RESEARCH ON CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERS: EMERGENCE OF RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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DEDICATION

Early childhood educators play an important role in children’s future success. They do more than arts and crafts projects all day. They lay a foundation for children’s learning and make lifelong impressions on countless young lives. Despite the important nature of what early childhood educators do, they are underappreciated. Work within the early childhood education sector continues to be undervalued and underestimated.

I’d like to dedicate this study to all early childhood educators, especially those who I have had the privilege to work with side by side for the past 18 years. Those who love to care for children, bring passion to their classroom, love to watch children’s wonder grow, have patience, dedication, and are sensitive to children’s needs. I wish for the day that they gain the professional identity that they deserve.
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ABSTRACT

It is recognized internationally that effective leadership in early childhood is vital to success of quality early childhood care and education. There is a need for our nation to commit to provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of early childhood leadership training. To create fiscally sound early childhood programs with learning environments that nurture and challenge young children and with work environments that develop, support, and retain skilled teachers, program directors capable of strong leadership are essential (McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2014). A pending shortage of early childhood leaders has been an ongoing issue in the past few years. Policymakers and practitioners commonly agree about the importance of strong leadership in early childhood education. This study is based on the premise that early childhood leadership practices have a direct effect on quality of care in early childhood development. Nettles and Herrington (2007) state that effect of competent leadership on children’s achievement and learning is only second to classroom instruction. High-quality early childhood education plays an important role in the future achievement of children. It benefits all young children, particularly children from low-income households with the greatest challenges to developing readiness to learn (Whitebook, 2010).

Qualified teachers and leaders are instrumental in the operation of high-quality centers for early learning. There is a need to establish policies and pathways to ensure early childhood leaders are well prepared to effectively care for and support teachers, children, and their families. The purpose of this study was to identify sets of characteristics that are essential for effective early childhood leadership and explore the challenges early childhood leaders encounter in an effort to become effective leaders. The
researcher hopes the results of this study may be used in the design and implementation of leadership development programs for early childhood leaders.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ................................................................................................................................. ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... iii
ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................................... iv
LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................................... x
LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................................... xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................. 1
   Global Movement in Early Childhood Education ............................................................. 3
   Background of the Problem .............................................................................................. 9
   Significance of the Study .................................................................................................. 11
   Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 12
      Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 12
   Summary ............................................................................................................................ 13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................................................... 15
   The Science Behind Early Childhood Development ...................................................... 15
   History of Early Childhood Education and Care ............................................................ 17
      Early Childhood Education Labor Market .................................................................. 22
      Diversity and Equity in Early Childhood Education Workforce .............................. 24
      Economic Insecurity .................................................................................................... 27
      Education Requirement ............................................................................................... 28
      Irrational Wage Structure ........................................................................................... 29
   Educational Leadership ..................................................................................................... 29
   Relational Leadership ....................................................................................................... 32
   Evolution of K-12 Leadership Role .................................................................................. 34
   Leadership in Early Childhood Education ........................................................................ 35
   Whole Leadership Framework ......................................................................................... 42
      Leadership Essentials ................................................................................................... 46
      Administrative Leadership ............................................................................................ 46
      Pedagogical Leadership ............................................................................................... 47
   Leadership as a Major Component of Quality Early Childhood Programs .................. 49
      Quality Early Childhood Education Matters ................................................................. 50
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Leadership Models Most Often Used in Education .................................................. 31
Table 2: 2017 Status Report on Early Childhood Program Leadership in the United States .............................................................................................................................. 42
Table 3: Summary of Participants’ Background and Qualifications ...................................... 85
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: United States Ranking in Public Funding for Early Learning .............................7
Figure 2: Composition of Early Childhood Workforce .......................................................26
Figure 3: Stakeholder Map for a Typical Early Childhood Leader .................................40
Figure 4: Whole leadership framework (Talan, Materson, & Abel, 2017) ......................45
Figure 5: Defined Categories and Their Relations..........................................................87
Figure 6: Whole Leadership Framework (Talan & Materson, 2017) ..........................129
Figure 7: Modified Whole Leadership Framework .........................................................130
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Any nation that fails to prepare most of its children for productive work and life must correct course and must do it right now. And all of us must be a part of the solution as parents, educators at all levels, community, business, faith and political leaders. The greatest threat to America’s security does not come from any enemy without but from our enemy within, and our failure to protect and invest in all of our children. We can change that, and we must change that, and we need your voice.

Marian Wright Edelman
Children’s Defense Fund
Stanford University’s
Baccalaureate celebration
2017

What children experience early on in life has lifelong effects on their development (Rohacek, Adams, & Kisker, 2010). It is commonly believed that children’s education starts at age five when they start kindergarten. But in reality, children’s learning starts from birth (Gerber, Wilks, & Erdie-Lalena, 2010). The early learning for millions of children in the United States is a joint effort between parents and early childhood educators. The children’s exposure to a high quality of early childhood education improves their physical and cognitive outcomes (Donoghue, 2017). Barnett and Fredei (2010) suggest, based on their research, the issues that the United States education system is faced with today can be alleviated with universal, effective early childhood programs. They further state that, sadly, most early childhood programs available to children do not fall into the high-quality-program category. They are mediocre at best. High-quality early
childhood programs are needed to create secure and caring environments for children. They can provide stimulating learning opportunities and experiences that prepare children for the later school years. Multiple researches in the past four decades have confirmed the direct correlation between high-quality early childhood programs and children’s future success, which in turn can prevent achievement gaps (O’Keefe, 2017). Perry School Study (Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev, & Yavits, 2010) and Abecedarian Project (Anderson, 2008) are the research studies most commonly referred to for the effects of quality early childhood education and students’ future outcome.

The former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan (2002), stated, “Of all the lessons in the past decade, the critical role of leadership is perhaps the most important one to take with us into the new century. Leadership is imperative if we are to improve the lives of children, their families and communities” (p. 6). While Annan was speaking of leadership more generally, effective leadership at the institutional level is essential to the success of education and the care of children. There is a need for skilled and committed leaders, to be able to create an environment that supports high-quality learning. Research support the idea that leadership is the second biggest influence on learning and student outcome after teaching, both in K-12 and early childhood education (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins 2006; Mitgang, 2012). Whitebook (2010) believes the status quo in early childhood education needs to be transformed to guarantee access to high-quality early childhood education. Strong leadership in early childhood programs is essential, since these individuals are responsible for creating an environment that ensures ideal growth and development of children.
Global Movement in Early Childhood Education

Education is widely held to be crucial for the survival and success of individuals and countries in the emerging global environment. In recent years, early childhood care has gained international attention. In 2012, the United Nations facilitated an investigation through “Global Conversation” to identify what globally is viewed as the world’s need for the future (Trube, 2015). Perhaps not surprising, Trube (2015) states education placed at the top of the list. She further explains global recognition of the importance of education led many countries to assess the quality of their early childhood care. World organizations have been instrumental in creating initiatives to focus in sustaining quality programs for children and youth.

Ban Ki-moon (United Nations [UN], 2015) former United Nation Secretary-General, stated,

2015 is a year of historic opportunity. We are the first generation that can end poverty, and the last one that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. With the adoption of a new development agenda, Sustainable Development Goals and climate change agreement, we can set the world on course for a better future. (UN, 2015, para. 19)

Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by world leaders in 2015, to provide a shared blueprint in 17 different categories by 2030 to end poverty, promote prosperity and well-being for all, and protect the planet (UN, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals set a course to achieve these objectives for people everywhere regardless of the country’s status, “developed or developing.” Goal number four is to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning. Woodhead (2016) explains
section two of goal number four as a signal that early childhood development will be a priority focus for the 21st century. It has been agreed to ensure that all girls and boys should have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education by 2030.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stressed that strengthening early childhood development is key to achieving at least seven of the Sustainable Development Goals, on poverty, hunger, health, education, gender, water and sanitation, and inequality (Woodhead, 2016). In the United Nations’ Global Conversation, members agreed that early childhood development is a key to reach the desired Sustainable Development Goals. These recent advances stand in contrast to just a few years ago, when few countries had looked at early childhood development as a necessity and a way to give children a head start, particularly less-developed countries. Now, it is recognized that an estimated 250 million children worldwide will not reach their developmental potential, unless there is global intervention (Richter et al., 2017).

Black and colleagues (2017) tell us that there is scientific evidence that links early adversity and nurturing care with brain development and brain function throughout a person’s life. They see equitable early childhood development policies as being very important for meeting Sustainable Development Goals and a necessity for well-being and development of intellectual skills of children, which is a requirement to become healthy, productive adults (Black et al., 2017). With the adoption of SDGs, the members agreed that they need to target their investment and interventions to reach children at greatest risk of falling behind. Early childhood programs are considered to be a key component to achieve the goals over the next few years. Thus, world organizations have been
instrumental in creating initiatives to focus on sustaining quality programs for children and youth.

In the United States, the importance of early childhood education is increasingly being recognized at the federal and state levels—but at an uneven pace. Over the past five years, states have increased funding to pre-K programs by 47%, but this funding has been inconsistent. Across the states in 2016-2017, funding grew at a much slower pace than the previous four years (Diffey, Parker, & Atchison, 2017). Young children deserve high-quality early childhood programs (Minervino, 2014). It is important that these programs enrich their social, intellectual, and physical development and build a foundation for school success. Our future prosperity and security will be at risk if we fail to provide our children with a well-balanced foundation. The well-being of our next generation depends on our ability to foster the health and development of our young children (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013).

Children’s learning starts from birth regardless of the environment in which they are raised. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), 62% of women in the labor force have children under age 3. They have no option but to share the responsibility of raising their child with extended family members, nannies, child care centers, or centers for early childhood education. The care children receive in their early years will affect their future lives. Normally, the care for children is chosen based on family values and affordability. A White House report on the Economics of Early Childhood Investments in 2015 recognized concern over the child care cost as a burden on working parents’ budget (White House, 2015). The report further concluded that, for childcare to be considered affordable, it should not cost more than 10% of a family’s income. Regretfully, in lower-
income families, the cost of childcare is an average of 30% of the family income. Thus, with increasing numbers of women with young children in the labor market, the need for facilities to support quality care, and unaffordability of childcare, early childhood education is in desperate need of federal and state support.

Increasing research has been conducted about the importance of children’s development in their early years and how it impacts their level of success later in life (Rohacek et al., 2010). Donoghue (2017), as a pediatrician and member of council on the early childhood executive committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics, suggests not only that the care of children should be consistent, but also it is important that the children attend programs that are developmentally proper and emotionally supportive. The place where children are cared for should be a healthy environment. Donohue adds to this research, recommending that early childhood education is an investment with a high rate of return and not a cost to the community.

In recent years with growing interest both at national and state levels in early childhood education, access to early childhood education programs has improved. One such initiative is President Obama’s call for “Preschool for All” as part of his 2013 State of the Union address. Some states like Texas and Florida have increased access but are scoring low in quality, and very few states are like Oklahoma and Georgia, scoring high on both access and quality (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013). According to the Department of Education, the United States ranks 25th in public funding of early learning among developed countries. Figure 1 illustrates enrollment rates for four-year-olds in early learning. Whitebook, McLean, Austin, and Edwards (2018), in their Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018 report, stress the importance of funding and its effect on the early
childhood education system. They emphasize that adequate funding is needed to have well-qualified, supported, and compensated early childhood educators who make high-quality early childhood care possible.

Figure 1. United States ranking in public funding for early learning. Source: www.ed.gov/early-learning

In the United States, in recent years, student achievement and learning in K-12 have been closely linked to educational leadership (Gordon, 2013; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Seashore, Dretzke, & Wahlstorm, 2010). This theory also has been connected to early childhood leadership (Douglass, 2017; Rohacek et al., 2010). To ensure school readiness and help prepare children for successful participation in work and civic life, our nation has to commit to provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of early learning and development. Goffin and Washington (2007) believe access to
quality early childhood education is a critical strategy to ready children for elementary and a way to minimize the achievement gap.

Even though the need is well established, research repeatedly demonstrates that the majority of early childhood education programs remains at best of mediocre quality (Douglass, 2017; Goffin & Washington, 2007). In recent years, more community-based programs provide publicly funded preschool, which in turn has increased the need for well qualified early childhood educators. The one known research study of early childhood education professionals in leadership roles, conducted in California, suggests that many of the early childhood program directors may bring administrative, management, and communication skills but lack professional and educational grounding in early childhood education (Whitebook, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2010). According to Abel, Talan, and Newkirk (2017), 47% of center directors hold less than a bachelor’s degree. Mims, Scott-Little, Lower, Cassidy, and Hestenes (2008) concluded from their research that 231 early childhood directors and 540 early childhood teachers in North Carolina associated higher education levels with higher quality scores of their program. Research suggests that early childhood center directors’ level of formal education is a strong predictor of overall program quality (Ackerman & Sansanelli, 2010). This is cause for concern, because the majority of center directors assume their leadership positions without prior preservice management training or extensive training in evidence-based pedagogy (Bella & Bloom, 2003). As noted by Rodd (2013), leadership continues to be extremely important and essential for improving quality of service provided to young children and their families. Rodd further explains that the early childhood profession should be recognized as a credible profession with its unique expertise that is different
from other professions in the field of education but should be treated equally and respected.

To create fiscally sound early childhood programs with learning environments that nurture and challenge young children and with work environments that develop, support, and retain skilled teachers, program directors capable of strong leadership are essential (McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2014). Policymakers and practitioners commonly agree about the importance of strong leadership in early childhood education. Douglass (2017) recommends,

“We do not need to reinvent the wheel to fix the persistent challenges we face…. We can benefit from recent scientific advances in other fields and experiment with how best to apply those lessons to advance progress in our own field. By applying lessons on leadership and change from across our own and other discipline, we can learn how to support and nurture a strong, diverse, and resilient workforce to lead change, improvement, innovation in early childhood education.”

(p. 5)

**Background of the Problem**

This study was an investigation and synthesis of the need of the field of early childhood education for access to well-prepared and effective leaders. There is a need for standards of quality in their professional preparation to promote higher levels of education and reduce inequity and inconsistency, which presently is codified into the nation’s early care and education system and leadership requirements. This study was based on the premise that early childhood leadership practices have a direct effect on quality of care in early childhood development. Nettles and Herrington (2007) state that
the effect of competent leadership on children’s achievement and learning is only second
to classroom instruction. Quality early childhood education is being looked at as a key
mechanism to remedy the gap in student achievement and school readiness (Rohacek et
al., 2010).

Quality early childhood programs are needed to support school readiness through
eyearly language and literature growth and the development of early math skills, cognitive
skills, and social-emotional readiness to close the achievement gap in elementary and
secondary schools (Heckman, 2011). Unfortunately, the lack of quality programs is an
issue (Stebbins & Knitzer, 2007). Regretfully, centers for early care and education are
often of poor quality, in short supply, and prohibitively expensive for poor or even
middle-class children (Whitebook, McLean, & Austin, 2016). Qualified teachers and
leaders are instrumental in the operation of high-quality centers for early learning.
Whitebook et al. (2016) state,

Our system of preparing, supporting, and rewarding early educators in the United
States remains largely ineffective, inefficient, and inequitable, posing multiple
obstacles to teachers’ efforts to nurture children’s optimal development and
learning, as well as risks to their own well-being. (Executive Summary, para. 2)

There is a need to establish policies and pathways that ensure teachers are well prepared
and that program leaders can effectively support them (Whitebook et al., 2018).
Whitebook et al. (2018) state, only the District of Columbia and New Jersey require
center directors to have bachelor’s degrees, and no state requires lead teachers in center-
based early childhood programs to hold a bachelor’s degree. However, increasing degree
expectations will not occur until work conditions, particularly the wages earned by early
childhood educators and directors, are improved. For instance, Boyd (2013) found that the field of early childhood is dominated by women who are paid low wages and given no benefits. Whitebook, Phillips, and Howes (2014) reported that the average hourly pay of preschool teachers was $15.11, and childcare workers as $10.33 an hour, which is comparable to fast-food workers and not educated professionals with a bachelor’s degree.

In summary, quality early childhood education is dependent on qualified and well-trained teachers and leaders. But early childhood educators cannot be expected to better educate themselves unless pay scale and benefits are improved.

**Significance of the Study**

It was the goal of this study to contribute to the understanding of effective leadership in the field of early childhood education. The significance of this study is that it will identify the essential dispositions, knowledge, and skills needed for effective early childhood leadership, which may be used in design and implementation of leadership development programs for early childhood leaders.

More skilled leaders are instrumental in establishing quality care programs that guarantee higher learning for children (Leithwood et al., 2006; Mitgang, 2012). High-quality early childhood education plays an important role in the future achievement of children. High-quality early childhood learning benefits all young children, particularly children from low-income households with the greatest challenges to developing readiness to learn (Whitebook, 2010). This researcher has sought to study the important characteristics of effective early childhood education leaders and challenges they are facing in an effort to theorize essential characteristics needed to aid in understanding effective early childhood leaders.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify sets of characteristics that are essential for effective early childhood leadership and explore the challenges early childhood leaders encounter in an effort to become effective leaders. The researcher sought to interview individuals and collect experiences and knowledge of experts and those who understand the complex challenges in the field to address the professional development needs of early childhood educators. The field of early childhood education desperately needs a pathway and systemized set of competencies to prepare the field’s leadership.

Research Questions

This research investigated the characteristics of effective early childhood leaders. Multiple different terms are used to describe early childhood leadership positions. Early childhood leadership is often referred to as director or administrator, which includes the individual responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating a childcare, preschool, or kindergarten program. The role covers both leadership and management functions. The leadership functions relate to the broad plan of organization, clarifying and affirming values, setting goals, articulating a vision, and charting a course of action to achieve the vision. Their managerial functions relate to the actual orchestration of tasks and the setting up of a system to carry out the organization’s mission (Click & Karkos, 2013). It was the goal of this researcher to seek to answer the following questions.

1. What are the characteristics of an effective early childhood leader?
2. What challenges do early childhood leaders encounter in an effort to become effective leaders?
The qualitative approach was used for this study. Multiple traditions within the qualitative study were reviewed, such as case study, narrative, and grounded theory. While all these traditions could be used to explore the characteristics of effective early childhood leaders, it was the intent of this researcher to use constructivist grounded theory. There is limited research in this field, so a methodological approach was needed to understand and build a theory about the phenomenon being studied. Constructivist grounded theory appeared to be a methodology fitted for the research questions.

Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of the participants. Selection was based on participants’ expertise and their contribution to the field of early childhood education. Efforts were made to select individuals with different backgrounds and disciplines ranging from early childhood policy advocates, educators, researchers, and scholars.

**Summary**

It is recognized internationally that effective leadership in early childhood is vital to the success of quality early childhood care and education. Early childhood education environments need skilled leaders who have the energy and ability to influence others to take their early childhood centers forward (Nupponen, 2006). These leaders must have the knowledge needed to effectively lead early childhood centers by positively empowering and motivating their staff. They should be able to create productive, quality organizational climates to nurture the needs of the children and teachers alike. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) state that leadership is considered the second most important factor after teaching as an influence on learning, and the quality and practice of leadership are directly correlated in a consistent and demonstrable way to
improve student outcomes and education equity. The following chapter will provide a review of the literature that supports this study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Science Behind Early Childhood Development

Wise investment in the well-being of today’s children is needed to ensure a better future for any society. In recent years, there have been abundant research and advances in neuroscience and biology and our understanding of how we can help the healthy development of children. The public needs to understand the science of early childhood and how the brain develops in order to better support policies and programs that affect the lives of children. Child learning starts from birth, and a strong foundation is needed for them to live a healthy life. Children’s experiences of the world around them strongly affect how their brains grow. A safe environment free from neglect and chronic stress along with opportunities to play and explore are needed for children to grow and learn to their fullest potential (Chan, Lake, & Hansen, 2017).

A study done by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007) adopted research from neuroscience, developmental psychology, and economics of human capital to substantiate a set of core developmental concepts. Following are their findings:

- Child development is a foundation for community development and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society.
- Brains are built over time.
- The interactive influences of genes and experience literally shape the architecture of the developing brain, and the active ingredient is the “serve and return” nature
of children’s engagement in relationships with their parents and other caregivers in their family or community.

- Both brain architecture and developing abilities are built, from the bottom up, with simple circuits and skills providing the scaffolding for more advanced circuits and skills over time.

- Cognitive, emotional, and social capabilities are inextricably intertwined throughout the life course.

- Toxic stress in early childhood is associated with persistent effects on the nervous system and stress hormone systems that can damage developing brain architecture and lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.

- Creating the right conditions for early childhood development is likely to be more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age. (pp. 4-13)

Shonkoff (2004) argues that policies that value the science of early childhood development gain important opportunities to address main causes of many social and educational concerns that our nation is facing. If the science of development is fully understood, then it will be apparent that education reform must start much earlier. Learning starts from birth and continues to adulthood. Nationally, teachers’ professional standards start from kindergarten, but there is no evidence to indicate that our need for skilled teachers should start with kindergarten. A stronger foundation and trained teachers are needed much earlier than the first day of kindergarten (Shonkoff, 2004).
After a brief discussion of the science behind early childhood development, the following section will discuss the history of early childhood education, globally and nationally.

**History of Early Childhood Education and Care**

The major focus of this research is on leadership of early childhood development. However, to get a better understanding of the field of early childhood development, this section will examine the history and current trends of the field.

Literature on the history of early childhood education is limited. Kamerman (2006) claims that, in an attempt to research the history of early childhood education, she was faced with a shortage of national data, and it got worse when she looked for cross-national data. Early childhood education in 18th- and 19th-century Europe and United States was motivated by welfare reform. Early childhood programs were viewed as a passage from poverty to prosperity (Cahan, 1989). Cahan further explains that one of the earliest attempts to educate poor children started in England in 1698, as Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. The Industrial Revolution brought along the need for care of the children outside the home, as an alarming number of babies died when women started working in factories. That led to the start of infant schools in Great Britain. Some proponents felt that early education would be the best means of preventing crime and juvenile delinquency. Others hoped infant education might serve as a lever for social reform, a train of thought that persists to the present day. As Barnett (2008) states, well-designed preschool education programs produce long-term improvements in school success and reduce delinquency and crime in childhood and adulthood. This position is also supported by High/Scope Perry Preschool research, a scientific experiment that has
identified both the short- and long-term effects of high-quality preschool education programs for young children living in poverty (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006).

Models of infant schools in Great Britain were followed by similar schools in Scotland in 1816, in France in 1837, and in Italy in 1828 (Kamerman, 2006). American social reformers and educators followed the lead of the European infant school movement, using early education to teach “moral” habits to the children of the poor. Religion was incorporated into school programs by evangelical women. Infant school was short-lived. Interest in infant school in New York died down in 1832 when Public School Society was established. Similarly, the Boston Primary School Board rejected infant school incorporation to public education systems due to funding grounds (Cahan, 1989). Poor mothers had to make a choice to either leave their young children unattended and work or stay home and be destitute. There was also a debate about what was best for children. Some believed early schooling could hurt the children mentally. Because of that, upper-class support for the program dropped (Cahan, 1989). This caused the concern for children in poverty in the last quarter of 19th century. The end of 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of day nursery for children of poor families and nursery school for more affluent families. The idea of day nursery came from France, where care was provided for children of parents who worked (Rose, 1999). In America, as the concern for poor children rose, more people got involved in child-saving activities; the National Conference on Charities and Corrections included child welfare in its agenda. In four decades, the number of day nurseries rose from three to 700 (Cahan, 1989). Day nurseries were typically located in converted houses or unused
stores, usually with few activities and little outdoor recreation. These nurseries went as far as bathing the children and getting them clean clothes, and some even got involved helping mothers to search for employment (Cahan, 1989).

Cahan (1989) notes that early childhood received more attention in the 1920s and 1930s, as child psychology emerged along with a growing number of research studies on early childhood. But the fortune of early childhood did not last. The Great Depression not only caused a high rate of unemployment, but also caused a drop in charitable donations, which caused half of the day nurseries to close (Michel, 2011). With the outbreak of WWII, despite a labor shortage, the federal government was reluctant to recruit mothers of young children. It was thought that mothers staying home with their children were performing patriotic services (Michel, 2011). President Franklin Delano Roosevelt refused funds for the operating cost of the nurseries. That action took childcare into crisis.

In the early 1960s, a reform initiated by President Kennedy and continued by President Johnson became an important component in the war against poverty (Cahan, 1989). In early 1965, Project Head Start was born, motivated by both political gain and genuine concern about the effects of poverty on child development. The aim of Project Head Start was to help not only the “whole child” but also parents and community (Vinovskis, 2008). Head Start is considered one of the longest-lasting programs of the war on poverty. Annually about 900,000 mostly low-income children participate in the program (Gibbs, Ludwig, & Miller, 2011). Head Start was reauthorized in 2007 with bipartisan support (Beltran & Goldwasser, 2008). Following reauthorization, an experimental study, the National Head Start Impact Study, has created debate over the effectiveness of the program. Some analysts have concluded that the Head Start program
is in need of change, while others believe that reacting to the report negatively is premature, when we have ample evidence that early childhood programs generate long-term positive effects, especially for low-income children (Gibbs et al., 2011).

In the 1970s, finding affordable, good quality childcare was identified as the number one challenge facing American families (Cahan, 1989; Cohen, 1996; Roth, 1976). The Ninety Second Congress of the United States recognized expanding comprehensive child development programs as a mean to provide every child a fair and full opportunity. Roth summarizes the Comprehensive Child Development Act:

1. Millions of American children are suffering unnecessary harms from the lack of adequate child development services, particularly during early childhood years;
2. Comprehensive child development programs, including a full range of health, education, and social services, are essential to the achievement of the full potential of America’s children and should be available as a matter of right to all children regardless of economic, social, and family background;
3. Children with special needs must receive full and special consideration in planning any child development programs, and, pending the availability of such programs for all children, priority must be given to preschool children with the greatest economic and social need;
4. While no mother may be forced to work outside the home as a condition for using child development programs, such programs are essential to allow many parents to undertake or continue full- or part-time employment, training, or education;
5. It is essential that the planning and operation of such programs be undertaken as a partnership of parents, community, and local government. (Roth, 1976, p. 1)
According to Zigler, Marsland, and Lord (2009), in 1970, the White House Conference on Children identified affordable, comprehensive, and quality childcare for families as a much-needed service. But despite the recommendation, President Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act, saying, “For the Federal Government to plunge headlong financially into supporting child development would commit the vast moral authority of the National Government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over against the family-centered approach” (Cohen, 1996, p. 32).

Despite 40 years of advancement in research and knowledge of the developmental needs of young children, the problems identified by the Congress of the United States in 1970 remain the same today. We are left with a number of federal and state-funded programs constituting system with no commonality or set standards (Zigler et al., 2009).

According to Goffin and Washington (2007), in the 1980s, public interest in early care and education was dominated by race, ethnicity, and class issues. In this era, early care was viewed as the responsibility of families.

The years following 2000 saw a shift in the public interest, where government is kept more and more responsible for the education of children zero to five. Currently, we are witnessing support for prekindergarten for four-year-olds, especially for at-risk children, and recognition of early care and education as means for reducing achievement gaps (Goffin & Washington, 2007). Some state-funded programs such as Tulsa’s pre-k program, New Jersey’s Abbott Preschool Program, and Illinois’ Preschool for All have been relatively successful. Despite the successes of some states, experts in the field along with educators still remain very concerned, as Zigler et al. (2009) noted, that the childcare crisis continues in the United States and remains a silent crisis. As Goffin and
Washington (2008) note, early childhood education and care are still in transition after more than a century of evolution.

**Early Childhood Education Labor Market**

One of the challenges early childhood education is faced with is availability of qualified leaders and teachers. This section will explore issues concerning this labor market.

According to the National Research Council (2015), in the late 1800s with the start of day nurseries, child “minders” were hired to care for the children with no education requirement. In the early 1900s, 28 nursery schools were established, and the teachers traveled to England to get training. The U.S. Office of Education published a pamphlet in 1943 titled “Nursery Schools Vital to the War Efforts.” It indicated that skilled teachers with specialized training in nursery school were essential to the war effort. From 1960s to 1980s, nursery schools were replaced by full-day childcare and Head Start programs. During this era, nursery school education was taught in private colleges and home economic departments at state colleges and universities. At the time, very few teacher’s colleges addressed early childhood as part of their curriculum (National Research Council, 2015). National attention was brought to the early childhood labor market by the National Child Care Staffing Study in 1989. This report recognized for the first time the poverty-level wages and high rates of turnover in the early childhood workforce. This was cause for concern not only for the work force, but also because of instability for children under their care (Whitebook et al., 2014).

The position of early childhood educators in the labor market has worsened since the 1980s. Fewer individuals are pursuing a degree in the field. The number of center-
based teachers and leaders with four-year college degrees has decreased from a high of 43% in 1983-85 to 30% in 2002-04. The percentage of people teaching with a high school degree or less has gone up from 25% to 30% (Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005). The primary reason for this shift of now having teachers with less education has been blamed on continuously low wages and benefits in the field even when the industry has been continuously growing. The second reason is that females with college degrees have been getting more acceptance in other fields. As a result, the shortage in the field has been filled with less educated women (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006).

While federal and state funding of early childhood education programs has expanded, funds have been devoted to expansion of early care systems while neglecting the quality of care or need for more educated teachers (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin, & Schulman, 2005). Bellm and Whitebook (2006) note, with the expansion came lower expectations; the explosion of the need put this kind of work in the category of routine and custodial jobs with a lower health and safety standard that did not meet the need of children. Barnett (2008) recommends educators in early childhood education should receive supervision and coaching and should be involved in a continuous improvement process for teaching and learning.

Ackerman (2006) notes, in the past 30 years, the number of women participating in the labor force who have young children has increased five times, which has increased the need for more early childhood centers. This growth is not reflected in the early childhood work force, mainly because the field remains unattractive. Because of the poor wages and limited or no benefits, the work force is looked at as unskilled. And more importantly, unfortunately, unlike K-12 teaching, the field of early childhood education
remains unrestricted. Due to the shortage of college-educated educators, increasing numbers of entry-level workers have entered the market, which in turn has reduced the urgency for more competitive salaries and benefits. A contributing factor to the surge of entry-level workers is the rise in the immigrant work force in the U.S. (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006).

For example, regulations set by the state of California and enforced by the Health and Human Services Agency require a center director to have either a BA degree in child development and one year of teaching experience in an early childhood setting or an associate degree in child development and two years of experience in the field, or four years of teaching experience with a high school diploma or GED. Because of the teaching experience requirements for director positions, it can be concluded that strong leadership in early childhood education requires skilled and highly trained teachers (California Department of Social Services, 2001-2016).

**Diversity and Equity in Early Childhood Education Workforce**

This section will examine the diversity in the early childhood education workforce and compare it with diversity in the K-12 workforce.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is mandated by Congress to collect, analyze, and report data related to education conditions in the United States. Their National Teacher and Principals Survey for 2015-16 provided a detailed picture of U.S. elementary and secondary schools and their staff (Taie & Goldring, 2017). The report showed that 78% of K-12 principals were non-Hispanic White, 11% were non-Hispanic Black or African American, 8% were Hispanic, and 3% were another race or ethnicity. The majority of the principals were female (54%). This is alarming when only
47.9% of enrolled students are White, but more than two third of schools are administered by White principals.

Castro, Germain, and Gooden (2018) also state that K-12 leadership does not reflect the diversity within the student population. They suggest leadership from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds has a positive impact on school academic outcomes, will help increase attendance for students of color, and will reduce referring the number of Black and Latino students to special education. Farinde, Allen, and Lewis (2016) further explain that, 60 years after Brown v. Board of Education, we are still facing a shortage of Black educators. To impact students’ educational outcome, the predominantly White, middle-class teaching force needs to be altered.

Early childhood education is also not immune to issues of diversity and inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, and class. But early childhood diversity challenges are in many ways different from K-12. Historically, childcare has been racialized. Black women first as slaves and then as an undervalued labor force have carried the burden of domestic work and the responsibility of taking care of children (Johnson-Staub, 2017). This systemic inequity has continued to the present day. Johnson-Staub (2017) states that the work force in early childhood programs gets paid very poorly with very little or no benefits. Whitebook et al. (2018) explain that the importance of development and learning of young children is scientifically proven, but sadly, the younger the child, the less skilled the care giver in centers for early learning and education. Johnson-Staub (2017) attests that 40% of today’s early childhood workplaces are made up of people of color who are employed in low-level position that requires less education where pay is less. Park, McHugh, Zong, and Batalova (2015) state that, as the number of immigrant
children has risen, so is the share of foreign-born early childhood educators. In recent years, immigrants account for almost one fifth of the total early childhood workforce. On the surface, the diversity that these immigrants bring to early childhood classes can be exciting and promising. But the sad reality is that the majority of immigrants in this field hold lower-paying positions with very few holding leadership positions as center directors or as prekindergarten teachers.

Whitebook et al. (2018) report that, in California, 63% of teacher aids and assistant teachers speak a language other than English, while only 47% of teachers speak a language other than English. Figure 2 demonstrates the composition of the early childhood workforce. People of color fill 40% of the positions in early childhood; by contrast, this number drops to 20% in the K-12 teaching workforce. This statistic gets more discouraging when it is broken down into job roles. Hispanic workers are underrepresented in teacher roles and overrepresented as teacher’s aides or assistant teachers.

Whitebook et al. (2014) bring our attention to the need for new policy approaches in three different segments of the early childhood education workforce. First is the economic insecurity of this workforce; second is the low value and requirement on education of this group; third is their irrational wage structure.

**Economic Insecurity**

To examine economic insecurity among early childhood educators, teacher turnover and dependence on public assistance will be explored. Bridges, Fuller, Huang, and Hamre (2011) explain that the teacher turnover rate in early childhood education is estimated to be one fifth to one third annually. In an attempt to research early childhood teacher retention and turnover, Wells (2015) sampled 81 newly hired Head Start teachers. Twelve of them quit their jobs before the initial phase of the research. By January, 36% of newly hired teachers had quit. She further explains how teacher turnover not only affects the operation of early childhood centers but also affects child outcomes and is connected to program quality and children’s math and language learning. There are multiple factors contributing to the high turnover rate, such as wages and benefits, low job satisfaction, alternative employment opportunity, and education and training (Totenhagen et al., 2015).

According to Whitebook et al. (2018), research using data from American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey, and Program Administrative Data, 53% of childcare workers in comparison to 21% of the general U.S. workforce were using one or more public support programs in 2016. The public assistance commonly used was Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, and the Children’s Health Insurance Programs. This statistic is
slightly better for preschool teachers at 43% but still much higher than the national average.

**Education Requirement**

Boyd (2013) explains the solution to improving the quality of early childhood programs is in professionalizing the workforce. That will be possible with proper professional development training, higher education, and enhanced skills. Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, and Knoche (2009) also believe education level, skills, and knowledge of early childhood educators are directly correlated to children’s learning and preparedness for entering to school, but resources for professional development for early childhood educators are limited.

There is no set early childhood educator and leadership qualification standards within the 50 states and District of Columbia. These requirements not only vary widely from state to state, but also, interestingly, they even are not consistent within states. (Whitebook et al., 2018). The Institute of Medicine and National Research Council report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (2015), recommends strengthening competency-based qualifications for all early childhood educators. The organizations suggest a minimum requirement of a bachelor’s degree. But Whitebook et al. report a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education has the lowest lifetime earnings projection compared to all college majors. They further state,

In contrast to many other developed countries, U.S. society has yet to fully recognize ECE as an educational endeavor or to embrace it as a public good, as
with K-12 education, and thus, our nation falls short on expectations and supports for early educators. (p. 9)

Irrational Wage Structure

Low wages and no benefits affect early childhood educators in general, but it is more apparent in employment of people of color. Whitebook et al. (2018) report that 75% of the workforce in early childhood education nationally makes less than $15 an hour, but this reality hits African Americans the hardest, because the chances of them working as assistant teachers are a lot higher, and the sad reality of the racial inequities that exist in U.S. culture makes early childhood education no exception. Nationally, 84% of African Americans make less than $15. These data snapshots show a slightly different picture for California, where 61% of Whites make more than $15, in contrast to 42% of African Americans and 41% of Hispanics. Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, and Amsden (2009) sampled 846 early childhood educators in a mid-Atlantic state and found that, despite the fact the majority had some college credits or a college degree, sadly they earned between $10,513 and $25,785 annually and did not have any benefits.

The fact that some states do not collect data routinely in this field makes the information at hand insufficient to make informed decisions at local and state levels. This fact contributes to identifying the many ways inequities exist and limits policymakers’ abilities to propose strategies for change and monitor progress (Whitebook et al., 2018).

Educational Leadership

After a brief review of diversity in early childhood education workforce and its comparison with K-12 workforce, this section will comment on the state of research in educational leadership.
Leadership has been defined in many different ways, and its meaning varies depending on the workplace we are studying. Leithwood and Louis (2012) describe leadership by reference to two core functions: providing direction and exercising influence. Whitebook et al. (2010) see leaders as agents of change—they are defined by what they do, not by their role. Whitebook and her colleagues believe leaders are developed, not born, and leadership can be learned. Leaders possess a combination of skills that can be identified, understood, learned, and practiced (Munoz, Boulton, Johnson, & Unal, 2015). According to Fullan (2004), “Nowhere is the focus on the human element more prevalent than in the recent recognition of the importance of strong and effective leadership” (p. 15). He further explains that effective leaders are the key to a large-scale, sustainable education reform. Kivunja (2015) sums it by noting, “There is a repeated pattern in consensus among leaders in educational change literature that leadership plays a role in the structural and cultural dynamics designed for school improvement. Leadership is seen as informational, interpersonal and decisional roles” (p. 1711). There are numerous leadership models that have been developed that work in non-school contexts, and there are some that are specifically developed for use in school settings. Table 1 summarizes leadership models most often used in education (Leithwood & Louis, 2012).
Table 1

Leadership Models Most Often Used in Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td>focuses on the school’s core business – teaching, learning, pupils’ progress and achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>is concerned with the commitment of colleagues, leading change, improving performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative leadership</td>
<td>stresses the importance of including colleagues, shared decision-making, and social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive leadership</td>
<td>recognizes that there are multiple leaders and that leadership activities are widely shared within and between organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As awareness of early childhood education as a public policy priority increases in the United States, there is a stronger need for capable leadership (Abel, Mauzy, Thornburg, & Heger, 2008). Barnett and Fredei (2010) demonstrate the importance of early learning, especially for low socioeconomic families, and how societies around the world are turning attention to the need for high-quality early childhood education. High-quality early childhood education can positively affect learning and development in young children, including gains in achievement, higher high school graduation rates, decreased behavior problems, and decreased crime and delinquency (Barnett & Fredei, 2010). Early childhood leaders must have the knowledge, training, and ability to form sustainable relationships within their environment to effectively lead to change. Distributive leadership and instructional leadership are the two most commonly referred to leadership methods in early childhood (Rodd, 2013). But due to complexity of this job, leaders are cautioned that only one leadership approach cannot be appropriate for such a
diverse sector. In the past few decades, multiple leadership theories have been introduced that focus on relationship. Relational leadership is one of the newer frameworks that speak to the quality of relationships that school leaders have with staff, learners, parents, and the community. Even though it is not one of the most commonly referred to leadership styles, due to the nature of early child education and the need for caring leaders, it will be explored in the following section.

**Relational Leadership**

Multiple leadership theories have emerged since the 70s that have focused on the importance of the relationship between leader and followers (Marcketti & Kozar, 2007). Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) believe leadership in today’s complex world depends on people developing trusting relationships while working toward a shared goal, and the importance of relationship should not be taken lightly. The transactional and transformational leadership theories are two examples of leadership theories that draw on the importance of relationship. In transformational leadership, both leaders and followers help each other to get to a higher ethical aspiration. Transactional leadership is based on an exchange of valued things. While the idea of relationship-oriented behavior is not a new concept, the formal studies of relational leadership as a framework are surprisingly new. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) developed a relational leadership framework and describe this leadership as a process that meaningfully creates an environment that engages leaders and participants and values what the participants have to offer (Marcketti & Kozar, 2007).

Komives et al. (2005) explain that the relational leadership framework is comprised of five components: relational leadership is *inclusive* of people, is *purposeful*
and creates a common purpose, empowers those involved, is ethical, and recognizes that the four components are accomplished by being process-oriented.

Nicholson and Kurucz (2017) believe there is a need to practice relational leadership in order to deal with more urgent and complex social, economic, and environmental issues. They describe the relational leader as one who encourages collaborative capacity; co-creates and co-produces social relationships, community and collective learning; cares for internal and external sustainability issues; enables empathetic response; and assumes the best in others. They further explain relational leadership can be utilized to establish a caring relationship at the social and individual level. A caring, informed approach to relational leadership might positively impact not only individual well-being but also organizational and societal flourishing.

Marcketti and Kozar (2007) share their view of relational leadership as a framework that emphasizes ethical and moral leadership that is driven by values and standards and leadership that is good, or moral in nature. The action of leaders and participants emanate from a set of values or guiding principles with respect to the personal and social ends desired. (p. 9)

In summary, relational leadership is based on trust and respect. It builds strong relationships with followers, along with mutual accommodation and learning. Accommodating the needs of subordinates is important to the relational leader. This leadership is appropriate for continuous improvement teamwork and allows for diversity and stability among followers. Notable disadvantages of relational leadership are that it is
time-consuming, and it relies on long-term relationships between leader and members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

**Evolution of K-12 Leadership Role**

Educational policymakers have seen a direct correlation between principal leadership and student achievement. The role of K-12 educational leaders has evolved in the past few decades. According to Hallinger (1992), American school principals played the role of administrative managers until the 1960s. Hampel (2015) describes their role as a hinge between the classroom and the district in that era. The 1960s-1970s brought changes to the profession. The principals had to accept the responsibility of managing federally sponsored, funded programs designed for special groups of students like education for disabled students or bilingual education. The 1970s made the life of the principal more complicated due to the events of the decade such as activism by the unions, protests by students, desegregation, and Supreme Court cases (Hampel, 2015). During this era, due to more federal funding, curriculum reform also took place. Principals’ role changed from maintaining the status quo to monitoring compliance with regulations to facilitating staff development. Their role changed from administrative managers to program managers (Hallinger, 1992).

Principals’ role evolved further in the 80s. This decade shifted the principal role from program or curriculum manager to instructional leader. Principals needed to be more than managers; leadership was needed. Policy makers were interested reforming the principal role into an instructionally oriented role. The new title and expectation required training. Hallinger (1992) states that principals often returned from these trainings with little enhancement of instructional leadership skills. In the 1990s, recognizing that the
education system was not properly preparing students, change was needed again. The concept of transformational leadership was introduced. This new role required working with staff in collaborative modes, extensively consulting with staff and various stakeholders. In recent years, distributed leadership has gained popularity (Leithwood, 1992). Distributed leadership acknowledges the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their formal leadership designation. Distributed leadership focuses on interaction between individuals and not their individual actions (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

Today’s principals are considered key to teacher and student success. They are asked to create a vision for students’ academic success, foster leadership in others, ensure a hospitable climate for education, improve instruction, and much more (Scott, 2018).

The issues facing early childhood leadership research and K-12 leadership research are very similar, but early childhood leadership research and implementation have some catching up to do. According to Waniganayake (2014), Kagan and Bowman were among the first to speak of the importance of developing leadership theories in early childhood education in the late 90s. Even though the subject has gained support since then, the level of theorizing still lags behind K-12 leadership by a couple of decades. To conclude the general overview of educational leadership and the changes K-12 leadership has gone through in the past few decades, the following section will discuss the importance, challenges, and needs of early childhood leaders and the Whole Leadership Framework.

**Leadership in Early Childhood Education**

It is difficult to imagine a focus for research with greater social justification than research about successful educational leadership. With the recent attention the field of
early childhood has been receiving nationwide, the field is enjoying fast growth and new discoveries. But unfortunately, research in early childhood leadership is limited to a relatively small number of researchers (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004). As Muijs et al. claim, the field not only is lacking research, but also research in this field is not supported by theories like leadership in a broader term. Whereas the above section outlined the definition of leadership in general and its importance to the field of education, it is helpful to look at what leadership looks like in early childhood development. In contrast to educational leadership, early childhood leadership is still in its infancy, and due to its complexity, early childhood education is not heavily regulated, does not fall under any uniform regulatory agency, and is highly fragmented (Ackerman, 2006). Kivunja (2015) argues that leadership is vital to the success of any educational organization, but it is more essential in early childhood education, because leadership in early childhood centers is responsible for planning, leading, organizing, while also being the visionary, a team stakeholder, a policy designer, and a pedagogy creator. Rodd (2013) believes that, in the field of early childhood education, leadership is not clearly defined, there is limited access to experienced role models and mentors, and there are limited opportunities for leadership preparation. As Bloom and Bella (2005) note, leadership in early childhood education is mostly focused on management issues and day-to-day business activities such as balancing the budget and staffing—but what needs to happen is for the leaders of early childhood to start exploring the position further into broader, more abstract leadership challenges. As leaders, they need to be able to envision goals, motivate staff, set values and promote unity of purpose in their program. According to Rodd (2013), typically leaders of early childhood services are teachers who are promoted
to leadership positions (having teaching experience before leadership position is required by some states), and other than standard teacher training, they have few skills for working with adults or the vision to lead their centers forward. As helpful as teacher training and experience can be, it does not offer adequate preparation for the complex leadership and administrative roles and responsibilities required for leading contemporary inclusive, integrated, multi-disciplinary, multi-agency early childhood services (Rodd, 2013).

Talan, Bloom, and Kelton (2014) suggest that early childhood leaders should be goal-oriented and be able to develop a vision for the future with continuous program improvement in mind (Talan et al., 2014). According to Kangas, Venninen, and Ojala (2016), the key to a high-quality early childhood education is professional leaders who have had extensive education and training. They conclude a capable leader is instrumental to children’s short-term and long-term cognitive and social development.

In the 21st century, visionary and ethical leadership is proving to be a critical professional issue for early childhood educators around the world (Rodd, 2013). Leadership continues to be of paramount importance for improving quality service provision for young children and families and for early childhood educators to be recognized as credible professionals with unique expertise that is different from, yet equal to, other professions (Rodd, 2013). Goffin and Washington (2007) speak to the importance of the need for collective problem-solving and accepting shared responsibility in the field in order to create an agreeable answer to the question of what defines and sets the boundaries for the early care and education field.

A noticeable issue in the field is the lack of education and experience of the leaders in the field of early childhood education. Whitebook et al. (2010), in their
research on early childhood leadership, found that less than 25% of participants in their study with a college degree reported the degree was completed in early childhood education or child development, mostly due to lack of universities offering the degree.

One of the challenges of early childhood directors is to be able to hire qualified teachers and keep the same staff over a period of time, since the turnover of teachers in early childhood centers is extremely high (Ackerman, 2006). According to researchers at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2014), center directors’ ability to attract and retain effective teachers in their program, establish norms of ongoing quality improvement, and oversee other facets of program operations is directly related to their own level of formal education, experience, and specialized training in early childhood education. California preschool program guidelines state that it is the responsibility of the leader to set the organizational climate of the program. This climate begins with the leader’s attitudes, values, and competence. This, in turn, translates to recruitment of well-qualified staff and to providing them the necessary resources they will need to teach effectively (California Department of Education, 2015).

In early childhood education, effective leadership plays a very important role in building and maintaining a high-quality early learning environment. Sheridan et al. (2009) focus on the importance of knowledge, skills, and practices of early childhood educators in relation to how much young children are learning and how they are being prepared for elementary school. Bella and Bloom (2003) explain that, even though the importance of strong leadership in early childhood education is commonly agreed upon, the majority of center directors assume their leadership positions without prior preservice management training.
It is paramount to note, research increasingly suggests that directors’ level of formal education is a strong predictor of overall program quality (Ackerman & Sansanelli, 2010). Muijs et al. (2004) have similarly found leadership to be an important factor in the quality of early childhood education. They conclude that a strong leader will facilitate a language-rich environment, sensitive teachers, child-focused communication with the child’s family, higher levels of teacher education, and lower staff turnover. In early childhood organizations, strong leadership is particularly critical, because center directors are the gatekeepers to quality. Center directors have multiple responsibilities to create a climate that promotes growth and development of children as well as creating a system to ensure the quality of education.

Bloom, Jackson, Talan, and Kelton (2013) explain, “Ensuring higher quality at the programmatic and systems level in early education reform necessitates visionary and skilled leadership” (p. 16). An early childhood leader could be facing the leadership of a for-profit or nonprofit program, half-day or full-day services, independent, agency affiliated, faith based, or corporate sponsored. Regardless of the type of organization that is being administered, four trends affect the job of a leader in early childhood education: the emphasis on quality and accountability, federal and state legislation, heightened competition for qualified education into broader social service, and greater competition for financial resources (Bella & Bloom, 2003).

Increasing complexity of the external environment has elevated the need for strong leadership in the director’s role. Figure 3 is an example of a stakeholder map for a typical early childhood leader. A high-quality early childhood program is directly linked to the action of the director. There is a growing demand for an early childhood leader.
who is interested in the art and science of leadership (Bloom, 2003). An effective center
director has to be an instructional leader and ensure a quality curriculum is implemented
and be a leader who can meet the needs of young children and their parents. This person
is someone who can play the role of a financial manager, making sure enough money is
generated and a proper marketing program is in place. This person needs to be able to
deal with vendors for educational supplies, accounting firms, attorneys, and banks and
regulatory agencies, just to name a few (Bloom, 2003).

Figure 3. Stakeholder map for a typical early childhood leader. Adapted from Bloom
(2003).
The role of the early childhood leader is complex and requires specialized training and expertise in addition to a solid grounding in child development knowledge and best practices in early childhood education (Ong & McLean, 2015). In their research, Muijs et al. (2004) point to the importance of leadership in early childhood education. They stress the need for more specific training and professional development and put emphasis on the complexity of the role. They believe the leadership position is complex because of its diversity and scale but also because of the strong advocacy and community roles required of leaders in early childhood. It is not a secret that the role of teachers for program quality is pivotal, but in order to make sure there is high quality at the programmatic and system levels, visionary and skilled leadership is necessary (Goffin & Washington, 2007).

The responsibilities of school principals and early childhood directors are very similar in many ways. They both have to oversee curriculum and child assessment, supervise and evaluate teachers, allocate human resources, and be engaged with parents. The early childhood director of a non-government-funded center has the additional responsibility of being in charge of marketing, making sure there is enough enrollment, and also dealing directly with the landlord, bank, and insurance. Yet directors’ qualifications greatly differ from the qualifications of principals. Almost all states require principals to have certification, have classroom experience, and have a master’s degree. But only five states (CA, CO, FL, NH, TX) require even one college course related to administration before assuming the position of director of a licensed early childhood center. Only five states (DE, IN, IL, PA, and Washington DC) require a director to have at least an associate degree. While having a degree is not a state requirement for a director position, due to the complexity of the position, most early childhood centers
prefer hiring directors with a degree. Unfortunately, in 2017 only 53% of center directors reported having a bachelor’s degree or higher, and that percentage is even less for family care providers (Abel et al., 2017). Table 2 is a comparison of the education level between early childhood leaders and elementary school principals.

Early childhood leadership is a multi-faceted and nuanced concept that is often clouded by inconsistent standards and policies across an array of program settings. In order to understand the complexity of the position as described by Bloom, this study will adopt the Whole Leadership Framework.

Table 2

2017 Status Report on Early Childhood Program Leadership in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early Childhood Center Directors (n=3,811)</th>
<th>Elementary School Principal (n=75,760)</th>
<th>Family Child Care Provider (n=2,855)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than AA</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher than Master's Degree</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Whole Leadership Framework**

Early childhood leadership is a multi-faceted concept with inconsistent standards and policies within many different types of program settings. The demands facing early childhood education today have prompted leading early childhood education scholars, advocates, and policy makers to call for new ways of thinking about the field, its mission,
and new models of leadership. The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2014) proposes a Whole Leadership Framework, based on the complexity and vast array of responsibilities of early childhood education leaders. Whole Leadership is a conceptual framework that follows three leadership domains: leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). In most leadership roles, regardless of the type of organization, there is usually overlap of functions and responsibilities. The Whole Leadership Framework is not an exception; there are some overlaps between each of the leadership domains. According to Goffin and Washington (2007), the field of early childhood education requires an understanding of leadership that moves beyond administration and management to focus on building a comprehensive, coherent, and high-quality early childhood education system.

Contrary to K-12 educational programs that are guided by standards set at both the national and state levels and implemented at the local level, early childhood education and learning are different. Early childhood centers could be a small operation or a center with a few hundred students; they could be privately run with for-profit or nonprofit organizations; they could be government-sponsored or part of a religious organization. Therefore, depending on the setup of the center, the Whole Leadership role could be assumed by one person or multiple people. Thus, distributive leadership is one approach to make this framework feasible for larger centers. Leithwood and Louis (2012) explain distributed leadership as the principals being the supportive source of leadership that determine and allocate leadership responsibilities based on the school goals. Distributed leadership promotes the decentralization of one leader. Leadership arrangements may shift as school goals change. Distributed leadership is one form of leadership that is used
in larger early childhood education centers. In this leadership style, there are multiple sources of leadership that have narrower sets of responsibilities.

Singh, Han, and Woodrow (2012) describe the concept of distributed leadership in early childhood education not much different from others. They explain the concept of distributed leadership in early childhood education as a system when few individuals within the center accept responsibility based on their capabilities. Implementing distributed leadership in early childhood settings requires attention to the fact that, in most centers, the workforce is limited, and individuals are expected to multi-task. Singh et al. note that increased responsibilities could burden teachers and not increase the power as expected. Spillane (2005) contends that what “matters for instructional improvement and student achievement is not what leadership is distributed, but how it is distributed” (p. 149). Distributed leadership has become popular in early childhood education because it encourages and allows individuals from formal and informal roles to contribute (Rodd, 2013). As attractive as the concept may be, attention needs to be paid to implementation. Distributed leadership is easily confused with shared leadership, where tasks are delegated. Distributed leadership is formed from collective responsibility, where individuals choose to act to meet the needs of the situation (Rodd, 2013).

Abel, Talan, and Masterson (2017) believe that all early childhood leaders should have competency in leadership essentials and at least basic knowledge and skills in both the pedagogical and administrative domains. This will create a balanced leadership perspective. Bloom and Abel (2015) suggest, depending on the early childhood setting, leadership may be distributed to multiple individuals. In smaller centers, the center owner usually shares part of the leadership responsibilities. In larger centers, leadership will be
distributed between the director, assistant directors, teachers with leadership responsibilities, parents, and the board of directors. In shared leadership, there would be collective capabilities and efficacy of various people in that early childhood center. Collective leadership efficacy can improve teaching practice and workplace climate (Bloom & Abel, 2015). Figure 4 demonstrates the relationship between the three domains.

Figure 4. Whole leadership framework (Talan, Materson, & Abel, 2017).
Leadership Essentials

Leadership essentials include the personal skills and attributes of leaders. Administrative and pedagogical leadership are built on essential leadership. Leadership essentials create a healthy environment that results in a greater degree of collaboration, efficacy, creativity, and ethical commitment for everyone involved, including the leader (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). Researchers believe there are certain personal attributes needed for this leader, such as self-efficacy, empathy, creativity, authority, humility, transparency, adaptability, and learning. An essential leader is one who has awareness of self and others. This leader has knowledge of the profession and has communication and team-building skills. Other skills needed by this leader are cultural competence, ethical conduct and morality, and ability to motivate people (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017).

Administrative Leadership

Administrative leadership is about setting goals, orchestrating work, and assigning employees to specific tasks (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). There are two separate aspects to this leadership: operational and strategic leadership. There are specific tasks expected from an operational leader such as hiring, evaluating, and supporting teaching staff, developing a budget that meets goals and needs of school, and making sure positive culture and climate of center is maintained (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). An operational leader is what commonly is known as a manager. As Leithwood and Louis (2012) explain, stability is the goal of what is often called management; improvement is the goal of leadership. Bloom (2003) explains the role of the operational
leader as the one who pays detailed attention to rules and policies, sets procedures, allocates resources, and seeks to maintain the status quo.

Abel, Talan and Masterson (2017) explain that strategic leaders guide the direction of early education centers and keep the future of the centers in mind. The strategic leader sets the mission and values, works with the staff to implement the vision, and seeks to achieve program goals. Strategic leaders not only work with the people within the organization, but also maintain strong communications with other services in the community that serve young children and their families. Bloom (2003) describes this function of leadership as being an “artist,” where the leader paints a picture and creates images of what his or her vision is for the organization. This leader focuses on relationships, motivates and inspires, is a risk taker, spends time on establishing a vision, and seeks new opportunities.

Of the three leadership domains, administrative leaders need to come in to their position with more tools. These leaders must have the ability to plan strategically. They must be experts in systems development and have financial, legal, and organizational climate skills. They should also be good at public relations, marketing, data interpretation, and building community partnerships. These individuals have to have an entrepreneurial focus and have the ability to advocate on behalf of young children and their families (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017).

**Pedagogical Leadership**

The responsibility of the pedagogical leader is to improve the science of teaching and improve and optimize child development and learning. This leader is faced with the challenge of ensuring fidelity to curricular philosophy, assessing children’s development
and learning, using data for evaluation, and optimizing learning (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). According to California state preschool program guidelines, choosing a curriculum philosophy is one of the most important parts of leadership. It not only has to be in line with the mission and vision, but also has to reflect developmentally appropriate philosophy and practices outlined by the California Department of Education (California Department of Education, 2015).

Pedagogical leadership is instructional leadership with some added responsibilities. Leithwood and Louis (2012) define instructional leadership as a leadership with a focus on the classroom. This implies that instruction will improve if teachers are supported with observation and feedback. This leadership method relies heavily on the leader’s knowledge of every grade level and ability to provide useful advice to the teachers. Pedagogical leadership is a broader term in early childhood education that embodies activities that occur in an early childhood setting that some people may not associate with instruction (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). For instance, an effective pedagogical leader will create a partnership with families, which is instrumental to children’s learning and growth (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017).

Heikka and Waniganayake (2011) explain that pedagogical leadership by itself does not work in early childhood education. Stamopoulos (2012) believes, in order to achieve reform for high-quality early childhood education and learning, leaders need to build pedagogical capacity. Tools needed for pedagogical leadership could be summarized as knowledge of evidence-based pedagogy, assessment methodology, and adult learning. Other tools needed are coaching and mentoring skills, the ability to apply
child development theory and research, and being able to have family focus (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017).

In this section, the role of leader in early childhood education was examined, and a framework based on Whole Leadership was discussed. The following sections will further discuss the need for more effective, educated center directors and will explore what can be done to facilitate the urgent need of training high-quality early childhood leaders.

**Leadership as a Major Component of Quality Early Childhood Programs**

Whitebook (2010) believes that, in order to guarantee that all young children have access to high-quality early childhood education with well prepared and supported teachers, the status quo in early childhood education needs to be transformed. She further stresses this transformation is possible with leaders as agents of change. Bloom et al. (2013) state, in early childhood centers, strong leadership is very important, because these leaders are responsible for creating an environment that ensures ideal growth and development of children. An effective leader is instrumental in implementing systems that promote and maintain quality. Early childhood leaders must be able to envision goals, affirm values, motivate staff, promote collaborative leadership, and make sure continuous improvement is part of an agreed-upon mission of the center. Dennis and O’Conner (2012) explain that there is a positive relationship between the quality of administrative practices and the quality of the children’s learning environment in center-based programs.
Quality Early Childhood Education Matters

In this section, there will be a detailed discussion and examples of how studies show that children benefit from attending early childhood programs, and the quality of the program makes a significant difference in the benefit they receive. Zigler et al. (2009) suggest that providing good quality care sensitive to children’s needs plays a large role in improving and strengthening families. For parents in need of early childhood programs while they are away at work, a quality childcare program can help them to be able to work with less stress and guilt. McLean, Austin, and Whitebook (2016) believe in the importance of child development in early years and the positive impact of high-quality early care and learning programs. Shonkoff (2006) draws from research done by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council titled Report From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development that “All aspects of adult human capital, from work force skills to cooperative and lawful behavior, build on capacities that are developed during childhood, beginning at birth” (p. 5). Early childhood programs are very important in developing the potential and raising the attainment of children, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Levitt (2009), chair of developmental neurogenetics at the Institute for the Developing Mind, states that children from low socioeconomic households experience far greater variations in quality of childcare compared to children from families that are more financially secure; therefore, increasing the first group’s access to high-quality care is clearly needed. Muijs et al. (2004) highlight that early childhood programs have been found to have both short-term and long-term benefits, such as higher academic achievement, lower
levels of grade retention, higher graduation rates, and lower levels of delinquency later in life.

Barnett and Fredei (2010) as co-directors of the National Institute for Early Education Research conducted a meta-analysis research and concluded that children who had attended higher quality early childhood centers had better academic outcomes, more positive student–teacher relationships, better behavior, and better social skills. The same study showed a key element of quality early childhood provision being identified as leadership among other factors such as creating a language-rich environment, sensitive teachers, child-focused communication with the child’s home, higher levels of teacher/career education, smaller child/adult ratios, and lower staff turnover (Barnett & Fredei, 2010).

One of the best-known studies on the effect of high-quality early childhood education is the High/Scope Perry Preschool study. As explained by Belfield et al. (2006), the study was a scientific experiment and looked for the short-term and long-term effects of early childhood education for young children living in poverty. A group of 123 low-income African-American children who were believed to be at risk were identified. Almost half of the group ages three and four received high-quality education, and the other group did not. Both groups were followed for 40 years. Nores, Belfield, Barnett, and Schweinhart (2005) performed a cost-benefit analysis and concluded strong positive economic impacts from participation in the program and strong gains for the general public. Cost-benefit analysis included costs of crime and burden of welfare and such. Belfield et al. conclude that the experiment has provided enough evidence for future investment in educational provision at an early age for at-risk children. Barnett (2008)
covered multiple meta-analyses conducted over two decades; they concluded that early childhood education moves a child from the 30th to the 50th percentile for achievement tests. Teachers reported better behavior in classrooms as well as less involvement in delinquency and crime. There were fewer special education students in this group, and more of this group graduated from high school.

Barnett (2008) also has studied the effect of center-based early childhood education and has investigated its short-term and long-term effects on children’s learning and development. He concluded that the earlier start and longer duration of early childhood education produces a better result. This points to the benefit of policies to expand early childhood education access to children under four; priority should be going to disadvantaged children, where we would see the most benefit. He recommended development of broad early childhood education policy in the context of comprehensive public policies and programs to effectively support child development from birth to age five and beyond (Barnett 2008).

As was discussed previously, early childhood leadership practices have a direct effect on quality of care in early childhood development. Following is a brief discussion of common indicators of quality early childhood programs.

**Indicators of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs**

It is not easy to find a single definition of quality for early childhood programs, but there are certain elements of childcare that are recognized as being important to the well-being of children. Wechsler, Melnick, Maier, and Bishop (2016) have published a substantial body of research on building blocks of quality early childhood education.
Following is a summary of their findings on what is needed to ensure quality in an early childhood program.

- Early learning standards and curricula that address the whole child, are developmentally appropriate, and are effectively implemented.
- Assessments that consider children’s academic, social-emotional, and physical progress and contribute to instructional and programs planning.
- Well-prepared teachers who provide engaging interactions and classroom environments that support learning.
- Ongoing support for teachers, including coaching and mentoring.
- Support for English learners and students with special needs.
- Meaningful family engagement.
- Sufficient learning time.
- Small class sizes with low student-teacher ratios.
- Program assessments that measures structural quality and classroom interactions.
- A well-implemented state quality rating and improvement system. (p. 1)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children ([NAEYC], 2018) as a professional membership organization has established an accreditation system that sets professional standards for high-quality early childhood programs. The NAEYC sets of standards for accreditations are relationships; curriculum; teaching; assessment of child progress; health; staff competencies, preparation, and support; families; community relationships; physical environment; and leadership and management (NAEYC, 2018).
Role of Professional Development in Preparing Effective Leaders

Rodd (2013) sees early childhood leadership as paramount to providing quality early childhood centers. Her views are shared by Douglass (2017) as she explains the leadership development gap as a key reason for many early childhood education programs not reaching high-quality thresholds. Quality early childhood services are associated with experienced educators. It is evident that professional preparation makes a difference, with leaders who access specialized rather than generic training and other opportunities, enabling them to perform their roles and responsibilities more effectively (Wechsler et al., 2016). Hujala, Waniganayake, and Rodd (2013) see leadership as a prerequisite for quality program delivery.

It is known that higher quality early childhood education centers tend to employ leaders with more years of formal education and more experience in the field, but unfortunately most of the research on hand is heavily concentrated on the professional development of the teachers and not their supervisors (Douglass, 2017; Whitebook, Kipnis, Sakai & Austin, 2012). Douglass states, “Professional development books, resources, and systems often neglect completely or give little attention to leadership” (p. 47).

A study by Bloom and Bella (2005) of 182 students who completed leadership training in early childhood administration demonstrated that those who completed leadership training had a sense of empowerment and transformed the way they viewed their role as leaders within their early childhood organizations. The administrators stated the leadership training improved their knowledge, helped them become more reflective in their leadership style, and helped with communication and group facilitation skills. A
similar study was done by Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, and Sakai (2011). They conducted an interview study with 98 directors of publicly funded preschools in New Jersey. New Jersey does not require a bachelor’s degree for directors of early childhood centers, but head teachers are required to have a bachelor’s degree. Directors are required to attend a directors’ academy consisting of 45 hours of training in childcare center administration, management, and leadership. The directors were asked for their preferred method of professional development. They preferred tailoring the professional development to be more in line with their experience levels. They suggested a second directors’ academy and more advance courses. They also saw the need for continuing refresher courses.

Ackerman (2008) argues that center directors’ ability to attract and retain effective teachers in their programs, establish norms of ongoing quality improvement, and oversee other facets of program operations is directly related to their own level of formal education, experience, and specialized training in both early childhood education and program administration. Ackerman states that directors with higher levels of education and specialized training in program administration are more likely to support the professional development of their teaching staff, secure and maintain program funding, and achieve center accreditation.

Rodd (2013), in her book *Leadership in Early Childhood*, states that research confirms that, when early childhood leaders are appropriately prepared and skilled, they will be more equipped to support children and be assets to parents, and they will be able to provide better quality care.

There is a growing need for early childhood education leadership development, but the majority of early childhood education leadership literature and programs remain
focused on management and administration. Within this literature, the majority of the research is focused on developing site-based administrators. Sheridan et al. (2009) explain that, in recent years, accountability has grown, but resources for professional support have not kept pace with the need. Bloom and Bella (2005) note that, while there appears to be common agreement among practitioners and policymakers of the urgent need for strong early childhood leadership programs, only a handful of states have made leadership training a priority. In a survey of early childhood education leadership, Goffin (2013) reports, out of 55 self-reported early childhood education leadership development programs, only one program (University of Kentucky’s Educational Leadership Studies graduate program) described itself as a program designed for individuals aiming for leadership positions in organizations that serve young children.

Unfortunately, literature on professional development in early childhood leadership is very limited. Sheridan et al. (2009) are concerned with the fact that, even though there are different theories and practices being experimented in leadership development in early childhood, it is unfortunate that the discussions on early childhood development practices or lesson learned are not documented enough in publications. Researchers suggest that leaders attain higher degrees of self-efficacy with more professional development. It not only helps the leader to be more competent but also creates an environment that is more productive and positive for staff (Talan et al., 2014). Bloom and Bella (2005) believe that leadership starts in the mind, and it is important how the leaders think about themselves and believe in themselves and their professional interaction. They use their data from their research in 2003 to confirm that “heightened feeling of self-efficacy has been sustained, empowering leadership participants to assume
new challenges they might otherwise not have had the confidence to take on” (p. 33).

Epstein and Willhite (2015) define educator efficacy as the belief educators have in their ability to influence children’s learning. They believe efficacy includes educator confidence in instructional and management skills. They conducted a pilot study where an experienced educator mentored and shared knowledge with a teacher candidate for over 100 hours. The result was strong efficacy across instructional and management aspects.

Goffin and Means (2009) conducted a survey of early childhood education leadership preparation across the country and identified 86 leadership preparation programs. This was a seven-fold increase compared to 2004. Unfortunately, 75% of the 86 programs were focusing on training management skill of site-based administrators, and only the remainder devoted their program to preparing field-level early childhood education leaders, only five of which were degree-based (Goffin & Means, 2009).

McLean et al. (2016) argue that lower standards for early childhood educators compared with those teaching older children cause us to believe that early learning is less valuable and requires less skills to teach. This could be a contributing factor in lower levels of investment in early childhood education. Most states do not require a degree for early childhood leaders. In turn, early childhood professional development can take many other forms: formal education, coaching or consultative interaction, study groups provided by local governmental agencies, or specialized on-the-job training, which is probably the most common form. Sheridan et al. (2009) describe the specialized training as in-service training, which can include training specific to early childhood that takes place outside of a formal education system, such as in-service presentation, web-based
lectures, or conferences. Coaching and consultation in this field are more of a collaborative and voluntary partnership when the educators learn from each other (Sheridan et al., 2009).

Researchers at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2014) have explored the question of what is needed to be done to remedy this shortcoming and have concluded that, in order to build comprehensive early learning and development systems, states must address the need for cross-sector early childhood leadership development. States need to

- Support the use of the Childcare and Development Fund (CCDF) quality set-aside funds, Head Start and technical assistance funds, and preschool development grants for early childhood leadership training. With the studies showing every dollar spent in early childhood, there are multiple dollars saved in the future; policy makers should see the need.
- Encourage institutions of higher education to expand early childhood administration courses and degree programs. What is currently available does not meet the need.
- Create incentives for early childhood administrators to enhance their professional qualifications and attain a state or national administrator credential.
- Provide leadership training to meet the needs of early childhood leaders working in a mixed-delivery system.
- Ensure that organizational measures of program administration are included in system reform efforts such as quality rating and improvement systems.
• Provide cross-sector professional development opportunities for principals and directors to learn together, share resources, and align standards, teaching practices, and transition practices.

• Increase pay scale of professionals in early childhood to attract more educated and effective leaders to the field. (p. 4)

Historically, the studies and research that have been done on classroom quality and the qualifications of and expertise of childcare directors have concluded that better-educated leaders positively influence both short- and long-term learning of children. But there is limited study investigating and questioning early childhood directors’ leadership approach at work (Muijs et al., 2004). Unfortunately, a limited number of colleges offer programs that are focused on developing leaders who understand the broader context of the early childhood education system. In general, there is limited attention given to leadership teaching beyond managerial skills. This lack of attention might be the result of a lack of data available to constitute the growing population of the leaders in roles outside of direct early childhood education settings (Whitebook et al., 2012). Ackerman and Sansanelli (2010) concluded from their research that, based on the response provided by the early education leaders holding a BA or higher degree and those holding AA or lower, it may be beneficial for individuals to continue their formal education leading to a BA. In 2015, the National Academy of Medicine and the National Research Council, following a comprehensive review of the science on early childhood development, recommended requiring a BA degree with specialized knowledge for lead educators working with children from birth through age eight (McLean et al., 2016).
Sheridan et al. (2009) suggest that, as we gain more insight into the field, it will be beneficial to have more thoughtful discussions and focused research studies while we integrate best professional development practices into early childhood intervention studies. Sheridan et al. explain,

Critical research needs still exist to uncover process variables that promote change in practitioners’ knowledge, skills and dispositions that are indicative of effective practices. A research agenda in early childhood professional development is needed to unpack basic information on processes that promote the development skills and competencies necessary to provide high quality, evidence based early childhood experiences, and identify interactions that occur between form and process, and influence the outcomes of professional development efforts. (p. 396)

Whitebook et al. (2010) conclude from their study that the professional development needs of early childhood program leaders are very apparent. They suggest that administrators and policy makers should respond to these short-term and long-term needs by implementing the needed programs. Because some of these leaders come from outside of the field, professional development should not only include policy and general administration issues, but also early childhood content. Whitebook et al. recommend that it is also very important that institutions of higher education and professional development programs in early childhood pay close attention to our diverse culture and adjust their trainings to the needs of our linguistically and culturally diverse population. The literature in this section supported what is needed to train an effective leader in early
childhood and stressed the fact that better-educated leaders positively influence both short- and long-term learning of children.

Summary

The literature review presented above demonstrated that early childhood education has been found to be pivotal to developing the potential and increasing the accomplishment of children, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Early childhood education has been found to have both short-term and long-term benefits, such as higher academic achievement, lower levels of grade retention, higher graduation rates, and lower levels of delinquency later in life.

The quality of the experience in early childhood education is also important. The children who attend higher quality early childhood education centers showed better academic outcomes, more positive student-teacher relationships, better behavior, and better social skills. Furthermore, studies have found leadership experience and the education level of the leader to be key elements of the quality of early childhood education. Chapter 3 will provide the methodology used to identify characteristics of an effective early childhood leader and challenges early childhood leaders encounter.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Study

There is an abundance of research in K-12 educational leadership. But despite attentions on early childhood leadership in recent years, studies examining leadership style in early childhood education are limited (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Austin & Harkins, 2008; Lower & Cassidy, 2007). Goffin and Janke (2013) affirm that recent attention by federal and state policies on the field of early childhood education has been a driving force in the field’s progress and development. Morrison (2015) feels it is an exciting time to be associated with the field of early childhood education. He attributes his excitement and excitement of others in the field to the interest that has been created in universal readiness and universal preschool. He attests that there is a transformation being made within the field of early childhood education and the roles of early childhood professionals.

Early childhood leadership is a complex role with diverse responsibilities. This role requires conceptual and practical experiences. These experiences include but are not limited to child development, pedagogy, family and community relationship, managerial and administrative, fiscal planning, and legal issues (Rodd, 2013). There is a direct correlation between early childhood quality programs and strong leadership. That is why Bella and Bloom (2003) refer to early childhood leaders as “gatekeepers” of quality. According to Douglass (2017), these gatekeepers are not recognized by the public or even within the field. She argues that “professional development books, resources, and systems often neglect completely or give little attention to leadership” (p. 47). It is her belief that
there are more opportunities provided through professional development systems for individuals in the entry level in the field without giving fair attention to how to support experienced members of the field. It is the intent of this research to explore characteristics of an effective leader in early childhood development as guideposts that will benefit early childhood leaders.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the characteristics of an effective early childhood leader?

2. What challenges do early childhood leaders encounter in an effort to become effective leaders?

**Research Design**

The purpose of this section was to provide the rationale for using grounded theory conducted from a constructivist perspective. This research aimed to study a field with limited existing research. Therefore, grounded theory seemed an appropriate methodological approach to not only understand but also be able to build a theory about the phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The field of education is considered applied social science because it deals with everyday concerns of people’s lives. This is what this study is aiming to do.

Marshall and Rossman (2014) describe qualitative research as a broad approach to the study social phenomena. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) simply explain qualitative research as a method that uses words as data. Words are collected, analyzed, and then sorted in all different ways. Creswell (2014) describes qualitative research as a method that is designed to explore and understand how individuals or groups of people ascribe to a social or human problem. He further explains, “The process of research involves
emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants’ setting; analyzing
the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making
interpretations of the meaning of the data” (p. 246). Marshall and Rossman (2014) tell us
qualitative research comes in many different varieties, but they offer few general
distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research and commonalities of researchers
that conduct qualitative research. Qualitative research

- Takes place in the natural world,
- draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the
  study,
- focuses on context,
- is emergent and evolving rather than tightly prefigured, and
- is fundamentally interpretive.

Qualitative researcher tends to

- view social worlds as holistic and complex,
- engage in systemic reflection on who they are in the conduct of the research,
- remain sensitive to their own biographies/social identities and how these
  shape the study (i.e., they are reflective),
- rely on complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deduction and
  induction, and
- conduct their inquiries systematically. (p. 2)

**Grounded Theory**

According to Morse et al. (2009), the use of grounded theory has surpassed
ethnography, which will make it the most commonly used qualitative method. Grounded
theory is used to develop a theory, grounded in data that were gathered during research. This is different from other methodologies that test theories already developed by others. According to Creswell (2014), “Grounded theory is design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants” (p. 14). Grounded theory starts by collecting data through a variety of methods. From the collected data, key points are extracted with a series of codes, which are collected from the text. The codes are grouped into similar concepts so they will be workable. Categories are formed from the concepts, which are the basis for the creation of a theory. These theories are typically substantive rather than formal and grand theory, which is useful in everyday-world situations, such as a specific math program that proves effective with low-income children (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Charmaz (2008) implies that most qualitative research does not answer the “why” questions. In comparison, grounded theory method not only addresses the “why” but also the “what” and “how” questions.

Grounded theory was developed by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss and published in 1967 (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Since then, it has been influenced by varying schools of thought over the years. Charmaz (2008) has taken conceptual theory in grounded theory toward a constructivist mode of grounded theory.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory Method**

Charmaz (2008) has not redefined most of the characteristics of grounded theory but takes a more subjective and reflexive stance. This method brings people and their viewpoint into the foreground. In order to deliver the participants’ experience, the
researcher digs into their meanings and actions. Their stories are listened to, and their action are watched, hoping to grasp their meaning. Charmaz and Flick (2017) explain,

> Pragmatist sensibilities can open us to intuitive ways of knowing, in which we sense implicit meanings. But only through connecting and questioning can we bring these to the surface. This connecting and questioning is tangible when our lives blend with those of our participants. (p. 41)

Constructivist grounded theory is different from the other schools of thought within this methodology, according to Charmaz (2006): “We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practice” (p. 10).

Constructivist grounded theory draws on the analytical framework of Glaser and Strauss’ original methodology but honors the flexibility of researchers co-constructing theoretical explanations of phenomena with participants (Charmaz, 2014). For this researcher, flexibility was very important, since dynamic interaction with participants was essential to illuminate the characteristics and challenges of effective early childhood leaders. This can be accommodated using constructivist grounded theory. Constructive grounded theory allows the researcher’s paradigmatic orientation to be derived by reasoning from self-evident propositions to the research project and encourages use of reflexivity by the researcher during the research process (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory brings doubt into the process, and using the theory means fitting and designing methodological strategies that will explore the researcher’s discoveries along the way (Charmaz, 2017). This characteristic of constructivist grounded theory is seen by the researcher as complementary to the nature of this study. There is limited research in
early childhood leadership, and this population is not well understood. Grounded theory seems a fitted methodology to use to study this process. Overall, the philosophical cornerstone of constructivist grounded theory and the methodological processes described by Charmaz fit with the research questions, the goals of this research, and the personal views of the researcher.

**Setting**

There is a dire need for understanding the knowledge and behaviors required for early childhood leaders to empower teachers and facilitate operation of quality early childhood programs. Because this issue is not isolated to a region or state, the researcher extended her investigation outside of the state of California where she resides. Expanding this investigation to multiple states enhances our knowledge of activities, problems, strategies, and policies that are necessary to qualify professionals as leaders. In this study, the researcher focused on eight experts in the field of early childhood development. These individuals were from eastern, midwestern, and western states. The researcher sought individuals with expertise in advocating for young children and managing and supporting bipartisan policies for early childhood education success—individuals with experience in conducting research, training, and consultation for local and state initiatives on early childhood leadership; authors with multiple books and scholarly publications; an early childhood education college professor and dean of a college of education with a degree program offered in early childhood education and early childhood leadership training. Selection of these individuals was solely based on their knowledge, reputation, and contribution to the field of early childhood education and not their geographic location or gender.
Data Sources

The researcher initially used purposeful sampling, which used an assumption that the researcher was interested in discovering, understanding, and gaining insight on the phenomenon and consequently had to select individuals she could learn from the most (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In grounded theory, variation within the sample is crucial; there is a boundary between initial purposive sampling and theoretical sampling, as theories emerged (Heath, 2007). The researcher first set selection criteria for the individuals she was intending to interview. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explain that setting up the criteria is crucial, since it directly reflect the purpose of the study and aids the researcher in identifying information-rich cases. The researcher interviewed individuals with expertise in different disciplines within the field of early childhood education. The first two participants were selected based on their experience and background—one was active in advocating for new policies in early childhood, and the other was a scholar in the field. The participants were invited to join the study as data were coded and the research necessitated their expertise. A few of the participants were recommended by other participants due to their contributions to the field of early childhood education.

Document

Documents are a major form of data, and grounded theory commonly uses a variety of documents. In addition to the use of typical data such as interviews, other forms like letters, media publications, diaries, reports, catalogues, policy documents, and more can be used (Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2014). The researcher requested copies of the participants’ resumes and publications from their organizations and websites that
could further assist the study. The researcher used documents as they presented themselves and emerged from conducting interviews.

**Data Collection**

The participants were selected from different disciplines in the field. The area of their expertise ranged from dean of college of education, to researcher with concentration in early childhood leadership, to authors of books and scholarly articles on the subject, to policy advisor and professors in early childhood education. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described theoretical sampling as a form of purposeful sampling:

> Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. (p. 99)

Potential participants were contacted via email and invited to participate. Interviews were scheduled after an anonymity consent form was signed. The first interviews lasted on average 45 minutes. Some of the interviews were done in person and some via Zoom video conferencing. There was a need for a follow-up discussion with some participants. Some of the second interviews were scheduled via Zoom video conferencing, and some participants preferred to respond via email. Using video during the interview was deemed beneficial to make connections with participants in comparison to using audio only. The researcher did not observe a difference in quality of collecting data between the two methods of in-person interviews and video conferencing. Rev.com was used to transcribe the interviews. A copy of the interview transcription was provided to participants to check for accuracy. The researcher utilized data collected from
interviews, personal notes taken during and after the interviews, documents provided by
the participants, written responses, and emails from participants. The interviews were
recorded using electronic devices. The researcher will make every effort to safekeep the
data collected, by utilizing password-protected electronic devices, locked desk drawers,
and a shredder as the data become obsolete.

As the primary data collector and the individual analyzing the data, the researcher
started studying the phenomenon, assuming a primary stance and deriving meaning from
the data. As the theory was emerging from one interview, the researcher would choose
who to interview next based on his/her expertise in the field and the theory that was
emerging. The interviews were semi-structured, where there was flexibility in questions,
but the interview was directed by a list of questions or issues to be explored. This allowed
the researcher a flexibility to respond to the situations that arose and led to emerging
views of the participants and to new ideas on the phenomenon that was being studied
(Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Wimpenny and Gass (2000) state that the interview process in the grounded
theory process includes setting the tone, looking for information in depth, researcher’s
feeling and reflection, searching for narrative, and, finally, ending on a positive note. The
researcher wrote memos after each interview about what was encountered after each
interview, not only about her perceptions, but also about what she had learned from the
interview. This allowed the researcher to develop interests. That was followed by line-by-
line coding. At the conclusion of initial line-by-line coding of each interview, the
researcher reflected her thoughts in a second memo. As insights were developed from the
analysis, they were used to modify and redevelop future interview questions. The
researcher’s reflective stance helped her conduct her research, relate to her participants, and represent them in written form. The researcher analyzed her research experience in a way that brought her into the process and allowed her to assess how and to what extent the researcher’s interest, positions, and assumptions influenced her inquiry.

It is inevitable that, through the course of qualitative research, relationships will be built between the participants and the researcher and will be helpful in interviews and other forms of data collection. The researcher gathered the data from interviews and created an environment to encourage participants to respond openly and honestly. The researcher took every measure possible to protect the integrity of the participant by following professional ethics. The nature and purpose of the study were fully explained to the participants. The researcher discussed confidentiality and security of the data as well as implications of the study.

**Data Analysis**

In any qualitative analysis, the first step is to read materials from beginning to end. This allows the researcher to enter into the life of participants, listen to what they have to say, and feel their experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data analysis and constructing theory using grounded theory can be described best as an evolving process (Charmaz, 2014). Data analysis begins with utilizing analytical tools, where the researcher identifies key phrases or words in documents and experiments with their meaning. This process, commonly referred to as coding, is the pivotal first step in data analysis. In this process, the researcher can identify concepts and their properties. The researcher will move up on the levels of concepts. The higher level concepts are referred to as categories and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The process of learning and
understanding the data in grounded theory is a circular process. Grounded theory requires collection of data, coding, categorizing, and writing memos be repeated throughout the research process in order to produce the cyclical nature of grounded theory to ensure data are thoroughly analyzed (Pulla, 2016). The researcher used an Excel spreadsheet as a tool to compile and analyze data. It allowed the researcher to locate, code, and annotate her findings in primary data material, to weigh and evaluate their importance, and to explore relations between them.

**Provisions of Trustworthiness**

Marshall and Rossman (2014) speak to the importance of expressing the elements of effective design for trustworthiness in qualitative methodologies. They further explain in qualitative research the researcher is the instrument, and it is not enough for her to call herself reliable. They suggest, “Instead, we distinguish the traits that make us personally credible and ensure that our interpretations of the data are trustworthy” (p. 44). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) point out that it is important to conduct the research in an ethical manner to ensure trustworthiness.

The researcher established credibility of this study with the use of an audit trail. She constructed this trail by keeping a research journal on the process of conducting the research as it was being undertaken. She wrote her reflections in the form of memos multiple times after each interview and noted the questions that were coming up as she read the transcriptions. As problems arose through the research, she documented the decision processes with regard to the problems. Throughout the data collection, issues or ideas she encountered were documented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Audio recording was double checked against the
transcription. Member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of the qualitative findings. All participants were provided with the final report of their interview for accuracy checks. They were given an opportunity to comment.

Positionality

An effective leader is a key component in the growth and sustainability of any organization. Centers for early childhood education are not an exception to this rule. Increasing research confirms the pivotal role of leaders in high-quality centers of early learning (Bloom & Abel, 2015). There is a common belief among practitioners and policymakers about the importance of strong leadership in early childhood programs (Bloom & Bella, 2005). The leadership in early childhood education programs plays a valuable role in maintaining a high-quality education at centers. The higher quality centers tend to employ leaders with more years of experience and higher levels of formal education and effective leadership skills (Whitebook, Sakai, Kipnis, & Ryan, 2008).

The aspiration for this research originated from the personal experience of the researcher. Seventeen years ago, she and her spouse searched for a quality early childhood program for their two children. Lack of a program that met their quality expectation and needs made them enter a field that was totally new to them. They both loved children, and education was very important to them—and their city needed a quality early childhood program. In the winter of 2002, their new center for early childhood learning was established and has been taking care of children two years to five years old since then. Their biggest obstacle since the inception of the center has been to be able to fill the leadership position with someone who is visionary, inspirational for team members and passionate about teaching and children. Due to the limited education
requirement set by individual states for this position, most leaders in this position are 
experienced teachers who have either had the inspiration and interest in the position or 
the potential has been seen in them by others to assume the role. The experience of the 
researcher has been that these center directors are usually capable in managing day-to-
day activities of the program and are generally very efficient managers. They normally 
are very capable of getting through the day-to-day activities, making sure everything runs 
smoothly and delegating responsibility. But what is needed is a leader-someone who can 
lead in planning for the future, set goals, help develop teachers, and create a community 
of learners by providing a quality program.

Limitations

Marshall and Rossman (2014) suggest that there are limitations in all research 
projects. They further explain “framing the study in specific research and scholarly 
traditions places limits on the research” (p. 85). The researcher understands this reality 
and is not making any claim about conclusiveness of what she learned. The researcher 
believes saturation occurred and collected data until no new information was obtained. 
The data collection and analysis strategies made it possible to allow a theory to emerge, 
which can be a basis for future study. It is the belief of the researcher that, for future 
study, a larger number of participants and including individuals in leadership positions 
may allow generalizability of findings.

Summary

This chapter discussed the reasoning for using the methodology to conduct the 
research. This study sought for a theory to emerge from the phenomenon being studied. 
The research questions were the guide for choosing the methodology. Constructivist
grounded theory was explored as the best method to conduct this research. Data analysis and data collection on this section gave a description of participant selection and explained coding was used as the first step in data analysis. The researcher will present the findings of the study in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The goal of the researcher in this study was to identify not only the set of characteristics effective early childhood leaders need to possess, but also the challenges these leaders encounter. In this qualitative study, grounded theory approach was used, and the general orientation of the work was provided by the constructivist interpretive perspective. This approach was used because existing research is limited in the field, and it was the hope of the researcher to be able to help build a new theory around the phenomenon being studied. Constructivist grounded theory was also a preferred method because it presents a single, systematic, and unified method to analyze the data. Charmaz (2006) explains one of the major strengths of grounded theory is that it suggests tools for the researcher to help with analyzing processes. This makes it easier for researchers to follow certain steps to develop the concepts, create categories, and propose hypotheses and theory. The researcher appreciated the fact that this methodology offers a degree of flexibility not only in the selection of samples and the data analysis, but also for investigation of topics with limited research. In an effort to contribute to the understanding of effective leadership in early childhood, the researcher investigated the following questions.

1. What are the characteristics of an effective early childhood leader?

2. What challenges do early childhood leaders encounter in an effort to become effective leaders?
Theoretical Sampling and Analysis Process

There are many ups and downs and turns and twists in any researcher’s journey to collect data. And one is often faced with the question of what direction to take and how to proceed. Charmaz (2006) suggests that a researcher should retrace her steps or embark on a new path if she discovers categories and ideas are incomplete. She suggests going back and collecting more data on the properties of the category in question. This process is also associated with writing memos. The researcher utilized this technique periodically.

Memo Writing

Memo writing enables the researcher to put her thoughts about the data collection and the direction of data collection in an organized manner. Memo writing is an integral step between the time the researcher collects data and codes the data and the time she writes her draft of the analyzed data.

The researcher made at least two attempts at writing memos after each interview. The first memo was written immediately after the conclusion of the interview, while everything was still fresh and the researcher was able to put down her thoughts about the data. The second memo was written after the interview was transcribed and coded. On multiple occasions, the researcher was unclear and even misunderstood the participant about issues as she wrote the first memo. Upon reflecting on the second memo, issues became clearer after having the opportunity to read the transcription.

The researcher found that the sorting of memos helped in the generation of the theoretical outline for the study. She was able to sort through the memos and look for similarities and connections within the data. Writing memos was also extremely helpful in deciding who to interview next. Charmaz (2006) recognizes that writing memos should
be informal; it is for personal use and is to serve analytic purposes. She states, “Memo-writing frees you to explore your ideas about your categories. Treat memos as partial, preliminary, and provisional. They are imminently correctable. Just note where you are making conjectures. Then go back to the field to check your conjectures” (p. 84).

Following are excerpts from a few examples of the memos as the researcher reflected on gathering data. For the researcher, memos served as an intermediate step between data collection and writing draft papers. Writing memos offered the researcher an opportunity to step away from the coding process to document and think about the process itself and to determine which categories and themes were shaping the study. Writing memos made her more involved in the analysis of themes that were emerging and was an instrument to control her biases. It helped her to shape new ideas and encouraged her mind to wander freely through the data. Memo writing helped the researcher to put down initial thoughts in writing in an informal manner, and it was helpful as a guide for steps that followed.

Memo #2 participant P2N

This participant has a variety of experiences, knowledge, and interest. It is not that common to have someone in higher education who has actual field experience. This participant has worked as a director and is a believer that, to be a leader in early childhood education, the director needs to have in-classroom experiences. She thinks leaders in early childhood need to have a sense of collaboration. They need to understand the importance of working with children.

Memo #1 participant P3S

She stated parents are the ultimate decision makers. I should follow up with her and get her thoughts on educators’ obligation to the child, even if the parents are the
ultimate decision makers. Does the early childhood leader have the responsibility to go the extra mile to make sure parents are making informed decisions? Where does the role of leader end?

Memo #1 participant P4P

I set up the interview with this participant because her experience and job duties are totally different from the rest. She oversees a few centers for early childhood in a major city that serves, as she explained, children at or below poverty level…. But as I went on with the interview, problems and challenges seem universal.

Memo #2 participant P4P

It is amazing how every interview is so different in many ways and also so similar. It seems like everyone has their own theme. If I have to pick a theme for this one, it would be student success. This participant keeps referring to it, and it seems student success is her central goal. I think she sees herself as the responsible person to let that happen, and she sees the role of leadership and center director as the person to ensure student success.

Memo #1 participant P6D

This interview was really interesting. One can probably write a book based on what she had to say…. I think the content of this interview was heavier than some of the other ones. It had a good balance of academic and practical.

Memo #2 participant P6D

I like her definition of leadership: “leadership, broadly, is the ability to hold groups of people together around common ideas in order to often initiate changes that are necessary.”
Memo #1 participant P7L

My participants from western and mid-western states have explained the issue of workforce differently. This is a subject that can be interesting to investigate, but I am thinking it is not directly contributing to this study. So I am going to stop collecting more data on the subject and maybe leave it for future research.

Memo #1 participant P8S

This interview was so different from all the others. It was very challenging from the very first question. She defines leader differently from the others. She does not believe that we can expect the individuals managing an early childhood program or even a principal of K-12 to be a leader. She thinks just because they have been given more responsibilities, that does not make them a leader, and they cannot be expected to be a leader.

Initial Coding

During the phase of initial coding, the researcher remained open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities could be observed in the data. The researcher looked for actions in every part of the data, and preexisting categories were not applied. Charmaz (2006) suggests that initial coding should be done quickly, spontaneously, capturing actions or processes by using gerunds (words that are formed with verbs but act as nouns, a verb with added ing to the end) as codes. She is in agreement with Glaser that coding with gerunds helps the researcher to detect processes and stick to data. She recommends keeping the codes as similar to the data as possible and starting with the words and actions of the participant. Line-by-line coding was used in the first step of coding. The researcher followed the theoretical process of sampling. Each interview was coded
promptly after the interview was transcribed and before the next interview was scheduled. Through coding each line of data, the researcher was able to develop insights about who the next participant should be, what expertise she should possess, and what kind of data to collect next. The initial coding gave the researcher leads to follow. The field of research in early childhood education is relatively untouched and very close-knit. That was an advantage for the researcher, since everyone seems to know everyone. Three of the participants were suggested by the other participants based on their field of practice and as theories were beginning to emerge. The researcher aimed to generate a wide range of coding during this phase related to the occurrence that was being studied. The goal was to keep things as open as possible during the initial phase of coding. After the first interview was coded, the researcher moved on to focused coding, the second phase of coding. This decision was made based on the overwhelming number of codes that were produced after the initial coding of the first interview. The researcher felt that was necessary to avoid any biases and have an open mind and fresh perspective as she moved on to the next participant. This decision proved to be helpful for multiple reasons, primarily because, by the time the last interview was coded line by line, the number of initial codes was in excess of 1,000.

**Focused Coding**

Focused coding is the second stage of coding in grounded theory method. This is done by increased depth of focus. Charmaz (2006) defines focused coding as “using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through a large amount of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (p. 57). Before proceeding with
focused coding, the researcher reread the interviews and personal memos. The researcher was aiming to get a better sense of what the participant had said. Proceeding with this comparative analysis and conceptualization resulted in changes in some of the initial coding.

Grounded theory is based on the logic of coding being an inductive process. It is very possible that unexpected ideas emerge. For example, as the researcher finished coding the first two interviews, it was very apparent that collaborative leadership could be emerging. But subsequent interviews proved that not to be the case. Focused coding categorized the codes to much more manageable numbers. At the end of the process of focused coding, the codes were categorized to about 230 codes. At the conclusion of coding the eighth interview, the researcher had the notion that saturation had occurred, which by definition in grounded theory means collecting data until no new information is obtained. Charmaz (2006) explains, “Categories are saturated when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (p. 113). Having rich data depends on the detailed description and does not relate to how often something is stated. As the researcher decided that saturation had been achieved, she proceeded to axial coding, the third type of coding used in grounded theory.

**Axial Coding**

Axial coding is utilized to specify the dimensions and properties of a category. As Charmaz (2006) explains, “Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (p. 60). Axial coding is
a link between categories and subcategories and poses the question of how they are related. Axial coding provided the researcher a structure to apply. This process is recommended for the researchers who prefer to work with a preset structure and have a low tolerance for ambiguity.

**Theorizing**

The researcher proceeded to move beyond the coding stage of analysis to elevate main categories to concept. Charmaz (2006) details that, as data are categorized, the researcher will be analyzing both minor and major categories. A decision needs to be made as to which category is elevated to theoretical concept. To remain consistent with grounded theory logic, the researcher elevated the categories that related to the most dominating codes in the data. One of the key reasons constructivist grounded theory was adopted by the researcher was that this perspective believes that individuals, including the researcher, construct the realities in which they participate: “A constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Constructivist grounded theories take a reflexive stance toward the research process and products and consider “how” theories emerge from the realities of the participants. This in turn involves reflecting on the research participants and the researcher interpreting meanings and actions (Charmaz, 2006). So constructivism promotes the researcher’s reflexivity about her interpretations and the interpretations of her participants. The cyclical nature of grounded theory allows the researcher to go back to the starting point and reconsider new parts of theory that had initially been overlooked. Cyclically collecting and analyzing data and theorizing allows one to sharpen the
narrative more and more. This prompted the researcher to revisit the literature review and introduce description, summary, and critical evaluation of relational leadership, as it seemed necessary for better understanding of the theory that emerged.

The above section summarized the process and steps taken to analyze the data as the theory was emerging. The subsequent sections will provide information about the participants and findings; the detailed findings are based on the interviews of the eight participants and final categories.

Participants

In grounded theory, it is important to have variation within the sample. There is also a boundary between the initial purposeful sampling and theoretical sampling. It was the intent of the researcher to interview participants from different disciplines within the field of early childhood education. The first two interviews were scheduled based on the role of the participant in the field. The researcher purposely intended to speak first to a participant who has been active in policy and the second participant to be a scholar in the field of early childhood education. The subsequent interviews were scheduled as data were coded and necessitated the researcher to interview an individual with specific knowledge of the field. A few of the participants were recommended by other participants as valuable individuals with a certain knowledge concentration that was deemed beneficial to the study. The participants were all female from different geographic locations, including the eastern, midwestern, and western United States. Their invitation to participate was merely based on their area of specialty and not gender or location. Table 3 is a summary of their backgrounds and qualifications.
Table 3

**Summary of Participants' Background and Qualifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Positions held</th>
<th>Accomplishments</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Publications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1J</td>
<td>Executive director of nonprofit organization, policy director for EC in Lt. Governor’s office</td>
<td>Established office of EC for her state and secured a $45-million grant for early learning, managed bipartisan policy efforts in EC and K-12</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, and national policy briefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2N</td>
<td>Dean of college of education, professor, chair of ECE department, director of ECE program</td>
<td>Child Development permit advisory panel, Curriculum Alignment Project advisory council</td>
<td>Post Doctorate</td>
<td>Scholarly papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3S</td>
<td>Associate professor, coordinator of program in EC Special Education, faculty director of the university’s EC center.</td>
<td>Research in the role of social and emotional experiences in early learning</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Book and scholarly papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4P</td>
<td>President and CEO of a learning center, university faculty member</td>
<td>Administers serving 7,500 children annually, created collaborations with variety of constituencies</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Scholarly papers and a few children’s book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Positions held</th>
<th>Accomplishments</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Publications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P5J</td>
<td>Director of professional learning in EC leadership research institute, assistant professor</td>
<td>Conducts research and consults for local and state initiatives on EC</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Scholarly papers and training guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6D</td>
<td>Dean and professor</td>
<td>Fulbright Scholar, recipient of Woman of Outstanding Leadership in Arts</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Scholarly papers, book, and book chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7L</td>
<td>Leadership role in research and policy in a university</td>
<td>Instrumental in developing leadership programs in higher education</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Scholarly papers and research papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8S</td>
<td>Recognized leader and author in ECE, professor</td>
<td>Led significant change initiatives in system, policy, and practice. Led design of the NAEYC’s early childhood accreditation</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Scholarly papers, books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

The following section will explore the findings from the data that were collected.

The two research questions—what are the characteristics of an effective early childhood leader, and what challenges do early childhood leaders encounter in an effort to become effective leaders?—were used as a guide as codes were turning in to categories. As the data were categorized, certain codes had overriding significance, and there were some common themes and patterns in several codes. As the researcher proceeded with categorizing the data, the conceptual level of analysis raised from description to a more
theoretical level. The researcher then defined the properties of the categories and their relation to other categories. Figure 5 is the demonstration of defined categories and the relation between them.

Figure 5. Defined categories and their relations.
Need for Professional Development and Teachers’ Support

Student achievement is directly linked to teaching quality and school leadership. It is vital for educators to continuously expand their knowledge and skills. The data collected reaffirm the need for professional development. The following four categories—higher education needs to match knowledge to need, degree requirement, understanding and implementing pedagogy, and mixed feelings for the need for standards in early childhood education—demonstrate the findings from this research.

Higher Education Needs to Match Knowledge to Need

In the past few years, the importance of early childhood education and its effect on lifelong learning and the well-being of the nation’s economy have been acknowledged. Likewise, the state of early childhood teacher preparations has been examined. Participant P6D said that early childhood education leaders see the leadership as a position and attached to specific tasks. Often, the directors at centers have not had the opportunity to be in an educational environment where they are pushed to think about developing self-awareness, understanding things about themselves, and being able to move that into environments where one can work with others. There are many educators in the field who do not make enough money and work long hours and do not have access to higher education. There is a need to partner with higher education institutions, finding a way to make degrees affordable—possibly creating degree completion programs in the evenings or an online program that is affordable.

Participant P7L stated her organization has done research on higher education, and the results suggested that, through higher education, people who are going into early
childhood education programs are not being prepared to have leadership skills, to supervise other teachers, or to work with other adults and teach them.

Participant P8S said she is supportive of education and degrees. But, unless we revisit our degree programs so that the degrees match the competence that is needed for leadership roles, then a degree by itself in not going to be sufficient. A degree is a proxy of one’s knowledge, so unless the degrees that are offered match the knowledge that those as administrators need, a degree by itself is insufficient.

Degree Requirement

Education level is normally an indication of individuals’ proficiency in their field. The participants were posed to share their thoughts about the correlation between a college degree and effectiveness of a leader in early childhood development. The participants were equally divided about a degree being an indication of effectiveness. But they were all concerned about the level of knowledge and skill.

Participant P2N mentioned that the director needs to have a sufficient amount of academic training in early childhood, and it should be a set pattern, but one does not necessarily need a degree. Participant P4P was in agreement and thought you can be a good leader without a degree, and having experience and knowledge of the field is more important. Interestingly, she mentioned that her state has done research on the subject and, even though it was concluded that a degree is not correlated with the effectiveness of the early childhood leader, having a center leader with a degree, and not necessarily in early childhood, will help teacher retention.

Participant P3S saw the need for the leader to have a broad awareness and not just a bachelor’s degree. She thought the individual holding this position should understand
participants and child development and understand family dynamics, multiculturism, and other kinds of diversities.

Participant P7L stressed that early childhood education preparation is misguided, and requirements for early childhood directors are very inconsistent. She believed there should be a universal application. She further explained there are five different requirements in her state depending on the position one holds. Requirements are different for individuals in charge of Head Start, TK in public schools, private schools, and state preschools. Early childhood leaders’ level of education should be consistent, regardless of who is providing the funding.

Participant P8S, in response to the same question, used a study by Power to the Profession Task Force hosted by NAEYC and added that, if the administrator has the responsibility for pedagogical leadership, then he or she is obligated to have a four-year degree. She continued saying that, due to her profession, she certainly is supportive of education and degrees but, unless we revisit our degree programs to ensure they foster the competence that the role requires, a degree by itself is not going to be sufficient. In her view, a degree is a proxy for knowledge, skills, and overall competence—so the degree should match the knowledge that the administrators need.

Understanding and Implementing Pedagogy

This was a subject that all participants had great interest in talking about, regardless of their concentration or their role in the field of early childhood education.

Participant P7L believed understanding teachers’ capacity is important. That can be done by conducting periodic observations throughout the year. Get into the classroom and see what is happening, be aware of how teachers are working with children and
where they need help. This enables the leader to provide strategies to support her teaching team. Working with adults takes a skillset and requires training, being a good communicator, and helping teachers implement effective practices and best practices. She noted,

If you’re going to be a site leader, you have to understand not only child development theory, but you have to understand the pedagogical applications. We totally neglect this whole other area of helping people develop their expertise about the field in which they are working.

Participant P5J suggested that the pedagogical leader needs to be skilled in coaching and mentoring and being able to apply theory to practice. She emphasized that having the knowledge of early childhood is important, but a leader should be able to apply it to practice and coach other people on how to do it. She also believed pedagogical leaders also need to be skilled in adult learning, assessing programs, assessing classrooms, and assessing teacher and children interaction.

A leader needs to have a clear idea of the instruction, the pedagogy, or the framework for learning, participant P4P explained. The pedagogical leader should be able to create a learning environment, to nurture, coach, mentor, and support the staff. She stressed that her center directors wish they had more time to spend with teachers, children in the classroom, and instruction, but they are occupied with licensing regulations, as they feel it is more imperative to follow the law.

Participant P1J felt a pedagogical leader’s job is to make sure to create a climate of professional development, learning, and support to help teachers to do their best for kids. This leader should drive the curriculum, the instruction, the pedagogy, and the
professional development and create the environment in which teachers feel like they can flourish.

She believed that the focus should be on what knowledge, skills, and attributes are needed to be center director and have a system that appropriately evaluates those. In her follow-up interview, she expanded by saying that, in her state, they are looking to introduce a system of evaluation. They are looking at the possibilities of a sort of portfolio that is able to exhibit what skills directors have or tools to evaluate the nature of the classroom interactions and the quality of the interactions.

Participant P2N’s views of pedagogical leader were one who understands the need to have a sufficient amount of academic child development training, offer professional development, know curriculum and be able to select curriculum, conduct classroom observations, and offer teachers support on how to be more in line with what is appropriate for young children. This leader needs to know what is going on in the classroom. “Is that a quality classroom?—if not, how can I help make it one?” She thought sometimes teachers need time to come up with new ideas; the leader needs to be able to plant seeds with teachers and give them time.

Participant P3S felt the role of a leader is to be a catalyst for getting other people to generate ideas and act. Teachers need to be given space where they feel comfortable generating ideas, thinking creatively, and using each other as resources. She reflected, We start with children, and we pay attention to what they’re telling us, and what they’re bringing from home, what their interest are, what their passions are, what their enthusiasm are, and we work from that. We work with an emergent curriculum, so we work very carefully to tune in to that, but I do think that it’s
really important to have a reflective component where there are places to talk about what is happening and to think about curriculum together, and I think that teachers really need the support of administrators to make things happen in the ways that reflect their beliefs and their understandings of the children. You know, I don’t see it as a top-down kind of thing. I see it really as something, again, that is meaningful within the context that it’s happening.

Participant P8S stressed the importance of the leader understanding what’s involved in creating effective conditions for early childhood educators to do their work well, having a better connection with teachers, creating a climate that is really supportive for the work they do. A leader needs to be aware of programs in the community that make it possible for the staff to expand their knowledge, skills, and competence.

Participant P6D suggested introducing a social-emotional curriculum. By that, she said she does not mean everybody being nice and everybody kissing their kids. It should be coordinated and thoughtful. She thought the curriculum needs to be coherent, so one teacher doesn’t do it this way and another teacher another way. There is a lot a leader can do in having positive impact on learners. Through working with teachers, a positive culture needs to be set. The ethic of care needs to be promoted so that teachers respect their children and have cultural awareness and culturally responsive practices.

**Mixed Feelings for the Need for Standards in Early Childhood Education**

Early childhood leadership is multi-faceted and is known to have inconsistent standards and policies across an array of program settings. Participant P2N believed having standards would help, because the early childhood educators will be looked at as professionals and not babysitters. It can facilitate teachers being credentialed in early
childhood. But she thought directors of centers would be against it, because they are convinced that, by having a higher standard, they’re going to lose the workforce. Higher standards require higher pay.

Participant P3J would like to see set standards to create a more objective measurement of quality. She further explained that, currently, there are a few states with early childhood competencies, but they are all different, and it’s basically like measuring apples with oranges. She favored national professional standards.

Participant P7L said we lack a universal system and public funding. Programs are unequal to begin with, and that creates an extra burden on site leaders, teachers, and parents. In some programs, parents can afford the fees, but most can’t. Qualifications of site leaders should be consistent and not depend on where you work. She commented,

I think a lot of that is made more difficult by our system being completely inadequate, ineffective. It’s not working for parents very well. It’s not working for teachers very well, and it is not working for leaders who are trying to implement good programs.

**Essential Dispositions**

Education is not a profession that one can simply perform based on training. It was the goal of the researcher to investigate the necessary dispositions needed for the early childhood leader to be an effective leader. Professional and personal attributes, self-efficacy, and respecting culture, diversity, equity, and social justice were the categories that emerged from the data attesting to that need.
Professional and Personal Attributes and Self-Efficacy

Educators touch the lives of children, and younger children are more impressionable. There are certain personal attributes such as fairness and kindness that seem to be necessary in the field of early childhood education. Positive personal attributes provide the essence of quality in a learning environment, and high levels of professional competencies and self-efficacy are vital. The participants suggested a wide range of personal and professional attributes as a requirement for an early childhood leader to effectively lead a quality center for early learning.

Participant P6D noted to be able to be a good listener is an important attribute, along with being able to see problems from multiple perspectives and having enough knowledge to be able to present new ideas. She commented that leadership is more than administering. It takes leadership to be able to present new ideas for improvement. Often, that has to do with working with teachers and being able to introduce new ideas and encourage teachers to think more deeply about their work. She stressed that just managing a center doesn’t mean you’re leading a center.

Participant P5J listed the attributes as self-efficacy, empathy, creativity, being authentic, and being humble. She also believed it is really important for a leader to be transparent with staff and to be honest and open. She saw the importance of being flexible and the need to be continuously learning and striving to improve.

Participant P8S thought the traits that might work in one setting where there is an opportunity to exercise leadership may look different in another context. But, regardless of the setting, she liked to see a leader to be authentic, a learner, recognize that she does
not have all the answers and cannot do everything singlehandedly, have clarity of purpose, and orchestrate the process of change with others.

Participant P7L also rated being a good listener high on her list of attributes. She said listening to staff and understanding their experiences as well as those of the families is very crucial. She also liked to see the administrator being proactive and not always operating in the moment. Being confident is really important to set the tone for the staff so that you can navigate difficult situations and be a people person.

Participant P1J thought an early childhood leader needs to be brave, have confidence, have knowledge and be a knowledge builder, have humility, have strong social/emotional intelligence, be flexible, and be efficacious—and cannot be afraid.

Participant P3S listed useful attributes as interpersonal capacity to communicate, respectfully engage people in conversation, and know what you believe in. A leader as an advocate for children and families has to fight and demonstrate that she is willing to question things that don’t seem to fit with the philosophical orientation that the staff has been working with. The leader should have intuitive and professional knowledge to believe in and hold on to. This makes the leader feel effective. It is a hard work, because the leader is up against a lot of challenges.

Participant P4P thought that dedication to education and learning is one of the main characteristics of an effective leader followed by the ability to bring out the best in their staff, one who is not afraid to ask for help, and one who ensures that children succeed. A leader should represent the organization, be an ambassador, have a presence in the community, have a realistic expectation of him/herself, and feel he/she is making an impact.
Participant P2N also alluded to the fact that a good leader is a good listener. A leader should have a passion for children, know how to build relationships within the field, keep up on what is going on, and keep current.

**Respecting Culture, Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice**

Participant P2N believed one of the equity issues is funding in an appropriate way. She said that, regardless of where you live, you should get the same quality, and make it attractive for all kinds of teachers to want to work in the field of early childhood.

Participant P6D would advocate for having values of equity and social justice imbued in the curriculum and imbued in the actions of the teachers and the leader all day long. She explained,

The leader has to work with the teachers and the staff to identify the values that ground their work and to really get practice aligned to them. So if equity is a value, then we need to align our practice to that value. The leader has to have ways of talking about them. There may be professional development on implicit bias, or there may be professional development on activities that value students in the classroom. Again, there’s a big role to be played.

Participant P2N believed one needs to be sensitive to culture, but our background limits us, because we only know what we have been taught. One has to be very open to one’s own lack of knowledge. One has to embrace support from people so that one can really do a good job at cultural diversity. She explained there is no gene for race, there is no Native American gene, no Hispanic gene, and no Caucasian gene. There is a gene for straight hair and curly hair. It is important to listen and have the openness so people know they can talk to you.
Participant P3S suggested that leaders should always honor the family culture and try to figure out how to best accommodate it. She said every child has the ability to learn, and one needs to meet them where they are, creating an environment that supports diversities in learning. Resources are needed to be able to give children opportunities. There might be a need for someone who speaks their language, and there might be a need for someone who understand their emotional needs. The person who is leading needs to be able to address that in multiple ways of looking at how we best create an environment that is going to support our learners. It is very important to remember diversity extends to families. The leader has to have the self-awareness, has to have a sense of their own privileges and their own racial identity or cultural identity and how that translates to working in a multi-cultural setting.

Participant P4P felt it is important for a leader to have intentional connections celebrating family culture and family history. Ensuring culturally responsive practices should be part of everyday lives. It needs continuous learning and improvement. It requires an extensive focus where extensive self-assessment of the program is needed. It should include policies, practices for staff, and families. Having acceptance and understanding that people are bringing their culture, their family history, and their experiences is all part of relationship building.

Participant P5J valued for a leader to think critically, be objective, and help teaching staff to be aware of biases:

The leader’s approach should be to have an open mind and to continuously ask questions, and to be aware of diversity, knowledge and diversity, culture, knowledge and bias so that they’re bringing that perspective to the table when
they are making decisions and when they are ensuring culturally respected practices.

Participant P6D suggested for the leader to have social awareness, to build a culture that is positive and helps everyone working in that environment successfully. The leader needs to set the tone, whether it is rituals or events or the way staff and faculty get honored or maybe have rituals with the children. All these help to create a symbolic realm that creates the environment. Traditions and rituals matter in creating a culture. When schools have a positive culture, it has a positive impact on learners.

**Managerial Duties and Field Advocacy**

Management is a vital segment of the process of ensuring any organization works optimally. Early childhood leadership is multifaceted, and the leader wears many different hats in the day-to-day operation of a center for early education. Data analysis from the collection of the data resulted in five categories: leader as business manager, leader as financial manager, leader as a human resource manager, early childhood leadership is multifaceted, and the need for public awareness about the early childhood field.

**Leader as Business Manager**

Business manager is defined as an individual who oversees and supervises the organization’s activities and employees. The participants defined the characteristics needed for this role as it pertained to early childhood programs. Management terms were not used by the participants, but as the researcher moved on to categorizing the codes, multiple disciplines of managerial terms seemed appropriate to use.
Participant P2N talked about how the center director has a lot to worry about: There are so many things that a director has to worry about and be on top of. You have to worry about, “did I do my fire alarm every month?”—down to that level. “How do I get substitutes when my teachers are absent? What is going on in the classroom? Is that a quality classroom? And if it’s not quality, how can I make it that quality? How can I work with this teacher in a positive way?”

Following rules and regulation is an example that was mentioned by participant P3S in addition to creating mutual respect with staff, understanding and listening to staff, giving staff opportunities to step up, being able to delegate responsibilities, and getting staff input and not dominating all the thinking even though it can be time consuming.

Participant P4P also mentioned you have to have an understanding of rules, regulations, licensing, performance standards—they are all part of the job, and they are time consuming. Having communication skills, accepting responsibility for the group, having skills in coaching, having organizational skills, and focusing on quality of work life were on the list of participant P5J. The ability to hold people together, knowing how to bring teachers together, being able to present some new ideas for improvement, communicating with teachers, and setting a positive environment for the teachers were suggested by participant P6D. Being responsible for the program was mentioned by participant P7L as well as setting the tone for the program. She also added the importance of supervising staff effectively and understanding their capacity.

Participant P1JS liked to see the leader create a climate of professional development and support the staff to do their best. Participant P2N also saw the importance of professional development as a means to support teachers. She talked about
how, in order to achieve your center’s goals, one needs to be more than a boss. To be a leader, you have to gain your people’s trust, work with teachers positively, and understand that part of the strategy is to know who your teachers are and who you are working with. Participant P4P said an effective leader is one who is able to make a learning environment to nurture, coach, mentor, and support the staff and basically support their operation. Leaders need to be able to bring out the best in their staff, provide support, and have high, clear expectations. Give teachers recognition, a voice, provide them opportunity to have input, allow collaboration, and help them to be successful.

Participant P5J included the responsibilities of this manager are to be able to communicate and have team-building skills. The leader is responsible for a group of people, and motivating them and being their mentor are part of the job. She further explained that the leader should be able to focus on an organizational plan and the quality of work life. The leader should know how to create a good work environment for staff and think about the needs of adults in their care, and not only the children.

Participant P6D described the leader role:

A center director has to have various dispositions in order to be able to be highly successful in working with teachers and staff. Some of those dispositions are an ability to listen and ability to develop others’ social awareness, optimism, a capacity to be impacted, and a level of personal self-awareness. Those dispositions come together in the act of leadership, and it helps a leader hold people together in order to initiate change.
Participant P8S noted that it is the responsibility of a leader to know what inhibits the ability of staff to maximize children’s learning and be familiar with resources that are available to teachers in their community. She further explained,

What is going on with center directors is really better understanding what’s involved in creating effective conditions for early childhood educators to do their work well, connecting better with teaching staff, creating a climate that’s really supportive for the work that they do.

Participant P2N saw the ability of a leader to provide professional development very essential. She blamed lack of education in the field partially on the shortage of learning opportunities. Participant P4P believed a leader should be dedicated in providing professional development, ongoing coaching, mentoring, and training. Other responsibilities of this manager are building relationships, managing and operating efficiently, encouraging collaborative leadership, and creating a community. Participant P2N not only liked to see a leader be able to build relationship with parents and staff, but also be able to reach out to others in the field. This person needs to make connections in the state in order to know what the laws are and advocate for the field.

**Leader as Financial Manager**

The researcher defines financial manager as the individual responsible for the financial health of the organization. This is one of many hats the early childhood education leader wears, trying to manage the center with limited financial resources. P2N attested that the leader has to make the day work, bringing in money, managing the budget, and making sure there is enough money. The leader either needs to get funding from the state or get it from parents to raise standards, and they are both not an easy task.
The low pay for the workforce in the field is also part of the lack of financial resources, which in turn discourages higher education. Participant P6D explained that, in order to elevate the field, there is a need to provide opportunities to these women. For teachers to pursue a BA, leadership needs to provide opportunities for them. Low pay and the hours they work deny them access to education.

Participant P8S suggested that the leader needs to know the center’s financing system very deeply. The leader needs to understand the financial resources, eliminate waste, understand how to effectively use the resources, and prioritize in terms of financial resources and knowing the spending priorities.

**Leader as a Human Resource Manager**

The researcher defines human resource manager as an individual who is in charge of managing, creating, implementing, and supervising policies and regulations that are mandatory for every employee. Participant P1J believed the early childhood leader should be able to hire well. She continued saying one of the biggest challenges of this position is to be able to find qualified staff and being able to keep them over time. Participant P2N stated that it is tough leading people who are tired, underpaid, and just want to work with children and are not open to change. Participant P6D explained that there is lots of work, research, and advocacy being done around the early childhood workforce development and pay. The pay issue is partially policy issue. You can have a strong leader in the center who does not have a great deal of control over teachers’ pay.

Participant P7L explained that not much progress can be made to improve pay scale without public funding. Currently, she does not see a tangible way to have enough resources in the system so that parents can afford services and teachers and
administrators can receive the pay and compensation that they need to not only make a living, but also reflect the complexity of the work they’re doing.

**Early Childhood Leadership is Multifaceted**

It is commonly agreed that leadership in early childhood education is multifaceted and requires a range of skills, attributes, and strategies to make it successful. The following are the participants’ views of what is required of the leader in early childhood education.

Participant P3S stated that leadership in early childhood happens at a lot of levels and in a lot of different ways from being in a classroom and taking the lead as a teacher or working with adults in a hierarchical way or collaborative way. She followed by saying that leadership in early childhood depends on the environment. The size of the centers varies a lot. So leadership duties can be done by one or, her preferred method, collaboratively. Teachers need the support of administrators to make things happen in the ways that reflects their beliefs and their understanding of the children. Teachers need to have a voice and a place to bring out ideas to the curriculum. The role of the leader is to be a catalyst for getting other people to generate ideas and act. It is important to start with self-awareness and capacities and then focus on giving other people the opportunity to step up. Sometimes it is hard doing it that way and is more efficient for the leader to do it herself. Getting everyone involved is time consuming. Working collaboratively takes a lot more time than just having someone come in and sweep things together. But the leader should not do all the thinking.

Participant P5J explained that directors are in different developmental stages, and, depending on the stage they are in, they may perceive their role differently. For example,
a novice director tends to deal with things like putting out fires and is more stressed out, because she is overwhelmed with things. Leaders perceive their role differently depending on what stage of development they are in.

Participant P6D also thought leadership is about developing self-awareness and understanding things about yourself and being able to move that into environments where you can work with others. Leadership is not just a set of skills. If one looks at leadership as a position, then that will give one power that one will use or misuse. Leaders can be administrators, but they are hired to be visionary, to be leaders.

Participant P7L explained that site administrators, just by virtue of their role, regardless of if they are in charge of a single site or multiple sites, have the responsibility for a program. There are many ways that administrators can exercise leadership. They should not only be managers of the program and just take care of the business aspects of the business, like scheduling and managing budgets, but they should be able to provide pedagogical leadership to teachers.

P8S did not think it is fair to expect an early childhood leader to be an expert in child development, instructional pedagogy, business, financing, board relationships, community relationships, and much more.

**The Need for Public Awareness about the Early Childhood Field**

The field of early childhood education is not understood, and advocacy for the field is needed from different fronts. It is very important for the public to be aware of the importance of the quality of early childhood education. Advocacy for the field is essential to build public awareness on issues affecting families, children, and educators.
Participant P1J believed systematic changes need to happen. These changes need to happen at the state level and sometimes even at the local level. Leaders are instrumental for these changes, and they have to be willing to educate, engage, and bring other decision makers along so that those changes can be made. Changing public knowledge and awareness could play a big role.

Participant P7L felt it is important for the site leaders to learn to advocate and to exercise their leadership not just in their own centers, but also as a voice in the field. The role of administrator as an advocate is really critical to acknowledge inequalities in the system. Leaders should develop their sense of advocacy and use their voice in the larger system.

**Child, Parents, and School Relationship**

The intention of this study was to investigate desired characteristics for effective leadership in early childhood programs and the challenges that they are faced with, which ultimately lead to quality of care. After the second interview was conducted and coded, the researcher realized the participants were taking the direction of the interviews toward the role of the leader and her relationship with parents. When asked to define early childhood leadership, participant P2N said as part of her response that an effective leader needs to work with families, understand what happens at home, know how to talk to parents, and share the child’s experiences with parents. Even when the participant was asked about challenges of the leader, the response included parents. When the participant was asked about what can be done about the underpaid workforce, part of the response was to empower parents to advocate for the field. These views were shared by participant P1J, as she believed in providing opportunities for parents to feel efficacious, making
families understand their role and empowering parents to advocate for their children. The interview was taking a direction that was not expected but seemed very exciting. At the final phase of coding, interestingly, seven categories related to parents’ role and relationship between child, parents, and school emerged, focusing on the child’s wellbeing, building parents’ capacity/educating parents in early childhood development, putting parents at the center of the child’s learning ecosystem, empowering parents to advocate for children, building relationship with parents, building a bridge between home and school learning, and supporting the teacher/parent relationship.

**Building Parents’ Capacity/Educating Parents in Early Childhood Education**

Participant P1J shared her view of the leader’s job: to create an environment of values, policies, and procedures that put the family at the center of the learning ecosystem so that family members truly understand their role, and this relationship can promote their ability to advocate for and on behalf of their child and become an even stronger piece of the relationship for their child’s development and learning.

Participant P2N liked for parents to have an opportunity to work in the center, parents getting informed about the pedagogy used in the center, giving feedback to parents and letting them know about the goals set for their child, and continuously communicating with parents. She further explained that this is more than just parent engagement—asking parents to be engaged is not sufficient. She advised parent engagement will only be effective if it is paired with communication. A leader needs to be able to communicate what the school is doing and how the child is performing. That responsibility could be shared with the teacher, but it is still part of the leader’s duty to make sure it materializes.
Participant P3S liked for the leader to get to know the parents, be available to parents, be there to listen and meet their needs, create a climate for parents to voice their concerns, and respect them. She believed every parent is involved with his or her own child. Parents have a commitment and a responsibility to make sure they are doing their best for their child at that point in time. She further explained that the sense of empowering parents comes from respecting their way of being and finding their strengths and capitalizing on them. Sometimes, school imposes things on a child who is perfectly happy at home. That makes the child’s life difficult, and so there has to be a sense of hearing parents’ perspectives on why they do something the way they do.

Participant P4P liked the parents to be part of the learning community. Recognizing parents is key to students’ success—having parent meetings monthly, having intentional connections with parents, understanding parents’ integral role in child development as the first teacher, and inviting parents to impact the child’s success. Successful leaders create essential programs for parents and do not assume parents know everything and understand parents’ limitations. She further shared her own organization’s way of including parents as part of the child’s learning experiences:

We ask for lots of parents input in terms of the activities, so we do a lot around sharing family culture, so some of the activities are fun. They’re really meant for parents and children and families to have positive experiences. We also have parents’ education classes, so ones that focus on how children are developing, how parents can support that, and then that is all tied back into what’s happening in the classroom, so that any of the education classes we do with parents are connected to the kinds of things that their children are learning.
Participant P6D advised that, in early childhood, children’s parents are still very open to learning, whereas this is not the case when they get to middle school and high school. She continued,

Building strong partnerships, being able to bring parents together around, again, forms of development. Whether it’s being able to offer meetings around parenting, or current trends, or changes that are being made in the school, but really partnering, and also working with teachers to gain skills to work with parents. That is the leader responsibility.

She said it is important to bring the parents to school; they can learn by seeing what is going on at school. They can learn what they can do with their children at home. Help parents understand their child, understand school, and understand how school works with their child. All that needs to be part of the center experience. She viewed leaders, teachers, parents, staff, and children all as learners. The school environment offers many opportunities for all involved to grow in their work if the leadership allows for it.

Participant P7L believed helping parents understand developmental milestones and communicating the methodology used is important. Administrators need to develop multiple modes of communication to engage parents in discussions. Parent communication needs to be built into the individual class curriculum. She recommended,

Asking parents what do they observe? What are the seeing? What is happening at home?—is that matching what’s happening in the program? Where are the differences? Think, again, kind of having the supports and multiple strategies to do that is a really important job for a leader.
Putting Family at the Center of the Child’s Learning Ecosystem

Participant P1J attested that it is all about how we are engaging our families in the learning and development process. It is the leaders’ job to do everything in their power to create a climate of professional development, learning, and support that enables teachers to do their very best for children and then to create an environment of values, policies, and procedures that put the family at the center of the learning ecosystem so that the family members truly feel and understand their role and so that relationship can promote their ability to advocate for and on behalf of their child. This will make them become a stronger piece of the relationship for their child’s development and learning.

Participant P2N reflected that, when you take care of children, you have to work with families, because what is happening at home affects children in the center. The center director has to know how to talk to parents and has to know how to proceed when things are not going right and intervene. Invite the parents to be part of the program.

Participant P7L remarked that, when you welcome families into school, they bring with them a lot of great things that they are doing in the community and all the hard problems they are grappling with. She believed the leader needs to model that, because it has a positive impact on the learner. The leader should not hold parents at bay and give the impression that only the leader and the teacher know what is best for the child. She continued,

The role of parents is critical. It’s critical because they spend more time with their children than we do. We want their perspectives integrated into what we are doing, but we also want to have a positive impact on them. We want to be able to
welcome them into the environment and value their perspective. So it is critically important that we include parents.

**Empowering Parents to Advocate for Children**

Participant P1J believed it is important for families to understand their role. Empowering families to advocate for their children makes the family a stronger piece of the relationship for their child’s development and learning.

Participant P2N explained that a parent is the child’s first advocate. But it is important to distinguish between appropriate advocacy and interfering with teaching at school.

Participant P3S stated that it all starts with respecting parents, having a set of principles, and seeing families as the primary caregivers. Parents need to be respected and understood so that they can advocate for their child and have the power to make final decisions, even if their decision is against the leader’s or school’s recommendation.

**Building Relationship with Parents**

Participant P2N noted that an effective director is one who makes sure parents are continuously receiving feedback, that they know what happened to their child in a day, that they know what pedagogy is being used and what the goals are. She mentioned parents’ engagement is not enough. It is the leader’s responsibility to make sure parents know what the school is doing. Parents need to be engaged, but the leader needs to communicate.

P4P stated that the leader needs to understand the importance of the relationship with families, because “It isn’t just about the child and the teacher; it is really about families, parents, and caregivers.” There needs to be a strong understanding that one of
the keys to students’ success is their parents. So, center directors need to create relationships, not only building the relationship but also nurturing and supporting it. Parents should be part of the governance of the program. There needs to be a very intentional connection with parents and also understanding of parents’ limitations. Parents are the child’s first teacher, and it is very important for the center director to understand the integral role that parents play in their child’s growth and development.

Participant P5J thought administrators have an instrumental role in involving and engaging families. They are the face of the organization, and it is important for them to be building relationships with families. Referring to her research, she explained that there is a direct relationship between the administrator and the organizational climate, teaching practices, and family engagement.

Participant P7L believed it is important for the administrator to be involved in the transitions during the day when parents and families are coming or going. That will give the administrator an opportunity to see them, know them, see how they are interacting on site and with teachers. She thought the ability to observe and engage is really critical. She looked at parents’ engagement as a source to bring support to the site and a way to bring their experiences and beliefs into the program. The administrator needs to be accessible to parents and find ways to invite the families in. She encouraged soliciting input from parents, informing parents about what is going on, inviting parents in to the classroom, and being open to what they are bringing to the table. But she warned not to confuse inviting parents in with shifting the responsibility to the parents.
Building Bridge Between Home and School Learning

Participant P3S believed the center leader has to address issues around what children are struggling with in the classroom that might be directly linked to what is going on at home. There needs to be a bridge between home and school. Teachers usually try to make this connection, but sometimes a director can really be helpful in being another voice or someone who helps lead those kinds of discussions.

Participant P4P also emphasized the importance of the home-and-school connection. She said that she makes sure that her parents’ education classes are tied to what is going on in the classroom. She uses translators for multiple languages that are spoken in her centers—that is one way to support parents. When leaders are supporting the parents, they are supporting the kids. She said it is important to connect with parents, but it is also important to understand their limitations. In her centers, families live at or below poverty level, and the majority of them work or go to school or both. The director needs to make sure her staff members understand these limitations and don’t have high expectations of parent participation. There are lots of ways parents can participate without being present in the center. Parents can have a voice and input without being present. It would be very hard to have a quality early childhood program without parents’ input, interaction, or engagement. Early childhood is all about family, and for the child to be successful, all kinds of comprehensive services need to be provided for children and families that help the child grow and develop.

Participant P5J felt the administrator has an instrumental role in involving and engaging families. There needs to be a connection with families. By having family involvement, leaders raise the bar higher in a quality program. Children will be impacted,
and children’s outcomes will increase when families are practicing lessons, ideas, and concepts that are being taught in the classroom. She believed in an indirect connection between administrator and the child. Through the teaching staff, the administrator, as the pedagogical leader, needs to coach the teaching staff to come up with ways they can embed what they’re teaching in the classroom into activities that could happen in home life, so that parents can carry through the activities and the practices that are happening in the classroom.

Participant P6D said that an effective leader wants a school-community connection and home-school partnership. That’s particularly important in early childhood, because parents are very open to learning. This can be accomplished through building strong partnerships, offering meetings about parenting, educating them about the changes that are being made in the school, and working with teachers to gain the skills to work with parents.

Participant P7L also talked about the importance of parents mirroring what happens at school at home. She said opportunities need to be created so parents get engaged not just in what is going on at school but also be part of the child’s learning. She explained that the leader should use different ways to communicate and expose parents to what children are learning and why. Then parents can create opportunities at home to mirror what is being learned at school.

**Supporting the Teacher/Parent Relationship**

This was also a topic of interest among many of the participants. Many agreed that, to help facilitate parents to become part of the child’s learning experience, the leadership needs to help the teachers to build relationship with parents. Participant P4P
said leaders’ core belief should be that children’s success is not possible without parents, and she referred back to statistics to make her point. She mentioned that, to make that happen, parents need support from teachers. In her program, teachers make home visits twice a year and do parent-teacher conferences. But it is the duty of the leadership to make sure teachers are given the time to carry out those tasks.

Participant P5J also stressed the need for the leader to help teachers build relationships with parents. She feels it is instrumental for the leader to model and coach the teaching staff on how to engage and involve families. In early childhood programs, the teaching staff often have more direct and regular connections with families.

Participant P6D shared the view that the leader’s responsibility is to work with teachers to gain the skills to work with parents. Teachers need to learn to welcome parents in their classroom and let the parents learn by seeing. She stressed that having a couple of events a year and inviting parents is no longer considered partnership with parents. Having strong parent relationships means there’s an ongoing dialogue. If teachers resist that, the leader needs to intercede and be a part of making change in that teacher. The leader has to set the tone and model what it looks like to interact with parents. She expanded on the topic in her second interview by adding that, when teachers establish positive relationships with parents, there is a better chance for parents to support school activities. This in turn benefits children.

Participant P7L said it is important to know who your families are. Opportunities should be created to get them engaged and encourage them to participate. She suggested that a leader cannot do that for every family. The leader should encourage and provide
strategies to help teachers be empowered to create relationship with parents. She moved on by suggesting leaders should come up with strategies to build this into the curriculum.

Participant P8S liked to see teachers as a support for parents in effective parenting. She said,

I think that working with staff and making sure that the staff can join together in identifying, with parents, what are the things that they think would allow them to be more effective in their parenting, and then what is it that the program can do to support their wishes and needs.

**Focusing on the Child’s Well-Being**

Educators make an important contribution to the well-being and development of early childhood learners. Participant P6D spoke to the need to have a properly informed curriculum and the need to know how to respond in thoughtful and caring manners to the problems and issues young children bring into schools’ settings. She explained it is the leader’s role to put the children right at the center of their thinking all day and have a very positive impact. But it does not always happen—they get sidetracked with administrative duties.

Participant P3S expressed that the leader needs to pay attention to what children are saying, what they are bringing from home, what they are interested in, what their passions are, what they are enthusiastic about. She felt sometimes a leader has to fight as she advocates for children and has to demonstrate that she is willing to question some of the things that do not seem to fit with the philosophical orientation that staff has been working with. The children’s way of being, their thinking, and how they see the world need to be respected. She felt that leadership is responsible for the foundational years of
growth and learning. This responsibility requires a different kind of skillset and knowledge base for leadership.

Participant P2N defined early childhood leaders as people who work together in a collaborative sense to better the world of young children. She says that, rather than concentrating on the statistics (like “we save $7 in incarceration expenses for every $1 we spend on early childhood education”), we need to really focus on how to make life good for young children—and it will take care of itself. Quality interaction in early childhood matters. The child needs to be the focus. Leaders have to make sure the children are always the focus—not the early childhood center. Every child is unique in his or her own way.

Participant P4P mentioned that leadership is about making sure children are successful. Children are really brilliant and capable—we need to create a place where they can grow and explore and be successful. Keeping in mind that the center of your work is the child and the ultimate goal of the organization is to serve children and to help children thrive, we need to create a safe, nurturing, celebratory place for people from all cultures and backgrounds.

Participant P5J connected child outcomes indirectly to the administrators. Child outcomes will materialize when administrators promote the children’s well-being by creating an organizational climate and a quality of work for staff that is comfortable and also engages families.

**Leadership Challenges**

There are many books, studies, and articles with multiple opinions about how to be an effective leader in any organization. But few talk about the obstacles and the
challenges that a leader faces. Early childhood leadership is not an exception. The field recognizes that the role needs to change from managing a center for early childhood education to a more visionary leadership position. Analyzing the data, the researcher found that challenges that leaders in early childhood face emerged as a category.

**Challenges**

Participant P1J simply stated the biggest challenge is to keep the door open. The leader needs to have a business model that actually allows making enough money to stay in business. The second biggest challenge is finding qualified and effective staff, followed by the ability to keep the staff, since staff turnover is one of the biggest challenges of early childhood leadership.

Participant P2N shared the opinion with Participant P1J in naming economics as the biggest challenge. She said money is a huge challenge. She said, “I advocate for families and want them as part of the program, but they can be a challenge. Requirements change all the time and the director needs to worry and stay on top of them. A leader is challenged in many levels.” She added that all the daily and critical issues get in the way of your ability to be a good leader. They prevent the leader from leading people to be better teachers and have the center to be the quality center you want.

Participant P3S stated that the leader faces lots of challenges. One of the biggest one right now is, holding on to early childhood knowledge in the face of academic push-down that is trying to standardize early learning in ways that I think are really putting a lot of stress on teachers. In some ways, it is like you want to have policies to protect the field, but sometimes policies can hurt the field.
Understanding how to work within imposed policies and practices that the leader is required to uphold in some way is a big challenge. Traditional racism is a big challenge for early childhood leaders. Much of the early childhood workforce is diverse—diversity in teaching staff is more common. She believed people come to this field through different pathways, and being able to integrate all these kinds of people and working together can be very challenging. Creating a space where there can be authenticity in practice for everybody involved and still be a community that is cohesive and a kind continuity for the child is challenging. Leaders are really challenged to figure out a way to respect everyone and, at the same time, address some of the practices that there might be some conflict over. Diversity also extends to families, and working with diverse populations can be challenging. A leader has to be good at conflict resolution.

Participant P4P said the challenge is leading an educational institution and working closely with families. Many different comprehensive services need to be provided to families to ensure student success. She acknowledged that teacher turnover is a challenge, and this will remain an issue until the compensation issue can be addressed. Teacher turnover is hard on staff morale. A leader has to continue finding a spark or flame to keep going, and that can be challenging.

Participant P5J believed that, in her state and possibly other states, there is a huge staffing crisis. The pay is low, and there is lack of qualified staff. She mentioned that staff leave the field because they are underpaid compared to other fields and professions. They realize they can make more money in a less stressful field. Replacing a staff member who meets state requirements is a challenge. Requirements are changing, and even some existing teachers are required to go back to school to get the qualifications
they need. That costs money, and they simply do not make enough to afford it. The administrator has to hold the licensing requirement of the teacher-to-child ratio, as teachers leave and lots of times the administrator is pulled in to the classroom to meet the ratio—and that will keep her away from her administrative duties, which is a huge challenge.

Participant P6D attested that early childhood leaders have lots of challenges. They deal with low pay in the field and the workforce with limited education. They are challenged by different funding formulas from the public school systems in most states. Early childhood funding is not always equitable. They are challenged by visioning the future of early childhood education and professionalizing the field.

Participant P7L said that many leaders are under-prepared. There is not a good system to prepare people for leadership in this field. People are just set up for failure; they do not have the foundation they need and no intentional pathways. She commented, I think the resources just completely undermine leaders’ ability to really implement high-quality early care and education on a consistent basis. Yes, there may be some programs that we can walk into and they are of the highest quality and doing all of the things we want programs to be doing. But the research does not bear out that that is happening across the board. More programs are kind of what we would call mediocre than anything else.

She mentioned that there is very limited public support, and parents struggle to provide the cost of care. Parents create instability for the program and administrator by coming in and out of the program, normally due to finances. The leadership makes the annual plan based on the number of students they have, but that can change multiple
times in the year. She attributed most of the challenges to the system being completely inadequate and ineffective. The system is not working for parents very well. It is not working for teachers and leaders.

Participant P8S thought the leader’s challenges depend on the community she is serving, the population of children and the families she is serving, the policy context in her community, her state, the conditions of her facility, and the competency of her staff. She mentioned,

I think her main challenge, both in terms of competence and leadership, is recognizing the strengths of her program and where there are gaps, if you will, that are inhibiting the ability of staff and the program overall to maximize children’s early learning and development.

Summary

Chapter 4 discussed data collection and findings as the eight participants’ interviews were analyzed in an effort to investigate the characteristics of an effective early childhood leader and the challenges that this leadership faces. The data analysis led the researcher to 19 categories, from which a theory emerged.

Chapter 5 will identify major conclusions based on the findings that were analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4. The emerging theory will be discussed and will be tied to the whole leadership framework that was introduced in Chapter 2. The researcher will then provide key recommendations for future study as the field gains attention in both academic and political arenas.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Data analysis and findings were discussed in the previous chapter. The 19 categories that emerged were presented and were discussed in five groups: need for professional development and teachers’ support; essential disposition; managerial duties and field advocacy; child, parent, and school relationship; and leadership challenges.

The insights and claims in this chapter spring from the theory that emerged from this study. This chapter will begin by reviewing the Whole Leadership Framework, a conceptual framework that was introduced previously. Then it will continue with a discussion of the findings in light of the framework and introduction of the emerged theory. Based on the theory that emerged, the researcher is proposing to remove family engagement as a component of the pedagogical leadership domain from the Whole Leadership Framework. She recommends the addition of a fourth domain to the Whole Leadership Framework, relational leadership. This domain draws from the child, parent, and school relationship that consisted of seven categories focusing on the child’s well-being, building parents’ capacity/educating parents in early childhood education, putting family at the center of the child’s learning ecosystem, empowering parents to advocate for children, building relationships with parents, building a bridge between home and school learning, and supporting teachers’/parents’ relationship.

Relational leadership focuses on the nature of relationships that are built between the leader and the organization one is leading. Data supported the need for attention to building strong relationships between child, parent, and educators in the early childhood setting. Relationships affect many aspects of a child’s developmental, social, emotional,
intellectual, behavioral, and physical development. Caring relationships facilitate a sense of connection between the child, parent, and educators and are a foundational component in early childhood programs. The researcher draws from the ethic of care theory to support the need for the addition of relational leadership as the fourth domain.

**Whole Leadership Framework**

In recent years, the field of early childhood education has been receiving more attention nationally as well as globally. Early childhood leaders are being expected to expand their responsibilities beyond the day-to-day managerial duties to explore the position to include broader, more abstract leadership challenges. This new role expects leaders to envision goals, motivate staff, set values, and promote unity of purpose.

To address this need, Abel, Talan, and Masterson (2017) introduced the Whole Leadership Framework, based on the complexity of this role and the multiple responsibilities that this leader is faced with daily. This framework is designed to illuminate our understanding of the complex role of early childhood leadership. The Whole Leadership Framework is a conceptual framework that includes three leadership domains: leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership that consists of two components, instructional leadership and family engagement. They explain that leadership essentials include the personal skills and attributes of the leader. There are certain personal attributes attributed to this leadership, such as self-efficacy, empathy, authority, and more. Administrative leadership is about setting goals, orchestrating work, and assigning employees to specific tasks. This leader is responsible for operational and strategic leadership. The operational leader is expected to perform tasks like hiring, evaluating, and supporting teaching staff, developing a budget, and
making sure a positive culture and climate at the center are maintained. An operational leader role pays detailed attention to rules and policies, sets procedures, allocates resources, and seeks to maintain the status quo. Pedagogical leadership aims to improve the science of teaching and improve and optimize child development and learning. This leader is an instructional leader with the added responsibility to promote parents’ engagement. The following section will test the study findings against this framework and will search within the data that were collected to support the Whole Leadership Framework and report inadequacies of the framework and suggestions to improve upon the framework.

**Supporting Leadership Essential Domain**

Essential disposition with its two major categories supported this domain—first, professional and personal attributes and second, respecting culture, diversity, equity, and social justice. In agreement with the leadership essential domain, participants listed a wide array of attributes needed for this leader. Participant P5J listed the necessary attributes as empathy, self-efficacy, creativity, and being authentic and humble. Participant P8SG suggested the leader should be a learner, have clarity of purpose, and recognize she cannot do everything by herself. Participant P4P thought it is important for the leader to be dedicated to education and learning and have a realistic expectation of herself.

The researcher believes, because this domain is developed through reflective practices, respect for culture, diversity, equity, and social justice should also be part of this domain. Participant P2N suggested that the leader needs to be sensitive to culture and be open to one’s lack of knowledge. Participant P3S stated that it is very important to
remember diversity extends to families. The leader has to have the self-awareness, has to have a sense of her own privileges and her own racial identity or cultural identity and how that translates to working in a multi-cultural setting.

**Supporting Administrative Leadership Domain**

This leadership domain coordinates work and mobilizes people to make sure the organization operation is stable and continues to grow. Whole Leadership Framework sees the operation manager, strategic manager, advocacy leadership, and community leadership as integral parts of this domain. Findings of this study support this domain through the emergence of managerial duties and field advocacy with its five categories: early childhood leadership is multi-faceted, business manager, financial manager, human resource manager, and the need for public awareness about the early childhood field. For example, Participant P7L noted that it is important for this leader to supervise staff effectively and understand their capacity. Participant P1J saw the need for the leader to support the staff by creating a climate of support and professional development. P2N suggested that the leader should be able to build relationships, manage and operate effectively, encourage collaborative leadership, and create a community. Participant P4P believed a leadership position in early childhood education needs to have a good understanding of rules, regulations, and performance standards. P5J liked to see this leader be able to motivate staff and be a good mentor.

As a financial manager, all participants agreed that financial stability plays a big role in effectively operating a center for early childhood education, regardless of source of funding, either private or public. Participant P8S suggested the leader needs to have a deep understanding of the center’s financing system. This leader needs to understand the
financial resources, eliminate waste, understand how to effectively use the resources, and prioritize in terms of financial resources and spending.

As a human resource manager, participant P1J mentioned this leader has to be able to hire and be able to meet the challenge of scarcity of qualified teachers. Low pay scales in the field make the job of this manager very challenging.

The Whole Leadership Framework asks for this leader to be an ambassador for children, families, and the field. The need for public awareness about the early childhood field is one of the categories that emerged in this study. Participant P1J believed early childhood leaders are instrumental in the systematic changes the field needs. They need to be willing to educate, engage, and bring decision makers together to make necessary changes possible. P7L expected the leader to be a voice for the field. She further explained the role of the leader as an advocate is really critical in acknowledging inequalities in the system.

Supporting Pedagogical Leadership Domain

This leadership domain is responsible for high-quality instruction in early childhood programs and includes curricular philosophy and assessment of children’s growth and development. This domain has two components, instructional leadership and family engagement. Understanding and implementing pedagogy is the category that emerged from this study and supports instructional leadership as one of the components of this domain. But the findings extensively support parent, leader, and school relationships, and, as one participant noted, engagement alone is not sufficient. Therefore, family engagement as a sub-category of this domain is inadequate. The extent of the relationship that is required between the parent, leader, and school makes it vital to put
higher emphasis on the five categories that emerged as the role of parents and their relationships with leaders. The researcher proposes removing family engagement from this domain and adding a fourth domain to the framework. After the discussion of findings in support of the pedagogical leadership domain, the proposal for the adding the fourth domain will be discussed in detail.

Participant P7L noted the importance of understanding teachers’ capacity and providing strategies to support the teaching team. P5J sought the ability to coach, mentor, and apply theory to practice necessary for this leader. She also recommended for this leader to be proficient in adult learning. Participant P2N believed that the pedagogical leader should have a sufficient amount of academic child development training, know how to select curriculum, and be able to conduct classroom observations and use that as a means to support teachers. Participant P3SR described that this leader would be a catalyst for getting teachers to generate ideas. She promoted collaboration with others for the pedagogical leader. The following section will discuss the emergent theory and the need for removing family engagement from the pedagogical leadership domain and creating a fourth domain.

**Emergent Theory**

As the researcher investigated the two research questions of the essential characteristics of an effective early childhood leader and the challenges of this role, she collected and analyzed data. At the conclusion of the data analysis, a theory that was grounded in the data emerged. The child’s well-being category and the six categories related to the role of parents and its relation to leadership were among the categories that emerged. Building parents’ capacity/educating parents in early childhood education,
putting family at the center of child’s learning ecosystem, empowering parents to advocate for children, building relationship with parents, building a bridge between home and school learning, and supporting teacher/parents relationships were the emerging categories that fall under role of parents and its relation to leadership. The researcher theorized that, because of the nature of early childhood education and the developmental stage of the children and based on the research presented, ethics of care theory should be an integral part of the Whole Leadership Framework. The researcher further suggests two components to this theory, child as the care recipient (cared for), drawn from the child well-being category, and parent-leadership-school relationship based on six components of parents’ role in early childhood education.

Based on the theory that was grounded in the data that emerged, the researcher proposed adding a fourth domain to the Whole Leadership Framework. The fourth domain, relational leadership, includes ethics of care with its two components, the child as the care recipient and parent-leadership-school relationship. In the proposed framework, there is no need to have parents’ engagement as a component of pedagogical leadership anymore. The fourth domain and its components will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section. Figure 6 is a demonstration of the whole leadership framework based on the original three domains (Talan & Masterson, 2017), and Figure 7 demonstrates the proposed whole leadership framework, including the fourth domain.
Pedagogical Leadership

Instructional leadership: Supporting classroom teachers in implementing curriculum.

Family engagement: Promoting partnership with families and fostering family leadership

Administrative Leadership

Coordinating work and mobilizing people to ensure the organization remains stable and continues to grow.

Whole Leadership

Is an interdependent relationship that exist between leadership domains. A balanced perspective is necessary when performing administrative functions.

Leadership Essentials

Foundational competencies and individual qualities necessary for leading people that are expressed in personal leadership styles and dispositions. Leadership essentials are often developed through reflective practice.

Figure 6. Whole leadership framework (Talan & Materson, 2017).
Pedagogical Leadership
Leading the art and science of teaching with an emphasis on educator dispositions and high-quality interactions with children.

Administrative Leadership
Coordinating work and mobilizing people to ensure the organization remains stable and continues to grow.

Whole Leadership
Is an interdependent relationship that exists between leadership domains. A balanced perspective is necessary when performing administrative functions.

Leadership Essentials
Foundational competencies and individual qualities necessary for leading people that are expressed in personal leadership styles and dispositions. Leadership essentials are often developed through reflective practice.

Relational Leadership
Ethics of care
Children as care recipients (cared for)
Parent-leadership-school relationship

Figure 7. Modified whole leadership framework.
Relational Leadership

Relational leadership is one of multiple theories of leadership that have been developed in recent years. According to Burnier (2003), Mary Parker Follet, a political scientist from the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, is the pioneer of the theory. She believed in the care perspective of leadership. She encouraged administrators to learn from their subordinates and their community. This leader focuses on the nature of the relationships that are built between the leader and the organization she is leading. A relationship-based approach would focus on the complemented relationship between the leader and the follower. This approach relies on respect, trust, and mutual obligation that generates influence between parties. It will foster a strong relationship between the leadership and followers. The advantage of this approach is that it accommodates differing needs of subordinates. But it can be time consuming since it relies on building relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Marcketti and Kozar (2007) explain the five components of this theory as inclusiveness, empowerment, purposefulness, ethic, and process. Inclusiveness as the first component is defined as understanding, actively engaging diversity in views, approaches, styles, and valuing. The relational leader values the variations and differences among participants. Inclusiveness requires individual members to contribute their talent to achieve the group goal. The second component is empowerment. This component includes the sense of self and set of environmental conditions that encourages the full involvement of participants. Empowering can occur through sharing of information and knowledge; rewarding, directing, and inspiring; providing resources; mentoring relationships; creating processes and policies; and claiming power for self-fulfillment. Third component is purposefulness, which indicates commitment to goals and being
purposeful to the group’s vision. The fourth component emphasizes ethical and moral leadership. It is driven by standards and values that are naturally moral. The last component is process, which refers to how to be a group and stay as a group.

The relational leadership put emphasis on moral and ethical leadership and how leaders are in relation to others. They look at communication as a way of working out what is meaningful and believe in talking with people, which means all views are shared and considered (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Denis, Langley, and Sergi (2012) describe relational leadership as participation and collectively creating a sense of direction. Uhl-Bien (2006) explains that relational leadership theory is defined as an overarching framework to study leadership as a process that influences social behavior. Its practices are socially constructed through relational and social process.

It is the belief of the researcher that leadership in early childhood education should be relational. It focuses on social processes and not on individual actions of the leader. As discussed in the preceding section, concepts such as empowering, ethics, vision, and care are integrated into this theory. Ciulla (2009) defines care as attention to what is going on in the world and emotional concern about the well-being of others. In the world of early childhood education, the world can be the individual centers for early childhood programs, and others are the children who are cared for. Relational leadership was proposed by the researcher as the fourth domain of the Whole Leadership Framework. Relational leadership includes ethics of care theory with two components, children as care recipients and the parent-leadership-school relationship.


**Ethics of Care**

Learning to love and nurture each other comes to mind when one thinks about the act of caring. Noddings (2015) defines a caring relation as a connection or encounter between two human beings. In this relation, both parties have to contribute something to the relation, or caring will not occur. In the early 1980s, Gilligan and Noddings pioneered the theory of care and won recognition in educational and philosophical arenas (Noddings, 2012a). Noddings published her first book in 1984, *Caring, A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Since then, the interest in the ethics of care has grown, and experts in various fields have come to understand and appreciate her work. She developed the idea of care as a feminine ethic and applied it to the practice of moral education (Noddings, 1984). According to Silverman (2012), Gilligan believes women use relational realities in their moral decision making and argues, because of that, the foundation of ethics should follow care and not justice. She further explains that Gilligan’s main interest is not on individuals’ sense of self and character but mostly on the relational aspect of decision making. But Noddings’ theory of ethics is relational. According to Noddings (2012b),

> The language of care ethics suggests to casual readers or listeners that caring is a warm, fuzzy feeling that cannot do much to identify or solve moral problems. But the words care, attention, empathy, response, reciprocity, and receptivity all have special meaning in care ethics, and caring—far more than a fuzzy feeling—is a moral way of life. (p. 56)

Pettersen (2011) gives his perspective of Noddings’ ethics of care: “With an alternative moral ontology, where the starting point is human connectedness and
interdependency as it is in an ethics of care, the welfare and growth of one individual is seen as intertwined with the flourishing of others” (p. 5). Noddings (2012a) explains human existence starts in relation, and through relations, the human individual emerges. In a caring relationship, one party acts as carer and the other as cared-for. The carer should display qualities that have been referred to “engrossment” and “motivational displacement,” and the person receiving care should display some sort of response to caring (Noddings, 1984). A caring relation happens when one accepts responsibility and sees to the needs of others. It is a view that sees persons as relational and interdependent. In Noddings’ ethics of care, emotion plays a big role. According to Silverman (2012),

Noddings claims that we cannot be caring towards others we do not know because the relationship required for caring does not exist. When being moved (motivated) to be “kind” or “charitable” toward strangers, we are instead, acting on behalf of ethic of justice (in Caring, Noddings held “care” and “justice” to be separate; however, her thinking has changed). In other words, one cannot act from an ethic of care when claiming to “love the world and all its people” because, says Noddings, real care requires real encounters with known individuals. (p. 104)

The notion of giving care only satisfies half of the equation. Care must be reciprocated for the equation to be in balance (Noddings, 2015). In an equal relationship, parties can change positions, but in relations that are not equal like teacher and student, both parties contribute to the establishment and maintenance of the relations (Noddings, 2012a). For the act of caring to happen in school, it is the responsibility of the educator to create an environment to support the act of caring. When the connection is broken, the caring ceases to exist. This type of broken connection is often seen in teacher-student
relations where one refuses to acknowledge the other. Noddings explains that caring in
the classroom is not only about teacher caring about student, but also about helping
student to learn to develop a caring relation with others, including learning (Noddings,
2015). She sees reciprocal, egalitarian, openness, honesty, fairness, collaboration, and
reflection as the characteristics that are needed for a school to be built on care (Noddings,
2015). Educators should create a climate where caring can flourish. She believes care is a
binding thread for all curricula in a global and democratic society. Noddings (2007)
imagines that, “If we could consider putting care in a prominent place within and
throughout the curriculum, then the benefit to students and teachers would be real and
meaningful” (p. 173). In fact, she suggests that education “should be organized around
themes of care rather than traditional disciplines and based in a general education that
guides the students in caring for self, intimate others, global others, plants, animals and
the environment, the human-made world, and ideas” (p. 173).

Noddings (1984) believes that, when one enters the teaching profession, one
knows that one is entering into a profession that will be engaged in a very special
relationship. She further explains that caring for the other is part of art of teaching: “As
teacher, I am, first, one-caring” (p. 176).

**Ethics of Care in Early Childhood Education**

The architecture of the brain is most open to the influence of experiences and
relationships during early childhood. Shonkoff et al. (2016) explain that children’s
development starts in an environment of relationship. Many people play important roles
in a child’s life in the early stages of development. Besides family, extended family, early
childhood educators, nurses, and more touch their lives. These relationships affect many
aspects of their development—social, emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and physical. The quality of care in early life will lay the foundation that supports later outcomes.

Caring for others has been studied by different disciplines of science and social sciences. Swick (2007) states that he has been interested and has studied the process of caring for many years. His special interest is in how caring transforms teacher-child interactions into intimate, empowering relations. He suggests that there are five themes that give insight into the value of caring for families and early childhood educators: the meaning of caring, the power of caring, families as caring environment, early childhood educators and caring, and strategies for caring communities. In terms of early childhood professionals and caring, he describes early childhood educators as the extension of the families’ caring and nurturing. He suggests four effective approaches: first, modeling. Setting an example is the most powerful teaching strategy. As the ones who care for children, early childhood educators set the tone for them to be caring adults. Second, educating about caring helps parents and children develop caring behavior. Third, supporting is the core of what early childhood educators do. Bonding with families is the basis for establishing quality caring. Last is empowering parents by creating possibilities where early childhood educators and families can engage in mutually respective relationships.

Taggart (2011) suggests early childhood education has every characteristic to be a “caring profession,” like the fields of nursing and social services, as it is defined by a moral purpose. The theory introduced by Gilligan and Noddings’ feminist notion of ethics of care, which defines expressing and maintaining a caring relationship as an ethical act, will particularly be relevant to taking care of and educating young children.
The researcher believes the keystone of educating is the relationship that is developed with the child. In her view, this notion is even more vital in the early childhood setting, since young children need consistent, nurturing relationships. Scientifically, it is proven that children need sensitive care and nurturing to be able to build capacity for love, compassion, empathy, and trust. The researcher believes that, when there is caring, nurturing, and supportive interaction with young children, their growth and development are ensured. Caring behavior modeled by educators will create a caring foundation for children as they grow to adulthood. Caring facilitates a sense of connection from which springs countless opportunities for learning. She believes building a caring relationship is a foundational component in teaching and caring in early childhood programs. Young children are impressionable and thrive in the context of caring and dependable relationships. It is imperative to have a positive child-teacher relationship built on trust, care, and understanding, which will bear the fruit of children’s cooperation and motivation and will increase the chances of higher outcomes. The researcher suggests that, to build a positive relationship with young children, educators need to invest in the attention and time they are giving to the child. Listening to the children’s needs at this stage of development is far more beneficial than children coloring pictures or practicing the alphabet. This will promote a trusting relationship and will reduce challenging behavior, as young children are known to seek attention, regardless of whether the attention is positive or negative. Another component of building a caring and positive relationship is getting to know the child, their interests, background, culture, and preferences. And, most importantly, a positive, caring relationship is based on love. Any individual who has had the privilege of working with children in an early childhood
education program can attest that the love that children give you is unconditional. In fact, it is the firm belief of the researcher that this is probably the number-one contributor for most people staying in this field regardless of the low pay, long hours, and low respect for the profession. A saving account is a metaphor that has been used in relation to love and positive relationship. Educators need to understand that, even though most of them are in this profession for the love of children, unless we show how much we love and care for them, the balance of the savings account will soon get depleted. As was presented before, constructive grounded theory allows the researcher’s paradigmatic orientation to be derived by reasoning from self-evident propositions to the research project and encourages use of reflexivity by the researcher during the research process (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2006), “We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practice” (p. 10). To speak to this, the researcher provides an example of her own experiences as an example of listening, caring, loving, and gaining children’s trust as a leader in an early childhood program.

An appointment was set for the researcher to meet with a grandmother of a child to tour the school and discuss the enrollment of a three-year-old. The grandmother, honest and upfront, admitted that the child was dismissed from her preschool the week before due to aggressive behavior and being a danger to the well-being of other children. Based on the recommendation of the child psychologist, the family had embarked into looking for another program, as it was the belief of the therapist that she did need interaction with children. The grandmother was reassured that the school philosophy is to give every child a fair chance and she would not be denied that chance based on another
program’s decision. The teacher of the classroom was met with, and a strategy was put in place. Other teachers were also notified to be proactive and watch for aggressive behavior and make sure the other children were not harmed. It was decided to closely observe the child for a couple of days. Leadership assisted the teacher during this phase, and it was commonly agreed that all this child needed was personal space to eliminate her aggression. She did not like to be held by the teacher; as Noddings said, caring is more than a warm, fuzzy feeling. At times, she liked to work by herself and did not like the children around her. At the time of enrollment, this child had gone through so much emotional disturbance that she had pulled out most of her own hair. A simple act of observing and caring for the specific needs of a child transformed a child who was labeled as an aggressive child to a child who was happy and cooperative. At the time of pickup, she did not want to go home and did not have incidents during her three years at the program with other children any more than what seems typical for that age.

Analysis of data was presented in the previous chapter, but it seems necessary to use some of the data in making a case for the importance of keeping the children’s well-being as the focus of any early childhood program.

Participant P2P mentioned that leadership is about making sure children are successful. Children are really brilliant and capable; we need to create a place where they can grow and explore and be successful. Keeping in mind that the center of your work is the child and the ultimate goal of the organization is to serve children and to help children thrive, we need to create a safe, nurturing, celebratory place for people from all cultures and backgrounds.
Participant P6D spoke to the need to have properly informed curriculum and the need to know how to respond in thoughtful and caring manners to the problems and issues young children bring into school settings. She explained it is the leader’s role to put the children right at the center of their thinking all day and have a very positive impact. But it does not always happen—they get sidetracked with administrative duties.

Participant P3S expressed that the leader needs to pay attention to what children are saying, what they are bringing from home, what they are interested in, what their passions are, what they are enthusiastic about. She felt that sometimes a leader has to fight as she advocates for children and has to demonstrate that she is willing to question some of the things that do not seem to fit with the philosophical orientation the staff has been working with. The children’s way of being, their thinking, and how they see the world need to be respected.

In conclusion of this section, the researcher provides her view based on the data that were collected and analyzed and the theory that emerged—caring and building a positive relationship with children is an essential part of early childhood care and education. It is the belief of this researcher that there is an absolute need for administrative leadership to make sure the center for early childhood education remains stable and continues to grow. There is no question that any center for education cannot prosper without pedagogical leadership to support classroom teachers in implementing curriculum. The need for leadership is essential and cannot be denied, as it sets the stage for competencies needed by an individual to lead people. But the researcher, relying on this study, suggests that an important component of leadership for early childhood education is relational leadership. Children’s well-being and welfare should be a vital
part of the framework. Ethics of care is proposed as an aspect of relational leadership. Children as care recipients is one of the components of ethics of care. The second component of ethics of care, as proposed by the researcher, is the parent-leader-school relationship.

In relation with parent, school, and student success, multiple terms have been used in the field of education, such as parent-school involvement, engagement, and partnership. As each term will briefly be discussed, it is the belief of this researcher that the above terms, based on research and implementation, seem to fit the K-12 setting. Due to the nature of young children’s needs, the privilege of having more one-on-one interaction with parents in early childhood education, and more openness of parents to learn about early childhood education and being part of the children’s learning ecosystem, the term relationship seems more fitting.

**Parent-School Involvement, Engagement, or Relationship?**

There are enormous amounts of studies and research on how parent partnerships with the school positively impact student success. Schools have realized they cannot educate students without the help of parents. It goes without saying that parents are children’s first teachers. They have the responsibility to have a healthy relationship with their child, be a role model, and provide guidance. This could lead to collaboration with schools later and forming a partnership. The philosophy of partnership has moved beyond mothers volunteering at school dances, chaperoning, and fundraising. The new model is more inclusive and not only includes mothers and fathers, but has also extended to grandparents, other family members, caregivers, and even community groups.
In recent years, increasing importance has been put on the role of parents in the child’s education. There have been several scholarly papers and models introduced. But what is best for the child: parent-school involvement, engagement, or relationship? There seems to be some confusion with the first two terms in K-12, as some people see them as the same, and some see them quite differently. The researcher tends to agree with the latter. The following section will discuss the first two terms, as they have been the subject of discussions in the education arena, but then will introduce the parent-school relationship as it seems more fit for early childhood education and as it is supported as the emerging theory of this study.

Parent-School Involvement

The researcher believes that, when schools are asking for parent involvement, they are expected to get involved with tasks that have been pre-selected for them. Ferlazzo (2011) tells us that schools that encourage family involvement have their goals, projects, and needs identified and tell parents how they can get involved and help. This in no way suggests family involvement is bad. As was discussed earlier, research shows that any kind of increased family support of students will increase their chances of success. Goodall and Montgomery (2013) referred to the dictionary definition of involvement as “the act of taking part in an activity or event, or situation.” They explained that involvement does not seem to have a feeling of ownership, and it tends to encourage to be part of an activity. Family involvement is easier to implement, and with the desire to increase student test scores and the promise that family involvement will have a positive impact on student achievement, it can be very tempting (Ferlazzo, 2011). Family involvement seems to be doing more of mechanical tasks at school, like showing up for a
meeting or attending a book drive. Neither one of these activities will cognitively challenge the child. The No Child Left Behind Act relied strongly on parents’ involvement. The law required that Title I school districts have parental involvement in writing and had funding tied to parent involvement (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Ferlazzo (2011) explains some school districts were even willing to pay parents to get involved. But having a set duty to do and even get paid to perform a task may only work short term and is not for the good of the child.

**Parent Engagement**

Ferlazzo (2011) and Goodall and Montgomery (2013) see parent engagement as a better way of inviting parents to school and being part of their child’s learning. Goodall and Montgomery state there is more parental commitment and ownership when parents are engaged. The researcher believes that, when schools invite parents to be engaged, in fact they are inviting them to be an integral part of leadership, where their visions and goals matter. Because a sense of belonging is created in family engagement, there is a higher possibility that engaged parents will encourage other parents to consider contributing their own vision. When that sense of collaboration is created, the children will win. Ferlazzo explains that schools that are looking to engage families tend to listen to what parents are thinking, dreaming, and worrying about. With family engagement, the goal is not to serve clients but to gain partners. In fact, in recent years, the terms engagement and partnership have been used interchangeably, and family-school partnership seems to be the more preferred term in recent years. This partnership supports students’ learning, strengthens families and neighborhoods, and improves schools. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) note, “For schools and districts across the U.S., family engagement is
rapidly shifting from a low-priority recommendation to an integral part of education reform efforts” (p. 5). They further explain that family-school partnership policies are backed by 50 years of research and link the parents’ role as “supporters of learning, encouragers of grit and determination, models of lifelong learning, and advocates of proper programming and placements for their child” (p. 5)—and students’ beliefs about the importance of education. Unfortunately, policies and reforms often lack the understanding that, just because a phenomenon is backed by research, it does not necessarily mean the skills, knowledge, and acceptance are possessed by the parties that are affected and benefiting from the proposed policy. Ishimaru (2014) stresses the idea that, as complicated as this task might be, one should also remember the diverse communities we live in. When you factor race and class into this undertaking, then the rules of engagement, the lives of all parties involved, should be respected. We are faced with race-based and economic educational inequities, and we are witnessing the change in our student population and relying on research that tells us that the key to student success is partnering schools with parents. Ishimaru et al. (2016) suggest the following:

A pre-dominance of cultural brokering consistent with programmatic goals to socialize non-dominant families into school-centric norms and agendas. However, formal leadership and boundary-spanning ambiguity enabled more collective, relational, or reciprocal cultural brokering. These dynamics suggest potential stepping stones and organizational conditions for moving toward more equitable forms of family-school collaboration and systemic transformation. (p. 850)

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) presented the challenges of parents’ engagement as part of their report. They stated that, nationally, both teachers and principals acknowledge
family engagement as one of the most challenging aspects of their job. This is despite the fact that the teachers have great interest in working with diverse families, but they do not know how to fulfill that goal. Lack of opportunities to build capacity in educators and families has been blamed as contributing factors.

Parent involvement, engagement, and partnership with schools have been identified as means to improve student success for K-12 students. The researcher agrees and believes in the research that has been presented on the subject but is relying on the theory that emerged from this study and proposes parent-school relationship as the paradigm that will show success in the early childhood setting. The following section will draw from the data analysis and show how building relationships with parents will increase child outcomes.

**Parent-Leadership-School Relationship**

The landscape of early childhood education has been changing in recent years. Research supports that closing the education gap in K-12 by providing quality early childhood education to children ages three and four will be possible. This has resulted in shifting the general view from early childhood education being a family responsibility to a model to improve children’s outcomes and educational success through investing in young children. The latter requires the support of the government and communities and active relationships between centers for early childhood education and parents.

The Oxford dictionary defines relationship as “the way in which two or more people or things are connected, or the state of being connected.” When early childhood leadership and educators build relationships with parent, children see that the important people in their lives are working together. When positive relationship is built between
parents, leadership, and educators, parents will feel more comfortable to be part of their child’s learning experiences. It is important to acknowledge and respect the parents who have trusted the care of their child to the hands of early childhood educators.

Research by Powell, Son, File, and San Juan (2010) on dimensions of parent-school relationships in public pre-kindergarten, parental school involvement, and parents’ perceptions of teacher representativeness to child/parent wrote,

First, our results strengthen the empirical basis for promoting parent–school relationships in public school pre-kindergarten. Parental school involvement and parent perceptions of teacher responsiveness uniquely and significantly predicted school readiness outcomes in a large urban school district. These two dimensions of parent–school relationships deserve attention in efforts to expand and improve the quality of pre-kindergarten.

Second, schools may wish to rethink the prevalent focus on academic outcomes in their efforts to connect with parents. It may be beneficial for schools to systematically help parents strengthen their pre-kindergarten child's social competencies. A focus on social outcomes builds on our finding that parent–school relationships were predictive of children's outcomes primarily with regard to social skills and problem behaviors. As noted earlier, a growing research literature documents the role of social competencies in school success and suggests that, in general, parents of pre-kindergarten children are keenly interested in this developmental domain.

Third, our findings regarding parent perceptions of teachers' responsiveness to children and parents suggest that parent–school relationships
entail more than providing opportunities for parents to participate in activities at school. Perceived teacher responsiveness predicted children's social and early reading outcomes above and beyond the observed quality of teacher interactions with children and parental home involvement. Conceptually, teacher responsiveness is a key element of reciprocity in parent–school relationships and accommodation of a range of child and family circumstances emphasized in recent standards and policy recommendations. (p. 289)

Hughes and MacNaughton (2000) concluded from their study on staff-parent communication in early childhood settings that formal means and channels of communication with parents tend to create parental involvement that is very formal and even ritualized. Educators preferred informal communication that allowed them to exchange ideas and build relationships. Participant P2N affirmed that building relationship with parents is more than just parent engagement—asking parents to be engaged is not sufficient. If a leader communicates with parents properly, then parents’ engagement can turn into building relationship with parents.

Leaders building relationships with parents is the second component of relational leadership as proposed by the researcher as the fourth domain of the Whole Leadership Framework. Relationship can be created and improved in many ways. As an example of building relationship with parents, the researcher’s professional experience demonstrates how children can benefit when the leader has established a relationship with parents.

A bright four-year-old girl enrolled in the program. She was eager to learn; socially and emotionally, she was well developed. She seemed to be enjoying the
activities, but at times, even after few months, would cry and ask for her mother when she was directed to do certain activities. The researcher had multiple conferences with the mother with and without the teacher being present. Every time, the mother would attribute the behavior to a recent divorce and the changes that had been brought up in her life. That is always a legitimate reason for a child not performing in certain areas or deliberately choosing not to participate. As time passed, there was almost no retention in recognizing the alphabet and numbers. Again, the researcher reached out to the mother and recommended a visit to the eye doctor. Results came back as normal. At this, the researcher was getting more concerned, as she was getting closer to going to kindergarten, and if her issue was not addressed now, it could have had lifetime implications. The researcher started observing her in the classroom and worked with her individually. Because of the relationship that was built with the mother and the trust that was gained, this made it possible to have her mother seek help from a specialized eye care facility that the school had worked with before. She was diagnosed with an eye condition and required special glasses. This can be attributed to the relationship that was built and the trust that was gained. In this case, both mother and child were cared for, and the researcher had the privilege of being the carer.

At the conclusion of this study data analysis, six categories emerged as contributors to building a positive relationship between parents and school. They were presented in previous chapter as building parents’ capacity/educating parents in early childhood, putting the family at the center of the child’s learning ecosystem, empowering parents to advocate for children, building a bridge between home and school learning, supporting the teacher/parent relationship, and building relationship with parents. The
researcher referred back to some of the data as they pertained to leadership and school and parent relationships, as a component of the emerging theory.

Participant P1J shared her views that, as the leader’s job is to create an environment of values, policies, and procedures that put the family at the center of the learning ecosystem, family members can then truly understand their role. This relationship can promote their ability to advocate for and on behalf of their child and become an even stronger piece of the relationship for their child’s development and learning.

Participant P3S stated that it all starts with respecting parents, having a set of principles, and seeing families as the primary caregivers. Parents need to be respected, and it should be understood that they can advocate for their child and have the power to make the final decision, even if their decision is against the school’s recommendation.

Participant P5J thought administrators have an instrumental role in involving and engaging families. They are the face of the organization, and it is important for them to be building relationships with families. Referring to one of her research studies, she explained that there is a direct relationship between the administrator and the organizational climate, teaching practices, and the family engagement.

Participant P4P also emphasized the importance of the home and school connection. She said that she makes sure that her parents’ education classes are tied to what is going on in the classroom. When you are supporting the parents, you are supporting the children. She said it is important to connect with parents, but it is also important to understand their limitations.
Participant P6D stated that an effective leader wants a school-community connection and home-school partnership. That’s particularly important in early childhood, because parents are often very open to learning.

Participant P6D shared the view that the leader’s responsibility is to work with teachers to gain the skills to work with parents. Teachers need to learn to welcome parents in their classroom and let the parents learn by seeing.

**Defining Characteristics and Challenges of Effective Early Childhood Leaders**

Drawing from the data and the theory that emerged, effective dispositions of leaders in early childhood education could be summarized within the four domains of pedagogical leadership, administrative leadership, leadership essentials, and relational leadership.

**Pedagogical Leadership**

The pedagogical leader is responsible to improve the science of teaching, support teachers, and help improve children’s development and learning. Data analysis in this research identified necessary characteristics of this leader as an individual who is skilled in early childhood education and is a knowledge builder, implements a pedagogy to foster learning, supports and values teachers, models for teachers, creates an environment to support learning, and applies theory to practice.

**Administrative Leadership**

This leader is responsible for strategic and operational planning of the program. It is the responsibility of this individual to create a vision and a mission for the program. Characteristics required to be effective in this position emerged as effective supervisor, having an understanding of resource limitations, being a voice for the field, being a
finance manager, being a business and human resource manager, having awareness of oneself and others, understanding the law, and being able to meet regulations.

Leadership Essentials

To be an effective leader, one should have certain personal skills and attributes. Dispositions of the leader can create a healthy environment that results in a greater degree of collaboration and efficacy. Essential dispositions that emerged for this role were broad, but the most commonly referred to were having social-emotional intelligence, being open to change, having a passion for children, being a good listener, being able to delegate, giving opportunity to others to step up, being an advocate for children and families, having dedication to the field, having clarity of purpose, having self-efficacy, and respecting culture, diversity, equity, and social justice.

Relational Leadership

This leader focuses on the nature of the relationships that are built between the leader and the people he or she is leading. Caring is a major component of this leadership. The characteristics that are associated with this role consumed a considerable portion of the data. Those dispositions can be summarized as an individual who can focus on the child’s well-being, build parents’ capacity, educate parents in early childhood education, put family at the center of the child’s ecosystem, empower parents to advocate for children, build relationships with parents, build a bridge between home and school learning, and support teacher/parent relationships. Acknowledging relational leadership is the theory that emerged and is proposed as the fourth domain of the Whole Leadership Framework. Following is a partial list of some of the data that led to the discovery.
Look closely at children as integrative learners
Respect a child’s way of being and thinking
Create a bridge between home and school
Let families make decisions
Aim for children’s life success
Believe children are brilliant and capable
Care for children
Create a place for children to grow, explore, and be successful
Make the world of the children better
Understand the importance of relationships with families
Know how to support families
Recognize parents are key to students’ success
Nurture and support relationships with parents
Teach parents how children develop and how to support their development
Have intentional connection with parents
Celebrate family culture
Understand parents’ integral role in the child’s development
Involve parents to impact the child’s success
Understand parents’ limitations
Create a supportive community for parents and children
Bring family experiences to the program
Expose families to what children are learning
Help parents understand developmental milestones
Help parents mirror what happens at school at home

Make communicating with parents part of the curriculum

Build strong partnerships

Teach current trends to parents

Coach staff on how to build relationships with parents

Interrelate school and home learning

Help families understand their role

Empower families to advocate for their child

Make family a stronger piece of the relationship for the child’s learning and development

Help parents understand their value.

**Challenges**

The obstacles that early childhood leaders encounter can arise from many directions. This study explored ways to address the challenges these leaders were faced with. Interestingly, the most common challenge that was referred to was parents, followed by lack of leader preparedness, having inadequate public support, not being able to sustain skilled workforce, not having a consistent source of revenue, inadequacy of the system, low level of workforce education, staff turnover, being able to create a cohesive environment, creating a space with authenticity in practice, keeping doors open and having a business model to stay in business, multi-tasking, and staying informed on ever-changing regulations.
Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

This research investigated the characteristics needed for effective leadership in early childhood development and the challenges this leadership faces. This study led the researcher to understand the importance of relationship and care in early childhood education leadership. It is commonly agreed that teachers need to care for children, but this view is not stressed enough for the role of administrators and leaders. Looking back at the dozens of books and scholarly articles that were reviewed for this study, the majority of the concentration is on how to help a center director to become a leader. By many, leader was defined as an individual who has a mission and a vision to move the center for early childhood education forward. A lot of effort and resources are being invested in investigating ways to help this individual to lead. Sadly, there is not enough conversation and research about the need and the importance for this individual to not only care for children, but also build relationships with adults. As was discussed earlier, a majority of center directors get promoted to the leadership position from being a teacher. As a matter of fact, in some states like California, it is required for a center director to have experience with children before being designated as a center administrator. Teachers in early childhood education enter the profession with a profound love of children. Patience, flexibility, and organization are their other attributes. Anyone who has taken care of a two-year-old child will agree that $13 an hour is not the motivation factor to take care of 12 two-year-olds for eight hours a day. These children need their diapers changed, need to be potty trained, need to be fed, need to be cleaned after, be supervised outside, have educational activities, and much more. The teacher does that while cleaning...
noses, putting on a band aid to make the child feel better, and holding the child who is crying after the parents dropped off.

Caring and nursing have always been thought of synonymously. Most individuals choose nursing as a profession because of their desire to care for other individuals. Vance (2003) defines caring behaviors as “behaviors evidenced by nurses in caring for patients” (para. 3). She further lists the top 10 caring behaviors as attentive listening, comforting, honesty, patience, responsibility, touch, sensitivity, respect, calling the patient by name, and providing information so the patient can make an informed decision. By this definition, teaching in early childhood education is a caring profession. Leaders for early childhood education possessed all these qualities when they were teaching in the classroom. But, sadly, when these individuals move to the front office to accept the role of leadership, they forget who they are serving. They get overwhelmed with the job duties and forget the child is the purpose. All of a sudden, taking care of the business becomes priority over taking care of the children.

The lesson that I learned from this study is that, when I look to hire for this position, it is important to look for an individual who has not forgotten she is in a caring profession and knows that building relationships should always remain a priority in this position. You can always teach someone to order supplies, make schedules, balance the books, follow regulations, and hire and fire people. But you cannot teach someone to care for and love children and have compassion. Leaders for early childhood education almost always assume the role of leadership after being a good, caring teacher with leadership abilities. It is important to help these leaders not to lose their caring attribute. It is my responsibility and responsibility of individuals, like me, to make sure people we appoint
to these positions do not lose the fact that they are there for the well-being of children. Loving and caring for children should be the first requirement listed for early childhood leadership positions.

National quality standards for early childhood education leaders can provide a shared understanding of the essential dispositions of an effective early childhood leader. Early childhood leadership quality standards can outline the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required for an effective, capable leader. They can be used as a core for the early childhood leader evaluation process and offer a tool for the leader’s reflection, goal setting, and ongoing professional growth. Early childhood quality standards can be foundational to providing what is needed to support a quality program. Leaders who meet the standards of quality will support their teachers’ professional growth and influence the quality of learning in a very powerful way. Based on this study, the researcher recommends the following as a set of standards for effective leaders in early childhood education:

1. Attain educational and knowledge level to meet the need of quality early childhood programs
2. Acquire essential dispositions and self-efficacy
3. Support teachers in understanding and implementing pedagogy
4. Respect culture, diversity, equity, and social justice
5. Be proficient in managerial and operational duties and field advocacy
6. Advocate and enact child’s well-being
7. Build parents’ capacity
8. Put family at the center of child’s learning ecosystem
9. Empower parents to advocate for children
10. Build relationships with parents
11. Build a bridge between home and school learning
12. Support teacher/parent relationships,

For future research, the researcher suggests including early childhood leaders from both private and public early childhood programs as contributing participants. This will provide an inside view from individuals who are actually holding these positions and test the new finding against the framework. Multiple participants, including early childhood higher education educators, recommended changes in teacher preparation and asking for higher education to match the need to knowledge. Investigating effectiveness of early childhood teacher preparation can be another future study.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview questions

1. How do you define early childhood leadership?

2. What skills do you believe are necessary to be an effective leader in an early childhood program?

3. How do you think early childhood leaders perceive their leadership role?

4. What should be certain personal attributes and characteristics of an early childhood leader?

5. How can ECE leaders be instrumental in creating a community of care to support students and staff?

6. It is commonly agreed that EC educators are underpaid. How will improving the quality of leadership affect the quality of work and pay for this underpaid workforce?

7. There is a professional standard for educational leaders in K-12. Do you see a need for professional standards for early childhood leadership, and, if so, how do you think having professional standards will help the profession?

8. Research shows that, to close the achievement gap, quality early childhood programs are needed. In your view, what is the role of leadership in improving quality?

9. What are your thoughts on formal education and degree requirements for center directors?

10. What should an ECE leader’s approach be to ensure culturally responsive practices?

11. What do you think are challenges that early childhood leaders are faced with?
12. How can ECE leadership promote the well-being of the children?

13. How can ECE leaders define the culture and stress the imperative of equity, social justice, caring, and continuous growth?

14. How should early childhood leaders place children at the center of education and accept responsibility for their emotional and social and cognitive improvement?

15. How can ECE leaders be instrumental in developing professional capacity of staff?

16. Can you recommend any documents from your organizations or other relevant organizational documents that speak to the high-quality leadership in early childhood education?

17. Can you recommend a site or an individual that exemplifies the qualities of high-quality leadership?
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS REVISED
1. How do you define early childhood leadership?

2. What skills do you believe are necessary to be an effective leader in an early childhood program?

3. How do you think early childhood leaders perceive their leadership role?

4. What should be certain personal attributes and characteristics of an early childhood leader?

5. How can ECE leaders be instrumental in creating a community of care to support students and staff?

6. What are your thoughts on relationship between an effective leader and parents?

7. How do you define the role of parents in creating a quality center for early childhood?

8. It is commonly agreed that EC educators are underpaid. How is improving the quality of leadership going to affect the quality of work and pay for this underpaid workforce?

9. There is a professional standard for educational leaders in K-12. Do you see a need for professional standards for early childhood leadership, and, if so, how do you think having professional standards will help the profession?

10. How do you think early childhood education leaders’ level of self-efficacy helps create and maintain a quality early childhood program?

11. Research shows that, to close the achievement gap, quality early childhood programs are needed. In your view, what is the role of leadership in improving quality?
12. What are your thoughts on formal education and degree requirements for center directors?

13. What should an ECE leader’s approach be to ensure culturally responsive practices?

14. What do you think are challenges that early childhood leaders are faced with?

15. How can ECE leadership promote the well-being of the children?

16. How can ECE leaders define the culture and stress the imperative of equity, social justice, caring, and continuous growth?

17. How should early childhood leaders place children at the center of education and accept responsibility for their emotional and social and cognitive improvement?

18. How can ECE leaders be instrumental in developing professional capacity of staff?

19. Can you recommend any documents from your organizations or other relevant organizational documents that speak to the high-quality leadership in early childhood education?

20. Can you recommend a site or an individual that exemplifies the qualities of high-quality leadership?
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