

**Educational Leadership Practised through Internal
Evaluation in New Zealand ECE services**

By

Christina Egan Marnell

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Abstract

The New Zealand Teaching Council's Leadership Strategy vision is:

To enable every teacher, regardless of their role or setting, to have the opportunity to develop their own leadership capability so that through principled and inspirational leadership, a culturally capable, competent and connected teaching profession achieves educational equity and excellence for all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand (Education Council, 2018b, p. 4).

There is however a lack of clarity about how this vision can be achieved. While there is a growing range of literature concerning ECE leadership emerging from New Zealand, highlighting shared or distributed approaches (Hill, 2018), the role of the positional leader and distributed leadership (Denae & Thornton, 2017), and leadership dispositions within leadership development (Davitt & Ryder, 2018), there is limited literature exploring the practices of educational leadership within New Zealand ECE services.

This study explores how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation processes in New Zealand ECE services and how these practices support the professional capabilities and capacities of teachers. Previous research has highlighted that a practice approach to leadership removes the focus on the individual leader and allows leadership to emerge from collective action. The objectives of this research were: to develop a better understanding of how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation processes; explore what challenges or enables teachers to become involved and practise educational leadership through internal evaluation processes; and to understand how services monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice, made as a result of an internal evaluation.

This qualitative research, which took the form of an interpretive case study, was framed around a single case design with multiple units of analysis. Data were gathered from three participating ECE services through interviews, focus groups and observations, and drew on the perspectives of both teachers and positional leaders. A reflexive thematic data analysis approach was employed, and four key themes were developed: identification with leadership; supportive workplace culture; continuous improvement; and effective leadership practices in ECE services.

This case study concludes that there is a complexity in the ways ECE teachers identify with leadership, restricted by a belief that leadership requires a formal title, with teachers often unaware of their own leadership practices. A supportive workplace culture can encourage and promote leadership, while a cycle of continuous improvement can promote quality teaching practices. Finally, seven effective leadership practices were identified: relational leadership; creating the conditions for teamwork; engagement; knowledge expertise and sharing opinions; shared decision making; facilitating and guiding and accountability and organisation. This study contributes to our further understanding of educational leadership in New Zealand ECE services, in particular the practices of leadership.

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Table of contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of contents	iv
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Tables.....	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. The New Zealand ECE sector	1
1.3. Leadership in ECE services.....	2
1.4. Internal evaluation	4
1.5. Statement of the research problem.....	5
1.6. Significance of the study	6
1.7. Research objectives and questions	7
1.8. The perspective of the researcher	7
1.9. Overview of thesis chapters	8
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	10
2.1. Introduction	10
2.2. Self-Review/Internal evaluation.....	10
2.2.1 Development of self-review in New Zealand ECE services	10
2.2.2 Features of a cycle of continuous improvement	13
2.3. Reflective thinking.....	16
2.3.1 Research on reflective thinking.....	16
2.3.2 Other perspectives on reflective thinking	17
2.3.3 The practice of reflective thinking.....	18
2.4. Monitoring the impact of change	19
2.5. Leadership.....	21
2.5.1 Relational Leadership.....	23
2.5.2 Distributed leadership.....	25
2.5.3 Positional Leadership and Distributed Leadership	27
2.5.4 Leadership-as-practice	28
2.5.5 Educational leadership including pedagogical leadership	29
2.5.6 Teacher leadership.....	31

2.5.7 Leadership within ECE in New Zealand	33
2.5.8 Leadership development in ECE	36
2.5.9 Shifts in thinking around leadership for ECE	37
2.6. Gap in the literature	38
2.7. Chapter Summary	39
Chapter 3 Methodology	41
3.1. Introduction	41
3.2. Methodological underpinnings.....	41
3.2.1 Research Paradigm.....	41
3.2.2 Theoretical framework.....	42
3.2.3 Research approach.....	45
3.2.4 Research design	46
3.3. Research Sample	48
3.3.1 Research Setting	48
3.3.2 Participants	49
3.4. Data collection.....	51
3.4.1 Data collection instruments	53
3.4.2 Field notes.....	53
3.4.3 Interviews	53
3.4.4 Focus Groups.....	55
3.4.5 Observations	56
3.4.6 Artefacts.....	57
3.5. Data analysis	57
3.5.1 Transcription of data	60
3.5.2 Coding	61
3.5.3 Theme development	61
3.6. Ethical considerations	62
3.6.1 Trial of interview questions.....	62
3.6.2 Ethical approval.....	63
3.6.3 Confidentiality.....	63
3.6.4 Vulnerable participants	64
3.7. Trustworthiness of the research	64
3.7.1 Creditability: Triangulation and Verification	64
3.7.2 Confirmability: Bias	65
3.7.3 Transferability	66
3.8. Chapter Summary	67

Chapter 4 Findings	68
4.1. Introduction	68
4.2. Hoiho Childcare	69
4.2.1 Understandings of internal evaluation	70
4.2.2 Leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation	72
4.2.3 Views of leadership	73
4.2.4 Understandings of leadership	76
4.2.5 Impact of changes to practice	83
4.2.6 Hoiho summary	84
4.3. Kororā Early Childhood	85
4.3.1 Understandings of internal evaluation	87
4.3.2 Leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation	88
4.3.3 Views of leadership	89
4.3.4 Understandings of leadership	92
4.3.5 Impact of changes to practice	98
4.3.6 Kororā summary	100
4.4. Tawaki Early Learning	101
4.4.1 Understandings of internal evaluation	102
4.4.2 Leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation	103
4.4.3 Views of leadership	104
4.4.4 Understandings of leadership	106
4.4.5 Impact of changes to practice	112
4.4.6 Tawaki summary	113
4.5. Chapter Summary	114
Chapter 5 Discussion	115
5.1. Introduction	115
5.2. Identification with leadership	115
5.2.1 Understanding leadership	116
5.2.2 Leadership without the title	117
5.2.3 Lack of leadership awareness	119
5.2.4 Section summary	122
5.3. Supportive workplace culture	123
5.3.1 Fostering leadership	123
5.3.2 Distributed leadership	125
5.3.3 Working collaboratively	127
5.3.4 Section summary	129

5.4. Continuous improvement	130
5.4.1 Reflective thinking.....	130
5.4.2 Impact of change on teaching practice	133
5.4.3 Section summary.....	135
5.5. Leadership practices in internal evaluation.....	136
5.5.1 Relational leadership.....	137
5.5.2 Creating the conditions for teamwork	138
5.5.3 Engagement	139
5.5.4 Knowledge expertise and sharing opinions.....	140
5.5.5 Shared decision making	142
5.5.6 Facilitating and guiding	143
5.5.7 Accountability and Organisation	145
5.5.8 Section summary.....	147
Creating the conditions for teamwork	148
Creating the conditions for teamwork	148
5.6. Chapter Summary	149
Chapter 6 Conclusion	150
6.1. Introduction	150
6.2. Summary of research findings	150
6.2.1 Identification with leadership	150
6.2.2 Supportive workplace culture	151
6.2.3 Continuous improvement	152
6.2.4 Leadership practices in internal evaluation.....	153
6.3. Research objectives	153
6.3.1 Understanding how educational leadership is practised	154
6.3.2 What challenges or enables teachers to practise educational leadership	154
6.3.3 How services monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice	154
6.3.4 Answering the research question.....	155
6.4. Future leadership practices in New Zealand ECE	156
6.5. Practical recommendations.....	158
6.6. Limitations of the research.....	159
6.7. Possibilities for future research	159
6.8. Chapter Summary	160
References.....	161
Appendix A Participant Information Sheet.....	178
Appendix B Consent form.....	182

Appendix C Focus Group Questions	186
Appendix D Observation Framework	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix E Interview Questions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix F Reflexive Research Journal sample	193
Appendix G Indicators of Quality Practice	195

List of Figures

Figure 1 Hoiho Timeline	52
Figure 2. Hoiho Timeline	69
Figure 3. Kororā Timeline.....	86
Figure 4. Tawaki Timeline.	101

List of Tables

Table 1. Activities of L-A-P.	44
Table 2. Format of Focus Group.....	55
Table 3. Data analysis method	58
Table 4. Hoiho Participants	70
Table 5. Kororā Participants	86
Table 6. Tawaki Participants	102
Table 7. Indicators of Quality Practice related to Leadership practices in internal evaluation	148

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research study and begins with an outline of the New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) sector. This is followed by an overview of leadership within New Zealand ECE services and the issues currently being faced. The role of internal evaluation in quality improvement in ECE is then discussed. Next, the challenge of the lack of research into educational leadership in the New Zealand ECE sector is explained. The rationale for this study is then discussed, which is followed by the research aims and study questions. The chapter concludes with an explanation of my professional and academic background and an outline of the thesis chapters.

1.2. The New Zealand ECE sector

There are over 4,600 licensed ECE services in New Zealand (Education Counts, 2019a), a number which has increased through a government initiative that aimed for 98% of all children to have attended a quality ECE service before starting school by 2016 (Education Counts, 2012). Children are spending longer hours in ECE than ever before (Education Counts, 2019b). Recent research (Rao et al., 2019) has reinforced the growing body of literature on the developmental benefits for young children who attend ECE.

New Zealand has a diversity of ECE services available, offering parents and families a choice in their child's ECE journey, such as: education and care, kindergarten, home-based, nga kōhanga reo¹ and playcentre². This diversity is seen as a valued feature of early learning provision in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2017c). Services can be teacher-led, whereby where 50% of the supervising

¹ Parents and families manage and operate the service with the support of the Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, in a Māori language and tikanga Māori environment.

² Collectively supervised and managed by parents for children from birth to school age with a strong focus on parent education as well as children's learning.

adults must be qualified and registered as ECE teachers, or parent-led, where parents and family or caregivers educate and care for their children. Teacher-led services such as education and care, and kindergarten make up the greatest number of ECE services in New Zealand at 58% and 14% respectively (Education Counts, 2019a) and will be the focus of this study. A unifying structure among this diverse range of services is the national bilingual curriculum document, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017c), which sets out a vision for all children to be “competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (p.2). Other guiding documents of ECE services include the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations and the Licensing Criteria (MOE, 1998a, 2004, 2008, 2017a).

1.3. Leadership in ECE services

The leadership structure within each ECE service type has developed uniquely based on their philosophy and operation model and there can be leadership complexities relating to high levels of collaboration, flattened leadership structures and formal and informal leadership roles that can include centre managers, senior or head teachers, room leaders and at times, parents (Klevering & McNae, 2018). Within teacher-led services, there is generally a positional leader who has oversight of the operation of the service and the pedagogical development of teachers (Thornton, 2010). Within this hierarchical structure, there are often other formal leaders who guide individual classrooms or subject areas. Symbolic of the collaborative nature of ECE teams, those who hold positional or formal titles often teach alongside their colleagues in the service (Thornton, 2010). Regardless of their position, there is a requirement for all certified teachers to demonstrate leadership within their practice as per the Standards of the Teaching Profession (Education Council, 2017) and the Leadership Strategy and Capabilities Framework (Education Council, 2018a, 2018b). While there is a national focus on children attending ECE, until recently, little attention appears to have been directed towards the practices of those leading within these services. Leadership can

impact the teachers, families and children who “develop a sense of belonging and connection to their service through respectful communication which in turn impacts on outcomes for young children and their families” (Krieg et al., 2014, p. 74) . Various writers have suggested that leadership should be considered a fundamental feature of a service’s and government’s approaches to developing high quality ECE (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004a), as a critical component in ensuring the success of quality ECE (Bush, 2013; Rodd, 2005) .

There was only limited guidance being offered to those taking on leadership roles in ECE or investigating the concept of educational leadership in New Zealand, before the release of the Leadership Strategy and the Educational Leadership Capability Framework (Education Council, 2018b). The framework describes the practical application of the strategy and supports teachers to identify, grow and develop their leadership capability while developing their understanding of effective educational leadership. (See section 2.5.2 and 2.5.5 of this thesis for further discussion). A lack of acknowledgement for leadership has been evident in the guiding documents of the ECE sector, such as the first version of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996) , policies of the MOE, and the Education Review Office (ERO) national reports, with minimal references to ECE leadership only appearing after 2009. The status of ECE leadership, as it is recognised in national policy documents, is still undervalued and a concept not well understood (Cooper, 2019).

A 2009 report exploring the issues faced by leadership in New Zealand ECE, identified the low profile of leadership; the lack of an accepted definition or common understanding of leadership; and confusion between leadership and management terminology within the ECE sector which emphasises management over leadership (Thornton et al., 2009, p5-12). The report also acknowledged issues such as newly qualified, less experienced teachers taking on leadership positions; a lack of emphasis on leadership in the ECE sector by the MOE; and the lack of leadership development programmes in ECE, issues which were in contrast to the school sector. A recent review of that report identified that while some progress had been made such as a growing

recognition of what leadership practice entails, there are still many issues to be resolved to ensure leadership receives adequate recognition and resourcing (Thornton, 2020). ECE leaders have been shown to engage in the same practices of setting direction, developing staff and redesigning the organisation, which are found in the practices of successful principals in primary and secondary schools (Notman & Jacobson, 2018). This highlights the effective leadership practice already present in ECE services that requires appropriate acknowledgement and support.

Research into leadership in ECE has highlighted similar challenges faced internationally.

Understandings of what, and who, ECE leadership involves have been hindered by a lack of an agreed definition, limited mentors and role models, reluctance towards taking on roles of authority and power and few opportunities for leadership preparation and development (Rodd, 2013).

Research into the role of educational leaders in Australia's ECE sector has identified similar conclusions. Grarock and Morrissey (2013) noted that there appeared to be a continuing dominance of hierarchical models with teachers requiring a formal title to feel confident in their professional identity to make changes, while Fleet et al. (2015) proposed that there was a variation in the perception and actualisation of the role, adding to the confusion and potentially decreasing the impact of educational leaders. According to Sims et al. (2018) there is a lack of information and guidance for those in educational leadership roles. This is supported by Barnes et al. (2019) who commented that organisational factors such as job descriptions, salary, time available and recognition still require greater development.

1.4. Internal evaluation

Quality improvement practices within New Zealand ECE services are supported through internal evaluation processes. Effective internal evaluation focuses on assessing what is and is not working, for whom, and determining changes that may be needed to increase equity and excellence for children (ERO, 2016a). Internal evaluation is a collaborative process, where all members of a team can be involved, and requires evaluative thinking and leadership. The concept of a learner-focused

idea of shared leadership and the concept of weaving or interconnectedness, which is strongly infused in Te Whāriki, supports teachers to see leadership extended to children, families and communities (Clarkin-Phillips & Morrison, 2018).

1.7. Research objectives and questions

Through this study, I am aiming to contribute to the knowledge base of how educational leadership is conceptualised and in particular, practised through internal evaluation processes in ECE services in New Zealand. I believe a deeper understanding of leadership is required to support the future success of ECE services in promoting confident, capable and competent teachers and leaders. My research question asks in what ways does educational leadership practised through internal evaluation processes, build professional capability and capacity, in New Zealand ECE services?

Guided by a case study approach, the objectives of my research are to:

- Better understand how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation processes,
- Explore what challenges or enables teachers to become involved and practise educational leadership through internal evaluation processes,
- Understand how services monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice, made as a result of an internal evaluation.

1.8. The perspective of the researcher

I graduated with an honours degree in Early Childhood Education in 2010 in Ireland and began my first leadership role in my initial year of teaching. The professionalisation of the workforce and national investment in Ireland's ECE sector is still underdeveloped and has clear links to the standards and expectations of quality. I chose to immigrate to New Zealand largely based on their international reputation for quality in the ECE sector. I have been a positional leader in ECE services since 2012 in New Zealand, working as a Manager in a private ECE service for several years before moving into an operational and training support role across multiple services. Throughout my

professional experience, I have been aware of the lack of robust discussion and training for aspiring and existing leaders, with leadership succession planning often relying on the unsupported idea that ‘great teachers will make great leaders’. In my experiences, ECE leadership roles have often over emphasised the management aspects of the role, at the expense of the educational influence of leadership, and have focused on the single leader. This idea conflicts with the collaborative and shared nature of ECE teams, removing the opportunity to explore how leadership practice actual unfolds throughout the day, among many people. However, through my experiences of participating in internal evaluation processes, I have become aware of the potential of internal evaluation processes to strengthen the professional practice of the ECE community.

1.9. Overview of thesis chapters

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter is a literature review which examines relevant literature on internal evaluation, continuous improvement cycles, reflective practice, monitoring the impact of change, leadership including several different approaches, leadership development and changes in the way leadership is viewed. The literature review chapter concludes with an identification of the gaps in research that will be explored in this study. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological underpinnings of this study. The theoretical framework and research approach for this study is stated, while the research design is outlined including the research question and the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 describes the context for each service and presents the findings according to the three-stage process of data collection: interviews and observations; a focus group; and an individual follow up interview, concluding with a case summary. This is followed by Chapter 5, which discusses an analysis of the findings according to four key themes developed through a thematic analysis. Each theme is discussed with an explanation of its purpose, the similarities and differences across the three participating services, and how these findings relate to literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the implications of the study for the future of leadership in ECE. The final chapter, Chapter 6, provides an overview of the research process and a discussion on the progress made in achieving the aims of the study. The

contribution of the research and its limitations are discussed and directions for future research suggested.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the current literature related to this study and has three sections. The first section provides an overview of literature on internal evaluation processes focusing on quality improvement and its development within New Zealand ECE services, highlighting an increasing awareness of the role of effective evaluation and self-assessment. This is followed by a discussion on the role of continuous improvement in quality and its associated processes. The concept of reflective thinking and monitoring of the impact of change on teaching practice are then considered as they are recognised as key features of a continuous review cycle in national publications. The last section will then discuss trends in the leadership literature which have signalled a move from leaders to leadership. This is followed by a review of the literature on relational leadership, distributed leadership, positional leadership, and L-A-P, with reference to their relevance to ECE, with these approaches being viewed as the most suitable to the ECE sector. This chapter will conclude with a discussion on leadership development and how the concept of leadership appears to be evolving.

2.2. Self-Review/Internal evaluation

The approach towards quality improvement in ECE in New Zealand has been influenced by the concept of self-review which requires services to self-assess their teaching and operational practices and forms the basis for effective continuous improvement.

2.2.1 Development of self-review in New Zealand ECE services

ECE policy within New Zealand has been increasingly developing in its provision and strategic focus on learning over the last 20 years, through its standards of consistency and quality provision of care and education services. From the 1990s into the 2000s, the MOE began releasing a series of policy reforms relating directly to ECE, many in response to changing social and political situations

(McLachlan, 2011). This period saw the implementation of the first compulsory ECE curriculum framework in New Zealand, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996), which was updated again in 2017 (MOE, 2017c). Other statutory and guiding documents released over that time included reforms focused on regulations, licensing criteria, strategic plans and exemplars of teaching practice (MOE, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008).

The international debate on the discourse of quality in ECE continued during the late 1990s, including the nature of quality in ECE and whose perspectives were being considered (Dalli et al., 2011). In the New Zealand context, a similar consideration led to the development of a range of quality policy initiatives, including an action research tool for quality improvement in ECE services, *The Quality Journey: He haerenga whai hua* (MOE, 1999). Dalli et al. (2011, p. 32) have suggested that the introduction of these documents in New Zealand:

positioned quality as an ongoing quest that is achievable through a continuous system of self-improvement in which the key components are: (i) teachers' ability to engage in evaluation processes; (ii) structural support features; and (iii) an ongoing openness to knowledge of what constitutes quality.

The Quality Journey resource positioned improvement systems as a major contributor to quality in ECE and encouraged teachers to voluntarily evaluate their own practice through reflection and the use of quality indicators (McLachlan & Grey, 2012). Although this resource was provided to all services, it was not widely implemented (Collins, 2007) and received criticism for employing confusing terminology and highlighting a disconnect between the MOE's intentions and the capabilities of the ECE sector (Wansbrough, 2004). This critique was centred on the resource reflecting ideas of control suggested in setting standards of practice and improving outcomes, and a lack of guidance on how services should form their own indicators of quality (McLachlan & Grey, 2012). It also emphasised management over leadership, losing a focus on the people involved and the assets they brought to the process (Edwards, 2000).

The first Early Childhood Strategic Plan, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki*, (MOE, 2002) symbolised and promoted the New Zealand discourse on quality, viewing quality as a continuously evolving practice (Dalli et al., 2011). The strategic plan identified three main goals: to promote participation in good quality ECE services; to improve the quality of ECE; and to enhance collaborative relationships. A key feature of the goal to improve quality was the requirement for ECE services to develop self-review practices, which ERO defined as “a process whereby early childhood education services evaluate their operations and practices to maintain or improve their quality” (2005, p. 1). A resource to support ECE services to implement effective self-review; *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: The Self-Review Guidelines* (MOE, 2006) was later published. These guidelines essentially replaced *The Quality Journey* and received a more positive response as they offered a clearer process for teachers to conduct reviews through (McLachlan & Grey, 2012), including its purpose and contribution to practice.

The term self-review is often used synonymously with other terms including internal evaluation. For the purpose of this initial discussion, I will use the term self-review in reference to the original term in the published documents of the 2000s. For the purpose of this research study, I will use the term internal evaluation in line with more recent publications (ERO, 2016a). Self-review was designed to be a deliberate and continuous practice of identifying how well ECE services promote positive learning outcomes for children by identifying which practices are effective and which need to be strengthened (ERO, 2009). Identifying these practices supports the formation of a development plan for the service. The continuous review cycle, and in particular the changes made, support the development of positive learning outcomes for children and families and improved teaching practices (MOE, 2018a). Self-review is built on the understanding that services choose to initiate an investigation and undergo critical self-examination as part of a cycle towards improved practice and quality learning outcomes for children. With that being said, it is still a mandatory requirement within ECE services, with Benade et al. (2017, p. 87) commenting that “There is fundamental irony in the notion of being 'forced' to undertake self-review”.

2.2.2 Features of a cycle of continuous improvement

The journey towards quality in ECE has been described as an continuous system/review cycle of self-improvement (Dalli et al., 2011), which suggests an ongoing process of an inwards examination and commitment to growth and improvement. When all members of an ECE community engage in a practice of continuous improvement, they are focusing their efforts on increasing the learning outcomes of children by raising the quality of their programmes and practices over time (Page & Eadie, 2019).

However, developing high quality programmes through a systematic and sustained way, requires dedication and ongoing support (Page & Eadie, 2019). In planning for continuous improvement, Best and Dunlap (2014, p. 2-4) suggest that consideration should be given to different factors before beginning such as: few, specific and measurable goals; flexibility; time; data use and capacity; evaluation; leadership; knowledge sharing; capacity building and stakeholder investment. Similarly, a report into internal evaluation in schools in the EU (Nelson et al., 2015) identified that the right conditions and environment need to be in place to achieve success. The conditions were noted as: evaluation literacy; resources; leadership; external support; supportive climate and accountability; with the mechanisms identified as: accepting and interpreting feedback from internal evaluations; building capacity and organisational learning; and implementing improvements.

In American ECE and school-based research (Daily et al., 2018; Park et al., 2013) continuous quality improvement can be observed in three broad areas; system/state level, programme level and practitioner level. In their white paper on Continuous Improvement in Education, Park et al. (2013) suggest that while the concept of continuous improvement is well established in business industries among others, it is less prevalent in education. The authors suggest this is due to a prevailing culture of high-level accountability and a desire for simple remedies for difficult problems in improving school and teacher practice. The slow implementation of continuous improvement within schools is partly due to an approach that sees teachers working independently rather than collectively, policy

demands that push for quick results, data that is not accessed in a timely manner to impact meaningfully and change practice, and poor outcomes that are seen as individual failures (Park et al., 2013). This case study of three school organisations highlighted overlapping features required to develop an environment focused on improvement. These included common themes of: leadership and strategy; communication and engagement; organizational infrastructure; methodology; data collection and analysis; and building capacity, that promoted effective continuous improvement.

Another example in the literature, which also holds similarities with New Zealand's ERO internal evaluation process, comes from the evaluation aspect of the Head Start programme in America. Here, a continuous cycle design is used within their conceptual framework to guide the effective use of data for improvement, rather than just for compliance purposes (Derrick-Mills et al., 2014). This cycle moves through actions of gather, analyse data, review, prioritise and plan, implement, monitor, evaluate, and develop and revisit. Each action is influenced by the presence of feedback. Derrick-Mills et al., (2014) have cautioned, however, that the use of analytic capacity as a key feature of continuous improvement, needs to be carefully considered, as not all ECE programme leaders see this as their responsibility or have access to efficient resources to learn this skill.

Within New Zealand, the review process outlined in the *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: The Self-Review Guidelines* (MOE, 2006, p.10) outlined a framework centred on improving practice for children's learning:

- Preparing: being clear about why, and what, services choose to review;
- Gathering: drawing on a range of information sources to ensure authentic evidence is used to make judgements;
- Making sense: using an analysis process to scrutinise the information to create meaning;
- Deciding: Based on what the service has learnt, they must then decide on what to do next.

ERO's resource, *Effective internal evaluation for improvement* (2016a) produced a refreshed and more detailed guide for developing evaluation processes, with a much stronger emphasis on evaluative thinking, including evaluation leadership. It also signalled the move from the term of self-review to internal evaluation within the ECE community. Five interconnected, learner focused processes that were necessary for effective evaluation for improvement were identified:

- Noticing;
- Investigating;
- Collaborative sense making;
- Prioritising to take action (including improvement actions);
- Monitoring and evaluating impact (including shifts in practice and outcomes for learners). (ERO, 2016a, p. 7).

This resource, *Effective internal evaluation for improvement* (2016a), was part of a series of three publications (ERO, 2015, 2016b) designed to support education services to develop capacity and capability to use internal evaluation for improvement. Additional publications (ERO, 2017, 2019b) have noted the variable levels of implementation of internal evaluation in ECE services, suggesting that further development and training is required. Aside from the three key documents produced by government agencies since the 1990s (ERO, 2016a; MOE, 1999, 2006), there is little research available on internal evaluation, limiting a service's ability to engage more deeply with the practice. ERO (2020a) have signalled a new resource on the updated internal evaluation guidelines, which will be available in 2021, which may offer some support to services in building their capacity and capability towards quality improvement.

A key message from all of the national publications mentioned in this section was the importance of reflection and monitoring the impact of change on practice as features of a continuous review cycle. These features will now be discussed in the next section.

2.3. Reflective thinking

There has been a considerable amount of research conducted on the role of reflective thinking in the education field and its impact on teaching practices (Cherrington, 2018; Choy & Oo, 2012; Lee, 2005; Margolin, 2012). Reflection can strengthen ideological practices, highlight opportunities for change, meet different interests (Pihlaja & Holst, 2013), enhance critical thinking (Choy & Oo, 2012; Korthagen, 2004) and create opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of knowledge of practice (Loughran, 2002).

2.3.1 Research on reflective thinking

While reflection has become a common term in educational literature, Rodgers (2002, p. 843) suggests that a lack of a clear definition has meant it has “lost its ability to be seen”, creating challenges such as differentiating reflection from other forms of thought, a lack of agreement on evidence of reflection, a lack of a common language to share understandings and difficulties in identifying the clear impact of reflection on practice and learning. Addressing these challenges, Rodgers, drawing on the work of John Dewey (1933), discussed four criteria to develop a clearer understanding of reflection:

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas;
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry;
3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others;
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others (Rodgers, 2002, p. 845).

Another perspective on reflective thinking has come from Schön (1983) and his development of the concepts of 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. Schön's research into the development of reflective practitioners is still widely cited today, possibly recognising his intention to have reflection-in-action seen as "legitimate form of professional knowing" (p.69) and to encourage its widespread application. Schön described reflection-in-action simply as the skill of thinking about something while doing it, while reflection-on-action relates to thinking after the event has occurred and assessing and evaluating the situation. Schön described examples of reflection-in-action through the reflective conversations of a mentor and mentee, and how a cycle unfolds of appreciation, action and appreciation. He stated that in reflection-in-action, "Doing and thinking are complementary. Doing extends thinking in the tests, moves, and probes of experimental action, and reflection feeds on doing and its results. Each feeds the other, and each sets boundaries for the other" (Schön, p. 280) .

2.3.2 Other perspectives on reflective thinking

While reflective thinking has been described by many as a beneficial skill to develop, other perspectives have encouraged caution. Dadds (1993) has contended that we are at our most vulnerable when we are reflecting on professional practice, as we may be challenging long-standing beliefs and our own self-image. Reflecting on practice can raise unexpected emotions for teachers and create feelings of discomfort and confusion, as they attempt to reconcile their planned intentions with the actual outcomes in their practice. During these emotional moments, there is the potential for teachers to disengage and try to protect themselves from exposure, rather than further engage with their understanding and on-going learning (Dadds, 1993). Leadership can play an essential role in developing an environment of psychological safety, where members can express themselves openly and promote the shared vision (Matsuo, 2016) by creating an atmosphere of support and respect.

2.3.3 The practice of reflective thinking

The work of Dewey (1933), and his model of reflective practice, has been considered the beginning of reflection in teacher education, a process which can support preservice teachers to learn new ideas and sustain professional growth once their training is complete (Lee, 2005). Use of multiple systematic aids, such as journals and written and oral forms of communication, have been found to be beneficial to preservice teachers, while the importance of context, individual preferences and capacities should also be considered (Lee, 2005). However, a criticism of teacher education is that preservice teachers are only being encouraged to reflect, not taught to reflect (Loughran, 2002). Similarly, criticism of reflection comes from a review of the literature which investigated journals promoting teacher reflection in Spain. Marcos et al. (2011) found that there was a discord related to how to conduct reflection, as well as a multitude of types of reflection. Their critique concluded that reflection offered only limited information for teachers on improving their practices and cautioned against potential biases in the literature which focused on the what over the how to, beliefs over evidence, while discussing ideal cases rather than actual practice (Marcos et al., 2011).

Reflective thinking and ECE Teachers

While there has been research into reflection as part of teacher education programmes and school based teachers, less research has been conducted with ECE teachers (Cherrington, 2018). The extent of reflective thinking by ECE teachers can be influenced by the level of preparedness their teacher education programme provided them, their personal attributes, and the culture within their service (Cherrington, 2018). Additionally, the structural and relational features unique to ECE services can create challenges for teachers' engagement in reflection (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014). Reflection within New Zealand ECE is promoted through the core educational documents. For example, within *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017c), there are pedagogical questions within each of the five strands to support reflective practice, while the responsibilities of kaiako³ section states that kaiako

³ Teacher(s).

need the capability to be “thoughtful and reflective about what they do, using evidence, critical inquiry and problem solving to shape their practice” (p.59).

While reflection can be commonly viewed as an individual process, there is increased attention towards collective reflection (Foong et al., 2018). A reflective learning culture can be developed when staff have the opportunity to regular meet together and engage in reflective discussions (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014). One qualitative New Zealand case study (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014), investigated the use of video recordings with ECE teachers to encourage engagement in reflective thinking in both individual and collaborative ways. Their findings highlighted that in using stimulated-recall interviews of the recordings and a reflective journal: “teachers were de-privatising practices through collective dialogue; gaining new insights into children, teaching practices and their programme through viewing the recorded episodes; and moving from discussion of specific episodes to broader principles of practice” (p.46). This study has identified useful practices in encouraging reflection and examining reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) in practice. However, it has also highlighted that teachers faced challenges in critiquing their own, or their colleagues’ practices, tending to offer supportive comments or advice on practice instead (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014).

Although, as described in the above research, there is a growing interest in collaborative reflection, it has also been noted that this does not commonly occur in practice. Researchers in a Finnish ECE study (Pihlaja & Holst, 2013), concluded that it was rare for professional teams to come together weekly to reflect on their work as a group, as the structure of the service and their responsibilities did not create many opportunities to do so.

2.4. Monitoring the impact of change

Through reflective thinking, problems can be framed and reframed (Schön, 1983), thereby influencing actions taken (Loughran, 2002). For many teachers, these actions are likely to be changes to their teaching practice focusing on quality improvement (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014). These improvement actions should be monitored so that teachers can evaluate the impact on their

teaching practices and learning outcomes for children, a feature of a continuous review cycle. In their discussion on accountability towards improvement within US schools, Fullan et al. (2015, p. 4) state that “Constantly improving and refining instructional practice so that students can engage in deep learning tasks is perhaps the single most important responsibility of the teaching profession and educational systems as a whole”. This suggests a change in the approach to determining who is responsible for a students’ positive learning outcomes, situating the teacher as primarily responsible for continuously adapting their teaching practice to suit the individual learning needs of the student.

In the New Zealand context, ERO has identified ‘monitoring and evaluating impact’ as one of five processes that is necessary for effective evaluation for improvement (ERO, 2016a, p. 7). By effectively monitoring the impact of changes and evaluating its effect, services can make appropriate judgements on what does and does not work, for which children and why (ERO, 2016b) . This allows services to re-focus their time, attention and resources into teaching practices that deliver improved outcomes for all learners, promoting an equitable programme. Teachers and leaders can develop a clearer understanding of how their practices affect children and whānau⁴ and can be inspired to continue engaging in continuous improvement. As the routine interactions between teachers and children can directly impact on the child’s development, teaching practices must be monitored and assessed so that the service can continue to improve (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Without an effective process of monitoring and evaluating, changes or shifts in practice can go undetected, missing the opportunity to make time sensitive modifications to practice that can have the greatest impact on learning (ERO, 2016b) . Monitoring and evaluating the impact of changes to teaching practice may include: reviewing the data for indications of what is and is not working; having appropriate systems in place to monitor progress and impact; developing indicators that will signal if you are moving in the direct direction; seeking input from students, their parents and whānau; and knowing when to adjust strategies (ERO, 2016a).

⁴ extended family, multigenerational group of relatives or group of people who work together on and for a common cause.

A fundamental role of the ECE leader is their pedagogical focus on quality practice, supporting and improving children's learning and development whether directly or indirectly (Siraj-Blatchford & Hallet, 2014) with monitoring and assessing practice through collaborative dialogue and action research seen as an effective leadership practice (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) . Douglass (2019) in her working paper for the OCED, investigated how leadership may directly or indirectly impact process quality, which are the interactions and relationships children experience in ECE services. Her findings highlighted that leaders can foster a culture of continuous learning through an organisational culture focused on learning and improvement. The literature has raised a frequent theme of leadership in driving continuous and/or quality improvement (Douglass, 2019; Park et al., 2013) and the following section of this literature review will focus on leadership practices.

2.5. Leadership

Extensive research into leadership including the historical development of leadership theories (Badshah, 2012) and both theoretical and empirical developments (Avolio et al., 2009) , has highlighted a diverse range of leadership theories, models, and approaches for different contexts. While some theories originated when scholars identified that an existing theory did not fully capture an individual's capacity (Halaychik, 2016), theorising on leadership appears to have changed from a focus on leaders to leadership. Avolio et al. (2009) identified three trends in the evolution of leadership development in the literature: a holistic view of leadership that acknowledges the context, the leader, the follower, and their interactions; an examination of how the process of leadership takes place including how both the leader and follower process information and how they affect one another and the organisation; and creation of alternative ways to examine leadership through mixed methods research designs.

The trends raised by Avolio et al., (2009) pose many interesting considerations for the future of leadership research. As the discourse around leadership continues to be debated, the literature is showing a move towards a shared, and practice perspective, of leadership. Bolden and Gosling

(2016) have noted the shift away from the individual conceptions about leadership, to those that are inclusive and relational. Leadership is being acknowledged as a collective activity (Crevani et al., 2010), with research on shared leadership beginning to emerge from 2004, becoming increasingly popular during the past decade (Zhu et al., 2019). Debates in the literature have also encouraged a view of leadership from a practice perspective (Carrol et al., 2008), respecting and acknowledging the context in which leadership occurs (Raelin, 2016), reflecting the relational and everyday aspects of leadership (Crevani et al., 2010), while drawing attention to the 'how' over the 'who' of leadership.

As outlined in the discussion above, research on leadership has shifted from an individual perspective to a shared and/or practice perspective. For the purpose of this study, leadership, rather than leaders, are of interest and the following literature will be discussed from this perspective. The next section of the literature review will begin with a discussion on relational leadership and distributed leadership, following the trend of leadership as collective endeavour while also acknowledging the role the positional leader plays in promoting a distributed approach to leadership. Following this, the literature will discuss a practice perspective of leadership examining the processes and actions taken, rather than focusing on the people involved. Leadership will then be explored within the domain of education, highlighting the growing research into teacher leadership and ECE leadership. Literature within a New Zealand context is then highlighted, with the concept of leadership as an inclusive practice wherein everyone can lead, with many teachers already practising leadership but resistant to acknowledging their leadership identity. While ECE leadership receives limited attention within the literature, leadership development still has to be adequately addressed and this will be explored further. This chapter will conclude with a consideration of what the future of ECE leadership might look like as conceptualisations of leadership continue to develop.

The inadequacy of literature investigating educational leadership in ECE within New Zealand presents a continuing challenge in sourcing empirical evidence (ECE Taskforce, 2011). Consequently,

research into leadership discussed in this section will encompass an examination of school-based literature (Krieg et al., 2014), as the closest comparison to ECE. Having said that, caution will be exercised to make deliberate the differing perspectives regarding ECE and school leadership (Thornton et al., 2009).

2.5.1 Relational Leadership

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, research has shown a shift towards a more inclusive and relational understanding of leadership. Interest has been growing in the use of relational leadership, outside of the education sector, as a response to fast changing and complex environments of organisations (Douglass, 2018), who are experiencing challenges in leadership capacity, context and responsibility (Clarke, 2018a). Relational leadership considers leaders and followers working in a reciprocal relationship, with leadership emerging in a dynamic and social process that occurs between people (Clarke, 2018a). Relational leadership places a greater emphasis on the role of followers as it “recognises that leadership emerges partially because followers interpret themselves as having a leadership relationship with a leader” (Clarke, 2018a, p. 3). In contrast to traditional perspectives of leadership, relational leadership considers knowledge as the source of leadership, being self-organising and emergent, focusing on the social and collective, occurring through relationships, and influenced from a bottom up and mutual approach (Clarke, 2018a). Similarly Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 655), defines relational leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, and ideologies) are constructed and produced”. These descriptions of relational leadership suggest that leadership is more than the attributes of an individual, but rather the processes or interactions between members in a relationship and how they view themselves and others.

A US study on ECE leadership development (Douglass, 2018), concluded that the participants strongly identified with contemporary understandings of leadership as relational and collaborative rather than formal, hierarchical leadership. When the participants redefined leadership in this

collaborative and relational way, they began to self-identify as leaders, connecting their past and present capabilities with leadership and experienced increased confidence and an openness to approaching challenges. Other examples in New Zealand literature have shown teachers' interest in relational leadership. Klevering and McNae's (2018) study into ECE teachers' experiences and understandings of leadership, suggested that effective leaders who display relational aspects of communication, trust, collaboration, and form strong relationships, are desired. While teachers in Dennee and Thornton's (2018) study, appreciated a collaborative approach to leadership that centred on motivation, empowerment and engagement, citing examples of following their interests and feeling encouraged by their team.

Respect and trust in relational leadership

Within the many perspectives of relational leadership in the literature, concepts of respect, trust and their connection to mutuality are frequently cited as essential conditions (Clarke, 2018b). Clarke (2018b) proposes three forms of respect: appraisal respect which reflects the judgements made about the value of the qualities and characteristics an individual possess; identification respect referring to the alignment of values between people in a relationship; while recognition respect reflects moral reasoning in that all individuals deserve fair treatment due to their common humanity. Clarke suggests that mutual recognition respect is a key feature of relational leadership and can positively contribute to workplace and personal outcomes. The concept of trust has also been investigated to understand how it develops and this can be impacted by characteristics of both the trustor and the trustee, including aspects of sincerity, reputation, a disposition to trust, past experiences while also acknowledging the type of relationship, such as professional or personal (Clarke, 2018b) For the purpose of this literature review, I will focus on the concept of trust within relational leadership, as it is frequently referenced in ECE leadership and school based research, as discussed below.

Within New Zealand, relationships is one of four guiding principles of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017c), highlighting the importance and requirement of responsive and reciprocal relationships to deliver equitable learning outcomes for all children, suggesting relational leadership may be well suited to ECE. Relational trust can be considered particularly important to the ECE sector due to the close working relationships teachers engage in and its impact on children's learning outcomes (Thornton, 2010). A New Zealand based study (Hill, 2018) examining leadership opportunities in a nature based programme observed examples of relational leadership occurring as teachers and children displayed leadership, regardless of hierarchical conditions. Teachers and children co-constructed knowledge and supported one another, strengthening the relationships between all members, which were built on a foundation of trust.

In a study examining the positional leader's role in promoting distributed leadership in an ECE service (Denée & Thornton, 2018), building relational trust was identified as an essential leadership practice. Their research highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships to professional learning and distributed leadership practice, with positional leaders suggesting that fostering well-being and relationships could support teachers' confidence and the development of distributed leadership. Effective relationships and the development and maintenance of relational trust was seen to benefit children's learning (Denée & Thornton, 2018). These findings concur with the literature from the school sector, wherein ERO's (2016c) report, *School leadership that works*, identified building relational trust and collaboration as one of six examples of effective leadership practice. They identified that genuine learning partnerships between schools, teachers and parents/whānau, where each person's knowledge and expertise were acknowledged and respected equally, supported educational success for students.

2.5.2 Distributed leadership

In the conclusion of their qualitative review of leadership theories, Dinh et al. (2014) argue that the approaches towards leadership that embody collaborative team processes, challenge the historical

views of the “dominant leader-centric, global, trait-orientated thematic category that have defined the field” (p.55). Distributed leadership is one of the four most studied leadership models in educational research according to Gumus et al. (2016), with research highlighting it as a prevalent model in ECE literature (For example see Aubrey et al., 2013; Bøe & Hognestad, 2015; Clarkin-Phillips, 2009, 2011; Cooper, 2014; Dennee & Thornton, 2017; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Heikka et al., 2013; Jordan, 2008; Ryder et al., 2011).

Distributed leadership can be viewed as particularly suitable to ECE services as it places a focus on relationships and interdependence (Colmer et al., 2015; Rodd, 2005) and the responsibility of leadership is aligned with both the formal and informal leaders (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Leadership is therefore not just applicable to those in roles of management or authority, it is also open to those with extensive teaching experience who are willing to share their expertise and skills with others (ECE Taskforce, 2011). Distributed leadership has the potential to harness the collective expertise of the teaching team and utilise their skills to support the learning and development of children. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2004b, p. 35) view distributed leadership as “valuing knowledge or expertise as reflected in leadership roles in diverse spheres of activity including curriculum, advocacy, personnel and community development”. There appears to have been a repositioning of power and decision making in the organisation of ECE services within New Zealand, in favour of a distributed or shared leadership approach (ECE Taskforce, 2011). Distributed leadership can raise the morale and self-esteem of teachers as they are actively involved in the leadership and management (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

A distributed perspective of leadership also aligns with the Educational Leadership Capability Framework (Education Council, 2018a), as the leadership capabilities are elaborated to describe what the practices might look like in different spheres of leadership: leading organisations; leading teams; and expert teacher, leadership of curriculum or initiative. This framework highlights the

possibilities for all team members, not just those in formal positions, to be involved and contribute to effective leadership.

Heikka et al. (2013, p. 38), in their efforts to conceptualise distributed leadership in ECE, argue that while it is evolving, “the use of distributed leadership theory and research applications in everyday practice is rare”. In contrast to this assessment, there is evidence of distributed leadership being positioned as a valid framework within a New Zealand context. A 2011 qualification in ECE Leadership, offered by the then New Zealand College of Early Childhood Education, placed distributed leadership as a underlying principle at the core of its design and analysis (Ryder et al., 2011). The Educational Leadership Capability Framework (Education Council, 2018a) includes one of its core capabilities as “building and sustaining collective leadership and professional community” (p.8), while the ERO (2020b) indicators of effective practice in ECE, discussed further in 2.5.9, promote a distributed leadership approach.

2.5.3 Positional Leadership and Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership needs to be considered within the unique context of ECE, before it can be effectively implemented (Heikka et al., 2013). The leadership structure within New Zealand ECE services has both positional leadership and distributed leadership dimensions (Denee & Thornton, 2017). ECE services within New Zealand are identifiable as diverse environments, where leadership roles and structures vary greatly between service types and where teachers work collaboratively (Thornton, 2010). These unique features have opened up the potential for different approaches to leadership. This includes the critical role the positional leader plays in developing the concept of distributed leadership for the whole team. Colmer et al. (2015, p. 104) assert that positional leadership is “essential to create the conditions necessary for collaborative and distributed leadership”. Research into a school based approach argued that it was vital for those in formal leader positions to create an environment that inspires innovation in a bottom up approach, as opposed to leading in a top down approach (Glatter, 2009). The positional leader has the responsibility to support the development of skills within individuals to enable them to meet the

demands of the role within distributed leadership (Denee & Thornton, 2017). Positional leaders have a key role to play in the success of the ECE service and the development of distributed leadership by being “reflective practitioners who influence and develop people by setting an example, and providing a model, both morally and purposefully” (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007, p.21).

One example of how this can be achieved comes from a New Zealand qualitative case study (Denee & Thornton, 2017) which investigated how positional leaders facilitated distributed leadership in ECE. They identified three leadership practices of mentoring and coaching; fostering relational trust; and creating vision and designing supporting structures. In their study, teachers and leaders had different views on how well these practices were executed and the authors recommend further professional learning and development to enhance these leadership practices.

2.5.4 Leadership-as-practice

L-A-P can be observed to align with distributed leadership wherein it represents a group of individuals working towards a mutual outcome. Viewing leadership through a practice perspective offers the opportunity to challenge the traditional views of leadership, as it does not consider leadership as attributes of individuals or the relationship between leaders and followers (Raelin, 2011). It differs from existing leadership theories as it does not produce a checklist of definable characteristics, skills and abilities of leadership (Kellie, 2016). L-A-P reimagines leadership as “an outcome rather than a prerequisite of practice involving more than one person and nonhuman artefacts” (Youngs, 2017, p. 151). More critically, L-A-P takes the concept of the distribution of leadership one step further by examining the processes and actions taken, rather than focusing on the people involved. Leadership is not only recognised in exceptional times or when routines differ from the norm, L-A-P recognises that leadership evolves through everyday experiences (Raelin, 2016.) L-A-P is concerned with what people can accomplish together as opposed to what an individual thinks or does. L-A-P also avoids the critique of distributed leadership wherein those in power can give the illusion of consultation and participation, while not disclosing the true methods of how decisions are made (Bolden, et al., 2009).

L-A-P is changing how leadership is conceptualised through a focus on practices, rather than on the leader themselves (Raelin, 2016; Youngs, 2017). While L-A-P is a relatively new movement in the field of leadership, research is starting to become available to consider this alternative perspective. A New Zealand case study (Baxendine, 2018), employed a L-A-P approach to analyse the excursions of an ECE service in their local community, as a means of identifying democratic leadership. This study drew on Raelin's (2011) 'four cs' tenets of leaderful practice: collectiveness, concurrency, collaboration, and compassion.

Collectiveness refers to the extent to which everyone in the entity can serve as a leader.

Concurrency considers the extent to which members of the unit of organization are serving as leaders at the same time. Collaboration considers the extent to which members are co-creating their enterprise. It also reviews the nature of the dialogue in which members determine together what needs to be done and how to do it. Finally, in compassion, there is interest in the extent to which members commit to preserving the dignity of every single member of the entity regardless of background, status, or point of view (Raelin, 2011, p.204).

Baxendine's study (2018), highlighted how teachers could broaden their conceptualisation of leadership and foster genuine leaderful practice in children and families through the co-creation of a community, through collective knowledge formation.

2.5.5 Educational leadership including pedagogical leadership

Educational leadership research in the previous decade can be characterised by four factors: an emphasis on the impact of educational leadership on students; a move from generic to educational leadership; a shift from leadership styles to educationally powerful leadership practices and cognitions; and a change of approach from heroic to distributed leadership (Firestone & Robinson, 2010). Educational leadership, when viewed from a practice perspective theorises leadership as a "set of social practices which compose our understandings, know-how, and relationships with other human beings with whom we interact in the practice and in the material world in which the practice

is enmeshed” (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 654). Research has shown that effective educational leadership produces positive effects on the learning outcomes for children and teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009).

Although the term educational leadership is more commonly used in New Zealand, the terms pedagogical leadership and educational leadership are often used interchangeably in the literature. Pedagogical leadership is concerned with establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum, and evaluating teachers and teaching (Robinson et al., 2009). Effective pedagogy is appropriately positioned to identify teaching practices that have a positive impact on children’s learning (Robinson et al., 2009), and pedagogical leadership is based on leadership for learning and equally supports the learning of teachers (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016).

A relevant definition of educational leadership developed in consultation with the teaching profession of New Zealand, and as published in the *Leadership Strategy*, views it as:

the practice of supporting others to make a positive difference to children’s and young people’s learning. It involves creating and sustaining the conditions known to enhance their learning. It requires the capability to work effectively with colleagues and other adults to support learning and to create new solutions and knowledge together. For those in positional leadership roles it also involves building and sustaining thriving teams and institutions that support ongoing professional learning (Education Council, 2018b, p. 8)

While the literature on educational leadership within the school sector is extensive, educational leadership within the ECE sector has been largely under researched (Thornton, 2011) with limited development of theoretical knowledge (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). Within the Australian ECE sector, the role of an educational leader was mandated within the regulations in 2012. It requires the educational leader to be qualified, responsible for the development and implementation of a curriculum across the service (Barnes et al., 2019) , the mentoring of other educators towards quality provision (Sims et al., 2018), while also initiating change (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013).

Characteristics and practices of this role have been described, most importantly, as the relationships with staff and mentoring (Sims et al., 2018). However, one study showed that as participants' length of experience in ECE increased, and they gained more experience in management roles, there was less of an emphasis on relationships (Sims et al., 2018). Qualities such as good communication, professional knowledge, relationships and enthusiasm were seen as important, while practices such as casual talks, sharing research and resources and contributing to the quality improvement programme were the most commonly cited leadership practices (Barnes et al., 2019).

A workplace culture of being open to change, valuing professional relationships and participating in further study were factors associated with a willingness to accept and work with educational leaders (Fleet et al., 2015). Research has also shown that there is still much confusion relating to this role. One Australian, ECE study (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013) identified that while educational leaders felt capable to introduce change, they also identified barriers to do so from a lack of time, a lack of authority based on their university training and a lack of a formal role or title. Organisational conditions such as a valid job description, the availability of additional time, improved salary and an appropriate budget were underdeveloped and seen as challenges to the effective implementation of the educational leader's role (Barnes et al., 2019; Fleet et al., 2015).

2.5.6 Teacher leadership

Similarly to the broader research on leadership, understandings of teacher leadership are hindered by the multitude of competing definitions available, leading in part to challenges in its conceptualisation (Cooper, 2014; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Wenner and Campbell (2017) summarised their quest to define teacher leadership in the school based literature as including five aspects: teacher leadership goes beyond the classroom walls; teacher leaders should support professional learning in their schools; teacher leaders should be involved in policy and/or decision making at some level; the ultimate goal of teacher leadership is improving student learning and success; and teacher leaders work toward improvement and change for the whole

school organisation. Their themes resonate with the ideas of Muijs and Harris (2003) in that teacher leadership is centred on collective action, empowerment and shared agency, which are also reflected in the theory of distributed leadership.

Teacher leadership as a concept, signals a strong link between teachers being central to a school's operation and its pedagogy (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) while also being important to achieving school and classroom improvement (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Teacher leadership is inspired by the desire to improve and support positive learning outcomes for all students (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke's (2004) school based seminal literature review of 140 studies, identified four key reasons for advancing the concept of teacher leadership: benefits of employee participation; expertise about teaching and learning; acknowledgement, opportunities, and rewards for accomplished teachers; and benefits to students (p. 258). The authors noted that the literature provided an abundance of claims on the effects of teacher leadership but did not substantiate these claims with evidence, a finding supported in a more recent review, as well as a criticism for the lack of a wider range of research into the topic (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

In looking specifically to ECE, Cooper (2014) argued that teacher leadership should be reconceptualised for the ECE sector as it can address the concerns of teachers' ability to recognise, understand and engage in leadership as part of their identity and responsibilities. In reconceptualizing teacher leadership for ECE, Cooper (2014) proposed four interrelated themes of teacher leaderships' relevance to ECE. These are: relational and empowering influence is central to teacher leadership; leadership is embedded in teachers' everyday practice; teacher leaders embrace an identity underpinned by advocacy and relational agency; and teachers' identity as leaders emerges within an effective community of practice. Cooper (2014) suggested that when teachers practice in leaderful ways, they are connecting to Raelin's (2011) 'four cs' tenets of leaderful practice; collectiveness, concurrency, collaboration, and compassion, as this practice correlates with the "collaborative contextualised and community-based ethos of ECE" (p.89).

In her New Zealand based study into teacher leadership in ECE, Cooper (2020), identified that some participants, including both those who did, and did not hold a formal leadership position, faced challenges in navigating and expressing a dual teacher-leader identity. Drawing on the work of Sfard and Prusak (2005) into identity construction, Cooper (2020) suggests that there can be actual identities, which can be considered factual or real-life experiences, and designated identities, wherein teachers are given a leadership identity by a positional leader or colleague, but do not self-identify as a leader.

Teachers in Cooper's study felt hesitant to accept a leadership identity when there was a lack of awareness of what constituted leadership practice, recognising their actions as a collaborative exercise rather than leadership practice. Other participants felt uncomfortable with the perspective of leadership as holding power over colleagues, instead wanting to be seen as equal in their team. Cooper (2020) advocates for further support and development of a teacher leadership identity through: opportunities for dialogue that challenges traditional views of leadership and reconstructs a leadership identity that relates to teachers' everyday work responsibilities; opportunities where teachers are encouraged to lead by positional leaders; and opportunities to recognise their own leadership practice. These suggestions also connect to a L-A-P perspective wherein all teachers, not just those with a formal title, can show leadership.

2.5.7 Leadership within ECE in New Zealand

New Zealand has a diversity of ECE services available, offering parents and families a choice in their child's ECE journey. The leadership structure within each service type has developed uniquely based on their philosophy and operation model and there can be leadership complexities relating to high levels of collaboration, level leadership structures and formal and informal positions (Klevering & McNae, 2018). Education and care and kindergarten services may have a clear hierarchy within their leadership structure and have a positional leader such as a Manager/Head Teacher, supported by additional positional leaders within the teaching team and an offsite management of an

owner/association (Thornton et al., 2009) . There can also be a duality of roles, with those holding leadership positions also responsible for the management of the service (Klevering & McNae, 2018). A distinct feature of leadership within New Zealand ECE, as in most other countries, is that most teachers and leaders are female (Ryder et al., 2017).

There is a requirement for all certified teachers (including those with positional roles) to demonstrate leadership within their teaching practices as a requirement of their teacher registration and certification, emphasised through *The Standards of the Teaching Profession* (Education Council, 2017), and also promoted through *The Leadership Strategy* (Education Council, 2018b) and *The Educational Leadership Capability Framework* (Education Council, 2018a). While there may be clearly defined roles, positional leaders and teachers are both expected to demonstrate leadership, and as they can often teach together in the same classroom, there can be a levelling of hierarchy (Denee, 2017).

Leadership in ECE in New Zealand has been traditionally viewed as governance and management but trends in the literature are showing a change in the perception of how leadership is viewed (ECE Taskforce, 2011). In a review of the literature on leadership in ECE between 1995-2015, 10 New Zealand articles discussed definitions of leadership. Of these, three associated concepts of leadership with traditional/hierarchal models, four as inclusive of a diverse range of ECE professionals and three as socially constructed, situated, interpretive, culturally influenced (Nicholson et al., 2018).

Reflecting the unique, bicultural context of New Zealand ECE services, one research project (Tamati, 2008) examined how whānau development in a Māori immersion centre, fostered leadership to enhance the educational success of Māori children. The underlining theory in this research centred on the belief that all members of an ECE community (teachers, children and whānau) were leaders already and leadership can be reflected as both an individual and collective responsibility. Through their research, the ECE community developed the four responsibilities framework of leadership, Ngā

takohanga e wha, which was formulated on how individuals perceive themselves while also considering relationships, perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and interactions with others. The four responsibilities can be elaborated as: *Being responsible*, which relates to an individual's attitude and actions and involves being professional, acting ethically and appropriately, being honest, being positive and being open to others and to different perspectives; *Taking responsibility* relates to courage, risk taking, having a go, taking up the challenge and trying new things; *Having responsibility* relates to having designated roles and positions of responsibility; and *Sharing responsibility* refers to sharing power, roles and positions. Sharing responsibility also denotes an interaction and engagement with others, being able to listen to others' points of view, acknowledging different perspectives and both asking for, and providing, assistance (Tamati, 2008, p. 26). Through *having*, and *sharing* responsibility, you can be supported to *take* responsibility and then, *be* responsible (Tamati, 2008, p. 27)

The New Zealand ECE sector is continuing to evolve at a fast pace, with demands for a professionalised workforce and accountability, requiring a focus on effective leadership (Klevering & McNae, 2018). A qualitative, New Zealand based study (Klevering & McNae, 2018) examined how ECE leaders conceptualised leadership and its enactment. Participants in this study valued the importance of leadership in quality provision. Themes arising from participants' conceptualisations included viewing ECE leadership as an inclusive practice wherein everyone could lead and acknowledging many already possessed leadership qualities. Effective leadership involved: being a role model for others and supporting them to achieve their own leadership potential; empowering others through distributed leadership; developing a positive organisational culture through teamwork and recognising the unique context of ECE; maintaining strong and trusting relationships; and requiring knowledge and expertise while continuing to learn and share knowledge. Klevering and McNae's study (2018) also identified common challenges in ECE leadership that included: tensions in maintaining a quality focus while also ensuring the business was sustainable; the

multifaceted role of the ECE leader in the challenge of managing a centre and focusing on pedagogy; and a lack of status and recognition in the wider community.

2.5.8 Leadership development in ECE

In teacher-led services, the designated 'person responsible', who is responsible for the day-to-day aspects of the service, must hold a recognised ECE or primary teaching qualification and a current practising certificate with the Teaching Council (MOE, 2008). This criterion is the only compulsory requirement for anyone interested in taking on a leadership role. Those who do take on leadership positions in ECE are unlikely to have had any formal training for their new roles (Fenech, 2013; Thornton, 2010) due to a lack of access to relevant preparation or training (Rodd, 2013). Similarly, in 2009, Thornton et al. (2009) identified six issues and dilemmas facing leadership in ECE within New Zealand, with the lack of leadership development programmes being one of the six issues, with little progress being made in the past 10 years (Thornton, 2020). Although the strategic plan of 2002-2012 (MOE, 2002) proposed leadership development programmes, a change in government led to the majority of the plan being abandoned. A similar concern with the lack of professional learning and development specific to leadership is noted internationally (Fenech, 2013; Krieg et al., 2014).

Leadership development within the ECE sector is needed (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016). Looking to the future, there are some promising initiatives being suggested. Within Objective 3 of the 2019-2029 Strategic Plan (MOE, 2019), as part of a wider commitment to a sustained programme of professional learning and development for the sector, the New Zealand government have stated their intention to have a dedicated programme to grow the leadership capability of positional leaders, drawing on the work of the Teaching Council's Leadership strategy and framework (Education Council, 2018a, 2018b). In her discussion on leadership in the ECE sector currently, Thornton (2020) has welcomed the intention for what is now a long overdue, leadership professional learning and development programme but has suggested that leadership could have been given a more prominent position within the strategic plan. Similarly, Cooper (2019) in her discussion on

leadership development and the strategic plan, has recommended that the government make a stronger commitment to leadership development, with one that considers the recent international and national research on ECE leadership, to enhance the quality of ECE.

It is important to consider the differences between leader development, which focuses on the individual, and leadership development which focuses on multiple individuals (Day et al., 2014). Rodd (2013) has suggested that competent leadership, in particular their style and standard, plays a significant role in the quality of ECE services, as their leadership “sets the tone, expectations, standards, boundaries and culture of the service” (p.255). Rodd (2013) recommends that to prepare for the future in building sustainable services and planning for succession, the ECE sector needs to invest in building leadership capacity in those showing interest in leadership and those already in designated positions.

2.5.9 Shifts in thinking around leadership for ECE

Leadership is considered “one of the single most important drivers of organisational performance, quality improvement and innovation” (Douglass, 2019, p. 6). Investigating how leadership is enacted internationally in ECE could support the development of a shared understanding of the many factors of leadership and their influence (Sims et al., 2018). A deeper level of understanding and recognition of an individual’s potential and capacity for leadership can encourage other teachers to see themselves as leaders, which can have a positive impact on children and families as well as raising the status of ECE leadership within the community (Rodd, 2013).

Within the New Zealand context, ERO (2020b) recently released their new framework for evaluating quality in ECE services. In considering specifically the process indicators of *Kaihautū*⁵ (ERO, 2020, p. 14) and *Te Whakaruruhau*⁶ (ERO, 2020b, p. 14), this framework has taken a different approach in separating the themes of leadership from governance and management. This suggests

⁵ Kai reflects the human aspect while Hautū refers to the person providing guidance and direction.

⁶ Whaka means ‘to cause something to happen’, while Ruruhau refers to providing shelter and protection.

that there is a requirement of both sets of skills for ECE services to effectively promote quality learning outcomes for children. McKenzie (2012, p. 45) contends that “leaders have the opportunity to create a sustainable learning organisation while managers ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the organisation”. While leadership skills can be considered more important to the success of an ECE service, effective services have individuals with both managerial and leadership skills (Carr et al., 2009). The release of ERO’s new framework offers an opportunity to build a cohesive understanding of what educational leadership within New Zealand ECE looks. It heralds a new focus on the examination of leadership in ECE, with all indicators centred on how practice can positively impact on children’s learning. Additionally, it promotes a leadership approach that fosters collaboration, relational trust, professional learning and development to build capacity, improvement, and equitable outcomes for all children (ERO, 2020b). Perhaps these arguments signal a re-examination of leadership- leadership that is focused on the teaching and learning practices and open to all teachers. To date, there is evidence of this occurring through the Teaching Council’s Leadership Strategy (2018b) and Capabilities Framework (2018a), with the overarching message from these documents suggesting leadership is a requirement of all teachers, not just those in positional leadership roles. These documents each reflect the importance and requirement of leadership to enable positive learning outcomes for children. With the sector gravitating towards a distributed approach to leadership (Thornton, 2018), the individual teachers’ and positional leaders’ expression of leadership contributes to enacting this approach effectively.

2.6. Gap in the literature

The process of internal evaluation has influenced how quality improvement in New Zealand ECE services is enacted, through activities of self-assessment and evaluation. While a range of national policy initiatives supported its implementation in all services, further research into internal evaluation is still required to support consistent implementation. Internal evaluation sits within a cycle of continuous improvement incorporating both individual and collective reflective thinking, creating opportunities for teachers and leaders to develop a deeper understanding of knowledge of

practice. Any changes made to teaching practice need to be monitored and evaluated so that teachers can develop a clearer understanding of how their practices effect children and whānau, with leadership playing a key role in driving continuous and quality improvement in ECE services. The trends in the literature emphasise a focus on leadership rather than a leader, with more literature now focusing on distributed leadership. This trend offers encouragement to those interested in practising leadership, as leadership is open to those without formal titles and those with extensive teaching experience who are willing to share their expertise. With that being said, a critique of distributed leadership has cautioned that while this approach is popular, it has also been portrayed as the answer to all issues with student learning (Gronn, 2008). A L-A-P perspective takes a different position, and while embodying aspects of distributed leadership, it places its focus squarely on the practices of leadership and the actions taken. In identifying leadership through a practice perspective, including its often-chaotic appearance, it is also identifying the “explicit efforts to build and maintain the community, which at times may require accommodation to nurture relations or confrontation to bring out disagreements” (Raelin, 2016a, p.125). However, research into a practice perspective of leadership in ECE is still very limited, with further studies needed to contribute to a greater understanding of the concept. This study will attempt to address a gap in the literature by exploring how leadership is practised through internal evaluation processes in ECE, building professional capability and capacity.

2.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the current literature related to this study and has explored the areas of internal evaluation, continuous improvement, and leadership. Internal evaluation is centred on the motivation to improve (ERO, 2016a) and when services engage in conscious, systematic internal evaluation processes, they are promoting valued outcomes for children and their whānau (ERO, 2020b). A cycle of continuous improvement, supported by a process of internal evaluation, aims to raise the quality of teaching practices and the service’s programme. The trends

in the leadership literature have shown an evolution of the concept of leadership, with a focus on leadership over leaders, while also a consideration towards a practice perspective of leadership.

This literature review has concluded by establishing a gap in the literature in the area of educational leadership practised through internal evaluation processes in ECE services. The methodology of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical and practical aspects and the research methodology used in this study. To help ensure the transparency of the research process, the steps taken will be described, creating opportunities for future researchers to replicate aspects of this study while also assessing if the chosen method was the most appropriate option for answering the research question (Given, 2008). The current literature continues to leave an unanswered question of how educational leadership is practised in ECE services in New Zealand. The purpose of this study is to generate and contribute new research on educational leadership, focused on leadership practices. Guided by a case study approach, the research question asks: In what ways does educational leadership, practiced through internal evaluation processes build professional capability and capacity, in New Zealand ECE services?

This chapter begins with a discussion on the methodological underpinnings, considering the paradigm, theoretical framework, research approach and design. This is followed by a description of the research sample and the data collection and analysis. The final section explores the ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the research, concluding with a chapter summary.

3.2. Methodological underpinnings

This section describes the methodological underpinnings of this research that framed the practical aspects of the study. The chosen paradigm represents my epistemological stance and involves an interpretative inquiry, wherein knowledge is seen as created and understood between people. This is followed by a description of the inquiry strategy and the research design of case study.

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

To understand the practices of educational leadership, we must understand how the meanings, beliefs and preferences attached to these leadership practises have materialised. Within qualitative

research, philosophical assumptions are made determining the ontology, the nature of reality and its characteristics, and the epistemology, which considers how the researcher knows what they know (Creswell, 2007) . Characteristics of an ontological assumption considers that “reality is subjective, and multiple, as seen by participants in the study”, and can include the use of “quotes and themes in the words of participants and provides evidence of different perspectives” (Creswell, 2007, p.17). The ontological position considers whether leadership, and subsequently educational leadership exists, as it is considered to be a phenomenon. The ontological position of this research asserts that leadership does exist, as social experiences and interactions continue to produce an environment where leadership is a perceived need. Whether an individual intentionally steps forward or the unconscious interactions of members of a group generate a leader or a leadership team, the requirement for leadership continues.

Examining educational leadership as a practice, rather than focusing on the person(s) involved, provides an opportunity to observe the practices which are visible and their influence on learning outcomes, which supports the epistemological position of how those ontological truths are generated and tested. This stance will enable me to utilise my skills in investigating events that I have experienced as an educational leader, first-hand (Denzin, 2001) and because of my content knowledge, I will be able to ask the appropriate questions. Within epistemology, the “researcher attempts to lessen distance between himself or herself and that being researched”, as the researcher spends time with the participants in the field, gaining first-hand knowledge (Creswell, 2007, p.17). This study utilised an interpretive theoretical paradigm to guide and shape the research. Interpretive theory is concerned with understanding and interpreting social reality through meaning-making (Given, 2008), valuing the place of context and acknowledging subjectivity over objectivity in understanding (Willis, 2007).

3.2.2 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework draws on a synthesis of research from leading writers in a field and supports the development of an “informed, and specialized lens, through which you examine your

data, conduct the data analysis, interpret the findings, discuss them, and even make recommendations, and conclusions” (Kivunja, 2018, p. 46). Incorporating a theoretical framework into research provides a structure to use existing knowledge from a field to make sense of the data gathered and supports the academic rigor and skills of that research (Kivunja, 2018). The theoretical framework underpinning this study, L-A-P, utilises a view of leadership that is focused on the practices that occur to construct the concept of leadership, as drawn from the literature review. Historically leadership research focused only on the individuals involved (Crevani, et al., 2010) , limiting the scope of the research to identify what practices occurred. L-A-P allows for research to take a fresh look at the phenomenon as it unfolds through day-to-day experiences. To find leadership, we must look to the practice within which it is occurring (Raelin, 2016) . Similarly, in theorising leadership practice in school based research, Spillane et al., (2004) , assert that to understand leadership within organisations, we must investigate the leadership practice. It is not simply a function of what a leader or leaders do, it is the activities they engage in as they interact with others in particular contexts (Spillane et al., 2004).

L-A-P works on the basis of individuals interacting with one another, questioning, listening, and potentially changing direction based on the learning that occurs (Raelin, 2013). This research will also engage an analytical framework developed from the L-A-P literature to conduct the observations to ensure a focus on the practices, or the “task of activity of leadership” (Raelin, 2006, p.6) . According to Raelin (2016a, p.6-7), activities that can highlight the practices of L-A-P can include constructing positions and issues and co-construction of responsibilities. Expanding on these two actions, he contends there are seven additional activities of: scanning; signalling; weaving; stabilizing; inviting; unleashing; and reflecting. These activities are elaborated in further detail in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Activities of L-A-P.

Constructing positions and issues	producing the boundaries of their own actions.
Co-construction of responsibilities:	for particular tasks and of identities shared by interacting actors.
Scanning:	identifying resources, such as information or technology, that can contribute to new or existing programs through simplification or sensemaking.
Signalling:	mobilizing and catalysing the attention of others to a program or project through such means as imitating, building on, modifying, ordering, or synthesizing prior or existing elements.
Weaving:	creating webs of interaction across existing and new networks by building trust between individuals and units or by creating shared meanings to particular views or cognitive frames.
Stabilizing:	offering feedback to converge activity and evaluate effectiveness, leading, in turn, to structural and behavioural changes and learning.
Inviting:	encouraging those who have held back to participate through their ideas, their energy, and their humanity.
Unleashing:	making sure that everyone who wishes to, has had a chance to contribute, without fear of repercussion, even if their contribution might create discrepancy or ambiguity in the face of decision-making convergence.
Reflecting:	triggering thoughtfulness within the self and with others to ponder the meaning of past, current, and future experience to learn how to meet mutual needs and interests.

(Raelin, 2016a, p.6-7)

L-A-P promotes a network of multiple leaders and encourages contribution, participation, and action towards a common goal. This approach complements the mandatory Code of Professional Standards for certified teachers in New Zealand (Education Council, 2017) and the Educational Leadership Capabilities Framework (Education Council, 2018a). The standard of Professional Relationships is elaborated to include that teachers must “actively contribute, and work collegially, in the pursuit of improving my own and organisational practice, showing leadership, particularly in areas of

responsibility” (Education Council, 2017, p. 18). The Educational Leadership Capabilities framework is designed for the entire teaching profession so that the leadership capacity in educational organisations can continue to develop. An L-A-P approach also reflects the process indicator of Kaihautū, within ERO’s quality indicators, as it considers that “leadership is about shared vision, collaboration, shifting the balance of power, negotiating, mutual engagement and ongoing learning. While appointed leaders may have positional authority, leadership roles and responsibilities are open to everyone, including parents, whānau and children” (ERO, 2020b, p. 30).

With the continuing interest of the New Zealand Government, as demonstrated through their commitment to ensuring almost all children attend ECE before starting school (MOE, 2017b) , there is a conducive climate to investigate the evidence supporting educational leadership in ECE services. While the literature reflecting educational leadership continues to develop, there is limited research encompassing ECE and within a New Zealand context. Educational leadership within New Zealand ECE has not yet been adequately understood and is worthy of being analysed and explained.

3.2.3 Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach, which Maxwell (2013) defines as research that supports the understanding of how participants see the world, “and how these perspectives are shaped by, and shape, their physical, social, and cultural context and the specific processes that are involved in maintaining or altering these phenomena and relationships” (p.viii). As the majority of the data were collected through interviews and observations of participants, it was critical that the approach I would choose, would enable participants to share their own views and express how they attach meaning to individual concepts. A qualitative approach can be considered when requiring a complex, detailed understanding of an issue, which can only be achieved by interacting directly with the people affected (Creswell, 2007) and supporting an inductive style (Creswell, 2014). Whereas quantitative research typically directs a narrow frame of exploration, reinforcing the idea of leadership connected to a single individual (Conger, 1998). Qualitative research attempts to explain

social phenomena, ‘from the inside’, analysing the experiences of individuals or groups, the interactions and communications that occur (Flick, 2018), all factors which relate to leadership.

A qualitative research approach was chosen, as this study aligned with what Braun and Clarke (2013, p.19) named the fundamentals of qualitative research: it is about meaning, not numbers; it does not provide a single answer; context is important; it can be experimental or critical; it is underpinned by ontological and epistemological assumptions; it involves a qualitative methodology; it uses all sorts of data; it involves thinking qualitatively; and it values subjectivity and reflexivity. Characteristics of a qualitative study can include the: natural setting; the researcher as a key instrument; multiple sources of data; inductive data analysis; participants’ meanings; emergent design; theoretical lens; interpretive inquiry; and a holistic account (Creswell, 2007).

Within a qualitative approach, modifications can be made along the research path, similar to Creswell’s (2007) ‘emergent design’, which may be necessary when working with human participants, or as a response to changing factors in the design (Maxwell, 2013). This provides the flexibility to continuously assess how the design is working during the process, how it may be influenced within its context and to make changes so that the research can meet its aims and objectives. A quantitative design would not have offered the same flexibility, as it is structured to be a more sequential or fixed process (Maxwell, 2013) and considers objective theories and the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2014). In drawing on further differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches, the relevance of context was important to this research as it forms a unique aspect of the ECE sector. A qualitative approach attempts to understand local means, recognising the place of context, whereas a quantitative approach aims to generalise the findings to a wider population (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which is not an objective of this research.

3.2.4 Research design

A research design can be considered a logical strategy to progress from the research questions to be addressed, to the conclusions drawn about these questions (Yin, 2018). A case study design guided

this research as it was particularly suited to understanding the phenomenon of leadership. Yin describes case studies as an “empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (2018, p.15). Case studies can also be categorised as either descriptive; describing a phenomenon in its real world context, explanatory; the explanation of how or why a condition occurs, or exploratory; whose purpose is to identify the research questions to be used in the study (Yin, 2018). Within this study, a descriptive design was chosen as it explored the phenomenon of leadership through internal evaluation processes which occurred within the natural and real world setting of an ECE service. A case study research design was also chosen as case studies have been referenced in literature for some time and offer a methodology that has a rich, extended history in academic research (Platt, 1992). They are regularly identified within educational research, among many other disciplines (Yin, 2018) and suit long term research such as in this study. According to Merriam, “the case study offers a framework for investigating complex social units containing multiple variables. Grounded in a real-life context, the case study as a holistic, life-like account offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand the experiences of its readers” (1985, p. 210).

Within the research design of this study, the case to be studied was educational leadership practices within ECE services engaged in internal evaluation. The case boundaries denotes the features or conditions which lie within the case (Yin, 2018), and within this study, they were the research setting (licensed education and care services); the participants (positional leaders and teachers); and the timeframe for the beginning and end of the case (the internal evaluation process), which are each described in further detail in the following sections, 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, of this chapter. This research utilised a single case design with multiple units of analysis. The main rationale for choosing a single case design was that the research was focused on a common case, as opposed to an unusual or revelatory case, with the objective being to “capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation, providing insight into the social processes related to theoretical interest” (Yin,

2018, p. 50). In having multiple units of analysis, also known as an embedded design, there were additional subunits of analysis to be considered during the inquiry (Yin, 2018), which were formed by the study's objectives and research questions (Xiao, 2009). The purpose of an embedded design in this study was to: better understand how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation processes; explore what challenges or enables teachers to become involved and practise educational leadership through internal evaluation processes; and to understand how services monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice, made as a result of an internal evaluation. The different units of analysis provide a nuanced context for interpreting the case study results.

In summarising the approach, this research involved a qualitative case study, described as “an in-depth study of a bounded system in which meaning and understanding of the phenomenon of interest are sought” (Merriam, 2010, p.457). The emphasis is placed on understanding the phenomenon of leadership, which is investigated from the vantage point of the participants involved. I, as the researcher, was a key tool used in data collection and analysis, with the findings being inductively gained from the data, with the final product being richly descriptive (Merriam, 2010).

3.3. Research Sample

This section will describe the context of the research, the participant selection process, and an overview of the three individual services, which formed the units of analysis in this case study.

3.3.1 Research Setting

The research setting is considered to be the physical, cultural and social site, and within qualitative research, the focus is on meaning making with the participants in their natural environment (Bhattacharya, 2008). To understand educational leadership through internal evaluation within ECE in New Zealand, the research sites chosen were licensed ECE services within a large, urban area in the North Island of New Zealand. The five main types of services in operation in the ECE sector, as mentioned earlier, are Education and Care, Home-Based, Kindergartens, Nga Kōhanga Reo and

Playcentre (MOE, 2018b) . There were 453 licensed ECE services within the selected urban area, of which 250 were education and care types, and 98 were kindergarten, both of which are teacher-led services (Education Counts, 2018). The other three types of services were excluded as Nga Kōhanga Reo and Playcentre were parent led services, while home-based services involved an individual educator rather than a team.

Education and care services operate all-day sessions or flexible hour programmes for children from birth to school age, or for specific age groups, may be privately or community owned, and/or may have a particular language and cultural base (MOE, 2018b). Kindergartens accept children most commonly from between two and five years old and can have set morning and afternoon sessions for different age groups, some offer all-day or flexible sessions for a wider age range of children and are non-profit, community-based services managed by a Kindergarten Association (MOE, 2018b) .

3.3.2 Participants

In choosing the appropriate participants for this study, the following selection criteria were applied. The service types approached were teacher-led, followed the same curriculum; *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017c) , and represented the majority of New Zealand ECE services. The research design included one private and one community-based education and care service, and one kindergarten. The intention was for all members of the teaching team to participate in the research, including the positional leader, so that there would be opportunities for the conclusions and recommendations of this research, to be of interest to a wider audience. The MOE ECE services directory (Education Counts, 2018) was accessed and filtered to the selected large urban area, with kindergarten and education and care service types only, which generated 137 results. In consideration of the researcher-participant relationship involved in academic research, several services were excluded from the list where I already had established relationships with the service, to prevent pre-existing relationships contributing to any potential bias.

Following this assessment, a systematic review of the evaluative reports of the remaining 137 services was conducted through the ERO website (ERO, 2018). The criteria for selection required services to have been reviewed by ERO as “well placed” to promote positive learning outcomes for children and have effective internal evaluation procedures and leadership. This ensured that the services had been previously reviewed to a similar standard by an external agency. In a review of the ERO reports, challenges arose in categorising services that meet the criteria of leadership and internal evaluation, due to a lack of uniformity in the structure and layout of the reports. After careful consideration in applying the criteria, a table was then created of 26 shortlisted services. Additional exclusions were then made where services had staff teams of under three people and limited operating hours. The shortlist was then re-categorised in priority of those services who received a well-placed report and were located in an accessible geographical location.

Contact details for the services were accessed through the MOE ECE services directory (Education Counts, 2018). Some of the contact details were not available or incorrect and additional time was spent reviewing this information against the services’ website and/or social media pages, where applicable, to determine the relevant details and person(s) to approach. In this study, the positional leader was the ‘gate keeper’ and was determined from the contact information. A gate keeper in qualitative research is an individual who supports the entry to a specific community and has ‘inside’ information that can help determine who are the most relevant participants within the organisation (Jensen, 2008a). The shortlisted services were sent a descriptive email with a participant information sheet and a request for the service to participate in the research (see Appendix A & B). Only two responses were received from the initial invitation email and a follow up email was sent out a week later to the remaining shortlisted services. This resulted in three services declining the invitation and three services accepting the invitation to participate in the research, one private and one community-based education and care service, and one kindergarten.

Selected participants and research settings:

An initial introductory meeting was held at each of the three services in March, April, and May 2019 respectively, to explain the research in greater detail and to answer any initial questions. Each service will now be briefly described, with all participants and service names described under a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality agreements.

Hoiho Service: Hoiho Childcare is a community owned and licensed ECE service within a large, urban area in the North Island of New Zealand. Data were collected in collaboration with the Hoiho service from March 2019 to April 2020.

Kororā Service: Kororā Early Childhood is a privately owned and licensed ECE service within a large, urban area in the North Island of New Zealand. Data were collected in collaboration with the Kororā service from April 2019 to March 2020.

Tawaki Service: Tawaki Early Learning is a licensed ECE, not-for-profit kindergarten, which is part of a larger association, located within a large urban area in the North Island of New Zealand. Data were collected in collaboration with the Tawaki service from May 2019 to April 2020.

3.4. Data collection

Data collection tools within qualitative research include observations, interviews, documents and audio and visual materials (Creswell, 2014). The aim of collecting data is to conduct an empirical investigation into the phenomenon (Flick, 2018), with qualitative data collection being “the selection and production of linguistic (or visual) material for analysing and understanding phenomena, social fields, subjective and collective experiences and the related meaning-making processes” (Flick, 2018, p. 17).

Multiple research data collection tools were used in this study including interviews (individual and focus groups), observations, informal and formal conversations (to provide context), artefacts, and a field journal, all common methods within interpretive research (Given, 2008). The timeline in Figure

1. below illustrates a representation of the timing of data collection tools in the Hoiho service. Each service had a similar timeframe for data collection.

Figure 1 Hoiho Timeline



It has also been noted in the following sections, 3.4.3-3.4.5, if these methods were structured or less structured, as Maxwell (2013) states that structured approaches support the comparability of data across several variables and are beneficial in identifying the differences between people and settings. He continues that less structured approaches place a focus on the “particular phenomena being studied which may differ between individuals or settings and require individually tailored method” (p.88). These methods also provided a medium to collect data that was rich in detail and contextual to its environment, while also providing a means to answer the stated research question (Maxwell, 2013).

During the data collection process, I was aware of respecting the research site and limiting disruption as much as possible to the normal routines (Creswell, 2014). I coordinated with the ‘gate keeper’ to visit the site outside of normal operating times when there were no children present and participants were not required to supervise. Another consideration was the potential of collecting sensitive information (Creswell, 2014), which was avoided where possible as I ensured all participants were aware of my arrival on site and by stating a clear beginning and finish point to the collection of data at each visit. The positional leaders also structured the observation visits so that

internal evaluation was the first topic on the meeting agenda with other topics being discussed after I left.

3.4.1 Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments used included myself as the researcher, a voice recorder (cell phone application, Otter, with a transcription function, further described in 3.5.1, and a hardware device) and a field journal for written notes. As I was also a data collection instrument, the auditory and visual processes that I experienced within the selected site and through interactions with participants, also generated data (Given, 2008) and were worthy of being collected. These instruments were chosen as they are common within the academic community, I was familiar with their operation and they were suitable to be moved around the sites easily, without being overly obtrusive to participants. Permission was sought from participants for the use of the stated instruments.

3.4.2 Field notes

Field notes can be considered the formal and informal notes that are taken as part of the research process and include before, during, and after engaging in the research process (Oliver, 2008).

Different types of field notes, descriptive, reflective and analytic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) were recorded during the case study as a means of documenting what I experienced through my senses, with memos also being documented to record impressions, ideas, hunches and potential codes for themes (Given, 2008). This information was utilised during the data analysis process in conjunction with the other research methods. In particular, as I analysed the transcribed data from observations, I also reviewed the field notes to ensure I did not miss any nuances in the participants' responses so that the data reflected an accurate perspective.

3.4.3 Interviews

Interviews are regarded as the most common qualitative data collection method (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The key features of a qualitative research interview are: purpose, to produce knowledge;

descriptions, of how the interviewee experiences their world; lifeworld, the lived experience; and interpretation of meaning, being open to multiple interpretations (Brinkman, 2018, p. 580). The interview questions were designed to support a developing understanding of educational leadership within ECE.

A total of 18 interviews were conducted with participants across the three services. Each interview was conducted on site, in a private space and lasted between 20-40 minutes. These interviews were pre-arranged with the 'gatekeeper' of each service to ensure a suitable time was chosen. Not all staff members chose to participate in interviews and there was also a change of staff at each service during the research. The positional leader of each service also participated in an interview, and this was deemed to add value, as the positional leader often supports the development of distributed leadership within the wider team and their interviews could provide extended data. The individual interviews were "used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how the subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.95). The interview questions were semi structured (See Appendix C), as it allowed me greater flexibility in pursuing the different directions the interviewee took in the discussion, as opposed to a more rigid outline in a structured interview (Brinkman, 2018). The wording and order of the interview questions respected the context and were responsive to the participants perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Brinkman (2018) has suggested that interviews are conversations which are developed for a purpose, which can impact on the interactions and as such, the potential of power imbalances during an interview were addressed. I maintained and promoted a view of the participants having control of the interview and the opportunity to review their responses, while acknowledging that I required their input more than the participants required mine (Bell & Waters, 2014). While the qualitative interview has many strengths, its limitation of being time consuming for both the participants and myself, and the lack of anonymity provided, were recognised (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.4.4 Focus Groups

Another method of data collection was focus groups, used to stimulate conversations between the members about a set issue (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) (See Appendix D for focus group questions).

Focus groups are used as a means to collect data from multiple participants at the same time, in a relatively unstructured, but guided discussion focused on set topic (Braun & Clarke, 2013). At the time of this study, ERO (2019a) had released their draft indicators for quality practice in ECE. These indicators were chosen as a mechanism to explore educational leadership in a focus group, as they identified a link between internal evaluation and leadership. I took the role of a moderator or facilitator, posing questions for participants to discuss between themselves.

In this study there were four focus groups held, each with a different format (See Table 2. below).

For the Hoiho service, there was a separate focus group for the leadership team and one for the teaching team, conducted in-person. The positional leader suggested that the teacher participants may offer different perspectives without the leadership team present. At the Kororā service, an in-person, focus group included both the positional leader and the teaching team. For the Tawaki service, the focus group was conducted through a video call (due to the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions) including both the positional leader and the teaching team. In all focus groups, the questions were semi-structured to allow me to cover the planned topics, to ensure complete and consistent information across different interviews, while also providing a degree of flexibility to allow the discussions to flow.

Table 2. Format of Focus Group

Service name	In person	Video call	Positional Leader & Teachers	Separate focus group for leaders and teachers
Hoiho	✓			✓
Kororā	✓		✓	
Tawaki		✓	✓	

The data from the focus groups provided a unique insight into how participants conceptualised educational leadership and their own identity as leaders, that was not present in individual interviews. There were, however, disadvantages acknowledged as part of this data collection method. This included focus groups not offering an opportunity to follow up more extensively with an individual's response, discussions moving off topic, time consuming for participants and time consuming for me during transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.4.5 Observations

Observations can be described as “the process of watching someone carry out a task or series of actions in order to gather data about specific aspects of behaviour, content, process or interactions” (Bell & Waters, 2014, p. 210). Observational evidence can provide additional, valuable information about the topic being studied, which can be complementary to other research methods or provide completely new insights about the research (Yin, 2018), and provide a first-hand encounter with the case (Merriam, 2010). While interviews can reveal what people may perceive, observations can reveal what participants actually do (Bell & Waters, 2014). In the context of leadership research, Conger (1998, p. 112) has stated that “observation when combined with interviews proved to be a powerful methodology for not only uncovering data either distorted in interviews or else not accessible through interviews”.

There were 13 observations across the three services, lasting an average of one hour and 30 minutes of a semi-structured, non-participatory nature. These were centred around the positional leader and the teachers during a team meeting which focused on their internal evaluation. These observations were designed to capture events of leadership being expressed through day-to-day practices or through organised events. As I analysed the observations, they are interpreted in a particular way. Bratich (2018) suggests that observation is tied to judgement as you select, filter, discriminate and sort that observation. In an attempt to avoid any preconceived ideas and to be aware of potential biases, the observations were audio recorded while I also took field notes. At the end of each observation, I wrote a summary analysis of the event.

3.4.6 Artefacts

Artefacts become data when the researcher poses questions about them and assigns meaning to them while also being cautious to study them within the context they were created in (Norum, 2008). Artefacts are considered to be a primary source as they are already in existence and they do not alter the setting in the ways a researcher might, and they participate in the stage of the research without the concern of a data source changing their mind (Merriam, 2010). However it is also important to consider if these documents are presented as an idealized perspective rather than a critical perspective, as they are intentionally designed documents (Brooks & Normore, 2015). Artefacts can be considered an important component in the overall case study as they can provide a greater perspective of the events and processes occurring alongside the other research methods (Yin, 2018). Although it was intended to collect multiple artefacts as part of the study, only one artefact was collected which was a progress report on the internal evaluation process in the Hoiho service, containing a summary of the actions to date and who was responsible for them. This artefact provided a useful tool to track of how the process was progressing and was often used as a prompt by the positional leader at the beginning of the internal evaluation meeting. A document analysis approach was used to analyse this artefact, which studied the written text as well as the documents physical condition, printing format and idiosyncrasies (Norum, 2008).

3.5. Data analysis

The analysis of the interviews (individual and group) and observations, including the audio recordings, began immediately after they were completed and continued alongside the research process. This allowed for initial categories and relationships between the data to be developed (Maxwell, 2013). It also provided a valuable opportunity for review, as “tentative findings or answers to one’s research questions can be weighed against subsequent data” (Merriam, 2010, p.460). A data analysis software, NVivo, (QSR International, 2018) was used to facilitate ordering data, generating coding categories, cross-linking data, and generated memos to ensure the analysis was comprehensive. I will first, briefly describe the analysis of my reflexive research journal before the

data collection methods of interviews and observations, which each used a different data analysis procedure, as shown in Table 3. below, will then be discussed separately.

Reflexive research journal analysis

A reflexive research journal was used as a tool to document my thinking and feelings as well as to keep a record of the process and significant decisions made as I engaged in the data collection and data analysis process. The analysis of the journal entries provided a clear, consistent account of the processes in the research which supported the description of an accurate account for thesis report.

Table 3. Data analysis method

Data Collection Method	Data Analysis Approach	Inductive/ Deductive
Interviews	Reflexive thematic data analysis	Inductive
Focus Group	Reflexive thematic data analysis	Inductive
Observations	Analytical framework from L-A-P literature, examining the task activity of leadership	Deductive
Artefacts	Document Analysis	Inductive

Observation data analysis

Although the structure of the observations had been defined around the internal evaluation aspects of the staff meetings, it was expected that a large amount of data would be generated from these events. As such, this research engaged an analytical framework (See Appendix E), developed from the L-A-P literature to ensure a focus on the practices, or the “task of activity of leadership” (Raelin, 2016, p.6). According to Raelin (2016, p.6-7) , activities that can highlight the practices of L-A-P include constructing positions and issues and co-construction of responsibilities.

The data analysis demonstrated the activities or practice of leadership occurring and supported the triangulation of the data. The observations provided complementary data to the interviews and focus groups, supporting participants' assertions with evidence of actual practices, with a sample being noted in the findings chapter. For example, in Sophia's interview, she spoke of the necessity of a leadership strategy of listening to everyone's ideas without having a set agenda. This feedback was supported by the observations wherein the positional leader asked each teacher for their view and the teachers agreed on further action, rather than the positional leader setting the action.

During the analysis of the observations, the data were re-visited multiple times when the audio recording was listened to, transcribed, and viewed in the context of the analytical framework, often illuminating a different perspective to those assumed during the actual event. An example of this included where I viewed the internal evaluation processes as unstructured during the observation of one service, however in re-visiting the data and viewing it as a whole, it was evident a purposeful structure was in place.

Interview data analysis

In this study, a reflexive thematic data analysis was employed for the individual and focus group interviews. This is a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), where I played an active role in the identification of the themes, rather than the themes emerging from the data without my input. According to Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 593) "reflexive thematic analysis procedures reflect the values of a qualitative paradigm, centring researcher subjectivity, organic and recursive coding processes, and the importance of deep reflection on, and engagement with, data". This research used an inductive approach to identify the data which is "a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions", while still recognising the impact of the researchers epistemological assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). The analysis of the data followed a recursive process through six phases: familiarizing yourself with your data; generating initial codes; generating initial themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report

(Braun, et al., 2018) . Through the analysis of the interview data, I drew on my theoretical framework of L-A-P in developing the theme of leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation, as it focused on practices of leadership. The process of transcription, coding and theme development will be discussed in further detail below.

3.5.1 Transcription of data

Data were transcribed from audio recordings and field notes. Audio was recorded through a cloud-based software application, Otter. This was downloaded onto two cell phones as an application. Each new recording was titled with the name of the service, if it was an interview, meeting or focus group, and the date of the event. Initial observations around what had occurred during the interactions with participants were noted, and observations often changed when listening back, 'detached', to the audio recordings. The final three sets of data collected (Tawaki focus group and follow up meeting, and Hoiho follow up meeting) were captured through an online video call and by email and then transcribed. This change from in person data collection was due to the social distancing requirements relating to the COVID 19 pandemic. One limitation identified was the quality of the data received by email, the only data collected that did not come from direct observation or conversation. As the participants only responded to a set list of questions, the data were limited and structured, removing the opportunity to follow up on responses in the moment.

After the event, the recording was accessed through the software on a laptop and played back through noise cancelling headphones. Three main features of the software were used: audio recording that can be played back which successfully recorded almost all of the audio. If there was background noise such as heavy traffic, it slightly distorted the audio of the participants speaking; an automatic transcription of the audio recorded which was not always accurate and missed sections of the audio which needed to be manually transcribed; and assigning a name to a section of audio/speaker and the software would automatically assign the same name to the same speaker throughout the transcript. This accurately assigned the correct name the majority of the time.

Audio was listened to short bursts, paused, and then a orthographic or verbatim account (spoken words and other sounds) was produced (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To ensure a high quality transcript, every effort was made to avoid transcription errors by; listening repeatedly to the audio, listening back on multiple devices to ensure the correct meaning was captured, transcribing as soon as possible after the event, being aware of sentence structure, quotation marks, omissions and mistaken word/phrases (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.5.2 Coding

The process of coding is organic and flexible, necessitating a constant engagement with the data, and develops depth over time through engagement (Terry et al., 2017) . Once all of the data had been transcribed, the interview data were re-read again in its entirety and coding began. A code was then applied to 'label' this data. The codes did not emerge from the data, but rather as it is a subjective and interpretive process, as I actively created them (Terry et al., 2017). The first draft created 41 codes. Each code was reviewed again and checked against the data assigned to it to ensure it was relevant and could be understood if viewed outside of context. The following reviews and drafts of codes resulted in a final list of 31 codes. Many of the code names related to terminology often found in leadership literature, which may relate to an unconscious bias due to the research topic under investigation.

3.5.3 Theme development

As the data analysis moved into theme development, the codes were reviewed again, and clustered together when there was similar attributes or potential overlap, and to see how they related to individual themes. A theme captures what is meaningful about the data, the research question and how that topic appeared in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013), reflecting a pattern of shared meaning or a central organising concept (Braun, et al., 2018) . Themes need to make sense on their own and also fit together to form the overall analysis. In this study, some of the codes were not clear enough on their own in a way they could add value to the narrative of the research and were changed to sub

codes (under existing ones) which provided a more cohesive explanation of the data. The first draft created seven themes, and these were reviewed again to see how they fitted against the data or were answered by the data. The final process resulted in the development of four key themes through a reflexive thematic analysis: Identification with leadership; Supportive workplace culture; Continuous improvement; and Leadership practices through internal evaluation.

3.6. Ethical considerations

In requiring the highest ethical standards for research, ethics should be considered an integral part of all stages of the process, even after ethical approval is gained, while the researcher should develop a broader ethical orientation that will inform the research practice (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Within this study, particular attention was paid to ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, interview ethics and consultation with participants about their data (Oliver, 2008).

3.6.1 Trial of interview questions

Interview questions were trialled with two individuals, unrelated to this research study, before ethical approval was applied for. The individuals were people from the ECE community, who I did not work directly with, who were invited to provide feedback from the perspective of a participant to conduct a feasibility test. The information collected was not used to generate any research data but was conducted to identify any potential issues with the proposed design and the effectiveness of the data collection equipment. The trialled questions identified several key points for consideration that included participants in the ECE community potentially feeling that they were being judged on their internal evaluation capabilities. This was addressed by explaining to all research participants that internal evaluation was being used as a mechanism to view educational leadership and not as an assessment on evaluation capabilities. It was also identified that some participants may feel uncomfortable with the use of audio recording equipment and as such, the equipment was discussed with participants before it was physically introduced to them during data collection.

3.6.2 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University prior to commencement of the research. The Human Ethics Guidelines of Victoria University of Wellington (Victoria University of Wellington, 2018) were adhered to throughout the research study; in particular the principles of respect, beneficence and justice. All participants were informed verbally and in writing about the study and participation was on a voluntary basis (See Appendix A). Written consent to participate was obtained from those who volunteered, and participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time up until the end of the data collection. Explicit consent for using audio and visual recordings for later analysis was sought from all participants. They were informed that raw data including audio recordings and transcripts would be stored securely for the appropriate period of time according to the requirements of the ethics committee. All information relating to participants remained my property and was not used for any purpose except for implementation of this study (Punch, 2016). The possible ethical implications recognised in this study were confidentiality and working with vulnerable participants, which are discussed below.

3.6.3 Confidentiality

It was acknowledged that services and participants agreed to participate in the study on the basis of confidentiality and every effort was made to ensure this was maintained. As I was participating in the data collection process, it was made explicit to all participants in the consent form, that the research data could not be anonymous but would be treated as confidential, wherein the identity and details of the participants would not be revealed (Bell & Waters, 2014). All data were treated in a way that protected the confidentiality of the participants involved in the study including following the stated university guidelines. The storage and processing of identifiable data were conducted in a secure and deliberate manner using gender-neutral pronouns and pseudonyms for the names of individual participants, the research site, and the geographical location.

3.6.4 Vulnerable participants

As the research was conducted in ECE services, there was the potential that I would encounter children physically or through visual descriptions displayed within the environment. I adhered to the service's code of conduct and policies regarding interactions with children during the research. It was confirmed that I would not be eligible to be considered as part of the regulated adult: child ratio or qualified staff ratio for funding purposes of the service, if I visited the services during operational hours. Observations at all staff meetings occurred outside of the services' operational hours which was their normal format. The participant interviews for Hoiho and Kororā services occurred during operational hours as organised by the positional leaders, in a room where children were not present. Tawaki's normal operational hours are shorter than the other services and staff continue to work when children have left, and as such their interviews were conducted when there were no children on site.

3.7. Trustworthiness of the research

In an effort to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study, criterion of credibility, confirmability and transferability were all considered.

3.7.1 Credibility: Triangulation and Verification

As the research study used several methods of data collection, a triangulation approach was used, which is described as "using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). This supports the credibility of the conclusions as the data is not limited to a single method (Maxwell, 2013). In this study, the practices espoused by participants in individual interviews were reviewed against the actual practices and actions displayed during observations. The data were also shared with my doctoral supervisor in ensuring a systematic analysis was undertaken. In having a multisite case design, the data were not limited to a single site and cannot be considered to be a 'one off' or rare event, strengthening the interpretation and analysis of the data. Finally, using several sources of

data, also supported the intention of gathering the participants' perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon as accurately as possible (Merriam, 2010).

Verification can be described as the "process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study" (Morse et al., 2002, p.17). In addressing the verification of this research, I requested participant checks through email on each of the interview and focus group transcripts, to confirm the content was accurate and reflected their perspectives accurately (Ballinger, 2008). Three participants responded to the participant check emails, one which confirmed spelling corrections and two participants who responded that they found it interesting to read the transcripts but had no corrections to add.

3.7.2 Confirmability: Bias

Bias can be considered to be the careful selection of data to present a particular point of view which can include deliberately influencing or misleading others by producing biased accounts or unconsciously presenting a particular viewpoint and not providing an objective account (Bell & Waters, 2004). A characteristic of qualitative research as described in 3.2.1, is interpretive inquiry whereby the researcher is involved for a sustained period of time, working closely with participants. By nature of this arrangement, I play a key role in the research and requires the articulation of any personal values, assumptions, and biases. My perceptions of ECE and leadership have been shaped by professional working experiences. As a qualified and registered ECE teacher, I have been working in a management and leadership role for the past 8 years in a private ECE service. Reflexivity requires the consideration and examination of decisions made at each stage of the research (Dowling, 2008). To address the potential of bias, I engaged in extensive reflection as I progressed through interviews, observations and artefact collection, through a reflexive research journal, emphasising an awareness of any potential biases (Maxwell, 2013). The reflexive research journal

was used as a tool to document my thinking as I engaged in the data collection process, highlighting different perspectives to those noted in the field journal (See Appendix F for a sample of the research journal).

Reactivity-researcher relationship

It was accepted in the research design that it was not possible to remove my influence on the setting or the participants in totality, but to instead understand it and use it productively (Maxwell, 2013).

The ECE sector, within the selected urban area is a relatively small, closely connected profession where there are existing relationships across services. As such, I followed the selection criteria in approaching services to participate and ensuring that I had no known affiliation with the services or participants. As I am a ECE trained and fully certified teacher working within the same geographical area, it was explained to the participants that I worked within the ECE sector and was a doctoral student. Participants were advised that I would not be comparing or participating in the process of internal evaluation and/or educational leadership, to avoid any unnecessary participation in the research. Those details were explained when seeking participants' involvement and at the beginning of individual interviews. In sharing this information, it was hoped that it would create a colleague-based relationship that may be less intimidating to the participants than a formal researcher-based relationship and reduce any influence on the setting or participants (Maxwell, 2013).

3.7.3 Transferability

Within qualitative research, the transferability of a study can be enhanced through the use of a thick description, wherein the reader is provided with "a full and purposeful account of the context, participants, and research design so that the reader can make their own determinations about transferability" (Jensen, 2008b, p. 887). A rich description was used in this research study by describing the scope of the study so that others could determine if the findings could be applied in alternative contexts.

3.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the methodological underpinnings of this research reflecting the stated philosophical assumptions that support the intention of understanding how the meanings, beliefs and preferences attached to educational leadership practices through internal evaluation have formed. The theoretical framework for this study paid attention to the practice of leadership over an interest in the individual leader, drawing on the L-A-P literature. Supporting the paradigm and theoretical framework, a qualitative research approach was utilised. This offered greater flexibility in achieving a detailed understanding of the phenomenon by enabling the participants to share their own views and express how they have come to attach meaning to individual concepts. Using a single case design with multiple units of analysis, this descriptive case study explored the phenomenon of leadership through internal evaluation processes which occurred within the natural and real world setting of an ECE service. The relevance of the research sample, including the three ECE services and participants were discussed, detailing the different data collection methods and analysis undertaken. The ethical considerations of this study, including the possible implications on confidentiality and working with vulnerable participants were discussed. The final section on the strengthening the trustworthiness of the research was described through the criteria of credibility, confirmability, and transferability. The following chapter will now discuss the findings of this study from each of the three services separately.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from each of the three services involved in this single case design with multiple units of analysis, that investigated how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation processes in ECE in New Zealand. The data gained for this study provided insights into how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation process, what challenges or enables teachers to become involved and practise educational leadership through internal evaluation, and how services monitor the impact of changes on practice. While there are several commonalities in the findings across the three services, they are examined separately here and then analysed together thematically, in the following discussion chapter.

A context for each service is offered, followed by the presentation of findings according to the three-stage process of data collection: interviews and observations; a focus group; and an individual follow up interview, and finally a case summary. To illustrate the findings, quotes from individual participants are given. In this and the subsequent chapters, the source of the quotes will be given in the bracket following the participant's name where the service names of: 'K' stands for Kororā, 'H' stands for Hoiho, 'T' stands for Tawaki, and the data collection methods of: 'I' stands for interview and 'FG' for focus group, and 'O' stands for observation. The services and the participants described below, have all been given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. A table with the details of the participants is provided at the beginning of each relevant section. An analysis of the reflexive research journal was drawn on for this findings chapter to ensure a consistent record of the processes undertaken and the significant decisions I made during the data collection and data analysis process.

4.2. Hoiho Childcare

Hoiho Childcare is a community owned and licensed ECE service within a large, urban area in the North Island of New Zealand. The service is one of two in the area, owned by the same organisation. It is an all day, education and care service for children aged from birth to 5 years, with three separate age groups. At the time of this research, the service had 12 teachers and a Centre Manager who oversaw the pedagogical direction, the day-to-day operation and supported two Head Teachers and an Associate Director who provided strategic management, curriculum support and guidance. Their internal evaluation was centred on exploring ‘how can we celebrate children’s diverse cultures to better support their learning?’. A timeline (Figure 2. below) illustrates the sequence of data collection activities.

Figure 2. Hoiho Timeline



The interviews, observations and focus groups conducted over 12 months during this research will be drawn on in this section. There were eight individual interviews in total, held across two sessions, five with the teaching team, two with the Head Teachers (Rebecca and Regina) and one with the Manager (Melanie). Table 4. below provides a summary of the details of the participants from this service. The interview questions centred around two themes, understanding internal evaluation, and understanding leadership. In addition, there were five observations, held before and after the interview sessions, at the centres regular staff and head teacher meetings, which were focused on

their internal evaluation discussions. In addition, there were two focus groups held at the end of the research, focused on participants understanding of leadership in practice.

Table 4. Hoiho Participants

Participant	Individual interview	Length of time at service	Position
Abigail			Teacher
Aria			Teacher
Anna	Yes	10	Teacher
Amelia			Teacher
Bella	Yes	14	Teacher
Clara	Yes	2	Teacher
Cora			Teacher
Deborah			Teacher
Joanne			Teacher
Josie	Yes	7	Teacher
Mila			Teacher
Melanie	Yes	Several	Positional Leader
Naomi			Teacher
Natalia			Teacher
Paula			Teacher
Rebecca	Yes	4	Head Teacher
Regina	Yes	5	Head Teacher
Sabrina			Teacher
Sophia	Yes	3	Teacher

4.2.1 Understandings of internal evaluation

At the initial introductory meeting, the leadership team had discussed how they had chosen a different approach to their current internal evaluation from previous evaluations, attempting to embrace the team more in terms of their opinions, decision making and direction setting. This approach was evident in the observations of the leadership team meetings, as they formulated different strategies to increase engagement and, in the staff meetings as the teachers were encouraged to participate in decision making. In their individual interviews, all of the teachers had a similar understanding in defining internal evaluation as narrowing their focus to look deeper into an

aspect of their teaching practice, identifying what they are currently doing, acknowledging the gaps, and planning how to move forward constantly. Regina categorised this as:

So whatever is important to us at that point, should be focused on and that's a great way to sort of measure your outcomes and how you're tracking. (Regina, HI)

Regina described the teacher's responsibility in internal evaluation as:

So they do, they do a lot of thinking. It's what we really want them to do. And then they do a lot of doing, you know, because if it involves parents and children, then that's their job and their domain. (Regina, HI)

Teachers saw internal evaluation as part of their responsibilities, citing that they have to participate and used examples such as contributing at the staff meetings, sharing their ideas and documenting their thinking. Sophia spoke of her hesitation in meetings:

I don't like to talk at the group meeting, so I don't really participate that much. It will be more sharing my ideas with one other person and it gets shared around. (Sophia, HI)

This was also supported by Anna, who recognised that not all teachers were comfortable in the process:

So I think sometimes within the team, you can have people who are worried about saying the right thing, or you might be introverted and need more time. So my role was almost like, you know, obviously, what I'm thinking and that can help other people to get on board as well. And just get the ball rolling sometimes. (Anna, HI)

The teachers also articulated how their colleagues participated by talking with one another about what they found confusing and bouncing ideas off one another. They also referenced the value of having more experienced teachers, who can share information with others and how they can learn together.

4.2.2 Leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation

Through the interviews, a view that a key leadership strategy needed for internal evaluation was the ability to encourage teachers to get involved was highlighted. Clara noted how the management team led it and they:

Workshop different ways to actually have an input. I think that they have to be pretty organized and have a pretty good understanding of what our understanding of it is and what we are capable of doing. (Clara, HI)

Sophia identified additional leadership strategies such as:

I think maybe being open to contribution and not having like a fixed idea of this is what we're going to do. But yeah, listening to what other people's ideas are and trying to go with them, as much as possible. (Sophia, HI)

These strategies were supported by the observations at staff meetings, as the full team would be asked for their views and each option was discussed, with teachers normally confirming the agreed action, rather than the leaders.

The teachers discussed the different ways leaders can support teachers who feel unsure around internal evaluation. These were providing resources and information to build their knowledge, not having an expectation that the team will understand all of the process, accepting mistakes and having an open-door policy in terms of conversations to break it down. Melanie, as the centre manager, spoke of the importance of reading the group at meetings and making sure everyone has time to think about what is being discussed. Regina supported this idea, contending that you need to be able to determine where the individual teacher is in their knowledge base and encourage them to incorporate the topic into their own teaching inquiry, in order to grow their understanding.

4.2.3 Views of leadership

Through the interviews, the teachers described their understanding of leadership. Their perspectives centred around overseeing and supporting everyone to work together. Comments included it was facilitating a group, not necessarily telling everybody what to do, but bringing everyone on board with a similar idea and moving forward together. Bella spoke of:

Leaders that understand and nudge us when we need nudging, and a pat on the back, sometimes helps that. (Bella, HI).

They also viewed leadership as role modelling and being approachable for support as the teachers trust in their knowledge. The teachers spoke positively of their experiences of the leadership at their service. Bella viewed the leaders as very understanding but also very demanding, as the standard is very high, concluding:

But at the end of the day, it pays off that the end result is very good. (Bella, HI).

Leadership was encouraged from all of the team and teachers were challenged to continue to grow from their current understanding. Anna shared her personal experience:

And I also get the sense that they've got a repertoire of leadership skills that I'm experiencing and may not even know I'm experiencing. So that gives you confidence, I think, to participate to your full extent, you're not at all confused about the purpose of that. (Anna, HI)

Teachers viewed the service leadership as robust, well organised, with the leaders working hard together but also having time for individual members of the team. Rebecca spoke of her own leadership role and how she supports the team:

So it's making sure that whilst sometimes you might be kind of going to do other things, its actually stopping to take the time to have those conversations. So they know that you are there to listen to them. (Rebecca, HI)

Sophia articulated her understanding of leadership across the full centre as:

I think each person has different skills of leadership, which I think works well. Because you know, how people relate differently to different people and so you don't have to necessarily just go to one person, you do have your head teacher, there's also a head teacher in another programme, and then there's Melanie. But then there's also other teachers who have a lot of knowledge, you can go to as well. (Sophia, HI)

In response to the question of what makes effective leadership, Anna discussed the need for a well-defined personal identity that includes your values, as people are drawn to work alongside those who share the same values. Teachers discussed leaders being open, honest and taking the time to support the team. Rebecca shared her perspective of the importance of being intentional in what you are doing:

And there's probably a lot of kind of reflecting on what you're doing, in terms of going 'you know what, that didn't actually go so well for me'. And in terms of, you know, getting some more strategies. I think you're always learning. And sometimes you learn from doing things, not the wrong way, but you often learn from doing things and going 'actually I could have/ this might have been a better approach, or maybe I'll try this next time. (Rebecca, HI)

Melanie elaborated further, reflecting on her manager's role as she spoke of how she sees herself as intentional and present:

So every morning when I come in and I do a round, and I might not necessarily be teaching anywhere in the space. But I go around and say, Good morning to everyone, how you going? What's happening in the space today? And it's just a way of me connecting with everyone first thing in the morning. (Melanie, HI).

Through the individual interviews, the teachers and leaders frequently referenced the importance of relational leadership and knowing your team well to have effective leadership, with Clara summarising it as:

Being really committed to understanding learners, into understanding teachers, to meet people where they are. (Clara, HI).

This also included co- construction for greater engagement which Regina described as:

A lot of construction, planting ideas, and then waiting months to see the growth. And then, them saying that was my idea all along. (Regina, HI).

In exploring teachers understanding of educational leadership, some were unfamiliar with the term. Some teachers spoke of leading in an educational context, including those outside of formal positional roles. Regina spoke of the connection to pedagogical leadership and building your own and other's knowledge in a teaching capacity:

And building on people's expertise, and knowledge constantly, like your never finished. (Regina, HI).

Conversely, while Melanie identifies that her role is as a pedagogical leader, she does not refer to herself by that title.

Towards the end of the individual interviews, some teachers spoke of their disinterest in taking on a leadership role in the future, stating that working with children is where their passion and pleasure lies. Sophia described her disinterest also, describing how she will often step up when a head teacher is away, but that she did not recognise these practices as leadership. She feels this responsibility is given to her solely because of her length of teaching experience. In contrast, Anna spoke of wanting to take on a leadership role again in the future as she enjoys the variety and challenge of it, but it would be influence by certain factors such a family life and future learning:

I wouldn't, in no way be interested going back into a leadership role in a workplace where I thought I couldn't learn from the other leaders, I wouldn't be interested in leading my values against the grain. I would be interested in being part of a team who I can learn from and grow. (Anna, HI).

Rebecca and Regina spoke of the need for greater support and emphasis on leadership in ECE. They believed there was a lack of research around ECE specific leadership and that previously used models of leadership from outside the education sector, have not fitted well. Regina observed how people find themselves in head teacher roles they are not prepared for. Regina elaborated that people do not often have a thorough understanding of what a leadership role entails, and greater knowledge and support is needed to build that understanding and of the business aspect to leadership.

4.2.4 Understandings of leadership

Five months after the individual interviews, two separate focus groups were held to further explore participants' understanding of leadership. This was done using the ERO (2019a) document, "Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most" in particular the process indicators within: Kaihautū: Leaders foster collaboration and improvement. This focus group was structured as a group discussion with the first hour utilised to unpack the group's understanding and views on the educational leadership definition, as discussed in section 2.5.5, and the following 30 minutes exploring how they viewed their own teaching practice within the Process Indicators of leadership. At the end of the discussion the teachers were asked for their insights based on the focus group. Participants in this leadership focus group included the centre manager and two head teachers, while the teachers' focus group was made up of 10 teachers. For the purpose of this study, the responses will be combined.

Unpacking the Educational Leadership definition

Melanie commented that the definition resonated with how leaders' coach and mentor teachers with their own inquiries, reflect on their teaching practices and improve learning outcomes for children. Examples of this coaching and mentoring were often observed at the staff meetings, with the conversations always being brought back to centre on learning for children. Melanie spoke of how leaders must enact the vision and show direction to the team while working collectively. Anna

observed how the definition of educational leadership framed the idea of leadership around the outcomes for children and young people's learning and how leadership needs to be driven by the needs of children. She believed that you need to have the tools to be able to be a good colleague and leader. She also commented that a leader facilitates problem solving and noted a clear separation between positional leadership and educational leadership. In contrast, Clara felt that without the defined positional leadership role, she does not fully understand the concept of leadership. Abigail responded to Clara's comments elaborating that leadership requires more than one person, and the way that you:

use that responsibility, the effect that it has, is the most important part of what you're doing.

(Abigail, HFG).

Aria and Josie agreed with Abigail's perspective, emphasising that the leader must acknowledge the strengths and knowledge of the team and scaffold from this point, as everyone works together to create the solutions. Milla noted the importance of collaborative leadership, which affirmed Natalia's opinion that:

When there's not a positional leader within that space, that, the decisions that you make with your colleagues, it kind of acknowledges that kind of leadership skills. (Natalia, HFG).

Reflecting on how educational leadership is shown in their own practice, Melanie spoke of the leadership team working with an educational coach to ensure they kept a strong focus on the pedagogical needs of the service, balancing leadership and management responsibilities:

But to really grow and move the team in a direction that their progressing in. You do need to think around your pedagogy and how we can do that effectively. (Melanie, HFG).

Continuing their discussion on how educational leadership may be shown in their practice, Melanie spoke of her understanding and practice of relational leadership, asserting that:

I think that's something that we pride ourselves on, as well. That we, we know each individual teacher and look at where their strengths lie, and where they may need to strengthen an area and offer them opportunities to allow that to happen. (Melanie, HFG).

Exploring the idea of educational leadership in their own practice, the teachers in the focus group spoke of supporting new staff to reach the same level as the existing team and leading cultural celebrations. Regina and Rebecca discussed how the teachers support one another through collaborating on tasks, while Melanie saw it through the relationships teachers hold with families, going deeper and finding out more personal information to incorporate it into the programme.

Showing educational leadership through internal evaluation

In responding to the question of how they see educational leadership happening in internal evaluation, Regina talked about the conversations that happen with teachers, that focus on unpacking topics further in a collaborative way. Melanie shared that while they are encouraging further collaboration, this is still an area that can be improved. This led the focus group discussion onto why teachers may not show leadership in internal evaluation. Melanie, Regina, and Rebecca agreed that the teachers can be uncertain of the process, are faced with time restrictions and view it as the leaders' responsibility. They shared that they are continuing to work on making the 'thinking' visible and to increase the dialogue within the team, as Melanie added:

I think people still feel a little bit like, 'Oh, I feel a bit shy about sharing that or, what if it's perceived in a different way, what if someone thinks it's wrong. (Melanie, HFG).

In the teacher's focus group, the discussion on practices of educational leadership raised a question for Clara, who asked was doing something for someone else, really leadership? Anna expanded on this question, sharing:

I mean like, If I understand correctly, I think in the instance of internal evaluation, just making a contribution is a form of leadership really. The way I think about it like, if you're the

person to kind of like, get the ball rolling on something, low level, or you're the person to say make sure I document that, (to Clara) which you're really good at, you know, that's a form of leadership because you're saying I'm going to take responsibility. (Anna, HFG).

The teachers' focus group delved deeper into the concept of leadership, as they began to discuss if there was a difference between a leader and leadership. They believed that you could show leadership qualities and guide people, without being a leader. You can work as a group at one level and those people show leadership to one another, without having a leader. Clara summarised her view on it as:

Or you could be a leader and you don't have good leadership qualities...Donald Trump.
(Clara, HFG).

The teachers agreed that leadership practices can be learnt or developed if you have a willingness and have built your own leadership capability. Concluding this section of the focus group, the teachers asserted that the term 'educational leadership' may prevent teachers from acknowledging the practices that they already display. Anna pointed out that if you replaced the term with a strong colleague, teachers would: *"probably claim it quicker, if it was called something different"*, as teachers did not want to appear to over inflate their capabilities. Josie suggested that this can be a result of the ECE teaching community being a majority female workforce and teachers tending to pander to their colleagues so not to cause any conflict.

A similar discussion ran in the leaders' focus group, as they considered if teachers realised they are practising leadership. Melanie remarked that while opportunities and feedback are offered around leadership, teachers may still think of leadership in terms of positional leadership, with the terminology causing peoples' thinking to default to a certain type. Regina built on this assertion, stating:

But um, people have always struggled with figuring out what that looks like if you're not a positional leader. You know, like, what does leadership look like if you aren't technically called the leader? (Regina, HFG).

While there was a number of similarities between the perspectives of the participants, there was also noticeable differences in their views of leadership. As the definition of educational leadership was unpacked, the teachers in the focus group established connections to collaborative leadership practices and delved further into what constituted leadership, while the leaders' focus group emphasised a link to pedagogical leadership and intentionally incorporating those practices into strategic planning.

Process indicators

Using the process indicators of leadership and their elaborations, the focus groups were asked to describe how they would view this in their practice.

Using the indicator 4.1 of 'Leaders collaboratively develop and enact the service's philosophy, vision, goals, and priorities, recognising Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ The Treaty of Waitangi as foundational', the leadership and teaching team discussed how they know and seek the perspectives of families and take them into consideration for the philosophy, vision, goals, and priorities for children's learning. If a particular area of learning is strong at home, they will focus on a less prevalent area in their programme. Melanie and Anna spoke of how they actively allocate resourcing in terms of enacting their philosophy. They were constantly looking at ways they can progress and develop that to reflect their philosophy stance. In reflecting on the progress they have already made, Melanie stated that:

It has been for better outcomes for children, more parent participation through conversations, who are coming into the centre. (Melanie, HFG).

Using the indicator 4.2 of 'Relational trust enables collaboration and sustained improvement', Rebecca, Regina and Abigail had similar responses as they spoke of working with outside agencies

for children who have additional needs and the challenges of working with changing people and matching their priorities with the services. Melanie also viewed this indicator as modelling professional accountability, providing positive and constructive feedback on teaching practice and interactions:

They need to know they're valued and they can count for something, but also I think we are quite, we do hold people to accountability in terms of, like, if you're walking through the space, and you might see an interaction that you think doesn't bode too well with how we do things here, find out a little bit more about that and, and giving that person the opportunity to have that conversation. (Melanie, HFG).

Using the indicator 4.3 of 'Leaders ensure access to opportunities for professional learning and development that builds capability', Regina acknowledged how her experience at the service has been that professional learning is a high priority and that you are supported to do what you want to do. Josie acknowledged a similar view, recognising that teachers had the freedom to choose their own professional learning, which was also seen as leadership. Aria described her view of this indicator through the service leaders identifying those teachers who may want to grow their leadership capabilities, and individual teachers taking the initiative to share resources with one another that might support a recent discussion.

Melanie described her view of this indicator as having autonomy with your own professional learning:

And so, like Regina said, it's sort of, there's those opportunities to flourish in, in your leadership role. And I think we similarly, give our teachers those opportunities, you know, should it present with working with or if it sits outside of that, what are the benefits for the centre, for you and for the children, yeah let's give that a go. (Melanie, HFG).

Using the indicator 4.4 of 'Effective planning, coordination and evaluating of curriculum, teaching and learning promotes learning and equitable outcomes for all children', Regina spoke of how they are using internal evaluation to reflect on the vision, philosophy and priorities for children's learning and teachers are unpacking what that actually looks like in practice:

And so those exact teaching practices that kind of go alongside that, and the teaching team are going to do that unpacking, more than the leadership team are. We'll be involved, we'll be leading certain groups, but it'll be over to do, sort of, to do a lot of it and can buy into it. And it's for them, because they're the ones who have to do it every day. (Regina, HFG).

Natalia referenced how teachers show leadership in ensuring new staff such as relieving teachers are trained to use their teaching strategies to support children:

And I guess, just teaching those people kind of what that looks like in this space. (Natalia, HFG).

The final indicator, 4.5 of 'Leaders develop, implement and evaluate the organisational systems, processes and practices that promote continuous improvement', was discussed by the teachers. They drew on the elaboration of 'Leaders ensure that policies and practices value and support the identities, languages and cultures, wellbeing and learning of all children' and connected this to the many varied, cultural celebrations they organised across the year. Amelia summarised it as:

And parents who might not necessarily have been to a pōwhiri⁷ before, got to experience what it's like and learn a little bit about the history of the marae⁸ and the different pou and the fact that te whare waka, is essentially hitch your canoe to marae, it's for everybody, it connects everyone. (Amelia, HFG).

⁷ formal welcome ceremony onto the marae,

⁸ communal and sacred meeting space within Māori culture

Insights based on the focus group discussion

At the end of the focus group, the leadership team shared their insights, with Regina stating they knew their services' strengths and the areas for improvement. Melanie discussed how the indicators provided an opportunity for accountability in terms of their own leadership:

So I think every now and then, I have to think about my own leadership and go; am I effectively leading from a pedagogical sense, or am I just running the ship? So, you know, and that's being honest. (Melanie, HGH).

4.2.5 Impact of changes to practice

A follow up, joint interview was held with the leadership team (Melanie, Regina and Rebecca) by email, four months after the focus group, to understand how the service was measuring the impact of changes to practice on children's learning outcomes from their internal evaluation. Their internal evaluation explored 'how can we celebrate children's diverse cultures to better support their learning?'.

The leadership team felt the process of internal evaluation had been more successful than previous attempts, as they have observed:

Teachers are more communicative with what they were working on and we were beginning to enter a phase of teachers proactively discussing where to next and what kind of work they were working with re: gathering data. (Melanie, Regina, Rebecca, H, email).

They believed that there was an increased level of leadership shown by the teachers as they worked together in taking responsibility for agreed actions and sharing this information back to the wider team. In monitoring the impact of change of practice, they spoke of experiencing more specific

engagement from families in cultural celebrations and a conscious effort from teachers to improve their tikanga⁹ practices.

The teachers were actively using the whanaungatanga¹⁰ forms (parent questionnaires on customs and values important to their family) and parent aspirations in planning for children's learning. In looking directly at the impact on learning outcomes for children, the leadership team believed there was a clear link between the cultural celebrations being offered for specific children and the associated learning being documented for them.

While measuring the change in outcomes for children has been a slight challenge, they assessed these changes through appreciative and positive feedback from parents, such as:

on how they have felt more included in centre life and have enjoyed the way in which their cultural is acknowledged and celebrated". (Melanie, Regina, Rebecca H, email).

4.2.6 Hoiho summary

While the leadership group and teachers had separate individual interviews and focus groups, their responses to how they viewed educational leadership in practice were very similar, which may suggest a shared vision is embedded into the culture and practice of this team.

The leadership team's change in approach to the process of internal evaluation was evident throughout all of the data collection methods, as teachers were consistently consulted on decision making and future planning. The teachers' responses in interviews echoed this approach as they understood they were being given greater leadership and responsibility in evaluating their own and the services' practices. With that being said, while teachers could articulate how others practised

⁹ Tikanga- procedure, custom, habit

¹⁰ a relationship through shared experiences and working together that provides people with a sense of belonging.

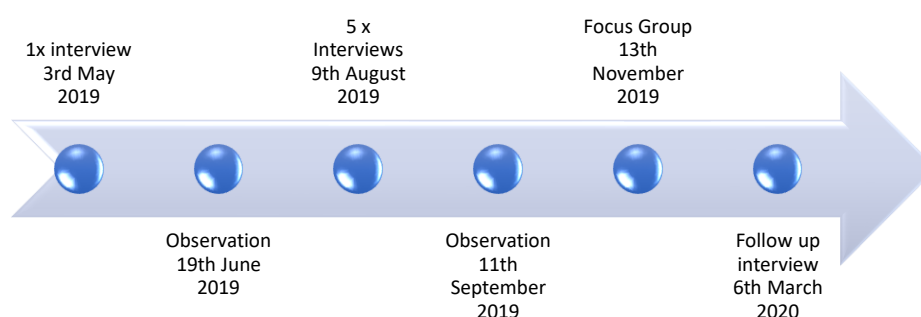
leadership throughout internal evaluation, they often did not personally identify with this leadership. There was also evidence of barriers that may have limited their interest in practising educational leadership such as a feeling of shyness in speaking in front of a group or having a contrasting opinion to the team. Over the course of the research, the teachers' level of understanding of educational leadership appeared to develop. Their discussions on leadership often brought the conversation back to self-identity, which will be expanded on in the discussion chapter.

In exploring how the service monitors the impact of changes on teaching practice, teachers were taking a collaborative approach towards the leadership of the internal evaluation. Children's learning outcomes had been measured on the feedback from families who acknowledged a sense of belonging to the service community through the celebration of their culture.

4.3. Kororā Early Childhood

Kororā Early Childhood is a privately owned and licensed ECE service within a large, urban area in the North Island of New Zealand. The service is one of four in the area governed by a board of directors. It is an all day, education and care service for children aged up to 2 years of age with a nursery and toddler group. At the time of the research, the service had seven teachers of which five were ECE qualified, one was in training and one unqualified. Two teachers held additional positional roles as an Assistant Manager and a Curriculum Leader/ Kaiārahi. There was also a Centre Manager who oversaw the curriculum, staff and day-to-day operation and a Principal who offered additional professional and operation support. Their internal evaluation was centred on exploring how well their centre philosophy was enacted in practice; was there an adequate balance of care and learning moments for children? A timeline (Figure 3 below) illustrates the sequence of data collection activities.

Figure 3. Kororā Timeline



The interviews, observations and focus groups conducted over 10 months during this research will be drawn on in this section. There were six individual interviews in total, held across two sessions - five with the teaching team and one with the Manager. Table 5. below provides a summary of the details of the participants from this service. The interview questions centred around two themes - understanding internal evaluation and understanding leadership. In addition, there was two observations held after each interview session at the centre’s regular staff meetings which focused on their internal evaluation discussion. There was a single focus group centred on participants’ understanding of leadership in practice and a follow up interview held at the end of the research.

Table 5. Kororā Participants

Participant	Individual interview	Length of time at service	Position
Gabby	Yes	15 years	Teacher
Jasmine			Teacher
Julia			Teacher
Khloe	Yes		Teacher
Linda			Teacher
Nathan			Teacher/Cook
Opal	Yes	1 years	Positional Leader
Sam	Yes	1.5 years	Teacher
Stella	Yes	2 years	Assistant Manager
Vanessa	Yes	3 years	Teacher

4.3.1 Understandings of internal evaluation

In their individual interviews, all teachers had a clear, shared understanding of what internal evaluation was, seeing it as improvement focused, recognising the constant change process happening and the need to be continually evaluating their own practices. Sam expressed their understanding as:

The team is constantly changing with new people coming in, and, you know, new children coming in. And we need to be continually evaluating what we're up to. And if we are best suiting our new team culture, with different families and children and teachers that are part of that. (Sam, KI).

The teachers reported they were engaging in a process of gathering information about what was happening, which Stella described as: “a snapshot into an aspect of education and care we try to provide to our children” (Stella, KI), and identifying areas that need to be improved. Teachers participated in different ways such as observing and documenting what is happening. Vanessa explained how she participated in the process and while she acknowledged that she did not like to document through writing, she did support the team meetings and engage in the discussions about readings they have shared.

Opal as the centre manager, and Stella as the assistant manager, talked about how teachers collect data, engage in open discussion, voice their opinion, and take ideas from these discussions and implement them in practice. These practices were supported by the observations at staff meetings, as teachers would debate back and forth on suggestions and ideas, for example ways to document assessment of children’s learning, identifying potential problems and coming to an agreement on what to implement.

When asked directly, the teachers were in agreement that participating in internal evaluation was part of their responsibilities as all teachers play an active role in the day to day running of the service therefore it is important that they have a say in how that happens. Opal and Stella firmly saw it as

part of their responsibilities as they wanted to ensure it is happening, that it is meeting their strategic plan and most importantly to them, that they were supporting other teachers to lead an internal evaluation.

In the individual interviews, teachers expressed conflicting opinions on the effectiveness of the internal evaluation process at their service. Opal summarised its effectiveness in her interview, by highlighting that internal evaluation is happening at the service but that they do not have the confidence for it to be part of everyday practice yet. It is led by the leader or as a big group with the intention of gaining experience and understanding, working towards the team feeling confident to lead it for themselves. Observations held during the research supported Opal's view. It was evident through the internal evaluation discussions in their staff meetings, that they were being led by Opal as she maintained frequent consultation with the team and encouraged them to make their own decisions on next steps in the process.

4.3.2 Leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation

In discussing leadership strategies needed for an internal evaluation, teachers mentioned delegation, accountability in following up on tasks, providing information, support, and an analytical approach in their individual interviews. Sam discussed the importance of:

A leader that creates an environment of trust, and honesty, you know, where people feel like they can express themselves. Honestly, even if it's a really tough discussion, without any judgment from the team, having a leader that is prepared to take, take some risks, I think is critical as well. (Sam, KI).

These leadership strategies were evident in the observations also, as Opal would begin each meeting with an opportunity for everyone to share what they were grateful for over the past week which often focused positively on other colleagues' teaching practices. Vanessa and Khloe advocated for supporting teachers to realise their ideas and giving them opportunities. This was affirmed by Opal

who spoke of ensuring the team had the right resources and stepping back and having the trust that they can do it.

All teachers highlighted the importance of learning together as a team and unpacking the internal evaluation, especially when some of the team were unsure about the process. Expanding on this, Sam commented:

Well, those people kind of people have to help themselves, firstly, to be communicating that they are not really understanding the process. I don't think the leader needs to necessarily be checking in on everyone all the time, to make sure of their understanding, really go through it systematically and break down, what you know, how internal evaluation works, and what the steps are, and then what the result is hopefully at the end, and why you're doing it, you know. (Sam, KI).

4.3.3 Views of leadership

The teachers described the leadership in their service positively, reporting through their interviews, that it works really well and is strongly relationship based. Stella remarked that:

I think although we have our titles, I think, you know, we are very much still equal in the way we, you know, talk with each other and do things together. (Stella, KI).

Opal emphasised a similar point as she described her role as part of a shared leadership, where she facilitates a strengths-based approach with respect and relationships as core values. All teachers strongly agreed on the importance of relationships for effective leadership and that they should include communication, admiration, and respect. Stella expanded on this by saying:

To be able to show leadership which will help people along the way, you need to be able to have some form of relationship with them. (Stella, KI)

Stella discussed her reason for taking on a leadership role, that she enjoys helping others and empowering them to work together as a team, to improve what they were offering. Likewise, Opal spoke of how relationships are her most enjoyed responsibility in her role:

That's why I do what I do really. For the people and for them. (Opal, KI).

In the interviews, the teachers tended to address Opal's attributes and practices, rather than the leadership within the centre in response to the question of how they view leadership in their service. While the relative inexperience of the leader was viewed positively by some, particularly her openness to learning, one teacher saw this as a less effective aspect of the current leadership. Teachers appreciated Opal's leadership practices of taking risks, making mistakes, accepting failure, creating strong relationships, checking in with everyone, communicating honestly and openly and encouraging them to develop their own leadership skills. Teachers gave individualised responses that appeared to link to their personal preferences such as not feeling pushed and feeling nurtured and with time, everyone feeling willing to volunteer. Confirming these responses, it was noticeable during the second observation, Opal led discussions focused on trying to find a more effective way of teachers using their non-contact time and appeared to carefully structure the conversation, so it did not imply judgment.

In reflecting on what makes leadership effective in general, teachers discussed leaders standing back, identifying individuals' strengths, needs and wants and working from this point. They expressed a view that effective leadership is supported through leaders who are constantly growing, inspiring others, communicating effectively, adapting when things change and has experience. Leaders need to be affirmed in the values of the centre and whole heartedly believe in the collective vision. They need to have compassion, empathy, be open and honestly communicate, including difficult conversations. Teachers agreed on the need for greater support of leadership through professional learning and development with a specific early childhood focus. Vanessa expressed her desire that:

They have to put some kind of like papers or things like that for the people (students), from the beginning. They want to be leaders, for them to understand what's the business sector of it. And what like, they have to lead, how to lead people. (Vanessa, KI).

Vanessa explained her response further by adding that she had observed good teachers being placed in leadership roles and they did not know what to do. Gabby spoke of the need for a consistent support network of other managers for leaders to work with. In considering the wider leadership structure, Khloe suggested:

I would love there to be some sort of requirement for you to open a Centre and maybe, to manage you have to have this many years' experience, or not saying experience means good, but, you know, something that could help not to make us all unified, but some sort of, some sort of level of intention or something. (Khloe, KI).

Some teachers discussed their interest in taking on a leadership role in the future and feeling hesitant as they would want the right opportunity to avoid stress, with others concerned about what was happening in the sector, such as a qualified teacher shortage and pay parity campaigns and felt discouraged by it to take on a leadership role.

In discussing educational leadership, five out of the six teachers expressed the view that they did not know what educational leadership was. In further discussion, some teachers offered additional insight into what they believed constituted educational leadership. Khloe discussed their dedicated curriculum leader:

I think that's been really vital to kind of have a focus, or someone that's driving that side of curriculum, our curriculum in general. (Khloe, KI).

Similarly, Sam commented:

They don't necessarily need to be directly involved within creating those spaces, but they need to be inspiring teams that are creating spaces of learning. (Sam, KI).

The responses from Khloe and Sam signalled a view of educational leadership that was centred on pedagogical practices which occur in inspiring educational environments. They appeared to believe that educational leadership can be facilitated by any member of the team, not just the positional leader.

4.3.4 Understandings of leadership

Three months after the individual interviews, a single focus group was held to further explore teachers' understanding of leadership. This was done using the ERO (2019a) document, "Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most" in particular the process indicators within: Kaihautū: Leaders foster collaboration and improvement. This focus group was structured as a group discussion with the first hour utilised to unpack the group's understanding and views on the educational leadership definition, and the following 30 minutes exploring how they view their own teaching practice within the Process Indicators of leadership. At the end of the discussion the teachers were asked for their insights based on the focus group. Participants in this focus group included six teachers, the centre manager and the cook (who also teaches).

Unpacking the Educational Leadership definition

Teachers agreed with the definition and enjoyed the reference to sustaining thriving teams. Opal expressed her understanding of it as:

It comes from the aspect of the leader providing a means to success, not providing the success, allowing the team the environment to succeed. It's not defining the leader's responsibility to do everything and be everything, it's saying its actually educational leadership is supporting the team to do it, providing the right conditions for a team to succeed. (Opal, KFG).

The teachers discussed how the lack of this environment can contribute to the high staff turnover, currently being experienced in ECE sector. The teachers linked this definition to a potential strategy

to develop distributed leadership to avoid staff turnover. In discussing how well distributed leadership fits within ECE, Stella stated that:

I think some do that really well and allow everyone to have leadership in their own, in their own areas of strength or passion or things that can challenge them, that I feel like I'm sure from, you know, stories you hear or read, I feel like there probably are places where it's quite constricted. (Stella, KFG).

Linda supported this assertion by adding:

Because I have a good friend in early childhood as well, and at her place, there is too many people trying to be that leader role, but then it's just not gelling together nicely because you know, you have that person and then other people can kind of contribute a little bit but they're all trying to be the top person, that it's not going like smoothly. (Linda, KFG)

Sam seen distributed leadership as essential to ECE, as they believed that we all have to step up to a leadership responsibility:

If we can foster a space that is open to new leaders coming through and making mistakes but then being supported to, you know, get through those mistakes and I think that is really beneficial for the teaching practice itself, as well as the governance of the centre. (Sam, KFG).

Sam also acknowledged the challenges services may experience in establishing distributed leadership as they believed not all centres have the same level of trust in their teachers as in this service.

The teachers continued to unpack the definition throughout the focus group discussion, referencing the separation of leadership and management. Nathan shared his view, seeing it as much more empowering, the leader creates solutions, not solves the problems:

I'd rather follow someone in leadership than follow a manager. (Nathan, KFG).

Opal voiced how she sees everyone as a leader, but a leader is different to a manager. She believed you need the support of a manager for effective operation to allow the leadership of children's learning, as in the past she has observed how leadership has not always been centred on children's learning. Opal added to this:

I really like the priority they are focusing on, the priority is shining a light on leadership opposed to management, has lots of opportunities to grow, not only kaiako in positional leadership opportunities, but kaiako in general. (Opal, KFG).

The teachers continued this discussion centred on the idea of leadership being within the whole team, rather than just one person. Stella saw how team leadership could nurture individual strengths and passions and also to support others and suggested it should be a natural thing, to be provided opportunities to feel that they are supported and a part of a supportive team. Linda raised the question do people stay away from leadership positions because of the pay? The teachers agreed that it is a regular topic in the sector and the financial aspect could sway people. Opal questioned if the perception of leadership could change if people were to view leadership through this definition. She believed everyone is a leader in their own right and as a teacher, it's an expectation that you show leadership, its collaborative:

Yeah, I guess it comes back to the environment that's created for us, for people to want to step into those positions, that support. (Opal, KFG).

The teachers considered if leadership were to be viewed as more than just management/ operation duties, would teachers step up? Opal saw leadership as role modelling and embodying the philosophy and vision of the service. She felt that people can often understand leadership as the management aspect, the positional titles, and the responsibility. She saw all of her colleagues as leaders already, leading the way for ECE and children in the service but mentioned that the terminology can restrict how people view themselves. Vanessa expressed her view as:

Sometimes like you show leadership when situation needed to be. And then when you step down, that's when you're letting others to lead, it's a like a balance. (Vanessa, KFG).

Showing educational leadership through internal evaluation

Continuing the focus group discussion, the teachers shared the ways they felt they have shown educational leadership through internal evaluation. These included through: creating a trusting environment; facilitation of the process; and stepping back to allow others to step forward and agreeing on the changes they want to make. In exploring the idea of creating a trusting environment, Opal (Opal, KFG) stated that she sees the team as leading this through creating a team culture where everyone had a safe space to be honest and trust one another. Sam disagreed, seeing this as needing to be: “mediated, usually by, by someone within a leadership role of what the kaupapa¹¹ is” (Sam, KFG) maintaining that sense of respect while everyone is being vulnerable. Opal, expanding on this narrative, added:

I completely agree with you, I think it's so important, but I also think in your own leadership as well, it's up to you to set the tone, because if you disrespected that, I don't think that's being a leader. (Opal, KFG).

When applying a more individual lens to how educational leadership was shown, Sam discussed how the team had agreed to implement a new strategy as part of their internal evaluation, by writing observations of children's play experiences and how:

None of us necessarily were taking the leadership to put any work into it. So, you know that, that's where it slowly came down to individual leadership of our own selves, to try to instigate that and try and get the ball rolling on that and so you know in that example, we all had a huge part to play within our leadership. (Sam, KFG).

¹¹Kaupapa- an agenda, a way of doing things, a plan

On a similar note, Jasmine shared her experience of taking the initiative when time was constricted, to share research and knowledge with the wider team:

And if it's a leader who kind of gels everyone together, then it's kind of a leadership that works. But it's only empowering a few of us and not all, then you kind of like won't be able to sustain that. (Jasmine, KFG).

Process indicators

The teachers were asked next to describe how the process indicators of leadership and their elaborations, could be observed in their teaching practice. Using the elaboration of 4.4 'Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the service's curriculum, processes and practices and promoting learning and achieving equitable outcomes', Opal and Nathan discussed Julia's role currently in leading an internal evaluation on evaluating the effectiveness of their current curriculum processes in terms of assessment, documentation and how up to date it is. Opal stated:

But through her learning, she is able to support the learning of kaiako and obviously equitable outcomes for children as well and the whānau. I think my role in that specifically, is to step back, and ensure Julia has the right conditions to feel supported but not too much. (Opal, KFG).

Using the elaboration of 4.3 'Leaders and kaiako seek and use evidence about the effectiveness of professional learning processes in improving professional practice and children's outcomes', Vanessa shared how teachers discussed children's interests at meetings and identified patterns. They built on these through revisiting the discussion and evaluating where the interests were and incorporating further resources to build upon the interests. She stated that they all learned together.

Using the elaboration of 4.2 'Leaders establish and promote the organizational conditions that support debate negotiation, problem solving and critical reflection on practice', Stella and Sam discussed how they seen it as providing an environment in which we feel comfortable and can

approach ideas. They described it as having a healthy debate and seeing multiple perspectives, concluding that we are all leaders. Stella summarised it as:

And in turn, if you are already, if you are like debating and negotiating, you are in a way already reflecting on your practice; what can we do here, what do we change, what's working, what's not working. (Stella, KFG).

The other teachers supported this statement by calling on the positive aspects of debating respectfully with one another, with Sam adding:

And I had that moment before where I was like, you know, you come up the idea and then, do you feel comfortable in the environment to, to share it and it was like yeah, I do, I do feel like I can put myself out there against my own manager and tell her that she's wrong (laughter). (Sam, KFG).

Using the elaboration of 4.1 'Actively seek the perspectives and cultural expertise of parents and whānau and include these in the services' philosophy, vision, goals and priorities for learning', Julia and Linda talked of the importance building relationships and having regular conversations with whānau. Jasmine built on this idea also, sharing:

It comes down to building relationships with them. If you don't know the whānau, then how do you get them to contribute, because some centres don't have that. (Jasmine, KFG).

Using the indicator of 4.5 'Leaders develop, implement and evaluate systems, processes and practices that promote ongoing improvement'. All teachers discussed the feedback they seek from parents on events such as the settling in process, with Opal expanding on it as:

to find out how effective it is, not how effective we think it is. (Opal, KFG).

Sam took a different perspective on measuring the effectiveness of internal evaluation, describing how the processes needs to be well thought out in advance. He believed that there are different

ways to approach the process of internal evaluation and that the positional leader plays an essential role in using their expertise to ensure the effectiveness of the process. He emphasised that:

Sometimes you can find out all the information you need through an informal chat, and then just share that in situations like team meetings, but for things that maybe aren't just on the surface, internal evaluations really get you to reveal the, you know, what is happening in that current system, and work out what is the issues, or what are the strengths of that system, and a leader would know where to shine light on. (Sam, KFG).

Teachers insights based on the focus group discussion

At the end of the focus group, the teachers shared their insights with an acknowledgment of their shift in thinking in how they defined leadership and recognised that distributed leadership contributes to the sustainable growth of the team and centre. They appeared to be starting to identify themselves as leaders, recognising everyone is a leader in their own right. Julia summarised this shift in view as:

This made me think about, like throughout the day of like everything that each individual teacher is doing already, but may not realize that is leadership. And also, just like making sure that like we're supporting them to continue to want to take on responsibility and want to do more, and not just let, kind of like the leaders do it all. (Julia, KFG).

4.3.5 Impact of changes to practice

A follow up interview was held with Opal the centre manager, four months after the focus group, to understand how the service was measuring the impact of changes to practice on children's learning outcomes from their internal evaluation. The internal evaluation explored how well their centre philosophy was enacted in practice and if there an adequate balance of care and learning moments for children. Their data had showed that most of their professional conversations focused on care moments for children as opposed to children's learning. In monitoring the impact of change of practice, while Opal asserted this was not an area they had done well in, she did offer examples of

these changes:

I think there has been that shift, because more kaiako are talking about children's learning and sharing, and being excited and passionate about it, has created more of a culture of talking about learning all the time, as opposed to beforehand, it was more so about care and individual kaiako were more observing their key children's learning, and then documenting it but it was more individual, were as now, it's a shared perspective of sharing learning with each other. And supporting each other to support children in that way. (Opal, KFG).

In looking directly at the impact on learning outcomes for children, Opal responded that:

What I see is with the culture that's been created, that's been really focused on children's interests in children's learning, and with a more shared approach as a team, more by environment setups or experiences or activities offered to the children, directly related to what they are interested in, in their learning. So, I think it's supported children's learning in the fact that we've had a really supportive kaiako team to extend on their learning. (Opal, KFG).

Reflecting on her own leadership through this process, Opal commented that she would like to focus more on distributed leadership in the future and empower more kaiako to take an active role. She had begun a new teaching inquiry on shared leadership and empowering kaiako to see themselves as leaders in their own right:

Yeah, and I want to like tap in on it and really empower them to, yeah, change their identity from kaiako to actually leader, within our space and it takes all of us to lead the space. (Opal, KFG).

She also acknowledged the leadership she had observed in the teachers as they implemented strategies, held each other accountable, empowered one another and shared their opinions.

4.3.6 Kororā summary

It can be concluded from the participants' responses that all teachers had a robust understanding of internal evaluation and its key purpose. This in turn influenced their engagement levels in the process of internal evaluations as they wanted to have an input into the day-to-day running and decision making of the service. The teachers spoke of challenges in engaging in internal evaluation that included a lack of interest in academic procedures such as writing, and confusing terminology. It could then be considered that if they were not fully engaged in internal evaluation, they may be restricted in their ability to practise educational leadership within internal evaluation. As their confidence in internal evaluation built, teachers continued to work towards embedding this into their everyday practice. A supportive culture and workplace environment where the teachers could unpack a topic and learn together, was identified as a key strategy in showing leadership throughout the internal evaluation process. Positional leaders advocated for a shared leadership approach, centred on relationships as its core value.

The focus group responses linked back to the individual interviews, with teachers focusing on the aspect of sustaining thriving teams. Their discussion highlighted the importance of an environment that supported a strength-based approach to teamwork and nurtured those who had leadership aspirations. Over the course of the research, teachers' understandings and perspectives of educational leadership appeared to deepen with them confidently articulating how educational leadership was being practised in internal evaluation processes. Their insights spoke of a shift in their thinking in how they define leadership, starting to identify themselves as leaders and recognising that distributed leadership contributes to the sustainable growth of the team.

In exploring how the service monitors the impact of changes on teaching practice, participants' anecdotal observations informed their understanding of their influence on children's learning outcomes. They identified how they now held a perspective of sharing learning with each other and

supporting children with this approach. There was a shift, with practice being more strongly child interest led and the teachers having the ability to further extend the child's learning.

4.4. Tawaki Early Learning

Tawaki Early Learning is a licensed ECE, not-for-profit kindergarten, which is part of a larger association, located within a large urban area in the North Island of New Zealand. It was a session-based kindergarten for children aged two to five years of age. At the time of this research, the service had four ECE qualified teachers and a Head Teacher who oversaw the day-to-day operation of the service. There was a change of positional leadership at the beginning of 2020 with a new head teacher from within the existing team. There was also a board and managers who provided governance for the organisation and senior teachers who provided support and professional learning and development opportunities for teachers. Their internal evaluation was centred on supporting the transition of new children into the service. A timeline (figure 4 below) illustrates the sequence of the data collection methods.

Figure 4. Tawaki Timeline.



The interviews, observations and focus groups conducted over 12 months during this research will be drawn on in this section. There were four interviews in total, three with the teaching team and one with the head teacher. Table 6. below provides a summary of the details of the participants from this service. The interview questions centred around two themes, understanding internal evaluation, and understanding leadership. There were six observations held before and after the interviews, at the centres regular staff meetings, which focused on their internal evaluation discussions. In addition, there was a single focus group focused on participants' understanding of educational leadership in practice and a follow up interview held at the end of the research.

Table 6. Tawaki Participants

Participant	Individual interview	Length of time at service	Position
Audrey			Teacher
Caroline			Teacher
Fergie			Teacher
Leona	Yes	5 years	Teacher- Positional Leader
Lucy	Yes	2 Years	Positional Leader
Ruihi	Yes	4 years	Teacher
Savanna	Yes	Teacher	Teacher

4.4.1 Understandings of internal evaluation

In their individual interviews, the participants expressed a shared view on internal evaluation, describing it as improvement focused. Ruihi explained it as:

So you assess that, and you go through the cycle of like, what's happening, how can we improve it, and then you gather information and see what comes out of that. (Ruihi, TI).

Lucy, as head teacher, reflected on how teaching practice can become complacent, and suggested internal evaluation provides a means of looking deeper at an area and using it to make sure you are staying on track. The teachers described having regular staff meetings, sourcing research and sharing

this back with the team, being part of the discussion, seeking other perspectives and documenting the evidence, as the ways teachers participated in internal evaluation. Responding to the question of how they see their colleagues participating, Ruihi referenced seeking other perspectives, stating that:

I think each one of us is different. We have different perspectives in, even if we read the same article, we will all have different views of it, because we're different people. (Ruihi, T1).

The teachers acknowledged internal evaluation as part of their responsibilities, seeing it as an opportunity to evaluate practice and focus on what the children were learning. It also had a deeper level purpose, as it encouraged them to question long standing practices and allow them to make sense of their practices. Savanna described her understanding as:

Oh, it's definitely a responsibility because it's evidence about improving your practice. And they're usually really good topics, and really reflective, so it's like having your own personal goal but it's a group. (Savanna, T1).

4.4.2 Leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation

The teachers identified several leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation which included the ability to facilitate the process, to plan, to delegate, to hold everyone accountable and big picture thinking. Lucy spoke of the need to acknowledge each teacher as having a different level of knowledge of internal evaluation, so it's important that the leader is confident in the process as:

Cos if I don't know what I'm doing, then it's very hard to help lead the team on that. (Lucy, T1).

Leona described more relational strategies that centred on having good relationships with everyone and building connections so that you are working in partnership. Ruihi reflected on the leadership strategies as being impacted by the individual leader, stating:

So, it depends on the ... leader of what, that ... internal evaluation and what topic it will be, and how they lead it and how to get us giving our perspectives. (Ruihi, TI).

Sharing resources and information was an agreed form of support leaders could offer to teachers who felt unsure about internal evaluation. Lucy built on this idea saying that teachers can attend professional learning and development training or make the topic a part of their own appraisal, so they could build their knowledge. Savanna shared her view of leaders needing to be patient and honest as they are learning themselves, with Leona adding to this saying it is important to have realistic expectations of a teacher's abilities and the time available to them. She also articulated that leaders should play a supportive role in building teachers' confidence by providing them with different options and encouraging them to give things a go.

4.4.3 Views of leadership

The participants' understanding of leadership involved collaboration and fairness. Savanna saw leadership as role modelling desired and acceptable behaviour with appropriate expectations:

So, if you've asked everybody else to gather evidence, then you come to the table with your evidence as well. Yeah, if you asked everyone for their input, then you actually listen to everyone for their input and then, move forward to the next thing. (Savanna, TI).

Ruihi expressed a similar view regarding valuing everyone's contribution:

I think a good leader will listen to everybody's point of view and try to extract what is important and what is doable, and probably collate that and read that together. But then you have to judge and gauge the differences and the strengths and weaknesses of the team, so that everybody is heard or included within that kind of discussion, of going through an internal evaluation. (Ruihi, TI).

When asked how she viewed the leadership at the service, the head teacher said she hoped it was a positive leadership style with a clear vision and that people collaborated and stepped up when they

needed to. The teachers described their experiences of the leadership at their service in distinct ways through their interviews. One teacher viewed the leadership as professional, leading by example and focused on outcomes for children. A second teacher viewed it approachable and transparent, with any concerns or issues raised immediately and resolved, with opportunities for distributed leadership. A third teacher shared their view saying they would prefer greater flexibility at times which would encourage them to express their ideas more frequently.

Ruihi, Lucy and Leona had similar perspectives on what makes effective leadership, proposing the importance of a clear, collaborative vision that everyone can contribute to. Ruihi and Leona also spoke of using a strength-based approach towards leadership, with everyone holding a common goal of achieving quality outcomes for children. Savanna elaborated further on the concept of leadership and the approach that works best for her as an individual. She spoke of not feeling pressured and this was important as she feels the job dynamics of teaching has changed markedly over the years, now being more physically and emotionally draining:

So that's why I like it when somebody else goes, this is what you need to do, I go off and do it and I'll come back. Yeah, but if I need to step up, I would. (Savanna, TI).

Some of the teachers spoke of their interest in taking on a leadership role in the future. Leona, who described herself as a 'relationship person', saw it as a positive step as she had been reflecting on the Treaty of Waitangi¹² and the principles of participation, protection, and partnership:

Just being in partnership, not only with your colleagues, but with your, with your whole community ... If you know who you are, then you're more likely to be able to support other people to understand who they are. (Leona, TI).

In contrast, Ruihi and Savanna, who both had held leadership roles previously, expressed a lack of

¹² The Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand's founding document, first signed in 1840. The Treaty is a broad statement of principles on which the British Crown and Māori rangatira (chiefs) made a political agreement to found a nation state and build a government in New Zealand.

interest in taking on a leadership role. Their experiences had led to them feeling vulnerable when they did not have support, and their observation of current leaders needing to constantly prioritise and be accountable.

In responding to the question of what they would like to see happen for leadership in ECE, Leona expressed a desire to see the profile and importance of ECE lifted:

Making sure that we show the community that we are leaders, that we can support, you know, newly training teachers. That we can be that foundation that children need for lifelong learning. (Leona, TI).

Ruihi advocated for increased training and guidance to inspire people to become leaders or to develop effective teams. In the final section of the interviews, teachers were asked about their understanding of educational leadership. They viewed it as leadership that sits within, and promotes, the education sector. It involved new ideas and support, supporting future leaders, and utilizing distributed leadership.

4.4.4 Understandings of leadership

Five months after the individual interviews, a single online call (due to the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions) focus group was held to further explore teachers' understanding of educational leadership. This was done using the ERO (2019a) document, "Indicators of quality for early childhood education: what matters most" in particular the process indicators within: Kaihautū: Leaders foster collaboration and improvement. This focus group was structured as a group discussion with the first hour utilised to unpack the group's understanding and views on the educational leadership definition and the following 30 minutes exploring how they view their own teaching practice within the Process Indicators of leadership. At the end of the discussion the teachers were asked for their insights based on the focus group. Participants in this focus group included four teachers and the newly appointed head teacher.

Unpacking the Educational Leadership definition

Leona felt that the educational leadership definition focused on distributed leadership. She described her responsibilities as a positional leader, as supporting the team to grow, encouraging them to show leadership in areas they were comfortable with, while also providing challenges. Leona believed that their combined leadership affects the learning outcomes for children. Fergie noted the sense of ako¹³ and shared responsibility, as the team worked together and shared knowledge:

Because we're all, we're all differently tuned. Yeah, we all see things from different angles.
(Fergie, TFG).

Audrey shared that she viewed the definition as a great representation of what is currently happening in their service. Building on Fergie's comments, Audrey stated:

We all differently tuned in, all bring our strengths and weaknesses in. Leona is there to facilitate or juggle us basically into the right direction. Using us, you know, each one of us in the right way to work together on the joint you know, on a journey towards positive outcomes for the children. (Audrey, TFG).

As the discussion moved on to how teachers show educational leadership through internal evaluation, the teachers reflected on their own internal evaluation process and identified some of the challenges they experienced. These included losing focus, working part time, and not getting a full sense of the big picture and participating in meetings at the end of a workday. Savanna shared her experience of what supported her to become more engaged:

For me, when I could openly, when I openly said, 'Oh, I'm actually really confused, and I found ... a bit overwhelmed'. And as soon as I said it out loud, I felt comfortable to say it and then I was like, ah, and then I could get my head back in the game. And then I could take it

¹³ ¹³ Ako- reciprocal processes of learning/to learn

and then when we all started talking, and just kind of get our, get our head in the game a bit better. (Savanna, TFG).

Showing educational leadership through internal evaluation

The teachers gave several different examples, of how they practised educational leadership during their internal evaluation. Ruihi spoke of her contributions through sharing her views and ideas with the team, as she felt clear about what she was doing, which was allowing her to lead others and make a positive difference to the children and the whānau. Audrey continued on this topic, describing that as a new team member, she was able to contribute her ideas from her previous roles and experiences. She felt supported, included, and listened to:

So, I felt, in a really safe environment and I felt like I could contribute to the bigger picture and be part of it and be part of the team and at the end, because the processes at Tawaki are so fast, I felt like I could see the difference in the learning immediately. (Audrey, TFG).

Audrey added that she feels supported in her position to become a potential leader in the future because this kindergarten has a culture of everyone is equal and supported and understood in their strengths.

Fergie spoke of developing their reflective practice as a professional and then sharing those reflections with colleagues:

I think we all, we all reflect anyway. But I think it's good to reflect ideas within a group because then you can collectively change what your focus is on. (Fergie, TFG).

Leona described how she had moved from a teaching to leadership position and used her experiences to make changes, focusing on the sentence in the definition “it involves creating and sustaining the conditions known to enhance their learning”. She used an example of how she changed the structure of the service’s daily meetings to incorporate a break/rest period before starting into the meeting, which allowed for:

Intentionally creating the conditions that will help us understand and learn together as a collective. (Leona, TFG).

Savanna spoke of how the idea of sustaining teams resonated with her, and the relevance of understanding how individuals think and work. She felt there was presently a culture of sustaining and more continuity in sustaining that culture of being supported, so she feels that she can voice her ideas:

And I thrive on being able to voice an opinion or have an idea and then being able just to do it, without having to wait for too long. (Savanna, TFG).

The teachers continued this discussion on educational leadership in internal evaluation centred on a supportive workplace culture with a sense of well-being, where they kept up the momentum of ideas. This also included being efficient and choosing the right idea that has the best outcome for everyone. Another example offered of educational leadership was teachers task sharing, wherein teachers would observe their colleagues and if they were already engaged in a task, they would support by taking responsibility for another task.

Process indicators

Using the process indicators of leadership and their elaborations, the focus group was asked to describe how they would view this in their practice. Using the indicator 4.1 of 'Leaders collaboratively develop and enact the service's philosophy, vision, goals, and priorities, recognising Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ The Treaty of Waitangi as foundational', Leona spoke of the ways they engaged and acknowledged the parents and whānau as the first teachers of children and sought their expertise in planning for children's learning. The teachers actively used parents' aspirations and contributions as part of their learning:

We as teachers are only there to facilitate what they've already started in terms of education for their children. And that really is very transparent when we talk about the Treaty of

Waitangi and about the partnership that we build with our, with our parents, and our whānau and our children. Just sort of utilizing their expertise and their thought process.

(Leona, TFG).

Using the indicator 4.2 of 'Relational trust enables collaboration and sustained improvement', Ruihi spoke of the culture of reflection within the service where they have a structured team meeting and can discuss, and problem solve together. This also included the ways in which they support children's learning:

We're getting to know them more in, if we do something or set up something and it doesn't work, it's okay to change it, for the best of the children's learning. (Ruihi, TFG).

Using the indicator 4.3 of 'Leaders ensure access to opportunities for professional learning and development that builds capability', Audrey commented on how, when she became aware of Savanna's appraisal topic, she shared her resources from previous professional learning and development that related to it. She also described the external professional learning and development the team utilised to continue to promote the service's philosophy. Professional learning also included reflecting on current practices and how the team brainstormed together and sought parent feedback so they could have their input.

Using the indicator 4.4 of 'Effective planning, coordination and evaluating of curriculum, teaching and learning promotes learning and equitable outcomes for all children', Fergie shared the strength of each teacher having a different interpretation of resources and research and how sharing those interpretations promoted a good understanding and helped ongoing inquiry into what they were doing.

The final indicator 4.5 of 'Leaders develop, implement and evaluate the organisational systems, processes and practices that promote continuous improvement', Savanna described the intentional

planning and strategies the team decided upon that would best support the child and whānau transitioning into the kindergarten:

There was so much thought and effort going into making sure that families felt that whole sense of well-being and belonging, when they started at kindergarten. (Savanna, TFG).

Insights from the focus group

At the end of the focus group the teachers were invited to share any insights they gained from the discussions. Leona spoke of feeling more prepared for an ERO review as she now had a better understanding of the process indicators and how they related to their own practices. Leona also shared how she has a greater understanding of distributed and collaborative leadership and how she sees this happening more frequently within the team. Savanna shared how the discussion had consolidated her previous knowledge of leadership. She expressed how she was still learning about different approaches and was enjoying it, and felt she was taking a lot more on board now. Savanna also discussed how she had recognised that she had encountered negative aspects of leadership and she has tried to leave them aside, which has not always been successful and so believed it was important that you try to take the positive aspects.

Ruihi reflected on how, as she was an experienced teacher and had met different leaders over time, she was now thinking about how she can be an effective leader within the team:

And it's good to kind of, reread that ... or check myself; where do I fit as a leader in that? And you just kind of like, weave yourself into the team as well to make it more productive.
(Ruihi, TFG).

Audrey shared her insights from the focus group as how she saw parallels in what teachers also want for children. As teachers, they also want to be competent and confident in what they do and better communicators and contributors. It has refreshed her thinking and gave her a greater awareness about being learners and becoming leaders. Fergie reflected similarly to Audrey, noting as leaders,

they were still learning, and always supporting each other. Leona commented that as a professional leader, it was necessary to take a step back and analyse how the picture is being drawn together and see the connections and then continue to link to what others have to share.

4.4.5 Impact of changes to practice

A follow up interview by video call, was held close to the focus group, to understand how the service was measuring the impact of changes to practice on children's learning outcomes from their internal evaluation. Their internal evaluation explored how best to support the transition of new children into the service.

Leona, as the head teacher, described how the internal evaluation had been successful, judged also by the validations from parents, and had influenced other evaluation processes because they have been thinking in a new way:

We've been thinking about being more connected with our families and more connected with the aspirations of our families and being more connected with each other and what we're talking to potential families about, each time they come through the door. (Leona, TI).

Reflecting on the changes to teaching practice, influenced also by a change in leadership, she saw the team as more connected. This was supported by feedback she received from the senior teachers and relieving teachers:

So, I'm definitely tapping into the strengths of the team, so that we can do this together. And I think, from the feedback I'm getting from the team, they're in, they're really enjoying that pace. They're enjoying being able to have more say in what they do, even though we still have a shared vision. (Leona, TI).

With a change in policy around enrolments and children attending more days of the week, Leona saw changes such as:

Our relationships have become stronger. We're able to, you know, engage and extend the children more regularly. (Leona, TI).

Discussing the impact of the internal evaluation on the learning outcomes for children, Leona felt the parents were more informed and as a result, more relaxed. She saw this influencing the children who seemed to be more relaxed and settling into the service better. Because the team was more connected and in tune with one another, the process of settling in had been more streamlined. She also saw a greater sense of tuakana teina¹⁴ happening with the children, as they were helping younger children to settle in.

Reflecting on her own leadership, Leona described how she was much more aware of the importance of internal evaluation on relationships and empowering teachers to be involved in a group exercise. She also recognised her responsibility to bring ideas to meetings and keep everyone accountable. She wanted to take her experiences as a teacher and use it as a leader to make the process more engaging and fun for the team:

It should actually be really interesting, should be part of our, the whole outcome of what we're trying to achieve for the children. You know, the quality outcomes we're trying to achieve for the children. (Leona, TFG).

She also noted how she saw leadership being practised by the teachers, as they were empowered to become involved, utilizing their personal skills such as additional languages, to connect with new families.

4.4.6 Tawaki summary

The participants expressed similar understandings and ways of participation in internal evaluation during the interviews. When the focus group was held, there was a noticeable difference from the interviews and observations in their level of interest and excitement for the process of internal

¹⁴ *Tuakana teina*- relationship between an older (tuakana) person and a younger (teina) person and is specific to teaching and learning in the Māori context.

evaluation, possibly influenced by the change in head teacher. The unprompted discussion in the focus group, highlighted several potential barriers that may impact teacher's engagement and practice of leadership in internal evaluation. Notably, a teacher's honesty in expressing their confusion to others, leading to a reinvigoration and re-engagement with the process.

The participants' perspectives on leadership emphasised key themes of collaboration, equitable opportunities, and a strength-based leader, which could be argued as features of distributed leadership. The teachers had a robust understanding of the leadership approaches that suited them best and what constituted effective leadership. Their exploration of educational leadership appeared to build from an idea of a supportive workplace culture, with the examples of educational leadership in practice strongly linked to relational leadership.

The responses in all data collection methods throughout the research regularly referenced quality learning outcomes for children. Leona, as the head teacher, was measuring the impact of changes on practice through the increased level of connectedness they were experiencing with their wider community. This connectedness is being highlighted as having a flow on effect to the learning outcomes for children.

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the findings from each of the three services in this study that investigated how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation processes in ECE in New Zealand. Participants perspectives was explored through their understandings of internal evaluation; leadership strategies needed for internal evaluation; views of leadership; understandings of leadership and the impact of changes on practice. While there were several commonalities in the findings across the three services, the discussion in this chapter also explored the differences, providing insight into how participants viewed educational leadership practised through internal evaluation process. The following chapter will discuss an analysis of the findings according to four key themes.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This qualitative, case study has examined in what ways educational leadership practised through internal evaluation processes, builds professional capability and capacity in New Zealand ECE services. As a single case design with multiple units of analysis, this chapter provides an analysis of the findings according to four key themes developed through a thematic analysis:

1. Identification with leadership;
2. Supportive workplace culture;
3. Continuous improvement; and
4. Leadership practices in internal evaluation.

These themes form the main structure of this discussion chapter as they consider: why teachers do not identify with leadership or view themselves as leaders; how can teachers be supported to identify as leaders and practise leadership; how a cycle of improvement can positively influence teaching practice; and what leadership practices were identified through the internal evaluation process. Each theme will be discussed by providing an explanation of its purpose, the similarities and differences across the three participating services, and how these findings relate to literature. I will then describe how the identified leadership practices also align with the indicators of quality practice, highlighting how educational leadership builds professional capability and capacity. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the implications of the study for the future of leadership in ECE. The research questions will be revisited in the final chapter.

5.2. Identification with leadership

One of the three objectives of this research was to investigate what enabled or challenged teachers to practise educational leadership through internal evaluation. This section will discuss participants' understanding of leadership and potential explanations as to their lack of identification with

leadership. The following section will then discuss the practices that can enable teachers to practise leadership.

5.2.1 Understanding leadership

The majority of the participants described an understanding of leadership that connected strongly to their personal experiences of leadership and the practices they viewed as necessary in their interviews. These lived experiences framed how they developed their understanding of leadership with four key ideas being shared by all participants, that leadership was: relationship based; strength based; distributed; and linked to vision and values. Effective leadership was seen to involve authentic relationships with all members of the service. Leaders needed to have the ability to identify teachers' strengths and passions and utilise these strengths to enhance relationships and create solutions. Leaders needed to provide opportunities for teachers to be leaderful and lead an area of practice. Leaders needed to be grounded in the service vision and role model the values that keep the community engaged to enact that vision. All participants believed that leadership within their services was an expectation of all teachers. Regardless of titles, there was an equality in how they interacted, acknowledging their individual strengths as contributing to the success of the service.

All services agreed on the need for a positional leader within their teams. A common agreement was that the positional leader has an essential responsibility for facilitating the team towards their vision by blending their skills to work collaboratively. This represented the idea of big picture thinking for the Hoiho service, whereas the Kororā teachers viewed this facilitation as maintaining the kaupapa of the team when teachers were being vulnerable in identifying areas for improvement within their own practice. The Tawaki teachers' perspective was focused on directing the team on what needed to be achieved when the teachers were feeling overwhelmed.

While teachers could articulately describe leadership, they often tended to address the practices and attributes of the current positional leader(s) rather than the leadership within the service, despite

their espoused belief that leadership was an expectation of all teachers. At Hoiho, it was being well organised, working hard as a leadership team but having time for individual teachers and at Kororā, this was the level of experience, risk taking, making mistakes, and creating strong relationships. At Tawaki, leadership was professional, transparent, and required a timely response to issues. Teachers' understandings of leadership suggest a perspective that focuses on the leader and the follower and less on the process of leadership.

Participants' lived experiences of leadership framed their understanding, drawing from their previous and current working environments. One example came from the Tawaki positional leader who discussed the different leadership approaches she had experienced over her career and the impact of these approaches. These experiences had influenced her understanding of leadership and as a result, she had now adapted her own leadership approach to fit the different personalities, skills, and abilities of the teachers she worked with. A contrasting example came a Kororā teacher, who described how they automatically think of authority when they consider the difference between a manager and a leader. They acknowledged that their own mindset heavily influenced their perceptions. These findings show how individuals' perceptions of leadership includes their "personal values, individuals frames of reference, world views and personal cultural constructs" (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2009, p. 5). The ways in which people understand leadership is important, as Northouse (2012, p. 9) argues that "how you *think* about leadership will strongly influence how you *practise* leadership".

5.2.2 Leadership without the title

Several teachers in this study were challenged by the idea of practising leadership when they did not hold a formal, leadership role. This contrasts with the belief expressed by all participants that leadership was an expectation of all teachers, and the requirement to show leadership in meeting the Standards of the Teaching Profession (Education Council, 2017), as discussed in the literature

review. This suggests that while teachers acknowledged these expectations, in actuality teacher leadership was less likely to be recognised.

Teachers' view of leadership appeared to be influenced by historical discourses on leadership and terminology, in particular the traditional leadership theories of the single heroic leader and a hierarchy structure that is consistent with the literature (Hard, 2006; Sims et al., 2015). Their understanding of leadership was centred on its association with formal positional leadership and the subsequent authority, suggesting that leadership would only be exhibited by those with a formal position and title.

The positional leaders in the Hoiho and Kororā services had also observed teachers feeling challenged by the idea of leadership not connected to positional leadership. The Tawaki positional leader did not express the same view, possibly as a result of Tawaki being the smallest service in this study, where the positional leader taught alongside the teachers daily. It is worth then considering that in smaller ECE services where positional leaders are teaching daily and there is a flatter structure, there may be greater opportunities for leaderful practice from all teachers, a similar finding to the research of Thornton (2005).

Grarock and Morrissey (2013) have suggested that staff can accept positional or hierarchical leadership because it is an approach they are familiar with, and which does not disrupt the status quo. If staff view themselves as followers, they are unlikely to seek to participate in distributed leadership. Teachers may feel that they are not in a position to express themselves to the group or challenge a perspective, because they do not have the authority (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013). Similarly, Krieg et al. (2014) stated that if teachers do not believe they hold the 'traits' that define leadership, they can see themselves as unsuitable for leadership and decide not to take on a leadership role. It can then be argued that if teachers' perspectives of their professional identity as a leader comes from holding a formal title of authority and the associated confidence it offers, without the title they are limited in what they believe that can do.

There are also similarities between the perspectives shared by the teachers in this case study and those in the research of Clark (2012) and Hard (2006), who both identified prevailing models of leadership that focus on ideas of authority, as the foundations on which teachers built their understanding of leadership. Hard's research identified that teachers' understandings of leadership were influenced by a complex interaction of factors, in particular the cultural expectations within their context. There was lack of continuity between the concept of team/shared leadership discussed in the literature and the actual practice of leadership happening within the services she studied. My findings differ from Hard's, in that the positional leaders in my study were actively encouraging shared leadership (discussed further below) while it was the teachers' understandings of leadership that connected to a positional view. Clark's research was stimulated by an awareness of teachers' pre-conceptions of leadership, most often referring to the meaning attached to leadership rather than the practice of leadership itself. Clark's participants were experiencing tensions with reconciling their role with their own understanding of leadership, which was based on an assumption of being in charge and directing others.

5.2.3 Lack of leadership awareness

In continuing the theme of identification with leadership, this research also highlighted that teachers were often unaware of their own leadership practice, with the Hoiho teachers the only participants to articulate some of the potential reasons behind this lack of leadership awareness. They suggested that they were given additional responsibilities because of their length of service, rather than as a result of displaying leadership capabilities, appearing reluctant to see their knowledge and expertise as a basis for leadership. Some teachers believed that you must have had experience and been on a journey of professional growth to be competent to show leadership. At both the Hoiho and Kororā services, the positional leaders believed it was teachers' mindset of connecting the terminology of leadership to associations with positional authority, which prevented them from acknowledging their own leadership practices, while there was no evidence of this at Tawaki. The Hoiho positional leaders acknowledged that they did not use leadership language regularly with the teachers, which

could impact on their ability to identify leadership within their own practices. This was supported by the Hoiho teachers, who were uncomfortable with the terms such as leadership or educational leadership, making the connection that these terms signalled positional leadership. Teachers were self-conscious of using the term leadership as they felt it would 'over inflate my capabilities', suggesting a caution of overstepping their place in the leadership hierarchy, with another teacher commenting that a term such as strong colleague would be preferred.

Teachers in this case study did in fact demonstrate many aspects of effective teacher leadership practices by drawing on their expertise and knowledge through coordinating staff members, problem solving and guiding practice. In other work environments, this would be categorised as leadership (Rodd, 2013) . Teachers did not believe that their daily work practices meet the definition of leadership, perhaps due to the difficulty of separating explicit leadership actions from their everyday teaching (Klevering & McNae, 2018).

A catalyst for encouraging a shift in thinking about leadership emerged when all teachers in this case study were asked to reflect on the following definition (as discussed in section 2.5.5) of educational leadership in a focus group:

Educational leadership is the practice of supporting others to make a positive difference to children's and young people's learning. It involves creating and sustaining the conditions known to enhance their learning. It requires the capability to work effectively with colleagues and other adults to support learning and to create new solutions and knowledge together. For those in positional leadership roles it also involves building and sustaining thriving teams and institutions that support ongoing professional learning (Education Council, 2018b, p. 8)

Some teachers began to recognise it was their interpretation of leadership and the notion of positional leadership that was preventing them from acknowledging their own leadership practice. Across all services, teachers spoke of a shift in their thinking in how they defined leadership. The

Hoiho teachers' focus group discussions on leadership described their self-identity, acknowledging that teachers were already leaders, with their teaching duties also representing leadership practices. The Kororā teachers were starting to identify themselves as leaders and recognising that distributed leadership contributed to the sustainable growth of the team. In contrast, the exploration of educational leadership at Tawaki appeared to build from an idea of a supportive workplace culture, which was linked to relational leadership. Teachers in this case study achieved a greater sense of clarity and understanding as they developed an awareness of how they may already be practising leadership within their teaching roles through unpacking the educational leadership definition.

It appears that the previous lack of a clear and practically relevant definition of leadership has contributed to a unwillingness to connect with the role, hindering the ability of the ECE sector to evolve their conceptualisations about leadership (Rodd, 2013) . This issue is often compounded by the use of several different, interrelated terms for leadership in the literature which adds increased complexity to breaking down the barriers for teachers to self-identify with leadership. The interpretation of leadership through traditional masculine models that do not reflect a sector of care and nurture, continue to add to the 'tainted notion' of leadership' (Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013, p. 313). Considering the ECE sector is made up of a majority of female staff, with just 3% male (Education Counts, 2020), a notion of leadership strongly infused with traditional heroic male constructs will continue to jar with leaders and teachers' understanding of leadership. It has been suggested that if teachers had more easily accessible access to professional knowledge on effective ECE leadership, it may support teachers to recognise and foster leadership in their own and colleagues practices (Cooper, 2014).

Teachers in this study began to develop a greater understanding of their own leadership practice as they unpacked what educational leadership looked like in their service. Similarly, Clark (2012) identified that it was necessary for teachers to have the opportunity to reflect on their own roles in leading practice. As teachers engage in collaborative envisioning, breaking down the barriers to what

leadership entails, they begin to reconceptualise the idea of leadership. Clark advocates for continuing to develop new ways of understanding leadership, as it is a social construct that is open to reconstruction and reconfiguration. One study that focused on the experiences of early educators in a leadership programme (Douglass, 2018), found that a redefining of leadership enabled them to identify as leaders. When educators re-conceptualised leadership as collaborative, relational and purpose driven, they could link this notion with their own past and current actions and capabilities. One possibility to support teachers in their identification with leadership is the greater visibility of the concept of teacher leadership, encouraging teachers to consider leadership as linked to their teaching practices and identities. It is suitable for the ECE sector as it acknowledges the relational activities that form the design of many ECE services (Klevering & McNae, 2018). Teacher leadership prioritises teachers' relationships with children, their whānau and other teachers and encompasses an educational focus. The knowledge and expertise teachers bring to these relationships, often gained through university training, and enacted in shared decision making, can affirm their professional identity as leaders also.

5.2.4 Section summary

This case study unveiled a complexity in the ways in which ECE teachers identified with leadership which in turn, challenged teachers to identify with and practise educational leadership. Teachers' understandings of leadership were framed by their personal and professional experiences and they agreed that leadership needed to be relationship based, strength based, distributed, and linked to vision and values. Participants' responses highlighted a tension in the conceptualisation of their own leadership; while they acknowledged that leadership was an expectation of everyone, they also believed that leadership would only be exhibited by those with a formal position and title. Teachers were often unaware of their own leadership practices, viewing their everyday practices as teaching responsibilities, that did not relate to leadership. The introduction and unpacking of an educational leadership definition provided a useful mechanism for teachers to further develop their self-identity as leaders and build an awareness of their existing leadership practices. These findings have shown

there is a need for the ECE sector to continue to explore the meaning of leadership, reconstruct its meaning to one that it is context specific and develop new ways of understanding ECE leadership (Clark, 2012). The Teaching Council's definition of Educational Leadership, as mentioned in section 2.5.5, signals a move in the right direction, as this definition has been defined in consultation with the teaching profession. The definition is centred on the practice of learning while also acknowledging the collaborative way in which ECE teachers work and gives recognition to the importance of positional leadership. In developing new ways of understanding ECE leadership, Denree and Thornton (2017, p. 42) cautioned that "if positional leaders do not establish shared understanding of the ways that leadership operates then the potential of distributed leadership will not be realised". They suggest that developing a shared vision within an ECE service should also include a shared understanding of how leadership operates as this can support leadership development and capacity. Positional leaders have a responsibility to develop organisational structures, such as allocating sufficient time, space and resources, that can create opportunities for teachers to lead (Denree & Thornton, 2017).

5.3. Supportive workplace culture

This section discusses how teachers can be supported to identify as leaders and practise leadership within an ECE service through a supportive workplace culture. Key features of a supportive workplace culture in this study were identified as fostering leadership, distributing leadership, and working collaboratively. A workplace or organisational culture "refers to the norms, beliefs, assumptions and values that shape how people interact and behave in an organisation" (Douglass, 2019, p. 19).

5.3.1 Fostering leadership

While many of the teachers in this research may not have personally identified with leadership, many spoke of their experiences of leadership, viewing a supportive workplace culture as a central

aspect to fostering leadership. All of the positional leaders agreed that in the context of internal evaluation, fostering leadership was also about collectively building teacher's confidence and knowledge in the process. They provided space at meetings so teachers could individually express their ideas, with the intention of teachers ultimately leading the process. Hoiho's positional leaders fostered leadership through shared decision making with the team. At Kororā, this often meant understanding when to take a step back and develop the right conditions of support, so teachers could step forward and develop their own leadership. This also included supporting teachers if they made mistakes and encouraging them to continue to take risks while providing knowledge and resources. Over time, as teachers felt nurtured and not pressured, they could be empowered to take on leadership responsibilities. The positional leaders' role was to provide the right environment for the team to succeed, not providing the success. At Tawaki, the positional leader wanted to inspire newly graduated teachers by showing them how exciting it could be to develop and share leadership capabilities.

All of the teachers acknowledged that leadership was an expectation in their service and was encouraged at any level of contribution. At Hoiho, teachers acknowledged a culture of reflection where everyone was engaged and contributed. As a team, they collectively problem solved to find the best outcome. Kororā's positional leader advocated for the teachers' leadership, where they actively created the team culture and a trusting environment in which they could express themselves honestly. Tawaki teachers spoke of a service culture where everyone was equal, supported and their strengths were valued. They believed this created an honest and fair environment where teachers felt empowered rather than judged and encouraged an interest in leadership as they felt supported and encouraged to share their ideas and contribute. The positional leader discussed the importance of being mindful of the highly emotional environment teachers work in and the importance of learning how to support each other's well-being and sense of belonging. This could involve learning the individual's strengths and weaknesses and building a sense of connection within the team.

In their research on ECE leadership, Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) have suggested that developing leadership capability and capacity is important for the sustainability of the organisation. In this case study, fostering leadership was seen as collectively building teachers' confidence and capability in the process of internal evaluation through an environment of trust and support to empower teachers to lead in the future. This is supported by the findings of another case study (Davitt et al., 2017) which explored how ECE leaders supported the leadership development of both themselves and their teaching team. In their study, these authors emphasised that sustainability of leadership required a "collective approach, underpinned by a culture of trust, respect and care, coupled with ongoing professional learning and development to reflect the importance of growing leadership within the centre team" (p.72). A similar finding is expressed in a school based study (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 61) that noted the importance of "relationships, informal collaboration, trust and collegiality in supporting teachers' leadership development".

All participants in this study constructed their organisational culture in positive and desirable ways which included: providing opportunities for distributed leadership; empowerment; using a strength-based approach; understanding how others learn; vision; mentoring or guidance; having professional relationships; and sharing knowledge and resources. Two features which spoke to the concept of supportive workplace culture most directly were distributed leadership and working collaboratively, which will now be discussed.

5.3.2 Distributed leadership

A significant finding in this case study was that while teachers' perspectives of leadership were linked to positional authority, the formal leaders took a broader view. The leaders actively promoted a distributed perspective, inviting all members of the team to participate by encouraging them to see sharing their ideas and opinions as an expectation, one that will hopefully lead to a greater sense of identification with leadership. These findings highlight that the conceptualisation of leadership within these services was different for the positional leaders, than for the teachers. Positional

leaders appeared to be challenging the traditional models of leadership in favour of an approach that sees influence constantly changing depending on the goal in mind and the expertise and skill available. This difference in conceptualisation provides an opportunity for positional leaders to mentor and guide teachers to view leadership as part of their identity.

Distributed leadership was interpreted by the positional leaders in different ways. At Hoiho, it was centred on mentoring and coaching the head teachers in their responsibilities of supporting their teachers and the programme. At Kororā, it meant empowering the teachers to take a more active role in leading an internal evaluation. While at Tawaki, it was seen as supporting the team to use their skills to show leadership in areas in which they are comfortable, while also challenging them to progress in other areas.

While teachers did not explicitly reference the notion of distributed leadership, it appears their daily practices evidenced distributed leadership. More specifically this process appears to align with “unconstrained distributed leadership”, which Leithwood et al. (2007, p. 46) describe as “the distribution of leadership to whomever has the expertise required for the job, rather than only those in formal leadership roles”. These authors pointed out that this form of distributed leadership not only uses the shared expertise of the individuals, but further builds that expertise. This connects with all of the positional leaders’ intentions of building the teachers’ confidence and capability to lead internal evaluations themselves in the future. This intention supports the findings of an ERO report (2015), where they observed that a distributed leadership approach built capacity for those leading aspects of the internal evaluation. While distributed leadership can be considered suitable to the ECE sector, possibly because it links well with the emphasis on relationships and interdependence of the community within the services (Colmer et al., 2014), it is important to note that teachers must also be given support and opportunities for development of their skills, so they are best placed to meet their leadership responsibilities (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

All leaders in this case study, held designated positional roles, which supports the view of Denree and Thornton (2017) that leadership within New Zealand ECE services is most often positionally aligned, while also being a requirement of all certified teachers. The ways in which this leadership is demonstrated is for the individual teacher to determine. As many positional leaders also engage in teaching with their colleagues while sharing the responsibilities, as evidenced in this study, they formed a more level leadership structure, which can provide opportunities for real time feedback and acknowledgement of leaderful practice by teachers. Positional leaders play a vital role in supporting the distribution of leadership and building the leadership capacity of teachers (Colmer et al., 2014) which can be effectively achieved through “relational trust, mentoring and coaching and creating vision and designing supportive structures” (Denree & Thornton, 2017, p. 40). Positional leaders operating through a distributed leadership approach, have the opportunity to identify and promote the leadership being demonstrated by teachers who do not hold formal leadership positions (Colmer et al., 2015). With that being said, Murphy et al. (2009) caution that positional leaders must be affirmed in their own leadership identification to challenge long standing, traditional beliefs about leadership. Denree and Thornton (2018) have recommended that positional leaders reflect on their own conceptualisations of leadership and seek feedback on their own practice, so they are more informed to promote distributed leadership.

5.3.3 Working collaboratively

Teachers’ perspectives of leadership in this case study frequently referenced the concept of working collaboratively, signalling the importance of being able to work and learn together as a key component of a supportive workplace culture. As participants shared knowledge and resources together, everyone had a voice and the opportunity to contribute, a key feature of distributed leadership. Systems of dependence and empowerment were formed through professional relationships centred around a vision. The observations at all services provided evidence of teachers working collaboratively using shared decision making. Positional leaders would often summarise discussions at staff meetings, with the teachers then agreeing on how to move forward. Another

similarity was the interpretation of working collaboratively and learning together as sharing knowledge gained individually through professional learning and development and through university training.

Participants at the services also interpreted working collaboratively in different ways. The Hoiho teachers would collaborate on tasks by seeking advice and clarifying issues with one another, sharing the curriculum for individual children, focusing on the same topic in different classrooms and working with specialised agencies for children with additional needs. At Kororā, they viewed working collaboratively as a system of support. The team would support each other to take risks, sharing information that was received through individual interactions with whānau, as a team, so they can improve practice jointly. The positional leaders' role was to support the team to do the best job they can, acknowledging that leaders rely on the team. The Tawaki service described a sense of ako in working together by sharing ideas and knowledge, so that they can see different perspectives, while reflecting collectively allowed them to change their focus. To enable this culture everyone had to be engaged and contribute to it. As the team felt connected, there were high levels of trust with each teacher having the opportunity to express themselves and be heard so that everyone feels part of the journey. The positional leader viewed their role as acting as an 'umbrella person', facilitating this shared vision.

There was a consensus amongst participants in this research on the requirement for working collaboratively, findings which support the research of Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) whose participants spoke of a strong desire to work together. The process of working and learning together offered opportunities for sharing pedagogical knowledge amongst other benefits. A culture of collaboration encourages respect, recognition and celebration of individual teachers, empowering them while allowing, to some extent, opportunities for disagreement (Thornton, 2007). This culture provides the time and space for open communication where teachers can freely express their ideas

and opinions, have their views challenged while broadening their perspectives and creating opportunities for shared decision making, leading to greater empowerment for teachers.

While participants in this study valued the opportunity to work collaboratively, other perspectives in the literature suggest that maintaining a collaborative culture needs to be done carefully. It has been suggested that the highly feminised nature of the ECE sector can play a major factor in determining the workplace culture, categorized by a discourse of 'niceness' and a desire for 'sameness' amongst the team (Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013). Leaders and teachers have a critical role in disrupting, rather than perpetuating, these discourses and stereotypes. By recognising the value of differences and using the strengths of individuals within a team, they can positively influence the collaborative culture, as it offers diverse contributions to the effectiveness of the service. Teacher leadership can flourish in collaborative environments with its focus on collective action, empowerment and shared agency, each signalling the ideas of the distributed leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Positional leaders can also influence teachers to take an active role in the leadership, as Thornton (2007, p. 161) states that "leaders who promote and model respectful and collaborative relationships, and provide support and mentoring, encourage their colleagues to become involved in the leadership of the centre". Similarly, Denée and Thornton (2017) discussed the importance of mentoring and coaching, fostering relational trust and creating vision and designing supporting structures as part of the positional leaders role in facilitating distributed leadership.

5.3.4 Section summary

This theme explored how leadership was promoted and encouraged through a culture created and maintained by all members of a team. A culture whereby educational leadership provides the environment or the right conditions for the team to succeed, through fostering leadership, providing opportunities for distributed leadership, and working collaboratively. The practice of shared decision making was frequently highlighted by teachers, as it is a process for building teachers' leadership capabilities through opportunities for increased responsibility and valuing of their contribution.

Effective leaders also play an essential role in establishing this culture which demands an unwavering commitment to a collaborative environment (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). When leaders establish positive working conditions that includes a supportive workplace culture, and support the professional learning and development of staff, they can improve the organisational and leadership capacity of teachers, which in turn lead to higher quality care and education.

5.4. Continuous improvement

As this case study investigated leadership practised through internal evaluation, it was not surprising that all participants in the research discussed the importance of continuous improvement and acknowledged their responsibility to engage in continuous improvement. Participants investigated and researched the agreed focus and shared this information with the team, building their leadership capabilities. Participants defined continuous improvement as not becoming complacent in the learning environment, having a growth mindset, investigating what was actually happening and constantly adapting the programme to improve learning outcomes for children. It also involved debating and negotiating, seeking feedback, assessment, and most importantly evaluating effectiveness.

5.4.1 Reflective thinking

Teachers in all services demonstrated reflective thinking, with participants acknowledging its value as the catalyst to improving their practices and the quality of the programme. At Hoiho, reflective thinking materialised as teachers documented the questions that they were asking themselves, while also discussing their thinking. The positional leaders planned how they could help teachers to unpack their thinking, while also reflecting on their own leadership practices and learning. The leadership team was often observed at staff meetings prompting teachers to reflect more deeply on questions that aligned with their goal of having the teachers 'do most of the thinking'. The Kororā service had identified that the culture already established in their service allowed them to unpack

topics and have conversations which explored deeper meanings behind practices, a process they believed not all services engaged in. They recognised their reflective thinking came from constant observation of what children were doing, their learning and achievements. At Tawaki, reflective thinking encompassed the intentional thought they placed behind changes in procedures and how this would affect other members of their community. They believed that reflecting as a group allowed them to collectively change their focus. The positional leader also advocated for teachers taking the time and space to reflect on their individual thoughts, to avoid undue influence from more dominant members of the team.

While there were different factors influencing teachers' engagement in reflective thinking such as workplace culture or building teacher capability, all teachers were making sense of their experiences in the ECE environment and whether they aligned with or contradicted their previously held beliefs. They were examining their teaching practices and wider pedagogy, whether in the moment as 'reflection in action', or after the fact as 'reflection-on action' (Schön, 1983) such as in the staff meetings, to determine if they were meeting the expected outcomes. Lee (2005) has suggested that reflective thinking can occur as part of a problem-solving exercise or through re-consideration of an educational situation, which is evidenced in the Kororā services' reflective thinking on the assessment and evaluation of children's learning. Reflective thinking can enhance critical thinking (Choy & Oo, 2012) with teachers scrutinizing the assumptions that underly their beliefs, to enhance the quality of their teaching. Reflective thinking can also encourage teachers to think systematically about the learning experiences the children are engaged in and how to improve teaching practices. Effective teachers incorporate metacognition into their practices, engaging in a process of reflection and planning with their colleagues to improve pedagogical practices to enhance children's learning outcomes and continue to increase their effectiveness (Farquhar, 2003).

Discussions on reflective thinking with participants in this case study appeared to favour a collective rather than individual orientation. It is possible that individual teachers did reflect on their personal

teaching practice but felt more comfortable and at less risk of judgement if they articulated reflective thinking as a group exercise. Leadership has an essential role in developing an environment of psychological safety, where members can express themselves openly and promote the shared vision (Matsuo, 2016). Leaders can create an atmosphere of support and respect that will allow teachers to be vulnerable when reflecting on their own teaching practice and desired improvements. This may be achieved through setting the boundaries of the group discussion, evidenced by the Hoiho leadership team as they prompted teachers to reflect more deeply. Additionally, as demonstrated by the Kororā service, it may include drawing on an existing, positive team culture, where the positional leader began meetings with positive introductory talks to set the tone of the discussions.

The responses of the positional leaders at Hoiho and Tawaki also illustrated how they engaged in reflective thinking themselves, while there was no data collected to show this at Kororā. The positional leader at Kororā is still at the beginning of their leadership journey in comparison to the other leaders and may be still developing their reflective practice skills. Effective leaders are reflective practitioners who lead by example in modelling practice and behaviours and influence others (Hallet, 2013), creating a catalyst for change and the motivation for on-going learning and development (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). As noted in the distributed leadership section, positional leaders often teach alongside their colleagues and through this collaborative interaction they can role model reflective practice, engaging teachers in reflective discussions within their classrooms. This practice of leadership also encourages reflection by “triggering thoughtfulness within the self and with others to ponder the meaning of past, current, and future experience to learn how to meet mutual needs and interests” (Raelin, 2016, p. 7). Positional leaders can perform an essential role in ‘triggering thoughtfulness’, by role modelling a deeper exploration of a topic. They have the unique benefit of ‘insider knowledge’ within an ECE service, supporting teachers to see how it may connect to the vision of the service or their teaching practices. As teachers continue to develop their abilities as reflective practitioners and how different areas of practice connect to

the vision of the service, they may also feel competent to lead the change process, growing their professional identity as leaders in the process.

5.4.2 Impact of change on teaching practice

The process of reflective thinking can lead to changes in teaching practice, as part of a cycle of continuous improvement. All the services monitored the impact of changes on teaching practice through observational and anecdotal evidence. Each positional leader commented on the discussions they were engaged in with teachers while teaching, which highlighted new approaches to pedagogy. Leaders also discussed the feedback they received from their community that informed their understanding of the impact of change on teaching practice. This case study has also found that each of the positional leaders were able to articulate the changes that occurred to the process of internal evaluation for their service, showing progression and growth from the previous year.

The Hoiho service's internal evaluation focused on how they could celebrate children's diverse cultures to better support their learning. The leadership team had identified changes to teaching practice involving more authentic utilization of parents' aspirations in programme planning. Teachers invited whānau to contribute more to centre celebrations and there had been a conscious effort to improve their tikanga practices. The leadership team had also initiated a change by incorporating a coaching strategy in supporting the teachers through the process of internal evaluation. They noted the clearest impact from these changes had resulted in more physical engagement from whānau in cultural celebrations. Parents were commenting on how much more included they felt in the centre routines and appreciated their culture being acknowledged and celebrated. The leadership team also observed a connection between the celebrations they offered and the supporting documented learning of the children. They identified teachers showing leadership in the gathering and actioning stages of the internal evaluation, using a collaborative approach in areas of responsibility, and feeding back to the wider team.

The Kororā service's internal evaluation explored their centre philosophy in practice, investigating if there was an adequate balance of care and learning moments for children. They concluded there had not been. The positional leader had identified changes to teaching practice, with their service planning meetings now having a dedicated time to discuss children's learning more in depth. The leaders were also developing new systems for planning in consultation with the other associated services. Teachers were excited about and had created a culture of consistent discussions about learning. They were taking a shared approach to focusing on children's interests in the environmental design, experiences and activities and now had a greater ability to extend children's learning. Through a successful internal evaluation, they had worked on building teachers' capability to lead the next internal evaluation themselves. The positional leader also observed the leadership practices of teachers empowering and supporting one another to follow through on agreed strategies and share their opinions. As a result of participating in this case study, the positional leader of Kororā had started a personal inquiry on shared leadership and empowering kaiako to see themselves as leaders, feeling safe and empowered to take on areas of interest and leadership.

Tawaki service's internal evaluation explored how well they were supporting the transition of new children into the service. The positional leader had identified changes such as teachers having increased opportunities in the decision making of the service, which they facilitated through a strengths-based approach. Teachers were actively informing whānau more on what to expect as part of transitioning into the service, including increased communication on digital platforms. The impact from these changes had resulted in a growing sense of connectedness within their team as they worked collaboratively, resulting in an improved settling in process. In turn, the team recognised the children were more relaxed and settled well into the service. The teachers felt they had stronger relationships with the children, which lead to increased engagement and extension of learning. The feedback received from different whānau, teachers, relieving teachers and senior management had allowed them to measure the changes to practice. Reflecting on their own leadership, the positional leader noted their increased awareness of the importance of relationships, empowering teachers to

be involved in a group exercise, and on their ability to see the big picture of the service. They were also fostering leadership in the teachers by empowering them to utilise the skills, knowledge, and interests they had, and those that they want to build on.

All of the positional leaders in this study had identified changes to their own leadership practice through the process of continuous improvement. They could articulate how these changes were now, or would in the future, build teachers' capabilities and capacity. This highlights how the practise of educational leadership by positional leaders can impact teaching practice. Similarly, one study which explored what led to positive changes in teaching practices in schools (Maughan et al., 2012), identified leadership as driving positive change through three practices: strategic, using vision and high expectations, operational, creating the right conditions and culture, and distributive, sharing the responsibilities across the organisation. It has been suggested that leadership is one of the most important drivers of quality improvement as it can create positive and supportive workplace conditions (Douglass, 2019), impacting indirectly through the leader's influence on the teachers (Douglass, 2018), but also through the leaders' focus on curriculum and pedagogy (Daniëls et al., 2019). Educational leadership can improve the quality of pedagogical practice directly through intervention into teachers' practices or through creating conditions that do so indirectly (Elmore, 2000).

5.4.3 Section summary

This theme investigated how a cycle of continuous improvement supported services to monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice made as a result of an internal evaluation. Engaging in continuous improvement was seen as having a growth mindset, investigating what was happening, and adapting the programme to improve the learning outcomes for children. Reflective thinking was a central component of the cycle as it provided the catalyst to improving teaching practices. Leadership can play a critical role in encouraging reflective thinking within teams by creating a conducive environment for reflection and feedback. Future research into the extent of reflective

thinking as an individual within an ECE environment, could add further nuance to the cycle of continuous improvement. In reviewing the impact of change on teaching practice, it was possible to view the *changes* to teaching practice that were introduced, the identifiable impacts from these changes to the practice and the evidence of leadership practices occurring within the teaching team.

5.5. Leadership practices in internal evaluation

The previous sections of this chapter have explored why teachers do not identify with leadership or view themselves as leaders; how can teachers be supported to identify with and practise leadership; and how a cycle of improvement can positively influence teaching practice. I will now discuss what leadership practices were identified in this research. This study has identified distinct leadership practices, that will contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of how leadership is practised through internal evaluation, while also adding to the limited literature available.

This theme discusses the tangible practices used by participants to achieve their agreed goals during this case study. Some of these practices were embedded as part of the team culture and occurred naturally, while others were actively selected at opportune times to move the process forward. Participants constructed these practices as largely positive experiences, practices they had showed or experienced through others. As L-A-P is centred around the practices of leadership, rather than the behaviours or traits of an individual, these practices were expressed by and observed in almost all of the participants. These practices highlights how leadership “emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experiences” (Raelin, 2016, p.3)

The seven practices identified in this research provide greater insight into how educational leadership is practised in New Zealand ECE services through internal evaluation: *relational leadership; creating the conditions for teamwork; engagement; knowledge expertise and sharing opinions; shared decision making; facilitating and guiding; and accountability and organisation.*

5.5.1 Relational leadership

Throughout the research, all services spoke of the importance of relationships to their teaching and leadership practices. Building relationships and forming connections with whānau and teachers was seen as integral to their success. The Hoiho leadership team acknowledged the relationships the teachers built and maintained with whānau, which supported teachers' knowledge of individual children. Teachers made a conscious effort to sensitively learn about the values and beliefs of the whānau and then worked collaboratively with them to support their child's learning. The Kororā teachers similarly advocated for building relationships with whānau, encouraging their involvement and contribution to the service. As teachers learnt more about each child's whānau, they were better placed to incorporate more of their values into the programme, but also to draw on their skills to support the programme. The feedback they received supported them to keep improving and adapting their practices. At Tawaki, good relationships were central to the effective service operation and was seen as a positive leadership strategy. Alongside relationships with whānau, they discussed the relationships with colleagues, working in partnership together. The positional leader advocated for being mindful of who you are working with and why you are doing it, so you are focused on the most effective outcome.

It has been suggested that relationships with staff members create an opportunity for pedagogical leaders to improve overall service quality (Sims et al., 2015). Through these relationships, teachers' strengths and interests can be identified and used to build their capability. Empowering teachers can ensure they feel invested in, through their positional leader showing an interest in developing their practice and in turn, supporting them to feel engaged. Team members who are encouraged to utilise their own strengths are yielded greater agency and motivation (Clarkin-Phillips, 2009). Stamopoulos (2012, p. 46) stated "interpersonal relationships are integral to leadership effectiveness because they entice followers to contribute to the change process. Motivation and empowerment, team leadership, and strong communication skills become the basis on which relationships are built". This suggests that relational leadership can positively impact the pedagogical practice within a service.

Relational leadership can be considered relevant to the ECE context because of the collaborative and interdependent relationships that occur naturally as part of the structure of the working environments. Klevering and McNae's study (2018) of ECE services, as discussed in 2.5.7, noted that effective leaders maintained strong and trusting relationships, with ECE leadership being seen as an inclusive practice wherein everyone could lead. Relational leadership is not constrained by the ideas of hierarchal structures of an organisation, but rather it occurs through the relational dynamics of the organisation (Uhl-Bien, 2006), allowing it to be viewed as relational, everyday practice.

5.5.2 Creating the conditions for teamwork

All participants spoke of creating a trusting environment where teachers could be vulnerable and honest and where everyone was encouraged to share their ideas in a respectful way. In this environment, teachers could have a healthy debate and hear multiple perspectives, break down the issues without judgement, articulate the change they want to see and support the team to see that change.

The Kororā service created an environment at team meetings where teachers could come together and use their shared knowledge to create solutions. The team actively created the environment by developing a safe space where they trusted one another enough to express themselves freely, approach ideas, have a healthy debate free from judgement, see multiple perspectives and fully participate. Teachers strengthened their relationships with one another the more they engaged together. The positional leader viewed their role as nurturing this environment, rather than providing solutions. The Hoiho leadership team viewed teamwork as a collaborative opportunity to unpack topics together, making time for vital conversations. They wanted to involve the team more in terms of their thinking and providing genuine opportunities for increased responsibility. The leadership team used coaching and mentoring strategies to create teamwork. They also held smaller sub meetings to slow down the process and encourage the connections between individual teacher inquiries and the broader internal evaluation process. While at Tawaki, teachers reflected on being

supported to contribute and being listened to in a safe environment, with opportunities to contribute to the bigger picture. Concerns were raised quickly and talked about openly, building trust within the team. The positional leader was promoting distributed leadership as a means of supporting teamwork, by each team member assigning tasks to one another based on their interests and strengths.

The leadership practice of creating the conditions for teamwork, held many similarities with the features identified in the earlier section of a supportive workplace culture, in particular working collaboratively. These similarities highlight the essential role both leaders and teachers play in designing an effective working environment for everyone. Dunbar (2016, p. 134) writing about higher education leadership, identified “being able to listen well, being considerate of others and showing benevolence, having integrity, accepting of constructive criticism and humble enough to admit mistakes, seeing progress and success as a team effort”, as dispositions of successful leadership. Conversely, Hackman (2013) stated that in effective teams, it is the responsibility of the team, rather than the leader, for reaching the final outcome. Leaders do not make teams perform well, rather it is the enabling conditions that when in place, has the greatest impact on their effectiveness, which included: a real team (a group of people with boundaries, interdependence, and moderate stability of membership over time); compelling direction; enabling structure; supportive context; and competent coaching. The findings of my study suggest that teachers place a high importance on having a trusting work environment. The positional leader has a crucial role in developing the right conditions for a team to work together and thrive, while the teaching team, through their respectful interactions, maintains this environment.

5.5.3 Engagement

Engagement can be described as supporting the team to become involved, and maintain that involvement, by suggesting meaningful topics for investigation and ensuring the process is accessible and relevant for everyone. Positional leaders need to consider both group and individual

preferences when choosing a relevant topic to ensure the support from the full team to enact the vision.

At Hoiho, it was essential for positional leaders to understand the different styles of learners, and their level of comfort with the process in fostering engagement. The positional leader needed to have a strong understanding of the purpose of the internal evaluation in order to engage others in it. For Kororā, engaging others centred on choosing a relevant and meaningful topic. The positional leader needed to be able to determine when a task could be casually approached or when it needed a more detailed exploration. The Tawaki positional leader made an active decision to make the process of internal evaluation more engaging and interesting for teachers. They drew on their own experiences in a teaching role when they felt disengaged, demonstrating empathy with the challenges teachers faced. The positional leader had implemented additional breaks into the working day to allow teachers to rest and reflect before moving into inquiry work. The teachers identified that the passion they held for teaching and the culture of reflection inspired greater engagement.

The leadership practice of engagement required responding positively to the needs of the teachers and building the trust necessary to collaboratively work towards improved teaching practices. This practice of engagement needed to be flexible to suit the varied skills of the teachers, and leaders need to understand the individual capabilities and preferences of those within their teams. Sands (2019) recommended focusing on children's interests to begin an internal evaluation. Teachers want to be engaged with the process, as exploring children's interests is where the teachers' passion comes from. It needs to be something that captures the team's imagination so it can be explored deeply and enthusiastically.

5.5.4 Knowledge expertise and sharing opinions

All teachers held the view that positional leaders needed to be confident in their own knowledge to support teacher' development and understanding. This knowledge needed to be communicated in a

clear and consistent way, so that questions or concerns could be satisfactorily answered. Teachers also shared their knowledge, gained from participating in professional learning and development. Regardless of position or experience, teachers were encouraged to share their opinions and ideas that would ideally generate a discussion and offer alternative perspectives for everyone to consider.

The Hoiho teachers drew on the knowledge and expertise available in a mentoring programme, while also sharing their knowledge with the mentor. Teachers built their knowledge by researching topics and sharing information with colleagues who might be inspired by the content. The leadership team recognised the importance of being intentional during spontaneous conversations with teachers, as it often was an opportunity for teachers to express their opinions. At Kororā, they similarly appreciated the value in utilizing the knowledge of all team members, not just those in leadership roles, such as experienced teachers. Enhancing their knowledge could also include revisiting previous experiences of supporting individual children's behaviour and applying that knowledge to new contexts. Teachers recognised that if they were facing time constraints, they had a responsibility to ensure their opinion was shared as part of a group discussion. Sharing opinions and offering another perspective was seen as a learning process, rather than an opportunity to dominate a conversation. Teachers needed to be willing to raise topics for discussion, negotiate and problem solve together while being prepared to be challenged on their views, with the potential of a debate or difference of opinion and an acceptance of others' viewpoints. Tawaki teachers saw accessing and generating expertise knowledge as strongly connected to the varied perspectives different people brought, such as through working together and sharing ideas, engaging with relieving teachers, working short term in other services, and utilizing learning stories from other services. Knowledge expertise was also promoted through the concept of tuakana teina, by bringing together teachers where one person has a more developed knowledge on a topic, who can then share their knowledge with others. The positional leader at Tawaki also acknowledged their responsibility, as a formal leader, to bring ideas to the group.

The leadership practice of knowledge expertise and sharing opinions connects with the previous practices of relational leadership and creating the conditions of teamwork through its focus on communication. This is supported by the findings of a case study (Davitt & Ryder, 2018) which examined the dispositions of ECE leaders, identifying being a communicator and a critical friend as key leadership components. In this research, being a communicator was acknowledged as modelling clear communication, “through enacting and promoting clear communication the designated leaders developed a team who could think for themselves and were, at the same time, highly reflective” (p.27) and offering supportive communication, “the need for the team to feel supported and know that the designated leader was there to listen and offer suggestions when required” (Davitt & Ryder, 2018, p.28). While being a critical friend meant “a willingness to challenge others and to be challenged and building a positive, strong team through honest and straight talking” (Davitt & Ryder, 2018, p. 27). My study is suggesting that the positional leader plays a key role in supporting the communication and knowledge sharing between the team in two ways. First, in sharing their own expertise and opinions they can stimulate discussions, while secondly, fostering leadership in teachers by role modelling effective communication strategies in a responsible way as part of a group. These leadership practices can empower the teachers to show autonomy and promote problem solving conversations.

5.5.5 Shared decision making

The participants on the whole demonstrated through their responses, a necessity for leadership practices that supported shared agreement. Teachers indicated that an agreement on decisions during internal evaluations needed to be supported by everyone, so that it could be sustainable and effective. The positional leaders actively encouraged professional autonomy in teachers in this shared decision-making process. Hoiho teachers recognised that their decision making occurred through a collaborative approach rather than a top-down instruction, as they worked and learnt together. The Kororā teachers understood that they needed to be in agreement about the changes the team wanted to make, to ensure the decisions were achievable, effective, and sustainable.

Teachers acknowledged that through the decision-making processes they were expressing their leadership also. At Tawaki, their team culture of collaboration, ako and shared responsibility facilitated their shared decision making.

Teachers can experience positive benefits from shared decision making such as improved morale, support, communication skills, efficiency and productivity (Pashiardis, 1994), while the organisation can achieve trust and commitment to its goals from meaningful participation in decision making (Bloom, 1995). Pashiardis (1994), alongside Clarkin-Phillips (2009) believe that collaboration and shared decision making can also lead to feelings of empowerment for the teachers involved as they are able to contribute their expertise and appreciate the value of their contribution. These benefits have the potential to foster the leadership development of ECE teachers, as shared decision making was one of six characteristics of distributed leadership identified in the case study of Clarkin-Phillips (2009). According to Pashiardis (1994), leaders also have a responsibility to ensure the effective participation of teachers in decision making, as for those experiencing shared decision making for the first time, it may feel threatening. Leaders have an important role in ensuring teachers feel comfortable by providing an open, trusting environment and promoting the message that the process is designed to improve the school's needs, such as their mission and goals, through working collaboratively. My study suggests the practice of shared decision making, seen as a collaborative approach with facilitation from the positional leader, can build leadership capacity as teachers are aware of decisions needing to be achievable, effective, and sustainable.

5.5.6 Facilitating and guiding

Leadership practices relating to facilitating and guiding were further unpacked to include delegation, patience, respecting the learning process, maintaining the services kaupapa, developing confidence and accessibility. Teachers across the three services held different views on whose responsibility it was to facilitate and guide the team.

Hoiho's leadership team had recently employed a new strategy of coaching to support the team as a means of facilitating and guiding. Teachers on the other hand viewed this practice as leaders having an open-door policy where teachers could work through their different levels of understanding. The Kororā teachers had contrasting views on the necessity for facilitation and guidance, as some believed that in the emotional stages of reflecting on their practice, distributed leadership was not as effective and preferred the positional leader to facilitate the process. They acknowledged how the positional leader would set the tone of the meeting with positive introductory talks. While others felt that the facilitation should be viewed cautiously as teachers needed to take ownership for their roles. The positional leader viewed their role in facilitating and guiding as supporting teachers to build their knowledge and gain their confidence, so that they could then lead the process themselves in the future. In contrast, the Tawaki service viewed facilitating and guidance as a group effort, as leaders were still learning themselves, they need to be honest in their capabilities. Teachers with a thorough understanding of their own professional teaching identity could then support their peers.

The leadership practice of facilitating and guiding in this case study highlighted perspectives that were unique to their ECE context, having a strong emphasis on the development of knowledge, an awareness of the learning process and a necessity for leadership that embodied values of care and sensitivity. These findings hold similarities with other studies, for example one study which explored teacher leadership (Allen & Blythe, 2018) acknowledged facilitation as a core function. Exploring facilitation through a lens of aesthetic leadership, the authors identified four dimensions of facilitation: affective awareness, embodied knowing, responsive design, and authentic engagement. All of these dimensions, which may overlap, contribute to how the facilitator supports the learning of the group and allows a balance of leading the experience while also allowing the teachers to lead the group. The findings from my study have emphasised that teachers are aware of the purpose of facilitation and guidance within their service, with leaders seeing their responsibility as taking a supportive role over an instructive one. However, teachers' differing opinions on the extent to which

facilitation and guidance is required, is of interest, and suggests that this leadership practice should be considered carefully alongside the needs and abilities of an individual teacher, rather than applied to all of the team.

5.5.7 Accountability and Organisation

Similar to the previous leadership practice of facilitating and guiding, teachers across the three services had different views on whose responsibility the accountability and organisation of the internal evaluation process was. However, teachers viewed clear guidance, listening to all ideas, and extracting the most relevant and achievable, big picture thinking, revisiting conversations, providing frameworks and being prepared, as the responsibility of the positional leader.

The Hoiho teachers identified making a contribution to the process as a form of leadership, as they indicated that they were taking responsibility. The positional leader would initiate meaningful and reflective conversations during teaching moments to uncover where teachers were in the process. They were accountable for always keeping the internal evaluation on meeting agendas. The leadership team identified their responsibilities as ensuring teachers were focused, reflecting on the relevant topics, and gathering evidence. They had identified an increasing involvement of teachers, towards the end of this case study, in partnering together to take responsibility and being proactive. The Kororā teachers believed everyone had a leadership role in implementing the agreed upon strategies. Teachers were responsible for expressing themselves if they were facing any challenges and the positional leader could then hold a group discussion. Teachers viewed the positional leader as responsible for ensuring tasks were completed and revisiting internal evaluation topics at meetings. The positional leader viewed their role as encouraging teachers to use the framework and then answering their questions. They observed teachers trying to empower and support others to follow through on the process. The Tawaki teachers viewed accountability and organisation as the positional leader's responsibility as they should maintain the focus at meetings, see the bigger picture, offer clear guidance while listening to all contributions and extract the most effective and

sustainable ideas to progress with. The positional leader themselves acknowledged their requirement to empower others to be involved in a group exercise and contribute their own ideas.

The findings related to this leadership practice highlighted a reluctance, in part, by teachers to assume accountability as part of the internal evaluation process. It could be suggested that this relates to their perspective of the historical discourses of leadership, whereby the positional leader holds power and control and is responsible for accountability measures. Within New Zealand ECE services there is a strong accountability culture, influenced by the governing regulations, and in exploring the differing teacher's perspectives on the responsibility for accountability, it could be suggested that the positional leaders do not require teachers to uphold this same accountability culture.

The leadership practice of accountability and organisation can be demonstrated by any teacher regardless of position or formal title. Through their behaviour and decision making, they can set the standards for quality leadership practice. In contrast to the concept of collective responsibility, another perspective is individual responsibility. Kivunja (2015) poses a challenge for teachers to take individual accountability for their service, with the leader's role as setting the expectation that teachers have an individual responsibility for the performance of the tasks and achievement of agreed goals. Teachers recognise this responsibility to contribute to the agreed strategies because they have something valuable to offer (Kivunja, 2015). One suggestion for supporting the leadership practice of accountability and organisation, draws on the four responsibilities framework, Ngā takohanga e wha, developed by Te Kōpae Piripono. It is centred on the belief that all members of an ECE community are leaders in their own right already, which reflects that by *having*, and *sharing* responsibility, you can be supported to *take* responsibility and then, *be* responsible (Tamati, et al., 2008, p.27).

5.5.8 Section summary

In exploring leadership practices, it can be helpful to consider practice as a “coordinative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome... encompassing routines as well as problem-solving or coping skills, often tacit, that are shared by a community” (Raelin, 2016, p.125). The seven practices identified in this research provide greater insight into how educational leadership is practised in New Zealand ECE services through internal evaluation (relational leadership; creating the conditions for teamwork; engagement; knowledge expertise and sharing opinions; shared decision making; facilitating and guiding; and accountability and organisation). These practices acknowledge relationships as a core value that enables contribution to any process through scaffolding a trusting and supportive environment within the ECE service, while engaging the community and working towards the service vision. Having discipline relevant knowledge that is communicated effectively while sharing opinions, can generate robust discussions and offer different perspectives. These practices require opportunities for the identification and co-construction of shared objectives and decisions, while facilitating and guiding each member with different levels of support. The practices encompass the role modelling of accountability and organisation of the process required for the implementation of the strategies agreed upon.

Connections to indicators

I have drawn on the recent indicators of quality for effective practice from ERO (2020b, p.16) , *Whakangungu Ngaio- Collaborative Professional Learning And Development Builds Knowledge And Capability*, to emphasise the necessary conditions that contribute to quality ECE and positive learning outcomes for all children (See Appendix G for indicators of quality and examples of effective practice). As outlined in Table 7. below, these indicators of quality practice align with the identified leadership practices in internal evaluation processes from this study, highlighting how educational leadership builds professional capability and capacity.

Table 7. Indicators of Quality Practice related to Leadership practices in internal evaluation

Process Indicator: <i>Whakangungu Ngaio- Collaborative professional learning and development builds knowledge and capability</i>	Leadership practices in internal evaluation
2.1 Children’s learning and development is supported by leaders and kaiako, and others with culturally relevant knowledge and expertise;	Relational Leadership Knowledge expertise and sharing opinions
2.2 Leaders and kaiako work collaboratively to develop the professional knowledge and expertise to design and implement a responsive and rich curriculum for all children;	Relational Leadership Knowledge expertise and sharing opinions Shared decision making Facilitating and guiding Accountability and organisation
2.3 Children’s learning is enhanced through leaders and kaiako engaging in professional learning and development opportunities that contribute to ongoing and sustained improvement and;	Relational Leadership Creating the conditions for teamwork Engagement Knowledge expertise and sharing opinions Shared decision making Facilitating and guiding Accountability and organisation
2.4 Children’s learning is enhanced through leaders and kaiako working as a professional learning community.	Creating the conditions for teamwork Engagement Knowledge expertise and sharing opinions Shared decision making Facilitating and guiding Accountability and organisation

5.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has brought together the findings from this case study, which employed a single case design with multiple units of analysis, to discuss the four key themes: identification with leadership, supportive workplace culture, continuous improvement, and leadership practices in internal evaluation. I have discussed why teachers do not identify with leadership or view themselves as leaders; how can teachers be supported to identify as leaders and practice leadership; how a cycle of improvement can positively influence teaching practice; and what leadership practices were identified in this research.

There was a notable tension in how participants conceptualised their own leadership when they did not hold a formal, positional leadership role, indicating a lack of awareness of their own leadership practices. A supportive workplace culture, supported by the overlapping ideas of distributed leadership and working collaboratively, can enable teachers to reconceptualise their professional identity as leaders and practise leadership. A cycle of continuous improvement supported services to monitor the impact of change on teaching practice, with reflective thinking playing a central role as it initiated a desire to improve teaching practices. The seven leadership practices identified in this research, relational leadership; creating the conditions for teamwork; engagement; knowledge expertise and sharing opinions; shared decision making; facilitating and guiding and accountability and organisation offer a different perspective on how the practice of leadership occurs in the day-to-day operation of an ECE service. Finally, I have shown how these leadership practices also align with the indicators of quality practice, highlighting how educational leadership builds professional capability and capacity.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This final chapter will summarise the four themes developed through a thematic data analysis of the research findings. This will be followed by an overview of the research question and objectives. The future leadership practices in New Zealand ECE services will then be explored in relation to this research. Consideration is given to the implications of the study for the ECE sector, including recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, limitations of the research are outlined and recommendations for future research are made, concluding with a brief chapter summary.

6.2. Summary of research findings

Utilizing a single case design with multiple units of analysis, the findings from the three ECE services led to the development of four key themes: identification with leadership; supportive workplace culture; continuous improvement; and leadership practices in internal evaluation. The key points of these four themes will now be discussed.

6.2.1 Identification with leadership

This case study unveiled a complexity in the ways in which ECE teachers identified with leadership which in turn, challenged teachers to identify with and practise educational leadership. Teachers' understandings of leadership were framed by their personal and professional experiences and there was agreement that leadership needed to be relationship based, strength based, distributed, and linked to vision and values. Regardless of titles, there was an equality in how they interacted, acknowledging their individual strengths as contributing to the success of the service. The findings highlighted a tension in how participants conceptualised their own leadership. While they acknowledged that leadership was an expectation of everyone, they also believed that leadership would only be exhibited by those with a formal position and title. Teachers were often unaware of their own leadership practices, viewing their everyday practices as teaching responsibilities that did

not relate to leadership. The introduction and unpacking of an educational leadership definition provided a useful mechanism for teachers to further develop their self-identity as leaders and build an awareness of their existing leadership practices. Some teachers began to recognise it was their interpretation of leadership and the notion of positional leadership that was preventing them from acknowledging their own leadership practice.

This study has contributed to the existing knowledge on how teachers conceptualise leadership and has highlighted that there is a continuing challenge for teachers to self-identify as leaders. It has also contributed towards a potential step in expanding teachers understanding of leadership and leadership practices, as emphasised through the focus group discussions, by collaboratively unpacking a definition of educational leadership. When teachers have the opportunity to reconceptualise their knowledge of leadership, they can be empowered to self-identify as leaders and develop their leadership capacity.

6.2.2 Supportive workplace culture

Leadership was promoted and encouraged through a culture created and maintained by all members of a team. Within this culture, educational leadership provides the environment or the right conditions for the team to succeed, through fostering leadership, providing opportunities for distributed leadership, and working collaboratively. Positional leaders were in agreement that in the context of internal evaluation, fostering leadership was about collectively building teacher's confidence and knowledge in the process, with the practice of shared decision making frequently highlighted by teachers. Positional leaders can build teachers' leadership capabilities by providing opportunities for increased responsibility and valuing their contribution. Effective leaders also play an essential role in establishing this culture by modelling a commitment to a collaborative environment. When leaders establish positive working conditions, including workplace culture, and support the professional learning and development of staff, they can improve the organisational and leadership capacity which can develop equitable learning outcomes for children (ERO, 2015) .

This study has contributed towards an increased awareness of the essential role of the positional leader in ECE services, in building and sustaining a supportive workplace culture that fosters leadership. Positional leaders understood and valued the opportunities an internal evaluation process offered them in building teachers leadership capacity through a nurturing and respectful approach. However, it did require the positional leaders to have a strong sense of their own leadership identity and a genuine commitment to collaboration, so that they could step back and create a space for teachers to step forward and practise leadership.

6.2.3 Continuous improvement

A cycle of continuous improvement supported services to monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice made as a result of internal evaluation. Engaging in continuous improvement was seen as having a growth mindset, investigating what was happening, and adapting the programme to improve learning outcomes for children. Reflective thinking was a central component of the cycle as it provided the catalyst to improving teaching practices. Leadership can play a critical role in encouraging reflective thinking within teams by creating a conducive environment for reflection and feedback. In reviewing the impact of change on teaching practice, it was possible to view the changes to teaching practice that were introduced, some of the identifiable impacts from these changes to the practice and the evidence of leadership practices occurring within the teaching team.

This study offers another contribution in expanding the knowledge on how continuous improvement cycles occurs within an ECE service, promoted by an internal evaluation process. It has drawn attention to the importance of skills for reflective thinking, debating, negotiating, seeking feedback, assessment, and most importantly evaluating effectiveness. With that being said, further research and training would be of benefit to positional leaders and teachers alike in effectively monitoring the impact of change on teaching practice.

6.2.4 Leadership practices in internal evaluation

One of the main contributions of this study has been the identification of seven distinct leadership practices. These practices have the potential to contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of how leadership is practised in New Zealand ECE services, while also adding to the limited literature available. These practices reflect the unique context of an ECE service and suggest that leadership can be viewed from a practice perspective, with teachers often unaware they are already displaying effective leadership practices. Some of these practices may occur spontaneously, while others can be selected at opportune times to move the process forward. As L-A-P is centred around the practices of leadership, rather than the behaviours or traits of an individual, these practices were expressed by and observed in almost all of the participants. These practices highlights how leadership “emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experiences” (Raelin, 2016, p.3). The seven practices identified are: relational leadership; creating the conditions for teamwork; engagement; knowledge expertise and sharing opinions; shared decision making; facilitating and guiding; and accountability and organisation.

6.3. Research objectives

Chapter 2 provided a review of the current literature related to this case study and explored the areas of internal evaluation, continuous improvement, and several different approaches to leadership. While there have been several studies examining ECE leadership, this review established a gap in the literature in the area of educational leadership and how it is practised within ECE services through internal evaluation. The objectives and research question of this study will be restated below, and a brief summary offered on the progress in addressing these.

The objectives of this study were to: better understand how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation; explore what challenges or enables teachers to become involved and practise educational leadership through internal evaluation; and to understand how services monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice, made as a result of an internal evaluation.

6.3.1 Understanding how educational leadership is practised

This study has contributed towards a deeper understanding of how educational leadership is practised in New Zealand ECE services through internal evaluation. It has revealed why teachers do not identify with leadership or view themselves as leaders; how can teachers be supported to identify as leaders and practise leadership; and how a cycle of improvement can positively influence teaching practice. In particular, this study has identified seven educational leadership practices: relational leadership; creating the conditions for teamwork; engagement; knowledge expertise and sharing opinions; shared decision making; facilitating and guiding; and accountability and organisation.

6.3.2 What challenges or enables teachers to practise educational leadership

Teachers' level of engagement in the process of internal evaluation highlighted a direct link to the practice of educational leadership. Where there were challenges to engaging in the internal evaluation process, such as a lack of interest in academic processes including writing and navigating confusing terminology, apprehension towards public speaking, or holding a contrasting opinion to the team, teachers were restricted in their ability to practise educational leadership within internal evaluation. These findings contribute towards a new understanding on how teachers engage in both internal evaluation and practice leadership, and an awareness of these barriers may support positional leaders to engage their teams further. Teachers' desire to contribute to the daily operation and decision making of the service encouraged their participation in internal evaluation, which in turn offered opportunities to practise educational leadership. A supportive culture and workplace environment where the teachers could unpack a topic and learn together, was identified as a key strategy in showing leadership throughout the internal evaluation process.

6.3.3 How services monitor the impact of changes on teaching practice

The findings of this case study emphasised that while there was quality pedagogical practice happening in services, the ability to monitor the impact of changes on practice on children's learning

outcomes was less well understood. Positional leaders could articulate the changes that had occurred around teaching practice and the reasons for these changes. However, leaders relied on anecdotal observations and feedback from families rather than measurable outcomes to determine the impact of their changes to teaching practice on children's learning outcomes.

6.3.4 Answering the research question

In what ways does educational leadership practiced through internal evaluation processes build professional capability and capacity, in New Zealand ECE services?

In addressing the main question of this research, this study has highlighted through the seven identified leadership practices, how educational leadership builds professional capability and capacity. These practices acknowledge relationships as a core value that enables contribution to any process through scaffolding a trusting and supportive environment within the ECE service, while engaging the community with a level of dedication towards the service vision. The value placed on relationships connects strongly with the principle of relationships in *Te Whāriki*, recognising that all members of an ECE community (teachers, children, and parents/whānau), can display leadership and contribute towards equitable learning outcomes for all children. Having discipline relevant knowledge that is communicated effectively, while sharing opinions can generate robust discussions and offer different perspectives. Teachers demonstrated many aspects of effective teacher leadership practices by drawing on their expertise and knowledge through coordinating staff members, problem solving and guiding practice. These practices require opportunities for the identification and co-construction of shared objectives and decisions, while facilitating and guiding each member with different levels of support. They encompass the role modelling of accountability and organisation of the process required for the implementation of the strategies agreed upon.

Quality ECE is achieved by teachers having professional knowledge and expertise in curriculum, pedagogy and relevant theories, to teach children from a diversity of cultures and backgrounds, to promote their learning and development (ERO, 2020b). A unique contribution of this research is that

it is one of the first studies to identify a connection between leadership practices in ECE and indicators of quality practice, as outlined in Table 7 in section 5.5.8.

6.4. Future leadership practices in New Zealand ECE

Participants in this case study recognised the lack of guidance and support available within New Zealand for ECE leaders. Some participants commented on the scarcity of ECE specific research, with those that are available relating to models of leadership situated outside of education, such as business and management, that do not always blend well with ECE. Participants who had previously held positional leadership roles and those who currently did, advocated for guidance that needed to include skills for people management and balancing the pedagogical and business needs of a service.

Participants' perspectives on the challenges facing ECE leaders are reflective of considerations already debated in the existing literature (Klevering & McNae, 2018; Krieg et al., 2014; Cooper, 2019; Thornton, 2020), highlighting continuing issues that still need to be addressed. Perspectives of supporting the future of leaders and leadership centred on appropriate and relevant professional learning and development, in particular during the initial teacher training programmes so that leaders would be better prepared (Klevering & McNae, 2018). This perspective is also supported by the research of Thornton (2010, 2020) who highlighted that there is a lack of support for leadership development in New Zealand ECE and that many leaders do not have the opportunity to engage in comprehensive long term programmes that strengthen their leadership practices. Cooper (2014, 2019) indicates that if teachers had access to professional knowledge on effective ECE leadership concepts, it would improve their ability to recognise and nurture leadership within their own and their teams teaching practices. Considering the findings of this research that have highlighted a tension with historical understandings of leadership, future leadership development should include opportunities for teachers to build their leadership capacities through research into leadership history, theory and practice (Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013).

Within a New Zealand ECE context over the past three years, there has been increasing attention on the status of leadership within ECE. The publication of the Leadership Strategy for the Teaching Profession of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Educational Leadership Capabilities Framework (Education Council, 2018a, 2018b) has added to understandings of leadership and its development in the education sector. These publications are designed to progress educational leadership within New Zealand with every teacher, regardless of their position, having the opportunity to develop their own leadership capabilities. The revised *Te Whāriki* curriculum framework (MOE, 2017c), Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession (Education Council, 2017) also signal the intention that leadership is an expectation of all teachers. Most recently, the newly revised ERO indicators of quality for ECE have specifically considered leadership in its process indicator, Kaihautū, Leaders foster collaboration and improvement (ERO, 2020b).

These documents may tentatively suggest a re-conceptualisation of leadership as educational leadership that is focused on the teaching and learning practices. With the sector gravitating towards a distributed approach to leadership (Thornton, 2018), the individual teachers' and positional leaders expression of leadership contributes to enacting this approach effectively. These documents each reflect the importance and requirement of leadership to enable positive learning outcomes for children. It has been well documented that effective educational leadership produces positive effects on the learning outcomes for children and teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009). Therefore appropriate investment is now required to enable the sector to achieve the vision of the Teaching Council's Leadership Strategy, whereby all teachers have the opportunity to develop their own leadership capability educational and achieve equity and excellence for all children (Education Council, 2018b).

While a welcome provision to the arena of leadership awareness and development, these frameworks contain many of recommendations given for a potential leadership development policy for ECE in 2009 (Thornton et al., 2009). The recent 2019-2029 Strategic Plan (MOE, 2019) , includes

the intention to have a dedicated programme to grow the leadership capability of positional leaders, drawing on the work of the Teaching Council's Leadership strategy and framework (Education Council, 2018a, 2018b). This has been the only indication of practical training and guidance offered towards the implementation of these frameworks for the New Zealand sector, with both Cooper (2019) and Thornton (2020) commenting that there needs to be a stronger acknowledgment of leadership and commitment to leadership development by the government, which raises the concern that these initiatives may not be utilised to their full potential.

6.5. Practical recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, I suggest the following recommendations for policy and governance and management.

Policy and Practice:

- The promotion of the professional status and relevance of ECE leadership on par with school leadership.
- A sustained programme of professional learning and development that builds leadership capacities through research into leadership history, theory and practice and teacher leadership.
- A programme of training for services on the effective implementation of internal evaluation, emphasising the link between quality in ECE and a cycle of continuous improvement.

Governance and management within services:

- A comprehensive leadership succession plan that promotes the concept of shared or distributed leadership.
- A programme of professional learning and development for positional leaders and teachers on evaluation capabilities in evaluating the impact of teaching practice of learning outcomes for children.

6.6. Limitations of the research

This study aimed to provide a greater understanding of how educational leadership is practised through internal evaluation in New Zealand ECE services. However, as a small-scale qualitative study, there were some limitations to the research. While the methodological design required several observations, the data collected produced similar, limited findings at each event and as such, the number of observations conducted could have been reduced. The focus groups produced the greatest insights into how educational leadership is understood and practised within services perhaps due to the more relaxed format and supportive collegial environment in which they were conducted. A second focus group session could have provided more detailed understandings in narrower lines of inquiry. Finally, the three participating services in this study did not represent a Māori perspective on leadership, which could have added to a greater understanding of ECE leadership within the bicultural context and ECE curriculum of New Zealand.

6.7. Possibilities for future research

Alongside this study's contribution to knowledge, there are additional directions that future scholars may be interested in exploring further.

- One avenue for future research may include the extent of reflective thinking as an individual within an ECE environment, which could add further nuance to the cycle of continuous improvement.
- Within this study, the findings emphasised that teachers were often unaware of their own leadership practice. Future research into how teachers conceptualise their own leadership practice and what influences these conceptualisations may provide a greater understanding of ECE leadership.
- From a methodological approach, the opportunity to collect data in person either through face-to-face meetings or video call, produced a higher quality data set through more detailed responses. Future researchers may benefit from a similar approach, wherein visual

or audio social clues can be identified, and the researcher can follow up on different lines of inquiry to develop a deeper understanding of the participants perspective.

6.8. Chapter Summary

This concluding chapter began with a brief overview of the research findings, including the four key themes that were developed. This was followed by a discussion on how the objectives and main research question were addressed as part of this study. Future leadership practices in New Zealand ECE services were then discussed, including the more recent attention given to the status of leadership within ECE. The implications of the study for the ECE sector, including recommendations for policy and practice were the focus of the next section, which were followed by the limitations of the research. The chapter ended with a discussion on the possibilities for future research.

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Appendix A Participant Information Sheet



Educational leadership and internal evaluation in New Zealand early childhood services

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS – Individual

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

My name is Christina Egan and I am a Doctoral student in the Doctorate of Education programme at the Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis.

This project aims to examine how educational leadership practiced through internal evaluation processes in New Zealand ECE services, contributes to the improvement of learning outcomes for children.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee: ethics application number 0000027011.

You have been invited to participate because your service is a teacher-led, education and care service located within a large urban area of the North Island. If you agree to take part, I will interview you at your service. I will ask you questions about internal evaluation processes. The interview will take a maximum 20 minutes. I will audio record the interview with your permission and write it up later. You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time before the 30th April 2019. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

This research is confidential*. This means that the researcher named below will be aware of your identity but the research data will be combined and your identity will not

* Confidentiality will be preserved except where you disclose something that causes me to be concerned about a risk of harm to yourself and/or others.

be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your identity might be obvious to others in your community.

Only my supervisor and myself will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on the 1st March 2021.

The information from my research will be used in my Doctorate thesis.

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study before the 31st of March 2019;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview recording;
- receive a copy of your interview transcript;
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact:

Student:

Name: Christina Egan
eganmchri@vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Name: Kate Thornton
Role: Post-graduate programme coordinator
School of Education, Te Puna Akopai,
Faculty of Education,
Phone: 04 463 9776
Kate.thornton@vuw.ac.nz

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convenor: Dr Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

Appendix A Participant Information Sheet



Educational leadership and internal evaluation in New Zealand early childhood services

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS for Focus Groups

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

My name is Christina Egan and I am a Doctoral student in the Doctorate of Education programme at the Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis.

This project aims to examine how educational leadership practiced through internal evaluation processes in New Zealand ECE services, contributes to the improvement of learning outcomes for children.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee: ethics application number 0000027011.

You have been invited to participate because your service is a teacher-led, education and care service located within a large urban area of the North Island. If you agree to take part, you will be part of a focus group at your service. I will ask you and other participants questions about internal evaluation processes. The interview will take a maximum of one hour. I will audio record the interview with your permission and write it up later.

The information shared during the focus group is confidential. That means after the focus group, you may not communicate to anyone, including family members and close friends, any details about the focus group.

You can withdraw from the focus group at any time before the focus group begins.

You can also withdraw while the focus group is in progress. However it will not be possible to withdraw the information you have provided up to that point as it will be part of a discussion with other participants.

This research is confidential*. This means that the researcher named below will be aware of your identity but the research data will be combined and your identity will not be revealed in any reports, presentations, or public documentation. However, you should be aware that in small projects your identity might be obvious to others in your community.

Only my supervisor and myself will read the notes or transcript of the focus group. The focus group transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on 1st March 2021.

The information from my research will be used in my Doctorate thesis.

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the focus group,
- withdraw from the focus group while it is taking part however it will not be possible to withdraw the information you have provided up to that point;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- read over and comment on a written summary of the focus group;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Student:

Name: Christina Egan

eganmchri@vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Name: Kate Thornton

Role: Post-graduate programme coordinator

School of Education, Te Puna Akopai,

Faculty of Education,

Phone: 04 463 9776

Kate.thornton@vuw.ac.nz

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research, you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convenor: Dr Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

* Confidentiality will be preserved except where you disclose something that causes me to be concerned about a risk of harm to yourself and/or others.

Appendix B Consent form



Educational leadership and internal evaluation in New Zealand early childhood services

CONSENT TO **INTERVIEW**

This consent form will be held for 5 years.

Researcher: Christina Egan, School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio recorded interview.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study at any point before the 30th of May 2019, and any information that I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed.
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 1st March 2021.
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Doctorate of Education thesis and/or academic publications and/or presented to conferences.
- My name will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify me.
- I would like a copy of the recording of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____
Name of participant: _____
Date: _____
Contact details: _____

Appendix B Consent form



Educational leadership and internal evaluation in New Zealand early childhood services

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP

This consent form will be held for 5 years.

Researcher: Christina Egan, School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio recorded focus group.

I understand that:

- I acknowledge that I am agreeing to keep the information shared during the focus group confidential. I am aware that after the focus group, I must not communicate to anyone, including family members and close friends, any details about the focus group.
- I can withdraw from the focus group while it is in progress however it will not be possible to withdraw the information I have provided up to that point as it will be part of a discussion with other participants
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 30th April 2021
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Doctorate thesis and/or academic publications and/or presented to conferences.
- My name will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify me.

- I would like a summary of the focus group: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Appendix B Consent form



Educational leadership and internal evaluation in New Zealand early childhood services

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN OBSERVATIONS

This consent form will be held for 5 years.

Researcher: Christina Egan, School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio recorded observation.

I understand that:

- I can withdraw from the observation while it is in progress however it will not be possible to withdraw the information I have provided up to that point as it will be part of a discussion with other participants.
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 30th April 2021
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Doctorate thesis and/or academic publications and/or presented to conferences.
- My name will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify me.
- I would like a summary of the observation: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Appendix B Consent form



Educational leadership and internal evaluation in New Zealand early childhood services

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FOR ORGANISATIONS

This consent form will be held for 5 years.

Researcher: Christina Egan, School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree for my organisation take part in an audio recorded interview, focus group and observations.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw this organisation from this study at any point before the 30th May 2019, however, information provided by members of the organisation in the course of the research will be used in the project
- The identifiable information I have provided will be destroyed on 1st March 2021.
- Any information provided by the participants will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor.
- I understand that the results will be used for a Doctorate of Education thesis and/or academic publications and/or presented to conferences.
 - The name of the organisation will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify the organisation.
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address Yes ☐ No ☐ below.

Signature of representative of organisation: _____

Name of representative of organisation: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Appendix C Interview Questions

Informal questions to begin: How long have you been working here? Have you always worked in ECE?

- How would you describe your current role?
- What do you see as your responsibilities in this role?
- Is there any of those responsibilities that you really like?
- What does internal evaluation mean to you?
- How is IE done in your service?
- In what ways do you see internal evaluation as part of your responsibilities? How do you/ How do you like to participate in internal evaluation?
- How do you see your colleagues participating in internal evaluation?
- What leadership strategies are needed or used in internal evaluation process?
- How do leaders deal with teachers knowledge gaps in internal evaluation?
- What does leadership stand for?
- How would you describe the leadership within your service?
- How effective do you find this leadership approach? How does that make you feel?
- What makes effective leadership?
- Would you be interested in taking on a leadership role in the future? In what ways? Why not?
- What would you like to see happen for leadership in ECE?
- What does educational leadership mean to you? What does that look like?

**Note: Additional follow-up questions may be asked, as appropriate, with each participant.*

Appendix D Focus Group Questions

The Standards for the Teaching Profession= Professional Relationships indicator includes *“Actively contribute, and work collegially, in the pursuit of improving my own and organisational practice, showing leadership, particularly in areas of responsibility”*.

We will use the new, ERO draft indicators of quality for early childhood education; what matters most, as a reflective tool, focusing on Indicator No. 4 Leadership. As there are 5 detailed indicators, we will take one aspect of each indicator to discuss & to hear your perspective on.

1. Leaders: actively seek the perspectives and cultural expertise of parents and whānau and include these in the service’s philosophy, vision, goals and priorities for learning
2. Leaders: establish and promote the organisational conditions that support debate, negotiation, problem solving, and critical reflection on practice.
3. Leaders and kaiako seek and use evidence about the effectiveness of professional learning processes in improving professional practice and children’s outcomes.
4. Leaders: evaluate the effectiveness of the service’s curriculum processes and practices in promoting learning and achieving equitable outcomes.
5. Leaders implement and use systems for evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken to:
 - provide rich curriculum and intentional teaching
 - achieve equitable outcomes for all children
 - enable all children and their whānau to participate in high quality early childhood education.

Questions:

Educational leadership is the practice of supporting others to make a positive difference to children’s and young people’s learning. It involves creating and sustaining the conditions known to enhance their learning. It requires the capability to work effectively with colleagues and other adults to support learning and to create new solutions and knowledge together. For those in positional leadership roles it also involves building and sustaining thriving teams and institutions that support ongoing professional learning.

- What do you think about this definition of educational leadership? Is there an example you could share about have you have practiced educational leadership through your current

internal evaluation? What might be other ways that teachers show educational leadership in internal evaluation?

- How do you feel about internal evaluation's value to your teaching practice? How do you feel about its contribution to learning outcomes for children?
 - Can you share an experience where you used this indicator in your teaching practice?
 - What might limit you in using this indicator in your practice?
 - I'd like to hear your perspective on how you/others have used this Indicator X in the centres' current internal valuation on Y.
-
- Indicator 4.3 asks: evaluate the effectiveness of the service's curriculum processes and practices in promoting learning and achieving equitable outcomes. How do you feel at the conclusion of your internal evaluation, you can see the changes to teaching practice?

Final question:

Reflecting back on this evenings' discussion and all of the conversations, what to you is the most important?

Appendix E Observation Framework

Observational Framework:

Constructing positions and issues,	
Co-construction of responsibilities- for particular tasks and of identities shared by interacting actors.	
scanning —identifying resources, such as information or technology, that can contribute to new or existing programs through simplification or sensemaking;	
signalling —mobilizing and catalysing the attention of others to a program or project through such means as imitating, building on, modifying, ordering, or synthesizing prior or existing elements;	
weaving —creating webs of interaction across existing and new networks by building trust between individuals and units or by creating shared meanings to particular views or cognitive frames;	
stabilizing —offering feedback to converge activity and evaluate effectiveness, leading, in turn, to structural and behavioural changes and learning;	
inviting —encouraging those who have held back to participate through their ideas, their energy, and their humanity;	
unleashing —making sure that everyone who wishes to has had a chance to contribute, without fear of repercussion, even if their contribution might create discrepancy or ambiguity in the face of decision-making convergence; and	

<p>reflecting—triggering thoughtfulness within the self and with others to ponder the meaning of past, current, and future experience to learn how to meet mutual needs and interests.</p>	
<p>Demonstrating an understanding of internal evaluation and its value,</p>	
<p>Being present and intentional,</p>	
<p>Fostering leadership in others-</p>	
<p>Understanding the individual- their knowledge base and capabilities,</p>	

Appendix E Observation Framework

Sample of analytical framework used in Tawaki observation data analysis.

Constructing positions and issues,	<p>50:34-Participant S <i>“But we’ve got on the top here, in the rationale, about supporting parents and knowing the benefits of free play. That will come into it. But yeah I’m hearing you. I get it now”.</i></p> <p>48:30 - Leader L: <i>“I think its when, you know, how what’s happening, is a new parent will come in, and then they have this big conversation with one of us. And we’ve managed to find out a lot more about them, like what country they’re from, they’ve been just in this country for six months. The problems with that is we get all that information, and then the next teachers going and having the same conversation. And then the next teacher is going in, having maybe a little bit different. So, it’s not really getting shared with the team. Too many conversations are being had and the focus is being taking away from children on the floor, because yeah, there’s too much of it”.</i></p>
Co-construction of responsibilities- for particular tasks and of identities shared by interacting actors.	48:30 - Leader L: <i>“Whereas, if we get that information, put it in the communication book, and then we can share on the next team meeting. So everyone knows about that”.</i>
scanning —identifying resources, such as information or technology, that can contribute to new or existing programs through simplification or sensemaking;	17:51- Participant S <i>“Yeah, when they possibly do start, we could send them an email, have just those four policies. Just send it to them, you know, when they formally enrol. So that means they’ve seen it when they are filling out. I mean, if they’ve got questions, they can ask us, but because I think there is a lot of information that needs to be transferred when they first start, I think there’s going to be different levels”.</i>
signalling —mobilizing and catalysing the attention of others to a program or project through such means as imitating, building on, modifying, ordering, or synthesizing prior or existing elements;	
weaving —creating webs of interaction across existing and new networks by building trust between individuals and units or by creating shared meanings to particular views or cognitive frames;	23:44 Leader L- <i>“Do you think it might be a plan if we go through the data, and we share with Participant C and R what we’ve got, so they sort of know what’s there? And then we can categorize it into whether it’s what we’re doing now or whether it’s stuff that we need for the future? Because I think we’ve got it there, but we’ve got it mixed up. Does that make sense?”</i>
stabilizing —offering feedback to converge activity and evaluate effectiveness, leading, in turn, to structural and behavioural changes and learning;	<p>20:30-Participant L <i>“We are just sort of trying to make sense of it at the moment aren’t we? rather than.....we’ve moved on (indicating to the form), we need to go back”.</i></p> <p>1:03:23 - Participant L: <i>“Participant R made a great comment then, that some parents are quite visual. Yeah. So that could be something we write down”.</i></p>

inviting —encouraging those who have held back to participate through their ideas, their energy, and their humanity;	1:11- Leader <i>“Participant L, what we will do to start is, we will share with Participant C and R, what we've done so far, before we move forward on anything else”.</i>
unleashing —making sure that everyone who wishes to has had a chance to contribute, without fear of repercussion, even if their contribution might create discrepancy or ambiguity in the face of decision-making convergence; and	18:42-Participant S <i>“Though, can we give them all of that attention if we've got realistically, 20 x 2year olds, and then 20 x 2year olds and them asking questions? And you trying to remain calm and just.. im throwing it all out there”.</i> 45:50-Participant C- <i>“Sometimes.....ehhh”.</i> -Participant S <i>“Go on”.</i> 46:11 Participant C: <i>“I'm thinking about what's good for the child, sometimes what's good for the child, is not what the parent does, when they're settling in. Do we have ideas or thoughts about how successful things will be, like sometimes when people come and go and stay all the time. And it's inconsistent. And it's not fluid. There's certain procedures..... that so how we...”</i>
reflecting —triggering thoughtfulness within the self and with others to ponder the meaning of past, current, and future experience to learn how to meet mutual needs and interests.	1:00:11 - Leader L: <i>“Is that okay if I write that down? Because I think there might be a bigger kind of a discussion. Yeah”.</i>
Demonstrating an understanding of internal evaluation and its value,	2:03- Leader L: <i>“If we go right from the beginning, the question and the rationale. And we'll just work our way down”.</i>
Being present and intentional ,	
Fostering leadership in others-	1:11- Leader <i>“I'm wondering if Participant C and R you situate yourself next to Participant L and S because they know what to do, to guide you through it”.</i>
Understanding the individual- their knowledge base and capabilities,	

Appendix F Reflexive Research Journal sample

Coding process:

After all of the transcription was complete, I re-read all data and began coding. I then received the 3 last pieces for my data collection and the process needed to be re-started with the data coded and then reviewed again.

I had reviewed a lot of literature around thematic analysis and the process of coding before I began, so I felt prepared to an extent and knowledgeable about what I should be doing.

I found this process achievable and difficult at the same time. While reading the data I was able to create codes to represent it, but I often worried I was using too much of the same codes and could be complacent and only using codes I had already created. I started to read more leadership literature in between coding data sets to ensure I was refreshing my thinking and keeping a 'leadership' lens on what I was coding. I also kept in mind that the data analysis literature I had read before beginning was psychology based, so I attempted to not lean too heavily in that direction.

All data were re-read: As each data set was read, I investigated whether there was something of interest. A code was then applied to 'label' this data. The codes did not emerge from the data as I, as the researcher actively created them. I went through each data set and applied various codes. The first draft created 41 codes. These code names often summarised what the data were about. Some used a more deeper identification of the content.

I then reviewed each code and checked that the data assigned to it was relevant and could be understood if viewed outside of context. During this process I did remove some coding and folded some codes into others. The second draft left 34 codes and the third draft 31, with four of those that may be removed on a further coding process. In the third draft, I spent additional time on one code 'working collaboratively' as it had the largest number of references. I reviewed the code again and noted down potential sub codes such as 'supportive culture'. I recognised all but one of the potential sub codes were already covered in existing codes.

Many of the code names related to terminology often found in leadership literature. This was most likely due to my biases because of my topic of research.

As I began to work on theme development, I was reviewing the codes again to see how they related to individual themes. I realised some of the codes were not clear enough on their own in a way they could add value to the narrative of my research. I changed 4 codes to sub codes (under existing ones) and these provided a more cohesive explanation of the data.

Once I was satisfied with the development of all the themes, I began summarising the data represented by each theme, including appropriate and thought-provoking quotes. This summary would hopefully be useful during the later stage of writing up my findings and the discussion chapter. I had to be pretty strict with myself through this process as it ended up being a very large document (55pages) and I wanted to make sure it was concise but understandable.

In reviewing the data, one challenge was the quality of the data received in a data set that came in late. This was received by email and the only data I collected that didn't come from direct observation or conversation. (This was due to the lockdown restrictions due to the pandemic). I felt that because the participants responded to a set list of questions, the data were limited and structured. I didn't have the opportunity to allow the conversation to flow in other directions if that's what the participant wanted or to encourage them to elaborate more on a particular topic. I feel fortunate that for almost all of the data I could collect, it was through face to face interactions which I hope will add to the quality.

Thinking as I coded the data:

- The majority of participants have a good understanding of internal evaluation with many having a deeper level of understanding about it. All positional leaders had a deeper level of understanding of IE.
- Measuring learning outcomes- there is not as much reflection and assessment put into this section by participants, as there is into the processes and changes they want to make. There appears to be difficulty in articulating what difference observed has been and how children are actually benefiting from it, in terms of their learning. Participants can articulate what changes to practice have happened. The next step would be being able to quantify observable changes to learning outcomes.
- A strong theme was working collaboratively and reflected in almost every data set.

Appendix G Indicators of Quality Practice

Process Indicator: <i>Whakangungu Ngaio- Collaborative professional learning and development builds knowledge and capability</i>	Examples of effective practice
<p>2.1 Children’s learning and development is supported by leaders and kaiako, and others with culturally relevant knowledge and expertise;</p>	<p>Leaders and kaiako:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have developed the cultural competence and expertise to provide a rich, responsive and inclusive curriculum for all children, • are committed to practices that promote success for Māori children such as fostering tuakana teina relationships or groupings, • learn about Māori theories and pedagogies, to assist them to enact culturally responsive practices, • engage with Māori as tangata whenua¹⁵, • value and celebrate Pacific and diverse groups of children and their parents and aiga for who they are and what they bring to the service.
<p>2.2 Leaders and kaiako work collaboratively to develop the professional knowledge and expertise to design and implement a responsive and rich curriculum for all children;</p>	<p>Leaders and kaiako have the professional knowledge, including subject content knowledge, to respond meaningfully to children’s interests and inquiries and to support development of their understandings, working theories and dispositions.</p> <p>Leaders and kaiako work together with children, parents and whānau to design, implement and evaluate a curriculum that is informed by current theories of teaching and learning.</p> <p>Leaders and kaiako can explain how the service’s curriculum is consistent with the principles and strands of Te Whāriki.</p> <p>Leaders and kaiako can explain the rationale and process of reviewing and designing their curriculum which includes, for example, the history, protocols and legends of the local area.</p> <p>Leaders and kaiako demonstrate understanding that, for all children, assessment should promote holistic learning and development.</p> <p>Kaiako practices demonstrate that care is understood to be an integral part of the curriculum, particularly for infants and toddlers</p>
<p>2.3 Children’s learning is enhanced through leaders and kaiako engaging in professional learning and development opportunities that contribute to ongoing and sustained improvement and;</p>	<p>Leaders and kaiako:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take personal responsibility for their own professional learning, • gather, analyse and use evidence of children’s learning and outcomes to improve individual and collective practice, • actively engage in critical reflection, problem solving and collaborative practice,

¹⁵ People of the land (literal), descendants of the first people to settle Aotearoa New Zealand, indigenous people (used of Māori).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subject their teaching practice to ongoing inquiry and evaluation.
2.4 Children's learning is enhanced through leaders and kaiako working as a professional learning community.	<p>Leaders and kaiako have access to professional learning opportunities that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrate theory and practice, • engage and challenge their beliefs and practices, • encourage them to individually and collectively take responsibility for their own professional learning and development, • deepen their understanding of the curriculum and pedagogical and assessment practices, • use evidence of children's progress and learning as a basis for collective inquiry into the effectiveness of teaching practice, • develop professional knowledge and expertise using context-specific approaches informed by research, • include multiple contexts in which to learn and apply new knowledge and discuss with others. <p>Leaders and kaiako inquire into aspects of their practice, asking themselves what works (practical insight) and why (theory); they make evidence-based changes to practice and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of this change.</p> <p>Leaders and kaiako seek opportunities to share their professional knowledge, expertise and practice with the wider professional community.</p>

(Education Review Office, 2020b, p. 16)