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WORK ENVIRONMENT, LEADERSHIP, AND TEACHER RETENTION
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

by

Karen Appel-Drazin

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of

Olivet Nazarene University

School of Graduate and Continuing Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Ethical Leadership

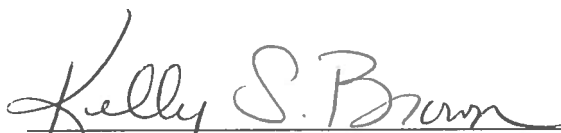
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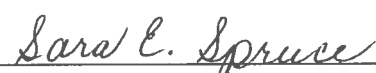
Karen Appel-Drazin

Dissertation



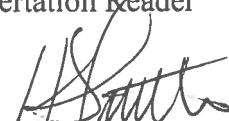
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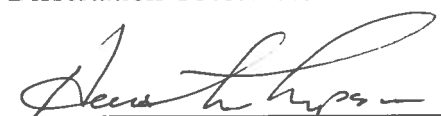
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Sonya Appel, Z”L, of blessed memory whose unconditional support, love, and understanding have most certainly contributed to all I have accomplished. You were a model of strength and unwavering optimism.

To my daughter Ana who inspired me to live my dream and consistently provided me with reassurance, know that I am so grateful. All things really are possible.

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ABSTRACT

The need for quality child care and early childhood education has greatly increased over the last decade. The literature has provided multiple definitions of what constitutes quality care; one key factor was teacher consistency. This study examined the perspectives of leaders and teachers working in early childhood centers about their work environment and the relationship of the environment, including leadership characteristics, to teacher retention. Participants completed the *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* about their perceptions of multiple organizational practices. Analysis of the data revealed that there was a significant relationship between a teacher's perception of supervisor support and their commitment to stay at their current place of employment. Additional results indicated that the early childhood leader has a central role in the overall functioning of the childcare center with supervisor support having a significant relationship to all other dimensions of the work environment. Because of the multifaceted leadership role in early childhood it is suggested that leadership does influence a teacher's retention decision.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The early childhood years, from birth to age 5, is an important period in a young child's life. Studies have shown that the environment and experiences in the first five years of a child's life are critical to cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development. Although genetics provides the base for early child development, environmental factors were found to have an effect on both the structure and functioning of the developing brain. The foundation of development that is created during this growth period was linked to a child's future capabilities and behaviors (Fox, Levitt, & Nelson, 2010; Hanson et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2007). Supporting and investing in young children's growth and development is essential to the success and future of children.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998), the demand for out of home child care has increased. Families are seeking early childhood centers for the education and care of their young children at increasing rates. Due to the importance of the educational experience throughout these early years, attention in the field of early childhood education has focused on the quality of care young children receive in center based childcare.

The long-term benefits of quality early childhood education and care have been studied. Researchers found links between the quality of childcare and the academic and social outcomes for children. The instructional quality of early childcare was found to be associated with children's academic achievement and social development for a year after

completion of a preschool program and participation in a year of kindergarten. Burchinal et al. (2008) determined that the quality of instruction in a pre-kindergarten program predicted positive outcomes in language acquisition, academic, and social performance for one year beyond preschool attendance. Children with special needs also benefit from participation in early childhood programs. Phillips and Meloy (2012) examined the school readiness of children with mid-moderate special needs. The researchers concluded that the children with special needs who had been in a preschool program had substantially higher academic scores and would be ready for kindergarten, more than those children with special needs who had not yet participated in the program. The benefits of attending a quality early childhood program were found to extend into a child's elementary years and beyond (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2009; McCarthy & Morote, 2009).

One of the central factors in defining quality in an early childhood program is the childcare center staffing. State licensing regulations exist that determine basic operating standards. The standards include teacher to child classroom ratios according to children's age and teacher qualifications. Some states set a low standard for licensing regulations that do not reflect current research about the factors that support optimal child development (Illinois Department of Child and Family Services, 1983; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). However, it is the quality of the educational and physical care methods in an early childhood center rather than the structure of the center that supports children's development. The consistency of care with teachers and assistant teachers is one of the most important aspects of providing quality care for young children. Attachment bonds form between young children and their teachers; it is within these trusting relationships that cognitive and social-emotional

development occurs (Commodari, 2013; Maldonado-Carreno & Votruba-Drzal, 2011). The impact of the close relationship that forms between teacher and child can have an effect on later behavioral and social-emotional functioning. Ahnert, Pinquart, and Lamb (2006) found that when children had discontinuous childcare they were less likely to form secure attachments to their caregivers.

One of the central characteristics of any early childhood center is the role of leadership. Of the many responsibilities of any school leader is that of supporting and keeping teachers. The supportive school leader's role has been described as providing guidance, nurturance, and being present throughout the school. Administrative support and the work environment were linked to a teacher's decision to remain at a school (Boyd et al., 2011; Brown & Wynn, 2009). The school leader sets the organizing structure of the work environment. The work environment or organizational climate may influence a teacher's retention decision. Govaerts, Kyndt, Dochy, & Baert (2011) found that appreciation had the most predictive value relating to retention. The authors also found that having procedures in place supported retention.

The effects of the school organizational climate on classroom quality have been studied. Dennis and O'Connor (2013) found a statistically significant association between aspects of the school climate and classroom quality. The researchers also found a stronger relationship between the school organizational climate and classroom quality from teacher's who had more years teaching. The focus of this dissertation was leader practice, the work environment that the leader maintains, and the relationship of the work environment to teacher retention.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher turnover in the field of early childhood education affects the quality of care and education that young children, ages 6 weeks to 5 years old receive. The costs of teacher turnover are high for the children, teachers, and leadership (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). Researchers found that teacher turnover had a negative impact in children's academic achievement and social-emotional development. The impact of teacher turnover was found to be even higher for children with special needs and at-risk factors. According to Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2012) and Guin (2004), teacher turnover had a broad influence that negatively affected elementary school students especially in language arts and math achievement. The researchers also found that the effects of teacher turnover were more harmful in at-risk schools serving academically low-scoring and minority students.

The impact of teacher turnover for leaders and teachers has had both a direct and an indirect impact. The direct costs of turnover related to the high financial expenses for recruiting, hiring, and training each new teacher (Boe, et al., 2008). Leaders and teachers were indirectly affected with an increased workload and decreased morale (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hedge, & Shim, 2011; Guin, 2004).

One of the organizational costs of teacher turnover related to the time required in the hiring and training process. Induction programs and professional development for new teachers are important to reduce disruption of the educational process however, according to Boe, et al. (2008) these training programs need to be individualized by the school leader to be effective and to integrate new teachers with the existing school organization. Other support including mentoring offered by peers was also found to be effective in training new teachers. The number of hours required to develop new teachers

may be quite high (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Another organizational cost is a decline in the morale of the remaining teachers. Guin (2004) found that even in the classrooms of the teachers who stayed in a school there was a negative impact on student achievement which the author attributed to the negative effect of teacher attrition on remaining teachers.

There are indications in the literature that the work environment in an elementary level school influences a teacher's decision to remain or to leave a school. Inadequate leadership has been identified as a factor of the work environment that contributed to teacher turnover. Administrative support was linked to teacher retention. Effective school leadership is essential for teachers. A school leader with high retention rates was found to motivate, encourage, and inform their teachers. Leaders created conditions and resources for professional development and continued learning. Successful leaders had a visible presence in their schools and worked collaboratively with teachers (Boyd et al., 2011; Brown & Wynn, 2009). According to Brown and Wynn, "principal support is essential, whether it be in attitude or actions" (p. 58).

There is limited research about the work environment in early childhood education that examines the work environment, leadership practices, and the relationship to teacher retention. Many studies examined work environment, leadership, and teacher retention in elementary, middle, and high schools. The purpose of this research is to identify effective elements of the work environment and leadership practice that supports teacher retention for early childhood education and care centers, serving children from 6 weeks to 5 years old that could be implemented as a proactive approach to increase teacher retention in order to improve the quality of care for young children.

Background

In January 1907, Maria Montessori, one of the pioneers of early childhood education, opened the first *Casa dei Bambini* or Children's House in Rome, Italy. Montessori separated herself from prior educational beliefs about how young children learn, traditional methods of teaching, and the materials used to teach young children. The norm at the time was for the teacher to be the central focus of the classroom with the children immobile at their desks. The environment of the Children's House contained instructive materials throughout the classrooms and children were free to move about the classroom to interact with the materials. The teacher became the observer and supported the child in their individual explorations (Weinberg, 2009). Montessori wrote, "From the very first I perceived, in all its immensity, the social and pedagogical importance of such institutions" (Montessori, 1912). Montessori schools worldwide continue to use methods that originated in the Children's House (Weinberg). Although the Montessori methodology has changed over time, important foundations in the understanding of how young children learn and quality early education are rooted in Montessori's research.

Another important milestone in childcare was the inception of Head Start Programs in 1965. Head Start Programs were created and funded by the federal government of the United States in order to provide education in an enriched environment, including nutrition and medical services for young children at-risk due to economic factors, ages 3 to 5 years old. In the mid 1960's private tuition-based preschools were operating in most states and only some states had public kindergarten programs (Hale, 2012). Head Start programs delivered a wide range of services that not only provided education, but also included hot nutritious meals, medical, and dental examinations. The purpose of participation in a Head Start program was to "promote

school readiness” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Administration for Children and Families [ACF], n.d., p.1). According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services; Administration for Children and Families (n.d. c) over 1 million young children participate in Head Start programs every year and since the inception of Head Start in 1965 more than 30 million children have participated in Head Start programs.

Head Start was a primary provider of early child education and continues to provide extensive care for young children. In addition to Head Start programs, other public early childhood programs now exist. There has been an expansion in public funding for increased access to programs for young children (Bassok, 2012). Two sources of federal funds are from the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Social Service Block Grants. Both grants provide funds for states to support a variety of programs for children that include childcare (Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, 1990; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. d). According to the United States Census Bureau (2012), the number of children 3 to 5 years old attending public early childhood programs doubled in the past decade, increasing from 1.2 million to 2.7 million children. The total number of children 3 to 5 years old attending all early childhood programs has increased as well. Over the past 30 years the number of children 3 to 5 years old attending both public and private early childhood programs increased from 2 million to 4.8 million children.

There has been an increased effort from the private sector to provide child care. Many of the initiatives include child care located in corporate centers available for employees. Other private initiatives in child care have been provided by non-profit organizations and religious based centers (Goodman, 1995). The structure of early childhood programs include part-day or full-day care. According to the National Center

for Education Statistics (2012), in 2010, 4.8 million children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled in full-day child care and 3.4 million children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled in part-day childcare. The total number of children from birth to 5 years old in 2012 who potentially needed childcare in the United States was over 15 million children (Child Care Aware of America, 2013).

The demand for childcare has greatly increased over the past 40 years (Child Care Aware of America, 2013; United States Census Bureau, 2012). Changes in the structure and function of the family may account for part of this increased need for childcare. A few of the major factors for this trend are an increase in the population of young children, mothers of young children are more likely to work, and an increase in single parenthood (Goodman, 1995). According to Child Care Aware of America (2013), in the United States there were over 30 million working mothers in 2012. With more mothers at work, there are more children enrolled in childcare as the primary care arrangement. Working mothers have become the norm and are no longer the exception in parenting (United States Census Bureau, 2012). The number of single-parent households increased over the past 30 years from 6 million households to 10.5 million households (U. S. Census Bureau).

As childcare became necessary for many families, so did the availability of funds to help families pay for childcare arrangements. In Illinois, for example, the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides financial assistance to low-income and working families to help defray the cost of child care. Teen parents and other parents pursuing education also qualify for assistance with CCAP (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.). Other programs in Illinois include the Child Care Collaboration Program. This program offers assistance to extend the length of care, either a longer day or a longer

school year, to low-income families with parents working, in school, or receiving job training (Child Care Collaboration Program, 2012). Early Head Start Programs for children from birth to 3 years old and Head Start Programs for children 3 to 5 years old offer quality childcare for low-income families through grants to public and private, non-profit and for-profit agencies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. b). Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) programs are also available in public and private organizations. In the public sector UPK programs are available to any child and not related to income eligibility. Other pre-kindergarten programs that are not a UPK but waive tuition are available in many states with admission to the program based on family or child risk factors. These pre-kindergarten programs have the potential to provide a strong base for learning and social-emotional development (Colker, 2008).

Another financial support for families who use childcare is the Child and Dependent Care Credit from the United States federal government. Individuals who are tax payers with children under 13 years old may apply for this tax credit to offset some of the costs of childcare expenses. This credit is based on family income. This tax credit could be up to 35% of the expense of child care (Internal Revenue Service, 2011).

The increase in the number of children attending child care and the provision by many federal, state, and other programs to aid families in need of childcare supports the importance of the focus of this research. High quality childcare and excellence in early childhood education is the goal of many early childhood programs (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d. b). Defining quality in early childhood education is complicated because of the multiple stakeholders' understanding and perception of quality in the classroom. The stakeholders may include: parents, teachers, assistant teachers, directors, children, social service personnel, and policy makers.

Harrist, Thompson, and Norris (2007) studied the multiple stakeholders and their perspectives about the definition of quality childcare. All the participant groups identified communication and rapport, caregiver practices, and caregiver characteristics as key components. Some of the participants identified involvement of the director as an important component in childcare quality. Harrist et al. stated that the director was a key figure in the functioning of a childcare center. The research for this dissertation focused on the perceptions of teachers, assistant teachers, and directors on the work environment which is inclusive of leadership.

The benefits for a child who has attended a quality early childhood education program not only promotes school readiness for the child entering kindergarten, but may support school success through kindergarten and elementary school. Researchers found a statistical significance in language and mathematics outcomes at kindergarten entry that related to the quality rating of childcare (Keys et al., 2013). Positive outcomes were found in children beyond their entry to kindergarten. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; Early Child Care Research Network (2005) studied the effects of quality childcare. The researchers found that children who attended higher quality child care had higher math, vocabulary, and memory skills than those children who attended a lower quality childcare. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found that the children's skills stayed consistent through third grade. Hamre and Pianta (2001) studied young children in childcare and the quality relationships between young children and their teachers. Their research suggested that young children who experienced a quality relationship with their teacher may be predictive of positive academic and behavioral outcomes through elementary school.

The benefits of attending a quality early childhood program for children with at-risk factors has also been studied. Burchinal et al. (2008) studied programs for 4 year olds that served children at-risk for academic failure due to poverty. The authors believed that the early childhood programs needed to be evaluated to determine their effectiveness in supporting the positive academic and social outcomes for the children served. Burchinal et al. found that the quality of classroom instruction was related to positive assessment scores in academic and social development through the end of kindergarten. Dearing, et al. (2009) also studied children at-risk for failure due to poverty. The researchers found that low income was less predictive of school readiness for children who attended a quality early childhood program than for children who had not attended a quality early childhood program.

Children with identified special needs can also benefit from quality early childhood education. Philips and Meloy (2012) examined the school readiness of children with mild-moderate special needs. The authors compared the achievement test scores of children with special needs prior to attending preschool with scores of children with special needs who had completed preschool. The authors also compared the scores of the preschool children with special needs to preschool children without special needs after the completion of the program. The children with special needs who participated in the preschool program had higher academic scores than those who had not yet participated and were ready to attend kindergarten.

An important factor in determining the quality of an early childhood program is the staffing and retention of teachers and assistant teachers. According to the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Report, childcare centers with lower rates of teacher attrition had higher quality ratings. Early childhood centers with high

teacher retention rates provided consistency and continuity of care for young children. Children who experienced predictable, emotionally supportive, and responsive relationships with the consistency and continuity of teachers had better developmental outcomes (Helburn, 1995).

School principals and childcare directors considered teacher turnover a major problem (Guin, 2004; Rolfe, 2005). The challenge for leadership is to retain teachers and build stability of employment in schools and childcare centers. The school leader was found to have an influential role in a teacher's decision to remain at a school and inadequate leadership was identified as a factor that contributed to teacher turnover. Boyd et al. (2011) and Russell, Williams, and Gleason-Gomez (2010) found a relationship between administrative support and an elementary school teacher's decision to remain teaching at a school. Russell et al. also found that teachers who reported their administration was less skilled and less dependable also reported thoughts of leaving their jobs. Brown and Wynn (2009) studied the role of an elementary school principal in teacher retention issues. The researchers found that principals believed their main responsibility was teacher retention and that providing a supportive work environment was crucial in that process.

As important as the classroom environment is for child development, the work environment or organizational climate is important for teacher retention. Govaerts, Kyndt, Dochy, and Baert (2011) studied the work climate and investigated the factors that influence an employee's retention decision. The researchers found that an appreciative approach of managing the work climate had a positive correlation to employee retention. In a school setting, Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) studied characteristics of school climate and relationships. The authors described a

positive school climate as that which supports the social, emotional, academic, and environmental aspects of a school. The authors believed that teacher retention was related to school climate.

Bloom (2005) researched the organizational climate in early childhood settings and described that climate as being “the collective perceptions of staff regarding the overall quality of work life at the center” (p.63). Leadership and supervision were identified as important factors in the early childhood organizational climate. According to Bloom and Bella (2005), “strong leadership is particularly critical because directors are the gatekeepers of quality” (p. 32). Early childhood directors have a complex and multifaceted role in school management. Directors are accountable to many stakeholders and must create, support, and maintain the work processes and environment (Bloom & Bella; Harrist et al., 2007).

The topic of the research for this dissertation was the focus on the early childhood work environment, leadership, and teacher retention. The growing need for childcare, the understanding that quality childcare has produced quality outcomes for children, the importance of consistency of classroom teachers, and the role of leadership were the basis for guiding this study on the work environment and the relationship to teacher retention in early childhood education.

Research Questions

This study was directed by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers’ perceptions of the early childhood work environment relate to teacher retention?
2. What is the relationship between leaders’ perceived level of supervision with the length of time they have worked in the field of early childhood?

3. What is the difference between leaders' and teachers' responses about the quality ratings of the early childhood work environment?

Description of Terms

The following terms were used in this study:

At-risk. At-risk for infants and toddlers refers to a child under the age of 3 who would be vulnerable to a substantial developmental delay if early services were not provided (U. S. Department of Education, n.d. a). Children over the age of 3 were identified at-risk by demographic characteristics and/or the presentation of functional learning, behavioral, or social issues as reported by parents or teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

Clarity. When evaluating a work environment, clarity refers to well defined and communicated policies, procedures, roles, and responsibilities (Bloom, 2010).

Cognitive development. Cognitive development describes the development of mental processes that allow the child to comprehend and participate in events. As cognition develops the child is able to comprehend more complex and abstract information and develops the ability to use the information in multiple ways (Hooper & Umansky, 2009).

Collegiality. Collegiality refers to the cooperative, supportive, and trusting relationships among colleagues (Bloom, 2010, Harrist et al., 2007).

Decision making. Decision making is the skill of choosing between two or more alternatives and is guided by professional knowledge and standards. Decision making in evaluation of the early childhood work environment refers to the amount of independence staff has to make decisions about their classrooms and the early childhood center. (Bloom, 2010).

Director. The director of a childcare center is the leader of the organization. The director has a central position in the childcare center and has a multifaceted role as a leader and manager. Directors are accountable to teachers, parents, policy makers, and other stakeholders; directors frequently serve as the link between groups (Harrist et al., 2007).

Early childhood education. (ECE) Early childhood education refers to programs and opportunities that are intentionally created for young children from birth through age 8. The purpose of early childhood education is to promote practice that provides support for the growth, learning, and optimal development of young children (Holochwost, Demott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009; NAEYC, 2009).

Goal consensus. Goal consensus is the agreement between leaders and teachers about the goals and philosophy for the children and the early childhood center (Bloom, 2010).

Innovativeness. Can adjust or modify a method or style to suit a new or different way; being creative and original to reach goals and solve problems (Bloom, 2010).

Leadership practice. Leadership practice refers to the characteristics and behaviors that school leaders exhibit as they manage and oversee the functioning of a school. The multiple dimensions of leadership practice are an observable set of skills, talents, and abilities (Bloom, 2000; Hard, 2006).

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (NAEYC): NAEYC is a professional organization for educators, administrators, and families that works to promote quality in the field of early childhood education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d. b).

Organizational climate (work environment). Organizational climate refers to the quality and atmosphere of the school environment. The organizational climate is the group experience and perceptions, rather than individual, which are related to relationships, supervision, professional development, instruction, values, and organization (Bloom, 2005; Cohen et al., 2009; Manlove, Vazquez, & Vernon-Feagans, 2008).

Physical setting. The physical setting is the environment of the early childhood center with regard to physical and environmental conditions. In addition the physical setting is inclusive of supplies and materials available (Bloom, 2010).

Professional growth/ professional development. Professional growth is the process of gaining and improving knowledge and skills through multiple means (Bloom, 2010; Ryan et al., 2011).

Quality early childhood education/childcare. Quality childcare ensures that a child's experiences promote development and positive outcomes through developmentally appropriate practice. Best practice is followed by practitioners with the highest benefits for the children served. Aspects of quality include a focus on relationships, curriculum, instruction, and environment. A quality program provides experiences that enhance a child's cognitive and social-emotional development (Burchinal et al., 2008; National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.).

Readiness. Readiness refers to school readiness. School readiness refers to a child's development in cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical domains that would deem a child ready to begin an elementary school level program (Sahin, Sak, & Tuncer, 2013).

Reward system. The reward system refers to the fair treatment of employees regarding salary, benefits, and advancement (Bloom, 2010).

Social-emotional development. Social-emotional development describes the development of emotions and the ability to use the understanding of emotions to engage others. Cognitive development allows children to understand their emotions and the emotions of others (Hooper & Umansky, 2009).

Special needs. Special needs refer to a child with mental retardation, developmental delays (cognitive, physical, communication, social-emotional), hearing, speech, language, or visual impairment, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, or a learning disability (U.S. Department of Education, n.d. a).

Supervisor support. Supervisor support is defined as the extent to which supervisors value the contribution of employees and show concern for their well-being. Supervisor support can be explained further as the manner and degree of support, feedback, motivation, and expectations from leadership to teachers (Bloom, 2010; Harrist et al., 2007; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006).

Task orientation. Task orientation is a focus on the tasks that need to be accomplished through effective and efficient leadership (Bloom, 2010; Harrist et al., 2007).

Teacher turnover. Teacher turnover refers to a teacher leaving their place of employment (Boe, 2008).

Significance of the Study

The need for early childhood education continues to grow, and stable programs led by qualified and informed directors are necessary to ensure quality programming for young children. Directors are needed who have the knowledge to lead, support, and

develop their teaching staff. In order to develop strong directors prepared to meet the challenges of encouraging and managing a positive work environment that supports teacher retention and school stability, the field of early childhood education must recognize the importance of the link between the work environment, leadership, and teacher retention. Important factors of the work environment that teachers and leaders relate to their commitment to stay at their places of employment must be identified.

Early childhood education is a strong and important field that is responsible to guide children, families, and early childhood professionals towards achievement of their full potential. The challenge is even greater today with an increase in the use of standards and the emphasis on school readiness skills that adds even greater pressure of the director to create and maintain a quality early childhood center (Kagan & Neuman, 2003). The early childhood professional community depends on center directors to take charge and make appropriate leadership decisions that will assure the success of their programs. The subject of this dissertation research about leadership, work environment, and teacher retention may provide the information that early childhood professionals need in order to improve teacher retention rates and improve the quality of programming.

A director with a better understanding of their school's work environment and their teacher's perceptions regarding the school's work environment will be able to make better leadership decisions. This study contributes to the understanding of the early childhood work environment as an important area for leadership focus in order to support and retain teachers. Teacher retention and the work environment is the infrastructure of an early childhood program that is necessary for quality early child education and care (Kagan & Neuman, 2003).

Although the sample for this study was small in the scope of the licensed childcare centers in the United States, the perceptions of the teachers and directors may be indicative of a larger population. The findings of this study, particularly the perceptions of the work environment and the relationship to teacher retention have application for the larger population of early childhood education. The field of early childhood education continues to focus on positive change and strategic planning with quality early childhood programs as the goal. Early childhood leadership is challenging; however, supporting and retaining teachers is critical in order to secure the future for our young children.

Process to Accomplish

The research conducted for this study investigated the relationship between the early childhood work environment, leadership, and teacher retention. A quantitative survey method was used for this study in order to identify the perceived factors of the work environment which included factors of leadership that related to teacher retention rates.

The quantitative data were obtained through the *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* (ECWES) (Bloom, 2010). The ECWES is a standardized survey instrument that measures the perceptions regarding the work environment of those who work in the field of early childhood education. The questions included in the ECWES relate to the work environment and organization of an early childhood center and are designed to measure the perceptions of directors, teachers, assistant teachers, support staff, and administrative coordinators. This survey measures 10 dimensions of the early childhood work environment which includes the subscales of Collegiality, Professional Growth, Supervisor Support, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal

Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness. The response format of the ECWES contains checklists and rating scales. In addition to the 10 subscales of the work environment, the ECWES also includes a section of questions with demographic background information, questions regarding the number of years the respondent has worked in the field of early childhood education, the number of years the respondent has worked at their current place of employment, and general work attitudes. The data from the ECWES were examined to identify key factors of the respondent's work environment that related to the respondent's perceptions of a quality early childhood work environment.

The ECWES has statistical reliability and validity. The 10 subscales were tested to determine the distinct differences each measured. The discriminant validity of the subscales was measured and ranged from .33 to .53 on a correlation of the mean of one subscale with the other nine subscales. Test-retest reliability was conducted on a sample of participants in a two month time period. The results for all the 10 subscales ranged from .60 to .89, concluding that the ECWES is a consistent measurement over a two month time frame. The concurrent validity scores were measured against scores from other work environment instruments including: the *Work Environment Scale* (Moos, 1995), the *Hay Group Organizational Climate Survey* (Gordon & Cummins, 1979; Nash, 1983), and the *CFK Climate Audit* (Howard, Howell, & Brainard, 1987). Associations between the ECWES and the other survey instruments ranged from moderate association to high association. The discriminant validity of the ECWES was measured against the *Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey* (Bloom, 2010). According to Bloom, only moderate associations were correlated between the two scales indicating that the two instruments measure different factors of the work environment.

The researcher discussed the use of the ECWES with Paula Jorde Bloom, the author of this instrument. Additional contact was made with other administrators in the research department at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. The survey was made available for a fee to the researcher through the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. Results of this study and a copy of this dissertation were submitted to Bloom and the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership.

This investigation examined the factors of the work environment that related to higher teacher retention rates and perceptions of a quality early childhood environment. Therefore, the researcher sought out early childhood centers that would potentially have higher retention rates and higher quality environments. The quality rating of a childcare center that serves young children, ages 6 weeks to 5 years old may be attributed to the work environment. Early childhood centers with accreditation from NAEYC were labeled as higher quality centers than centers without NAEYC accreditation (Apple, 2006). The researcher chose to survey centers that either had NAEYC accreditation, were in the process of NAEYC accreditation, or were supervised by an agency with other early childhood centers that had NAEYC accreditation.

The researcher reviewed the NAEYC website that posts a national list of all early childhood centers with accreditation (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d. c). The researcher identified those early childhood centers that were located in the chosen geographical area of a major Midwestern city. The researcher used a convenience sample due to the accessibility of the participants. The sample included 150 teachers and assistant teachers and 30 directors and component coordinators from nine childcare centers located in a major Midwestern city. The early childhood centers were not affiliated with the public school system.

The process to administer the survey had four steps. In the first step the researcher contacted and met with the executive director of each supervising agency for the identified early childhood centers in order to present the research topic. Once the researcher had written approval from the executive director and/or board of directors, the second step was to meet with center directors from each agency or from each center to present the research topic and review the timeline for the research. The third step involved the researcher meeting with the teachers and assistant teachers from each center at a staff meeting to present a brief presentation of the research topic, an explanation of the ECWES survey process, and an explanation of informed consent. The participants were made aware that they were volunteers and could withdraw from the research at any time, without penalty, of any kind. In addition, the participants were advised that the data sheets for the survey were anonymous. The fourth part of the process was to administer the ECWES survey. The researcher and director selected a week day during the mid-day hours when most teachers had a break. A private room was available at each location for the directors, component coordinators, teachers, and assistant teachers to take the survey. The teachers who completed the ECWES were willing participants in the study and did not receive any benefits at their centers for their participation. Each respondent needed approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. At the end of the research process, the director of each early childcare center was provided with an individual center summary of responses from the ECWES.

Three research questions were answered using the ECWES:

1. How do teachers' perceptions of the early childhood work environment relate to teacher retention?

Research Question 1 was answered through an analysis of the teachers' responses on the ECWES. The researcher analyzed the teachers' responses to the 10 subscales of the work environment on the ECWES. Descriptive analyses were used to calculate the means for the 10 subscales and other quantitative measures including the length of time in the childcare profession, the length of time working at their current childcare center, and the age of the respondent. Inferential statistics were used to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable of the ratings of the teacher's perceptions of the 10 subscales and the independent variables of length of time in the childcare profession and length of time at the teachers' current childcare center. The first statistical test calculated was the Pearson product moment correlation that was conducted to analyze the relationship of the variables of the scores of the 10 subscale categories and the categories for length of time in the profession and length of time at the childcare facility.

The next statistical test that was conducted provided additional information to answer Research Question 1. A two-way chi-square was used to examine the relationship between the variable of *support and feedback*, from the dimension of Supervisor Support and the variable of *committed to the center* in the Work Attitude section. Respondents marked these sections with a check to indicate an answer of *yes* or left the statement blank to indicate a *no* response. The frequency counts for the variables served as the data for analysis. One other statistical test that was conducted to answer Research Question 1 was a between subjects *t*-test for independent samples using the same variable of *committed to the center* with one group of teachers who reported that they were committed and another group of teachers who reported that they were not committed to their current center as the independent variables. The mean scores of the teachers' perception in each of the 10 dimensions of the ECWES served as the dependent variable.

2. What is the relationship between leaders' perceived level of supervision with the length of time they have worked in the field of early childhood education?

Research Question 2 was answered through an analysis of the directors' responses on the ECWES. The researcher analyzed the directors' responses to the 10 subscales of the work environment on the ECWES. Descriptive analyses were conducted to calculate the means for the 10 subscales and other quantitative measures including the length of time in the childcare profession, the length of time working at their current childcare center, and the age of the respondent. Inferential statistics were used to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable of the ratings of the directors' perceptions of the 10 subscales and the independent variables of the length of time in the childcare profession and the length of time at the directors' current childcare center. The relationship between those identified factors in the 10 subscales and variables of the length of time in the childcare profession and the length of time at the director's current childcare center was then assessed using the Pearson-product moment correlation coefficient.

3. What is the difference between leaders' and teachers' responses about the quality ratings of the early childhood work environment?

Research Question 3 was answered through an analysis of the teachers' and directors' responses on the ECWES. The researcher analyzed both the teachers' and the directors' responses to the 10 subscales of the work environment on the ECWES. Descriptive analyses were conducted to calculate the means of each of the subscales for the teachers and for the directors. Inferential statistics were used to analyze the responses of the respondents to the 10 subscales of the work environment and the relationships between the perceiver (teacher versus director). A between subjects *t*-test was conducted

with employee status, either teacher or director, serving as two levels of an independent variable. The mean scores for each of the 10 subscales served as the dependent variable. The t-test for independent variables was conducted to determine the differences between the levels of the independent variable. The results of the analyses for all 10 dimensions were then compared.

Summary

There is a growing increase in the number of young children attending early childhood education and care centers. A responsibility of childcare professionals is to provide an environment in which young children are able to grow in all developmental domains and demonstrate academic and social-emotional competence. The quality of the classroom and childcare center environments should be the focus for childcare professionals in order to achieve these goals. When directors of childcare centers focus on the 10 dimensions of the early childhood work environment as outlined in the ECWES, they consider collegiality, professional growth, supervisor support, clarity, reward system, decision making, goal consensus, task orientation, physical setting, and innovativeness. By understanding how the work environment influences a teacher's decision to remain teaching at their center, the director might be able to strengthen their workforce which could then support a quality early childhood education and care experience for young children.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The early years for a child, especially from birth to age five, is a critical period of growth and development. The trajectory of a child's physical, cognitive, and emotional growth can be influenced by many variables (Barrett & Holmes, 2001; James & Swain, 2011). The environment in which a child is reared as well as the environment outside of the home is a factor that can impact short term and long term outcomes for children (Hanson et al., 2013). During this early stage an emotional bond to caregivers, parents or others, is established. Having an attachment to another is an additional strong influence that relates to developmental outcomes (Commodari, 2013). Early development, environmental conditions, and relationships with children are topics that are of primary importance for early childhood professionals as we plan, implement, and supervise quality programs.

Brain Development

Brain growth and development in children has been studied in order to understand the various types of brain functions as well as associations between exposure to environmental conditions and brain maturation. Specific regions of brain activation have been associated with different areas of development (James & Swain, 2011; Lewis & Carmody, 2008; Ribordy, Jabes, Lavenex, & Lavenex, 2012). Aspects of self-

development from birth to age 2 ½ were studied by Lewis and Carmody. The researchers believed that when a specific brain region was activated behaviors associated with self-representation would be observable. Lewis and Carmody studied 15 children who had no neurological issues. Each child had magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of three sections of their brain that were associated with self-representational behavior. Each child was also observed in tasks requiring personal pronoun usage, interactive pretend play, and mirror recognition. Lewis and Carmody found that the extent of “brain maturation in a specific region, independent of age, is related to the emergence of children’s self-representation” (p. 1332). The findings from the research of Lewis and Carmody suggested that brain maturation occurs early in a child’s development.

During early childhood, sensory-motor systems also develop in the brain. According to James and Swain (2011), children need to have active contact with objects in order to create neural response patterns. The researchers believed that as typical children participated in active learning the brain would trigger the sensory and the motor systems. James and Swain studied 13 children; the children were randomly put into two groups. One group had active contact with a new object and the other group had a passive or non-interactive session while they observed a researcher using the object. Subsequently, the children had MRIs to acquire information about the brain volume of the children. Through research, James and Swain discovered an increased brain volume for those children who had active contact with the object as compared to those children who had a non-interactive session. James and Swain believed this was an indication that repeated interactive experiences had an effect on a child’s brain, neural response patterns, and subsequently on their cognition.

Spatial memory is another brain function of young children that has been studied. Ribordy et al. (2012) found that by 2 years of age a child has the capacity to form a simple allocentric representation of their environment and from 2 years to 3 ½ years of age a child increases their ability to differentiate and remember different spatial locations with many similarities. This research indicated that brain maturation occurs during early childhood by confirming the “emergence of specific memory processes” (p. 26).

Environmental factors have been studied and related to brain growth and development. Researchers have studied the effects of adverse conditions including children living in poverty and children living in institutions where they were subjected to social and environmental deprivation. According to the research, being raised in an adverse environment may influence brain development (Hanson et al., 2013; McLaughlin, Fox, Zeanah, & Nelson, 2011; Nelson et al., 2007; Noble, Houston, Kan, & Sowell, 2012; Sheridan, Fox, Zeanah, McLaughlin, & Nelson, 2012). Hanson et al. and Noble et al. examined changes in the brain structure of children from 5 months to 4 years old. The researchers believed that children living in low socioeconomic environments had less cognitive stimulation than children not living in poverty. In addition, the researchers believed that the brains of children living in poverty would have differences in structure as compared to children living in middle to high income households by the time the children had reached toddlerhood.

According to Hanson et al. (2013), smaller amounts of grey matter were related to greater social-emotional problems in 3 to 5 year olds. At the start of Hanson’s et al. research, all children had similar amounts of grey matter. Hanson et al. found that as the children aged and had increased amounts of time in their environments, the differences in grey matter widened between children living in poverty and those living with increased

resources. The data from this study suggested that children living in an unenriched environment had reduced brain growth. Noble et al. (2012) found in their research that children from low socioeconomic environments had differences in areas of the brain that were specific in processing language, memory, and socio-emotional behaviors as compared to children from higher socioeconomic households. The data from Hanson et al. and Noble et al. suggested that children living in an unenriched environment had reduced brain growth which could lead to cognitive and socio-emotional issues.

Environmental conditions and the relationship of the environment to the developing brains of children living in institutions were studied by McLaughlin et al. (2011), Nelson et al. (2007), and Sheridan et al. (2012). These researchers studied children who were abandoned at or close to the time of birth by their families and were reared in institutions in Bucharest, Romania. The three studies conducted by McLaughlin et al., Nelson et al., and Sheridan et al. are part of longitudinal research conducted through the Bucharest Early Intervention Project that compared children living in an institution to children who had been living in the institution but were moved into foster care and were living in the community. The deficient conditions in the observed institutional life did not provide sufficient social, emotional, and environmental stimulation. According to the researchers, the deprivation for the children would result in a possible disruption of brain development, an increase in behavioral issues, and developmental delays but that a transition out of the institution into foster care would ameliorate the negative outcomes.

Nelson et al. (2007) studied one group of institutionalized children and another group of children who were institutionalized but had been transferred to foster care and were living with families. The researchers tested both groups of children in cognition,

motor, and behavioral functioning. Nelson et al. found that the children reared in the institution had greatly reduced cognitive function as compared to non-institutionalized children. The children who had been placed in foster care showed gains in intellectual function, and that the younger a child was when placed in foster care the greater the gains.

McLaughlin et al. (2011) and Sheridan et al. (2012) used MRIs and electroencephalograms (EEG) to examine the brains of the same groups of children from the institution in Romania and those children placed in foster care. Sheridan et al. studied the white matter part of the brain; the area of the brain that forms the network for cognitive function. The researchers found deficits in the white matter of children living in the institutions suggesting that those children would have deficits in cognitive functioning. McLaughlin et al. also studied the effects of institutionalization on brain structure and function as compared to children who had been living with foster families. The researchers found evidence of brain growth that they believed was influenced by the caregiving environment; specifically the areas that regulates approach behavior. Those children who remained in the institution showed brain growth deficits while those children who were placed in foster care before they were 2 years old showed that the brain responded to the improved environment through measurable change in brain growth. “These findings add to a growing literature documenting that early deprivation alters brain development” (p. 1013).

Attachment

Caregiving experiences that children have early in life have been linked to development. A young child needs to have an attachment to at least one caregiver in order to be able to develop bonds with other people. Attachment is the deep and stable

emotional connection in the relationship between children and their caregivers.

Caregivers may be parents, guardians, teachers, or others. Children selectively search for this person in stressful times for comfort and security. Secure attachment is different than dependency. When children have a secure attachment to an adult, they have a sense of freedom to be able to leave the side of their caregiver and discover all that is in their environment (Commodari, 2013; Pasco Fearon & Belsky, 2011).

Attachment formation is a “normative event” (Commodari, 2013, p. 123) in typical development and most children form groups of familial and non-familial attachment relationships. The various attachment relationships essentially effect a child’s development. Attachment theory has added to the understanding of the importance of both brain development and the link between early experience and social emotional outcomes. The development of coping behaviors in adolescents who experienced changing personal relationships were studied and were found to be related to the qualities rooted in early childhood attachment experiences (Madigan, Moran, Schuengel, Pederson, & Otten, 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006).

Barrett and Holmes (2001) studied continuity in attachment style and young adults’ perceptions of secure relationships they had with caregivers and peers. The researchers believed that a child who had a supportive and comforting relationship with a caregiver would internalize that model and develop a positive sense of self and trust of others. A child who did not have consistency and positive attention from a caregiver would develop a negative self-image and view others as threatening and unreliable. With consistency from early childhood through adulthood, attachment style should remain stable. Barrett and Holmes studied 161 first year undergraduate college students through responses to questionnaires and interpretation tasks. The researchers found that the

students who reported insecure attachments in relationships were more likely to report unclear social situations as threatening as compared to students who reported secure attachments in relationships. According to Cassidy (1988), a link exists between the self and the child-caregiver for attachment in young children that continues to influence social emotional behaviors through one's lifespan.

Ahnert et al. (2006) and Recchia (2012) studied the impact of the relationship between young children and their non-parental caregivers in a quality childcare setting. Ahnert et al. studied 2,867 children whose ages averaged 29.5 months through data collected from questionnaires and rating scales. The researchers found that children created attachment models that combined both parent and caregiver. Recchia conducted a case study of two boys from infancy to approximately 2 ½ years of age. After six months in the childcare center, both boys demonstrated behavior that indicated secure attachment to their primary caregivers.

The relationship between attachment and specific areas of development has been studied. Commodari (2013) studied 3 to 4 year olds and found a relationship between positive attachment to a teacher and acquisition of language, cognitive capabilities, social competence, and adjustment to preschool as compared to children with poor attachments to preschool teachers. Cassidy (1988), Madigan et al. (2007), and Pasco Fearon and Belsky (2011) focused on social/behavioral outcomes for children. Cassidy found that with secure attachments children could tolerate stress and be secure with exploration as compared to children with weak attachments. Madigan et al. conducted a study about attachment at infancy and behavior at 18 months old. Madigan et al. found that disorganized attachment at infancy was associated with behavior issues at 18 months of age. Pasco Fearon found through the results of a longitudinal study an association

between attachment and children's behavioral issues. The research indicated that insecure and disorganized attachment in early childhood was related to increased behavioral issues in school-aged children.

Children and caregivers have unique strengths and expectations as they build relationships. In a childcare center, children will transition into other classrooms as they age, and the individual caregiver styles may change as well. Only when children had discontinuous care such as teacher turnover were they less likely to form secure attachments with their caregivers. Because children develop close relationships with their primary caregiver in a school setting, attachment theory could provide an important understanding of the basic psychological needs of children in order to support future development and learning (Ahnert et al., 2006; Day, 2010; Recchia, 2012).

Together these studies provide compelling evidence about the importance of the early childhood years from birth to 5 years old. Key findings about brain development provide an understanding of the critical neurological development that occurs during the early years. The cognitive and social emotional foundation for a child is created during this sensitive and important period of growth. Secure attachments that include relationships as well as an environmental context also influence a child's developmental trajectory. With both an increasing number of children in childcare and an increasing amount of time spent in childcare the quality of care and the relationships and interactions between teachers and children are vital to study (Danziger, Ananat, & Browning, 2004; Day, 2010; Hanson et al., 2013; Jeon et al., 2010; Lewis & Carmody, 2008).

The Expansion of Childcare

For many low income families programs such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the recent reauthorization of PRWORA have expanded federal and state expenditures for childcare. The PRWORA had financial assistance attached to the legislation that provided subsidies for center based and home based childcare. The goal of the program was to encourage low income parents, especially single parents to gain employment with the incentive of reduced childcare expenses. Childcare subsidy programs such as the PRWORA increased the demand for childcare, especially for center based childcare as opposed to home based childcare (Danziger et al., 2004; Gennetian, Crosby, Huston, & Lowe, 2004).

In more recent years, other welfare reform policies and programs have encouraged mothers to seek employment. Almost all of the programs greatly increased employment. The success of the policies raised the number of low income parents working outside of the home and increased time children spent in non-maternal care. As more low income parents gained employment there was another large increase in the demand for center based childcare (Chang, Huston, Crosby, & Gennetian, 2007; Crosby, Gennetian, & Huston, 2005; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004). Working parents with young children were found to need childcare, especially low income families in which either both parents worked or were headed by a single parent (Gennetian et al., 2004). Non-maternal care that started during infancy became more typical for many families in the past 25 years (Belsky, 2006).

Families of children with special needs were an additional group of the population that increased the use of center based childcare. Connections were built with childcare resource and referral agencies in order to support families of children with special needs

who needed center based childcare (DeVore & Hanley-Maxwell, 2000). DeVore and Russell (2007) studied a group of families with children who had special needs and were searching for center based childcare. Many families who participated in the research sought the help of leaders in their community to support more inclusive childcare environments. As a result of the collaboration between the community stakeholders and the families, the number of children with special needs who received integrated services in childcare almost doubled, which represented nearly half of the children with special needs in that district.

Considering the increased numbers of children attending childcare and the diverse needs of the children and families in care, childcare researchers have found that non-maternal care experiences may boost and support healthy development for young children if the childcare is of a high quality. Child care quality is important for all children (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Bryant, & Clifford, 2000; Dearing et al., 2009; Harrist et al., 2007; Jeon et al., 2010). According to Cottle and Alexander (2012), quality in early care is dynamic and was viewed as a consistent fixed goal to be achieved. The researchers believed that quality was an “evolutionary process” (p. 646), which required reflection, collaboration, questions, and communication. Observed variations across childcare settings may also uncover differences in the quality of care which has been associated with multiple domains of development in children (Geoffroy et al., 2010; Harrist et al., 2007; Jeon et al., 2010; Loeb et al., 2004).

Quality Childcare

The issue of defining quality childcare was studied by Harrist et al. (2007). The researchers considered the description of quality childcare from multiple perspectives in order to create a complete understanding of quality. Harrist et al. conducted a qualitative

study using homogeneous focus groups that included 92 participants in 11 focus groups. The researchers interviewed three groups of childcare directors, three groups of parents, three groups of child caregivers, one group of policy makers, and one group of social service support personnel. The common themes all of the participant groups named were communication and rapport, caregiver practices, and caregiver characteristics.

Other researchers have examined childcare centers and referred to two types of quality as being either structural or process in nature. The focus of structural quality is about those areas that are regulated through state licensing standards or accreditation such as child-caregiver ratios, group size, educational requirements for staff, and professional development (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992; Jeon et al. 2010). According to Helburn (1995), Howes et al., and Jeon et al., caregiver-child ratios are especially important. Howes et al. found that the California 1:8 ratio made a difference in the quality of care provided for 3 to 5 year olds as compared with the higher level of 1:9 caregiver-child ratio. Jeon et al. also found that smaller group sizes were associated with a better quality experience for each child.

Process quality is a multifaceted measure and more about the overall functioning of a classroom that includes availability and access to developmentally appropriate materials, engagement in stimulating activities, interactions with adults and peers, and teacher behavior and affect. A number of researchers have focused on interactions between caregivers and children. Indicators of a positive supportive relationship between caregiver and child were sensitivity, more affection, more frequent verbal interaction and responses, and positive engagement. Responsivity to children's needs helps to provide an environment in which children feel safe to learn and explore (Howes et al., 1992; Jeon et al. 2010; Mashburn, 2008; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). Researchers have also

found that classroom practices especially the activities, experiences, and materials provide rich experiences for children and are associated with higher quality programs (Cottle & Alexander, 2012; Mashburn; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal).

Howes et al. (1992) and Jeon et al. (2010) believed that structural and process qualities were interconnected. According to the research, process variables were influenced by the structural variables. Specifically, Howes et al. found that the caregiver to child ratio had an impact on the quality of the classroom activities and adult/child interactions. Jeon et al. and Mashburn (2008) found that the overall classroom quality, both structure and process, encouraged more nurturing and positive learning experiences, which these researchers believed were linked to children's general well-being, cognitive development, social emotional competency, school readiness, and academic achievement.

Quality Childcare for the At-Risk Population

Educational, socio-emotional, and behavioral outcomes for young children are just some of the benefits of quality childcare. According to Day, (2010) providing quality care "is considered to be one of the key delivery mechanisms to improve outcomes for young children" (p. 45). Children who are at risk for future academic failure and behavioral issues due to ethnicity, poverty status, low maternal education, and geographic factors benefit substantially from quality early care (Fantuzzo et al., 2005).

Two other groups to be considered in the at-risk population are first children who are homeless. Grant (1991) studied 87 homeless children ages 2 through 5 years old and found that most of the children had speech and language delays as well as social-emotional and behavioral issues. The children were unable to maintain focus on a task and were observed to be distractible. Grant determined that after being in an enriched daycare type program for three months, offered at the welfare hotel where the families

resided, the children showed improvement. The second group was comprised of immigrant families. Some of the issues that might place immigrant families at-risk include: living in poverty, immigration status, single parenthood, and language and cultural differences (Obeng, 2007; Santhiveeran, 2010).

Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov (1994) conducted longitudinal research that determined the effects of economic deprivation on the development of children. The sample in this study consisted of 895 infants who were followed until they were 6 years old. Duncan et al., tracked neighborhood conditions, poverty levels, and health for the children for six years. At the end of the sixth year, Duncan et al. measured the cognitive levels of the children. The results of the study were consistent with the researchers' hypothesis that family income and poverty levels were associated with children's cognitive delays and behavioral issues as compared between low and high income families. According to Crosby et al. (2005), children from low income families are at a substantial risk for negative outcomes. High quality childcare can close the gap between those who are disadvantaged and others (Day, 2010).

The benefits for young children from low income families attending quality childcare have been observed. Burchinal, Roberts et al. (2000) found that the quality of care for infants and toddlers was related to cognitive and language development. Specifically Burchinal, Roberts et al. believed that the child care environment or the process quality of the classroom was a "consistent predictor of cognitive and communication development during the first three years of life for predominantly low income children" (p. 352). Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2000) also believed that the quality of care was more important for children living with economic and social risk factors than for children without risk factors as related to early development.

Children who are not ready for the typical education experiences of kindergarten struggle in school. Children living in poverty, who have attended quality childcare, have the potential to protect cognitive and behavioral gains from the significant impact of their family risks (Hall et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2010). Dearing et al. (2009) and Fantuzzo et al. (2005) studied the effects of quality childcare on school readiness for children who were living in poverty.

Fantuzzo et al. (2005) studied 3,969 kindergarten children from an urban location attending a public school kindergarten. As part of this study, the researchers evaluated the family socio-economic level, childcare experiences, academic performance assessments, and social knowledge assessments of the children at kindergarten entry. Fantuzzo et al. found that family poverty was a significant risk factor for poor academic and social outcomes. The researchers also demonstrated that the children who participated in a licensed center based childcare program prior to entry in kindergarten, performed at a higher level in academic and social areas in their kindergarten class as compared to their peers who did not attend childcare. Fantuzzo et al. found that the children who attended childcare “performed significantly better” (p. 583) in language arts, literacy skills, mathematics, social knowledge, and fine and gross motor skills than their peers with other early care experiences. Those advantages were maintained throughout the kindergarten year.

Dearing et al. (2009) studied higher quality childcare as a moderator of associations between economic levels of the family and academic achievement scores of children into middle childhood. The researchers’ findings were consistent with the high quality of childcare as an intervention to promote school readiness skills for children living in low-income families. Dearing et al. found an association between children who

attended higher quality childcare and higher readiness scores in mathematics, problem solving, literacy, and vocabulary as compared to children who had alternate care experiences.

Children in families living within low socio-economic levels who had attended higher quality childcare prior to entry in kindergarten retained an academic advantage throughout the kindergarten year. The same research samples of children performed at higher levels across academic as well as social-emotional areas and at the end of kindergarten had greater skills in reading and mathematics achievement than their peers who had other types of experiences before starting school (Burchinal et al., 2008; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Geoffroy et al., 2010).

Burchinal et al. (2008) conducted a study of publicly funded pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) programs for 4 year olds that served children at risk for academic failure due to poverty. The researchers wanted to examine the effectiveness of the Pre-K programs to determine their success in supporting positive academic and social outcomes for the children served. Burchinal et al. researched the degree of Pre-K teacher “sensitivity and warmth” (p. 141) and the quality of instruction that related to academic achievement and social development a year after Pre-K in a kindergarten program. The researchers gathered data from 227 Pre-K sites in six states and included data from 746 children. Burchinal et al. found that the quality of instruction “predicted language, academic, and social performance of children up to one year beyond Pre-K” (p.150).

Geoffroy et al. (2010) studied a similar population of children as Burchinal et al. (2008). In their research Geoffroy et al. found that children of mothers with low levels of education and living in poverty scored consistently lower on academic assessments than other children of highly educated mothers unless the children had been attending formal

childcare. The results of this research suggest that attending quality childcare could decrease differences “in several cognitive outcomes in kindergarten and first grade between children of mothers with low levels of education and those without such low levels” (p. 1363).

Quality childcare has even made a difference into middle childhood for children of families living in poverty. Dearing et al. (2009) studied the academic achievement of 1,364 children in third and fifth grades. The researchers believed that both structure and process quality would benefit children and moderate the associations between children’s academic achievement and family economic level into middle childhood. Dearing et al. found that higher quality childcare during infancy and early childhood appeared to shield children in low income families and promoted higher scores in reading and mathematics through middle childhood as compared to children who did not have the same experience. The achievement scores of the children in this study were almost equivalent to the achievement scores of children from affluent families.

Ethnicity is a risk for academic problems that may also be linked to poverty. Harden, Sandstrom, and Chazan-Cohen (2012) believed that there were wide disparities between African American children and non-African American non-minority children in multiple developmental domains. The researchers studied 778 African American children who were randomly placed in an intervention group that received Early Head Start (EHS) services that were identified as quality care, and a control group that could not receive EHS although these children could receive other types of care. Harden et al. found that the children in the intervention group receiving EHS for up to three years, yielded many benefits. The children at 3 years old, at the end of the study, had higher receptive vocabulary, less aggressive behavior, longer attention span, and were more engaged

during activities than their peers in the control group. These results suggest that EHS strongly influenced the outcomes of young African American children.

An additional study about African American children was conducted by McCarthy and Morote (2009). The researchers investigated the association between preschool attendance and high school graduation rates for African American males. McCarthy and Morote believed that African American males were under-represented in colleges and universities. The researchers chose to examine the high school graduation rates for a sample of the African American male population ages 14 to 19. McCarthy and Morote sought to determine the degree to which preschool attendance affected the graduation rates. According to the researchers, there was a strong link between preschool attendance and high school graduation rates of their study participants. McCarthy and Morote concluded that “enrollment in preschool programs dramatically increase[d] the high school graduation rates of African American males” (p. 237).

Children living in poverty from Latino families face similar risks of failure. Owen, Klausli, Mata-Otero, and Caughy (2008) conducted a study that included 223 African American and Latino children enrolled in quality childcare that served low income families. The study measured cognitive and social-emotional development over a two year time period. The children were tested at specified intervals until the end of the program prior to entry in kindergarten. Owen et al. found modest improvements in the measures of language, vocabulary acquisition, and pre-academic skills as compared to the children’s prior testing indicating the child’s readiness for kindergarten.

Another segment of the early childhood at risk population is children with special needs. Children with special needs have had the right to be included in an appropriate public education setting since the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

in 1975 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d. a). A priority of the legislation was to place children with special needs in the least restrictive environment. According to Phillips and Meloy (2012), since the legislation was passed, public education expanded inclusive classrooms including inclusive Pre-K classes.

Phillips and Meloy (2012) examined the school readiness of children with mild to moderate special needs. The researchers were interested in the academic outcomes of a Pre-K education for children 4 years old with special needs. Phillips and Meloy compared the achievement scores of children with special needs prior to Pre-K attendance with scores of children who had completed Pre-K. The researchers also compared the scores of the Pre-K children with special needs to those Pre-K children without special needs after completion of the program. Phillips and Meloy included 312 children with special needs and 2,752 without special needs in their study. The researchers found that the children with special needs who had been in the Pre-K program had significantly higher academic scores and would be ready for kindergarten than those children with special needs who had not yet participated. Phillips and Meloy also found no substantial differences in the effect of the Pre-K program for children with and without special needs. These findings indicate that a Pre-K program is beneficial for children with special needs in order to be ready to enter an inclusive kindergarten program.

Quality Childcare for Diverse Populations

The benefits of quality childcare are not exclusively for children with at risk factors for academic failure. Children from diverse backgrounds and children who are developing typically can also gain an academic and social-emotional advantage by attending a quality childcare program (Belsky, 2006; Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg et al. 2000). High quality care for infants and toddlers was associated with a higher cognitive

developmental level at 24 months as compared to other children who had an alternate early care experience (Li, Farkas, Duncan, Burchinal, & Vandell, 2013).

Language, linguistic knowledge, and mathematics scores were reported for 3 to 5 year old children attending quality childcare. Higher scores for the children on standardized tests and observational assessments were related to higher rated classroom quality (Belsky, 2006; Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2000; Li et al, 2013; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal found that pre-reading scores were “significantly related to the set of child care quality variables” (p. 467). Ratings of socio-emotional development for children of typical growth were significantly correlated with the caregiver-child relationship; in a quality childcare the correlation was positive and in a childcare not rated as quality the correlation was negative. Fewer behavioral issues were associated with a positive teacher-child relationship (Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal).

Kindergarten readiness for a diverse group of children has also been studied. Quality childcare and preschool experiences were found to be a predictor of having the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten. Children who attended a higher quality childcare and preschool program demonstrated superior cognitive and social outcomes throughout kindergarten than those children who did not attend a quality childcare (Keys et al., 2013; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Sahin et al., 2013). Some kindergarten teachers reported that they have observed enhanced development in all areas for children who attended preschool, especially for those children who had consistency in their program (Sahin et al.).

Some of the outcomes of quality childcare for children of diverse backgrounds extend through elementary school. In most developmental domains the longitudinal

effects were observed in language, mathematics, attention skills, and ability to positively interact through appropriate behaviors (Downer & Pianta, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2011). In first grade, studies have linked child characteristics and the quality of childcare children had prior to school entry as accounting for variance in both academic and cognitive functioning. Attendance at a quality childcare was a predictor for academic achievement in first grade. The achievement of the children was based upon a function of the quality childcare centers having provided early learning and experiences that supported cognitive development. The children were able to sustain those gains into elementary school (Downer & Pianta; Hamre & Pianta).

Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2001) found evidence of long term positive cognitive and social-emotional effects for children who had attended quality childcare extend through second grade. Sylva et al. (2011) also found that childcare quality was important in sustaining positive developmental outcomes for children through third grade. The results of the studies for the benefits of childcare indicated that quality of care was related to positive outcomes for children with and without risk factors, well beyond the early childhood years.

Researchers have provided evidence that quality early childhood care and education young children received was linked to positive cognitive and social-emotional development (Burchinal et al., 2008; Burchinal, Roberts et al., 2000; Day, 2010; Dearing et al., 2009; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Harden et al., 2012; Loeb et al., 2004; McCarthy & Morote, 2009; Phillips & Meloy, 2012). Much of the research about quality in childcare has been associated to many positive benefits for young

children. Both structure and process elements have been identified as related to increased academic and emotional benefits for children (Howes et al., 1992; Jeon et al., 2010).

Mandatory state regulations exist for all licensed childcare facilities that designate the minimum standards for operating a childcare facility. Rigby, Ryan, and Brooks-Gunn (2007) studied childcare quality and found that those centers following their licensing regulations and receiving federal funding had slightly increased quality than those centers without federal funding. Alternatively, NAEYC offers a program for voluntary accreditation with multiple criteria above the level of state licensing. Many early childhood centers in the process of working towards NAEYC accreditation need to implement changes to their programs in terms of ratios, classroom materials, teacher credentials, director credentials, and general work environment (Apple, 2006; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). According to Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes (2004), early childhood centers seeking to improve in quality try to achieve NAEYC accreditation. However, the desire to change and participation in the process through NAEYC is not a guarantee of accreditation. Whitebook found that some centers made positive changes in areas such as hiring more sensitive staff but were lacking in other areas of quality such as high levels of staff turnover.

Variation in Quality

A wide variability of quality exists across child care centers. Up to one sixth of centers fail to meet recommended structural quality levels in adult to child class ratios and in the total number of children in each class (Fuller et al., 2003). In examining quality in California's early care, Fuller et al. found that some class sizes for 3 year olds were up to 20 children for one adult, way above a typical state standard of 20 children for two adults in a classroom of 3 year olds. In another study of childcare quality, Jones-

Branch, Torquati, Raikes, and Edwards (2004) found that 52 % of the classrooms they examined had poor quality ratings, which represented 18 out of 34 classrooms.

Fuller et al. (2003) determined that childcare centers receiving public funds had a higher quality than those centers not receiving public funds. The reason for this effect was due to the requirement of strict quality standards that must be in place in order to receive the subsidy. Fuller et al. also discovered that in some areas, there was a higher demand for childcare than there were existing childcare centers. Many of the families in need of childcare are just above the qualifying level for subsidized care. According to Fuller et al., these areas with high demand for childcare for mostly Latino and blue-collar families had lower quality care.

One more variable in the regulation of quality for child care is that each state maintains individual minimum licensing standards. Researchers have been challenged to evaluate the effects of these licensing standards as well as the policies that support public funding on the quality of child care. According to Rigby et al. (2007), the states that maintain stringent regulations were associated with higher quality childcare. However, Rigby et al. also found that they were challenged in determining whether there was a direct correlation between the level of state licensing standards and the actual quality of care that children received.

State licensing standards represent the minimum requirements that child care centers must have in place (Gallagher, Rooney, & Campbell, 1999). Gallagher et al. also believed that quality of care could not be enhanced through additional state regulations. The relationship between regulations and quality childcare relates to a small portion of what is considered overall quality that includes both structure and process quality. According to Rigby et al. (2007), higher quality childcare “requires higher teacher

education, training, more elaborate materials, and different classroom configurations than the minimal levels established by current state regulations” (p. 903).

The variation in state regulations and the relationship between those states with more stringent regulations and higher quality led researchers to examine the benefits of voluntary accreditation through NAEYC. NAEYC as an organization that supports many aspects of child development is cognizant of the benefits of quality child care and has created a system of accreditation for childcare centers (Apple, 2006). Apple found that in those states with increasingly rigorous standards the number of early childhood centers seeking NAEYC accreditation had also increased. Early childhood programs that meet the quality standards of NAEYC accreditation have an obligation to provide high quality classrooms, including better adult to child ratios. Accredited sites also employ staff with superior educational qualifications, implement rich and developmentally appropriate curriculum, and commit to ongoing self-evaluations and reaccreditation studies through NAEYC (Roach, Kim, & Riley, 2006).

McMullen, Alat, Buldu, & Lash (2004) examined factors of a NAEYC accredited childcare center that were related to quality in order to provide insight into the NAEYC qualifications for early childhood professionals. The researchers focused on aspects of the organization known to “contribute to developmentally appropriate environments and programs and positive outcomes for children” (p. 87). Other researchers have also studied NAEYC accredited schools. There were many similarities in the characteristics of classrooms across centers from multiple studies. Structural variables were easier to measure but still impacted the quality of care that children received. The average group size was approximately 16 children in a classroom of 3 year olds with an average adult to child ratio of 1:8. Classrooms were observed to be well equipped with various activity

centers, an area for dramatic play, and tables for open literacy and math activities. Environments were noted to be decorated with posters as well as samples of the children's work. Teachers reported that they attended in-service trainings, workshops or other professional development opportunities throughout the school year. Teachers in accredited centers generally had more education in the field of early childhood than teachers at non-accredited centers. Higher teacher retention rates and general staff stability was also reported at accredited centers (Bloom, 1996; Hojnoski et al., 2008; McMullen et al., 2004; Roach et al., 2006).

The process variables, although harder to measure than structural variables, were found to have a more direct impact on the children and the quality of care that the children received. Researchers have observed teachers engaging in high quality practices with children through interactive instruction and communication and were also observed to be more sensitive towards children. The curriculum implemented was observed to be developmentally appropriate and supported children's growth in multiple domains. Teachers conducted large and small group activities as well as having free-play and working with children at center activities such as a writing or math center. Throughout observations researchers noted that teachers guided activities such as reading books and leading art activities. Teachers also monitored appropriate classroom behaviors for children such as treating peers with respect (Hojnoski et al., 2008; McMullen et al., 2004; Whitebook et al., 2004). According to Whitebook et al., early childhood centers can provide quality programming without NAEYC accreditation however, their findings demonstrated, "the considerable strengths of NAEYC accreditation as a vehicle for enhancing and maintaining quality" (p. 320). Accredited programs were also more likely to have teachers who implemented and engaged children in high quality instruction

(Denny, Hallam, & Homer, 2012). The characteristics of the early childhood staff have been associated with quality of care, accreditation, and ultimately the outcomes of children (Jeon et al., 2010; Whitebook et al.).

Quality Characteristics of Childcare Professionals

There has been much attention focused on early childhood teachers, as researchers have attempted to describe their personal characteristics. A large portion of this research has examined quantitative data that included education, experience, and demographic information or the research has been about teachers in grades beyond the early childhood years. As the early childhood field strives to improve quality of care, more qualitative research might yield important information regarding the characteristics of effective teachers (Colker, 2008; Thomason & La Paro, 2013).

Colker (2008) conducted a qualitative study of 43 early childhood educators in order to obtain their beliefs about the characteristics of successful teachers. The responses of the teachers were evaluated for common themes. Colker found 12 personal characteristics that the respondents to the survey mentioned most frequently: passion, perseverance, willingness to take risks in order to achieve their goals for the children, pragmatism, patience, flexibility, respect, creativity, authenticity, love of learning, high energy, and sense of humor. Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, and Ting (2010) believed that professionalism was another characteristic that early childhood educators perceived as important. Martin et al. studied caregivers' perceptions of professionalism in order to determine if a relationship existed based on demographic information. The researchers found a statistical significance between years of experience working in childcare and commitment, ability to use trainings, and perceived professionalism.

A responsive and available educator, who establishes caring relationships, can provide a foundation for young children that could support future educational success. Higher quality relationships with teachers have been observed to be based on positive emotional climates in the preschool classroom. Research suggested that the interactions between teacher and child during the early childhood years and into elementary school have great importance for the child's development in multiple areas that include cognitive and social-emotional domains, as well as general well-being (Burchinal et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jeon et al., 2010; Landry et al., 2014; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) believed that elementary school success was associated with teacher-child relationships that occurred during a child's early years in school, from 3 to 6 years old and focused their research on teacher-child relationships from preschool through first grade. The researchers studied 490 children through observation, teacher and parent surveys, and standardized tests of academic achievement. First grade teachers reported higher academic achievement for those students with whom they reported having a closer relationship. Pianta and Stuhlman found "small to moderate" (p. 454) associations between teacher-child relationships and child outcomes in first grade in both social and academic skills. The researchers found that higher levels of conflict in teacher-child relationships were associated with lower levels of social skills.

Maldonado-Carreno and Votruba-Drzal (2011) researched teacher-child relationships from preschool, serving children 3 years of age through sixth grade. The researchers believed that the teacher-child relationship was associated with gains in a child's academic and social development but that few studies existed that examined these relationships beyond second grade. Maldonado-Carreno and Votruba-Drzal explored

whether teacher-child relationships were related to academic and behavioral ability throughout elementary school. The researchers studied 1,077 children and analyzed data from the children's parents, teachers, and standardized test results. Maldonado-Carreno and Votruba-Drzal found that a quality teacher-child relationship remained important as children aged. Teachers' reports of higher achievement and social development were associated with a quality relationship with the teacher.

Leadership

Teachers have reported that various factors influence their job performance and subsequently their relationships with children and the quality of care for children; in particular teachers have identified the director of their center as a contributing factor that had a direct influence on their work life (Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011). Styles of leadership and leadership behaviors have been linked to employee's satisfaction and functioning on the job. Some styles of leadership have a positive effect on subordinates such as resilience and accomplishment. Studies identified that developmental, respectful, and supportive leadership were associated with employees' job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and self-efficacy. Abusive leadership was associated with employee stress and emotional exhaustion (Harland, Harrison, Jones, & Reiter-Palmon, 2005; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010, Yagil, 2006).

van Quaquebeke and Eckloff (2010) believed that respectful leadership was a positive organizational attribute that subordinates desired but that leaders have not adopted. The researchers were interested in the identification of attributes of respectful leadership and the study of the effects of those attributes on employees. van Quaquebeke and Eckloff interviewed a sample of 426 employees who described respectful leadership.

The researchers then surveyed another sample group of 228 employees in order to obtain data about the relationship of respectful leadership attributes with employees' respect of leadership, identification with leadership, and job satisfaction. van Quaquebeke and Eckloff found that respectful leadership was positively related to respect of leadership, identification with leadership, and job satisfaction.

Transformational leadership also had an impact on employees. Rafferty and Griffin (2006) explored transformational leadership and the subsets of developmental and supportive leadership. Employees may perceive both developmental and supportive leadership "as indications of a leader's overall level of concern for their welfare in the workplace" (p. 55). The authors surveyed 2,864 workers from a public organization in Australia. Rafferty and Griffin found evidence that supportive leadership had a positive relationship with followers reporting of job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, retention decisions, and self-efficacy. Developmental leadership was found to have a greater impact than supportive leadership on follower commitment, retention, and satisfaction. Rafferty and Griffin believed that developmental leadership had a greater impact because it causes a transformation of the employee with greater skill levels and higher self-efficacy. Leadership has multiple meanings that could be based on context, environment, and followers.

Leadership in Education

There is substantial research about school leadership in elementary schools. Much of the research focused on the leadership practices that principals used in order to create positive work environments that were associated with teachers' job satisfaction (Chen & Cheng, 2012; Demir, 2008; Elliott, Isaacs, & Chugani, 2010; Eyal & Roth, 2011).

Transformational leadership behaviors of school principals characterized by charisma and

support were studied and had a positive relationship to teacher collaboration, motivation, and effectiveness. Transactional leadership characterized by controlling and monitoring practices had a positive relationship to teacher tension, exhaustion, and stress. Principals who demonstrated transformational leadership with teachers were found to best support job satisfaction and performance (Chen & Cheng; Demir; Eyal & Roth).

The connection between the perceived emotional intelligence (EI) of school principals and the self-reported job satisfaction of teachers employed in primary through high schools was studied as an additional characteristic of effective school leadership. Singh and Manser (2008) defined EI as the ability to understand and appropriately manage emotions of one's self and others in a supportive and motivational manner. The researchers surveyed 474 educators and found a statistically significant correlation between the perceived behavior of the principal, especially self-awareness and adaptability, and an educators' job satisfaction. Those educators who reported low job satisfaction also indicated their principals' EI as being low. Singh and Manser believed their findings indicated that a principal with a high perceived level of EI would have a better relationship with educators they supervise and a higher level of job satisfaction in their schools.

Leadership in Early Childhood Education

In early childhood education, leadership is complex and multidimensional. The influence of leaders on outcomes for children, teachers, and other stakeholders has been recognized as important in the overall organizational climate. The early childhood leaders' role is far more complicated than managing and implementing services for children. Although there is not an abundance of research about early childhood leadership, there have been several studies that have identified job characteristics,

effective practices, and behaviors of those who are directors of early childhood centers (Ang, 2012; Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2012; Harrist et al., 2007; Rous, 2004).

According to Ryan et al. (2011), early childhood directors “play a major role in building and sustaining high-quality early childhood programs” (p. 10). Ang found that directors believed it was crucial to communicate and drive the vision of the center in order to maintain quality.

Harrist et al. (2007) believed that the directors’ position was complex and challenging. The researchers also believed that the role of the director in a child care center was central to proper functioning of the center. Harrist et al. interviewed directors, teachers, parents, and social service personnel. The director was identified by all of the participant groups as the person responsible for enabling the caregivers to support the children’s needs. Harrist et al. found that the director had connections to all the stakeholders of a center which included children, parents, teachers, and social service professionals; directors acted as the link between the stakeholders. The central position of the director described in this study provides evidence of the important role of the director in an early childhood center.

There is evidence of the relationship between leadership practices in early childhood and effective early childhood centers. Studies have shown that better educated and consistent leaders have the potential to positively influence children’s experiences in childcare and academic as well as social-emotional outcomes (Helburn, 1995; Whitebook et al., 2004). Rous (2004) conducted a study that examined the perspectives of preschool teachers about the behaviors of their supervisors that influenced their instructional practice. Participants of the study included 197 preschool teachers from rural, urban, and suburban geographical areas. The teachers were asked to describe examples of positive

and negative behaviors of their supervisors that they believed had an influence on their teaching. Rous identified themes from the teachers' responses. The largest number of responses related to supervisor support of the program which included the provision of supplies, materials, resources, and staffing. In the category of support, teachers also specified dedication to the program, interaction with staff, children, and families. Teachers reported negatively about the lack of support, unethical behavior, and ineffective communication from a supervisor that inhibited their ability to provide quality instruction.

Another theme that Rous (2004) identified was a supervisors' visible presence. Teachers reported feeling "energized" (p. 277) when their supervisor was in their classroom. Teachers also reported feeling abandoned when they did not have sufficient personal contact with their supervisor. Praise and encouragement were described by teachers as important, both verbal and written. Rous found that most teachers stated that they were appreciative when their supervisors were able to support their teaching with knowledge of early childhood practices.

The directors' perspective about quality leadership has been studied in order to obtain information regarding characteristics of leadership and to analyze how supervision was enacted (Aubrey et al., 2012; Nupponen, 2005). Aubrey et al. observed directors during their work day and noted that directors maintained a very high intensity level of work throughout their day. The researchers found that directors spent time planning, delegating, meeting with staff and others, coordinating staff, and maintaining children's records. Aubrey et al. reported that directors had effective communication skills and regularly needed to delegate tasks and coordinate schedules with others. Directors reported to Nupponen that they had many diverse administrative tasks which required

extensive amounts of time to complete. The directors of the Nupponen study stated that because of the hectic pace of the day, time management skills and delegating to others were important in order to be successful.

The work of a childcare director was reported to be built on relationships and directors believed that it was their responsibility to create a work climate that supported positive interactions with and between children, teachers, and families (Harrist et al., 2007; Nupponen, 2005). Directors had extensive knowledge of children, both developmental and educational information in order to be able to provide support for teachers in planning for the class and for individual children. In addition, it was believed to be essential that directors had in-depth knowledge of individual children enrolled at their center and have time to meet with and communicate with families regarding the children (Nupponen, McMullen et al., 2004). Leadership is a core component of the functioning of an early childhood center and is an important factor in creating and maintaining a quality organizational climate.

Organizational Climate

The organizational climate refers to the environment of a workplace and relates to the “quality of the work life for employees” (Bloom, 2010, p. 45). According to Bloom, the quality of the environment can be assessed through perceptions of 10 dimensions of the organizational climate: Collegiality, Professional Growth, Supervisor Support, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness. In educational settings, the climate can influence teachers’ behaviors and subsequently have an effect on both process quality in the classroom and children’s outcomes (Bloom, 1996; Dennis & O’Connor, 2013). Nupponen (2005) identified characteristics of a positive organizational climate in an early childhood

setting. Directors who participated in the study believed that a “harmonious environment is essential” (p. 149) and that all employees in the organization must act in a professional manner.

Previous research about the organizational climate in early childhood and the relationship between the climate to program administration and classroom quality exists.

Lower and Cassidy (2007) studied 26 administrators and 225 teachers from early childhood centers who completed surveys about the work environment. Lower and Cassidy found a relationship between childcare work environments including both program administration and organizational climate with classroom quality. Dennis and O’Connor (2013) studied 40 directors and 37 teachers from preschool centers who also completed surveys about the work environment. Dennis and O’Connor found a significant association between the quality of the classrooms and the overall work environment.

Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak (2005) examined the work environment for 1,071 public elementary school teachers and the relationship of the work environment to teacher turnover. The researchers found certain school climate factors did influence a teachers’ decision to remain in the school such as the physical environment and the quality of professional development. Yagil (2006) found that a teacher would base their decision to stay or leave a school on the support and relationship they had with their supervisor. Loeb et al. also believed that high levels of teacher turnover were related to the organizational climate and ultimately that teacher turnover would negatively influence classroom quality.

Organizational Climate and the Relationship to Teacher Turnover

The high rate of teacher turnover has been linked to classroom quality and continues to be an issue for early childhood professionals and leaders (Helburn, 1995; Howes et al., 1992; Whitebook et al., 2004). Cassidy et al. (2011) were concerned by the high rate of teacher turnover in the child care industry and believed that teacher turnover had an effect on the quality of classroom instruction, staff, and the children and families served at individual childcare centers. Cassidy et al. believed that teacher turnover “can affect classroom quality and child outcomes, due to changes in relationships with the classroom” (p. 4). The researchers studied teacher turnover during the actual transition process as one teacher transitioned out of the classroom and another teacher transitioned into the same classroom. By studying the actual transition period, Cassidy et al. believed that they could obtain information on the day-to-day experiences of the site directors, teachers, children, and parents.

Cassidy et al. (2011) conducted a mixed methods study of nine preschools located in early childcare centers in North Carolina. A sample of 13 classrooms, including a total of 34 teachers participated in the study. Three teachers connected to the same classroom were observed and interviewed; the departing teacher, the remaining teacher, and the replacement teacher. Cassidy et al. demonstrated that the transition period of teacher turnover affects the children in the classroom, the remaining and the new teacher, the director, the parents, and the “childcare centers as a system” (p. 18). The researchers reported negative effects on classroom quality that related to instructional activities and classroom routines. Cassidy et al. found in their research that the strongest student teacher connections were severed. Cassidy et al. also found that directors, other teachers,

and parents reported that other repercussions of a teacher leaving negatively influenced relationships, communication, consistency of care, and self-reported levels of stress.

Stress, also referred to as burnout, as a factor of teacher turnover may stem from the organizational climate of a school (Baumgartner, Carson, Apavaloaie, & Tsouloupas, 2009; Rentzou, 2012). Rentzou identified burnout as an antecedent to a teacher leaving their position. The researcher described burnout as a condition caused by stressful factors and believed that early child educators, caring for children from 6 months to 5 years old had high levels of stress that could lead to burnout and reduce the quality of care for young children. Rentzou surveyed 108 early childhood educators and found that the teachers reported that working conditions only partially met personal and professional needs. The researcher found partial correlations between teachers' "level of burnout, demographic data, and working conditions" (p. 177).

Further research in the field of early childhood explored the level of influence teachers' age, perceptions of compensation, benefits, and administrative support "predicted antecedents of turnover" (Russell et al., 2010, p. 195). Russell et al. believed that teacher turnover was a negative influence on the quality of care in early childhood education programs that served children from 6 weeks to 5 years old. The researchers examined 78 teachers' self-reported thoughts of leaving their job, commitment to the job, and intention to remain in their current position for at least two additional years. Russell et al. found that teachers who reported their director was less skilled at coordinating tasks, less dependable, and inconsistent also reported thoughts of leaving their jobs.

Costs of Teacher Turnover

The turnover of teachers is costly in many ways and can have a negative impact on children, teachers, and leadership. Specifically, there can be a negative impact on the

continuity of instruction and academic achievement (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Guin, 2004; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Researchers have found two primary effects of teacher turnover in elementary schools on student achievement. First, academic assessment scores of students were linked to teacher turnover; schools with higher teacher turnover rates had lower scores (Guin; Ronfeldt et al.). According to Guin, remaining teachers reported that teacher turnover disrupted teaching and impaired their ability to work effectively. Ronfeldt et al. found that the students in the classrooms of staying teachers had lower scores, thus they believed that turnover had an impact on teachers outside of the classrooms of the leaving teachers.

Teacher turnover has also had a direct impact on schools and leadership. The process of teacher replacement includes recruitment, hiring, induction, and professional development. The financial costs are high for the replacement process as are the direct costs of the effort and the actual number of hours invested in the process of hiring and training (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski, & Karelitz, 2012). Guin (2004) reported about some of the indirect impacts of teacher turnover in elementary schools. Teachers reported that collaboration on projects was challenging when there were new teachers. Several teachers expressed that relationships were strained due to the additional time spent and responsibilities that staying teachers had to assume for the new teachers. These studies about the costs of teacher turnover suggested that stability of teachers was related to the quality of care and outcomes for children. Although there is considerable research about teacher turnover and retention in elementary school settings, the research in early childhood settings is limited.

Organizational Climate and the Relationship to Teacher Retention in Elementary Schools

The research about teacher retention in elementary schools has focused on the organizational climate of the school. Teacher retention is a challenge and teacher attrition has contributed to problems in the quality of education. Hughes (2012) conducted a study to examine the relationship between characteristics of schools and teachers that related to teacher retention. The researcher examined teacher, school, and organizational characteristics that related to teacher retention in order to provide schools with information on possible causes of teacher attrition. The sample included 200 teachers working in public schools ranging from elementary through high school. Hughes specifically studied the teacher's workload, the physical environment, resources, materials, and leadership. Based upon the responses from the participants, Hughes determined that the studied variables of the organizational climate "made a statistically significant contribution to distinguishing between teachers who plan to teach until retirement and those who do not" (p. 252).

Perrachione, Petersen, and Rosser (2008) researched the variables that influenced teacher retention and job satisfaction. Perrachione et al. believed that intrinsic and extrinsic variables, job satisfaction, intent to remain in the profession, and demographics were related to retention. The purpose of the research was to identify the variables that influenced job satisfaction and to determine the degree to which these variables influenced a teacher's retention decision. Perrachione et al. surveyed 201 elementary school teachers, in kindergarten through fifth grade. The researchers found that both intrinsic and extrinsic variables influenced job satisfaction. Intrinsic variables included personal teaching efficacy, working with students, and job satisfaction. Extrinsic

variables related to the organizational climate and included positive work environment and teacher support from the principal. Perrachione et al. found that teachers' reasons for leaving or for staying were based solely on extrinsic factors.

Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) examined issues of teacher recruitment and retention in public education settings in Australia. The research conducted in this study also focused on both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons why people decided to teach and decided to remain in the profession. The intrinsic factors researched related to personal motivation topics and the extrinsic factors related to working conditions. Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd found that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors were important in teacher recruitment and retention. Intrinsic factors were found to be more influential for recruitment and extrinsic factors were found to be more influential for retention. The teachers reported that the organizational climate and the subcategories of support, recognition, collaboration, and professional development had the highest relationship with their decision to stay in a school.

Administrative support has been identified as a major influence on teacher retention decisions. Studies have been conducted in order to identify the styles and strategies of school leaders who have been successful at retaining teachers. Several common themes of leadership qualities and strategies were found by the researchers. Principals reported that they provided supportive environments, resources, fostered collaboration with teachers in goal setting and work plans. In addition, principals believed that they offered encouragement, support, and guidance to their teachers and fostered a positive professional environment (Boyd et al., 2011; Brown & Wynn, 2007; Brown & Wynn, 2009; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010; Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011). Brown and Wynn indicated that 12 out of 12 principals in their study reported that their

main responsibility in teacher retention was to support new teachers. Brown and Wynn identified that leadership was shared between the principal and the teachers as they reached decisions together and thus “communities were formed, and effective teachers were retained” (p. 682).

The teachers’ perspective about leadership has been studied. Swars, Meyers, Mays, and Lack (2009) conducted mixed-methods research involving 134 elementary school teachers designed to address the issues of teacher turnover and teacher retention. The teachers reported leadership style and trust as factors that related to turnover. Swars et al. found that the teachers in this study believed that their relationships with administrators were the most important factors in their decisions to remain or to leave the school. Specifically, teachers identified support and appreciation from the administration as the most important factors related to turnover or retention.

In Early Childhood Centers

Although the studies previously discussed pertained to elementary schools, perhaps some of the findings about the organizational climate and teacher retention could be applied to an early childhood setting. At this time there is some information about the early childhood organizational climate and limited information about teacher retention in early childhood centers. Bloom (2010) has researched the early childhood organizational climate and created the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey. Bloom (1996) also researched NAEYC accredited centers and non-accredited centers in order to compare the quality of both. According to Bloom, accreditation related to a more positive organizational climate and teacher retention. Bloom found that teachers working in centers with NAEYC accreditation had “higher levels of job commitment” (p. 310). Teachers, directors, and other staff of the NAEYC accredited centers rated the

organizational climate of their centers higher than non-accredited centers in the dimensions of “innovativeness, goal consensus, opportunities for professional growth, and clarity” (p. 311).

Teachers’ perceptions of the organizational climate including leadership have been studied. Russell et al. (2010) believed that teacher turnover was a negative influence on the quality of care in early childhood education programs. The researchers chose to examine teachers’ self-reported thoughts of leaving their job, commitment to the job, and intention to remain in their current position for at least two additional years. Russell et al. surveyed 78 teachers employed in central Texas. The researchers found that teachers who reported their director was less skilled in coordinating tasks, less dependable, and inconsistent also reported thoughts of leaving their jobs. Job commitment and retention were associated with teachers who reported their director as supportive and proficient in attaining school resources.

Conclusion

Research has provided insight into the importance and benefits of quality childcare for all children. One of the key factors of creating this quality is the classroom teacher. Studies have also indicated a connection between the organizational climate, which includes leadership, and quality. However, very little research in early childhood education exists that has examined the relationship between the organizational climate and teacher retention. The intent of the methodology section was to obtain the teachers’ and the directors’ perceptions about the organizational climate, compare the two perspectives, and investigate what factors of the organizational climate perceived by teachers were related to retention.

Summary

The environment of a quality early childhood center has the potential to positively impact a child's growth and development. During childhood, as brain structures mature, early and appropriate experiences can provide those opportunities necessary for cognitive and social-emotional development. A critical component in the provision of this care is the early childhood educator and the stability and consistency of care provided. The role of the supportive classroom teacher is that of primary caretaker and provider of an enriched process for learning that can increase positive long-range outcomes for children. Each classroom is part of an overall organization and the climate of that organization has been found to influence the quality of the care provided for children. The organizational climate includes structural and process elements of the functioning of the entire center. In order to retain teachers and implement quality care for young children, it is critical for a childcare director to understand their teachers' needs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The demand for childcare in the United States continues to increase due to changes in family structure, economics, and other needs. Through quantitative and qualitative research, quality early childhood programs were found to produce short and long term positive correlations with school readiness, academic success, and social-emotional behavior development. Researchers also found correlations between attendance at a quality childcare program and success, especially for children at risk of failure and children with special needs (Burchinal, Roberts et al., 2000; Day, 2010; Jeon et al., 2010). There is evidence that “high quality early experiences make a difference in children’s lifelong academic and social success” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d. a).

Quality in early childhood centers has been studied. The factors that contributed to quality were varied and included many facets of the organizational climate. Classroom quality was found to have a strong positive correlation with the work environment especially in areas of teachers’ relationships with children (Dennis & O’Connor, 2013; Manlove et al., 2008). Individual factors such as perceived supportiveness and efficiency were identified as characteristics of effective leadership that led to higher teacher retention as well as increased quality (Bloom, 1996; Russell et al., 2010).

The research contained in this dissertation includes an examination of the early childhood work environment, leadership, supervision, and their relationship to teacher retention. The purpose of this research was to explore any correlations between aspects of leadership and teacher perception of the work environment. Any characteristics of leadership and environment that were found to be effective in teacher retention could be implemented in early childhood education and care centers as a proactive measure to increase teacher retention and therefore increase quality programming. The researcher explored the perceptions of those in leadership positions, including directors, assistant directors, and component coordinators as well as the perceptions of teachers, including lead teachers, classroom teachers, and assistant teachers regarding their perceptions about their work environments. Relationships were examined between the respondents' perceptions about their work environments and various demographics, specifically; age, years working in the field of early childhood education, and years working at their current site of employment at the time of participation in the research. Other factors that were examined to establish relationships were teachers' commitment to their current site of employment, characteristics of leadership and perceptual differences between teachers and leaders. Chapter III describes the methodology used to gather data as well as describe how each research question was addressed. This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do teachers' perceptions of the early childhood work environment relate to teacher retention?
2. What is the relationship between leaders' perceived level of supervision with the length of time they have worked in the field of early childhood education?

3. What is the difference between leaders' and teachers' responses about the quality ratings of the early childhood work environment?

Research Design

The research for this study was a quantitative design which required measuring the perceptions of leaders and teachers working in an early childhood education and care center. Their perceptions were measured in a numerical way using a standardized survey instrument. The data collected were used to explain the relationship between the work environment and teacher retention, to inform about the specific responses regarding leadership qualities, and to validate prior research about the importance of leadership and supervision. Statistical procedures and specific tests for descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013) a quantitative study can be used to explain and predict. The intent of this quantitative research was to identify relationships, define differences, and to develop generalizations about the early childhood work environment and teacher retention that could be used to inform others and contribute to the body of research in early childhood education.

In order to obtain data to answer the three research questions, all respondents were administered the ECWES (Bloom, 2010). The ECWES is a survey instrument that was created to measure the organizational climate of an early childhood center. According to Bloom, the climate of an early childhood center is composed of the perceptions, beliefs, and dispositions of those in the work place as well as "the leadership that guides them" (p. 45). The response statements contained in the ECWES are divided into 10 subscales or dimensions of the organizational climate. The subscales include Collegiality, Professional Growth, Supervisor Support, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness as

defined in Table 1. The ECWES is contained in a test booklet. Respondents mark their answers directly in the booklet by checking statements or ranking items that relate to questions about their work environment. The questions that contained statements for participants to check all that applied were scored by subtracting the number of negative statements checked from the number of positive statements checked, then adding five to obtain a score for each question. Each dimension section is composed of multiple questions. The researcher purchased the ECWES through the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership.

The ECWES has been used by other researchers to examine the work climate of child care centers. Studies were conducted that used data from the ECWES to explore the relationship between the child care work environment and the quality of caregiving, learning environments, and professional growth for teachers and leaders (Bloom, 1996; Lower & Cassidy, 2007; Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Manlove, et al., 2008; Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2014).

Table 1

Definitions for the Ten Dimensions of the Work Environment from the ECWES

Dimension	Definition
1. Collegiality	The cooperative, supportive, and trusting relationships among colleagues.
2. Professional Growth	The process of improving and increasing knowledge and abilities in the field through multiple means.
3. Supervisor Support	The manner and degree of support, feedback, motivation, and expectations from leadership.
4. Clarity	Well defined and communicated policies, procedures, roles, and responsibilities.
5. Reward System	Fair treatment regarding salary, benefits, and advancement.
6. Decision Making	The amount of independence staff has to make decisions about their classrooms and the center.
7. Goal Consensus	Agreement about the goals and philosophy for the children and the center.
8. Task Orientation	Focus on the tasks that need to be accomplished through effective and efficient leadership.
9. Physical Setting	The environment of the center with regard to physical and environmental conditions as well as supplies and materials available.
10. Innovativeness	Can adjust or modify to suit a new or different way; being creative and original to reach goals and solve problems.

Note. Definitions reflect information found in the following: Bloom (2010); Colker (2008); Harrist et al. (2007); Howes et al. (1992); Martin et al. (2010); Rafferty and Griffin (2006); Rigby et al. (2007); Roach et al. (2006); Ryan et al. (2011).

The reliability of the ECWES was determined for internal consistency of each dimension through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Two different samples were tested. The total climate scores for the 10 dimensions were for sample one, $\alpha = .93$ and for sample two, $\alpha = .95$ suggesting that the 10 dimensions of the ECWES have a high internal consistency. In addition, a test-retest of reliability for the ECWES was conducted over a two month period with two different samples; sample one, $n = 80$ and sample two, $n = 120$. For sample one, the range was from .60 for Clarity to .93 for Decision Making; sample two ranged from .60 in Physical Setting to .89 in Decision Making. These scores were determined to be evidence of the stability of the constructs (Bloom, 2010).

Although there is some overlap between the dimensions, the questions for each dimension were designed to measure some unique qualities. Discriminant validity of the dimensions was tested using a correlation of the mean of one dimension with the other nine dimensions. The correlations ranged from .33 to .53. These results were interpreted as the dimensions having some commonalities as they would in a work environment, but also represent individual characteristics. In addition, the ECWES was tested for discriminant validity with the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey (Bloom, 2010). A Pearson product-moment correlation between some of the dimensions of the work climate and job satisfaction was conducted. The correlations ranged from .02 with Clarity to .84 in Physical Setting. Most of the correlations were moderate, which suggested that although there were some similarities between climate and satisfaction, they are distinct constructs (Bloom).

The concurrent validity of the ECWES was measured against various other work environment surveys including the Work Environment Scale (Moos, 1995), the Hay Group Organizational Climate Survey (Gordon & Cummins, 1979; Nash, 1983), and the

Charles F. Kettering Ltd. School Climate Audit (CFK School Climate Audit) (Howard et al., 1987). The ECWES and these three other scales had significant positive correlations in many dimensions. The CFK School Climate Audit scale and the ECWES correlations ranged from .47 in Collegiality to .86 in Physical Setting.

Population

Research for this dissertation was conducted in a major Midwestern city utilizing the population of leaders and teachers employed in early childhood centers that had achieved NAEYC accreditation. One of the control variables for this research was limiting the participating early childhood centers to those with accreditation from NAEYC. The researcher identified accredited centers located within the city limits from a list posted on the NAEYC website (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.). Because centers with NAEYC accreditation were found to be of a high quality and one of the measures of quality is teacher consistency, the researcher chose to focus on those centers that had achieved NAEYC accreditation (Apple, 2006; Bloom, 1996). Another control variable related to the type of child care center which might have physical and staffing differences that could account for alternative perceptions of the work environment. Those variables were controlled through the participation of early childhood centers that were center based, no home based centers, therefore the environments and the staffing would follow similar patterns.

An email invitation to participate in this research was sent to the director of approximately 20 early childhood centers. Of those who replied, one director volunteered her site's participation and three executive directors from multi-site agencies agreed to participate on behalf of their center directors. Ten centers were initially accepted to participate in the study.

Ultimately a convenience sample was used that consisted of nine early childhood centers. One of the centers had a change in leadership and without a permanently employed director that center no longer met the criteria for the research. Among the nine participating centers, 160 ECWES surveys were completed. Of the 160 respondents, a higher number of females than males were in the participant sample. The total number of females who participated was 153, which represented 114 teachers and 27 leaders and accounted for 92.2% of the total number of respondents. The total number of males who participated was 12, which represented nine teachers and three leaders and accounted for 7.8% of the total number of respondents. Table 2 shows an analysis of teachers and leaders by job title. The mean age for teachers was 38 years old and for leaders was 39 years old. The mean number of years teachers had working in the field of early childhood education was 12.25 and leaders had an average of 12.50 years. The mean number of years a teacher had employed at their current center was two while the average number of years a leader had working at their current site was 7.75. All figures regarding age and years working in early childhood education and years working at the current center are shown in Table 3.

Table 2

Job Title for Respondents

Title	Teachers	Leaders	Percent
<u>Teachers</u>			
Lead	40		25.3
Assistant	41		25.9
Non-specified teacher type	44		27.8
<u>Leaders</u>			
Director		9	5.7
Assistant Director		2	1.3
Component Coordinator		19	12.0

Table 3

Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Teachers	Leaders
	<i>n</i> = 125	<i>n</i> = 30
Average Age (\pm <i>SD</i>)	38 (12.06)	39 (8.05)
Average years employed in early childhood education (\pm <i>SD</i>)	12.25 (9.21)	12.50 (7.50)
Average years employed at current center (\pm <i>SD</i>)	2 (5.02)	7.75 (6.32)

Data Collection

The ECWES was identified by the researcher as the proper survey instrument to use for this research because the focus of this survey is specifically about the early childhood work environment. The researcher spoke with Paula Jorde Bloom, the author of the ECWES, and was granted approval to purchase the survey from the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership for the purpose of this research. The researcher met with each centers' leaders and teachers in order to review informed consent and the manner in which the survey would be administered at each location.

The survey was administered by the researcher at the same time of the work day at each of the nine sites and in a similar setting. Each center had a private, well-lit room or area available with tables and chairs for the participants. During mid-day hours, between noon and 2:30 p.m. when the participants typically had break time, they were able to take the survey. From one to 10 participants were able to take the survey at the same time during the designated hours. The surveys took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Completed surveys were placed in envelopes provided by the researcher and sealed by the participants; the surveys were then sent to the McCormack Center for collation of the responses. The data was returned to the researcher and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was then used to analyze the three research questions.

Analytical Methods

The data once entered into SPSS, was reviewed. Some of the data was re-coded prior to conducting statistical tests. Sometimes with data analysis certain procedures need to be performed prior to analyzing the data (Yockey, 2011). In order to answer the research questions the number of months teachers and directors had working in the field

of early childhood education were recoded into years. Other responses to specific leadership traits (*support and feedback*) and the work attitude of commitment (*committed to the center*) were also recoded into a *yes* response if the item was checked in the test booklet and a *no* response if the item was not checked.

This research included both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to describe basic characteristics of a sample, as well as organize, and summarize the data (Salkind, 2014). Descriptive statistics described the demographic characteristics of the sample. Inferential statistics are techniques used to make inferences and generalizations about a population with data from a representative sample (Salkind). The researcher used inferential statistics to examine the data from the participating centers to infer to the population of early childhood leaders and teachers.

Research question one was, how do teachers' perceptions of the early childhood work environment relate to teacher retention? The researcher first chose a correlational method to analyze this question. The participants were assigned to groups based upon their job description. The focus of research question one was the relationship between continuous variables; participant scores to the 10 dimensions of the early childhood work environment. To answer research question one, the researcher analyzed the responses of the teachers on the ECWES using the Pearson product-moment correlation. This tested the relationship between teachers' perceptions of Supervisor Support with the other nine subscales of the work environment. The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the degree of the relationship between two continuous variables. The responses to the subscales of the ECWES are measured on an interval scale. The researcher used X for the response score for the subscale of Supervisor Support and Y for the response score of the

other subscales of Collegiality, Professional Growth, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness.

A second Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to examine the relationship between the length of time a teacher had working in the field of early childhood education and the 10 dimensions of the early childhood work environment. The focus of this calculation was between continuous variables. The researcher examined the relationship between the length of time a teacher had working in the field of early childhood education as measured in years (X) and each of the 10 dimensions of the early childhood work environment as measured on an interval scale (Y).

Other researchers have conducted correlational research using the ECWES and a Pearson product-moment correlation. Lower and Cassidy (2007) examined the relationship between administration of an early childhood program through the use of the Program Administration Scale (PAS) (Talan & Bloom, 2004) and the organizational climate through the ECWES. Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, and Ting (2010) used a Pearson product-moment correlation to examine the relationship between several demographic variables including years worked in early childhood and perceptions of professionalism for both teachers and leaders.

Information regarding specific leadership traits was examined next for this research to provide another way to answer question one and the relationship between teachers and leadership. Individual leadership qualities such as *support and feedback* are included in the subscale of Supervisor Support. Previous researchers indicated that teachers in early childhood education viewed support and feedback from their supervisors as an important factor in their decision to remain at their place of employment (Rous, 2004). The subscale of Supervisor Support contains 10 statements about the

characteristics of supervision; one of those statements indicated that a director provided support and helpful feedback. The teachers who participated in this research checked all those statements that they perceived would apply to their leaders. A section about work attitudes on the ECWES also contains 10 statements that teachers checked if the statement applied to their perceptions about personal feelings toward their center. One of those statements was about feeling *committed to the center*.

In order to ascertain whether a teachers' commitment to their current employment related to a leaders' support and feedback, the researcher chose a quasi-experimental method to examine the relationship between two variables. For each of the two statements (*support and feedback*; *committed to the center*) the checked statement was counted as a *yes* response and a blank statement was counted as a *no* response. A two-way chi-square statistic was chosen to examine this data to determine if there was a relationship between the two categorical independent variables. The dependent variable was the frequency count for each of the independent variables.

Prior research using a two-way chi-square was conducted by Russell et al. (2010). Russell et al. surveyed early childhood workers using the ECWES and the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The nominal variables that were used for the two-way chi square were frequency counts from questions that related to perceptions of professionalism and the work environment.

One additional statistical test conducted for research question one using the same independent variable about commitment, as was used in the two-way chi-square test. A between subjects *t*-test for independent samples was conducted in a quasi-experimental method to determine teachers perceptions about the 10 dimensions of the work environment. A quasi-experimental method was chosen because the two groups used for

this test were defined by teachers' responses to the ECWES question about commitment to their workplace and not through random assignment. A check for the statement about commitment to their workplace was considered a *yes* response and a blank for the statement was considered a *no* response. A *t*-test for independent samples was chosen to examine the means of the two teacher groups (*yes* or *no* to commitment) about each of the 10 subscales of the early childhood work environment. For this statistical test the researcher examined the differences between groups and not relationships between variables. The independent variable for this test was the two groups of teachers. The dependent variable for this test was the teachers' score about their perceptions for each of the 10 dimensions of their work environment.

Research question two was: what is the relationship between leaders' perceived level of supervision with the length of time they have worked in the field of early childhood education? For this question the relationship between the leaders' perceptions of their supervision and the length of time they had worked in the field of early childhood education was examined. This question examined relationships, the method chosen was correlational and the statistical test chosen was the Pearson product-moment correlation. The two continuous variables were the length of time (measured in years) each leader reported they had worked in early childhood as X and the leaders' responses to the 10 dimensions of the work environment on the ECWES as Y.

Research question three was: what is the difference between leaders' and teachers' responses about the quality ratings of the early childhood work environment? The research question addressed whether there was a difference between the perceptions of teachers and leaders regarding their perceptions about the work environment. To answer this question, the researcher calculated the mean scores for each of the 10

dimensions of the work environment for the group of teachers and for the group of leaders. The differences between the two groups were compared. The independent variable for this question was the employee status, and levels included teachers and leaders. The variable was between-subjects because the participants were in different groups and were only tested one time. The dependent variable for this question was the score for each of the 10 dimensions. The statistical test chosen to analyze the data for question three was the *t*-test for independent samples. A *t*-test was computed for each of the 10 dimensions (dependent variable).

Martin et al. (2010) analyzed the perceptions of professionalism in child care centers using questionnaires created for their research. Because their research included analyzing the differences between three groups (center directors, center caregivers, family child care providers), Martin et al. used an ANOVA instead of a *t*-test. An ANOVA is used to compare the means of three or more groups and is similar to the *t*-test. In both statistical tests the differences between means are calculated (Salkind, 2014). The basis of the Martin et al. research was to examine the differences between the mean scores of three groups. The method chosen to answer question three for this dissertation was a *t*-test instead of an ANOVA because this researcher was examining the mean scores between only two groups; teachers and leaders.

Limitations

The overall design of this research was with the intention of obtaining results that would identify characteristics of the work environment that related to teacher retention. Part of that process was to survey a sufficient number of teachers and leaders. The number of centers included in this research might be considered small and therefore, some of the results might not have the same impact as a larger sample. A smaller sample

size “limits the power to detect significant effects” (Dennis & O’Connor, 2013, p. 88). Effective leadership in early childhood education is commonly accepted as being the key to successfully managing all components of an early childhood center (Harrist et al., 2007). For this research, directors, assistant directors, and component coordinators were considered leaders and resulted in a sample of 30 total leaders. With a larger total sample the number of directors and assistant directors would have increased as well as the number of teachers. In addition, the choice to use NAEYC accredited centers in order to survey higher quality locations was limited to a major Midwestern city. Perhaps if the researcher had expanded the geographical area and included suburban locations there would have been broader implications.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions of the early childhood work environment with teacher retention rates. An additional purpose was to identify specific areas of leadership as reported by teachers who related their retention decisions in order to provide information for proactive management of early childhood centers. The research design, methodology, and limitations were outlined and described. The findings of the statistical analyses that were conducted for each research question as well as recommendations for future research are included in chapter four.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The quality of care that children age 6 weeks to 5 years old have received in a childcare setting has been determined to be an important factor in the development of young children. The childcare work environment, leadership, and teacher relationships all influence the level of quality care that children receive. Teacher-child relationships that are established in a childcare setting have been identified as high in importance for quality care. The quality of the relationship can be partially determined by the consistency of the teacher or caregiver (Cassidy et al., 2011; Helburn, 1995; Howes et al., 1992; Mashburn, 2008). The retention of teachers in early childhood centers therefore has a high level of importance in the research about quality care.

The purpose of this research was to examine factors of the work environment that related to higher teacher retention rates in order to inform early childhood leaders. With information about factors that lead to teacher retention, leaders could implement strategies to potentially increase teacher retention rates and subsequently increase the quality of early childhood programs. In the current study, the researcher addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers' perceptions of the early childhood work environment relate to teacher retention?

2. What is the relationship between leaders' perceived level of supervision with the length of time they have worked in the field of early childhood education?
3. What is the difference between leaders' and teachers' responses about the quality ratings of the early childhood work environment?

Chapter III provided a detailed explanation about the methodology used in this study. The chapter included descriptions about the research design, population, data collection, and analytical methods that were used by the researcher. All of the data were entered into SPSS Version 22.0 and subsequently analyzed and interpreted. In Chapter IV the researcher will present the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations of this study.

Findings

Research Question 1: How do teachers' perceptions of the early childhood work environment relate to teacher retention?

To answer Research Question 1, the researcher analyzed the responses of the teachers on the ECWES; $n = 125$. In order to gain a thorough answer to this question, the researcher conducted several statistical tests. The first statistic chosen was a Pearson correlation coefficient that examined the relationship between teachers' perception of supervision with the other nine subscales of the work environment. The teachers' response score for the dimension of Supervisor Support was correlated with the response scores of Collegiality, Professional Growth, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, and the results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between Supervisor Support and the other nine subscales. Table 4 illustrates the findings of the teachers' perceptions of their current

supervision with each of the other nine subscales. The relationship between Supervisor Support and the other nine subscales predicted statistically significant positive correlations and ranged from .34 in Physical Setting to .50 for Decision Making, with p values for all nine dimensions $< .01$. Based on Cohen's guidelines, the ranges .34 - .50 indicate medium to large effect sizes. The correlation for this research showed that Supervisor Support had a connection to the other nine dimensions of the early childhood work environment as identified in the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES). A scatterplot of Supervisor Support and Decision Making as shown in Figure 1 displays the positive correlation of these two dimensions of the early childhood work environment; $r(122) = .50, p < .01$. Table 4 shows the correlations of Supervisor Support with the other nine dimensions.

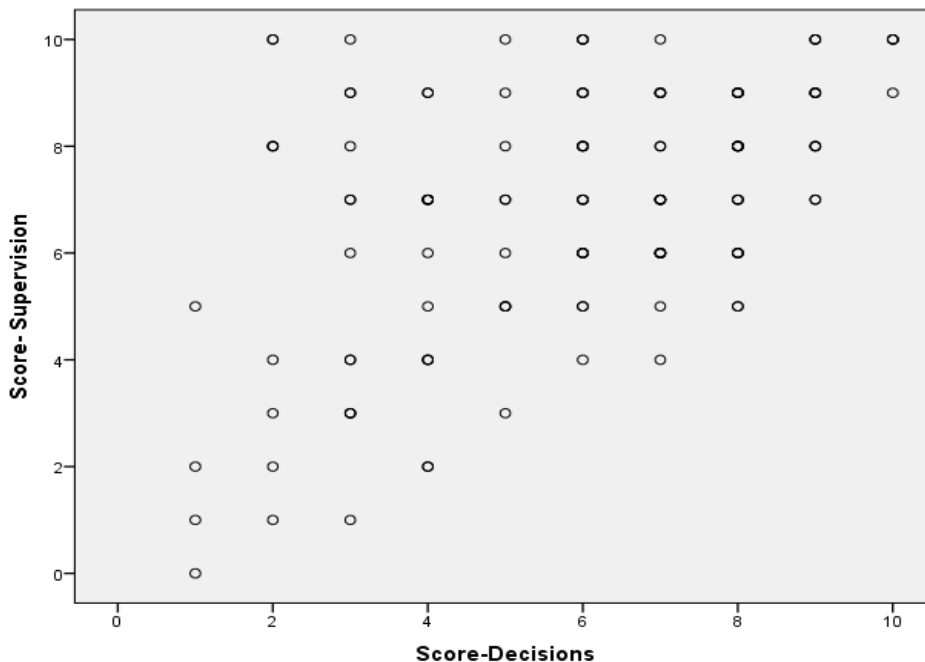


Figure1. Scatterplot of supervisor support and decision making.

A second Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated that examined the relationship between the length of time a teacher had working in the field of early

childhood education and the 10 dimensions of the early childhood work environment as defined by the ECWES. The results indicated both significant and non-significant relationships as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for all Variables: Teacher Responses

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.	1.00										
2.	.32**	1.00									
3.	.39**	.34**	1.00								
4.	.46**	.47**	.60**	1.00							
5.	.49**	.42**	.43**	.51**	1.00						
6.	.50**	.48**	.34**	.60**	.60**	1.00					
7.	.45**	.54**	.52**	.70**	.57**	.61**	1.00				
8.	.47**	.53**	.26**	.52**	.63**	.58**	.57**	1.00			
9.	.34**	.39**	.36**	.51**	.54**	.46**	.62**	.57**	1.00		
10.	.43**	.40**	.46**	.55**	.56**	.61**	.66**	.52**	.54**	1.00	
11.	.004	.10	.22*	.15	.23*	.15	.20*	.16	.31**	.23*	1.00
<i>M</i>	6.85	5.98	4.69	2.18	5.02	5.82	6.45	6.52	6.19	5.97	147.50
<i>SD</i>	2.37	2.17	2.41	1.54	2.28	2.37	2.17	2.30	2.21	2.37	113.35

Note. 1. Supervisor Support; 2. Collegiality; 3. Professional Growth; 4. Clarity; 5. Reward System; 6. Decision Making; 7. Goal Consensus; 8. Task Orientation; 9. Physical Setting; 10. Innovativeness; 11. Time working in Early Childhood (EC) Overall $N = 124$. All tests are two-tailed. The mean for time working in EC is measured in months.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 4, there were significant positive relationships between the length of time a teacher had working in the field of early childhood education and the subscales of Professional Growth, Reward System, Goal Consensus, and Innovativeness

ranging from .20 for Goal Consensus to .23 for Reward System and Innovativeness with p values $< .05$. The Pearson correlation indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between the length of time a teacher had working in the field of early childhood education and the Physical Setting, $r(121) = .31, p < .01$. According to Cohen's guidelines, these correlations of .20 to .31 represent small to medium effect sizes.

Information regarding specific leadership traits was examined next and provided another way to answer Research Question 1 and the relationship between teachers and leadership. Individual leadership qualities such as *support and feedback* are included in the subscale of Supervisor Support in the ECWES. The subscale of Supervisor Support contained 10 statements about the characteristics of supervision; one of those statements indicated that a director provided support and helpful feedback. The teachers who participated in this research checked all those statements that they perceived would apply to their leaders. The section about Work Attitudes on the ECWES also contained 10 statements that teachers checked if the statement applied to their perceptions about personal feelings towards their center. One of those statements was about feeling *committed to the center*.

For each of the two statements (*support and feedback* and *committed to the center*), the checked statement was counted as a *yes* and a blank for the statement was counted as a *no*. Therefore, the responses were grouped as a *yes* response group and a *no* response group. A two-way chi-square statistic examined this data to determine if there was a relationship between these two categorical variables, each with two levels. The data used were frequency counts for the teachers' responses.

Table 5

Chi-Square Test of Independence between Support and Feedback with Commitment to Center: Teacher Responses

Committed to Center	<u>Support and Feedback</u>	
	No	Yes
No	24 (19.2%)	41 (32.8%)
Yes	12 (9.6%)	48 (38.4%)

Note. $\chi^2(1) = 4.36, p < .05$

Numbers in parentheses indicate total percentages.

As shown in Table 5, there is a significant relationship between support and feedback and committed to center, $X^2(1, N = 125) = 4.36, p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .19$. Those teachers who were committed to their workplace perceived more support and feedback from their supervisors than those teachers who were not committed to their workplace. The effect size for this relationship was in the high range, which indicated that there was a strong relationship for these two variables.

A between subjects t -test for independent samples was used to determine teachers perceptions about the 10 dimensions of the work environment as defined by the ECWES. A check for the statement about commitment to their workplace was considered a *yes* response and a blank for the statement was considered a *no* response. A t -test for independent samples was chosen to examine the means of the two teacher group responses (*yes* or *no* response) to being committed to their current workplace about each of the 10 subscale dimensions of the early childhood work environment.

Sixty of 125 (48%) teacher participants reported that they were committed to their current early childhood center; 65 (52%) of the teacher respondents reported that they were not committed. In addition, 52 (42%) of the 125 teachers indicated that they intended to stay at their current center for at least two more years; 73 (58%) of the teachers indicated that they did not intend to stay at their current center for two more years. Table 6 illustrates a difference between those responses of teachers who were committed to their center and the responses of those teachers who were not committed to their centers in all dimensions. The differences in scores between the committed group of teachers and the group of non-committed teachers were statistically significant.

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviation, and t-test scores for all variables: Teacher Responses

	Committed		Not Committed		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -test
Supervisor					
Support	7.62	2.02	6.14	2.46	-1.48**
Collegiality	6.67	2.08	5.35	2.08	-3.53**
Professional	5.33	2.55	4.09	2.13	-2.96**
Growth					
Clarity	2.65	1.60	1.75	1.36	-3.38**
Reward	5.87	2.21	4.23	2.08	-4.27**
System					
Decision	6.65	2.30	5.06	2.19	-3.97**
Making					
Goal	7.24	2.15	5.74	1.93	-4.09**
Consensus					
Task	7.24	2.13	5.86	2.25	-3.50**
Orientation					
Physical	6.73	2.27	5.69	2.05	-2.68**
Setting					
Innovativeness	6.85	2.17	5.17	2.26	-4.21**

Note. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

***p* < .01

Those teachers who were committed to their centers had significantly higher ratings in all 10 of the early childhood work dimensions than those teachers who were not committed. One example is in the area of Supervisor Support, $t(123) = -1.48, p < .01, d = .25$. Supervisor Support scores for both committed and non-committed groups are shown in the bar graph in Figure 2. The graph shows that both groups had higher scores in Supervisor Support than lower scores.

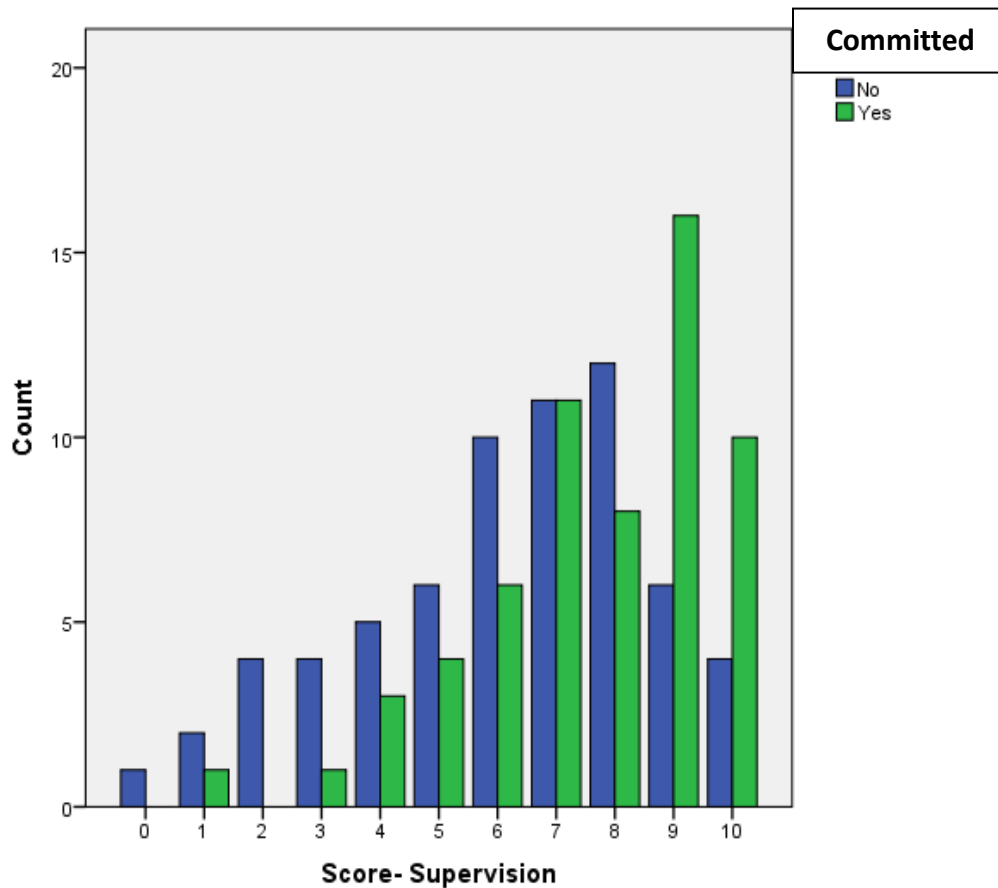


Figure 2. Graph for the independent samples t -test of commitment to the workplace with Supervisor Support.

In the area of Collegiality, teachers who were committed had statistically significantly higher scores than teachers who were not committed, $t(123) = -3.53, p <$

.01, $d = .63$. Following Cohen's guidelines of effect size, the .63 represented a moderate effect size emphasizing statistical significance of the score in the dimension of Collegiality. The bar graph for Committed/Not Committed and Collegiality shown in Figure 3 has a normal distribution for the Not Committed group of teachers. The Committed group of teachers had a negatively skewed distribution indicating that more teachers who were committed to their center rated the level of collegiality higher than those teachers who were not committed. In addition, the scores for the committed group in the dimension of Collegiality had a higher mean score than those who were not committed.

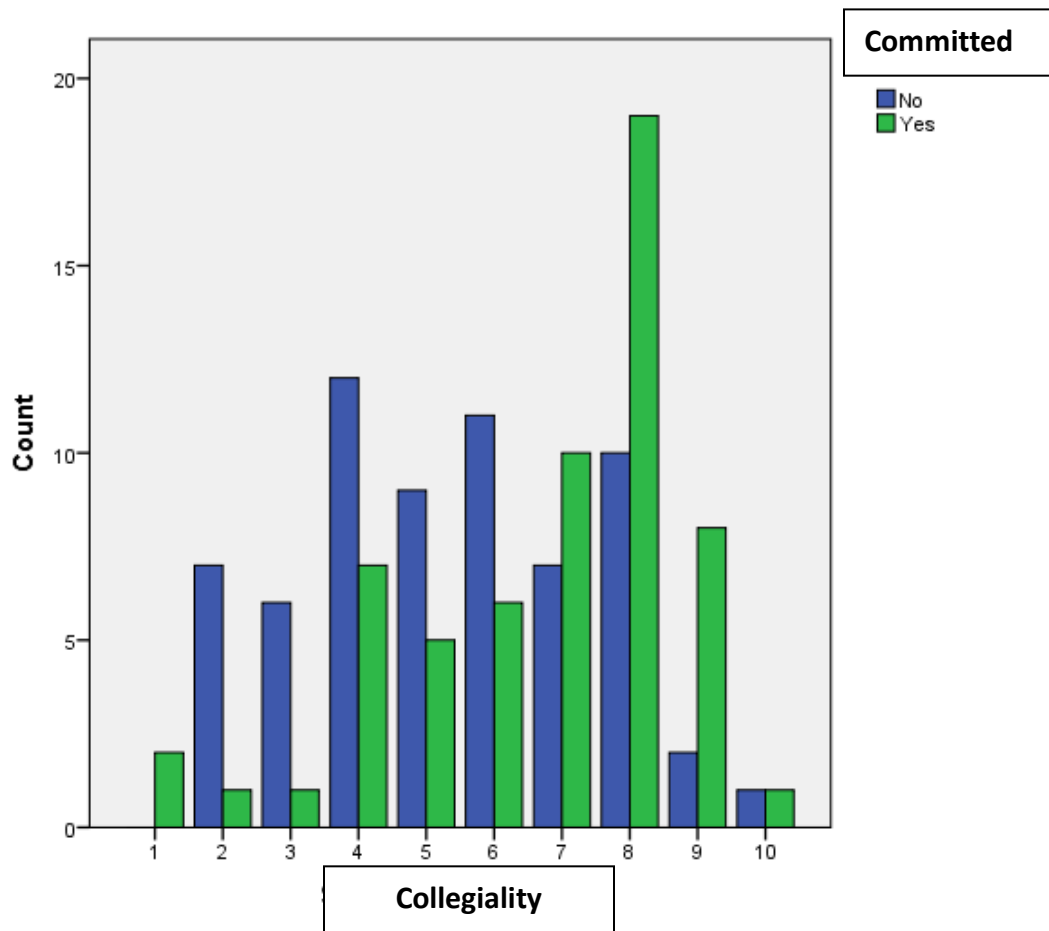


Figure 3. Graph for the independent samples *t*-test of Commitment to the Workplace with Collegiality.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between leaders' perceived level of supervision with the length of time they have worked in the field of early childhood education?

To answer Research Question 2, the responses from the leaders on the ECWES were analyzed. The leader group consisted of center directors, assistant directors, and component coordinators; $n = 30$. To identify any relationship between the leaders' perceived supervision and the length of time working in the field of early childhood the researcher evaluated their responses on the ECWES. A Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the length of time a leader

had working in the field of early childhood and the ten dimensions of the work environment.

There was a statistically significant positive correlation between Professional Growth and length of time working in early childhood, $r(28) = .40, p < .05$. A scatterplot summarizes the results in Figure 4. Professional Growth is defined as providing workshops, encouraging collaboration, allotting time for teachers to engage in learning opportunities outside of their center, providing guidance, and reference materials (Bloom, 2010). Overall, the number of years a leader had working in early childhood education was positively correlated with Professional Growth.

Although no other dimension other than Professional Growth had a relationship with the length of time a leader had working in early childhood, the dimension of Supervisor Support had a significant relationship to all nine of the other dimensions. Scores ranged from .40 for Reward System ($r(28) = .40, p < .05$,) to .61 for Task Orientation ($r(28) = .61, p < .01$). According to Cohen's effect sizes, .40 in Reward System is in the medium range and .61 in Task Orientation is in the large range. Other correlations of Supervisor Support and other dimensions of the work environment that would be considered in the large range included: Clarity, Decision Making, and Innovativeness as shown in Table 7.

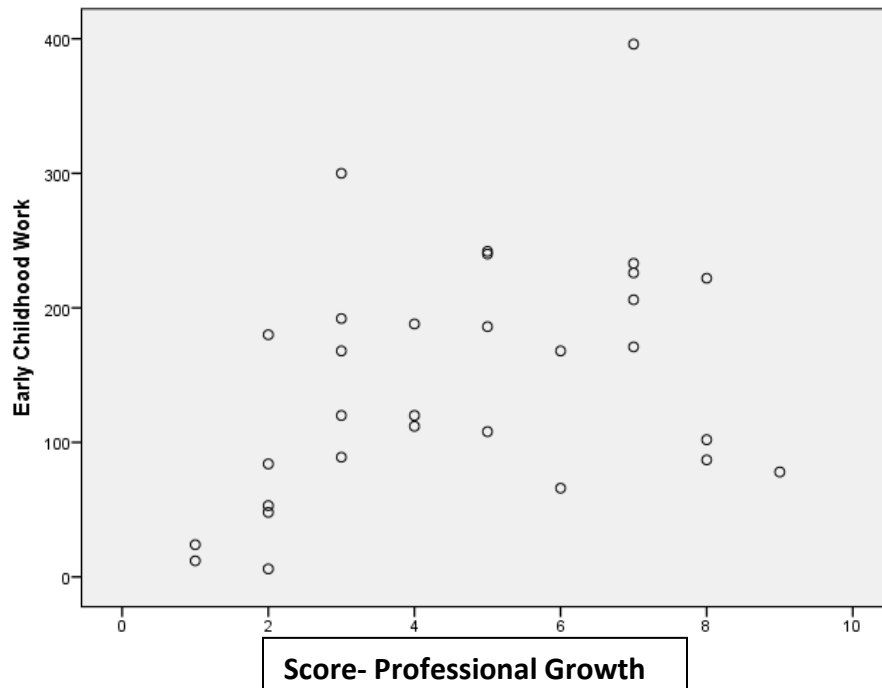


Figure 4. Scatterplot of length of time a leader has working in early childhood education with professional growth.

Table 7

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for all Variables: Leader Responses

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.	1										
2.	.38*	1									
3.	.46*	.26	1								
4.	.54**	.37	.49**	1							
5.	.41*	.34*	.36*	.28	1						
6.	.52**	.37*	.59**	.57**	.67**	1					
7.	.42*	.25	.21	.28	.34	.34	1				
8.	.61**	.49**	.44*	.50**	.64**	.60**	.47**	1			
9.	.49**	.06	.38*	.38*	.55**	.43*	.53**	.49**	1		
10.	.59**	.24	.61**	.48**	.55**	.54**	.52**	.61**	.51**	1	
11.	.19	.13	.40*	.32	.31	.29	.02	.16	.16	.26	1
<i>M</i>	6.97	5.33	4.63	2.37	5.57	5.80	6.37	6.17	5.53	5.83	147.57
<i>SD</i>	2.46	2.40	2.36	1.63	2.27	2.61	1.85	2.61	2.68	2.20	89.82

Note. 1. Supervisor Support; 2. Collegiality; 3. Professional Growth; 4. Clarity; 5. Reward System; 6. Decision Making; 7. Goal Consensus; 8. Task Orientation; 9. Physical Setting; 10. Innovativeness; 11. Time working in Early Childhood (EC) Overall $N = 30$. All tests are two-tailed. Length of time working in EC measured in months.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Research Question 3: What is the difference between leaders' and teachers' responses about the quality ratings of the early childhood work environment?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the early childhood background of the leaders and teachers in this research, descriptive statistics about the two groups were

conducted. The length of time each group had working in the field of early childhood and the length of time each group had working at their present place of employment was reviewed. Figure 5 shows the length of time as measured in years that teachers and leaders had working in the field of early childhood. The bar chart for teachers shows a positively skewed distribution, indicating that in the sample for this research there were a larger number of teachers with a relatively lower number of years working in early childhood education. The bar chart for the leaders shows a bimodal distribution, indicating two distinct modes for this group.

Figure 6 shows the length of time as measured in years that teachers and leaders had working at their present place of employment. The bar chart for teachers again is positively skewed indicating that a larger number of teachers had less years working at their current early childhood center. The bar chart for leaders indicates that a larger number of leaders also had less years working at their current location.

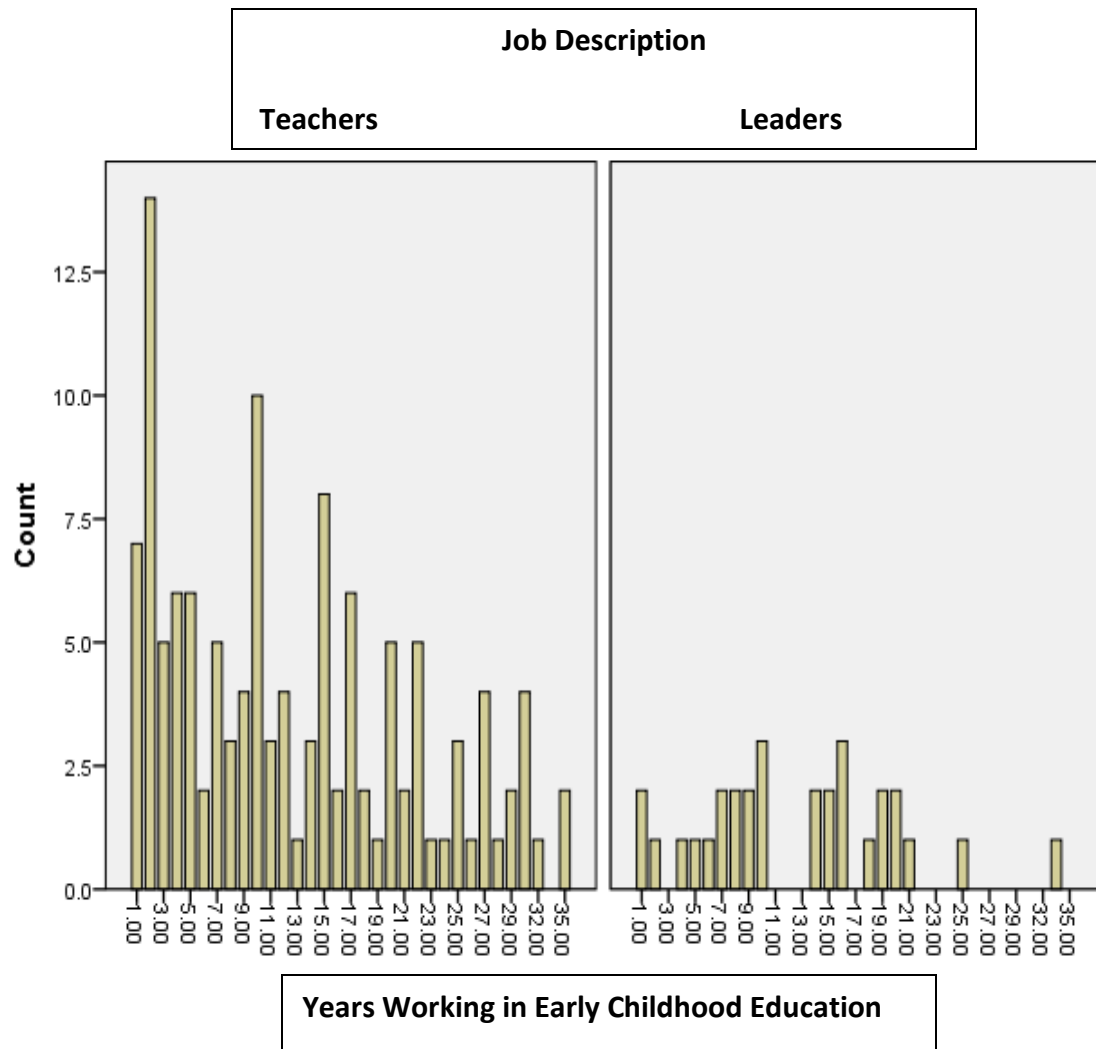


Figure 5. Bar graphs of length of time working in early childhood education.

Table 8

Means, Medians, Modes, and Standard Deviations: Years Working in Early Childhood Education

Job Description	N = 154	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Teachers	N = 124	12.68	10.50	2.00	9.20
Leaders	N = 30	12.60	12.00	10/16	7.47

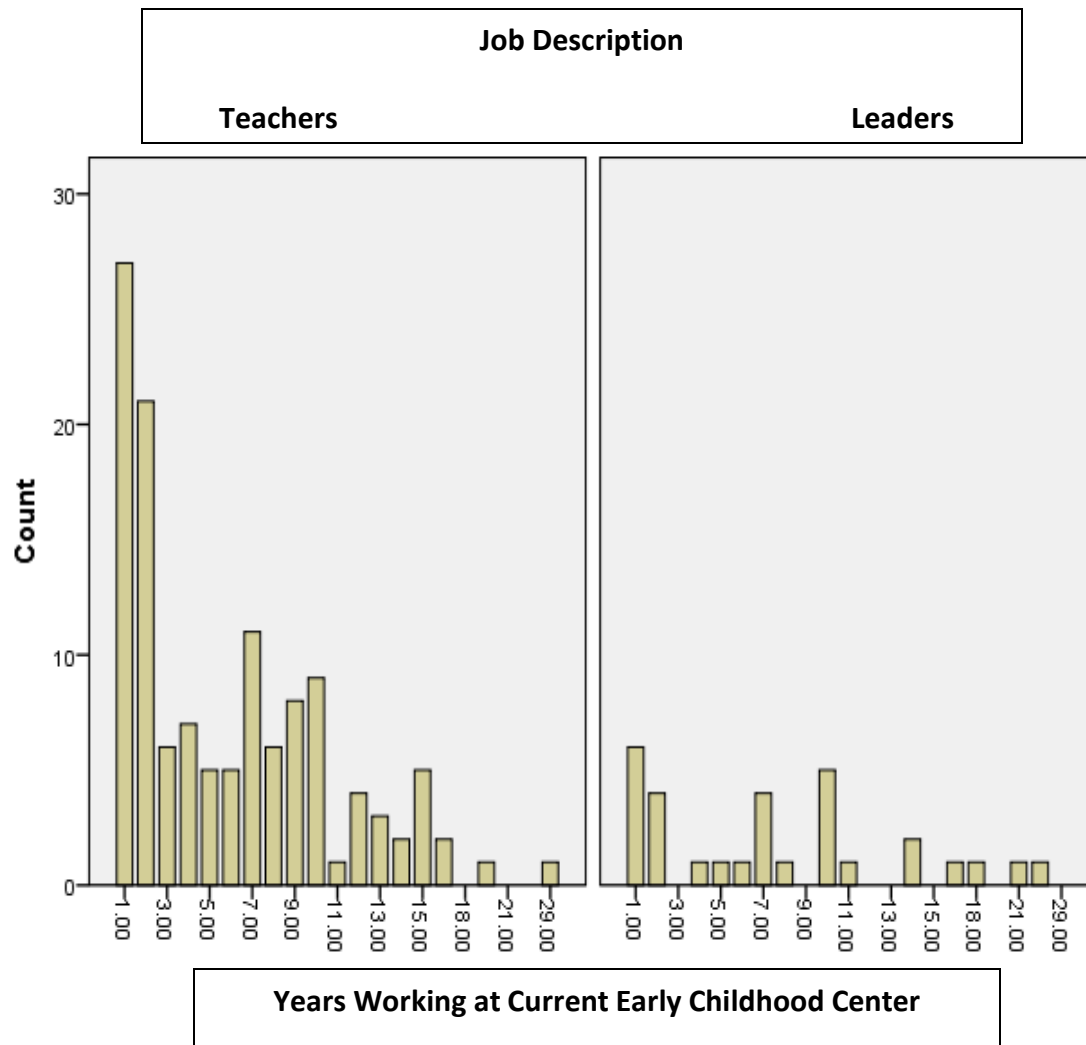


Figure 6. Bar graphs of length of time working at current place of employment.

Table 9

Means, Medians, Modes, and Standard Deviations: Years Working at Present Place of Employment

Job Description	N=154	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Teachers	N = 124	5.95	5.00	1.00	5.02
Leaders	N = 30	7.77	7.00	1.00	6.32

The inferential statistic used to answer Research Question 3 were independent sample *t*-tests conducted on the mean scores of leaders' and teachers' responses to each of the 10 dimensions of the work environment as well as responses to the Work Attitude

section on the ECWES. The *t*-test scores were analyzed to compare the leaders' and teachers' perceptions of their work environment. The results indicated that in all of the 10 dimensions (Supervisor Support, Collegiality, Professional Growth, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness) the results of the *t*-test for independent samples indicated there was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of the leaders and teachers. *p* scores ranged from .166 in Physical Setting to .961 in Decision Making.

A comparison of the leaders' and teachers' scores for each of the 10 dimensions is shown in Figure 7. The evaluation of the mean scores as shown on the line graph in Figure 7 illustrates only minor differences in leader and teacher perceptions of their work environments. The responses to the questions on the ECWES for both groups follow a similar pattern.

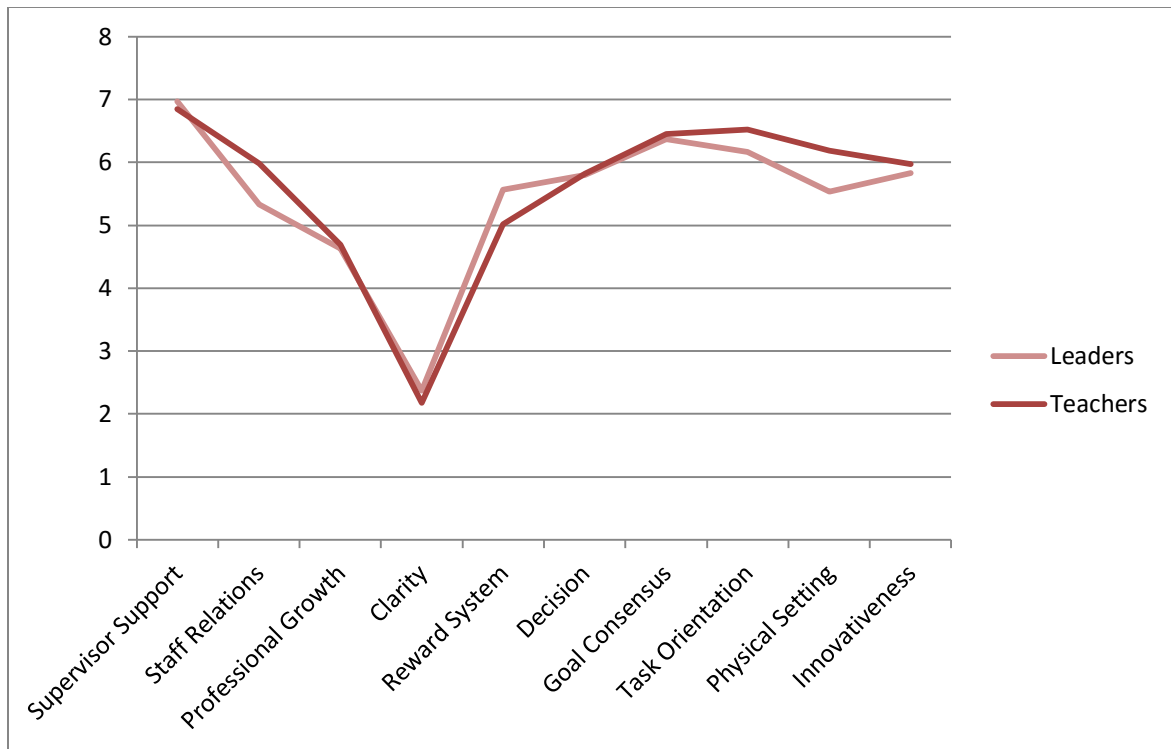


Figure 7. Comparison of leaders' and teachers' perceptions of the organizational climate.

There was a significant difference in the scores on the Work Attitude section of the ECWES for leaders, $M = 7.17$, $SD = 1.34$ and teachers $M = 6.55$, $SD = 1.95$; $t(62) = 2.03$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.51$. The commitment of leaders was significantly higher than the commitment of teachers; The Cohen's effect size for this analysis ($d = .51$) indicated a moderate range of difference between the leaders' and teachers' scores of Work Attitude.

Table 10

Analysis of Work Attitudes for Leaders and Teachers from the ECWES

	Leaders			Teachers			<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Work Attitudes	30	7.17	1.34	124	6.55	1.95	2.03*	62.32	.047

* $p < .05$

Conclusions

Reviewing the analyses of the four statistical tests used to answer Research Question 1, several themes relating to teachers' perceptions about their work environment were noted. First, the significant positive relationship between the teachers' perceptions of their supervisors' support to their perceptions of all other areas of the work environment that include: Staff Relations, Professional Growth, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness. In addition, teachers who perceived higher levels of support and feedback from their supervisor reported commitment to their current place of employment. Those teachers whose responses on the ECWES indicated that they were committed to their center can be interpreted to mean that they will choose to remain working at their current place of employment. In addition, teachers' ratings of the dimensions of the work environment can be related to prior research about the quality of early childhood programs.

The Role of Leadership

Other studies have found that early childhood leaders have an important role in the overall functioning and success of the center they manage (Harrist et al., 2007; Ryan et al., 2011). The current study presents evidence that the early childhood teacher values support and feedback from supervisors and that leadership is central to all other dimensions of the work environment. The results of this research support the findings of the Harrist et al. qualitative study which found that the early childhood director had a central management role. The Pearson product-moment correlation that was conducted to answer Research Question 1 showed that for teachers, supervision had a connection to all the other labeled areas of the work environment as identified in the ECWES. This

information validates the previously identified importance of leadership in education. The analyses presented demonstrated that a teacher's reported perception of all aspects of their work environment is connected to their perception of leadership. Therefore, teachers do perceive that their leaders have a central position in their overall work environment.

The Relationship of the Organizational Climate to Quality Care

For teachers, the dimension of Decision Making in the current research had a high correlation with Supervisor Support, $r(123) = .50, p < .01$. Teachers who rated Decision Making at a higher level also rated Supervisor Support at a higher level indicating that teachers who perceived higher levels of support from their leaders also perceived that they had greater independence in making decisions about their classrooms and about the school. This correlation indicated that teachers value the ability to be able to make decisions about multiple aspects of their work environment. Teachers might perceive their leaders as more supportive when they give teachers the independence to make decisions that affect their classroom and the school. A similar finding was reported by Brown and Wynn (2007). In their research, Brown and Wynn found a connection between supportive and shared leadership in an elementary school setting. Shared leadership was defined as being collaborative with teachers; encouraging teachers to share ideas and participate in making decisions about classroom and school issues.

The dimension of Professional Growth as labeled in the ECWES or Professional Development, a term other researchers have used, has been studied in Early Childhood education. Rous (2004) found that teachers rated professional development as highly important and described professional development behaviors that were exhibited by their leaders. Supervisor feedback as well as the provision of other training opportunities led Rous to identify leaders as instructional supervisors. As shown in Table 4, teachers'

perceptions of Supervisor Support and Professional Growth in the current research had a strong correlation, $r(123) = .39, p < .01$. Teachers who perceived a higher level of supervisor support also perceived that they received increased amounts of professional growth that related to gains of skills and knowledge. Both NAEYC and state regulations require professional development as part of accreditation or licensing requirements. Maintaining stringent requirements have been associated with increased quality of care provided (Illinois Department of Child and Family Services, 1983; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998; Rigby et al., 2007). Manlove et al. (2008) found in their research that professional development for teachers increased the quality of interactions between teachers and children. There are indications from the current research that teachers value opportunities for growth and development. These findings might be interpreted that supervisor support exemplified in the provision of professional development opportunities could increase the quality of care in a child care center.

The second Pearson product-moment correlation conducted for this research focused on the length of time a teacher had working in the field of early childhood and the connection to the 10 dimensions of the work environment as described in the ECWES. The results of the correlation between teachers' years working in early childhood and the 10 dimensions of the work environment indicated a strong relationship with only some aspects of the work environment. The longer a teacher had working in early childhood education the higher the score in the dimensions of: Professional Growth, Reward System, Goal Consensus, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness. The variables that were not related to the number of years a teacher had working in early childhood were: Supervisor Support, Collegiality, Clarity, Decision Making, and Task Orientation.

Although all of the dimensions had a connection to Supervisor Support, when the length of time a teacher had working in the field of early childhood was the variable that was examined for correlations with the 10 dimensions, the results were quite different. The longer the amount of time a teacher had working in the field of early childhood the higher the rating was for the variables of Professional Growth, Reward System, Goal Consensus, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness. While there is not a correlation between Supervisor Support and the length of time a teacher had working in early childhood, perhaps this finding addressed the conclusion of Eyal and Roth (2011) who found that leadership styles can provide teachers with “an autonomy-supportive working environment” (p. 268). Over time teachers did not need quite as much direct support and feedback.

The current research shows that the longer a teacher is employed in early childhood education the more likely they were to perceive the importance of the dimension of Reward System which includes aspects of salary, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. This finding is related to the research of Russell et al. (2010) who found that the longer teachers worked at the same center the more likely they were to perceive their pay and benefits as unfair. Although, teachers in the current study rated pay and benefits as more important based upon their number of years working in early childhood, the perception about rewards being fair or unfair were not evaluated.

The length of time a teacher had working in early childhood had a significant positive relationship with the dimension of Physical Setting; $r = .31, p < .01$. Those teachers with greater amounts of time working in early childhood tended to value the physical environment as more important. This is an indication that environmental conditions as well as relationship issues affect teachers’ perceptions about their work. A

quality indicator of an early childhood center is the physical environment. The dimension of Physical Setting refers not only to the physical environment but to the availability of supplies and materials; both structural and process qualities. According to Jeon et al. (2010) and Mashburn (2008) the overall classroom quality related to both structure and process. Based on the current results, the researcher suggests that experienced teachers identified an important aspect of quality that supports prior research and contributes to the understanding of quality education for young children.

Commitment of Teachers to Current Place of Employment

The positive support of administrators has been identified as an important factor for teachers in previous research. A substantial body of research about elementary education has provided evidence that school leadership is valued by teachers and related to teacher retention (Boyd et al., 2011; Brown & Wynn, 2007; Loeb et al., 2005). Specifically, Brown and Wynn found that a lack of support contributed to teacher turnover. Brown and Wynn also reported that almost everything a school leader does could be construed as providing support. For the current research, the support of leaders emerged as a particularly important factor for teachers' decisions about commitment to their current employer. Those teachers who were committed to their workplace perceived more support and feedback from their supervisors than those teachers who were not committed to their workplace. There was a strong relationship between teacher commitment and supervisor support. Of the 60 teachers who were committed to their workplace, 48 or 80% reported that they perceived support and helpful feedback from their supervisor. Teachers who perceived their supervisor as providing support, feedback, useful evaluations, guidance, opportunities for professional growth, as well as being generally knowledgeable about children's growth and development also reported that

they were committed to their job. Conversely, teachers who perceived their leaders to be less skilled reported that they were not committed to their jobs.

Commitment of teachers to their current centers was also evaluated in this research through a *t*-test for independent samples. Those teachers who were committed to their centers had significantly higher ratings in all 10 of the dimensions than those teachers who were not committed, with all *p* values < .01. The most significant results were in the dimensions of Reward System, $t(123) = 4.27, p < .01, d = .76$ and in the dimension of Innovativeness, $t(123) = 4.21, p < .01, d = .75$. Following Cohen's guidelines of effect size, the .75 and .76 represent a large effect size, emphasizing the significance of these two scores. Other dimensions to note that were significant and had large effect sizes included: Goal Consensus, Decision Making, and Clarity. Past research studies also found differences between committed and non-committed teachers (Russell, et al., 2010). In fact, Russell et al. found as in this current research that all the variables they compared to the two groups of teachers were rated considerably higher for the committed group. The variables in the Russell et al. research were related to the type of supervision, supervisor support, salary, health benefits, and innovativeness.

The *t*-test results of the dimension of Supervisor Support were higher for the committed group than the non-committed group and again provide an additional indication of the importance of support that teachers seek from their leaders. The support of leaders appears to be a particularly important aspect of teacher retention decisions. The importance of leadership to commitment is not surprising. The literature and the current research provide evidence that leadership in a school context is a priority for teachers. Leadership can shape the work climate and was found to be related to all other dimensions of the environment as perceived by teachers. Those dimensions related

directly to the indicators of quality child care and education. In addition, teachers' perceptions of each dimension of the environment were related to retention decisions. Therefore, there are clear indications in this research of the important role that leaders have in creating and maintaining a work environment that supports teachers and increases process and structural quality in order to positively influence a teachers' decision to remain committed to their center.

Leaders' Perceptions

Research Question 2 focused on the relationship of the length of time a leader had working in early childhood education and the organizational climate as measured by the 10 dimensions of the ECWES. In general, leaders' perception of the dimension of Supervisor Support was correlated to the other nine dimensions including: Collegiality, Professional Growth, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness. This finding indicated that for leaders as well as teachers, the perception of a leader is that of a central figure being connected to all other areas of the organizational climate. Based on these results, the researcher would contend that the leader of an early childhood program has a major role in the functioning of a center.

In contrast, when examining the relationship of the number of years a leader had working in the field of early childhood with each of the dimensions, only the one dimension of Professional Growth had a significant relationship to the number of years worked. Leaders who have more years working in early childhood rated professional development at a higher level. Both leaders and teachers rated Professional Growth at a higher level based upon the number of years working in the field. Based on these results, the researcher would suggest that professional development is a key feature of the

organizational climate as rated by those teachers and leaders with experience in the field of early childhood education.

The fact that only one dimension of the organizational climate correlated to the number of years a leader had working in the field of early childhood is confounding for this researcher. Perhaps the results are due to a relatively small sample size that does not represent the larger population of early childhood directors. Another possibility for the results could be related to the specification of component coordinators as part of leadership. Because a component coordinator has supervision tasks but only has responsibility in a particular area may have resulted in skewed responses.

Comparison of Leaders' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Organizational Climate

Research Question 3 examined the differences in perceptions of the work climate based upon role in the organization. According to Bloom (2010), the respondent perceptions on the ECWES may be related to individual backgrounds, the structure of the center, or the person's work role. Bloom found that in a larger sample of administrators ($n = 94$) and teachers ($n = 535$) there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the 10 dimensions between the two groups. However, in that same sample the comparison of the total mean scores in each dimension for administrators ran parallel to the total mean scores in each dimension for the teachers. The administrators scored higher than the teachers in all of the 10 dimensions.

The data from the current research did not replicate the findings of Bloom (2010). In this research there were no statistical differences between the responses of the leaders and the teachers. As seen in figure 7, the data does indicate that the responses of the teachers paralleled the responses of the leaders. One reason for the non-significant results could be a result of having a smaller sample size. According to Pyrczak (2010), with a

larger sample size the more precise the results will be; perhaps with a larger group of leaders and teachers the responses would replicate those found by Bloom.

In the Brown and Wynn (2007) study, both principals and teachers were found to have the same perception about how to provide support to new teachers in order to increase teacher retention. The researchers believed that shared norms and values contributed to higher teacher retention. Harrist et al. (2007) also found agreement among all stakeholders, including directors and teachers that included areas of professional development and financial compensation. Both the Brown and Wynn and the Harrist et al. research were qualitative studies. The current quantitative research also found agreement between teachers and leaders when rating the organizational climate. Perhaps, based on prior research, not having a significant difference between leaders and teachers can be interpreted as positive and could potentially lead to increased teacher retention.

Differences were found in the current research when analyzing the work attitudes of leaders and teachers. In the area of Organizational Commitment the data showed a significant difference in level of commitment between leaders and teachers. Leaders were more committed than teachers to remaining at their current center of employment. This difference could have occurred due to the large percent of new teachers who participated in this research and had not yet committed to their center.

Ryan et al. (2011) believed that to create positive change, program directors must take the lead. In order to create quality early childhood programs, the center director has a central position to manage an organizational climate that supports the growth and development of young children. An important quality factor of an early child center is the retention of teachers. This research has demonstrated that leaders are perceived as a central figure by both leaders themselves and by the teachers. Quality factors were also

identified by both leaders and teachers as having a significant relationship to workplace commitment. Supervisor Support, Professional Growth, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Clarity, and Reward System were key areas of the organizational climate that were perceived as important as well as being connected to commitment.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this quantitative study add to the body of knowledge about early childhood education and have implications for leadership and management of quality early childhood education and care centers. This study is a step in understanding the influence of leadership in an early childhood organizational climate. The importance of working conditions as suggested by this research can be connected to teachers' decisions about commitment to their center. One goal of most school leaders is to retain and develop their teachers in order to provide a stable and quality environment for the children they serve. Ultimately, the children are those who benefit from a quality and stable school environment.

The present research, along with Harrist et al. (2007), found indications that the early childhood director is the central figure in a childcare center. Early childhood leaders seem to play a major role in teacher perceptions of their organizational climate. The support of the center leaders is essential, whether it is in attitude or behavior. Teachers expressed the need for supervisor support and productive feedback; leaders therefore must be actively engaged with teachers about their teaching in the classrooms and about the functioning of the school. Both teachers and leaders expressed a desire to grow professionally. Certainly that need should be understood as positive. With increased knowledge and increased skills, the quality of instruction and the quality of the entire organizational climate could operate at a higher level. Teachers also want a voice in those

policies that affect them in the workplace. There is a balance that leaders must find as a supervisor to their teachers but also to instill independence in them and transfer some of the decision making power to the teachers. That effectiveness of the director can be demonstrated through the implementation of both quality process and structure initiatives in order to increase teacher retention and improve the quality of care for young children.

In the United States there continues to be a growing need for non-parental childcare and early childhood education, especially for children from families in low socio-economic groups. Quality early education provides the environment that enables children's growth and provides them with the skills to be successful in Kindergarten and beyond. The implications of research into the outcomes of children who attended early childhood programs support the provision of quality care. Children could have an increased chance of success that they may not have had without quality care. Every child is worthy of success.

Child care remains in the forefront of public interest. The labor force as well as single parenthood has increased. Clearly the need for quality early childhood programs has also greatly increased. In December of 2014, the federal government expanded childcare grants and the U. S. Department of Education awarded 18 states preschool development grants to increase the number of quality preschool programs. The grants awarded were part of the \$1 billion dollars of federal and private investments in early education and was expected to serve more than 33,000 additional children (U.S. Dept. of Education; Press Office, 2014). The city of Chicago won two education grants in December of 2014 in order to expand early educational programming for 2,200 children (City of Chicago; Mayor's Press Office, 2014). In March of 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded \$500 million dollars in Early Head Start and Head

Start Expansion grants. The New York City expansion of a free, full-day state funded Pre-K had 22,000 families apply for the program on the first day in March of 2015. A total of 70,000 spaces for Pre-K were expected to be filled before the school year began in August of 2015 (New York City Government; Office of the Mayor, 2015).

All of the announcements associated with program expansion included the words *quality programs*. In order to meet the criteria of quality in these programs as well as in existing programs, it is essential to examine to organizational climate of these centers. The early childhood community needs to take the time to review daily functioning of centers. Leadership in early childhood must shift their focus from daily administrative tasks to the examination of how their leadership is affecting their teachers, teacher retention decisions, and ultimately the quality of care for young children. Leaders should communicate with teachers in their individual centers to ascertain the needs of the teachers regarding support, professional development, decision making, and all other aspects of the organizational climate. The results of this current research needs to be shared with early childhood leaders and support the effort to increase teacher retention and the quality of programs.

This research is a step in understanding leadership and teacher retention decisions in early childhood education. Further research is necessary to continue the investigation about specific attitudes and actions of leaders within those key dimensions of Supervisor Support, Professional Growth, Goal Consensus, Reward System, and Decision Making. One suggestion of this researcher would be to add to the current research with a qualitative component that includes focus groups of leaders discussing how they approach each dimension and focus groups of teachers to define their ideals in each of the dimensions. There is also a need to repeat this research on a larger scale and in different

geographical areas, for example in urban versus suburban and rural settings in order to ascertain if a larger sample or geography would make a difference in responses on the ECWES.

Many have suggested that leadership in early childhood is unique because of the environment. This statement supports the use of the ECWES to understand the work environment. However, to address the absence of research about theory of leadership in early childhood education, this researcher recommends other studies about leadership and the relationship to teacher retention. Two areas that could be addressed are: How does leadership style affect teacher retention? What is the importance of emotional intelligence for an early childhood leader?

The important findings of the current study about leadership and teacher retention in early childhood are the findings about the central role of leadership, the identification of key quality indicators as perceived by leaders and teachers (Supervisor Support, Professional Growth, Goal Consensus, Reward System, and Decision Making), and teachers' commitment to their center based upon those quality indicators. Knowing what dimensions teachers have identified as relating to job commitment could help supervisors gain an increased understanding of their work environment and implement changes that could lead to increased commitment and teacher retention. Implementing desired changes requires both leaders and teachers to work together to best meet the needs of all employed at the center in order to ultimately best serve the children in their care.

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