peers (accomplished connections) were important to participants.

7.3.1   Organisational connections

The theme of context informs and determines support received (earlier in this chapter) discussed participants' organisational connections that were supporting them in their roles. This theme of the desired relationships discusses those participants who were still seeking organisational connections. Amelia spoke of a significant situation for her and one she felt was her greatest challenge. This was her experience with her governing body. Amelia was lacking an organisational connection saying "it's been tricky". She explained, "the [governing body] is where I haven't had the support that I needed". Amelia explained that, "none of them … have met with me unless I've asked them to come in. Then I've never really got the answers that I've needed". In trying to contact the leader of the governing body, Amelia explained,

> It would have been good to have met with, say, the [leader] to talk through
> … how I can contact her. I have tried to have those conversations with her,
> but whenever I do contact her, I don't hear back from her.

The governing body of her service, Amelia explained, had been highlighted by the ERO (Education Review Office) as needing to be more involved in the operation of the centre. There was a necessity to work out how the roles within the operational group worked. At the time of her interview, Amelia had been at her service for "nearly five months and I still have no access to bank accounts". She explained that the deed for the governing body:

Was missing and there was no current constitution. No one really knew what their roles were. It's a shambles … It has been so challenging coming in, not only needing to win staff over, and parents over and ensure the place is running… but there's no budgets… I don't think that the [governing body] have been warm and welcoming. I don't think they have made an effort to support me … I keep just sort of thinking … we'll get through it once these systems are in place … It's going to run so smoothly ... Yes, it's a shame that I'm walking into this, but I can't change it ... So it's a lot of me biting my tongue and sitting back and just being patient … I just remind them every meeting … I still don't have access to these things … I think that some of them are warming to me … That's probably where I've found the hardest, I've cried after [governing body] meetings … I don't understand, and then I think is it me? That I just don't like being told what to do… Do I just have issues with anyone who's above me? … and going, no, it's not that.

Amelia identified that, while communication could be strengthened, the governing body had made some progress, including beginning to figure out ways of working. During her induction, Amelia's predecessor had explained to her the decisions she could make, such as booking professional development for staff and replacing equipment. The governing body was, however, indicating to Amelia she needed approval for these things. This left her feeling like, "well I don't really know until they work it out what they want and they don't want, it's a bit of me … treading along and making decisions".

While Amelia was working on developing connections with her governing body, she was also negotiating the connection between the governing body and the teaching team. She explained,

There's a real divide at the moment between teachers and the [governing body]. There's a real tension, so the teachers are [questioning] 'why are they changing this?' … I'm [responding] like … 'I need to know what you want as a team, so I can advocate and I'll... put it forward'.

This sense of tension and unknown future was described by Amelia as being a lot to "sort out and until that happens, it's just sort of this weird place that we are in, of the unknown really". Literature encompassing the relationship between the governing body and the leader or teaching team could not be found. The most relevant literature that drew some

likeness to Amelia's experience was that of Franzén and Hjalmarsson (2018) who recognized that leaders see themselves as being responsible for almost anything within their roles. For Amelia while her role encompassed the teaching and learning of the children and teachers within her service, she was nevertheless negotiating connections with her employer for herself and her teaching team.

Amelia would have liked someone checking in with her, specifically someone from her governing body. Amelia explained, "I'm crying out for that, and I've tried, and I will keep trying" and acknowledged she would have liked to be:

> Able to meet outside of the [governing body] meeting … There's things that maybe are not appropriate to share at the big [governing body] meeting unless it's needed. If I can have someone in the [governing body] that I talk to … The previous [leader] did have that rapport [with the former governing body leader].

In the absence of a mentor, Amelia credited having an administrator who did her job well as supporting her in her role. Knowing in the:

> First few months, I could focus a lot on the teaching and children and the programme and getting to know people. Because she was ensuring that those payments were being made and when parents were calling wanting to change hours, she could do it, so that helped.

Administrator support and the benefits of this are not evident in the literature. However, an administrator is not necessarily a support for developing leadership practice.

While better leadership support was required for Amelia, she identified it would have been helpful to also have more understanding of how a governing body should run. Amelia's experience indicates governing body members do not always have the skills or understanding required to govern an early childhood education service. The challenges in the relationships Amelia was experiencing added to the complexity of her role and detracted her from focus on teaching and learning. Amelia had experienced tension in connections and required some clarity of systems and processes for herself and her governing body. Having no bank access or budget left Amelia in a sense of limbo. The self-doubt and emotional impact, such as crying after meetings, seemed to have accumulated from the combination of these things. McCulla and Degenhardt (2016) discussed the importance of alignment between school leaders and governing bodies in schooling settings. This was something Amelia was yet to experience.

While Maya, Charlotte, Areana, and Sarah all discussed having supportive organisational connections (discussed in the theme context informs and determines support received), George was challenged by not having a strong organisational connection. On a quest for further support, George explained she was not prepared for "not getting… proactive feedback really, not having a relationship with a [professional leader] or peers that can grow my practice". This was important for George as when asked about what she felt well supported with, she briefly discussed what she was well supported with, she soon returned to describe areas she had not felt particularly well supported with. These areas included leading internal evaluation, facilitating appraisals, and "how to be a mentor and a coach … how to, grow your young teachers or grow your older teachers, so they are still willing and able and wanting to participate and learn".

Donald (2019) found one of her participants' experiences contrasted with other participants in that they felt "unsupported and unable to be emotionally honest with either those in her team or other leaders in the centre" (p, 25). Similarly, in my study, George's experiences contrast with that of other participants with professional leaders. George was seeking a deep connection with a trusted professional leader to support her with the emotional labour of her role. Other participants in organisations gave a sense that they had this connection.

George was specific about the kind of connection she was seeking explaining that she did not want someone checking in about administration or strategic planning, which she had experienced in her organisation. What she wanted was someone who:

> Checked in that in a way that I could trust them. I absolutely agree to have someone be able to pop in and say 'how is it going? There's been some challenges' … To say 'it's actually okay for you to feel overwhelmed, vulnerable, whatever. You don't have to tell me any of that if you don't want to. I'm just letting you know that those things are okay'.

George likened this experience to working with children and how teachers acknowledge children's feelings, offer support, and the opportunity to talk if it is wanted.

Like Amelia and George, Oscar wished for more contact, specifically someone who contacted her. She explained,

> The most helpful [practice] would have just been check-ins to say 'yep, what you're doing is … right. You're … doing it well' ... As a [leader], you're

constantly praising your team and giving them feedback on how they're going, but as a [leader], you don't get that a lot yourself.

Oscar identified, "sometimes you need to know from higher above that you are … on … the right track". She explained she would have liked "someone ringing up asking 'what you do need a little bit of help or support with'. In saying that, when I did have questions, I was always well supported". Oscar's example here shows that, in the career stage of being a recently appointed leader, she felt it would be most helpful if someone took the initiative to develop a connection by contacting her first.

Having someone to contact them seemed significant to Amelia, George, and Oscar. Without this contact, it leaves leaders vulnerable to being left unsupported and "left to shoulder the toll of emotional labour alone" (Donald, 2019, p. 25). A participant in Donald's (2019) study referred to loneliness, indicating similarities to Amelia, George, and Oscar's accounts. Amelia's situation, in particular, was significant concerning her desired connection. Her story draws a likeness to the findings of Donald (2019) who found "when feelings arose that conflicted with the idealised demeanour, leaders described suppressing these feelings behind a professional mask or façade." (Donald, 2019, p. 25). While Amelia, George, and Oscar desired organisational connections to support them in this stage of their career, there were also horizontal connections that participants desired, which I now discuss.

7.3.2 Horizontal connections

The previous theme, context informs and determines support received discussed the horizontal connections that participants had. The current theme, the desired relationships, discusses horizontal connections participants were seeking or ones that could be strengthened. While other participants were on a quest for connections to support their learning and development, Areana had a suggestion for a horizontal connection for recently appointed leaders. She suggested having experienced leaders facilitate a workshop for new leaders to discuss what their average day or week is like. Areana had the desire to see:

Really awesome [leaders] out there … that … can walk out there with confidence and pride, knowing exactly what they are doing and showing that not only to their team but to everybody. It's like I know what I'm doing.

In response to the idea of having experienced leaders run a workshop, other participants had mixed perspectives. Participants wanted horizontal connections with other

leaders, often in an ongoing way. Being able to visit other services or come together with other leaders and ask questions specific to your context was expressed as important for some participants. Both Oscar (as part of her aspiring leaders' program) and Maya (as part of her leaders' meetings) listened to other leaders discuss their experiences. Charlotte thought a workshop could be a beneficial opportunity, but an opportunity she had not had.

Amelia had thoughts about connections she could access or was seeking. There was a group in her location for leaders that Amelia was yet to attend. She said she thought more groups of this type and more courses or day conferences could be beneficial. Amelia explained she was "really excited to go and meet other people" in similar roles. While Amelia identified courses and day conferences as a way to meet other people, Horn Ratner et al. (2018) caution "workshops and trainings, may provide less authentic and less effective opportunities to network with and learn from colleagues" (p. 429).

Sarah had horizontal connections from her aspiring leaders' group. However, when she assumed her role, she moved into a professional learning group for leaders. In discussing her shift from preparing for a role and attending the aspiring leaders' group to moving to the professional learning group for those in a leadership role, Sarah raised a valid point: once you assume:

> A position of leadership, you are no longer a part of that … You get ditched pretty much … Lots of people, that … I've talked to, [have said] that is not good… That's your core and support. You've already got those relationships going with those people that are in a similar boat … Then you drop off and you don't see those people anymore as much.

The organisation's justification for this shift in groups is unknown. The way Sarah discussed the shift in groups was almost as if she felt a need for a connection to the familiar as she continued to transition to her new role. Changes or shifts in professional learning groups did not feature in the early childhood education leadership literature.

Shadowing other leaders was raised by Areana as a possible learning opportunity for recently appointed leaders. Leigh confirmed shadowing as a possible learning opportunity but then acknowledged this as a challenge for standalone services. In referring to specific contexts, Leigh explained, shadowing might not always work as "there's often not a technical hand over". Leigh advocated for de-privatising practice, explaining that, in her experience, [leaders] were "willing to open up … but their owners aren't always willing to

let you see behind the scenes". Leigh had tried to create horizontal connections with others in similar situations to her but was challenged by this not being well received.

Caitlin and Oscar had thoughts about when to take up a horizontal connection. Caitlin had been offered horizontal connections from others in similar roles but was conscious of other people's time. She said, "lots of people have said to me 'oh just give me a ring, I'm here to support you' and things. It's quite tricky because you know that it's their time as well". Regarding other connections, Oscar described a horizontal connection, explaining, "I do have a mentor teacher. But once again that's sort of up to us to keep communicating with each other and we just get, we both get really busy, that we tend to forget to". She explained that for new leaders she felt:

> While it's great to say that you've got a mentor or that you can approach
> people if you've got issues. I actually think that for the first even six months
> a phone call once a fortnight just to actually check in on you would be of a
> huge benefit … I was one of those people at the beginning that I didn't like
> to ask too many questions, because I didn't want it to look like I didn't know
> what I was doing. So I sort of kept struggling, struggling along, whereas if
> you actually had somebody ringing you up and asking you some of those
> questions, then sometimes, you might actually be a little bit more open.

Similar to the participants I discussed in the previous section on organisational connections in the theme, context informs and determines support received, for Caitlin and Oscar, having the contact initiated by others could have been beneficial for them as they settled into their leadership roles.

As assuming and enacting their roles had become a reality, Sarah, Leigh, Caitlin, and Oscar were interested in increased or more robust horizontal connections. This could have added an element of support for them. What was evident across participants and corresponded to the findings of Donald (2019), was the desire for connection with others, even though it varied between participants. Participants were on a quest to seek examples and modelling of practice. Having competent and more experienced people they could turn to for genuine ongoing support was desired by participants. I have termed these people accomplished connections.

7.3.3 Accomplished connections

The theme of the context informs and determines support received discussed participants accomplished connections that they felt supported them in their roles. This theme of the desired relationships explores the accomplished connections participants were on a quest to find, but had not yet established, to address their support and learning needs. Participants recognised they required more support than they currently had. While Sophie and Leigh described opportunities that involved mentor relationships that supported their development as leaders (discussed in accomplished connections in the theme of Context informs and determines support received), Amelia, Caitlin, and George were still seeking accomplished connections with quality mentor support. A solution suggested by Areana to provide accomplished connections for recently appointed leaders was shadowing (to follow someone else to learn about your role expectations). Other participants' perspectives on this were sought and are discussed at the end of this section.

At multiple points throughout their interviews, both Amelia and George shared their desires for further connections. They had a sense of wonder about how to access the connections professionals feel they require. There were discrepancies between what Amelia and George felt they needed concerning accomplished connections, compared to what they had to support them enact their roles. Amelia, George, and Caitlin were interested in exploring how professionals get the support they need. This highlights that they had not been systematically supported and the need for more robust support for recently appointed leaders in addressing their learning requirements. However, regarding mentors, Edwards (2018) found the availability of mentors was limited and leaders were often left to find their own mentors. This was similar to Amelia, Caitlin, and George's situations.

Amelia was on a quest to seek connections to support her with her role responsibilities. In seeking an accomplished connection, Amelia discussed her desire to connect with someone who worked in a similar service to her. She explained to "potentially even have them as a mentor. That would be incredible, that would have really helped me". When interviewed, Amelia was yet to find herself a mentor for teacher registration (Being a registered teacher in New Zealand means that teachers have been endorsed by a professional leader to verify that they have maintained standards of professional practice and professional learning). The previous leader at her service had a horizontal connection with the leader at a nearby service. Amelia acknowledged this person was "a lovely person, but I might get

something more from someone else". Amelia finished this part of the conversation by asking, "how do I find that network and that person who can support me?"

Without being prompted, Amelia expressed, "I think it can be… quite isolating being in management". At a later point in her interview, it was explained to Amelia that other participants had talked of feeling alone. Amelia elaborated further and explained she had an administrator and an assistant "who are lovely, lovely people". However, she described that if she discussed sensitive information with them "someone will find out somewhere and then I'm putting out fires". Amelia described situations throughout her interview such as when "you just have to hold it in a lot" and sometimes "I can't talk to anyone ... It is very isolating". Amelia's story suggests an accomplished connection could be someone to confidentially confide in, talk to, and find the space to offload and discuss frustrations, which could have helped with Amelia's sense of isolation.

Caitlin was in the process of figuring out the best way to access an accomplished connection. She discussed how she would like "to be able to convince my committee to pay for a mentoring program for me". She discussed the valuable experience of having a mentoring program when she was on secondment to a professional learning and development provider. Having someone "who I could talk to, who was just removed, but could help me set goals and work through things" was beneficial. Caitlin discussed the possibility of using a professional development provider who offers mentoring and supports leaders with their appraisals as an accomplished connection. This was a conversation that she was still to have with the leader of her governing body, which was understandable given she was so new to her role.

George had similar thoughts to Amelia regarding the quality of an accomplished connection with a mentor. She noted that:

> Just because you have age on your side or how many years you've been a...
> teacher … does that mean or equate to being a good mentor? Does your mentor
> have the qualification, skills, knowledge, [and] expertise? … Do they want to
> do this? Are they desiring, or do they have a desire to really support new
> [leaders] ... to do the very best? So... before I would enter into it, I want to
> know all of that. Do you have the qualifications? Do you have the drive? The
> expertise? Am I going to be able to trust you enough that if I stuff up you're
> going to say, 'well it wasn't great and these are maybe the reasons you did it'.

George further explained her thinking around an accomplished connection, saying:

> If you are going to be in a mentor/mentee relationship, feel safe and trust the other person. You need to have some good structure around it. Those very simple things of being able to be a really effective listener. Not offering a solution ... Having the ability to have open-ended questions. Trusting that [the] person you talk to about your struggle that they are going to come back with constructive feedback.

George was challenged by not having a quality mentor that she could trust and not having space and time to sit and reflect. Her professional leader was looking after fifteen services, so George did not see her as being able to offer her the level of mentoring she was searching for. George, when working in social work, was:

> Used to being able to go to supervision once a month and I mean really unpack difficult cases or how I was going. I really miss that. I miss that ability to sit with someone who … would be seen as a senior … to be able to say, 'oh I don't understand this or I'm trying to figure this out' or 'how could I do this in a different way?' or 'tell me another way to look at reaching these goals outlined that the organisation want' or 'how do I shift someone's thinking?'

George returned to connections and lack of mentoring that she had experienced throughout her interview. She felt having a quality mentor would have been significant to support her learning. Having accomplished connections could offer recently appointed leaders the opportunity for individualised support and learning experiences. Pitching these at participants current support and learning needs could help to find workable solutions (Sharma et al., 2018).

Areana suggested the idea of shadowing experienced leaders as possibly beneficial for new leaders. This was then explored with subsequent participants. The importance of an accomplished connection that allowed for being guided by experienced peers was advocated for by participants who had experienced shadowing and those who would have appreciated the experience. While little is known about it in the early childhood education context, work shadowing has been shown to be of benefit (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009) in a schooling context (McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016). As part of her quest for quality practice and support for recently appointed leaders, Areana justified her rationale for suggesting shadowing. She

explained, "because you can go to professional development and read slides … but actually seeing it in action of what it is day to day" she felt would be beneficial. Areana advocated for shadowing to happen over a period of time. She felt that day-to-day differences would be able to be seen along with the pressures, highlights, and structures of responsibilities. In regard to the quality of the role model to shadow, Areana importantly identified "you do want a good role model. You just don't want someone who's higgledy-piggledy". This draws likeness to George's perspective on the quality of mentors discussed earlier in this section.

The concept of shadowing was introduced to participants. Some participants viewed shadowing in a more short-term context, while others looked at it from a longer-term perspective. Some participants referred to experiences in specific contexts, while others referred to it as an opportunity over time.

Oscar thought shadowing an accomplished peer would "probably be quite good". She acknowledged shadowing the leader from her service would have been challenging, given someone was acting in the role before she assumed it. Oscar thought shadowing could offer the opportunity of "seeing exactly what they are doing in their workday. That would give you a lot better understanding of what you're in for". Oscar referred to a historical connection, explaining that her leader at her previous service shared things with her about her leadership role. She did, however, explain, "just not in the way it really fully prepares you for what you're going to take on yourself".

Concerning shadowing, Hognestad and Bøe (2016) advocate for shadowing as a research methodology because it allows for engagement in conversation about sayings, doings and relatings. Shadowing as a way to develop leadership understanding is different from their approach, but what can be drawn from Hognestad and Bøe (2016) is the importance of observing and discussing practice. However, as Areana and George stated earlier in this theme, there is a need for the experience to be of a certain quality to be beneficial.

In summary, Amelia, Caitlin, and George were all on a quest to seek knowledgeable and experienced people to support them to better understand and enact their roles. They were seeking people to connect with, who would also support them in further developing their knowledge and practice. Participants seemed open to the idea of shadowing as a learning opportunity. This could allow the opportunity to experience both role modelling and mentoring.

Participants were on a quest to find deep connections that would help them grow their practice while reflecting on their experiences. There was some complexity in trying to find these types of connections. From a pragmatic standpoint, because participants' realities had changed since assuming their roles, they were needing support to reorganise and reconstruct their experiences (Sharma et al., 2018). The social nature of the way in which knowledge is produced within pragmatism is significant in this context. Participants continuing to seek deep connections showed they were seeking a source of knowledge that could support them with the practicalities of their roles.

The desired connections of participants show they were seeking people who could help them, acknowledge what they can do, help build their knowledge, and provide reassurance in what they are currently learning about and grappling with. The all-consuming desire for support amongst the participants shows the need for stronger connections to support the development of useful knowledge for recently appointed leaders.

Connecting through an interview

Analysis of findings showed participants were on a quest to find more opportunities to talk about, unpack, reflect on, and make sense of their learning and experiences, but that they rarely got these opportunities. Time designated to talk, share, and reflect on their own experiences through an interview within my research provided benefits for participants. This aligns with the work of Atkinson (2012) and Layen (2015). Atkinson explained, "interviewees receive great benefit in being listened to and guided through the telling of their life story, even though they may not be aware of it until they've had time to reflect on the experience" (Atkinson, 2012, p. 116). Similarly, Layen (2015) explained that interviews allow the interviewee the opportunity to develop knowledge and awareness of self that helps provide clarity and transparency. While participants had only one interview, their comments showed the importance of time to reflect on and discuss challenges, and unpack the complexities involved in leadership.

Without the opportunity to participate in this research, it is not known whether the participants would have had similar opportunities to process, share, and reflect on their experiences. Having a specific time commitment and an additional person to ask questions of to provoke thinking and reflection offered this level of opportunity. It highlights a need for leaders to have time to reflect on, process, and share their experiences and thoughts. This

has shown that creating time and space to talk and share, with parameters, in a facilitated manner can support recently appointed leaders.

Maya, Sarah, Amelia, Sophie, and Areana discussed the benefits of their research participation. Their comments pointed to areas for further support and the importance of recently appointed leaders being able to connect with someone with whom they can talk through their experiences. While participants explained the benefits of being able to talk through their experiences with someone outside of their service, a one-off interview is not enough for ongoing and long-term benefits. Participant comments identified that a support need for leaders was to have regular and ongoing time and space to reflect on their experiences and where they could share and have time to process their experiences and thoughts.

Maya described her interview participation as "a nice little sort of reflective exercise for myself. Actually [to] just kind of sit and really think about what it's been like". Like Maya, the interview experience provoked thinking for Caitlin, who discussed using her transcript as a reflective tool. Caitlin described "it's a really good opportunity to think, you know, to really put my thoughts in order".

Sarah and Amelia expressed benefit in the ability to discuss how their experiences had been so far. Sarah explained, "it's quite nice getting it off your chest". Amelia said, "thank you for letting me have the space where I can share that because I haven't been able to". Being able to be open and honest to tell and share their story seemed important for these participants.

Sophie viewed her participation in this research as helping support what she defined as "a huge gap in New Zealand in regards to supporting ... emerging leaders". She discussed the need for the sector to address how leaders are supported. Similar thoughts were echoed by Areana, who said she was "really thankful that I have taken this step because there's nothing out there".

In reflecting on being interviewed, many participants acknowledged the perceived benefits of sharing and articulating their experiences to others. Utilising Layen's (2015) approach of exploring the lived experiences of leaders, in more depth than one research interview, could help understand the current demands of recently appointed leaders. If recently appointed leaders were given more opportunities in a facilitated manner to tell, share, and reflect on their practice, it could support their development and build a more comprehensive understanding of suitable support processes for recently appointed leaders.

From a pragmatic standpoint, discussing their experiences allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and reconstruct the meanings of what had occurred for them (Winchester & Green, 2019). Participants could put into words their emotional upheavals (Pennebaker, 2000) and the challenges of their roles. The natural process of constructing stories and the social nature of telling stories helps simplify and understand what occurred (Pennebaker, 2000). In addition, the benefit of speaking or writing about emotional experiences helps people to organise and think about their experiences (Pennebaker, 2000).

7.4   Conclusion

The pragmatic concept of social connection has framed this chapter. The concept of connection represented the connections participants had as well as the additional ones they were on a quest to find. Different forms of connections the participants experienced related to the types of services and the participants' previous experiences. The theme of the context informs and determines support received showed that support for the participants varied and was specific to their situation and context. What became apparent was that participants desired further connections to widen their support and learning opportunities. A range of connections appeared to be an effective source of support for participants. This highlights the importance of having a range of key people for support and confidence building when embarking on a leadership role.

Concerning connections with significant people (excluding service connections), in some respects these connections served as mentors, guides, or role models for participants. Mentors and role models have the potential to have positive impacts on leader identity construction (Lanka et al., 2020) and grow the practice of the mentee. An example of this was Sophie, who consulted her range of mentors for different purposes. From a pragmatic standpoint, the social aspect or practice (Rumens & Keleman, 2010; Sharma et al., 2018) of being connected to others was incredibly significant for participants in my study. This is important, as participants were on a quest for deep social connections to support them with the individual challenges of their roles.

Participants discussed connections that resulted in positive experiences, which helped guide their practice and offered them support. Amelia, George, and Caitlin knew they wanted to be involved in the social process of learning (Sharma et al., 2018) through a connection that could support or guide them. However, they had experienced a lack of support that they desired or described how they were yet to find mentors.

In my study, participants were on a quest whereby they were seeking knowledge production within a social context. The accumulation of interactions where trust is able to be built then produces resourceful knowledge (Mackay et al., 2021). It is important that time is prioritised to allow recently appointed leaders to build trusting relationships. In line with the literature, connections allow the formulation of bond-building with those in similar roles (horizontal connections), or in roles that have some responsibility to support recently appointed leaders (organisational connections and accomplished connections).

The pragmatic framework and inductive analysis processes within this research were important because they allowed for openly investigating (Feilzer, 2010) what was occurring for participants. Not being bound only by concepts within the literature allowed for looking beyond earlier discussions and being able to develop concepts that were more inclusive and representative of the findings of my research. The analysis process showed participants were on a quest to seek sources of practical knowledge and were using social connections to support this.

The first year of their role is what Katz, in her seminal 1972 paper on early childhood education career stages referred to as the survival year for new early childhood education teachers, where they are trying to make it through each day. I argue the same is relevant for recently appointed leaders and that they should be supported by people who can guide their practice. Mentors for leaders are strongly advocated for (Edwards, 2018; Macpherson, 2014). Macpherson (2014) recommends first-time leaders be supported by a mentor and that this continue throughout the first year of their role. Edwards (2018) found having a mentor was something leaders in her study would have liked the opportunity to have if they were starting their leadership journey over again.

Supportive relationships are important for recently appointed leaders both in assuming their roles and in an ongoing way. The ability to have an open dialogue with an experienced professional can have positive impacts on building capability and supporting the complexity of early childhood education leaders' work. Mentoring can help support and develop leaders (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016). However, previous studies (Edwards, 2018) and findings from my study have found early childhood education mentors are limited and experiences are variable. Nevertheless, when available and done well, the benefit of this type of relationship provides the opportunity for open dialogue where leaders "can take their mask off" (Donald, 2019, p. 26) and discuss aspects of their role.

The importance of the sense of connection with others was evident in the participants' accounts shared in the theme of the desired relationships, and that recently appointed leaders require more robust support systems and deeper connections to help them develop their leadership practice.

The sense of wanting more and deeper connections with others was evident for participants who wanted more dialogue with others, even for the participants who appeared to have had the most support. Engagement in open dialogue supports opportunities for developing and applying new skills, knowledge, and strategies (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Competent and experienced others have the potential to offer connections to support this learning. Robust ongoing relationships that involve mentoring, coaching, role modelling, and collective group experiences could help address this. However, the importance of having parameters around the processes, including that there are specific purposes and robust processes involved, should be considered. Purposeful learning opportunities are necessary because if opportunities are not focused on the leader's current professional learning and development needs, exchanges might be little more than a 'nice chat'.

Analysis of the findings showed that more organisational connections, horizontal connections, and accomplished connections were desired by participants to help ease the sense of isolation some participants had experienced. Participants also desired these connections to better prepare them when they were assuming roles, and to provide ongoing peer or expert coaching, mentoring, and guidance. The isolation participants discussed showed how leaders can find it challenging to access support when they assume roles. Participants wanted to feel connected with others, source peers in similar roles, and feel like they had a circle of people for support. The quality of these relationships is most important and should ensure the relationship is focused on the learning relating to the career stage of being a recently appointed leader.

Besides this, the section concerned with connecting through an interview showed that participants were needing opportunities for dialogue to discuss their experiences and the challenges involved in their roles. If, through one interview, participants could highlight benefits for themselves, this indicates that deeper connections could provide long-lasting and ongoing opportunities for recently appointed leaders to make sense of their experiences. An ongoing connection could also help with offering specialised support to address learning needs and in developing useful knowledge related to their role and practices.

The opportunity for talking about their experiences in an interview showed the initial benefits of having a structured conversation with someone outside of a leader's service. The appreciation of being able to talk about and reflect on their experiences, which participants spontaneously acknowledged, showed the benefit of being asked about parts of their leadership story. What was worrying about this was that some participants expressed relief in sharing their stories as they had not previously been able to do so. This is extremely concerning and identifies a serious gap in how recently appointed leaders are supported as they embark on their leadership roles. The ability to have ongoing conversations could, over time, be substantial in transforming recently appointed leaders' practice and knowledge.

Participants were on a quest to seek further and deeper connections with people related to their service, in similar roles, and who could help guide their practice. In particular, with reference to organisational connections and accomplished connections, participants were seeking guidance, support, and help. From a pragmatic viewpoint, participants were seeking a guide to "provide opportunities for the natural development" (Sharma et al, 2018) of their skills, practice, and knowledge (Kooy, 2006). The creation of social connection was where participants wanted to gain useful and practical knowledge to support them with their roles. Participants were seeking people they could connect with and who had shared experiences to help them with constructing and refining their leadership identity (Isaac & Trodd, 2008).

In the following chapter (chapter eight), I conclude this thesis. The conclusion chapter responds to the research questions by theorizing leadership for recently appointed early childhood education leaders and providing pragmatically influenced principles for supporting and addressing the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Chapter eight draws together the main claim of this research: recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection that characterise this career stage.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the under-researched area of the learning needs of recently appointed leaders in early childhood education, specifically within the New Zealand early childhood education context. Understanding the preparation, support, and current learning needs of these leaders was the specific focus of this research. Recently appointed leaders were not a feature of the current literature, which reinforced the importance of my study. A pragmatic framework underpinned by an exploratory methodological approach was chosen to guide this research. This approach allowed for inquiring into and openly investigating what had occurred and what was still occurring for participants. Within this thesis, I have described the experiences of the participants who were appointed to their roles less than two years before being interviewed (part of the inclusion criteria). An exploration of participants' preparation and support experiences before assuming their leadership responsibilities helped to determine their learning needs.

In this chapter, I initially discuss the three research questions. My theory to address the support and learning needs of recently appointed leaders follows. This is built on four concepts (distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection) which became evident through the analysis processes. Two pragmatic principles, useful knowledge and social connection, relate to my theoretical concepts. The principles represent the two key areas that this research has shown need addressing concerning the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. This is followed by an explanation of the principle claim of this research: recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection that characterise this career stage. Before concluding, the chapter offers implications for the research findings, possible opportunities for further research, and discusses the limitations of this study.

8.1   Summarising the research questions

The overall aim of my research was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. The principles - useful knowledge and social connection - are elaborated on in section 8.3 of this chapter. In response to the research aim, the research questions that guided this research were:

– RQ 1: What is the professional profile of recently appointed leaders in early childhood education in New Zealand, and to what extent is the profile shared?

– RQ 2: What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles?

– RQ 3: What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders?

Each of the three research questions is revisited and summarised in this chapter. The first research question asked, What is the professional profile of recently appointed leaders in ECE, and to what extent is the profile shared? and was addressed in chapter four. This question established that there were considerable distinctions among participants. These distinctions challenged the ability to create a shared profile of recently appointed leaders. The distinct information specific to the participants was inclusive of a range of features. This included the length of time participants had worked in their roles and in their services, their qualifications, and the appointment processes they experienced. The type and operational hours of their services, the ages and the numbers of children their services catered for, team sizes, and roles within their service also varied across participants. In further constructing an understanding of the findings related to this question, it became evident that participants either aspired to, were hesitant in, or were ambivalent about assuming their roles.

The second research question asked, What preparation and support have recently appointed early childhood education leaders had before and after assuming their roles? and was addressed in chapters five to seven. The preparation and support that participants experienced was conceptualised through concepts of navigation, transformation, and connection. Analysis of the data showed participants were on a quest to find useful knowledge and deep social connections to support them in enacting their roles. This was because the preparation and support that participants received was not enough to help them navigate and transform their knowledge and practice or provide deep connection.

The third research question asked What are the current support and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders? and was addressed in chapters five to seven. An understanding of the areas of support and the learning needs that participants' felt they required were described, again through the concepts of navigation, transformation, and connection. Understanding participants' learning needs involved asking them what further support they felt they required, including what they thought they would like to learn or

understand more about. Alongside this, participants' responses were analysed to draw further conclusions about how to best support aspiring and recently appointed leaders. Findings showed that the support and learning needs of participants differed and were related to context-specific elements of their roles. The insufficient support participants experienced went some way towards helping them navigate and transform, however, participants were also engaged in considerable on-the-job learning. Analysis of the data showed that deep connections to others in similar roles and more experienced peers were desired by participants to support the development of useful knowledge.

The distinct nature of services and participants, including their experiences and their learning needs, were evident in answering the research questions. Also evident was the amount of on-the-job learning that occurred for participants. Answering the research questions allowed for theorising leadership for early childhood education leaders, which helps represent and support the overall findings of this research. This theorization is discussed next.

8.2   Theorizing leadership learning for recently appointed early childhood education leaders

For recently appointed leaders to thrive, the early childhood education field needs to acknowledge the distinct differences of recently appointed leaders and the navigation, transformation, and connection that characterise this career stage. It has been established by previous researchers, and now reinforced in my study that leadership learning opportunities for early childhood education teachers are limited before assuming leadership roles (Argyropoulou and Hatira, 2014). A lot of leadership learning for early childhood education leaders occurs out of necessity and on the job (Edwards, 2018; Ryder et al., 2017).

The analysis of findings in this research enabled the identification of the four overarching concepts (distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection) in response to the research questions. The concepts represent the knowledge created through this research and form the basis of my theory concerning the support and learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Figure 8.1 represents each of the four concepts within their own domain. As participants experienced some, if not all, of the concepts simultaneously, this is summarised by the overlap between the domains.

Figure 8.1

Addressing the preparation, support, and learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders: Conceptualising the problematic
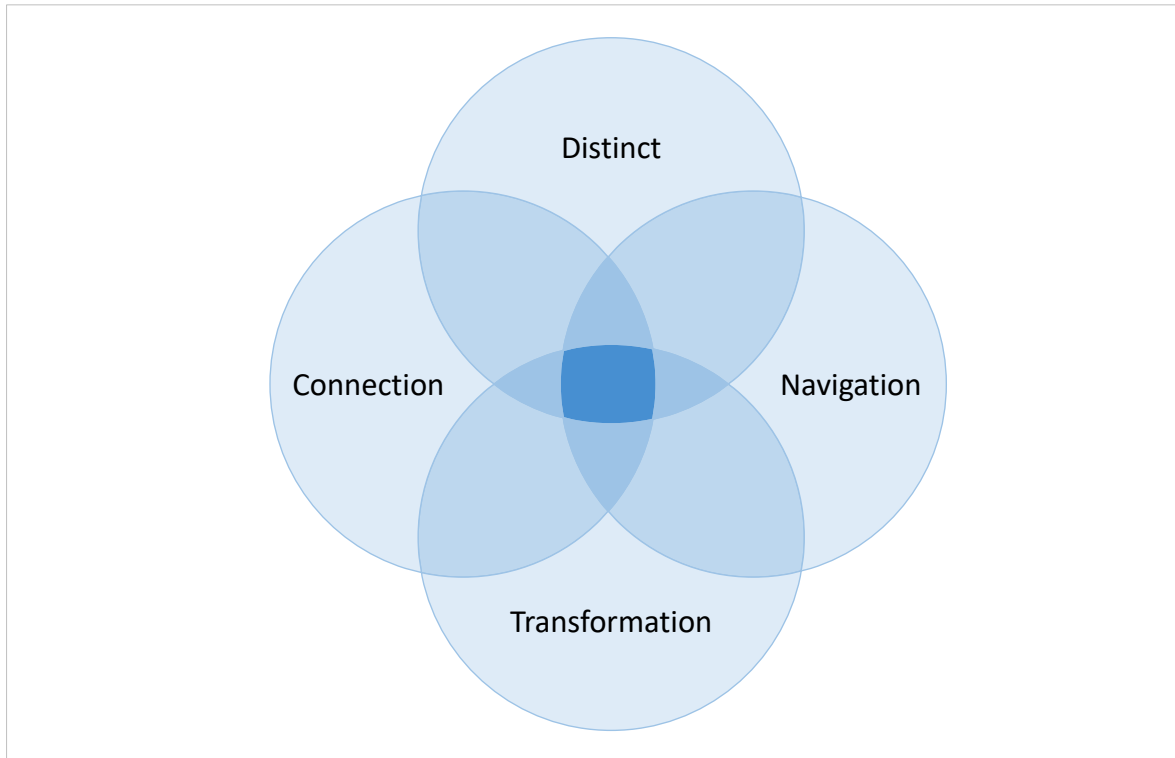
These concepts allow us to make sense of the distinct nature of services, conditions, experiences, support, and learning needs of participants. Individual shifts were occurring in knowledge for participants as they were navigating through new challenges and transforming their practices to meet these challenges. Having connections with others for support helped shifts in practice and knowledge development to occur.

8.3 Principles for supporting and addressing recently appointed early childhood education leaders' learning needs

In this thesis I have argued that recently appointed leaders are in a career stage characterised by a quest for useful knowledge and ongoing social connections. The four concepts of distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection developed and presented in the findings chapters, and discussed above, represent key findings within the data. These inductive concepts represent the people (the participants) and the practices they engaged in to carry out, learn about, and make sense of their role expectations. The concepts provide meaning and explanation to better understand possibilities for supporting and addressing the learning needs of recently appointed leaders.

Besides the four concepts, two background theoretical principles originating in pragmatism were adopted in this study. These principles propose a way forward to support and address the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. I have argued that the two core pragmatic principles of useful knowledge and social connection contribute to understanding how best to support and meet the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. To be effective, professional learning for recently appointed leaders requires opportunities to develop knowledge that is useful in the context of social connection. Useful knowledge is the knowledge that is specific to an individual current challenges. I have aligned these principles with the idea that participants were on a quest. The notion of a quest represents the search participants had embarked on (perhaps unknowingly) for social relationships that would support their knowledge development.

The theorization of the data through the two principles, involved looking for key ideas that were evident across the four concepts (distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection). In mapping, the significant threads within the data, the two background principles of useful knowledge and social connection were confirmed. The requirement for further knowledge was evident within the needs of the participants. These needs were diverse and specific to the individual participants. What united participants was that they were all navigating challenges and seeking to transform their practices. Participants sought knowledge that was relevant to their specific context but also wanted to do this by connecting with others. To gain support and reduce their sense of isolation, participants sought connections. From these connections, participants were seeking opportunities to help address the diverse challenges they were navigating and the parts of their practice they wished to transform.

8.3.1 The quest for useful knowledge

Participants acknowledged a range of experiences that provided them with elements of preparation and support. Their ongoing support and learning needs, however, indicated they were still on a quest to seek further knowledge to assist them in enacting aspects of their roles.

Current levels of support and learning opportunities were insufficient for participants' individual and context-specific needs. Participants were seeking support in real-time to help them work through individual challenges, sustain their development, and move their practice forward. In their quest for the best sources of useful knowledge, participants were seeking help to navigate the challenges of their roles and to transform their knowledge and practice.

8.3.2   *The quest for social connection*

In conjunction with seeking sources of useful knowledge to support them in enacting their roles, participants were also on a quest for social connections. The connection*s* that participants desired were ones that could offer them support and guidance.

Participants indicated elements of connections that worked for them (discussed in chapter seven in the theme of context informs and determines the support received). However, the data suggest that social connections for participants were highly variable. Sophie, for example, had multiple mentors whom she could draw on (discussed in chapter seven in the theme of context informs and determines the support received). However, Amelia acknowledged not being able to share with anyone her experiences so far (also discussed in chapter seven in the theme of the desired relationships).

A key principle of pragmatism is that learning occurs in a social context. Therefore, it was important to consider the social nature of how knowledge is produced and internalized by recently appointed leaders. The learning experiences of participants did not foster the deep connections that participants required. Professional learning opportunities, therefore, need to provide a mechanism to develop long-term, ongoing connections. An example that shows the importance of ongoing connection involved Sarah discussing her loss of established connections (discussed in chapter seven in the theme of the desired relationships) when she moved from an aspiring leaders' group to a professional learning group for current leaders after she assumed her new leadership role.

8.4   A model for conceptualising the research problematic

The overall aim of this thesis was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. This involved understanding how the current professional learning needs of recently appointed early childhood education leaders could be supported. This research has established that participants were on a quest to seek useful knowledge and social connection. Participants required useful knowledge and social connection to support them in developing the knowledge and practices required to enact their roles. Participants were grappling with their diverse and individualised experiences and services. As they were navigating challenging experiences, participants were transforming their practices. Increased connections were sought by participants to support them with the challenges they were experiencing. Figure

8.2 brings together the concepts developed through the analysis of the data (included in Figure 8.1 earlier in the chapter) to represent the understanding of strategies participants were using to develop in their practice. The two pragmatically influenced principles (useful knowledge and social connection) represent the outcomes participants were seeking from these practices. This figure (Figure 8.2) summarises my theory of supporting the learning needs of recently appointed leaders.

Figure 8.2

Recently appointed early childhood education leaders: Conceptualising the problem
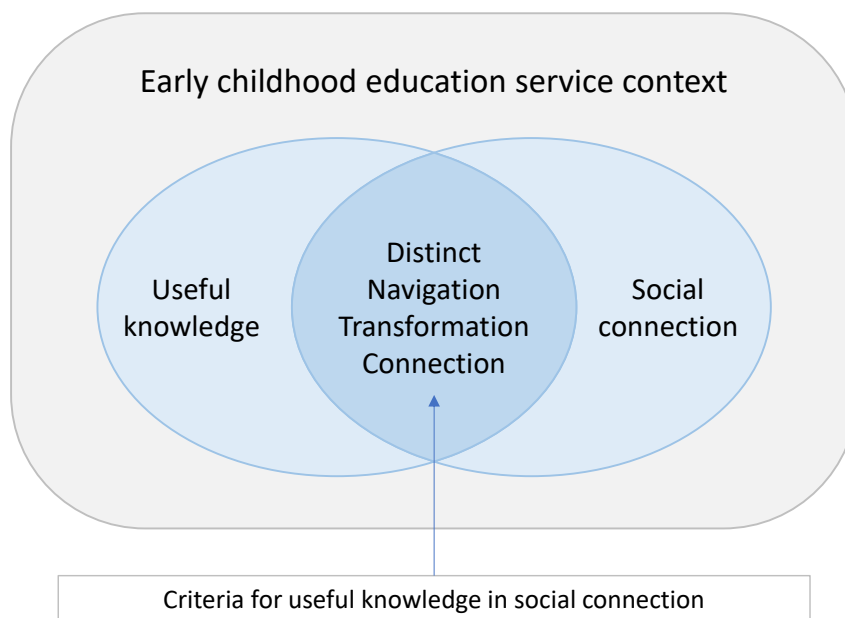
The all-encompassing nature of the surrounding oval in Figure 8.2 represents the early childhood education service context. The intersection of useful knowledge and social connection signals the importance of the relationship between the two principles. Within this intersection, the nature of the participants and the learning they were seeking is summarised through the four concepts: distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection.

This model implies that recently appointed leaders will consider whether professional learning and development opportunities will provide them with useful knowledge and social connection. My research shows that participants were also looking at learning opportunities and asking whether they would help support them to navigate their diverse challenges. They wanted to transform their knowledge and practice while being supported by deep and ongoing connections.

One of two main contributions of this research involves understanding the recently appointed leaders' experiences of becoming a leader and what they are seeking to allow them to better enact their roles. The inductive concepts (distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection) of this research represented the people and the practices that participants engaged with. The deductively driven principles (useful knowledge and social connection) specifically address the outcomes related to knowledge and connection that participants were seeking.

The second contribution of this thesis is its illustration of the way recently appointed leaders in early childhood education have specific support and learning needs, different to that of experienced leaders. These differing needs are due to their recently appointed status. Being recently appointed requires the need to build knowledge of what being a leader entails in order to successfully enact leadership practices, and to forge professional connections on a leadership level.

To address the specific support and learning needs of recently appointed leaders, professional learning and development opportunities provided by organisations and external providers should consider the concepts, principles, and main claim of this research. It is important to consider that, like the participants in this research, recently appointed leaders are likely to have been opportunistic in assuming their roles and probably leading in diverse settings with insufficient leadership learning. On this basis, professional learning and development for recently appointed leaders should incorporate and provide experiences that allow for the development of useful knowledge relevant to participants' individual needs. For the development of useful knowledge to occur, this learning needs to happen within a social context, not in the isolated practice or on-the-job contexts of several of the participants.

Ongoing opportunities where deep connections that offer support and guidance can be formed to support transformation over time should be prioritised as significant to learning opportunities. This would create foundations to address the needs and concerns that leaders are challenged by at this stage of their careers. Addressing individual contextual challenges would support the creation of knowledge specific to participants' services. Leaders may later go on to further leadership roles where they take with them their previous experiences and knowledge to help inform further roles. In any further roles,

leaders assume they would be new to the role, but would no longer be a recently appointed leader. They would then have different support and learning needs.

8.5   Main claim of this thesis

In response to the research questions, I now outline the main claim developed through this research. This claim relates to the support required to address the professional learning needs that participants were experiencing at this career stage. The claim is that recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection that characterise this career stage. This claim encompasses five components relating to the findings of this research, summarised in Figure 8.2.

8.5.1   *Participants, their experiences and their services are diverse*

Being appointed to their roles within the last two years (part of the inclusion criteria for the study) and holding the highest leadership role in their service were common aspects of the participants. While other similarities further united some participants, their experiences, and their services were largely idiosyncratic. This distinct nature of participants, their experiences, and their services challenged the ability to create a straightforward understanding of the profile of recently appointed leaders. A larger sample size, while beyond the scope of this study, might help obtain a clearer view of leaders' demographics, yet could also confirm their distinctive nature. The two things uniting the diverse participants were their search for useful knowledge and their desire for social connection. These two principles I elaborated on in section 8.3 of this chapter.

8.5.2   *Participants were opportunistic in assuming leadership opportunities*

Participants were mostly opportunistic in grasping roles presented to them, some earlier than expected (discussed in the theme of grasping convenient opportunities in chapter four). Assuming convenient opportunities meant that participants' transitions to leadership were not well planned and participants experienced a lack of robust succession planning. It is important to acknowledge the opportunism in grasping roles, as willing leaders may be able to be identified before assuming roles. Identifying and offering learning opportunities over time to aspiring leaders earlier in their careers could allow for implementing more robust professional learning opportunities. Thorough succession planning to prepare and

build the capability of aspiring leaders could support successful transitions. However, it is necessary to first establish ways to identify aspiring leaders.

8.5.3   Better support and learning opportunities are required before and after the transition to leadership roles

Initial teacher education included very little leadership learning. Participants indicated that at the time of their initial teacher education, they were focused on learning about teaching. Therefore, opportunities for leadership learning outside of initial teacher education need to be considered, including in-service opportunities and even a progression structure for qualifications. Early childhood education-focused postgraduate study showed promise for the two participants that had participated in it (discussed in chapter six in the theme of early childhood education leadership-specific postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of early childhood education leadership). The useful knowledge produced during this period of learning broadened participants' conceptualisations of leadership practice and gave them a wider range of examples to draw on.

Because of the restricted opportunities for learning before assuming their roles, many participants learned on-the-job while working through multiple new challenges. On-the-job learning, discussed in Edwards (2018) and Rouse and Spradbury (2016) was common in participants' accounts of their experiences. While on-the-job learning has a place in leaders' learning, it does not provide enough useful knowledge if unaided by other learning and development opportunities.

The individualised learning that occurred for participants varied because of the services they worked in, their prior roles, and the opportunities offered to them. All participants indicated at some stage in their interviews that their preparation could have been improved. Participants described varying degrees of how prepared they felt when they took on their roles. Many participants reported on coming to terms with the reality of their new role, including how their perception changed after they had been in their role for some time.

The findings of my study suggest the acceptance of and transition into a leadership role is incremental. The transition does not cease when a role has been assumed, therefore support should be continued past when recently appointed leaders assume their roles. Increased guidance and support for recently appointed leaders could allow them more opportunities to focus on the teaching and learning of young children and the learning and development of their teaching staff. Support for participants both before and after they had

assumed their roles depended on their work history and experiences. These prior experiences did not align with the individual preparation and support participants believed they needed.

Addressing the transition into early childhood education leadership roles should begin with addressing succession planning and induction processes for aspiring leaders (discussed in the theme of unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership, chapter five). The development and strengthening of in-service learning opportunities also requires attention. These opportunities could provide better support to recently appointed leaders as they navigate into new territory and work on transforming themselves and their practice. Participants' experiences showed informal learning structures were significant but that current learning structures did not match their actual support and learning needs they required.

8.5.4   Transformation occurs over time

Participants were in a transitioning phase and were in the process of accepting their roles. Time in their roles was important for participants' shifts and growth in their views and thinking. With prompting, participants could acknowledge areas where their confidence had emerged and grown. Participants were also beginning to see the effects of their leadership learning and practices. These changes, like many other findings, varied among participants but covered two broad but distinct areas: operational aspects and relational aspects. For some participants, day-to-day routine tasks were featured, whereas for other participants it was related to their thinking or role-specific challenges. Regardless of this, all areas involved the development of useful knowledge. The transformations discussed in the theme of acknowledging emerging confidence and growth (discussed in chapter six) also showed that participants were experiencing different responsibilities within their roles. This has implications for professional learning and support that could occur for recently appointed leaders when they are in the early stages of their roles.

8.5.5   Contextually relevant learning

The literature review chapter discussed the importance of planned and contextually relevant learning opportunities (Doan, 2016; Edwards, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018).

The need for planned and contextually relevant learning opportunities was also evident in the findings of this study. To address the gap between participants' current knowledge and required knowledge, individualised ongoing support and learning opportunities are required.

The relevance of opportunities concerning the specifics of participants' contexts and previous experiences is also vital to developing their capabilities. Development opportunities must be pitched at a level that meets current learning needs. Therefore, conventional forms of professional development such as workshops, which have been found to offer less authentic learning opportunities (Horn Ratner et al., 2018), would likely not fully address learning needs.

Problem-solving in real-life contexts (Knowles et al., 2012) and work-based experiences (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009) are beneficial ways for adults to learn. These types of learning opportunities should be considered in supporting the development of the mental schemas (Mistry & Sood, 2012) of recently appointed leaders. In forming their professional identity, working alongside experienced leaders (Doan, 2016) could benefit recently appointed leaders as it would allow for the creation of useful knowledge and social connections. Working alongside experienced others was challenging for participants in this study, as they were either the only leader or the highest-positioned leader in their service.

8.5.6   Connections to others are significant

Participants discussed wanting increased opportunities to connect with others, including those in similar roles and more experienced peers. While participants desired connections with others, organisational leadership programs were reported as not sufficient as the only form of preparation for the participants who experienced them (discussed in the section on inconsistent opportunities to learn in chapter five). This was a finding that was also evident in the work of Edwards (2018). These collective learning opportunities benefitted those who took part in them by connecting them with others in similar roles and reducing the sense of isolation participants described.

Previous experiences with other leaders, professional leaders, and predecessors (discussed in chapter seven in the theme of context informs and determines support received),

played an important role and contributed to participants' learning. This shows the importance of relational support and the relationships with more experienced peers that participants discussed (in chapter seven in the theme of context informs and determines the support received) as having been their most effective preparation. Given that participants reported they still did not feel fully prepared for their roles, it was hard to determine the quality, extent, or breadth of this support. But it highlights the importance of researching the practices of those who are supporting leaders, particularly recently appointed leaders.

These components show that, with the distinct nature of participants and their services, commonalities are not universal. Participants assumed roles that were presented to them. They were shifting their thinking, accepting, and assuming leadership. The support participants received, while helpful, depended on their work history and experiences. However, participants' experiences were insufficient and did not provide sufficient useful knowledge or deep and ongoing social connections with others in similar roles or who were more knowledgeable.

This study has built some initial understanding of how to best support recently appointed leaders. Understandings include the need for recently appointed leaders to be supported in developing useful knowledge related to their roles, and recently appointed leaders need ongoing social connections that support them in making use of this increased knowledge. Using a pragmatic framework was beneficial for this research, as it allowed for openly investigating and incorporating participants' varied experiences. Participants' experiences helped to understand the research problem through the four concepts of distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection. More emphasis and effort are required to design and create ongoing learning opportunities with deep social connections for leaders. It was through the five components discussed here that the main claim of this research was developed to summarise and represent the overall research.

8.6   Representing the research

The following figure has been developed to bring together the components of this research.

Figure 8.3

Summarising the research

Recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection that characterise this career stage.

Principles

Useful knowledge

The NZ ECE sector currently has a randomised approach to support for leaders

ECE leadership is a multidimensional role

Social connection

Being a recently appointed leader requires relational support in the forms of organisational, horizontal, and accomplished connections

What are the conceptual needs of leaders in this early career stage?

Support with their *distinct* challenges and circumstances

Support *navigating* when embarking on a role

Support to *transform* leadership practice and knowledge

Connections with more experienced leaders

This model highlights for the early childhood education sector what recently appointed leaders require concerning the support they desire. Organisations, professional learning providers, and those supporting recently appointed leaders should take note of this new knowledge. The need for useful knowledge development and social connection should be incorporated into professional learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders. My research has also identified implications for policy, practice and research which is now discussed.

8.7   Implications for policy, practice, and research

My research has highlighted significant implications for early childhood education policy, practice, and research in relation to recently appointed leaders. The sector needs to stop assuming that because people have an initial teacher education qualification, they have capability to lead. Many leaders are taking convenient opportunities to become leaders. It is time to move beyond this opportunism to identify willing leaders and provide them with learning opportunities in preparation for leadership.

From a policy standpoint, the prioritisation of the provision for leadership learning opportunities, specifically for recently appointed leaders is required. Investing in leadership provides benefits for the overall service quality, meaning better outcomes for children. Recently appointed leaders need ongoing learning opportunities that support them to build knowledge of what being a leader entails, how to enact leadership, and opportunities to form professional connections. Specific funding should to be provided for leadership support and learning opportunities.

From a practice standpoint, professional learning providers and organisations need to consider the career stage and specific learning needs of recently appointed leaders. It is vital that within learning opportunities there is recognition that recently appointed leaders' learning needs will be different to that of more experienced leaders. Learning opportunities designed for recently appointed leaders should involve the incorporation of knowledge and support that is useful at this career stage. Additionally, support to build social connections with others in similar roles and those with more experience should be part of learning opportunities that are provided. Given that participants in my study expressed that the organisational leadership programs their organisations offered were not sufficient preparation (as discussed in the section connections to others are significant), current programs require a review of effectiveness.

From a research standpoint, recently appointed leaders are an under-researched area. There is a need to further research the experiences, knowledge, and practices of recently appointed leaders to understand their needs and challenges. Further understanding the needs and challenges of recently appointed leaders could be identified and supported through the establishment of a research and development program based on the principles (useful knowledge and social connection) of this research. This is discussed in the next section on further research.

8.8   Further research

In the findings chapters, I have outlined possible options for further research concerning recently appointed leaders, which I now summarise. My research has contributed knowledge and principles concerning the support and learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Some aspects of the research problematic that were only touched on provide opportunities for further research, which I now explain.

First, the induction, succession planning, and transition processes for supporting leaders require addressing. Further developing these processes and then researching the effectiveness of the processes that have been carried out is required. These processes should incorporate elements of useful knowledge to prepare aspiring leaders and offer ongoing social connections that aspiring leaders could maintain once they are appointed to a role. It would be important to assess the extent of the effectiveness of implemented induction, succession planning, and transition processes to understand the strength of their design.

Second, conducting larger-scale research to build a more robust and extensive understanding of how to best support and address the learning needs of recently appointed leaders is needed. This larger scale research could involve a similar research design to this study but involve a larger cohort of participants to ensure reliability of results.

Third, emphasis and effort to design and carry out ongoing learning opportunities for recently appointed leaders is required. Having developed a model of how to support recently appointed leaders it would be logical to explore the use and effectiveness of the model through the facilitation of a research and development program. Based on the principles of useful knowledge and social connection, the research and development program should involve exploring ways to connect recently appointed leaders to other people through coaching and mentoring opportunities and specifically structured network groups. These social connections could offer recently appointed leaders support to develop knowledge that would help them navigate their challenges and to transform their practice. It would be important to establish if involvement in a research and development program focused on the principles of useful knowledge and social connection would lead to increased confidence and effectiveness of participants.

Finally, participants who had or were participating in postgraduate study advocated for the benefits of engaging in postgraduate study. Exploring the success of leadership-specific postgraduate qualifications to a greater depth than was possible within this research

would help gain a further understanding of the benefits of these programs. It would be important to assess postgraduate programs in relation to the principles of useful knowledge and social connection that are presented in this research. For example, what useful knowledge development occurred for participants or did the program support participants to develop social connections that would continue beyond the course? Consideration should also be given for how leaders can be supported to engage in postgraduate study opportunities.

8.9   Limitations of this study

The scope of the study meant it was limited to only 10 participants. This made it manageable for doctoral research and allowed for the collection of in-depth data. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed for following up on interesting issues participants raised.

However, while the findings of this study reflect the participants in this study, it is not known to what extent they reflect the wider cohort of recently appointed leaders. There is currently no way of identifying how many recently appointed leaders there are within the New Zealand early childhood education context. Participants were identified through self-selection (discussed in chapter three in the section on participant recruitment) and participation was limited to those who responded to the initial email.

8.10   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued the need for the early childhood education sector to acknowledge the distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection requirements of recently appointed leaders. There is a need to address the currently insufficient support available to support the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. Addressing transition, induction, and succession planning practices could help build robust foundations for recently appointed leaders. From these foundations, ongoing learning and support opportunities need to address the specialised needs of the recently appointed career stage. These opportunities must involve a combination of social connection and the development of useful knowledge.

The main claim of this research is that: recently appointed leaders are distinct individuals who require professional learning opportunities that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection. These opportunities must acknowledge the qualities of navigation, transformation, and connection that characterise this career stage. This claim advocates for the uniqueness of recently appointed leaders' situations. Recently appointed leaders need professional learning opportunities that are specifically designed for and relevant to becoming a leader and embarking on leadership.

The lack of discussion for teaching and learning practices within their services highlighted within this study shows that recently appointed leaders need support addressing some of their immediate needs. Addressing these needs would help recently appointed leaders to refocus their attention on the teaching and learning practices within their services. If a leader's focus is not on teaching and learning, this impacts the quality of the program for children (Muijs et al., 2004).

This thesis has offered a theorisation of the preparation, support, and learning needs of recently appointed leaders. That theorisation comprised the following four concepts: distinct, navigation, transformation, and connection. These are complemented by two pragmatic principles (useful knowledge and social connection) to argue for how to best support and address the learning needs of recently appointed leaders. These principles were developed to include perspectives participants expressed about what they thought recently appointed leaders needed and the conclusions that were drawn from the analysis of the data.

This research has highlighted some areas for further research concerning leadership within the New Zealand early childhood education sector, specifically concerning recently appointed leaders. Along with this thesis, further research could lead to designing and creating robust learning and development opportunities to support recently appointed leaders.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Ethics Approval

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: Professor Joce Nuttall
Student Researcher: Rachel Foster
Ethics Register Number: 2018-302E
Project Title: Exploring sector-specific needs and expectations of novice early childhood education positional leaders from a lived experience perspective.
Date Approved: 26/02/2019
End Date: 31/12/2019

This is to certify that the above application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (ACU HREC). The application has been approved for the period given above.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all conditions of approval are adhered to, that prior approval is obtained for all modifications and that HREC is notified of any reportable matters, incidents or unexpected issues impacting on participants that arise in the course of the research. Researchers must ensure compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the University's Code of Conduct.

Any queries relating to this application should be directed to the Ethics Secretariat (res.ethics@acu.edu.au). Please quote your ethics approval number in all communications with us.

If you require a formal approval certificate in addition to this email, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

We wish you every success with your research.

Kind regards,

Nina Robinson
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Assoc Prof. Michael Baker

Research Ethics and Integrity Officer | Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Australian Catholic University
T: +61 2 9739 2646 E: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

Appendix B

Organisation Consent Form

ORGANISATION CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: Developing Novice Early Childhood Education Positional Leaders in New Zealand

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Joce Nuttall

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Rachel Foster

I .... *the leader of* .... have read the Organisation Information Letter *and Participant Information Letter* and understand the information provided. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I am happy to:

☐ Distribute the Participant Information Letter and Consent Form to positional leaders in my organisation who have been appointed to their first leadership role within the last two years

OR

☐ Provide a list of leaders within my organisation who have been appointed to their first positional leadership role within the last two years. I understand that you will then contact these leaders and provide them with an invitation to participate in your research along with a copy of the Participant Information Letter and Consent Form.

NAME OF ORGANISATION REPRESENTATIVE: ....

SIGNATURE ....   DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: ....

DATE:.............................

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:...

DATE:............................……...

Appendix C

Organisation Information Email Template

Dear_____,

I am currently carrying out research entitled *Developing Novice Early Childhood Education Positional Leaders in New Zealand* as part of my degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Joce Nuttall. The main focus of this project is the preparation of, the support for and learning needs of novice early childhood education positional leaders in New Zealand.

As the leader of your organisation I would be grateful if you would consider supporting this project by helping identify leaders in your organisation who have the following attributes;
- Have been appointed to their first positional leadership role within the last two years.
- Are located in Wellington City and Central Lower Hutt.

The attached Participant Information Letter provides further information about the research project.

If you are comfortable for novice leaders in your organisation to participate within this research could you please sign and return the attached Organisational Leader Consent Form. To let the leaders in your organisation know about this research you are welcome to forward on to them the attached Participant Information Letter and Consent Form. Alternatively, you could to provide me with contact details for novice leaders in your organisation who have been appointed to their first positional leadership role within the last two years and I can contact them directly.

To contact me with any questions or to discuss this project further please email rachel.foster3@myacu.edu.au

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information.

Kind regards,

Rachel Foster

Organisation Information Letter Template

ACU INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING SCIENCES & TEACHER EDUCATION

Rachel Foster
rachel.foster3@myacu.edu.au

DATE

Name
Address line 1
Address line 2
Address line 3

Dear_____,

I am currently carrying out research entitled *Developing Novice Early Childhood Education Positional Leaders in New Zealand* as part of my degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Joce Nuttall. The main focus of this project is the preparation of, the support for and learning needs of novice early childhood education positional leaders in New Zealand.

As the leader of your organisation I would be grateful if you would consider supporting this project by helping identify leaders in your organisation who have the following attributes;
-   Have been appointed to their first positional leadership role within the last two years.
-   Are located in Wellington City and Central Lower Hutt.

The attached Participant Information Letter provides further information about the research project.

If you are comfortable for novice leaders in your organisation to participate within this research could you please sign and return via email the attached Organisational Leader Consent Form (If you require a postal address please email me on the address below to request this). To let the leaders in your organisation know about this research you are welcome to pass on to them a copy of the attached Participant Information Letter and Consent Form. If you would like copies of these documents email please let me know via the email address below. Alternatively, you could to provide me with contact details for novice leaders in your organisation who have been appointed to their first positional leadership role within the last two years and I can contact them directly.

To contact me with any questions or to discuss this project further please email rachel.foster3@myacu.edu.au

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information.

Kind regards,

Rachel Foster

ACU INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING SCIENCES & TEACHER EDUCATION

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: Developing Novice Early Childhood Education Positional Leaders in New Zealand.
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Joce Nuttall
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Rachel Foster
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project *Developing Early Childhood Education Leaders in New Zealand.* The main focus of this project is the preparation, support, and learning needs of novice early childhood education positional leaders in New Zealand.

What is the project about?
The aim of this research project is to contribute sector-specific understandings of the professional learning needs of novice early childhood education positional leaders (i.e. in their first centre leadership position and appointed within the last two years). The project's research questions ask:

- What is the professional profile of leaders in ECE in New Zealand?
- What preparation and support have novice ECE positional leaders had before and after assuming their roles?
- What support and learning needs do novice leaders feel they require?

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Rachel Foster and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Joce Nuttall.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
It is not anticipated that participation in this project will involve risks beyond those of your normal daily working life. There is a small chance that some participants may become distressed if recounting difficult or unpleasant experiences during the interview. Should this occur, participants will be offered the option of pausing or ceasing the interview then restarting if they choose.

What will I be asked to do?
This project will involve you in an individual interview that will be digitally recorded and later transcribed. The interview questions will involve discussion of the type of setting you currently work in, your qualifications and professional experience, the preparation you had prior to assuming your role, the support you have received to carry out this role, the support you believe you still require, and your current learning needs. For participants based in the Wellington region, face-to-face interviews are possible. For participants outside of the Wellington region telephone and video call interviews are available.

How much time will the project take?
The interview is expected to take approximately one hour and will take place at a mutually agreed time (and location for Wellington based participants). The transcribed interviews will be sent back to participants for checking. Participants can withdraw or add anything further at this point.

What are the benefits of the research project?
Through being involved in this project you will be able to reflect on your own experiences and contribute to developing an understanding of the preparation and support that novice early childhood education positional leaders in New Zealand have received.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time up until the end of the fieldwork period. There are no adverse consequences for withdrawal from the project.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?
The study will be published as a doctoral thesis, and in publications such as professional journals and conference presentations. All data will be de-identified. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality for participants. You will not be identified in any way in the thesis, any subsequent publications or presentations. Reporting of results will be aggregated across the participants. Individual quotes may be used to illustrate results. Any identifying characteristics of participants, such as potentially identifying details of their workplace, will be removed.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?
Following completion of the project an electronic copy of the thesis will be available to participants to download.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?
The email address to contact if you have any questions about this research project is rachel.foster3@myacu.edu.au. Professor Joce Nuttall can be contacted at Joce.Nuttall@acu.edu.au

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?
The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (2018-302E). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

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Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?
To participate in this research please email rachel.foster3@myacu.edu.au indicating your interest in the project and attach a signed copy of the consent form.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Foster

Participant Consent Form

ACU INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING SCIENCES & TEACHER EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: Developing Novice Early Childhood Education Positional Leaders in New Zealand.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Joce Nuttall

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Rachel Foster

I .... *(the participant)* have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this interview for approximately an hour and that the interview will be digitally recorded, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time up until the end of the fieldwork period. I understand such withdrawal will have no adverse consequences for me. I understand that research data collected for the study may be published and may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

SIGNATURE .... DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: ....

DATE:............................

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:...

DATE:............................

Participant Email Template

Dear_____,

I am currently carrying out research entitled *Developing Novice Early Childhood Education Positional Leaders in New Zealand* as part of my degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Joce Nuttall. The main focus of this project is the preparation of, the support for and learning needs of novice early childhood education positional leaders in New Zealand.

As part of this research, I will be conducting interviews with **positional leaders** employed to their **first positional leadership** role within the **last two years**. You are welcome to share this information with anyone else in your organisation or the wider early childhood sector if they fit the inclusion criteria.

Interviews are expected to be about an hour in duration and will be conducted at a mutually agreed time over the coming months. If you are interested in the possibility of being involved please read the attached Participant Information Letter. The letter outlines the project, associated risks, what you will be asked, benefits of the research, withdrawal from the process, how the research will be shared and contact information.

Once you have read the attached Participant Information Letter and have any questions or wish to discuss this project further please email rachel.foster3@myacu.edu.au

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information.

Kind regards,

Rachel Foster

Appendix H

Interview Protocol

Interview questions

Before the interview:
- Thank the participant for making the time available

- The interview should take about an hour

- Make a short test recording. Ask the participant to say their name and a little bit about themselves. Check that audio recorder is working.

- Remind the participant;
  - The interview is being audio recorded and you can ask to stop as any point
  - Your identify is confidential to the research team (Supervisor and myself)
  - Your transcript will be de-identified as soon as it is transcribed
  - You will receive a copy of the transcript to keep and so you can withdraw or ass any further comments
  - You can contact me at any time about the project

Do you have any questions before we commence the interview?

After the interview:
- Check that I have up-to-date contact information (Email and phone)

- I will email you a copy of your de-identified transcript.

- Do you have a pseudonym you would like to use to replace your real name in the data? If not, tell them I will choose one so their identity remains confidential.

- You are welcome to let me know any changes or corrections that need to be made to the transcript, and to let me now if you have any further thoughts on the topic after the interview. My contact details are on the participant information letter.

- Thank you for your participation and for kindly making the time available for the project.

- Remind – you are welcome to connect me at any time with any questions about the project.

Centre/service

Tell me about your early childhood education service
- Type of centre
  - Private, community based etc
  - Size and rooms?
- How many children do your service cater for?
  - Licensed for
  - Daily
  - Each room – if separate rooms
- How many staff are employed at the service?
  - Full time
  - Part time
  - Non teaching staff
- What is the range of qualifications and certification that the staff hold?
- What is the leadership structure of your service?

Qualifications

Tell me about your qualifications
- What qualifications do you hold?
- To what extent was leadership covered in your qualifications?
- Are you currently studying towards a further qualification?

To what extent is leadership covered in this program?

Professional experience

Tell me about your professional experience
- How long have you worked at this service?
- When did you assume your leadership role?
- Why did you take on your current role?
- Did you formally apply for the role?
  Multiple rooms/services
- Did you change rooms to take on role?
- If employer has multiple services have you changed services to take on role?
- Have you held any other leadership roles?
  - At this service?
  - Other services?

Professional learning

- Tell me about what you view as professional learning?
- What professional learning opportunities are you aware of to support you in your role?

Prior to assuming role

- Tell me about what happened prior to assuming your role
  - Did you aspire to holding a leadership role?
  - Did you intentionally plan to take on your current leadership role?
  - What support did you have in preparing for your role?
  - Who encouraged you to take on the role?

- What effect did this have on you taking the role?
- What types of professional learning experiences did you have to prepare you for your role?
    - (Coaching, mentoring, courses, tertiary study, acting in role when previous leader was on leave, nothing, other)
- Overall what do you feel was most effective in preparing you for your role?
- Prior to assuming your role how prepared did you feel in taking on the role?
- Did this view change after you assumed the role?

Since assuming your role
- Since assuming your role what types of professional learning experiences have you had to support you with your role?
    - (Coaching, mentoring, courses, tertiary study, nothing, other)
- Do you use social media to support you in your leadership?
    - In what ways?
    - (Webinars, online courses, TED talks, YouTube, Pintrest, Contributing to Facebook discussions, Reading posts in Facebook discussion groups, email, FaceTime, Messenger, blogs)
- Overall what do you feel has been most effective in support you in your role?

Learning needs
The following questions are about your current perspective of your role and your learning needs
- What aspects of your role do you feel comfortable in carrying out?
- Why are these aspects that you feel comfortable with?
- What do you consider as some of the greatest challenges within your role?
- Why are these your greatest challenges?
- What would make them less challenging?
- What do you consider as some of your greatest successes in your role?
- Why are these your greatest successes?

Reflecting on experience
Thinking back to before you assumed your role and knowing now what is involved in carrying out your role now:
- What aspects of your role;
    - Do you feel like you were well prepared for?
    - Do you feel you were unprepared for?
    - Do you feel like you were well supported in?
    - Do you feel like you were not well supported in?
What kind of professional learning opportunities do you feel would have been helpful?

Is there anything further you would like to add?

Final coding

Codes	Category	Theme
- Aspirant participants - Hesitant participants - Ambivalent participants	- Assuming convenient opportunities	Distinct

- Mindset and practice shifts when assuming leadership
- Inconsistent opportunities to learn
 	
- Types of demands
    o Operational
    o Temporal
    o Relational
    o Emotional
	- Unequipped to navigate the complexity of early childhood education leadership
	
	- Complex and competing knowledge demands
		Navigation

- Operational aspects - Relational aspects - The rationale for embarking on postgraduate study - Benefits of postgraduate study	- Emerging confidence and growth for participants - Postgraduate study broadens conceptualisations of early childhood education leadership	Transformation

- Types of connections
    o Service
    o Historical
    o Organisational
    o Horizontal
    o Accomplished
 	
- Types of desired connections
    o Organisational
    o Horizontal
    o Accomplished
	- Context informs and determines the support received
	
	- The desired relationships
		Connection