Exploring the organisational cultures
of early childhood centres

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Statement of Candidature

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled "Exploring the organisational cultures of early childhood centres" has not been previously submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted in part for the requirements of a degree to a university or any institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis itself and have been appropriately acknowledged.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, Reference No: 5201400450, on 9/5/14.

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Date

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Glossary of Acronyms and Key Terms

ACECQA   Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority.

Advocacy   Advancing the values, needs and interests of individuals or a group (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley, & Shepherd, 2012).

Collaborative   When two or more people co-operate and work together for mutual benefit.

DEEWR   Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations.

Educator   EC practitioners who work directly with children in EC settings to provide education and care programs - directors, teachers, or assistants (ACECQA, 2011; DEEWR, 2009).

Ethical practice   Practice carried out in intentional ways and in accordance with rules, standards and philosophy of an organisation.

EYLF   Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009).

National Law   Education and Care Services National Law Act, 2010.

National Regulations   Education and Care Services National Regulations, 2011.

Networking   Interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional contacts to facilitate professional development.

NQF   National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2011a).

NQS   National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011b).

Organisational cultures   Shared understanding of stakeholder behaviour within an organisation, based on the organisational philosophy, values and beliefs.

Policy   A principle of action proposed by an organisation which guides actions and resource allocation.

Professional inquiry   On-going cycle of review through which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed, and new ideas generated (ACECQA, 2011).

Professional learning and development

Growth of professional identity and competence through continuous learning of knowledge, skills and practice (Waniganayake, et al, 2012).

Professional learning community

Educators coming together over time to share expertise and experiences of working with children and families, reflect on practice, build professional knowledge, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and outcomes for children.

Regulatory burden   An aspect of legislation, regulation or policy that could be made more efficient without diminishing intended levels of protection.

Regulatory requirements   Rules or laws designed to control or govern conduct, usually by state or national governments.

Stakeholders   People who hold an interest in decision-making and operations of a body or group, or who can be affected by actions of a body or group. EC stakeholders who contributed to this data collection comprised Head Office staff, centre directors, teachers, and assistants.

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Abstract

The introduction of the *National Quality Standard (NQS)* (ACECQA, 2011b), invites an investigation into how this major policy reform is being communicated and what impact it has amongst staff working in early childhood (EC) centres. The aim of this research study was to explore how relationships amongst EC educators influenced the organisational cultures of EC centres, and how the *NQS* was being communicated amongst educators. Data was collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews with the directors/educational leaders, teachers, and assistants from three community-based long day care centres in the Sydney metropolitan area, as well as an interview with the Director of the auspicing agency. Information available on public access through the website of the auspicing agency, and other related documents available to parents through their centres, were also analysed to gain further insights on the nature of the organisational cultures of the participating centres. Thematic analysis of data from a social systems perspective identified emergent trends and issues of relevance to quality provisioning of EC programs. Findings suggest that the leadership of the centre directors and the Head Office of the auspicing agency, and a notion of interdependence between staff, played a key role in developing the organisational cultures of the centres. A democratic-style of leadership was identified through intentional communication strategies which provided a sense of belonging and attachment to the settings, and collaborative reflection on practice provided a foundation for the implementation of the *NQS*. Insights gained from this research can be used to inform training provisions for EC staff, specifically in support of the implementation of the national quality assessment and rating requirements.

Keywords: Organisational cultures, leadership, professional relationships, communication strategies, early childhood quality

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The organisational cultures of early childhood (EC) centres draw on the values, beliefs and identities of stakeholders, and shape the vision and philosophies of EC centres. These vision statements in turn, provide direction for how centres develop their policies and practices, in delivering quality services to children and their families. It takes leadership to bring together the values, beliefs and identities reflected in the organisational cultures to support collaboration amongst stakeholders. Understanding the role of educational leadership in shaping organisational cultures is relatively embryonic in the EC sector (Lumby, 2012). There is a new focus on developing leadership models that can embrace the increasing complexity of the work of contemporary educators dealing with rapidly changing social environments. This thesis makes a contribution to advancing our understanding about how relationships amongst educators can influence the organisational cultures of EC centres. In promoting a sense of belonging and interdependence, this thesis will also discuss how the nature of communication strategies used by key stakeholders assisted educators to collaborate effectively when implementing the *National Quality Standard (NQS)* (2011b).

This introductory chapter outlines the overarching aims and research questions of the study, contextualising its importance for the EC sector. Firstly, the shift in recognition of the importance of the EC sector is discussed. This discussion is supported by information about the significant changes that have occurred with the introduction of the *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2009), and the added responsibilities in relation to the introduction of major policy reforms in Australia. The establishment of the *National Quality Framework (NQF)* (2011a), and its associated assessment and rating system, the *National Quality Standard (NQS)* (2011b), and increasing complexity of compliance requirements, have made significant impacts on today's EC educators' work.

Secondly, it is noted that organisational cultures and educational leadership are relatively new research concepts in the EC sector, and that there is limited recognition of the connections between organisational cultures and educational leadership, important in articulating and clarifying the vision and goals of EC settings. An understanding of this

background is necessary when locating relevant resources and support for educators responsible for implementing major policy changes. Given its social constructivist nature, Bolman and Deal's (2013) "*Reframing Organisations*" model is utilised as an appropriate framework in theorising and designing the study. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of how this thesis is presented.

1.1   Research Aims

The first aim of this study was to examine how educator relationships influenced the organisational cultures of EC centres. The second aim was to identify key communication strategies that were used by EC educators in enacting the *National Quality Standard (NQS)* (ACECQA, 2011b). The introduction in Australia of a *National Quality Framework (NQF)* (ACECQA, 2011a), to guide EC educators to promote children's development and learning during early childhood, influenced EC practice and pedagogy across the country. While the move to introduce education reforms worldwide has generally not included teachers in the decision-making or taken into account their knowledge (Zeichner, 1993, cited in Stamopoulos, 2003), the introduction of the *NQF,* which "reconceptualise[d] pedagogy and practice" (Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos, & Maloney, 2014, p. 42), provided opportunities for the creation of "new pathways for pedagogical leadership to be reconceptualised and ultimately reframed" to support positive outcomes for children (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 45).

The way that process and structural factors influence the nature of organisational cultures and leadership in EC centres was investigated in this study. *Process factors* refer to the interactions or communication between stakeholders, and include relationships between educators employed within a centre or relationships with parents and centre staff. S*tructural factors* typically include "the measurable and regulatory aspects of a centre's environment" (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley, & Shepherd, 2012, p. 42); for example, the number of staff employed in a centre and their qualifications. To fulfil these aims, the study explored two key research questions:

   i)   How do relationships amongst educators influence the organisational
         cultures of the centres?

ii)   What are the key communication strategies used within the centres to assist educators in the enactment of the *NQS*?

1.2   Rationale

The rationale for this research lay in the global recognition of the importance of early childhood education (ECE), and the fundamental changes that have impacted the EC sector in Australia following the introduction of the *Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (*EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2009), and the *National Quality Standard* (*NQS)* (ACECQA, 2011b). The increasing complexity of educator work expected in the implementation of these major national policy reforms invites an examination of the organisational environments, where stakeholder relationships are formed. This thesis will focus specifically on relationships amongst three key stakeholder categories – educators, families, and between Head Office staff and EC centre staff - as well as the communication strategies used in maintaining these relationships and sharing knowledge about the *NQS*.

Research on ECE has enhanced global and national social and political awareness of the importance of ECE (Cheeseman & Torr, 2009; Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council, 2001; EIU, 2012; Fasoli, Scrivens, & Woodrow, 2007; Fenech, 2013; Hujala, Wanignayake & Rodd, 2013; OECD, 2012; Productivity Commission, 2011; Thornton, 2010; UNICEF, 2008; Vinson, 2006; Waniganayake, 2002). Governments (and educators) are becoming more aware of the importance of employing well qualified educational leaders as being integral to the delivery of quality ECE programs (Waniganayake, 2013). In this environment, there has been an international "proliferation of curriculum and learning frameworks for early childhood education and care" (Sumsion, Barnes, Cheeseman, Harrison, Kennedy, & Stonehouse, 2009, p. 4). This calls for an examination of the workplace environments of EC educators involved in the implementation of new policy frameworks.

Australia's poor rankings in international benchmark reports on the state of ECE in *OECD* countries also influenced the government's reform agenda (EIU, 2012; Fenech, Giugni, & Bown, 2012; UNICEF, 2008; Waniganayake, et al, 2012). With the inclusion of preschools, the *NQF* extends the work of the former National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) which provided Australia with its first national approach to quality provisioning of EC

services throughout the country (Sumsion et al, 2009). EC educators were faced with the daunting task of implementing the requirements of the associated assessment and rating system, the *NQS*, which impacted the day-to-day organisational work of EC centres. This was confirmed in a recent report, *A Report on the National Quality Framework and Regulatory Burden* (ACECQA, 2013), which indicated that EC educators experienced difficulties in enacting the complexities of the new *NQS* requirements.

Literature published during the past two decades has attested to the ever increasing complexity of the work of educators, including EC educators (Blank, 2009; Bottery, 2004; Culkin, 1997; Duignan, 2012; Duignan & Cannon, 2011; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Fasoli, et al, 2007; Hayden, 1996; Hujala, 2013; McCrea & Ehrich, 1996; Rodd, 2013a; Rodd, 2013b). There has also been increasing pressure on educators for "better performance, higher achievement, and improved student outcomes" fuelled largely due to the availability of "international comparative performance data" (Harris, 2014, p. 17). The major changes in the EC educational climate in Australia "intensified the role of early childhood leaders and led to unprecedented challenges" (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 42). The success or demise of the new national reforms rested on educator examination of their "conceptual and behavioural stance" and capacity to adapt their practice as appropriate (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 43). As such, an investigation into the organisational cultures and associated leadership in EC settings during a time of complex and rapid changes in policy and practice is timely.

1.3   Relevance

The relevance of this research study stems from two considerations: firstly, 'organisational cultures' is a relatively new notion in the EC sector (Jorde Bloom, 1988; Nupponen, 2005; Pope & Stremmel, 1992); and secondly, there is limited understanding of the connections between organisational cultures and educational leadership (Lumby, 2012).

The notion of organisational cultures has strong roots in the business sector (Baker, 2002; House & Aditya, 1997; Murray, Poole, & Jones, 2006), and has also been adopted by school education (Oldroyd, 2005; Shaw, 2005). However, the extent of consideration of organisational cultures in EC management manuals is limited to exploring the delivery of administrative and human resources requirements (Community Child Care Co-operative,

2013; Hayden, 1996). McCrea and Ehrich (1999) have called for a more humane management and leadership within EC workplaces, which they suggested was integrally linked to staff roles and responsibilities and "the organisational climate of the shared setting" (p. 438). Hayden (1996) also considered management and leadership within EC contexts from an ecological perspective, and this work aligned with Jorde Bloom's (1988) work in the USA, and has been extended briefly by those interested in staff satisfaction issues (Fenech, 2006; Fenech, Sumsion, Robertson, & Goodfellow, 2007; Jovanovic, 2013; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003).

The focus on organisational cultures and leadership as a joint activity continues to be marginal and limited, however, the development of a "lively culture of professional inquiry" amongst educators (ACECQA, 2011b, p. 119; DEEWR, 2009, p. 13), is encouraged by regulators as a means of critically examining and reviewing practices and educational outcomes, with the aim of generating new ideas for practice and pedagogy. Attention needs to be focussed on how this mandated collaborative work contributes to the development of organisational cultures and educational leadership, so that a "reframing" of the required emphasis for EC educator relationships and behaviour can be formulated (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 45). This is also relevant in reshaping of leadership training for EC educators (Campbell-Evans, et al, 2014; Fenech, 2013; Messenger, 2013; Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004; Nupponen, 2005).

Relevance of this research to the EC sector, therefore, lies in the evidence that, while there is published literature about organisational cultures and leadership in the business and school education sectors, there is little specifically written about this topic in ECE, and in relation to EC leadership, "in some cases [it] does not transcend the 'tips for leaders' style" (Muijs, et al, 2004, p. 158). It is also evident that the relatively sparse research literature reviewed on EC organisational cultures comes mainly from outside of Australia. As such, future Australian research, specifically related to EC organisational cultures and its development in relation to leadership, could be of assistance to EC educators in working towards achieving assessment and rating under the new *NQS*.

1.4   Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

The theoretical underpinnings of this research were informed by organisational culture theory, and the "*Reframing Organisations*" model by Bolman and Deal (2013). These frameworks consider both internal and external social systems of the EC organisations as reflected in the work of Jorde Bloom (1991), and indicate a shift away from the "functional and technical aspects" of organisations to the "interpersonal and symbolic aspects of management" (Baker, 2002, p. 1). It is therefore appropriate to focus on the relational and communication aspects of EC organisational cultures.

The theoretical perspectives of organisational cultures have been well developed over the past century in the social sciences (Hatch, 1997). Organisational culture theory has provided firm grounding for investigations about how social realities are constructed, making use of a subjectivist epistemology as opposed to an objectivist approach (Hatch, 1997). The use of organisational culture theory, therefore, was appropriate to this study as it sought to elucidate practices in a group situation and from the subjective perspective of "insiders" (Hatch, 1997, p. 201), namely, educators employed within EC organisations.

Publications on organisational culture theory can be traced back to the early 1900s (Hatch, 1997), and came mainly out of business faculties with notions such as, single chain of command, and the desire to improve business performance (House & Aditya, 1997). With an increased managerialist focus in educational settings, and an emphasis on targets, measurement and accountability, organisational culture theory was fervently taken up in school educational leadership, even though those trends were at odds with "the progressive humanist educational values and the traditional autonomy of education" (Oldroyd, 2005, p. 189). However, discussion of organisational culture theory features little in EC literature. There have been some EC researchers, in particular, Jorde Bloom (1988; 1991; 2000a, 2000b; 2010), and colleagues (Jorde Bloom, Sheerer & Britz, 1991a; 1991b; 1992), who have provided much needed input over the past two decades to the discourse of EC organisational cultures development, by consideration of the internal and external influences on an organisation through a social systems perspective. Culkin (1997) also referred to organisational cultures in discussing administrative leadership, with a focus on management of EC centres. More recently, Waniganayake, et al, (2012), have contextualised

the concept to Australia, relating organisational cultures to the notion of intentional leadership, with emphasis on educator practice which develops positive and collaborative cultures within an EC centre. These interpretations of organisational culture theory provided a specific framework in which to place the research findings of this study.

Consideration of organisational cultures also utilised Bolman and Deal's (2013) model, "*Reframing Organisations*". This work informed the examination of process and structural factors enacted within the EC centres. Bolman and Deal (2013) promote the use of "mental models" (p. 10), or a "set of ideas and assumptions" (p. 11), to assist in understanding how organisations operate in relation to people's behaviour, and they refer to these mental models as "frames" (p. 10). This thesis is based on two of the four frames comprising the "structural" model, which focuses on the "rules, policies, procedures, systems, and hierarchies", and the "human resources" model, targeting the "needs, feelings, prejudices, skills and limitations" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, pp. 15-16). This framework also aligns well with Jorde Bloom's (1991) social systems model, and thereby providing a balanced approach to the study of work environments of EC organisations.

1.5   Research Approach

The participants for this study were drawn from educators employed at three community-based long day care centres in the Sydney metropolitan area. These centres were all directly managed by an auspicing agency. To preserve the agency's anonymity and for ease of reference and smooth flow of the discussion, it will be referred to by the pseudonym, *ECXX*. The Head Office of *ECXX* was initially approached to identify an appropriate sample of centres for this study and to obtain authority to conduct this research within their organisation. The researcher then approached the Directors and educators directly to invite them to participate in the study. Content analysis was undertaken on the *ECXX* website, various *ECXX* and EC centre documents, and participant questionnaires. This information was used as a stimulus for dialogue during the semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders including the director/educational leader, teachers, and assistants, as well as the *ECXX* Director. Thematic analysis of the interviews elucidated information in regard to the development of organisational cultures and leadership in each centre.

The theoretical underpinnings of the methodology were social constructivist in nature (Layder, 2006). As such, it examined the social connectedness between stakeholders through an analysis of the social processes and structural aspects of EC centres. This approach enabled the illumination of the extent to which individuals both "resist" and "embrace" (Layder, 2006, p. 145) the social environment of the EC workplace. Through semi-structured interviews, participants had the opportunity to reflect on organisational issues and shape their own social construction of the issues, thereby developing their own knowledge and skills (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Multiple triangulations of the data sources occurred through the use of diverse groups of participants and data collection strategies. This strategy added weight to the validity of the research by enabling a comprehensive analysis, built around "a robust picture" (Edwards, 2010, p. 163) of the organisational cultures of EC centres.

1.6   Structure of the Thesis

The content of this thesis is organised within five chapters. This introductory chapter provided an overview of the scope and design of the research. Chapter 2 gives a précis, in the form of a literature review of historical thinking about organisational culture theory and educational leadership, locating both in relation to their embryonic state in early childhood education. Knowledge gaps pertaining to our understanding of organisational cultures and educational leadership of EC settings are also highlighted. Chapter 3 presents information about the methodological bases of the study. The sequential mixed method research design as well as the data collection and participant recruitment methods, are all framed by ethical considerations in relation to possible impacts on participants. The key findings that emerged from the data collected for the study are presented in Chapter 4. It is evidenced that the three EC centres participating in this study were strongly connected under the auspices of *ECXX,* through relationships between key stakeholders, and the utilisation of diverse communication strategies. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the two key research questions explored in this study. It also looks outward to practical application opportunities, and possibilities for further research. The original aims and goals of the study are used as a light to identify new pathways in conceptualising organisational cultures and leadership in EC centres. An evaluation of the

research, nuanced within the limitations of the study, completes the thesis by highlighting the potential contribution this research offers to the EC sector.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an analysis of key literature relevant to the aims of this study, exploring the nature of organisational cultures and associated leadership in EC centres during a period of rapid policy reform. The procedure for identifying the literature is outlined and a brief précis of the main themes found in the literature is presented in two ways: firstly it will focus on literature on organisational cultures and educational leadership; and secondly, it will foreground the EC policy landscape within Australia. This analysis lays the ground work used in identifying the 'gaps in knowledge' that support the rationale for this study.

2.1   Scope of the Literature

The literature reviewed for this thesis comprised a range of national and international publications written in English, and of relevance in the study of organisational cultures, leadership, school leadership, and EC leadership, and included books, journal articles, higher degree theses, and reports. Empirical studies identified through the database search focussed predominantly on EC leadership, and had the specific topic of EC organisational cultures only as a peripheral consideration of the research, which highlighted the embryonic state of research on EC organisational cultures. Controlled vocabulary database searches were undertaken in 2014 using A+ Education, Scopus, JSTOR, and Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC). Literature published during 2000 to 2014 was considered appropriate as a search period because organisational cultures and leadership have been attracting the attention of the sector during that timeframe. As such this analysis brings the literature into close relationship with the lived experiences of contemporary EC educators, resonating with the embryonic state of the study of organisational cultures and leadership in the EC sector (Community Child Care Co-operative, 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012; Waniganayake, 2011; Waniganayake, Morda, & Kapsalakis, 2000). Database searches were conducted using key terms, such as, 'early childhood', in combination with terms, such as, 'organisational cultures', 'early childhood leadership', 'distributed leadership', and 'collaborative leadership'.

These searches provided appropriate literature, which was added to seminal work about organisational cultures and educational leadership by writers well known and respected by academics as foundational thinkers in the respective fields. Journals which produced material through the searches included Australian, American and European. The journal material was weighted in favour of European journals, recognising that authors for whom English is a second language produced some of the literature reviewed. This point emphasises the globalised nature of EC knowledge.

2.2 Organisational Cultures and Educational Leadership

The literature reviewed enabled the contextualisation of this study against past research on organisational cultures and leadership. The formulation of modern organisational cultures began with the question, "What makes us human?" (Hatch, 1997, p. 203). A tussle between anthropologists and sociologists, and "primitive" cultures versus "advanced" cultures, resulted in a change in attitude and refocussing of culture theory (Hatch, 1997, p. 203). Postmodernist theorists suggest that 'cultures' are shared and commonly understood by members of that community (Hatch, 1997). Based on this notion, organisational cultures as a concept began its development in educational leadership and management literature from the 1970s (Lumby, 2012). Baker (2002) suggested that there has been a move to examine cultural complexity and differentiation within organisations, and therefore the need to recognise the plurality of organisational cultures. This shift signals the end of an era searching for a universal definition of one "single overarching culture that incorporates everything" (Baker, 2002, p. 6).

A symbolic-interpretive approach sees cultures as "socially constructed realities" formed not so much by the natural or physical world, but through "interpersonal association and agreement" (Hatch, 1997, p. 218), or relationships and practice. This approach is concerned with how organisational realities are socially constructed not just for the individual, but for the group as a whole (Hatch, 1997). This view is emphasised also in research by Nupponen (2005), who examined EC educator perceptions of organisational cultures particularly in relation to EC management.

The development of organisational cultures in EC contexts was noted in research by Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013), where there was evidence of "cooperation within leadership teams that . . . created flatter organisational structures and collaborative cultures" (p. 26), which emerged through interactions between individuals. This notion of the collaborative nature of organisational cultures was also supported by Lumby (2012), who suggested that "leaders are currently ill-served by encouragement to focus on aligning the organisation's members to a single, strong culture" (p. 576). A shared culture may be enabled through relational activity and effective leadership (Messenger, 2013; Wong, Press, Sumsion, & Hard, 2012). This literature provided a foundation for the research for this study focussing on how organisational cultures in EC settings influenced the implementation of the *NQS*.

The literature revealed that there have been notable impacts on educational leadership which demand consideration when attempting to frame an understanding of the nature of organisational cultures. Societal changes, such as the rise of a new individualism, impelled educational leaders to counter "selfish modes of living", and to provide alternative role models (Duignan, 2012, p. 6). New pressures from an emerging "knowledge society" also led to what are considered to be unhelpful individualistic leadership responses, which presented as "traditional hierarchical structures and processes" (Duignan, 2012, p. 35). It is suggested that these traditional models of leadership were a perpetuation of a model for an "earlier industrial age but not [a] 21st century technologically smart, networked and creative society" (Duignan & Cannon, 2011, p. 111).

This societal knowledge revolution has brought new expectations, values, aspirations, and organisations which are different from the past and require a new approach to leadership (Duignan & Cannon 2011; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Fenech, 2013). This is a widespread movement, with *OECD* economies having changed from a traditional industrial base to a knowledge era where learning and innovation are central (OECD, 2008). In the development of EC leadership there has been an increased focus on "new models of leadership" (Aubrey, et al, 2013, p. 5), and "multiple perspectives to better understand the change process" (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 45). This notion of "reframing" educational leadership (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 45) supports an investigation of relationships and communication strategies used in the implementation of EC policy reforms.

There have been links made between organisational cultures and education since the 1930s through to the thinking of Erikson, in the late 1980s, in his examination of conceptions of school culture (Lumby, 2012). Culkin (1997) was among the first EC scholars who identified the notion that the leadership that is necessary for the management of EC centres is integrally linked to positive organisational cultures. The seminal work of Schein (1992), was also relevant to this study in the metaphor that "culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin" (p. 15), suggesting that organisational cultures and leadership cannot be understood in isolation, alongside the proposal that the development of organisational cultures is actually a group activity.

An understanding of educational leadership needs to be situated in our perceptions of organisational cultures and how they develop. However, there is little in-depth research on how leaders might influence organisational cultures (Lumby, 2012). As will be shown later, the findings presented in this thesis aligned with previous research, which had identified EC organisations as being hierarchical in structure and yet collaborative in culture and operation, which is reflective of a distributed leadership model (Aubrey, 2011; Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Grarock & Morrissey, 2013; Hard, 2006; Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, & Yashkina, 2007).

2.3 Early Childhood Policy Landscape in Australia

Previous research laid the groundwork to enable debate about the implementation of the *EYLF* and the *NQF.* Cheeseman and Torr (2009) outline research which enabled discussion around the implementation of the *EYLF*. Likewise, Fenech, et al, (2012), discuss research relevant to the development of the *NQF,* and indications are that the reforms have been given positive reception in the EC sector. However, the *ELYF* Consortium, surprisingly acting as negative protagonists, described the *EYLF* as "a significant development in Australia's ECEC [early childhood education and care] policy", but "far from bold and brave" (Sumsion, et al, 2009, p.11). While providing a positive view of the general reception of the *NQS* by the EC sector, Fenech, et al, (2012), also question the veracity of the *NQS* to provide what is "needed for a visionary system of quality assurance" (p. 10). For the reforms to be successful, it is suggested that there is a need for "innovative, democratic and critical

leadership and management practices" (Fenech et al, 2012, p. 11). Clearly this debate can only strengthen the goals of the reforms, and is especially important given the weak position reported in relation to EC leadership strategies for Australia in the *Investing in the early years: A national EC development strategy* document (COAG, 2009, cited in Fenech, et al, 2012). Examination of these debates was important in designing this study, with a view to identifying the influences of leadership when implementing major policy reforms.

There has also been a raising of the bar in societal expectations of those in educational leadership positions in regard to complexity, multidimensionality, diverse responsibilities, and accountabilities (Aubrey et al, 2013; Campbell-Evans, et al, 2014; Duignan, 2012; Duignan & Cannon, 2011; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Fasoli, et al, 2007; Hujala, 2013; Hujala, et al, 2013; McCrea & Ehrich, 1996; Rodd, 2013b; Stamopoulos, 2012; Waniganayake, et al, 2000). Organisational theorists argued that this increased complexity is best addressed through "the collective capacities of the organisation" (Leithwood, et al, 2007, p. 46). As the EC sector "expands and transforms and new career frameworks emerge", there is a requirement for "more complex models of organisation" and leadership (Aubrey, 2011, p. 98), in the socially, politically and economically complex EC work environments (Nupponen, 2005). The research of Waniganayake, et al, (2000), suggested that this leadership growth in EC settings, is often inhibited by structural impediments, including regulations, positional hierarchy, and centre size.

Campbell-Evans, et al, (2014), also discuss challenges about school infrastructure in the development of broad ranging leadership amongst EC educators, and the increased complexity in the school sector has led to dissatisfaction with the traditional roles of school leadership, particularly as experienced by school principals (Duignan & Cannon, 2011). It is suggested that the EC sector has even greater complexities due to the extent of diversity and scale of organisations (Muijs, et al, 2004), and the requirement for educators to work closely together (Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013). However, governments and employers are beginning to recognise that the employment of skilled educational leaders is integral to the delivery of quality EC programs (Waniganayake, et al, 2012). The increasing complexity in EC policy and practice was an important consideration in identifying enablers of supports for educators.

Many authors make comment on the substantial body of literature in which discussion about leadership traits is presented (Aubrey, 2011; Coleman, 2005; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Leithwood, et al, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Adjectival theories have been postulated, for example, charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, etc, (Dubrin, Dalglish & Miller, 2006), as well as suggestions of leadership being contingent on situational circumstances (Gronn, 2009). But still there has been no outright common pattern to traits found which can be said to characterise educational leadership, in particular in EC educational leadership (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Hard, 2006; Rodd, 2013a). Historically, the failure of leader-centric approaches has been blamed on "avoidance of top-down and hierarchical models, and the shift into more strategic thinking in organisations" (Hujala, 2013, p. 50). The suggestion was made that previous understandings of organisational cultures and leadership were more suited to "an economy premised on industrial production", that they are "not well suited to a more knowledge-oriented economy" (Uhi-Bien et al, 2007, in Aubrey, et al, 2014, p. 7), and that specifically, "traditional notions of leadership are at odds with the pedagogy and ethos" of the EC context (Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013, p. 289). An international example of the lack of a definitive agreement on the characteristics of EC educational leadership emerged from the *International Leadership Project* (*ILP*), developed in the early 1990s by academics from Finland, England, Australia, the USA and Russia. It revealed differing definitions of educational leadership between countries (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004), and enabled the development of the contextual theory of leadership by Hujala (2013). This understanding highlights the importance of applying situationally specific lenses through which to examine possible enablers of organisational cultures within EC settings.

There is consensus in the literature that there is insufficient resourcing for, and research about, organisational cultures and leadership development (Campbell-Evans, et al, 2014; EIU, 2012; Fenech, 2013; Hard, 2006; Hayden, 1996; Hujala, et al, 2013; Rodd, 2013a; Thornton, 2010), and that EC leadership development in particular is weakly theorised (Aubrey, et al, 2014; Fasoli, et al, 2007; Muijs, et al, 2004; Stamopoulos, 2012; Waniganayake, et al, 2000). This was evidenced in research by Fenech (2013), which indicated that EC leadership had been given prominence in the sector with the establishment of the role of Educational Leader in Australia through the introduction of the

NQF. Nupponen (2005), also researching Australian EC directors' perceptions of their leadership roles, suggested that further research on director preparation for leadership roles was needed. Ten years on, this debate persists as indicated in recent research by Fleet, Soper, Semann and Madden (2015), focussing on the role of educational leaders in EC settings in Australia.

Vinson (2006), in addressing the issue of disadvantage amongst Australian children, concluded his paper by stating that the "lack of national leadership and the willingness to invest in [the education of] our most precious national resource" (p. 9), were barriers to researching EC leadership. Further research and continuous professional development is required with many educators appointed as Educational Leaders having had little or no training. As Campbell-Evans, et al, (2014), explained, their research revealed that educator perception of leadership was low, and greater focus on leadership in teacher training courses was necessary. As such, resourcing of organisational cultures and educational leadership through professional development, staff meetings, room meetings, communication strategies, etc, are strategies that are worth pursuing.

To offer fresh ways of seeing organisational cultures and EC leadership, "the practice of leadership, rather than leadership as a role" is now the focus of educational leadership research (Rodd, 2013a, p. 61). Aspects of the social theory of structuration add support to this notion, with its proponent, Giddens (1984), suggesting that "the study of day-to-day life is integral to analysis of the reproduction of institutionalised practices" (p. 282). Going beyond a simple description of EC educators' roles, the research of Leithwood, et al, (2007), focussed on illuminating day-to-day practice of EC educators in seeking to improve that practice in developing of positive organisational cultures.

Fleer (2002), explored "taken-for-granted" EC practices (p. 65), which "have become traditions that have been named and reified" (p. 64), and looked to the notion of communities of practice, concluding that the meaning found in communities of practice "does not reside in an individual or even in printed matter . . . [but] . . . exists through a dynamic process of living in the world" (p. 76). This notion of communities of practice provides the foundation for a model of leadership, as outlined by Stamopoulos (2012), and Campbell-Evans, et al, (2014), which builds EC professional capacity and capability through a

culture of professional enquiry and a shared culture of leadership. Authentic opportunities for shared reflection within communities of practice, particularly in regard to acquiring knowledge together through customised and centre-based training, were found to overcome cultural differences in research into inter-professional cultures in EC centres (Messenger, 2013). In line with the research outlined above, and as a means of exploring how EC educators are communicating the implementation of the *NQS*, the actual practices of EC educators, specifically through relationships and communication strategies, were investigated in this study.

Sumsion, et al, (2009), recognised that the reform agenda, as outlined previously, provided an "historically significant marker" (p. 4) in Australian ECE. Stamopoulos (2012) submitted that the reforms have "led to unprecedented challenges" (p. 42). The Australian EC sector is in a liminal, or transitional, state, where EC educators are poised between a pre-*NQS*-assessment condition and a post-*NQS*-assessment condition, with some EC centres still having not been assessed under the new assessment and rating system for the first time. The sector is in a transitional phase between the old and the new, and is in a liminal state of interpreting, understanding, and putting into practice the *NQS* requirements. Rodd (2013a) suggested that this interpretation needs to be done through the "practice of leadership" (p. 61), addressing actual reform, rather than, as Fenech, et al, (2012), suggested, "simply following regulations" (p. 11). Fasoli, et al, (2007), viewing the practice of EC reform in the New Zealand context, commented that the leadership required for successful implementation of reform must come from within the profession. While Fenech, et al, (2012), indicated that the *NQS* reforms have been received positively by EC educators, it is timely, in this liminal state, for an examination of how educators seek to understand and communicate the reforms and policy changes of the *NQS*.

2.4   Gaps in Knowledge

This review of the literature identified the evolutionary nature of educational organisational cultures and leadership, and suggests that the EC context is ripe for research in these areas. Although, Wong, et al, (2012) have outlined enablers and challenges to collaborative work between EC professionals, further research is needed, particularly in

relation to connections between organisational cultures, educational leadership, and the implementation of the *NQS*. The literature review also revealed a need to use new frameworks for organisational cultures and leadership, and the following reflections on the literature considers the general to specific view of organisational cultures and educational leadership; enablers of practice; and a broader view of educational leadership.

There is widespread recognition in the literature that there is not only a need for a paradigm shift in our understanding of educational organisational cultures and leadership and how they are conceptualised (Duignan & Cannon, 2011; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Stamopoulos, 2012), but that there is also a need to move away from an examination of the general to an examination of the specific, through a "practice-informed approach to theorising leadership" (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015, p. 354). This approach rejects the generalist notions of leadership traits of previous scholarship, and addresses a gap in our knowledge about the specific nature of leadership practice within educational organisations (Aubrey, et al, 2013; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Leithwood, et al, 2007; Spillane, et al, 2004; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015). The consequences of an overly simplistic application of traits to leadership, "like a recipe" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007, p. 10), are avoided by taking this more specific approach in illuminating the practices that enable organisational cultures and leadership. Data collection strategies utilised in this research study endeavoured to address this gap in our knowledge about actual practices by focussing on EC educators' everyday practices in their settings, placed within the organisational cultures of the context.

The review of the literature also revealed that there are gaps in our knowledge about the actual enablers of that everyday practice. With a shift in focus from looking at "tasks, responsibilities and experiences" of leaders, to investigating how leadership practices are "shared, negotiated and constructed" (Harris, 2009, cited in Duignan, 2012, p. 128), new light may be shed on the enablers of organisational cultures and leadership through investigation of collaborative practice enactment. An examination of "democratic structures" (OECD, 2008, p. 15), which support shared practices, as they are revealed in documents, for example, policies or task schedules, as well as democracy and equity in EC educators' relationships, may provide useful indicators about what structural and process factors can "strengthen or weaken democratic tendencies" in EC centres (Borhaug, 2013, p. 156). Hard (2006), providing a meta-analysis of leadership research, outlined a questioning

of the "incongruence between the rhetoric of democratic governance with the reality of traditional line management approaches" (p. 42), which supports an examination of the nature of these possible enabling factors. Enablers may also be evident in the language used to communicate organisational cultures and notions of leadership (Duignan & Cannon, 2011), as well as in collaborative "spaces for participation in innovation" (Duignan, 2012, p. 127), necessitating an investigation into the language and locations where organisational cultures and leadership emerge. This study endeavoured to address this gap in our understanding of the enablers of successful development of organisational cultures and leadership through an examination of process and structural factors.

It is also evident from the literature reviewed that research on organisational cultures and educational leadership has predominantly focussed on examining positional leader views, indicative of another gap in our knowledge base. It is suggested that there is a need to include multiple voices, or to view leadership as "multiple layered" (Hard, 2006, p. 40), and to move beyond the view of solitary leadership in the role of the centre director (Aubrey et al, 2013; Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013; Rodd, 2013a; Waniganayake, et al, 2000). Kagan and Bowman (1997, cited in Waniganayake, et al, 2000), proposed that by "adopting a more broadly-based notion of leadership" (p. 13), a more accurate picture of leadership in EC contexts may be revealed, and they suggested that a broader notion of leadership may actually support an enabling of leadership at all levels of staffing in EC centres. There was recognition in the literature that EC leadership is now "stretched" to include more stakeholders (Aubrey et al, 2013, p. 25), with a consideration of a multi-directional leadership model between leader and follower (Halttunen, 2013) being appropriate. The "dynamic relationship" between a group of collaborators (Rost, 1991, cited in Aubrey, 2011, p. 3), invites the development of a new paradigm based on a broader conceptualisation of organisational cultures and leadership.

Rodd (2013a) submitted that "leadership responsibility cannot be shouldered by one person" (p. 144), and Harris (2014) agreed that the job of leadership is "now far too big for one [person]" (p. 12). Halttunen (2013), also supported this notion, and outlined the importance of including followers in leadership discussions as "definers" of leadership (p. 109). This was also noted by Stamopoulos (2012), in explaining how leadership developed when "each person interacts and influences another while contributing to a shared vision"

(p. 42), resulting in a positive multiplicity of perspectives. Leithwood, et al, (2007), examined this repositioning of leadership in depth, focussing on new patterns of distributed leadership, and specifically the notion of a "holistic" (Gronn, 2003, cited in Leithwood, et al, 2007, p. 39) pattern of distributed leadership, where there are "consciously managed and synergistic relationships among . . . all sources of leadership in the organisation" (p. 39). This research addressed the need for a broader view of leadership by including interviews with centre directors, Educational Leaders, teachers, and assistants, rather than only centre directors, with a focus on relationships and communication strategies.

2.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the foundations for this research by reviewing appropriate literature focussing on organisational cultures and educational leadership in EC contexts. It is evident when considering the gaps in knowledge based on the review of the literature, that there is a need to focus research on the development of organisational cultures and factors that have enabled the growth of associated leadership within EC settings. In turn, this chapter informed the methodological aspects of this study, as discussed next.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological approach, including the data collection strategies of this multi-site, mixed-method research study. The design of the study with associated ethical considerations is outlined, and selection criteria for the research sites and participants are explained. Modes of analysis utilised, together with the justification for selecting the particular data collection strategies, are also discussed.

3.1 Research Approach to the Study

A strong connection needs to exist between the theoretical foundations for research and the methodology deployed in carrying out the investigation (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). As this study focussed on process and structural factors that constitute organisational cultures and leadership, the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology were social constructivist in nature (Layder, 2006). As previously explained, Jorde Bloom's (1991) social systems framework provided an overarching framework to examine interconnectedness between different layers of organisational processes, and between processes and structures. These different layers comprise the external environment, people, structure, processes, culture, and outcomes (Jorde Bloom, 1991), and will be examined in this thesis through document analysis as well as through interviews with those participants in this research.

3.2 Ethical Considerations of the Study

This research study was undertaken as approved by the Macquarie University Research Ethics Committee (see approval letter at Appendix A - Reference No: 5201400450, Approval Date: 9 May, 2014). Ethical considerations made in relation to this research study included the following:

- moral and legal acceptability,
- adherence to the codes of ethics and approval, and
- researcher integrity by avoiding deception.

Additionally, protection of the interests of participants was ensured with the adoption of informed consent, security of data storage, and through confidentiality of data by safeguarding the privacy of participants in presentations and publications of data (Denscombe, 2010).

It was important to ensure there was no coercion involved in selecting participants for the study: EC centres were recommended to the researcher by *ECXX*; the directors were then approached directly by the researcher and informed that their centre was one of many being approached to limit pressure for participation. EC educators were then approached directly by the researcher, rather than through the director, and given information about the study which led to written consent being obtained (see Appendix F). All participants were also provided with information about the aims of the study (see Appendix D), the interview questions (see Appendix H), and questionnaire (see Appendix G), so that they were well informed in regard to the study topic, and their participation. Participants were also informed that if they were students at Macquarie University, and withdrew from the study, that their academic progress would not be prejudiced in any way. Contact details of the chief investigator were provided for participants to approach if they had concerns about the study.

The security of interview locations in regard to privacy was checked with participants prior to interview commencement; participants were informed that all data would be de-identified; participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time and withdraw their data; participants were informed that they could refuse audio recording of their interview; participants were informed that they could refuse to answer questions, or stop the interview at any time. Interviews were conducted at each EC centre, for no more than one hour, and at times that were convenient to the centre routines to reduce impact on participants and the centre routines. No participants raised any issues or concerns during the data collection phase of the study in relation to infringement of their privacy, or in relation to their personal or intellectual protection. Data, such as, audio files and transcripts, were kept in secure storage.

3.3   Research Sites and Participants

Nine participants from three community-based long day care centres were involved in this study. In addition, the Director of the auspicing agency, *ECXX*, was also interviewed. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) suggest the need to be mindful of whether the research objectives suit a small or large sample size, and they suggest that small sample sizes are advantageous for "exploratory, concept-generating studies" (p. 491). It was appropriate then for a small sample size, with the strengthening factor of multiple sites and diverse participant roles – as per, centre directors, teachers, and assistants - to be selected for this exploratory study.

All participant EC centres were based in the Sydney metropolitan area, and were directly managed by *ECXX*. *ECXX* Head Office was approached (see Appendix B) to identify an appropriate sample of centres for the research, and to obtain authority to conduct the study. The selected sample comprised three centres of similar size providing long day care services. Two centres were located in low to middle range socioeconomic areas, and one in a middle range socioeconomic area. The director of each centre was approached (see Appendix C) for permission to include the director/educational leader, one teacher, and one assistant in the study. Educators were directly approached for inclusion in the study, and they indicated their willingness to participate to the researcher. Everyone approached accepted the invitation to participate without reservation. The goals of the research were outlined in an *Invitation and Information Letter* (see Appendix D), including a *Consent Form* (see Appendix F). Participants and researcher completed and retained consent forms. Site and participant demographics are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Research sites, children numbers, and participant demographics.

	Age & Gender	Role	Part-time/ Full-time	Existing qualifications	Qualifications working towards	Years in sector	Years at present centre	No. different centres worked at	Paid time for programming Yes/No	Hours paid time off floor
Centre 1	Children numbers: Birth - 3 years = 16; 3 – 6 years = 24 Total = 40									
Participant 1 (DIR[1] 1)	31-40 years Female	Director	Full-time	Bachelor of Teaching (EC)	Nil	19 years	10+ years	1 centre	Yes	N/A
Participant 2 (ECT[2] 1)	41-50 years Female	ECT Edu'l Leader [3]	Part-time	Bachelor of Education (EC)	Nil	20 years	2-5 years	2-3 centres	Yes	2 hours
Participant 3 (ECA[4] 1)	21-30 years Female	Room leader 2IC [5]	Full-time	Diploma of Children's Services	Nil	7-8 years	5-10 years	1 centre	Yes	2.5 hours

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[1] Director.
[2] Early childhood teacher.
[3] Educational Leader.
[4] Early childhood assistant.
[5] Second-in-charge.

Table 3.1: Research sites, children numbers, and participant demographics (continued).

	Age & Gender	Role	Part-time/ Full-time	Existing qualifications	Qualifications working towards	Years in sector	Years at present centre	No. different centres worked at	Paid time for programming Yes/No	Hours paid time off floor
Centre 2	Children numbers: Birth – 3 years = 16; 3 – 6 years = 25 Total = 41									
Participant 4 (DIR 2)	21-30 years Female	Director	Full-time	Bachelor of EC Teaching	Nil	9 years	1-2 years	4-5 centres	Yes	N/A
Participant 5 (ECA 2a)	41-50 years Female	ECA 2IC Comm Leader [6]	Full-time	Certificate III in Child Care Studies	Bachelor of Teaching (EC)	13 years	2-5 years	4-5 centres	Yes	2 hours
Participant 6 (ECA 2b)	Over 61 years Female	ECA	Full-time	Certificate III in Child Care Studies	Nil	5 years	5-10 years	1 centre	Yes	2 hours
Centre 3	Children numbers: Birth - 3 years = 16; 3 – 6 years = 24 Total = 40									
Participant 7 (DIR 3)	31-40 years Female	Director	Part-time	Bachelor of Education (EC)	Certificate IV in Workplace & Assessment	14 years	2-5 years	2-3 centres	N/A	N/A
Participant 8 (ECT 3)	21-30 years Female	ECT Edu'l Leader	Full-time	Bachelor of Education (EC)	Nil	3 years	2-5 years	2-3 centres	Yes	3 hours
Participant 9 (ECA 3)	21-30 years Female	ECA	Full-time	Certificate III in Children's Services	Nil	11 years	10 years	2-3 centres	No	N/A

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[6] Community Leader.

3.4   Research Design and Data Collection

This study is situated within the field of Mixed Methods Research, considered appropriate to address the more complex issues of social research (Torrance, 2012). A variety of data sources, diverse groups of participants, and the different data collection strategies enabled a triangulation of the data (Layder, 2013). Issues of equity in research design were considered based on notions presented by Grieshaber (2010), including, an awareness of power relationships between the researcher and participants; awareness of the absence of homogeneity in the research; and an embracing of self-reflexivity as well as the minimisation of bias.

Sequential collection and analysis of data was completed in three stages and three sources as follows:

Stage 1 - Data from *ECXX* website and documents, and centre documents.

Stage 2 - Data from educator questionnaire.

Stage 3 - Data from educator interviews.

How each of these contributed to the overall research is described next.

Stage 1 - *ECXX* website and documents, and EC centre documents

The study began with an exploration of the *ECXX* website to get a sense of the overarching environment of this organisation as an auspicing agency for the EC centres participating in this research. To ascertain the nature of relationships and means of communication amongst participants, a range of documents was obtained from the *ECXX* Head Office and the centres, as listed in Table 3.2.

Content analysis of these items listed in Table 3.2 was useful in providing a systematic approach to the analysis of textual and graphic data sources, and facilitated the investigation of the everyday life of the EC centres through their cultural artefacts (Fattore, 2014; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Importantly, the analysis of the contents of these items also informed and shaped the questionnaire used in Stage 3 interviews.

Table 3.2: Key documents collected from the Head Office and EC centres.

ECXX Head Office	EC centres
- Newsletter - Statement of purpose - Vision statement - Values statement - Philosophy - Handbook - Generic EC policies - Generic Educational Leader duty statement	- Centre Philosophy statements - Centre handbooks - Centre brochures - Staff meeting agendas - Staff meeting minutes - Room schedules - Staff schedules

Stage 2 - Educator questionnaire

Nine educators (excluding the *ECXX* Director), working at three *ECXX* centres, completed a questionnaire (see Appendix G), comprising questions about their professional background, including, age, experience, qualifications, role, training, and workplace tenure and conditions. Layder (2013) encourages the use of surveys "in conjunction with mixed strategies and with both probability and non-probability samples" (p. 104). This questionnaire enabled the systematic collection of participants' background information in a consistent and non-threatening way. Despite being given the questionnaire in advance of the date/time allocated for the interviews, the majority of participants had not completed the questionnaire before the interview dates, and completed it either just prior to, or after the interview.

Stage 3 - Educator interviews

To help the educators feel more comfortable in doing the interviews, they were provided with the questions to be used (see Appendix H) prior to the interviews. With the permission of the participants, interviews were audio recorded. Each interview was approximately one hour in length, and was conducted in a private or semi-private location in each EC centre, with the *ECXX* Director being interviewed by phone (see Appendix I). The educator interview questions were aligned with the themes of everyday routines and

processes, as well as existing structures that support the creation of organisational cultures and educational leadership in EC centres.

The interviews also enabled participants to express their opinions freely and in depth, thereby expanding their responses documented in the questionnaire. The semi-structured nature of the interviews reflected a social constructivist approach (Layder, 2006). This was achieved by providing for a reflective connectivity between the research and the educators in discussing issues during the interview. This in turn could influence the development and understanding of their knowledge base (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). This format was also in keeping with the social systems approach described by Jorde Bloom (1991), and as discussed previously in Chapters 1 and 2.

3.5   Data Analysis

The data collected for this study was analysed in two ways: content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is considered by Krippendorff (1989), to be potentially one of the most important analytical techniques in social sciences research, and he suggests that content analysis goes beyond commenting on or quantifying responses, behaviour, characteristics or conditions, and rather allows for connections to be made with the symbolic artefacts of the responses, behaviour, characteristics or conditions. The use of content analysis was particularly useful in this study in illuminating the organisational cultures of *ECXX* and the EC centres, as well as leadership characteristics communicated through the *ECXX* website and documents. Through content analysis of text, the frequency of an idea or matter can be measured (Krippendorff, 1989; Mukherji & Albon, 2010), illuminating broad thematic responses (Edwards, 2010). A fine analysis can also be utilised where phrases or words can be grouped into categories, with the assumption that the words or phrases have the same meaning (Edwards, 2010).

Categories of images, words, phrases, and concepts applied to the *ECXX* website and *ECXX* and EC centre documents, were explored using frames of reference for content analysis, taken from Fattore (2014), that is, frequency, existence, relationships, proximity, type, and purpose. Analysis of language and images provided useful data in relation to the

approach of *ECXX* to the organisation's goals and values when working with educators, children, and families.

Thematic analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in research recognises patterns within the data, which become categories for the data analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Participant interview responses were analysed initially, and then overall themes were extrapolated with consideration to the study research questions focussing on relationships and communication strategies. Participants' emotional responses to questions were also taken into consideration, which supports Jorde Bloom, et al's (1991), notion that the face-to-face nature of interviews enables the researcher to delve more deeply into issues and values, which is generally absent in questionnaires. Although undertaken in a linear fashion, this research was conducted as an "iterative and reflexive process" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 4). This was particularly so in regard to initial interviews informing subsequent ones.

3.6   Chapter Summary

This chapter presented information about the study design and methodological approach of this research. Ethical considerations and the strength of the study have been presented and appropriately supported through the discussion. The next chapter presents key findings, which emerged from the content and thematic analysis of relevant data collected for this research and as explained in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the key findings of data collected and analysed in relation to process and structural factors which influenced the organisational cultures and leadership, within the three EC centres participating in this research study. With a view to fulfil the aims, the study explored two key research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How do relationships amongst educators influence the organisational cultures of the centres?

RQ2: What are the key communication strategies used within the centres to assist educators in the enactment of the *NQS*?

Data collected for this research were obtained from three sources: the *ECXX* website and a range of *ECXX* and centre documents (see Table 3.2); a questionnaire completed by nine educators (see Appendix G); and a semi-structured individual interview with the nine centre-based educators (see Appendix H), and the *ECXX* Director (see Appendix I). In this chapter, after contextualising the study by presenting demographic information about each centre and the nine educators, the key findings that emerged from the data analysis are presented in three sections as follows:

i)   Relationships amongst key stakeholders
ii) Communication strategies
iii) Philosophical underpinnings to work

4.1   Contextualising the Study

The three EC centres involved in this research were managed by the auspicing agency, *ECXX*. They were all community based long day care centres that catered for children birth to five years, in the metropolitan areas of western Sydney. According to the *2011 Census* (ABS, 2011), the demographics of the centres were relatively comparable, with 78.2%, 84.4%, and 87.9% of people in each locality identifying with ethnic groups other than an Anglo background. Two areas had median weekly incomes of 10% below the national

average, and one area had 5% over the national average. The centre sizes were similar, with a centre licensing capacity of 40, 41, and 40 places each respectively.

All three centres were purpose-built as EC centres, and were established in 1974, 1989, and 1996 respectively. Although purpose built, based on the age of the buildings, educators expressed misgivings about the usefulness of the building designs for contemporary use. For example, one director commented, "[The centre] was purpose built, but not in the way that you'd build a purpose built centre now. There are improvements needed for today's use" (DIR2). A common concern was the small size of the staffrooms which was not conducive to facilitating relationships and communication between educators, and because of that staff meetings were always held in one of the children's rooms. One assistant reluctantly shared, "The space is not appropriate [for communication]. The staffroom is so small, and we have the food from the kitchen, the pantry's in there. . . . We just persevere" (ECA2b). A teacher had concerns about there being no private space to communicate with the centre director: "If I was to have a professional meeting with the director, it's [a matter of] closing the door here, and I feel like you can hear, like it's not private" (ECT3).

Educators also noted positive aspects of the building design of these centres. There was a general belief that as the centres were purpose built, appropriate access between children's rooms facilitated a sense of safety and security: "Everyone can see everyone in the rooms . . . there are plenty of viewing spaces" (DIR1); and "The rooms are very open, and that's quite good" (ECT1). One assistant compared her present centre with another centre she previously worked at:

> At my last centre we had a laundry and toilets between the two rooms, and it was really hard [to communicate] . . . Here, the environment is really conducive to communication. (ECT2a)

The centre environments did, however, present some challenges in developing positive and constructive relationships and communication between educators, which meant that different strategies were used to enable the required and desired communication. For instance, the layout of the centres' outdoor play areas in two centres created communication challenges to staff, as explained by one director about her centre:

"This is an awkward L-shape, so we have a supervision plan in place. . . . How we position staff enables . . . the sandpit person [to] see both [other staff]" (DIR3). Although there were intercoms between rooms in all centres, one assistant stated that they were not always used: "We do also have the intercoms that work between the rooms, but we get a bit confused about which buttons to press, . . . and it's just easier to open the door and shout" (ECA3).

Demographic data collected from the participant questionnaires (*n*=9) were summarised and are presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Table 4.1: Educators' age and qualifications.

	Directors (*n*=3)	Teachers (*n*=2)	Assistants (*n*=4)	Total (*n*=9)
Age				
• 21-30 years	1	1	2	4
• 31-40 years	2			2
• 41-50 years		1	1	2
• 51-60 years				
• 61 years+			1	1
Qualifications				
• Degree	3	2		5
• Diploma			1	1
• Certificate III			3	3

Six of the educators were aged 40 years or less, with only one of the assistants being over 60 years. Likewise, most educators (*n*=5), comprising all three centre directors and the teachers, had achieved an EC bachelor degree. Although one of the assistants had an EC diploma, the majority (*n*=3) held the minimum qualification of a Certificate III in Children's Services. One of those assistants was currently working towards an EC bachelor.

Table 4.2: Educators' experience.

	Directors	Teachers	Assistants	Total
Employment status				
• Full-time	2	1	4	7
• Part-time	1	1		2
Experience in EC sector				
• < 5 years	1	1	1	2
• 6-10 years	1		2	3
• 11-15 years	1		1	2
• 16+ years		1		2
Years at current centre				
• < 5 years	2	2	1	5
• 6-10 years			2	2
• 11+ years	1		1	2

All educators interviewed were female (*n*=9), and the majority (*n*=7, 78%), were employed full-time. They were an experienced group of educators who had been employed in the EC sector for between five and 20 years; apart from one teacher, who was a second year out graduate. The length of tenure within the current centres indicated that there was a mix of long and short employment records in *ECXX* centres. For example, one director had worked in the sector for 20 years, including over 11 years at one centre, moving from the role of assistant to teacher, and then to the director at the centre. Another participant had been in the sector for only two years and this was her first appointment as a qualified teacher. Overall, the length of tenure as educators indicated that 78% (*n*=7) of participants had been employed in the sector for six or more years.

Based on the questionnaire responses, the main tasks they performed in their particular roles at the centres are outlined in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Main tasks performed by the participants x staffing category.

Directors	Teachers	Assistants
• Service management • Liaising with families • Oversight of programming • Leadership and support of team • Networking with community and professional networks	• Observations and documentation • Programming and interaction with children/learning environments • Family and community networking • Supporting team	• Observations and documentation • Programming and room management • Interaction with children and nurturing environment

As can be seen, there were differences and similarities between the responses of directors, teachers, and assistants. The directors focussed on tasks associated with adults, comprising leadership, networking and management. Although the teachers also identified families, networking and team support, they emphasised relationships with the children through observations, documentation and programming. Likewise, the assistants also referred mainly to tasks connected with the children. These responses reflect the task foci of the respective roles performed by these educators.

4.2 Relationships Amongst Key Stakeholders

The first aim of this study was to examine how internal and external elements represented by relationships amongst educators and other key stakeholders influenced the organisational cultures of the centres. Analysis of participant interviews and organisational documents collected and analysed previously (see Table 3.2), provided an understanding of the nature of relationships between and amongst educators, families and the Head Office. Three themes emerged from the analysis of this data as summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Characteristics of relationships amongst key stakeholders.

1. Educator collaborations	2. Partnerships with families	3. Relationships between *ECXX* and EC centres
• Everyday working • Feedback and support • Sense of accomplishment	• Role of building relationships with families • Intentional communication • Partnerships in action	• Reciprocal support • Knowledge building • Sense of ownership of *ECXX* and centres by all staff

As can be seen above, there was a distinction between the responses of directors, teachers, and assistants. Directors' responses were predominantly about personal characteristics, and assistants' responses focussed on task enactment. The teacher responses were spread relatively evenly amongst the different categories. Interview data are used to illustrate each of these three key themes next.

4.2.1 Educator collaborations

The *NQS* (ACECQA, 2011b) suggests in Quality Area 7, *Leadership and service management*, that collaborative work between educators be promoted to "affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills and to improve practice and relationships" (p. 119). There was strong evidence of collaborative relationships amongst these educators, and this was highlighted in three ways: through *Everyday work*, *Support and feedback*, and *Sense of accomplishment*.

Everyday work

Participants were asked to describe their everyday working relationships with their colleagues at the centre, and these responses were categorised in terms of professional relationships and personal relationships. Professional relationships focused on tasks that they completed as a part of their employment roles and responsibilities. Personal relationships reflected qualities that were valued by the participants in establishing close bonds with colleagues.

When referring to their professional relationships, several educators noted equity in tasks as important, irrespective of their qualifications or position at the centre:

> I'm the room leader, and the 2IC, but we don't have, 'I'm the room leader, so you need to do this'. We're all equal. We all clean the toilets, and take turns. It goes throughout the whole centre. . . . We work as a really good team, and we're really flexible. (ECA1)

Centre directors in particular described their approach as team work: "We're a team. I'm the leader, but we work as a team. 100% teamwork" (DIR1); and "While I'm their manager, I'm still a teammate, and work on the floor alongside them" (DIR2); and "I want it to be really collaborative and cohesive, and I think that works well for a team once you've established that culture" (DIR3). One teacher, who was also the Educational Leader, summed up the professional relationships in the team: "They're a great team, we work really well, we communicate, we're all flexible and willing. Everyone shows initiative, so it's a good team" (ECT3). One assistant referred to experiencing disharmony with another educator, and she explained that while she initially decided to relinquish her right to question the disharmony and defer to the more qualified staff member, the issue was discussed and a collaborative solution to the issue was achieved:

> I was always room leader at my last centre, and I wasn't room leader here. I like to make decisions, . . . but I was stepping back a bit, to give her [the room leader] space, because I know I can be very bossy and domineering. Then [the director] said, 'We're getting rid of this whole room leader thing'. . . [we] both have different skills so we complement each other. (ECA2a)

While there was a focus on work relationships, friendship was also mentioned by one assistant: "We all have a good working relationship and friendship . . . that creates a nice working environment, when you want to come to work, because you spend so much time here you need to be friends with these people" (ECA3). It was important to educators that they related positively: "It's quite positive, everyone seems very nice. We all get on really, really well" (ECT1); and "This is a really good team, and the most harmonious team I've worked with, and that's probably why I've stayed so long." (ECT1).

Support and feedback

Participants consistently indicated that they felt supported by members of their team in initiating and developing new ideas. They suggested that there was flexibility in routines, activities, and daily task allocation, which contributed to the collaborative cultures of the centres: "Our centre is our own – we create it." (DIR1); and "I hope I create a culture of safety, and of reflection, and I try to model that" (DIR3); and "It's not just me as room leader, everyone brings their ideas and it's really respected." (ECT3). Sources of support for teachers and assistants for information and clarification of everyday issues, predominantly came from their immediate work colleagues, and reflected a hierarchical direction according to their role. Support for ideas amongst educators was, however, reported as being non-hierarchical, while support for information and clarification of pedagogical issues was reported as being hierarchical.

Teachers also discussed formal feedback received during performance reviews with the director: "We have supervision, which is monthly or six weekly, where we sit down and we talk about what's happening, how we're going, what we need help with, and she'll provide feedback" (ECT3). Assistants reported on welcome feedback about their observations and documentation from the Educational Leaders: "Anything that's constructive criticism, I don't mind. . . . That's important to me, so I can reflect on myself and improve" (ECA1). Educational Leaders also reported a sense of satisfaction in the opportunity to provide feedback to the educators: "A lot of it's in my own time. I'm happy to do it. I love seeing improvements and them wanting and willing to improve on their practices" (ECT3). There was a distinction made by all participants between formal and informal feedback, with informal feedback reported in non-hierarchical formats, and formal feedback reported in hierarchical formats.

Formal, hierarchical lines of feedback and mentoring were mentioned by directors who reported a direct line of feedback from their *ECXX* managers: "[My manager] does service visits. She does all my supervision and appraisals" (DIR1). Mentoring by other directors within the *ECXX* group was also mentioned, as part of a collaborative network organised by *ECXX*. The *ECXX* Director reported that there was strong support given from *ECXX* Head Office to educators at all levels through the Operations Managers. Interestingly,

however, she also mentioned that inversely, support from educators for Head Office staff was just as important in gaining direct input from educators in policy development, feedback on policy implementation, as well as collaborative knowledge building on aspects of the *NQS*.

Sense of accomplishment

Participants described their feeling of satisfaction when explaining the achievements of each year. One director reported on having a sense of accomplishment knowing that the centre ran smoothly for six weeks in her absence:

> While I was gone [the 2IC] stepped up as acting director, and there wasn't a hiccup. My manager said to me, 'That's a great reflection on you that your leadership allowed the team to continue to work when you're not here'. (DIR1)

There was some hesitation on the part of most participants in identifying daily accomplishments, due to, for example, difficulties with children's behaviour, or a lack of time. One assistant, for instance, noted, "Some days, it's like, I feel like I'm running around putting out fires, but that's probably because I haven't set up a stimulating environment in the first place" (ECA2A). Although the same assistant stated, "I love it when I have a really great conversation with the children and you can see that something sparked with them, and I'll think, this is where I'm meant to be" (ECA2a). Another assistant passionately explained that, "The children are the only reason I'm here. I can see that over a period of five years, I couldn't believe that at my age, how much I've learnt from the children. . . . They've really shaped me. . . . I've never thought of leaving" (ECA2B). One director, however, mentioned sometimes going home having not ticked anything off her *to-do* list:

> There are some days when you can walk in with a plan, and then something can happen on that day and then that plan's gone. That's just the industry that we work in, and you have to be adaptive to that. I definitely feel when I go home that I have achieved a lot most days, but there are some days when I go home and I think I've got nothing done on my *to-do* list! (DIR2)

4.2.2 Partnerships with families

Opportunities for families to "be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions" (ACECQA, 2011b, p. 152) through collaborative partnerships are promoted in the *NQS*, in Quality Area 6, *Collaborative partnerships with families*. There was strong evidence of partnerships with families at the centres involved in this research, and this was highlighted in three ways: through *Building relationships with families*, *Language of partnerships*, and *Partnerships in action*.

Building relationships with families

Partnerships with families and communities were revealed in the participant questionnaires where directors, teachers and assistants indicated that relationships with families and communities were amongst their main tasks (see Table 4.3). The notion of partnerships with families was expressed by educators as "developing and securing strong relationships with families" (ECT3), alongside "connections with our community" (DIR2). One educator had been nominated as the Community Leader, in addition to another educator being the Educational Leader. The educator, an assistant, undertook the role of Community leader in building relationships with families and the community with enthusiasm, stating:

> It's so exciting. My role as I see it, is that we make sure that we engage the community. . . . We have a Community Book with people's faces who visit the centre, so that [the children] know who the people are. . . . 'That's Jerry, he comes to fix the computers'. (ECA2a)

This assistant saw her role as heightening her sense of partnership with families, children and communities. Positive relationships between educators were reported as being linked with longer length of tenure at a centre, and as positively impacting on partnerships with families. See for example, comments made by one director:

> When there are no real team issues, it makes a difference to the children, and makes a difference to the families, and just the feel of the centre is different, and that's what parents comment on when they walk in. They say it feels just like home. (DIR2)

Language of partnerships

Promotion of partnerships with families and communities was evident in the analysis of content on the *ECXX* website, as well as *ECXX* and centre documents, as indicated in Table 4.5.

As can be seen, the language of partnerships with families and communities was being use consistently in all of the items listed in Table 4.5. The emphasis was particularly strong in centre handbooks, with specific mention of embracing diversity. Parents were invited to "check in with staff" to exchange information about their child; were "welcome to call in for a visit, or stay for a day"; were encouraged to share something of their cultural heritage; and could provide feedback informally or as part of an advisory group at each centre. Specific guidelines for engagement with centres through relationships underlined the intentionality of collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Table 4.5: Intentional communication about partnerships with families.

ECXX website	*ECXX* & centre philosophies	Handbooks	Policies	Educational Leader
• Partnership with children and families • Partnership with the local community • Responsive to children, families and community	• Family involvement • Parents' feedback • Linkages and networks • Partnerships within the community	• Involvement in the service • Check in with staff • Spend time with your child at the service • Share your family's culture • Mutual respect, open communication and partnership with families • Feedback is important	• Families will be consulted regarding their child's rest needs and sleep patterns for consistency in approach • Families will be contacted to inform them of any signs of illness of the child • Families will be given accurate and prompt information	• Contribute to newsletters and inform families about the educational program • Establish program links with other community services and groups

Partnerships in action

Centres used a variety of strategies to encourage parent participation in centre based activities, including morning teas for special events, such as Mother's Day, the 40th anniversary celebrations of one centre. Examples of this partnership in action were an *All About Me* board and a *Family Book* used at different centres which aimed to encourage a sense of belonging for children and families: "Over the years we've done an *All About Me* board, and everyone puts up pictures of themselves and their families, and talk about that [with the families]" (ECT1); and another stated:

> We have a *Family Book*, to encourage children's sense of belonging, so the families take a page home and put in information about their child, whatever they want. It's largely been photos, because of [English as a] second language being an issue for families, and some families write it in their first language, which is brilliant. (DIR3)

All staff also contributed to the activities which presented an additional avenue for communication between staff and families. One of the centres had recently introduced new formatting for children's portfolios as a means to improving communication about children's learning with families: "The portfolios are much simpler, more user friendly, and there are a lot of photos. A lot of our families have English as a second language, so they like a lot of photos, so they can understand it more easily" (DIR2). These intentional activities at the centres provided capacity for active relationship building between educators and families.

4.2.3 Relationships between *ECXX* Head Office and EC centres

These findings include additional data from the interview conducted with the *ECXX* Director, and are presented under three sub-themes that emerged: *Interdependence*, *Knowledge building* and t*eam building*, and *Belonging and attachment to the setting*.

Interdependence

The *ECXX* Director described the relationship between the directly managed centres and *ECXX* Head Office as being characterised by reciprocal support and interdependence.

While dependent on Head Office for policies, funding and regulatory provisions, centre independence was welcomed, as reported by one director: "I wouldn't continue to work for *ECXX* if you were a puppet. That's not the way I work, and they don't either" (DIR1). One director in particular responded very positively in relation to the creativity she felt possible with support from *ECXX*:

> The culture of *ECXX* gives me a lot of flexibility to be creative, and I feel very supported by Head Office and the management team, so I can make decisions that aren't just in the box of what I'm limited to do, but can make decisions to get results and feel supported by them. (DIR3)

As mentioned previously, the *ECXX* Director indicated that supporting centre based educators by Head Office staff was important in all aspects of their daily work. This was also reflected in the sense of reciprocal accountability reflected in the data analysed. Accountability in service provision was communicated through specific language used in the *ECXX* documents, such as, *consultative, ethical, risk minimisation, regulations, legislation, accredited*. The handbooks stated clearly that *ECXX* was directly linked to governance and management of the individual centres through their relationships and support. One director also felt that her advocacy work in the local community was only possible through the support of *ECXX*: "It's only through the backing of *ECXX,* and being able to be creative in my role, that I can be involved in something like that" (DIR3). She explained further about the support she received from *ECXX*:

> I've been wonderfully supported, and through that, mentored, which has allowed me to understand my role better and to do my role better. . . . It's not just about doing A, B, or C, because that's what I'm limited to. It's about getting an end result, so I can do a lot more. (DIR3)

Knowledge building and team building

The ten participants all indicated a responsibility for knowledge building amongst all levels of staff employed by centres run by *ECXX*. While data from the questionnaires revealed that all participants were suitably qualified for their roles, the interview data also indicated a commitment to undertaking professional development training, with all participants having undertaken some form of training in the 12 months prior to completing

the questionnaire. One director was keen to "support and upskill the education team so that they can provide great outcomes for children and families" (DIR3). Likewise, a teacher reported:

> All the staff need to keep doing training . . . because you always come away with a little bit more knowledge, and understanding, and ideas, and I think people get a bit stale, and a bit caught up in *same, same, same*, if they don't do the training. (ECT1)

The significance of knowledge building was also evident in the importance participants placed on professional development training opportunities available from the Head Office and funded by each centre. One assistant, who was the second-in-charge at her centre, talked about means of knowledge building available from Head Office: "Talking to Head Office, the library in Head Office, and training in Head Office" (ECA1). Another assistant responded with enthusiasm to Head Office training she had undertaken: "It re-energised me, it gave me new vision, new purpose, new ideas to act on. Wow, this is what I'm wired to do" (ECA2a).

The transfer of knowledge gained from Head Office in Educational Leader training, was suggested as being of great importance to knowledge building in the teams, as reflected in the following comment:

> In my work . . . I didn't really understand much with reflections and evaluation, but once the Educational Leader came in, I was able to get on track and put more meaningful reflections into my work. I like the Educational Leader to read over my work. (ECA1)

The *ECXX* Educational Leader's duty statement is not included in this thesis to protect the identity of this organisation. However, it defined the role as being to support relationships between educators to "enable open and constructive conversations about the educational program", and to promote a "positive organisational culture that builds a professional learning community". According to the duty statement, the Educational Leader was expected to coach and resource their team. It was also emphasised that leadership at the centres was a joint endeavour in knowledge building, and that recognition should be given to the "diversity of experiences, backgrounds and contributions of educators". Words

such as, *research, policy, advocacy, evidence-based, excellence, strong voice with government, influence in the sector*, used in the *ECXX* website and related documents, reflected the value of learning coming from the Head Office and accessible to the centres.

While all staff meetings included *housekeeping* (eg, discussion of work safety, policy reviews, parents' morning teas, routines, etc), and preparation for quality assessment or the Quality Improvement Plan, there was also specific time set aside at one centre for team building. The director stated:

> I try to plan the staff meetings with information that is necessary, but also information that is useful to them, and . . . it's not in every staff meeting, but in most, at least in every second, I try to plan a team building activity as well. (DIR3)

These team building activities were appreciated by educators, as explained by one assistant: "Everyone has different strengths, and might see things in a different way, and they might have a different angle on something" (ECA3).

Belonging and attachment to the setting

Perhaps because of the support of *ECXX* as discussed above, the participants expressed a sense of belonging and attachment to the centres, and a high level of engagement with their work. One assistant stated, "It comes down to ownership. . . . I feel a great deal of ownership of the centre with the new director. When you have that sense of ownership, you put a lot more into it" (ECA2a). One director also suggested that the quality of the centre was influenced by a sense of ownership: "We try to encourage ownership and empowerment in their roles, what they have to offer, and we value everybody's ideas" (DIR3). It was suggested that the *feel* or culture of the centre was created when educators were able to ". . . bring unique styles and personalities to the centre" (ECA2a). For example, one assistant reported singing songs with the children from her particular cultural heritage, accompanied by her guitar: "I'm the only guitarist in the place, so I brought the guitar in. Not just for our room" (ECA2b).

4.3   Communication Strategies

The second aim of this study was to identify key communication strategies that were used by the educators in their work which assisted in implementing the *NQS*. Participants were asked about the focus of their day-to-day communication at work. All participants responded to this specific question with great interest and enthusiasm, using language which was positive and engaged. Analysis of the documents (see Table 3.2) and participant interview responses were used in separating the findings into two themes: *Informal communication* and *Formal communication*.

4.3.1 Informal communication

Informal communication was non-hierarchical, unplanned, on the floor, and throughout the day. It related to clarification of task requirements, children's needs, program requirements, and sometimes pedagogical issues. Participants spoke about incidental, on-the-floor communication, with one director explaining, "Everything has to be communicated" (DIR1); and another director describing communication as, "On the job, about things in the moment" (DIR3). The importance of communication was well understood by all participants: according to one teacher, "Communication is the most important thing. Open communication is pivotal, especially in EC" (ECT2); and an assistant agreed, "What we always try to do, which is the most important thing, is verbal communication, so that if [other staff] have any questions or if they don't fully understand, they can ask you" (ECA3). These responses indicated the vitality and intensity of informal communication that occurred spontaneously and casually amongst all educators as they went about their work.

Information about the children or the program was often communicated between educators at a change of shift, during quieter times of the day (the beginning or end of the day), at lunch time, or outdoors. The heightened importance of day-to-day communication was captured in the comments made by a teacher who worked part-time: "Because I work part-time, I generally ask a lot of questions about the end of the week, things that we planned, and did they go well with the other children later in the week" (ECT1). One assistant was concerned about the lack of time for communication:

Communication with staff is when we can, and when we're not tied up with engaging the children. So it's usually done during lunchtime when we can catch one another – if we can catch one another – or a lot of times outdoors, if we can, although we have to be careful with that because of the supervision factor. At times it's quite difficult to be able to communicate on a longer basis. . . . A lot of times things are cut short because the time factor's not there. (ECA2b)

The responses about different modes of informal communication, and the frequency of comments made during the interviews are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Informal communication focus and frequency across educator roles.

	Directors	Teachers	Assistants	Total
Children (medication, collection, programming, activities for specific children, behaviour)	4	2	7	13
Room (room set up, routines, nappies)	1	4	5	10
Centre (equipment/ material deliveries, routines, events)	4	0	1	5
Total	9	6	13	

As can be seen in Table 4.6, there was a distinction between the types of responses of directors, teachers and assistants. The directors focussed more on communication about centre administration activities, and children's health and wellbeing. The teachers, who were both room leaders, focussed predominantly on communication about running their rooms. In contrast, the assistants' communication focussed more on the children's health and wellbeing, with consideration of running the rooms also evident in their responses. The participants reported that the rationale for these interactions and engagement with each other included a mix of reasons such as, clarification, instructions, and advice, and communication was in a hierarchical or a non-hierarchical manner.

Communication that related to pedagogy, and specifically the *NQS*, did not tend to be undertaken when supervising children, in order to give due focus to the children, and was rather done in staff meetings, room meetings, or programming time, which will be discussed in the section *Formal communication* below. Participants indicated that educators were "all on board with the *NQS,* as a continuing practice and part of routine" (DIR1), and that they "are getting more of a handle on the *NQS*" (ECT1), suggesting that they had less need to talk about the *NQS* on a daily basis. Despite this, pedagogy was sometimes discussed between educators informally, and one assistant reported feeling comfortable in informing teachers and directors of knowledge she had gained from reading sector specific magazines, which she did while on her lunch break or at home:

> [The magazines] tell me a lot. . . . I didn't know that a couple of things I've found in those magazines, the educators had no idea about. I'd say, 'You haven't read that Rattler in there have you? Did you know, . . . You should read it'. (ECA2b)

4.3.2 Formal communication

Formal communication took place at planned and regular times, and included opportunities for training in pedagogical knowledge, team building, and housekeeping about the centre. Examples included the use of room diaries, room meetings, staff meetings, and newsletters.

The responses about different modes of formal communication, and the frequency of comments made during the interviews, are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Formal communication modes and frequency across educator roles.

	Directors	Teachers	Assistants	Total
Room meetings (programming, room set up, housekeeping, reflection on practice)	2	2	3	7
Room diaries (children arrangements, programming)	1	1	4	6
Centre diaries (events, routines, training)	2	1	3	6
Staff meetings (assessment/compliance, WHS, training, team building, reflection on practice)	3	2	0	5
Staff appraisals (assistance, reflection)	3	1	0	4
Director/Educational Leader memos	2	0	1	3
Mock assessment visits	0	1	1	2
Programming time (feedback, clarification)	0	1	0	1
Room program boards	1	0	0	1
Observation books	1	0	0	1

As can be seen in Table 4.7, the directors focussed predominantly on staff meetings and staff appraisals. The teachers likewise, focussed on staff and room meetings, while assistants focussed on room diaries and room meetings, which were concerned with immediate means of communicating with colleagues. One teacher explained the importance of these formal communication modes:

> We communicate so well, because we have so many areas where we can communicate in, like the book where we give praise to other staff members. It's things like that, the little things. Everyone feels appreciated for their work. (ECT3)

As mentioned previously, participants indicated that it was preferable that pedagogy was discussed formally during the monthly staff meetings, weekly room meetings, or weekly programming time. One director explained,

There shouldn't be too much communication between staff while they're engaged in supervision, and learning and education with children. . . . The focal point at that moment should be the children. And then in staff meetings and room meetings, that's when you have discussion about what worked, what didn't work, what we could do differently, what was challenging. (DIR3)

As indicated in Table 4.7 above, room meetings played a key role in formal communication, particularly for the assistants. All room meetings were held during children's rest time and, while enabling only limited opportunity for in-depth analysis of pedagogy, they were considered vital to program development within rooms. An Educational Leader reported: "As Educational Leader I'm trying to bring more reflection on practices for the team, so they can see where we are" (ECT3). All educators were welcome to share knowledge on particular topics during staff meetings, particularly those educators studying to upgrade their qualifications. Centre directors reported that they were endeavouring to ensure that staff meetings were not swamped by housekeeping, and that time was allocated for the Educational Leaders to present training on aspects of pedagogy, and feedback on observations/programming. One Educational Leader emphasised her role at staff meetings as follows:

During the staff meeting . . . if I think, for example, at Easter, people have been doing too much structured craft, I'll bring things up like that, and just remind them that it should be child centred and going from the children's interests. (ECT1)

Three times per year, *ECXX* organised meetings for all of its centre directors. In addition, monthly meetings were organised by *ECXX* for directors of directly managed centres. These meetings played an important part in the directors' continuing understanding of the centre environments, as explained by one director: "The directors' meetings are a good forum to catch up with everyone, and put out ideas" (DIR1). All educators were welcome to attend directors' meetings, particularly teachers, and those staff who worked as second-in-charge in the centres. Input from the directors' meetings was reported back through centre staff meetings, enabling a broader communication of topics of interest throughout *ECXX*. Centre directors and Educational Leaders also shared information

about the *NQS*, by distributing *ACECQA* information and support fact sheets, EC sector specific magazines, and the *ECXX* monthly newsletter.

As indicated in Table 4.7, directors emphasised the importance of annual and two- to three-monthly performance appraisals which illustrate formal and in-depth communication between the director and the educators. Importantly, all centre based educators were responsible for observations and some programming for focus children. Staff saw the practice as encouraging leadership in all educators. One assistant said: "Particularly with some part-time staff, [all of us programming] provides stability across the whole week. I started when I first started working. I got into programming straight away" (ECA3). The director or Educational Leader reviewed observations, programming and portfolios of educators, particularly for assistants, and was able to provide written feedback, or they attended room meetings to enable communication about the practice of the room. One assistant reported that she was very keen to be involved in observations and programming, and sought advice from the Educational Leader as she particularly appreciated her constructive criticism: "I'll ask [the Educational Leader], are you able to read this, what I've written. Let me know what you think, or if you've got any input" (ECA1).

Another important mode of formal communication mentioned in interviews was the mock assessment visits conducted by *ECXX* Head Office at all centres. At these events, educators were required to respond to questions from the Head Office staff in regard to aspects of the *NQS*, and needed to be able to justify pedagogy and identify connections that could be made between practice and the centre philosophy and policies. One assistant spoke positively about these visits, mentioning that their director also conducted her own random mock assessments for educators on an individual basis, and she gave an example of a possible question, "How does our philosophy underpin our interactions with the children?" (ECA3). One Educational Leader (ECT3), whose centre was coming up for its first assessment under the *NQS*, enthusiastically indicated that:

> The mock visits are brilliant. . . . They help so much, so we can see what we can improve on and what we're doing great and can be proud of. Everyone's nervous about being assessed, but I'm confident in our practices. (ECT3)

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The same teacher also indicated that sharing of assessment results for centres across the group in the *ECXX* newsletter as a form of formal communication, was appreciated by educators across the centres run by *ECXX*.

4.4 Philosophical Underpinnings of Educators' Work

The philosophical underpinnings of educators' work provided insights into assumptions about knowledge, reality and existence within centres. The participants' descriptions of these assumptions reflected their understandings of the organisational cultures of their centres. While each centre used generic *ECXX* policies, and *ECXX* had well developed and comprehensive statements about the organisation's purpose, values, and vision, the centres were able to develop their own individualised philosophies relevant to their context. The *ECXX* values and mission statements are not provided as attachments to preserve the anonymity of *ECXX.*

Participants' priorities

Participants were invited to outline what they considered to be the most important tasks of their position of employment at the centre. The subjective nature of this question provided insight into the participants' understanding of their tasks, placing the tasks "in the context of the social conditions within which they arise" (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 490).

Participants' responses about their self-identified priorities were categorised and reflected different levels of importance based on their position at the centre, as reflected in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Participants' priorities.

Directors	Teachers	Assistants
1) Quality education and care service 2) Team leadership, and supporting and up-skilling team 3) Liaising with families	1) Quality education programs 2) Quality education and care service 3) Liaising with families	1) Nurture of children 2) Quality education and care service

These priorities revealed a focus on quality education and care service by all participants, although, the main priority for the assistants was the nurture of children. The directors' responses indicated team leadership as a priority, which was not necessarily an expectation of those employed as teachers or assistants. Similarly, liaising with families was seen as one of the most important tasks performed by directors and teachers, but was not mentioned by the assistants. These responses also reflect the nature of relationships amongst key stakeholders in these centres. That is, directors and teachers appear to prioritise relationships with families and to the team in a leadership capacity. In contrast, the assistants prioritised building relationships with the children.

Participants' mottos and centre philosophies

During the interviews participants were invited to summarise their approach to their work in a one sentence/word motto. It was interesting to compare educators' mottos and their respective centre philosophies, as presented in Table 4.9. As noted previously, these documents depict the nature of relationships (RQ1) and communication (RQ2) amongst the participants in each centre, and then taken together, these elements portray or illuminate the characteristics of the organisational culture of each setting.

Table 4.9: Educator mottos and centre philosophies.

Centre 1	Centre 2	Centre 3
Educator mottos		
• "Happy children, happy team, happy families, happy centre" (DIR1) • "It's about a level playing field – everyone needs to feel equal and valued" (ECT1) • "It's all about the children" (ECA1)	• "Just do it" (DIR2) • "Fun" (ECA2a) • "The children" (ECA2b)	• "Inspire, educate and empower children within a framework of relationships and respect" (DIR3) • "Great leaders inspire greatness in others" (ECT3) • "Children don't remember what you made them do, they remember how you made them feel" (ECA3)
Centre philosophies		
• Development and education of young children • Individual needs, strengths and interests of the children • Respect of children, families and staff • Links with community	• Links with children, families, and community • Respect of children, staff and community • Sense of humour and fun • Balanced food and safe hygiene • Sustainable environment • Child focussed programs with parent input	• Respect of children, families, staff, and community • Empowerment and well-being of children • Child centred programs • Collaborative partnerships with families • Advocacy for families and community • Team cohesion through support and valuing of strengths

Participants' responses revealed the beliefs and values as reflected in their relationships with colleagues, families, children and communities. These responses also suggested alignment of individual perceptions with centre philosophies, based on equitable, intentional, and respectful relationships. Two educators mentioned the impact of their centre's philosophy on their approach to their work: "The most important thing is the centre philosophy" (ECT3); and

> Our philosophy is about how we want our centre to run, and how it works in the room. . . . We need to work to make sure that we are mirroring what that philosophy says. . . . We go with the *ECXX Values [Statement]*, but implement our own philosophy, and we work on that all the time. (ECA2a)

For these participants, it was important that the centre philosophies were implemented in their work. One director mentioned that her centre had recently re-worked their centre's philosophy in consultation with all educators: "We have two days planning at the start of the year. So the first day is planning out the year, where we want to go, and revisiting our philosophy" (DIR2). The development of respectful relationships, including child oriented programs, was common across the centres.

4.5   Chapter Summary

The findings presented in this chapter revealed that relationships and communication are foundational to educators' work, and that process and structural factors that enable organisational cultures are interrelated. Relationships between educators, with families and communities, and with the *ECXX* Head Office, were found to be pivotal to task enactment and in prioritising the work of educators. Communication strategies, both informal and formal, were also found to be key structural factors shaping task enactment. These findings form the basis of the following chapter, where connections with previous research are discussed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter the key findings of this study are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It highlights both commonalities with existing research as well as new insights about organisational cultures and leadership in EC centres that have emerged through this research. In discussing and drawing conclusions based on the key findings, recommendations for further research are presented. Limitations of the study are also considered, and implications for the EC sector are outlined.

5.1 Organisational Cultures and Educational Leadership

This research set out to explore the organisational cultures of EC centres by focussing on two key research questions. Findings as presented in Chapter 4 suggested that relationships and communication strategies between educators were integral, and that the leadership of the centre directors, Educational Leaders, and the Head Office played a key role in developing the organisational cultures of the centres. Table 5.1 provides an overall summary of the research questions and the key findings of this study.

Table 5.1: Summary of research questions and key findings of this study.

	Relational Aspects	Communication Strategies
Research Question 1: How do relationships amongst educators influence the organisational cultures of the centres?	**Key finding #1:** A sense of belonging and attachment to the EC setting played a key role in the development of an inclusive and team oriented organisational cultures.	**Key finding #3:** Use of intentional and clear modes of formal communication (such as, room diaries, centre diaries, newsletters, e-mails, communication boards, and observation books) provided the foundation for enacting the *NQS*.
Research Question 2: What are the key communication strategies used within the centres to assist educators in the enactment of the *NQS*?	**Key finding #2:** Interdependence between the centres and the *ECXX* Head Office, through trusting relationships and flexibility in management and programming, influenced the development of the centre organisational cultures.	**Key finding #4:** Focussed and regular avenues for collaborative knowledge building and reflection on practice (such as, staff meetings, room meetings, professional development, staff appraisals, and *ECXX* mock assessment visits) supported the enactment of the *NQS*.

Key understandings emerging from this study are discussed next by focussing on the relational aspects (RQ1) and communication strategies (RQ2), and the respective key findings related to each of these.

5.1.1 Relational aspects

Bolman and Deal (2013) framed the consideration of human resources within organisations using the metaphor of "family" (p. 19), and advanced the notion of exploring relationships within organisations. The human resources frame provides a lens for understanding how people and the strategies they use to relate to one another in the workplace can influence organisational cultures. The challenge of leadership lies in working out how to "align organisational and human needs" through "empowerment" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 19).

The literature reviewed in designing this study indicated firstly, that there was a need to shift the focus of research from looking at "tasks, responsibilities and experiences" of leaders, to investigating how leadership practices are "shared, negotiated and constructed" (Harris, 2009, cited in Duignan, 2012, p. 128). Secondly, the literature indicated a need for a broader conceptualisation of organisational cultures and leadership, and a move away from a limited model of mono-directional leadership from leader to follower, towards a multi-directional leadership model between leader and follower (Halttunen, 2013).

When examining organisational cultures, it is important to examine not only how tasks are shared amongst educators, but more so, how tasks are "completed together" (Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013, p. 229), which evolves out of a "culture of collective responsibility" (Rodd, 2013a, p. 48). Examination of educators' relationships in this study revealed the multi-directional nature of relationships amongst educators employed within the same centre and between centres, as well as between the educators and the Head Office, and how these relationships contributed to the development of positive organisational cultures. This discussion will be presented in two sections: *Belonging and attachment to the setting*, and *Centre and Head Office interdependence*.

Key Finding #1: Belonging and attachment to the setting

Participants reported having a sense of belonging and attachment to the EC settings as being integral to their relationships with their work colleagues and the workplace culture, or *feel* of the centres where they were employed. Press, Sumsion and Wong (2010) also found that "collective ownership . . . generated a sense of strength, professional agency and effectiveness" (p. 48) amongst EC educators. In this study, a "sense of ownership" or belonging to *ECXX*, the auspicing agency, was achieved through a number of strategies utilised across the centres. These included opportunities for informal communication, teamwork, equity in documentation and programming, partnerships with families, and opportunities to include educators' interests and personalities into the centres. These strategies aligned with findings by Aubrey, et al, (2013), where organisations were described as generally hierarchical and traditional in strategic decision-making, but collaborative in culture and operational functioning.

The collaborative nature of the work environment may reflect the intentionality of educators, as discussed by Gronn (2002). He suggested that where there is "spontaneous collaboration [and] intuitive working relations" (p. 425), there is "concertive action" to work together (p. 429). This is consistent with descriptors provided by the participants in this study, and as reflected in the informal communication strategies which supported their everyday tasks. Aubrey, et al, (2013) stated that multiple leadership roles emerged through collaborative organisational cultures, which was also evidenced in the strong teamwork and equity in tasks indicated in the findings presented in Chapter 4. The term "hybrid leadership" is used in the literature (Bøe & Hognestad, 2014, p. 1; Gronn, 2008, p. 148). This was reflective of a democratic-style of leadership (Waniganayake, et al, 2000), and positive organisational cultures, as evident in the equity focussed language used by participants.

Research by Leithwood, et al, (2007), has suggested that positive organisational cultures were achieved through a "collective capacity" (p. 62), and a "multidimensional conception of successful leadership" (p. 63). This was also evidenced in information shared by participants about their daily tasks in running children's rooms, including the collective approach to documenting children's learning and development. This focus on collective action, rather than individual capabilities, or individual capital, (Fonsen, 2013; Hargreaves &

Fullan, 2012; Harris, 2014; Messenger, 2013) was important in understanding the relationships amongst centre staff. That is, staff interactions provided the "social glue" (Harris, 2014, p. 4), in building positive organisational cultures.

There is much literature which supports this notion of relationally collaborative work environments, and the direct influence of relationships on the development of positive organisational cultures. For example, Stamopoulos (2012), reported on the development of shared cultures as being integral in developing leadership that "builds professional capacity and capability" of educators (p. 47). Similarly, Weymes (2002) encouraged a complex network of relationships amongst educators and deep engagement with the complexity of cultures, rather than a "silo mentality" (p. 320). Lumby (2012) saw this complexity as a means of developing strong foundations of organisational cultures in EC settings. As evidenced in research by Logie (2013), when organisational cultures are "verbally and behaviourally communicated within an organisation" (p. 250), language can strengthen links to the organisation's goals through a reciprocity between the educators and the "centre's operational system" (p. 248).

The social constructivist nature of the methodology of this study enabled the examination of the social connectedness amongst the educators (Layder, 2006). The social constructivist framework also enabled illumination of the extent to which individuals both "resist" and "embrace" (Layder, 2006, p. 145) the social environment of their EC work place, with the findings indicating the educators' sense of belonging and attachment to the EC centres. These strategies of collaborative or collective work and informal communication, as described by participants, went beyond relying on "the lingering discourse of niceness" of EC contexts, as described by Hard (2006, p. 40), and produced authentic possibilities to create a sense of belonging and attachment to the centres as well as the auspicing agency.

Key Finding #2: Centre and Head Office interdependence

Interdependency between the centres and the *ECXX* Head Office was evident in the findings of this study. All participating EC centres were reliant on the Head Office for policies, funding and regulatory provisions, which the centre staff recognised as being an important

and welcome source of support. However, the Head Office encouraged autonomy in the everyday management of the centres, development of philosophies, and programming that was relevant for each community where the centres were located. This independence enabled the contextualisation of each centre to address particular needs of families, and provided possibilities for inclusion of the educators' interests and personalities into the centres. While the centres adhered to *ECXX* guiding values and mission principles, each centre valued their independence in being free to formulate centre specific philosophies that were meaningful to the children and families in each centre. A sense of interdependence, or reciprocal relationships, between the centres and the Head Office was evident, as reported by the *ECXX* Director.

Research by Leithwood, et al (2007), indicated that "organisational identity" (p. 47) assisted in defining people's self-concept and self-worth in relation to their employment within the organisation. Likewise, Hard (2006) suggested that the capacity to enact leadership was directly linked to educators' interpretations of organisational cultures and their professional identity. The data from this study indicated that there was a distinction between the identities of the Head Office, centres, and individuals, with independence encouraged. However, there was also a sense of interdependence, reflecting a complexity in the notion of identity, also highlighted in Leithwood, et al's (2007) research, which identified a complexity in leadership identity and functions, and a need for distributed leadership as opposed to directive leadership, in line with the level of complexity of tasks.

Fenech (2013) also promoted engagement in decision-making at all levels to facilitate job satisfaction and retention, as well as leadership, when dealing with policy reform challenges encountered, such as the implementation of the *NQS*. The notion of interdependency evidenced in this study, reflects consideration of the internal and external influences on an organisation through a social systems perspective as conceptualised by Jorde Bloom (1991). Feelings of confidence in respectful relationships as expressed by the participants and as presented in the Findings chapter, is evidence of their sense of belonging in their workplace environment, and the presence of a notion of interdependency between the centres and the Head Office sustained the unique organisational cultures of each centre.

5.1.2 Communication Strategies

Bolman and Deal (2013) described the structural frame of analysis of organisations using the metaphor of a "factory or machine" (p. 19). The challenge of leadership in this frame lies in exploring the alignment of "structure to task, technology, environment", through the "social architecture" of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 19). In this study, strategies that supported communication within the workplace provided evidence of how structural factors can influence the organisational cultures of EC centres. Examination of these strategies provided information about the "vertical and horizontal procedures [that are used] to lash the many elements together" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 67).

The review of the literature in Chapter 2 identified that there is a need to move away from an examination of general systems to an examination of specific systems, through a "practice-informed approach to theorising leadership" (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015, p. 354). Examination of the specific structures within the organisations which enabled social processes, was in keeping with the social constructivist nature of the study (Layder, 2006), and revealed strategies which provided a strong foundation for the development of positive organisational cultures within EC centres implementing the *NQS*. This examination is presented in two sections: *Intentional communication strategies*, and *Collaborative reflection on practice.*

Key Finding #3: Intentional communication strategies

Communication strategies, intentionally formulated and deliberately maintained in the centres, provided a foundation for implementing the *NQS*. These strategies were broad ranging, and incorporated formal modes of communication, such as room diaries, centre diaries, newsletters, e-mails, communication boards, and observation books. These provided avenues for purposeful communication in achieving *NQS* tasks related to children's needs, learning, programs, routines, housekeeping, the centre environment, and events. McCrea (2015) observed that "a communications-focussed approach within organisations can be supportive" (p. 93), and similarly, Duignan (2012) suggested that strong structural connectors can provide support for the development of consistent organisational cultures. Research by Wong, et al, (2012), also indicated the importance of leadership and

communication in collaborative work amongst EC professionals. They found that a lack of appropriate structures challenged the dialogue and communication which could be utilised through agreements and protocols, space, proximity and location. These examples of enablers of collaborative work support the relevance of examining the structures of intentional communication strategies, such as those listed above.

Walker (2011) promoted a conception of "connective leadership activity" as a means of producing an organisation where there is "a high degree of internal harmony between the structures, values and relationships" (p. 237). This notion of connective activity includes "connecting, disconnecting and in some cases reconnecting pathways" to communicate "within, across and beyond" the organisation (Walker, 2011, p. 237). Planned management of communication strategies and relationships were found to contribute to distributed leadership, as discussed by Leithwood, et al (2007), when investigating patterns of distributed leadership and "its contribution to organisational functioning" (p. 37). In their review they also refer to Spillane's (2006, cited in Leithwood, et al, 2007) notion of "consciously managed and synergistic relationships" (p. 39), as well as Gronn's (2002, cited in Leithwood, et al, 2007) conception of designed "institutionalised practice" (p. 40), as characteristics of distributed leadership. Leithwood, et al, (2007), extended these interpretations of the management of structures of leadership by exploring a notion of differing levels of alignment of leadership, from "anarchic misalignment" to "planful alignment" (p. 42). Leithwood, et al's (2007) findings revealed that, "planful alignment" of leadership and strategies was most often used by educators to achieve "organisational productivity" (p. 42). These aspects provide efficacy to intentional communication strategies achieved through room and centre diaries, newsletters and communication boards, as used in the EC centres in this study.

Key Finding #4: Collaborative reflection on practice

Educators participating in this study had a variety of opportunities to exercise collaborative reflection on their practice when implementing the *NQS*. Primarily, structural elements such as staff meetings, room meetings, planned professional development activities, staff appraisals, and *ECXX* mock assessment visits*,* enabled reflection on daily practice. These collaborative opportunities were intentionally and systematically planned,

particularly by the Head Office staff, centre directors, and Educational Leaders. In exploring supporting involvement across staffing levels, McCrea (2015) suggested that "both positional and situational colleagues ought to be actively engaged in shaping aspects of pedagogy" (p. 123). In a meta-analysis of EC educators' negotiations of the discourses and subjectivities which informed practice, one particular study revealed that "having theoretical resources and critically reflective practices to draw upon seemed to enhance ECEs' [early childhood educators'] construction of their practice as 'intellectual' work" (Sumsion, 2004, cited in Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2013, p. 232). This type of supportive and collaborative reflective practice was evidenced in this study, particularly amongst the assistants, who found that formal interactions in meetings enhanced their understanding of their practice as educators.

There is much literature which promotes collaborative reflection on practice, particularly about the development of 'communities of practice' (Bøe & Hognestad, 2014; Dyment, Davis, Nailon, Emery, Getenet, McCrea, & Hill, 2014; Fleer, 2002; Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007; McCrea, 2015), and 'professional learning communities' (Campbell-Evans, et al, 2014; Harris, 2014). Other literature also includes discussions about concepts such as shared learning (Aubrey, et al, 2013), reflective journey (Forrest & McCrea, 2002; McCrea, 2015), shared reflection (Messenger, 2013), collective experience (Nuttall & Edwards, 2009), collective sharing (McCrea, 2015), collaborative learning (Press, et al, 2010), professional story telling/writing (McCrea, 2015), and professional enquiry (Stamopoulos, 2012).

The recommendation that "a lively culture of professional inquiry" be established amongst educators is explained in the *ELYF* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13), and as a core component of the *NQS* (ACECQA, 2011b, p. 119). For instance, Quality Area 7 in the *NQS*, *Leadership and service management*, promotes the building of a professional learning community through the promotion of "professional conversations" and sharing the "collective knowledge of the team" (p. 174). Supporting this notion, there is a suggestion that there needs to be a conceptual shift away from a focus on individual practitioner skills, and a "technical conceptualisation of educational practice (do I do things right?)", to a more reflective view of practice, asking the question, "do I do the right things?" (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari & Peeters, 2012, p. 516). This kind of deeper understanding is presented as foundational to relational teamwork, and the development of a "community of learners"

(Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007, p. 16), providing the framework for collaborative reflection on practice as revealed by participants in this study.

The literature reviewed and findings of this study indicate that emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of developing an understanding of a collaborative notion of reflection on practice. While professional development opportunities were identified in the study as being part of reflective practice, it is also important to recognise the "problematic nature of transmission-oriented 'professional development programs'" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995, cited in Fleet & Patterson, 2009, p. 17), which can "deny agency" of educators (p. 17), and can disallow self-analysis of the "lived experience" (Nuttall & Edwards, 2009, p. 132). When investigating ways of developing capacity in EC educators in relation to sustainable pedagogy, Dyment, et al, (2014), recognised that "one-off PD sessions cannot be seen as the panacea to changing teachers' thinking and pedagogies", but rather should be "part of a larger and systemic approach . . . in the form of strong and active communities of practice" (p. 675). Collaborative opportunities for professional development in the centres focussed on this co-operative sharing of knowledge in room meetings and staff meetings, where educators were open to listening to the opinions of their colleagues. The examples of collaborative reflection in this study were aligned with research findings of Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013), who evidenced "a stance of non-judgemental inquiry, . . . [and being] receptive to the critical scrutiny of others" (p. 321).

Participants agreed that centre staff had a strong understanding of the *NQS*, and that policy reform was embraced positively. At each centre, it was reported that this strength in understanding was connected with the comprehensive introduction to educational and pedagogical concepts through a systematic examination of each quality area, led by the *ECXX* Head Office staff and centre directors. Participants also agreed that while the *NQS* was embedded in their thinking, that it was helpful to regularly revisit the details during room meetings and centre staff meetings, when they came together as a group. This factor highlights the important role of positional leaders in initiating opportunities for collaborative reflection on practice (Leithwood, et al, 2007). It also reflects one theoretical basis of this study which was founded on the notion of intentional leadership practice, introduced by Waniganayake, et al, (2012), and in this instance, was aimed at developing positive and collaborative cultures within EC centres run by *ECXX*. As discussed, the nature

of collaborative practice identified within these centres reflects the connectivity between knowledge and cultures, as illuminated in research into shared reflection in an interagency EC context illuminated by Messenger (2013). Interagency collaboration, however, was not identified by the participants in this study, and offers an avenue for further investigation.

The process of assessment by *ACECQA* under the *NQS*, while raising the anxiety levels of centre staff, was viewed as a means by which each centre was able to improve staff practice and centre quality. Self-assessment by educators in-between *ACECQA* rating days was collaboratively embraced by all staff as a means of preparing for the centre assessments. This was particularly utilised by the Educational Leaders who made note of positive improvements in centre practice in documentation to be presented for assessment, which enabled educators to see the steps being taken by their centre towards a positive assessment. The *ECXX* mock assessment visits also enabled opportunities for collaborative reflection on practice, where educators were *tested* by *ECXX* staff on their understandings of the *NQS*, and their ability to make connections between their centre's philosophy and aspects of the *NQS*. Research by Wong, et al, (2012) revealed a lack of resourcing as a challenge to productive evaluative work on EC practice, which highlights the importance of the opportunities provided for educators in this study. The varied opportunities for collaborative reflection on practice provided by the *ECXX* Head Office, however, offered much support to educators in these centres.

Overall, the investigation of communication strategies used by educators addressed gaps in knowledge identified in Chapter 2, where it was suggested that actual enablers of communication needed illumination, and also that there was a need to move from an examination of the general to the specific, through a "practice-informed approach to theorising leadership" (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015, p. 354). Through formulation and use of intentional communication strategies, and opportunities for collaborative reflection on practice, "connective leadership activity" (Walker, 2011, p. 237), was made accessible to all educators employed by *ECXX*. These strategies made it possible to communicate and reflect collaboratively as a group of staff within a centre, and as part of the larger auspicing agency, *ECXX*.

5.2   Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study could be redressed in future research to enhance the generalisability of the findings. Since the centres participating in this study were selected by *ECXX*, and therefore reflects a convenient sample, the extent to which these centres were representative of all other *ECXX* centres is not known. The use of a convenient sample of centres was based on practical reasons in facilitating ease of access to three EC centres within the constraints of the study timelines. This, however, meant that data collection was limited by the lack of diversity and non-generalisability of findings to a wider context. Replicating the study across a wider sample of centres across the country, representative of differing governance arrangements, can enhance the generalisability of understandings about organisational cultures of EC settings in Australia.

As noted in the Methodology chapter, the majority of participants had not completed the questionnaire before the interviews. Completing this task just prior to their interviews reduced some participants' capacity to discuss issues during interviews adequately, and restricted the researcher's ability to use the survey as a springboard for the interviews, as had been planned. Impact of the limited privacy afforded, and the continuous interruptions (eg, phones ringing) during the interviews conducted in space-poor locations, were also noted. While the researcher checked with participants that they were comfortable with the semi-private locations, the time-poor nature of the EC centres also impacted on the overall quality of the interviews. That is, the educators were conscious of the need for them to return to their rooms to relieve the staff taking their place during the interviews. More flexibility with time and location for the interviews could have ameliorated these research challenges and thereby enabling educators to have more time to engage in the discussion in a more focussed way. Paradoxically, these challenges confirmed the nature of the rapid pace of everyday work environments in EC centres, as described by the educators participating in this research.

5.3   Recommendations for Further Research

As in most research, more questions were raised than answered as a result of this study. In Table 5.2, four possible areas for further research are outlined in relation to the key findings of this study. The suggested research could augment the examination of factors contributing to improved job satisfaction, increased tenure of educators in the EC sector, and thus an enhanced implementation of the *NQS* and higher quality of service delivery.

Table 5.2: Recommendations for further research.

Key findings	Suggestions for further research
#1: A sense of belonging and attachment to the EC setting.	The participants in this study had an impressive tenure record at their centres, with two having been at their present centres for 11+ years, two for 6-10 years, and four for 2-5 years, with only one having been at their present centre for under two years. Given the issue of low retention in the EC sector, as evidenced in much EC literature (Bretherton, 2010; Cumming, et al, 2013; Fenech, 2013), it is important to highlight factors which contribute to a sense of belonging and job satisfaction. Research into long-term tenure could provide important data for the implementation of appropriate strategies for retaining staff in the EC sector.
#2: Interdependence between the EC centres and the Head Office.	Increasing corporatisation of the EC sector, and the provision of a growing number of services by a Head Office, indicate that it is appropriate to investigate the notion of interdependency between centres and a central office managing a group of centres under one system. Comparison of interpretations of management from both perspectives can enhance quality provisioning through effective reciprocity.
#3: Use of intentional and clear modes of communication.	Participants raised concerns about the lack of time for adequate communication, particularly in relation to the employment of part-time and casual staff. Examination of how various methods of communication were used with part-time and casual educators and their perceptions about the usefulness of these methods of communication, would be beneficial in providing consistency and developing a better sense of belonging for all staff.
#4: Focussed and regular avenues for collaborative knowledge building and reflection on practice.	A more in-depth analysis of the collaborative knowledge building activities, especially with external agencies providing specific services (such as, speech therapy) for individual children would be beneficial to ascertain how these activities and the professionals were incorporated with everyday work of EC centres. The nature of educator relationships with external professionals was not explored in depth in this study and the impact of interagency collaboration offers another venue for future research.

5.4   Contribution to the EC Sector

The relevance of this study, as outlined in Chapter 1, stemmed from two considerations: that the notion of organisational cultures is relatively new in the EC sector (Lumby, 2012), and that there is limited recognition of the connections between organisational cultures and educational leadership (Muijs, et al, 2004). The findings of this research can assist in advancing our knowledge of management and leadership approaches for the EC sector by confirming the need for an increased focus on "new models of leadership" (Aubrey, et al, 2013, p. 5), utilising "multiple perspectives to better understand the change process" (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 45) in the implementation of the *NQS*. The findings are particularly relevant for today's EC educators as the implementation of the *NQS* reforms has become increasingly important in improving the quality of EC services in Australia (Campbell-Evans, et al, 2014; Fenech, 2013).

While the findings contribute to our understanding of the integral nature of staff relationships and communication strategies used in EC centres, they also provide important insights into the need for a greater professionalisation of the EC sector. This proposal is particularly supported by findings in relation to educators' interpretations of organisational cultures and their "professional identity" (Hard, 2006, p. 43), and collaborative reflection on practice with an emphasis on the development of a "community of learners" in EC settings (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007, p. 16).

Research on the increasing professionalisation of the EC sector (Miller & Cable, 2011; Urban, 2008), support moves from a decade ago to change the notion of ECE from being one of child minding to being recognised as a skilled profession with a dedicated knowledge base founded on child development, care and education (Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council, 2001). Global trends of increasing numbers of university qualified educators being employed as educational leaders (OECD, 2006; OECD, 2012; Waniganayake, Rodd, & Gibbs, 2015), reinforce the professionalisation of the sector. Foundational work by Whitebook (1997), have also suggested that an increase in societal recognition of the EC profession in the USA was important in developing an understanding of leadership and identity in the EC sector.

The development of a professional identity, or "uncovering [of] who we are professionally" (McCrea, 2015, p. 22), can be "crafted through on-going dialogue and reflection" amongst educators (Stamopoulos, 2012, p. 46), and through the organisational cultures that are created in EC settings. It was also noted in Chapter 2 that leadership preparation is inadequate (Fenech, 2013), and this is unsurprising in light of the general lack of accessibility and availability of leadership training both within Australia and internationally (Campbell-Evans, et al, 2014; Hujala, et al, 2013; Muijs, et al, 2004; Siraj Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Stamopoulos, 2012; Thornton, 2010). Further examination of the enablers of the professionalisation of the EC sector is needed, which is also supported by the findings of this study. This aspect was highlighted by the identification of the importance of professional identity and relationships amongst educators in developing positive organisational cultures in EC centres, which in turn support educators in the implementation of the policy reforms connected with the *NQS*.

The discussion presented in this chapter suggests that there is a complexity to the relational influences on the organisational cultures of EC settings, as well as the key communication strategies that are being used within EC settings to assist educators in the implementation of the *NQS*. The findings of the study have shown that flexibility in management and programming, with respectful relationships amongst educators, and between the auspicing agency and the EC centres, are integral in developing a sense of belonging. In turn, the sense of attachment to the centres, and the development of inclusive and team oriented organisational cultures can influence the delivery of quality services to children and families.

In this research, both formal and informal communication strategies played an important role in enabling the effective implementation of the *NQS*, and the intentionality and collaborative nature of the varied strategies is essential to their success. Varied means of collaborative knowledge building and reflection on practice also provided important avenues for quality improvement in EC settings, and call for prioritising by management. Overall, knowledge about organisational cultures and associated leadership practices acquired through this study have implications for adequate resourcing and provision of support for educators, in terms of developing new national policy and leading EC settings within local communities.

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APPENDIX A
Ethics Approval Letter

Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Research Office
C5C Research HUB East, Level 3, Room 324
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109 AUSTRALIA

Phone   +61 (0)2 9850 7850
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MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

09 May 2014

Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake
Institute of Early Childhood
Faculty of Human Sciences
Macquarie University
NSW 2109

Dear Associate Professor Waniganayake

Re: "Connecting Organisational Cultures and Educational Leadership in Early Childhood Centres"

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response was reviewed by the Executive of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Human Sciences and Humanities).

This research meets the requirements set out in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007) and your application has been approved.

Details of this approval are as follows:

Reference No: 5201400450

Approval Date: 09 May 2014

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

The following documentation have been reviewed and approved by the HREC (Human Sciences and Humanities):

Documents reviewed	Version no.	Date
Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Application	2.3	Jul 2013
Correspondence from Associate Professor Waniganayake addressing the HREC's feedback		05 May 2014
Letter of invitation to UCCS Director		
Letter of invitation to centre directors		
Letter of information and invitation to parents		
Consent form (participant and co-investigator copies)		
Participant centre consent form (centre and co-investigator copies)		
Interview questions		

1

Please ensure that all documentation has a version number and date in future correspondence with the Committee.

Standard Conditions of Approval:

1. Continuing compliance with the requirements of the *National Statement,* which is available at the following website:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research

2. Approval is for five (5) years, subject to the submission of annual reports. Please submit your reports on the anniversary of the approval of this protocol.

3. All adverse events must be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.

4. Proposed changes to the protocol must be submitted to the Committee for approval before implementation.

It is the responsibility of the Chief investigator to retain a copy of all documentation related to this project and to forward a copy of this approval letter to all personnel listed on the project.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat should you have any questions regarding your ethics application.

The HREC (Human Sciences and Humanities) wishes you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karolyn White
Director, Research Ethics & Integrity
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee (Human Sciences and Humanities)

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) (the National Statement) and the CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice.

2

18 July, 2014

**MACQUARIE
UNIVERSITY**

Director
ECXX
NSW

Dear

I would like to request the involvement of a small number of *ECXX* centres in a research study: ***Exploring the organizational cultures of early childhood centres.*** This research is part of Master of Research studies I am undertaking at the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University.

This research will explore practices and structures that support leadership and the development of organisational cultures within early childhood centres. It will involve an individual interview of no more than one hour with three members of staff (the director/educational leader, a teacher and a childcare worker) at each centre. The interviews would take place at the centres if appropriate, and at a time that is convenient for the centre and the staff.

I will provide copies of the interview questions to each participant so that they understand the focus of the questions prior to the interview. With permission from each staff member, interviews will be recorded. They will have the option of withdrawing from the research at any point with no need to explain why and without prejudice. If they are a student at Macquarie University, their participation and/or withdrawal from the research study will not prejudice their academic progress in any way. Attendance at one staff meeting will also be requested to enable observation of the processes and structures that inform the creation of organisational culture and leadership in the centres. The Macquarie University Human Ethics Committee has approved this study (No. 5201400450).

In addition to undertaking 1:1 interviews with staff, I will also request access from the centre directors to the following:

- Staff duty statement/position description of the educational leader
- Policy Statements on Regulation 85 Trauma, injury and illness; Regulation 90 (1) Medical conditions; Regulation 81 Sleep and rest
- Daily schedule for one week for one group
- Staff roster for one week for same group
- Attendance record for one week for the same group
- Vision Statement for the centre
- Staff meeting agenda and minutes (one sample)
- Annual Report for 2013/14

I am hoping that this information will inform my understanding of each centre, as well as assist me in speaking with the staff.

 I would appreciate it if you could please let me know by 25 June, 2014, if you are willing to give permission for three ECXX centres to participate in my research study. If you have any questions of clarification in regard to the research please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you would like further information about the research, you are also welcome to contact Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake, my supervisor and the designated Chief Investigator of this study, by e-mail on manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

I am very excited about being able to collaborate with *ECXX* centre staff as professionals within the early childhood community, and I hope that you will approve *ECXX* being involved in this research. I look forward to speaking with you.

Regards
Andrea McFarlane
Phone: 0416 127 349
andrea.mcfarlane@students.mq.edu.au

Date
Name
Director
Service
Address NSW xxxx

Dear

Your centre has been identified by *ECXX* to assist in locating participants for the research project: ***Exploring the organizational cultures of early childhood centres.*** I would like to invite you and your teaching staff to participate in this research that I am doing at the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, as part of my studies for the Master of Research.

This research will explore practices and structures that support leadership and the development of organisational cultures within early childhood centres. It will involve an individual interview of no more than one hour with three members of staff (the director/educational leader, a teacher and a childcare worker) at your centre. The interviews would take place at your centre if appropriate, and at a time that is convenient for the centre and the staff.

I will provide copies of the interview questions to each participant so that they understand the focus of the questions prior to the interview. With permission from each staff member, interviews will be recorded. They will have the option of withdrawing from the research at any point with no need to explain why and without prejudice. If they are a student at Macquarie University, their participation and/or withdrawal from the research study will not prejudice their academic progress in any way. Attendance at one staff meeting is also requested to enable observation of the processes and structures that inform the creation of organisational culture and leadership in the centre. The Macquarie University Human Ethics Committee has approved this study (No. 5201400450).

In addition to undertaking 1:1 interviews with staff, I would also appreciate being given access to the following:

- Staff duty statement/position description of the educational leader
- Policy Statements on Regulation 85 Trauma, injury and illness; Regulation 90 (1) Medical conditions; Regulation 81 Sleep and rest
- Daily schedule for one week for one group
- Staff roster for one week for same group
- Attendance record for one week for the same group
- Vision Statement for the centre
- Staff meeting agenda and minutes (one sample)
- Annual Report for 2013/14

I am hoping that this information will inform my understanding of your centre, as well as assist me in speaking with the staff.

 I would appreciate it if you could please let me know by xxxxxx if your centre is willing to participate in my research study. If you have any questions of clarification in regard to the research please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you would like further information about the research, you are also welcome to contact Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake, my supervisor and the designated Chief Investigator of this study, by e-mail on manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

I am very excited about being able to collaborate with you as professionals within the early childhood community, and I hope that you would like to be involved in this research. I look forward to speaking with you.

Regards
Andrea McFarlane
Phone: 0416 127 349
andrea.mcfarlane@students.mq.edu.au

MACQUARIE
UNIVERSITY

Date
Name
Director
Service
Address NSW xxxx

Dear

Your centre has been identified by *ECXX* to assist in locating participants for the research project: ***Exploring the organizational cultures of early childhood centres.*** I would like to invite you and your teaching staff to participate in this research that I am doing at the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, as part of my studies for the Master of Research.

This research will explore practices and structures that support leadership and the development of organisational cultures within early childhood centres. It will involve an individual interview of no more than one hour with three members of staff (the director/educational leader, a teacher and a childcare worker) at your centre. The interviews would take place at your centre if appropriate, and at a time that is convenient for the centre and the staff.

I will provide copies of the interview questions to each participant so that they understand the focus of the questions prior to the interview. With permission from each staff member, interviews will be recorded. They will have the option of withdrawing from the research at any point with no need to explain why and without prejudice. If they are a student at Macquarie University, their participation and/or withdrawal from the research study will not prejudice their academic progress in any way. Attendance at one staff meeting is also requested to enable observation of the processes and structures that inform the creation of organisational culture and leadership in the centre. The Macquarie University Human Ethics Committee has approved this study (No. 5201400450).

In addition to undertaking 1:1 interviews with staff, I would also appreciate being given access to the following:

- Staff duty statement/position description of the educational leader
- Policy Statements on Regulation 85 Trauma, injury and illness; Regulation 90 (1) Medical conditions; Regulation 81 Sleep and rest
- Daily schedule for one week for one group
- Staff roster for one week for same group
- Attendance record for one week for the same group
- Vision Statement for the centre
- Staff meeting agenda and minutes (one sample)
- Annual Report for 2013/14

I am hoping that this information will inform my understanding of your centre, as well as assist me in speaking with the staff.

I would appreciate it if you could please let me know by xxxxxx if your centre is willing to participate in my research study. If you have any questions of clarification in regard to the research please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you would like further information about the research, you are also welcome to contact Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake, my supervisor and the designated Chief Investigator of this study, by e-mail on manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

I am very excited about being able to collaborate with you as professionals within the early childhood community, and I hope that you would like to be involved in this research. I look forward to speaking with you.

Regards
Andrea McFarlane
Phone: 0416 127 349; andrea.mcfarlane@students.mq.edu.au

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CENTRE CONSENT

(Centre copy)

Exploring the organizational cultures in early childhood centres.

I, _____ have read and understand the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to my centre, _____ participating in this research, knowing that we can withdraw at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Centre Director's Name:_____ (block letters)

Centre Director's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ (block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au).   Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

(Participant copy)

Exploring the organizational cultures of early childhood centres.

I, _____ have read and understand the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name:_____ (block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ (block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Exploring the organizational cultures of early childhood centres.

Prior to your interview, please complete those questions you feel comfortable answering, and bring with you when attending the interview. Thank you, Andrea McFarlane.

Name	
Age	❑ below 20 years ❑ 41-50 years ❑ 21-30 years ❑ 51-60 years ❑ 31-40 years ❑ Over 61 years
What is the highest qualification you have gained?	
What qualification are you working towards, if applicable?	
What is your employment status?	❑ Full-time ❑ Part-time ❑ Casual
What is/are your full role title/s	1. 2. 3.
What are your main tasks or duties, eg recording observations of children; developing programs, etc?	
What do you consider to be the most important tasks of your job, eg care and nurture of children; providing EC education programs; providing support for families, etc?	
Is this your first of year of working in the EC sector?	❑ Yes ❑ No
How many years have you worked at this centre?	❑ Less than one year ❑ 5 to less than 10 years ❑ 1 to less than 2 years ❑ 10 or more years ❑ 2 to less than 5 years
How many years have you been in your present role?	_____ years

How many years in total have you worked in the early childhood education sector?	_____ years	
How many different child care centres have you worked for in that time?	❏ Just 1 centre ❏ 2-3 centres	❏ 4-5 centres ❏ 6 or more centres
Have you attended any professional development during Jan – Dec 2014?	❏ Yes	❏ No
If 'yes', please indicate the key focus of the professional development: Conference: External workshop: In-house workshop: Other:		
Do you get any paid time at work for program planning?	❏ Yes	❏ No
How much time do you get every week away from children for program planning?	_____ hours per week	

Please provide any clarification or additional information if desired:

Exploring the organizational cultures of early childhood centres.

Interview questions

1. **Process influences on development of organisational culture and leadership, ie people interactions/interdependencies**

- Tell me about how you and other staff communicate with each other in relation to the NQS

    – How do you communicate with other staff, what do you communicate about, when do you communicate, who do you communicate with? (eg, instructional, questioning, clarifying, etc)

    – Who provides you with feedback about your work? (eg, incidental, staff meetings, staff appraisal, etc)

    – How do you describe your relationship with your work colleagues? (eg, support, respect, teamwork, etc)

- Tell me about opportunities at work for you to be creative

    – To what extent are you encouraged to try new ideas? (activities with children, evaluation of teaching, reflecting on practice, etc)

    – What sort of flexibility is there in the routines or activities?

    – In what way are you involved in decision making about the children's program?

2. **Structural influences on development of organisational culture and leadership, ie staff meetings, physical work environment, professional development, time off the floor**

- Tell me about specific formal events when staff have time to share ideas, talk about issues, and evaluate work (staff meetings, brief informal discussions, strategic planning meetings, peer evaluation, etc) – where, when, how?

- How does the physical environment at this centre support your ability to communicate with other staff (can you see each other easily, is there adequate room in the staff room to be comfortable to do your work, is there designated space for small group or large group discussions between staff, do your surroundings reflect what is important to the staff)?

- What resources are available for information about the NQS(are they easily accessible, is time allocated for access to the information)?

- Is professional development in regard to the NQS funded, and if so, through what means?

3. **Mix of processes and structures**

- What informs what you do at work every day (other staff at the centre, staff from other centres, reading, workshops, etc)?

- Who or what do you turn to most often for support, clarification or answers (other staff at the centre, staff from other centres, reading, workshops, etc)?

- Do you have a sense of accomplishment with your work (on a daily/weekly/term/yearly basis, feel in control of your work environment, etc)?

- What is your one sentence motto on your approach to your work?

APPENDIX I
ECXX **Director Interview Questions**

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Exploring the organizational cultures of early childhood centres*.*

Interview questions – *ECXX* Director

Consideration of these questions needs to be mainly in relation to Directly Provided Services since all participating services in the research study are DPSs, but some information will overlap with Locally Provided Services as well.

1. How does *ECXX* support relationships and teamwork between staff in EC services?

2. How does *ECXX* support staff in their ongoing understanding of the *NQS*, eg, training, and putting the *NQS* into practice, eg on the job mentoring in practice?

3. What is the role of *ECXX* in supporting leadership development amongst not only positional leaders but also non-positional leaders?

4. What do you see as the role of the Educational Leader?

5. Do you see staff taking on additional roles to their teaching/care roles, eg Educational Leader, Community Leader, Sustainability Leader, as supportive to their own professional and leadership development as well as the other staff, and is that something *ECXX* promotes?

6. What structural factors would you encourage at the EC services which are supportive to staff development, as well as developing positive organisational cultures and leadership? For example, paid time off the floor, professional development, engagement in leadership, on the job/floor mentoring, etc.

7. Out of the complexity of a Director's tasks, are you able to specify one as being of most importance? For example, service management, team support, quality for children, liaising with families, etc.