Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

2019

Characteristics of Successful Early Childhood Educational Leaders

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Characteristics of Successful Early Childhood Educational Leaders

by

Darla Tucker

MS, Capella University, 2012

BA, Evangel University, 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The problem that precipitated this study was the marked differences among early childhood education leaders in the quality of leadership for private early childhood entities as indicated by a voluntary quality rating improvement system in a Midwestern state. The scholarly literature lacks studies on characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore characteristics of quality early childhood leadership based on examination of successful early childhood programs using leadership trait theory as a conceptual framework. Research questions were designed to examine characteristics of successful early childhood leaders based on the components of trait theory as reported by leaders themselves and as perceived by teachers working with them and parents whose children attend their programs. Data were collected from interviews and questionnaires. The sample included 12 high-quality leaders who participated in the state quality rating system and had at least 5 years of leadership experience. From each school represented by the leaders, 5 teachers with 2 years of teaching experience and 3 parents with a child enrolled in the early childhood program for a minimum of 6 months participated in the study. Data were thematically coded, looking for themes, differences, and similarities. Common traits across all groups and data collection method were trustworthiness, self-confidence, and dependability. Positive social change could come about through the encouragement of early childhood leaders who may be confident in awareness of the needs of children and families and dependable and trustworthy in providing an early learning program that may positively develop the emotional, physical, social, and academic needs of children.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father and to my mother. My dad was a great man of faith. The two things most important to him in life were his faith in God and his family. He loved to read and passed that love for reading down to me. His exemplary work ethic and determination have always been an inspiration to me. It is this inspiration that helped me continue this journey to its completion.

Mom, I also dedicate this dissertation to you because you are an amazing woman and have been a great source of strength to me through this dissertation journey. When I got frustrated or discouraged, you always reminded me that Dad would not want me to quit, so I didn't. I am amazed at the grace and strength you have shown throughout my life and even more so in the past 3 years. I know your strength comes from God.

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your prayers, love, support, and encouragement. Most of all, thanks for believing in me.

Thank you to my sisters and their families for your prayers and encouragement. I know that sometimes I bored you with my talk of research, but you were willing to listen, and for that I am grateful.

A special thanks to my Walden colleagues. Some of you I met in class, and others I met at the residency. It was a pleasure working with you and sharing this journey together. I truly hope we can work together on future research that will benefit children, families, and those working in the field of education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Early childhood educational leaders are at the forefront of making decisions, conducting staff development, and ensuring the overall care of each child in their programs. The quality of early childhood programs varies; therefore, it is essential to look at characteristics of successful educational leaders. There is a small amount of existing research that focuses on high-quality early childhood leadership characteristics. In this study, I explored characteristics of highly qualified early childhood leaders in a Midwestern state. While their characteristics may differ, it is important to determine whether these leaders possess specific attributes that could potentially lead them to build successful early childhood programs. This study may have implications for positive social change; by identifying characteristics of successful leaders, it may contribute to the development of high-quality leaders in early childhood education who influence the quality of care and promote learning for children, higher education levels for teachers, training for future early childhood educational leaders, and improved staff development.

This chapter summarizes the background of high-quality leaders in early childhood education. Included in this chapter is the study's problem statement, which addressed a gap in practice, along with the purpose of the study and three research questions. The conceptual framework for this study was leadership trait theory, which is briefly described as it was derived from the literature. Also included are the nature of the study, the rationale for the study design and methodology, and definitions of key terms used throughout the study. Additionally, this chapter includes assumptions about the study, the study's scope and delimitations, limitations related to the design or

methodology and potential biases, and the significance of the study, including its potential for positive social change.

Background

When parents place their children in early learning environments, they trust the programs they select for the quality, leadership, and services that they can provide their children (Puig, Erwin, Evenson, & Beresford, 2015; Roberts, 2011). High-quality early childhood leaders are often seen as being managers in charge of training, staff development, and child safety; in these capacities, they may serve as professional role models (Goncu, Main, Perone, & Tozar, 2014; Ho, 2011). Research has shown that high-quality early childhood leaders who mentor their staff often help them gain the confidence to work toward a college degree, in addition to improving employee satisfaction, teacher retention, and overall job fulfillment (Deutsch & Tong, 2011). Research indicates that scholars and educators in other countries are beginning to understand the importance of leadership quality (Bornstein et al., 2012; Stamopoulos, 2012) and the effect of high-quality early childhood leaders on early learning (Ho, 2011; Puig et al., 2015).

Successful early childhood leaders may possess characteristics that are similar or vastly different. Ethical conduct, trustworthiness, charisma, honesty, prudence, integrity, and wisdom (Hauserman & Stick, 2013, Northouse, 2016) are but a few of the potential attributes of high-quality early childhood leaders. These characteristics assist leaders in managing and motivating their staff (Bischak & Woiceshyn, 2016; Yaffe & Kark, 2011) and making decisions (Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Zacarro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004).

High-quality early childhood leaders also develop trust in their professional relationships with staff, parents, and individuals in the community (Puig et al., 2015; Roberts, 2011).

Through this study of high-quality early childhood leaders, I sought to explore characteristics of successful leaders in early childhood education. In the Midwestern state in which I conducted this study, there were marked differences in quality between early childhood education leaders in private early childhood entities based on the voluntary quality rating improvement system, creating a gap in practice due to differences in leader, teacher, and program quality. A gap exists based on differences in leadership quality and lack of research in the area of early childhood leadership. Insight gained from this study may be important to early childhood education because high-quality leadership can lead to high-quality programs that benefit the children in their care. Characteristics of high-quality early childhood leaders and their effect on early education programs are further discussed in Chapter 2.

Problem Statement

From 1995 to 2012, the percentage of children in the United States ages 3 through 6 years attending center-based early childhood programs grew from 55% to 61% (Child Trends, 2014). In 2012, 65% of the children aged 3-6 years in the Midwestern state in which I conducted this study attended early childhood programs (Child Health Data, 2012). Services offered by center-based early childhood programs include infant and toddler care, daycare, preschool, prekindergarten, and programs for kindergarten and school-age children. Other providers of early childhood programs include home childcare providers, private organizations, and faith-based schools. In this study, I

focused on nonpublic (i.e., private) early childhood education, not public-school leadership, teachers, or their programs.

The quality of early childhood leadership and the early childhood setting influences how children served within the setting advance or decline in every aspect of their development (Gobbo & Chi, 1986; Howes & Smith, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). In the study state, the use of a quality rating improvement system (QRIS) is voluntary (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2013), and a QRIS is not used by most of the local early childhood programs, according to the state's board of education. Per the 2015 state board of education report in the county of the Midwestern state in which I conducted this study, there are 756 center-based, home-based childcare, and private and faith-based early learning programs (H. Vara, personal communication, August 14, 2016). Only 71 (9.39%) of these schools are accredited through a national accrediting agency (American Montessori International, 2014; American Montessori Society, 2016; Association of Christian Schools International, 2016; National Association for Family Child Care, 2016; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2016; National Council for Private School Accreditation, 2016; National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, 2016; National Lutheran School Accreditation, 2016).

There have been many studies concerning early childhood teacher quality (Ang, 2012; Guss et al., 2013; Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011), and there have been other studies focusing on the quality rating of programs (Denny, Hallam, & Homer, 2012; La Paro, Williamson, & Hatfield, 2014; Sabol, Hong, Pianta, & Burchinal, 2013). Studies have indicated how a high-quality program affects the learning of low-income

children and those with special needs. These studies indicate that children who attend

high-quality early childhood programs develop strong reading, literacy, and vocabulary

skills (McKie, Butty, & Green, 2012; Phillips & Meloy, 2012) compared to children

attending lower quality programs (Tucker-Drob, 2012). High-quality early learning has

also been shown to improve school readiness and literacy skills for children with special

needs (Phillips & Meloy, 2012). However, there has been little research concerning

leadership characteristics in early childhood education, and this gap warrants further

study (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Ho, 2011; Liborius, 2014).

The quality of early childhood education programs is influenced by administrative

leadership (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013). How each individual leader defines quality has

an influence on the success of his or her program. High-quality leadership can lead to

positive practices, capabilities, quality of communication (Stamopoulos, 2012), building

relationships, cooperation, collaboration (NAEYC, 2011; Stamopoulos, 2012), and

student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). Because the use of a QRIS is

voluntary (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2013), in the

Midwestern state where this study occurred, there were marked differences in leadership

quality between private, home childcare, faith-based, and center-based early childhood

education programs. Due to these discrepancies, a gap in practice exists based on

differences in leadership quality and lack of research in the area of early childhood

leadership. There has been a need for additional information to discern the leadership

traits necessary for early childhood leaders to be successful. Based on an examination of

the traits of successful leaders, recommendations can be made for early childhood programs.

Purpose of the Study

There has been much research on the effect that high-quality early childhood programs have on early learning. Most of the research has been directed toward children of low-income families and those with special needs (McKie et al., 2012; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Tucker-Drob, 2012). An insufficient amount of research has been conducted on leadership characteristics in early childhood education. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. The results, by identifying characteristics of successful leaders in this Midwestern state, may have the potential to influence the development of high-quality leaders who contribute to high-quality care of children, better staff development, and the training of future early childhood leaders.

Research Questions

To explore the characteristics of leaders of high-quality early childhood programs, I sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs?

RQ2: What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire?

RQ3:   What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study of successful early childhood education leader characteristics was leadership trait theory (Northouse, 2016). This theory was chosen because the need for leadership has remained constant over the course of time. What has changed is how leadership has been carried out in early childhood programs. In this study, I looked at leadership traits to determine characteristics of high-quality early childhood education leaders.

Throughout the 20th century, various leadership theories were introduced, but leadership trait theory was one of the first leadership theories studied (Northouse, 2016). Researchers have been interested in how traits and characteristics influence leadership (Bryman, 1992). Stogdill (1948) surveyed leaders and found that there was a specific set of characteristics that distinguished those in leadership positions from individuals not in leadership positions. These traits included intellect, insightfulness, responsibility, socialization, self-confidence, and alertness (Northouse, 2016; Stogdill, 1948). Stogdill (1974) for a second time studied characteristics that relate to leadership and found many of the same traits as before in leaders.

In a time when men dominated leadership roles, Mann (1959) studied leadership characteristics by looking at personality and traits that leaders demonstrated when in

small groups. Mann associated leadership traits with leaders being masculine, intellectual, conservative, and well adjusted. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) maintained that leaders show stronger characteristics of possessing drive, confidence, cognitive skills, motivation, and integrity. Additionally, Kirkpatrick and Locke contended that individuals could develop leadership traits, could be born with them, or both. Zaccaro et al. (2004) studied leadership characteristics from the perspective of social abilities and found traits such as problem-solving skills, emotional stability, conscientiousness, openness, agreeability, social intellect, the ability to self-monitor, and being motivated in individuals with strong leadership skills. Leadership trait theory suggests characteristics that could potentially be traits of many early childhood leaders.

Early childhood education leaders take on many roles in the development and education of children, and in working with the parents of these children. Teachers are also influenced by these leaders as managers and professional role models. Personal characteristics and traits of leaders may determine their level of success as leaders. For years, researchers have examined how traits and characteristics affect leadership (Bryman, 1992; Stogdill, 1948). In studying leadership trait theory, Stogdill (1948) found self-confidence, responsibility, socialization, and intellect among strong leadership characteristics. Others found confidence, motivation, drive, integrity (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), intellect, social skills, problem solving, and conscientiousness (Zaccaro et al., 2004) as successful leadership characteristics. It is possible that successful early childhood education leaders possess the characteristics discussed in leadership trait theory, but it is also possible that they possess other characteristics that play stronger

roles in making them successful leaders. Leaders have perceptions of their own characteristics and traits, but teachers and parents see these traits daily as they interact with them. I explored successful leadership traits as perceived by early childhood leaders, teachers, and parents. The need for leadership has been continuous, but the characteristics that successful leaders possess remains an important topic for many research studies.

Leadership trait theory served as a guide for this descriptive case study as I interviewed early childhood leaders to explore characteristics of high-quality leaders in early childhood education. The research method and questions were designed to allow me to gather data from leaders, teachers, and parents concerning characteristics and traits of highly qualified early childhood leaders. It was possible that their characteristics would differ, but it was important to understand whether these leaders possessed specific attributes that could potentially lead them to be successful leaders. Leadership trait theory related to the collection and analysis of self-reported data through interviews and data on teacher- and parent-observed characteristics of successful early childhood leaders through questionnaires. Teachers and parents often work in small groups (Mann, 1959) or one-on-one within the work environment where leaders' personal characteristics are demonstrated.

Nature of the Study

The research approach for this study was a qualitative descriptive case study, through which I explored characteristics of high-quality early childhood education leaders. A descriptive case study allowed early childhood leaders to self-report

characteristics of highly qualified early childhood educational leaders, as well as parents

and teachers to report observed characteristics in their early childhood leaders. In this

study, I sought only to describe self-reported and observed characteristics, not to give

explanations as to why these occur (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Participants

were chosen based on the quality of their early learning programs. The state QRIS

provided a list of high-quality early childhood programs in the local area where the study

occurred. A letter of invitation was sent to each high-quality leader explaining the study

and asking for their participation. From the responses to this invitation, I purposefully

selected and interviewed 12 early childhood leaders who used the QRIS, held the highest

program and leadership ranking, and had been in a leadership position for 5 or more

years. One-on-one interviews were conducted with high-quality early childhood leaders,

in which the exact same questions were posed to each leader (Appendix A). Each

interview was audiotaped and transcribed. A second data collection instrument that was

used was the Leadership Trait Questionnaire (Northouse, 2016), which the early

childhood leaders completed (Appendix B).

The third data collection instrument was also the Leadership Trait Questionnaire

with the addition of two open-ended questions (Appendix C). Parents and teachers were

selected by a volunteer method. I asked each leader to place a letter of invitation and the

criteria to participate in the study in the mailbox of every teacher in the school, as well as

in the teacher-parent communication folder of each parent meeting the criteria to

participate in the study. Parents and teachers were selected from those who returned the

letter with their contact information. I purposefully selected five teachers from each

school and three parents of children from each early childhood program to complete the leadership questionnaire with the additional questions. I then triangulated the data from the questionnaires by looking for similarities and differences as I placed the scores in tables. The Leadership Trait Questionnaire is in the public domain as presented in the Northouse (2016) text, and I added two open-ended questions to it. The additional questions allowed the teachers and parents to openly express their thoughts concerning the characteristics of the leader of the early childhood program where they worked or that their children attended. The data were analyzed by looking for emerging themes identified in the transcript of the leadership interviews, then comparing the data across sites. Further discussion of data analysis is provided in Chapter 3.

Definitions

The following definitions are used throughout this study:

Leader: The term *early education leader* may signify an administrator, manager, or director. This leader is accountable for carrying out all duties of a program relating to the security, development, advocacy, and protection of rights for all children, families, and staff under their guidance (NAEYC, 2011).

Quality program: A quality program is one that offers a positive environment with the highest quality of care for young children while tending to their emotional, physical, social, and cognitive development (U.S. Department of State, 2015).

Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS): An improvement system that increases the quality of early childhood education programs and the quality of service

they provide to the children and families in their care (Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, 2015).

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale—Revised (ECERS-R): An environmental rating scale for early childhood care for children from ages 2 through 5 (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2004).

Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale—Revised (ITERS-R): An environmental rating scale for early childhood care for children from birth through 2-1/2 years of age (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006).

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS): An assessment scoring system that assesses the quality of prekindergarten through 12th-grade classrooms (University of Virginia, 2015).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): An organization that works toward high-quality early childhood education for children through the provision of high-quality programs, teaching staff, and leadership development (NAEYC, n.d.).

Assumptions

In this study was included several assumptions. The first assumption was that all schools would be up to date with the QRIS ratings. The ratings can be checked on the QRIS website for this Midwestern state, where schools are listed according to their quality. This list is updated frequently so that parents can have a current list indicating the quality of schools in their area. Second, it was assumed that all participants would be leaders of their early childhood education programs, that teachers would be current

employees at the early childhood programs, and that parents would currently have their

children enrolled in said program. Third, it was assumed that all participants knew what

a high-quality leader is as this idea pertained to the success of their early childhood

education program. To rank high on the QRIS, an administrator is required to have met

the highest of standards for early childhood programs. According to the state's QRIS,

these standards include the quality of the teachers they hire, professional development

they provide for staff, meeting the standards for early childhood administration, and a

continual effort in quality improvement. Fourth, it was assumed that the participants

would effectively express their true opinions and thoughts on the leadership questionnaire

and in the interview. There was always a chance that a person could embellish responses,

so it was explained to the participants that the questionnaire and interview were not

intended to shed negative light on them or their programs. I explained to participants that

they had been asked to take part in this study because of the high-quality rating they had

already received from the QRIS, and that their true opinions and thoughts would provide

valuable data for early childhood education.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was confined to the views and opinions of early childhood

leaders who participated in the voluntary QRIS in a Midwestern community and had

received the highest standard rating. Participants who were current and in good standing

with the QRIS were purposefully chosen from local early childhood programs. The study

was limited to early childhood leaders receiving the highest quality rating score,

indicating that they went above and beyond to meet the requirements of a high-quality

program and high-quality leadership as set forth by the QRIS. While other levels are of high-quality by the rating standards, they were not included in this study because these ratings do not reach the highest potential of quality for early childhood education programs and leaders. The teacher and parent participants worked at and had their children enrolled in these high-quality programs.

The quality of early childhood programs and teacher quality were not explored in this study. Research has often focused on quality programs and quality teachers (Hyson & Whittaker, 2012; Raikes, Brooks, & Goldstein, 2012; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011), but there has been a gap in the literature on characteristics of successful early childhood education leaders.

While it was not intended for the findings of this study to be generalized to the total early childhood population, early childhood schools in other counties and states with similar settings could determine that the findings are transferable to their setting (Yin, 2014).

Limitations

This study was limited to a local community in a Midwestern area. Purposeful sampling was used to intentionally select participants and locations (Creswell, 2012) to better understand the characteristics of high-quality early childhood leaders. This study was limited to 12 leader participants representing the quality of early childhood leaders but could have the potential to be transferred to the larger population. Twelve leader participants were chosen to account for the possibility that one or more might drop out of the study. All the leader participants were female; therefore, the lack of male participants

was a limitation. Even if there had been some male leader participants, it is unlikely that there would have been enough male participants to effectively represent both genders.

A strength of the methodology was that this qualitative descriptive case study provided in-depth detail in the data, in that participants were able to give thick, rich descriptions as they knew the experience (Creswell, 2012). A weakness of the methodology of this study was the concern that each of the participants would truthfully convey data from their perspective, and not answer according to what they thought I wanted to hear (Merriam, 2009). I addressed this concern by asking the participants to be as honest as possible when answering the questions and explaining that their identity would remain confidential.

<p style="text-align:center">Significance</p>

In this study, I explored characteristics of successful leaders in early childhood education. In this field, leaders have a strong influence on the quality of their programs. Wise and Wright (2012) found that leaders with higher levels of education had higher quality programs when compared to leaders with lower levels of education. However, one may question what characteristics these leaders possess that make their programs successful. Earlier studies placed emphasis on student achievement and teacher quality (Hyson & Whittaker, 2012; Raikes et al., 2012; Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). The results of this study may allow professional educators to review the characteristics that they use in their own leadership styles and in their early childhood programs.

While there have been many studies on teacher quality (Hyson & Whittaker, 2012; Raikes et al., 2012), there have been only a few studies of the characteristics of

high-quality early childhood educational leaders. Leadership trait theory was used as a guide to explore high-quality leadership in several of the early childhood programs in my local community. Positive social change could be brought about as a result of this study on successful early childhood educational leadership characteristics by providing professional development, promoting higher education, and developing high-quality leaders. In current, peer-reviewed articles, the literature review indicated quality leadership traits and characteristics in early childhood educators and leadership in general.

Those potentially benefiting from this study include the participating leaders and teachers, in that they reflected upon their organizations and the contributions they made toward developing high-quality programs, as well as the outcomes of program quality for children, their families, and the community. Early childhood leaders play a great role in the success of a program. Exploring the characteristics of a successful early childhood leader could lead to a better understanding of characteristics or traits that contribute to successful leadership of a high-quality early childhood program. Successful early childhood leaders of high-quality contribute to the value of their programs, the quality of education that children receive within them, and they make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Positive social change could be brought about through communication and collaboration as the successful high-quality leaders begin to work to develop other leaders who understand their worth in the field of early childhood education. Furthermore, high-quality leaders could help create professional development classes on

leadership characteristics and how such traits can work toward building an early childhood education program of high-quality. The professional development classes could assist other leaders in seeing their own potential to become high-quality early childhood education leaders while promoting the need for them to choose educational paths that direct them toward becoming successful early childhood educators. They could work together to bring about improved professional development into early childhood programming and promote higher education so that early childhood leaders can invest positively in the life of every child in their programs. Positive social change could come about through the development of high-quality leaders. In turn, these leaders may be more aware of the needs of children and families and better assist families in areas such as parenting skills and family involvement, in addition to providing an early learning program that may positively develop the emotional, physical, social, and academic needs of children considered at risk.

Summary

Early childhood leaders determine the effectiveness of their programs (Wise & Wright, 2012). In this study, I explored the characteristics of successful early childhood education leaders and developed insight into potential leadership development. The marked differences seen in early childhood leadership between private, center-based, and faith-based early childhood programs offer an indication of the importance of exploring high-quality early childhood leadership. Information gained from this study could show that early childhood leadership development is essential in working toward high-quality early childhood education for all children. These leaders could have the potential to train

other individuals, provide professional development, and collaborate with others in working toward the development of other high-quality early childhood leaders. Successful leaders can be examples of how leadership characteristics can lead to improved program quality, hiring and training of qualified staff, allowing children to learn and develop properly in an environment that meets the highest of standards, advocacy for children and families, and giving back to the community.

In this chapter, the issue of characteristics of successful early childhood education leaders was introduced. In Chapter 2, I review current literature showing a relationship of past studies to the current study. Also included is the history of the conceptual framework, leadership trait theory, and literature discussing general leadership characteristics. Additionally, characteristics of quality leadership, leadership and the classroom, as well as leadership and early childhood programs are reviewed in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore characteristics of quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. The literature review encompasses the history of leadership trait theory, general leadership characteristics, quality early childhood leadership characteristics, quality leadership and the classroom, and quality leadership and early childhood educational programs. The literature review also addresses the study's conceptual background, exploring Northouse's (2016) leadership trait theory. In looking specifically at characteristics of early childhood leaders, I found a gap in the literature on this topic. To gain better insight into past literature, I focused part of the literature review on general leadership, as this research best reflects the topic of successful leadership characteristics. I also reviewed educational literature on characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders but found that most past literature focused on quality principals and teachers in the public-school system. Because my study was centered on nonpublic (i.e., private) early childhood education, I did not want to focus on public school leadership, teachers, or their programs.

Leadership trait theory was used to explore general leadership characteristics because there is a gap in the literature specifically pertaining to characteristics of high-quality early childhood educational leaders. In this chapter, I address the small amount of literature I could find on quality early childhood leadership characteristics, as well as quality leadership and the classroom, which focused on student learning and the effects

that quality classrooms have on all students. Next, quality leadership and early childhood

educational programs are discussed, with a focus on quality rating improvement systems

in early childhood programs. Following this summary, I review related patterns that

appear in the literature concerning quality leadership and the organizational climate and

quality leadership and the classroom.

Literature Search Strategy

Various strategies were used for searching the literature, including online searches

of scholarly journals through the Walden University library. Walden University library

searches included advanced searches for empirical articles found in peer-reviewed,

scholarly journals. The databases most often used were EBSCO, ProQuest, Sage,

Education Research Complete, and ERIC. Other searches included printed books and

physical searches at local libraries. Key words used in searching for literature included

quality leadership, leadership traits, leadership characteristics, early childhood

leadership, quality early childhood administrators, negative leadership characteristics,

early childhood organizational climate, organizational climate, successful leadership,

successful early childhood leadership, and preschool leadership.

Conceptual Framework

Leadership trait theory has been studied for many years, with researchers

providing various perspectives as to what makes a leader or distinguishes leaders from

nonleaders. In the mid-19th century, the *great man theory* was supported strongly by

Carlyle (1849), who had studied the heroes of that time. As expressed by Carlyle, the

great man theory involved an assumption that the characteristics of leadership are only

possessed by men. Proponents of this theory held that successful leaders are born; their destiny begins at birth. Spencer (1896) argued against the great man theory, claiming that such heroes were part of modern-day history and only came to be leaders as a result of a social situation. Galton (1869) held to the belief that successful leadership qualities were innate and passed down through generations.

Throughout the 20th century, various leadership theories were introduced, but leadership trait theory was one of the first leadership theories widely studied (Northouse, 2016). Researchers were interested in how traits and characteristics influence leadership (Bryman, 1992). In the mid-20th century, Stogdill (1948) disputed previous trait theories and looked at leadership trait theory in a different light. Stogdill (1948) proposed that leadership trait theory was situational and that individuals might possess leadership qualities in one situation but not in another. Stogdill surveyed leaders and found that there was not a specific set of characteristics that distinguished those in leadership positions from those not in leadership positions. Traits such as intellect, insightfulness, responsibility, socialization, self-confidence, and alertness (Northouse, 2016) could be found in leaders and nonleaders alike. Stogdill (1974) for a second time studied characteristics that related to leadership and found that both situation and personality determined leadership quality.

In a time when men dominated leadership roles, Mann (1959) studied leadership characteristics by looking at personality and traits that leaders demonstrated when in small groups. Mann associated leadership traits to leaders being masculine, intellectual, conservative, and well adjusted. Moreover, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) maintained

that leaders show stronger characteristics of possessing drive, confidence, cognitive skills, motivation, and integrity. Additionally, Kirkpatrick and Locke contended that individuals could develop leadership traits, could be born with them, or both. Furthermore, Zaccaro et al. (2004) studied leadership characteristics from the perspective of social abilities and found traits such as problem-solving skills, emotional stability, conscientiousness, openness, agreeability, social intellect, the ability to self-monitor, and motivation in individuals with strong leadership skills. Although there have been varying beliefs on leadership traits or characteristics over time, leadership trait theory posits characteristics that could potentially be traits of many successful early childhood leaders.

The qualitative research approach was used for this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. The qualitative approach was used because it made it possible to explore a phenomenon and interpret it in the way it was perceived by the individual participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Leadership trait theory served as a guide for this descriptive case study, allowing me to explore the characteristics of successful early childhood educators in the daily environment in which they are observed. Case study was used because it allowed me to use multiple sources of data, which improved the credibility of the data (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Patton, 2015; Yin 2014) as seen from a variety of viewpoints.

Leadership trait theory helped me to select case study and to design the research questions considering the work of past researchers such as Carlyle (1849), Spencer,

Galton (1869), and Stogdill (1948). These scholars explored characteristics of leaders and developed theories as to what makes a great leader. The leaders they studied were men who had gone off to war and came back heroes; thus, they assumed that only men were born with leadership ability (Carlyle, 1849). Spencer (1896) believed that leadership was situational, whereas Galton (1869) argued that successful leadership qualities were innate. Stogdill (1948) suggested that leaders possess specific characteristics that others do not possess. I sought to explore characteristics of leaders today to look for similarities in the characteristics of high-quality leaders.

In considering leadership trait theory, I explored a phenomenon, interpreted it (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and collected data based on the way in which the phenomenon was self-reported by leaders and perceived by teachers and parents. When collecting and analyzing the data, I was reminded that leadership trait theory assumed of men occupying leadership positions. In my own study, all the participating leaders were women. In the early years of leadership trait theory, many scholars posited that leaders were men with the characteristics of being strong and masculine (Carlyle, 1849; Mann, 1959). There is a gap in the literature concerning the characteristics of high-quality early childhood educational leaders, and I sought to add to the literature and provide more research using leadership trait theory.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

The literature review contains current articles from peer-reviewed academic journals. Previous research studies were reviewed and synthesized as they relate to the research questions.

General Leadership Characteristics

There has been a substantial amount of literature on classroom quality (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013; Denny et al., 2012), teacher quality (Deutsch & Tong, 2011; Son, Kwon, Jeon, & Hong, 2013), and leadership styles (Graham, Ziegert, & Capitano, 2015; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Mohammadi, Mohammadi, & Moniri, 2015), but there is a scarce amount of research on characteristics of high-quality early childhood leaders. To specifically review leadership characteristics, I looked at leadership in general and found empirical studies on leaders and their characteristics. Xu et al. (2014) studied how leadership traits evolve and suggested that evidence supports the leadership trait theory that characteristics can be learned, evolve, and are composite, being made up of various parts or situations that a leader experiences (Northouse, 2016; Stogdill, 1948).

Over time, theories of types of leadership have developed, with opposing opinions emerging as to how leadership is carried out in large and small organizations. Stincelli and Boghurst (2014) promoted leadership as occurring informally, such that an individual has the capacity to lead others to a shared vision and goal but does not have control or authority over the organization. They purported that followers in small organizations were more likely to trust an informal leader rather than administrative leadership and that present-day leaders are missing out by not using informal leadership to work toward a common vision. A high-quality leader realizes that some individuals possess certain qualities and strengths that can further the success of the organization and seeks to be a leader to whom fellow employees can look for insight, encouragement, input, and assistance.

Another perception of leadership in large organizations is that the leader should be resolute or firm (Bolton, Brunnermeier, & Veldkamp, 2013) in leadership; this notion contradicts the claim that informal leadership (Stincelli & Boghurst, 2014) and nonleadership (Southerland, Land, & Bőhm, 2014) are most effective. Bolton et al. (2013) found that resoluteness allowed leaders to be unwavering in what they wanted to accomplish for the organization; the drawback was that some employees held back valuable input for lack of trust and fear that the resolute leader would not listen.

Leaders are thought of as individuals who assist a group or company in attaining their goals and reaching a vision set forth for the betterment of the organization. However, Southerland et al. (2014) found that social movement organizations offered sharp contrast with their views of antileadership by suggesting that leadership is shared by everyone, not a single individual. While Southerland et al. did not deny that individuals may possess certain quality traits, the social movement organizations included in their study approached leadership as something that should be shared, with everyone having input and all individuals' ideas being valued regardless of the personal characteristics they possessed. Antiauthoritarianism and antileadership formed the basis for these groups, and members believed that they were creating a democracy where one person did not dictate decisions; rather, the group was able to address any situation through decision-making conversations. Should one person try to lead the group, all participants had the right to question and discuss whether they agreed with the direction in which the discussion was headed. This type of leadership seems more like shared leadership where everyone feels comfortable in taking the leadership role in various

capacities. These groups may also participate in role rotation so that one person does not dominate and appoint themselves as leader. This antileadership paradigm is opposed to the great man theory, in which leaders are heroes (Carlyle, 1849) who have made a name for themselves on a local and national level.

Green, Duncan, Salter, and Chavez (2012) found that one participant group reported that highly educated individuals did not function well within an antileader group because they tended to take on leadership roles, possibly suggesting that higher education levels promote leadership capacities. These individuals were confronted by the group and asked to not lead. A separate study (Green et al., 2012) on educated workers found that higher education equated to certain positive and negative characteristics and qualities of a leader. These characteristics included honesty, uprightness, magnetism, egotism, maliciousness, dominance, and positive self-esteem. The higher educated participants showed an awareness that both positive and negative characteristics exist in leaders and that a high-quality leader knows the difference between these characteristics (Green et al., 2012). This study was in line with those of Abu Taleb (2013a) and Victor (2014), who found that higher education levels give leaders higher capabilities to make decisions, solve problems, and have awareness of their leadership. In contrast, Forry et al. (2013) found that education level was not a quality issue in family childcare settings. They found high-quality in settings where the provider only had a high school degree, contradicting previous studies stating that education plays a role in program quality. Leadership comes in various styles and demonstrates several characteristics, but are there characteristics specific to successful leaders in early childhood education?

There is a plethora of research on characteristics of leaders in almost any field except early childhood education. To gain a broad view of leadership characteristics, Kabacoff and Ringwood (2013) took a global perspective and compared leaders from 26 countries. They emphasized diversity and successful leadership to determine how leaders respond to diverse groups, and they found that leadership practices varied greatly from one country to the next. Leaders display the characteristics valued by their culture and promoted by their experience (Morov & Morova, 2015). According to Morov and Morova (2015), leaders from Russia did not see ethics or moral values as being important for a leader to possess; instead, determination, impulsiveness, and activity were the leadership characteristics that were most dominant.

In Taiwan, Chen and Chung (2014) found that individuals self-managed their behavior, were committed to the organization, and were more motivated to reach their own goals when directed by a charismatic leader. In Nairobi, Okoko, Scott, and Scott (2015) reported that leadership was obtained by sheer determination to work up through the ranks in order to achieve a higher position. Early childhood education leaders face diversity in the classroom and in their relationships with parents. How leaders perceive others and how they are perceived may influence how they establish relationships with children and parents from differing cultural backgrounds.

Wisdom is a characteristic that many feel is necessary for successful leadership. In the literature, wisdom has been approached from two perspectives: personal wisdom (Zacher, Pearce, Rooney, & McKenna, 2013) and intellectual wisdom (Blickle et al., 2013). Leadership success and behavior are determined by the leaders' personal wisdom

(Greaves, Zacher, McKenna, & Rooney, 2014; Zacher et al., 2013), with wise individuals demonstrating supportive behavior and leaders with less personal wisdom demonstrating high level leader-follower relationships. Blickle et al. (2013) viewed wisdom as meaning intellect and described it as a political skill, implying that successful leaders used their intellect to (a) determine the complexities of social interactions, (b) determine the intent of others in social settings, (c) influence others, (d) understand conflict resolution, and (e) make adjustments in behavior to fit the situation. Intellect was a desirable characteristic in studies that focused on leadership-follower relationships (Blickle et al., 2013; Nichols & Cottrell, 2014) along with trust and appreciation. Followers indicated that where intellectual wisdom was present, so was trust and a feeling of being appreciated (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014; Stocker, Jacobshagen, Krings, Pfister, & Semmer, 2014), which were indicative of good leadership.

It is often assumed that extroverts are leaders (Zaccardi, Howard, & Schnusenberg, 2012) and introverts are individuals who are less likely to be promoted up through a company (Furnham & Crump, 2015). However, Stephens-Craig, Koufie, and Dool (2015) examined 31 mid- to high-level leaders and found that nearly all participants perceived both introverts and extroverts as having the potential to be high-quality leaders, thus supporting the claim by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) that individuals have the potential to develop leadership traits, are born with them, or both. Additionally, the participants in the Stephens-Craig et al. study believed that introverts have ability to display traits of extroversion in order to be successful in their chosen profession even though introversion might be a strong trait in their personal life.

Studies have shown that early childhood educational preservice leaders have a self-perception of continually needing to improve their leadership abilities, learn more about how young children develop, and a constant need to improve their abilities to work well with others and build relationships with the staff and families. (Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos, & Maloney, 2014; Mistry & Sood, 2012). They felt that personal traits for every leader should be empathy, honesty, and availability. On the other hand, Cowart, Gilley, Avery, Barber, and Gilley (2014) studied ethical conduct of leaders and how their employees understood ethical behaviors of the leader. Cowart et al. (2014) found that the more a leader created strong relationships of trust, the more they were possessing strong ethics. Other studies indicated that employee personality plays a role in how they determine the trustworthiness of their leader (Krasman, 2014; Parmer, Green, Duncan, & Zarate, 2013). Their ability to trust the leader depended on their own age, level of maturity (Cowart et al., 2014), and their level of competence (Krasman, 2014; Parmer et al., 2013).

Quality Early Childhood Leadership Characteristics

The quality of early childhood education programs is established by the administrative leadership, and how each individual leader defines quality will determine the success of that program. Personal characteristics (Stogdill, 1974) of an early childhood education leader may play a role in determining how successful a leader is in building a program of high-quality. Leadership characteristics have varying effects on the leader, staff, and early childhood program (Aubrey et al., 2013). Among the characteristics are leadership styles and roles. Yaffe and Kark (2011) conducted a study

to determine the effects of leading by example on a program and found that leaders who lead by example had a positive or negative influence on their staff and their program because the staff emulated the leaders' attitude. It was found that positivity bred positive attitudes and negativity bred negative attitudes. Other leadership styles are situational (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014), and transformational (Hauserman & Stick, 2013) leadership. Sethuraman and Suresh (2014) found that situational leaders focused more on the task rather than the relationships with their followers. Transformational leaders showed that they invested in staff development and developed collaboration skills (Hauserman & Stick, 2013) and greater leader-follower relationships (Zacher et al., 2013).

Leadership trait theory closely examines various styles of leadership (Northouse, 2016) and it is within these leadership styles that specific characteristics of the leader are defined. Leadership characteristics are essential in having a positive influence on young children, their families, and the overall program because positive characteristics will filter down from the top to the staff, the children and the parents. When positive actions are taking place, positive responses will be seen. Quality leaders possess characteristics that will affect the quality of their program by demonstrating traits that indicate they are worthy to be a leader. Leaders have an influence on their followers and Liborius (2014) determined that teachers were more willing to follow their leader when they showed characteristics of integrity, humility, forgiveness, and gratitude. Furthermore, ethical behavior is noticed by employees and sparks creativity among them when there is positive leader-member exchange (Gu, Tang, & Jiang, 2015). On the other hand,

unethical behavior may influence individuals in unpredictable manners. Graham et al. (2015) found what they called unethical pro-organizational behavior was at its highest among many transformational leaders than in transactional leaders. Unethical pro-organizational behavior has been described as unethical choices made by an employee to promote or improve how an organization is seen by others (Vadera & Pratt, 2013) or cheating on reports in favor of the school or organization with the sole purpose of getting ahead or reaching goals (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). It was reported that among employees and families, moral behavior was a core value of leadership, and it was found that while teamwork led to trust, willingness led to being vulnerable and earning respect (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). All these characteristics will influence how a quality leader directs the program, interacts with others, and how they lead their staff. Staff will be influenced because they will see a leader that sets high standards for moral and social behavior. Children will have an example of moral behavior (Ho, 2011) and can be influenced by their environment. Parents will see these characteristics and know that the leadership is of high-quality, which develops a certain amount of trust in the program and in the adults, who care for their children for several hours each day.

Hallet (2013) conducted a qualitative descriptive case study where early childhood professionals in London were interviewed, observed, and surveyed, and found that leaders considered of high-quality were visionaries and this is what lead them to inspire others and work toward positive change. The early childhood professionals described characteristics of themselves as being enthusiastic and being passionate about working with young children. They also had deep-rooted feelings for the children,

community, and their school. These professionals also showed an ethical trait when it came to the care of all children. Commitment was a motivational factor that enhanced their leadership role as a transformational leader (Colbert, Barrick, & Bradley, 2014; Hallet, 2013). In contrast, leadership can also display negative aspects and some leaders abused their power or authority and used it for self-serving purposes. Leaders may find themselves in a situation where they sacrifice goals, teacher quality (Maxfield, Ricks-Doneen, Klocko, & Sturges, 2011), and quality of the overall program to serve their own interests. In looking for personal gain, no one benefits from the leaders' actions and it can be detrimental to the quality of services that are offered to children, their families and eventually the program, and its standing in the community.

Early childhood educators become leaders for various reasons. Some get involved because they love working with young children (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). Others feel it is a gift they were born with, some feel it is a calling and meeting professional qualifications are not necessary, and other were simply moved into the leadership position because of their experience as a teacher (Galvao & Brasil, 2014; Preston, 2013). Heikka and Hujala (2013) found that leaders not only have different traits, but they have different visions for their programs. Some determined that the overall quality of the program was important while others felt building relationships, collaboration, and sharing the vision of the program were of most importance. Quality leadership is a critical element of any early childhood education program (Yukl, 2012). Leaders in early childhood learning programs who have participated in leadership development may increase their potential, leadership quality, apply improved skill

development, higher quality programs with accreditation, higher staff retention, overall growth in the early childhood profession (Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2014), and stronger characteristics of determination, teamwork, fearlessness, and deliberation (Lamorey, 2013).

Principals are the leadership in public and private school settings. Most often their roles do not include responsibilities of prekindergarten children. However, they do play a big role in school achievement and student success (Branch et al., 2013). When examining characteristics of school principals, new public-school principals have shown quality traits in relational areas such as social and personal skills, and shared visions (Lehman, Boyland & Sriver, 2014). New public school teachers show negative traits of frustration, isolation, and high staff turnover. In private schools, teachers did not carry the same qualifications as public school teachers and their classroom resources were significantly less (Mahmood, 2013). Teachers in public schools feel trust, communication between staff, sharing a vision, and opportunities for leadership development are important traits for principals to have to be successful leaders (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Other studies have shown that principals from high achieving private schools (Henkel & Slate, 2013; Smith & Slate, 2014) and high achieving public schools (Borg & Slate, 2014; Henkel & Slate, 2013) tend to place emphasis on student achievement by challenging academically successful students more than principals in schools where academic achievement is not as great. Principals, both public and private, in lower achieving schools placed greater importance on a shared vision and building relationships

with the staff to work toward greater collaboration for school success (Borg & Slate, 2014; Henkel & Slate, 2013; Smith & Slate, 2014).

In contrast, other cultures do not have the same type of training as school leadership in the United States. Okoko, Scott, and Scott (2015) found that in Nairobi, principals came up through the ranks, beginning with teaching and worked their way up to become principal. While starting out as a teacher was seen to give them training for the job of school leader, it also caused problems because they had the same qualifications as many of the teachers; this led to a lack of respect and authority (Okoko et al., 2015). Other school leadership have found themselves in positions of leadership simply by being on staff at the correct time that new staff was needed, and as a result were moved into a leadership position without training and proper education (Preston, 2013). Furthermore, in New Zealand (Thornton & Cherrington, 2014), the government required early childhood educators to become certified. Not only did they have to obtain certification, they also had to demonstrate leadership capabilities by their involvement in the school and community. Leadership can be found in various styles and carries with it different requirements depending on the country, grade level, or whether the program is public or private. While there are contrasting views of leadership, it is still important to look at what qualities successful leaders possess.

Quality Leadership and the Classroom

Quality leaders create quality programs that serve every level of learner. Early learning classrooms are full of children from all backgrounds and levels of learning. However, children have shown improved behavior, improved social skills, and increased

math, reading and language skills when high-quality science programs are present in the classroom, crossing domains to allow for skill development (Gerde, Schachter, & Wasik, 2013). Additionally, learning has been found to last beyond the preschool years for low income children (Son et al. 2013) who experience learning in a high-quality environment when compared to children who did receive the benefit of a high-quality teacher and were not enrolled in quality programs.

Tucker-Drob (2012) conducted a longitudinal study with twins where disadvantaged children experience improved effects from family environment when attending a high-quality early learning program. The effects of a high-quality early childhood program are innumerable and can be seen in studies of children with special needs. High-quality early childhood classrooms provide support and developmental opportunities for minority children (Jung & Han, 2013), low SES (Reid & Ready, 2013; Sabol & Pianta, 2014), and those who are considered at risk, preparing them for school readiness (Pentimonti, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2014). Studies have also determined (Phillips & Meloy, 2012) that the influence of inclusion of prekindergarten special needs children in high-quality early childhood classrooms has a positive effect on school preparedness.

Phillips and Meloy (2012) and Iruka and Morgan (2014) found that quality programs increased school readiness skills for children with special needs compared to those attending a lower quality program. However, in contrast to these studies, another study focusing on literacy in early childhood special education classrooms (Guo, Sawyer, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2013) indicated that the literacy instruction quality and the literacy

environment quality were average to low in inclusive classrooms for early childhood special education. When placed in a high-quality program with high-quality teaching, child involvement, and an environment that was safe and conducive for learning to take place, African American children encountered high-quality education. When placed in programs where optimal learning cannot take place, the children encountered a lower level of education quality (Iruka, & Morgan, 2014). It was also noted that often, African American children do not encounter equal quality of preschool and early childhood programs compared to White children (Barnett, Carolan, & Johns, 2013). However, the study conducted by Iruka and Morgan indicated that outcomes increased when children were placed in low level quality early childhood programs if there was an emphasis on literacy.

Quality leaders will provide an environment that will influence the learning of low-income children, those with special needs, and for those considered disadvantaged because of the family environment, and they will also recognize the need to provide diverse services from outside agencies (Ang, 2012) to better support the children and families in their program. Diamond and Baroody (2013) found that when preschool children begin writing their name and the alphabet at an early age, letter knowledge and recognition, emerging literacy, and word decoding skills were developed. The development was at various levels because the participants involved all children of varying academic abilities. However, overall improvement was seen though not all experienced the same amount of growth (Diamond & Baroody, 2013). Quality early childhood programs will not only provide a program where these children can have the

opportunity to succeed academically, but they will be immersed into a classroom where genuine learning can occur.

Quality early childhood leaders will offer value to their staff by conducting observations and providing meaningful feedback. Leaders who provide observation and feedback help improve the quality of the preschool classroom, teacher quality, and more particularly, student learning (McKie et al., 2012). When quality leaders invest time in observation and feedback, they can see strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, in teacher capabilities, and in the program. By assessing the various aspects of the early learning program, the leader can look for ways to improve the quality of the classroom, the teacher, and how they serve children and families in their care.

Other studies (Auger, Farkas, Burchinal, Duncan, & Vandell, 2014; Jung, Brown, & Karp, 2014; Keys et al., 2013) found the quality of early childhood program effected math and literacy development while preparing young children for school. These studies determined that teacher quality is important to the quality of the program and student outcome. Children with low math achievement showed greater benefits when in classrooms with teachers of high capabilities (Jung et al., 2014; Reid & Ready, 2013).

Quality leaders will look for ways to enhance teacher quality by developing staff members through empowerment. Positive relationships between the organization and the leader (Maxfield et al., 2011) produce higher quality classrooms, and positive staff relationships. Work experience of the teacher has been found to determine the relationship the teacher has with the organization (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013). In contrast, other studies (Jung et al., 2014; Rusby, Jones, Crowley, & Smolkowski, 2013)

found that teacher experience had little or no influence on the improvement of math skills in young children. Teacher education level has been found to improve literacy, language and math skills (Reid & Ready, 2013) in preschool children. Higher educated teachers provided high level instruction (Reid & Ready, 2013), greater knowledge of classroom diversity, and classroom manipulatives (Jung et al., 2014), with higher classroom accomplishments compared to those with less education (Abu Taleb, 2013b).

Empowering teachers will improve their classroom performance, causing more positive outcomes for each child. Furthermore, quality leaders will be called upon to make quality decisions. Quality leaders will continue learning and improving their skills as leaders in planning, program operations, staff development, technology (Wilcox-Herzog, McLaren, Ward, & Wong, 2013) and diversity (Wise & Wright, 2012). By assessing the complete program, including their own skills, the quality leader is establishing a program that has the potential to not only affect the children and families in their care, but the community as well.

Leadership and the Early Childhood Educational Program

I have included this section on the quality of the program because the leaders chosen to participate in this study have met the highest standards of this state's QRIS. Part of their program being high-quality, and being high-quality leaders, is the fact that they use the QRIS to ensure the highest of these standards for their program, leaders, teachers, and staff. To enhance the overall program quality and improve child outcomes, quality leaders may use a QRIS to assess the quality of the complete program. Researchers have found that a QRIS will support what a quality program should look like

in early childhood education (Denny et al., 2012). Research has found that rating scales such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Extension (ECERS-E), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System – Toddler (CLASS - Toddler) improve cognitive skills in young children, promote safe and healthy environments, and lead to positive outcomes for the children because the teachers are involved in quality assessment decisions (Guss et al., 2013; Sabol et al., 2013). Furthermore, because these rating scales are in place, children have been found to display better behavior because teacher/student engagement was higher (La Paro et al., 2014). Early childhood education leaders will use a QRIS because they want to create, improve, or maintain a quality early learning program; one that will allow them to better serve children, families, and their community.

Recent literature has questioned the effectiveness of the use of ITERS-R and ECERS-R (Colwell, Gordon, Fujimoto, Kaestner, & Korenman, 2013; Gordon, Fujumoto, Kaestner, Korenman, & Abner, 2013; Karoly, Zellman, & Perlman, 2013). Early childhood programs across the nation use ITERS-R and ECERS-R as a source for quality rating. When looking at quality within an early child care center, often times the rating system will rate a few of the classrooms and let the rating of these classrooms speak for the entire program (Karoly et al., 2013). In a qualitative study, Karoly et al. used the measure ECERS-R and the ITERS-R and found that by allowing the quality of a few classrooms speak for the quality of the entire center, often times the quality was not

the same center wide with in some cases a large variation between classroom quality. The study also indicated that quality leaders using a QRIS across the entire program scored higher on true quality than those choosing to allow a percentage of the classrooms speak for the quality of the entire program (Karoly et al., 2013).

In another study, Gordon, Fujumoto, Kaestner, Korenman, and Abner (2013) found that ECERS-R did not measure child development, rather the quality of care a child receives in areas such as the environment, classroom quality, teacher quality, and leader quality. It did not measure in great amounts the development of a child in areas such as knowledge, skills, abilities, aptitude, personality traits, and academic achievement (Gordon et al., 2013). The results of this study are in line with other studies where validity of ECERS-R was questioned concerning how it improved child achievement (Colwell et al., 2013; Sabol & Pianta, 2014).

Quality in early childhood can be measured by programs such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), ECERS-3, ITERS-3, and CLASS (Casbergue, Bedford, & Burstein, 2014; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2014; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2017; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2016). These programs measure various aspects of program quality, but each one seeks to improve the early childhood experience for children and their families. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has provided guidelines for program quality as well as child development, teacher and director improvement, and ethical conduct (NAEYC, 2011). Kindergarten classrooms and preschool programs have attributed their program quality to the use of NAEYC certification guidelines (Abu Taleb,

2013a). Furthermore, public kindergarten classrooms show more of a tendency to diligently follow NAEYC guidelines compared to private kindergarten programs that did not follow as closely (Abu Taleb, 2013a). Similar results were found when examining licensed programs and state registered programs (Raikes et al., 2013) where licensed programs scored higher in quality than those that were state registered.

Quality rating systems were created to help improve program and classroom quality. Participation in the QRIS is voluntary in the Midwestern state where this study is being conducted. Studies have found (Casbergue, Bedford, & Burstein, 2014; Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2014) that teachers involved in a QRIS scored higher in areas such as overall classroom quality, classroom instruction, literacy, and the overall emotional assistance shown toward students. The higher ranked the quality rating program was, the better teachers displayed increased classroom organization, a higher quality of language curriculum, improved classroom environment, and stronger teaching skills compared to teachers involved in lower ranked quality rating programs (Casbergue et al., 2014; Jeon et al., 2014).

Parents of preschool children tend to look at quality in a different light. Grammatikopoulos, Gregoriadis, Tsigilis, and Zachopoulou (2014) conducted a study to determine the parents' perception of quality by asking parents to evaluate the quality of program where their children were enrolled, using the ECERSPQ (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Parent Questionnaire) (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997). The result indicated that the parents perceived program quality much higher than the trained observers using ECERS-R (Grammatikopoulos, Gregoriadis, Tsigilis, & Zachopoulou,

2014). Parents often determine quality by the experiences of their children, and what they see upon entering and exiting the building. All early childhood programs were also scored high in the area of accepting diversity. The observers were trained in early childhood education evaluation and knew the exact qualifications of a quality early childhood program (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2014) and scored all early childhood programs lower than the evaluation scores of parents. It was suggested that the parents evaluated high because of how they perceived the programs or at least how they hoped them to be (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2014). Scopelliti and Musatti (2013) also found that parents often have varied perceptions of quality. Parents of infants and toddlers found quality programs to be provide meaningful developmental experiences for their child, and one where the parents could have reciprocal relationships with caregivers. Parents perceived programs to be of high-quality if their children's needs were being met, as well as their own (Scopelliti & Musatti, 2013).

Parents will have varying perceptions of what makes up a quality early childhood educational program. Some parents will be more knowledgeable in the area of early childhood education, while others are not. It is the responsibility of the early childhood leader to provide a program that meets the needs of all children and their families. Quality leadership will advocate for children and the families to promote change and early childhood legislation. Abu Taleb (2013b) discovered that parents found quality in such teacher characteristics as fairness, patience, and kindness. They wanted an early learning environment where not a single child was discriminated against and every child was cared for and shown equal respect (Abu Taleb, 2013b).

Quality leaders advocate for child, family, and teacher equality. Goncu et al.

(2012) found that legislation is needed to improve the quality of early childhood

educators by placing them on the same level or scale as teachers in kindergarten through

12th grade. Quality leaders can advocate for stricter definitions of what a quality early

learning program should be and how each program goes about educating young children.

Stamopoulos (2012) studied reform that would bring about change in preschool

leadership. Mentoring and advocating were crucial to the reform, but leaders were

charged with the responsibility of going beyond the classroom and out into the

community. Using outside agencies to provide services for children and families

encouraged leaders to be more purposeful in their leadership and in advocacy

(Stamopoulos, 2012). The need for quality leadership in every early childhood education

program will be essential in providing quality programs that produce positive outcomes

for children from low income families, those with special needs, and children from

disadvantaged family environments.

Summary and Conclusions

Throughout history researchers have used leadership trait theory to study

leadership and determine what distinguishes leaders from nonleaders. Whether one holds

to the belief that successful leaders are born (Carlyle, 1849; Galton, 1869) or the belief

that successful leaders are made through various situations (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991;

Stogdill, 1948; Stogdill, 1974), strong leadership characteristics are essential for the

success of quality early childhood educational programs and child outcomes. Because

there is limited literature on the characteristics of successful early childhood leadership, I

looked at leadership characteristics in general. Some literature pointed to general leadership traits that evolve and are situational to the leaders' experience (Xu et al., 2014) which aligns with trait theory of leadership traits being situational (Northouse, 2016; Stogdill, 1948). However, I did not study situational leadership because it is often seen as a style of leadership and not a theory (Northouse, 2016). I studied characteristics of the successful early childhood educational leader.

In early childhood education, personal characteristics (Stogdill, 1974) of the educational leader will play a role (Yukl, 2012) in establishing how successful a leader is in creating a high-quality early childhood program. Quality early childhood leadership shows characteristics of fearlessness, determination (Lamorey, 2013), integrity, humility (Liborius, 2014), and positive ethical behavior (Gu et al., 2015). However, early childhood leadership characteristics are not limited to those mentioned in this review. Quality leaders are interested in the quality of the classroom and the overall program and place importance on what happens in the classroom. As a result, children from all backgrounds increase reading, math, social, and behavior skills (Gerde et al., 2013). Program quality can be enhanced by using a QRIS that supports what a quality early childhood educational program will look like (Denny et al., 2012).

There is a plethora of literature on classroom and teacher quality (Hyson & Whittaker, 2012; Raikes et al., 2012; Wise & Wright, 2012). However, there is a gap in the literature on characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders and further studies are needed on this issue (Aubrey et al., 2013; Ho, 2011; Liborius, 2014). There is a restricted amount of research on successful high-quality early childhood

leadership. The limited amount of research suggested that high-quality early childhood educators were visionaries, inspired others, worked toward positive change (Hallet, 2013), ethical, and committed (Colbert et al., 2014), but much more research is needed on this subject within the field of early childhood on characteristics of high-quality leadership.

History has shown that there are varying beliefs on leadership traits or characteristics, but leadership trait theory contains characteristics that could potentially be traits of many successful early childhood leaders. The literature reviewed suggests that there are certain characteristics that make a leader successful. One cannot limit the characteristics a leader might possess. Characteristics of successful high-quality early childhood educators were explored by conducting interviews with experienced early childhood leaders.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore the characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the identification of successful early childhood programs by the QRIS used in a Midwestern community. The issue of characteristics of leadership quality was explored because of the marked differences that are found in early childhood leadership quality across organizations in a Midwestern community and voluntary participation in the use of the QRIS (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2013). The use of a QRIS varies from state to state, and the Midwestern state in which this study took place does not mandate the use of a QRIS. Participation is voluntary, but a program cannot receive a rating of high-quality unless it uses the QRIS used by the state (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2013). According to the state's QRIS, a majority of the local early childhood programs in the Midwestern state do not use the QRIS of the state. Therefore, this descriptive case study allowed me to collect data and gain insight into the characteristics of leaders considered to be successful, high-quality early childhood educational leaders.

The research design and the rationale for its use are discussed in the remainder of this chapter. My role as the researcher and an observer is explained, along with any biases or ethical issues that needed to be addressed. Additionally, how participants were chosen, what instrumentation was used to collect data, where and how data were collected and recorded, and my data analysis plan are discussed in the methodology section. In the final portion of this chapter, I discuss issues of trustworthiness, explaining

strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, I describe ethical procedures in the treatment of human participants, Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, any ethical concerns with how participants were recruited, measures taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants and the data collected, and how the data will be stored for 5 years and then destroyed.

Research Design and Rationale

To explore the characteristics of leaders of high-quality early childhood programs, I developed the following research questions:

RQ1:　What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs?

RQ2:　What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire?

RQ3:　What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs?

A qualitative approach was used for this study exploring characteristics of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood education programs. In qualitative research, inductive reasoning is used, and data are collected and summarized in a narrative style (Lodico et al., 2010). In qualitative research, an issue is explored, the data are analyzed, and the researcher looks for emerging themes (Creswell, 2012).

For this study, several qualitative research designs were considered, such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study, to determine the appropriate design for the issue being explored. Ethnography is used to study behaviors, languages, and patterns within cultural groups. In a grounded-theory design, the researcher seeks to describe a process from the viewpoint of the participant while attempting to develop a theory from the participant data. Phenomenological design is used to allow participants to describe a common experience they have had and explain it from their point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Case study is often referred to as a form of ethnographic study, but it differs in that case study can be used to explore programs, events, processes, and activities that individuals have encountered (Creswell, 2012).

The design for this qualitative study was a descriptive case study. I gathered information from more than one source in order to offer different perspectives on the issue being studied (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). I followed guidelines described by Aubrey et al. (2013), who studied characteristics of early childhood managers and how they lead, with added information from Fitzgerald and Theilheimer (2013). Case studies may provide documentation of interviews, observations, notes, and archived documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Freebody, 2003). Descriptive case study as used in this study allowed me to collect data from high-quality early childhood leaders, as well as teachers and parents who work with them, to provide insight on characteristics of successful early childhood education leaders. I collected data that I use to describe

differences or similarities between individuals, but I do not discuss why these differences or similarities happened (Lodico et al., 2010).

Role of the Researcher

I have worked in the field of early childhood education for 12 years. During that time, I have served in a variety of positions, such as preschool lead teacher, kindergarten teacher, center director, and school principal and administrator. During my time in administration, I have realized that successful leadership styles vary, as everyone's characteristics play a role in how he or she leads. I did not personally know any of the individuals who participated in the study, nor had I held any type of supervisory or instructor role over them. The participants were not selected from within any school where I am or ever have been employed. Participants were not given incentives, and there was not any conflict of interest because I did not know the early childhood educational leaders who qualified to participate in the study. Through open-ended questions, I was able to establish an appropriate researcher-participant working relationship as the participants discussed their experiences and insights regarding characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders. It was important that I remained unbiased in all communication with the participants and during the entire research process. Any biases were checked by a peer reviewer who carefully read over the interview questions and the data analysis and asked questions concerning the data collection and analysis to check for potential biases.

Methodology

In this study, characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders were explored by conducting interviews with 12 identified leaders. The Leadership Traits Questionnaire was completed by each leader to collect self-reported data. The traits questionnaire with two additional open-ended questions was completed by five teachers and three parents from each early learning program. Data were collected from the teachers and parents to understand their perceptions of high-quality leadership.

Participant Selection

In this study, I focused on high-quality early childhood leaders in a Midwestern state. It was my intent to select 12 early childhood leaders to participate in the study. These leaders came from four different counties and 12 different early childhood programs that had been deemed of highest quality according to the state QRIS. Because the criteria for choosing participants involved the quality of their programs, the program sizes and number of people served varied.

The participants were chosen by sending letters of invitation to those leaders and programs qualifying for high-quality status according to the QRIS. These programs can be found on the quality rating system website, which is updated on a monthly basis. In the local region, there are not many early childhood programs that qualify as highest quality according to the QRIS standards, so a letter of invitation was sent to all qualifying programs. From the email responses stating a wish to participate in the study, I used purposeful sampling to choose the first 12 leader participants responding to my invitation who had been in a leadership position for 5 or more years. I identified 15-20 potential

high-quality leaders in the area. I sent letters of invitation to all of them, but 12 leader

participants were selected from the first 12 responses that I received. Multiple attempts

were made with follow-up calls 2 weeks after the letter of invitation had been mailed. A

second letter was sent and was more successful in reaching the leaders. Twelve

participants were chosen because qualitative research calls for in-depth analysis. In

determining this target number, I considered the possibility that one or more of the

participants might drop out of the study. Having a larger number of participants was time

consuming in collecting and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2012), but I was able to give

each leader proper consideration of time and inquiry. A larger number of participants

might have led to increased data but not more information, especially if saturation

occurred (Mason, 2010).

The study included five teachers and three parents from each school. I asked each

leader to place a letter of invitation in the mailboxes of teachers with at least 2 years of

teaching experience. I also asked the leader to place a letter of invitation in the teacher-

parent communication folders of parents who currently had a child enrolled in the

program for a minimum of 6 months. If an individual was interested in participating in

the study, the individual would email me stating interest. I chose from the first five

teacher emails and the first three parent emails that I received. The time and availability

offered by each leader, teacher, and parent participant was met with respect and a high

standard of ethics.

In selecting the participants for this study, consideration was given to sample size.

I identified between 15 and 20 potential high-quality leaders in my local county and

invited all of them to participate. From that group, only two leaders qualified or were willing to participate in my study. In order to select 12 individuals to participate in the study, I had to expand the invitation to the northern half of the state to find participants meeting the standards of high-quality determined by the state QRIS. In this case, saturation occurred because adding new data would not have added anything to the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Instrumentation

The data collection instruments that I used were leadership interview protocols, the Leadership Trait Questionnaire (Northouse, 2016) for leaders, and the Leadership Trait Questionnaire with two additional open-ended questions for teachers and parents. Before the interviews I developed an interview protocol (Appendix A) that I used with every leader interview. The protocol contained the project title, the date and time of the interview, the name of the interviewer, an interviewee identification number, pre-interview questions on program demographics, written reminders to give a description of the study and get participant consent, and the interview questions. Each leader was asked the exact same questions, which were researcher produced and aligned with the research questions, and the entire interview was audiotaped.

The leadership interview questions were enough to answer the first research question: What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs? The interview questions were centered on the first research question regarding self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders.

The second data collection instrument was a published questionnaire. It was the Leadership Trait Questionnaire found in the Northouse (2016) text. Even though the instrument is in the public domain, I contacted the author and gained permission to use the questionnaire (Appendix D). The Leadership Trait Questionnaire helped in answering the second research question: What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire? The Leadership Trait Questionnaire allowed the leaders to answer the second research question regarding to what degree they possessed 10 different characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders.

The third data collection instrument was also a version of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire by Northouse (2016) that I modified by adding two open-ended questions. The questionnaire and additional questions allowed the teachers and parents to answer the third research question concerning their thoughts about the characteristics of the leader of the early childhood program where the teachers worked and the parents' children attended. Data from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire answered the third research question: What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs? Teachers and parents filling out the questionnaire and answering the open-ended questions helped to facilitate triangulation of the data as I compared collected data within and across sites.

To report the validity and reliability of data from past studies where the Leadership Trait Questionnaire was used, I searched for studies through the library and

contacted ResearchGate; however, I could not find any studies in which the Leadership

Trait Questionnaire had been used. I then contacted Northouse concerning the reliability

and validity of the instrument. Through e-mail communication, Northouse (personal

communication, June 20, 2016) stated that I had permission to use the Leadership Trait

Questionnaire. However, he stated that "because it is intended as a self-assessment tool, it

does not have established reliability and validity."

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving approval from the IRB to conduct the proposed study, I sought to

recruit participants via a written letter of invitation. I selected 12 leader participants who

expressed interest in taking part in the study. Twelve leader participants were selected to

account for the possibility of some participants dropping out of the study. If there had

not been enough participants, I would have extended my search to other schools in the

county. A consent form was signed by each participant once the individual agreed to

participate in the study. The consent form addressed the purpose of the study, benefits

and foreseeable risks of the study, how confidentiality would be protected, the fact that

there was no compensation for participating, any conditions of an individual's

involvement in the study, and time requirements for the interviews and questionnaires.

Additionally, participants were reminded that they had volunteered to take part in the

study and could choose to withdraw at any time (National Institutes of Health, 2014).

Once the participants had been chosen, I used the interview protocol to conduct

the leadership interviews and answer the first research question: What are the self-

reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early

childhood programs? I contacted the early childhood educational leaders by telephone to begin establishing working relationships with them. I explained to them that I had chosen them because they had a quality program, I gave them the opportunity to ask any questions they had, and we scheduled a time for the leadership interview. I conducted the interviews at the participants' schools, with each lasting 1 hour. I audiotaped each interview while I took notes. The questions were open ended and followed by probes, if necessary, to acquire further information or for clarity. These probes were written verbatim ahead of time so that each participant would be asked the exact same set of questions. If necessary, I contacted the leader to conduct a follow-up session over the telephone. Once the interviews were complete, I transcribed the recordings and saved the transcripts on an external drive and a USB flash drive, both of which are stored in a locked safe in my home office to which I have sole access.

Once the transcriptions of the interviews were complete, all interview participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcript to assure accuracy of the information they had presented. Upon completion of the leadership interviews, I used the second data collection instrument of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire to answer the second research question of: What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire? Consent for participation was received from each of these participants before conducting the interview and I explained any risks, confidentiality, and their right to drop out of the study at any time (National Institutes of Health, 2014). The leaders were asked to complete the Leadership Trait Questionnaire at the conclusion of their interview.

The third data collection source was the teachers and parents who completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire with two additional open-ended questions. The questionnaire provided descriptive data to answer the third research question of: What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose child attend these programs? I asked each leader to place a letter of invitation in the teacher mailboxes of those having at least two years of teaching experience. I also asked the leader to place a letter of invitation in the teacher-parent communication folders of parents who currently had a child enrolled in the program for a minimum of six months. In order to protect the privacy of the teacher and parent participants, implied consent was used meaning, their completion of the questionnaire indicated their consent to participate in the study and a signature was not required. I explained any risks, confidentiality, and their right to drop out of the study at any time (National Institutes of Health, 2014). The teachers and parents were to complete the questionnaires at a location away from the early learning program. I tried this with the first school, and it was difficult to get teachers and parents to meet me at a location away from the school. After that, I collected the questionnaires via email except for three schools. Of those three schools, some of the teachers and parents completed the questionnaire via email, and others did not. The other parents completed the questionnaire at the site and I personally collected them. At one of those schools, the leader participant was leaving and asked me to come in on her last day to finish collecting the questionnaires from the teachers and parents. I was in an assigned room and met with each person individually. The

responses from the questionnaire and open-ended questions were in written form by the participant. If necessary, I contacted the teachers or parents and conducted any follow-up session over the telephone.

All data were stored in a locked safe in my home office where I have sole access. It was planned that there would be five teachers and three parents from each school to complete the questionnaire, and if a teacher or parent dropped out, I would choose another teacher or parent to complete the questionnaire from those who volunteered to participate in this study. Due to a low number of teacher and parent volunteers, I was not able to choose other participants to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, two schools do not have the five teachers and three parent volunteers but have enough to be included in this study. All interviewed leaders were given the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy, assuring that it states exactly what they said and how they meant to say it (Creswell, 2012). All participants could review a draft of the findings. Data collected from all instruments and the three data sources (leaders, teachers, and parents) are stored in a locked safe in my home office for five years where I am the only person to have access.

Data Analysis Plan

The data collected from the leadership interviews were used to answer the first research question of: What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs? These were self-reported data from each leader as they expressed what they perceive to be characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders. Leadership trait theory was used to

analyze the data. Just as researchers in the past have studied characteristics of successful leaders (Mann, 1959; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Zacarro, 2004) by looking at traits and characteristics such as intellect, problem solving, social stability, and strong leadership skills, I explored the characteristics the local high-quality educational leaders were reported to possess.

Data were analyzed by looking for emerging themes or similar statements and categories were created from data in the transcripts. The transcripts were color-coded, marking the emerging themes that appeared from the data. Emerging themes were identified using verbatim quotes from the interviews to create a narrative for exploring characteristics of successful early childhood leaders. Each interview participant was given the opportunity to review the transcript to assure the accuracy of the information they presented (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). I had planned on using the software NVivo to assist with coding the data and allow for comparisons (Creswell, 2012), but my answers were so specific, it was easier to determine the themes by completing the analysis by hand.

I used the data collected from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire to answer the second research question of: What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire? The data were received from the early childhood educational leaders and revealed what characteristics the leaders possess. Once the questionnaires were submitted, I used the scoring sheet to analyze the data and record the descriptive findings in a table (See Table 1) by averaging the responses of the participants for each early childhood leader. This

allowed me to code the data and look for emerging themes. I did not use data software to analyze the questionnaire data because it was collected from the questionnaire forms in a manner that immediately showed emerging themes.

The third data source came from the teachers and parents answering the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. Because the Leadership Trait Questionnaire is public domain, I modified it by adding two open-ended questions, allowing the teachers and parents to further explain any response they had on the questionnaire and ask questions. By looking at the individual questionnaires I was able to check for contradictions and discrepancies. Using the questionnaire, I collected teacher and parent perceived data while answering the third research question of: What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders, and parents whose child attend these programs? Data were collected in the same manner as the leader questionnaire and five teachers and three parents from each school completed the questionnaire.

Data collected from the teacher and parent questionnaires revealed what they perceive to be the characteristics and traits of their early childhood leader and was used to triangulate the data. Once the questionnaires were submitted, I used the scoring sheet to analyze the data and record the descriptive findings in tables (See Tables 3 and 4) by averaging the responses of the participants for each early childhood leader. This allowed me to code the data, look for emerging themes, and record the descriptive findings in a table. The two open-ended questions allowed the teachers and parents to further explain any response they had on the questionnaire and ask questions. By looking at the

individual questionnaires I was also be able to check for contradictions and discrepancies.
All discrepant data from any of the three types of data collected were included in the
study as these relate to the issue being studied. However, no information was included
that would bring harm to any individual or expose sensitive information toward the
schools or the participants of the study.

Trustworthiness

To validate the data, I checked for credibility of the leader interviews, the traits
questionnaire filled out by the leaders, and the leadership questionnaire with two
additional open-ended questions completed by the teachers and parents. This allowed me
to triangulate the data, and look for emerging themes (Creswell, 2012), as I compared the
data and examined leadership characteristics of each early childhood leader. Once the
transcriptions of the interviews were complete, I gave each participant the opportunity to
review the transcript to assure accuracy of the information they presented. Data were
collected and analyzed, and if any of the information needed clarification, I returned to
the participant to gain clarity. I was reflective in my role as a researcher by respecting
the participants and the sites of this study as I interpreted the data, not allowing any
biases or personal experiences determine how I interpreted the data. I also used a peer
reviewer to avoid such biases or misinterpretation of the data.

This study was limited to 12 leader participants representing quality early
childhood leaders. Also included were five teachers per site, and three parents from each
early childhood program I purposely selected. Although limited to the 12 leader
participants, this study could have the potential to be transferred to the larger population

and be useful in other areas in this Midwestern state by contributing to the development of high-quality leaders in other programs. After coding the data, I combined the data from the leader interviews, the Leadership Trait Questionnaire from each leader, and the Leadership Trait Questionnaire with two addition open-ended questions from the teachers and parents to provide a thick description of the settings, and participant perspectives and experiences (Lodico et al., 2010).

To establish dependability, I interviewed the leader of each early childhood program using open-ended questions. Each leader was asked to complete the Northouse (2016) Leadership Trait Questionnaire to determine to what degree they possess 10 different characteristics of a successful early childhood educational leader. Additionally, five teachers and three parents from each school were to complete the Leadership Trait Questionnaire concerning their perception of characteristics of the early childhood educational leader. The teacher and parent questionnaires included two open-ended questions. Interview data were collected using audiotaping. Once the interview data were transcribed, the interview participants were given the opportunity to review a copy of the transcript to assure accuracy of the information they presented. A peer reviewer was used to read all data and verify the logical development of themes and findings. The questionnaire was scored based on the answers provided by each participant. The third source of data, the parents, helped triangulate the data by comparing their answers with those of the teachers and the leaders. Reflexivity assured that the findings were derived from the personal experiences and perceptions of each participant and not from my own perceptions.

Ethical Procedures

Prior to beginning the research, I received approval for the IRB (see Appendix E). Approval from the IRB must be received prior to any type of data collection to assure that all ethical standards are being maintained. I followed the IRB guidelines concerning the protection and privacy of all participants. Before beginning the research, potential ethical dilemmas were addressed. The rights of the participants and the research sites were respected, not putting them or any vulnerable population at risk while protecting their privacy (Creswell, 2012). All participants received a letter giving an in-depth explanation as to the purpose of the study, their individual rights as a participant, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time, the right to privacy, the right to ask questions, the benefits of the study, and the right to receive a copy of the study (Creswell, 2012; National Institutes of Health, 2014).

I obtained a signed consent form from each leader participant, keeping a copy and providing them with a copy. In order to protect the privacy of the teacher and parent participants, implied consent was used meaning, their completion of the questionnaire indicated their consent to participate in the study and a signature was not required. The consent form included permission to audiotape the interviews, asking the participant to review the data, and the time it took for each activity, including follow up questions and discussing the results. All language used was unbiased and the transcript was reviewed by the participant which allowed them to assure the accuracy of the information they have presented.

For purposes of collecting data, I needed to know the identity of each participant. However, I assured each individual that their identification, the location of their site, and all information they shared would be confidential. Once the individual agreed to participate in the study, they were assigned a number instead of using names. After the completion of the study, all information will be stored for a period of five years, and then destroyed by burning in an incinerator.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. In this chapter I discussed the methodology of this research study. Using a descriptive qualitative case study, I collected data from three different sources: the early childhood leader, teachers from each early childhood program, and parents from the same early childhood programs. Data were analyzed and checked for trustworthiness issues and ethical procedures.

In Chapter 4 I discussed the results of my study. I also explained how the data were collected and presented any variations from the plan as described in Chapter 3. How I analyzed the data, looked for emerging themes, and discrepant cases were also discussed. Additionally, I discussed trustworthiness by explaining describing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. There has been much research directed toward children of low-income families and those with special needs (McKie et al., 2012; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Tucker-Drob, 2012). Due to an insufficient amount of research conducted on characteristics of early childhood educational leaders, it was the intent of this study to help fill this gap (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Ho, 2011; Liborius, 2014) regarding characteristics of early childhood educational leaders.

Information was obtained from participants to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs?

2. What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire?

3. What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs?

In this chapter, I describe organizational conditions that might have had an influence on participants during data collection. Additionally, I describe participant demographics, how data were collected, and how the data were analyzed. This chapter

also includes results for each research question, as well as tables that illustrate the results.

I conclude this chapter by discussing evidence of trustworthiness and a presenting a

chapter summary.

Setting

In this study, I explored characteristics of high-quality leadership in early

childhood education. The participants in this study were high-quality leaders as

identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. The teacher and parent participants

were either employed at the school or had children enrolled in the early childhood

programs directed by the leader participants. Nine of the participating schools were in

suburban settings, and one was in an urban setting. All the leaders were female. Three of

the leaders held a Bachelor of Arts degree, and seven leaders held master's degrees in

various fields. One of the leaders was working on her doctoral degree in early childhood

education. Three of the leaders taught at least one early childhood education class at their

local community college. The number of years that each leader had been in a leadership

role varied from 5 to 42 years. Seven of the schools served 100 or more children daily,

while the other three schools served under 100 children daily. The number of individuals

on staff varied from six to 42 at the participating schools.

All but one school was in a typical private daycare/preschool setting, with no

evidence of personal or organizational conditions that could affect the interpretation of

the study results at any school. It must be noted, however, that at one of the schools I

experienced evidence of an internal struggle. To collect teacher data, I met with the

teachers one-on-one in an assigned room per the request of the director. One of the

teachers filling out the questionnaire was disgruntled with the leader. She questioned me as to whether I was from the corporate office, and I told her several times that I was not. She completed the questionnaire and continued to talk to me as if I was from corporate headquarters, asking me to change the way that the leader was managing the program.

As each participant came into the room, I wrote the date and time on the questionnaire. Once I began to analyze the hard data, I realized that the teacher who appeared disgruntled while filling out the questionnaire was the last person to come into the room. This teacher was the sixth person when I only needed five teacher participants, so I did not include her data in this study. The overall scores for this leader were lower, which indicates that all the teachers tended to see their leader in a similar light. I included data from this school because, while the scores for its leader might have been lower than those for other leaders, they were not so far below the scores of the other leaders that the inclusion of the school would have skewed the results.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, I began contacting the leaders and programs as identified by the QRIS in this Midwestern state. Participation was voluntary, but a program cannot receive a rating of high-quality unless it uses the QRIS used by the Midwestern state (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2013). I mailed the letter of invitation to leaders in my local county. Because only two leaders responded to my invitation locally, I had to go outside my county. I mailed an additional 180 letters of invitation to potential participants in the northern half of the Midwestern state. If I did not hear from a potential participant after 2 weeks, I attempted to call, email, or mail a

follow-up letter of invitation. I sent invitations out 15 at a time. One out of every 15 letters that I mailed received a response to the invitation. Five leaders responded to my first invitation, and seven leaders responded to the follow-up invitation. Twelve leaders responded to the invitation to participate in my study and met the criteria for participation.

Due to the number of leaders who participated, there was the potential for 60 teacher participants and 36 parent participants. One of the schools did not have any teachers who were willing to participate, and the other school did not have any parents willing to participate; therefore, I was unable to collect enough data, making these discrepant cases. At another school, partial data were provided by teachers and parents. These data were deemed enough to include in this study because half of the required number of participants took part in the study. When analyzing the data from another school, I had to leave out the Leadership Trait Questionnaire data from one of the parents because of contradictory information in this parent's questionnaire and open-ended question responses. The open-ended question asked the respondent to state the top three positive characteristics of the leader. On the questionnaire section, this parent gave the leader very low ratings, but on the open-ended question, the parent provided three of the characteristics that were indicated as reasons for a low rating on the questionnaire, indicating that the parent was ranking the same characteristics as being the highest and lowest, which led to a contradiction within the data. The other eight schools provided complete data that were analyzed. The final numbers of participants for this study were

10 leader participants, 46 teacher participants, and 28 parent participants, totaling 84

participants in all.

In collecting data, I used leader interviews and questionnaires, teacher

questionnaires, and parent questionnaires. Prior to conducting the interview, I had a brief

conversation with each leader, in which I tried to create a relaxed atmosphere. I then

asked the leader participant to read and sign the consent form and provided her with an

opportunity to ask questions. I had spoken to each leader by phone prior to the

appointment to explain the interview protocol. I received permission to record the

interviews at that time of the phone calls. Nine of the 10 leader interviews were

conducted with a one-on-one format at the early learning sites and were audiotaped using

a digital voice recorder. The last of the 10 interviews was conducted over the telephone.

Each interview lasted 50 minutes to 1 hour, and questionnaire completion lasted 3

to 5 minutes for each leader. After the interview, each leader completed the

questionnaire while I waited. Once the questionnaire had been completed, I collected the

questionnaire and took it with me. I explained to the leader that I would transcribe the

interview and would email a copy of the transcript within 7 to 10 days. I explained that I

needed the participants to carefully read over the transcript, making sure that all

information was correct and that it conveyed the information in the manner they intended.

I asked participants to let me know via email whether everything was correct or whether I

needed to make changes. I asked them to specifically write out any changes that needed

to be made. Next, I spoke to the leader participants about putting the letter of invitation

in the teachers' mailboxes and the teacher-parent communication folders. Before

leaving, I asked the leaders if they had any questions about the process; no one had questions.

The final interview was conducted over the telephone and lasted approximately 40 minutes. I audiotaped this interview with the permission of the leader participant. Once the interview was complete, I explained that I would transcribe the interview and would email the participant a copy of the transcript. I told her to read over the transcript carefully to make sure that it was correct and conveyed all information in the way she intended. I asked her to let me know via email if the transcript accurately reflected what she said in the interview or if I needed to make changes. I asked her to write out any specific changes that needed to be made, if any were noted. Next, I explained that I would mail the questionnaire to her and would then go to the school to pick up her questionnaire at the end of the week. I mailed the questionnaire to the leader, she completed it, and I picked up the questionnaire at the school.

The teacher and parent questionnaires were originally to be filled out in person at a specified location in the town where each school was located. One school followed those guidelines, but it was very difficult to arrange for each participant to meet at the proposed location. For the remaining nine schools, I received permission to have the teachers and parents contact me via email or by phone to indicate their interest in participating in my study. Once I received notice of their interest, I sent them the consent form and questionnaire to be completed and returned to me via email. Some of the teachers and parents responded to the option of completing the questionnaire by email. If I did not have enough participation from a school, I sent a second email to the teachers

and parents asking for their participation. Due to this not being completely successful, I mailed consent forms and questionnaires to three of the schools from which I did not receive enough data. I sent the forms to a designated person (someone other than the leader) and had that person sign a letter of confidentiality. The designated individual gave the teacher and parent participants the consent form and questionnaire and asked them to complete it and then return it to the designated person in a sealed envelope to ensure confidentiality. I returned to the three schools and collected the outstanding data.

Because there had been budget cuts in many of the schools, some of the early learning sites had cut back on staff. In one school, there were not enough teachers to complete the questionnaire. In place of the fifth teacher, the administrator asked a student teacher to complete the questionnaire without my knowledge. The criteria for participation in the study stated that participating teachers had to be employed at the school. Considering this fact, I was unable to include the student teacher's Leadership Trait Questionnaire in the data.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I transcribed the interview and emailed it to the leader. This allowed each participant the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy. Once the participants reviewed the transcribed interviews, they contacted me by email to let me know that they approved the transcript or that changes needed to be made. Each transcript was stored on an external hard drive and was password protected. I also sent a report of the findings to each participant for the participant to review the results.

Each school was assigned a color and number. I categorized each school by assigning a color code as follows: R = red, B = black, P = purple, G = green, O = orange, BU = blue, PK = pink, Y = yellow, W = white, N = navy, F = forest green, and A = aqua. The first school was assigned red (R). The leader from the first school was then assigned the code RL101. The leader was indicated by an L. Teachers were identified by a T, and parents were identified by a P in their participant numbers. Because this school was the first school, it was given the number 1. Because the leader was the first person to complete an interview in each school, the leader received the number 1, and each participant that followed was then given a sequential number. Teacher participants were assigned numbers 2-6, and parent participants were assigned numbers 7-9. Thus, the participant numbers for the first school were as follows: RL101, RT102, RT103, RT104, RT105, RT106, RP107, RP108, and RP109. The participant numbers were similar for each school, only varying to reflect each school's assigned color (e.g., BL201, PL301, GL401, etc.). I printed off hard copies of the interview transcripts to work from once I began to analyze the data from the interviews. The hard copies were placed in folders that were linked to the colors assigned to the schools and were stored in a locked safe in my home.

Data from the leader interviews were used to answer the first research question. Once all interviews had been transcribed and the transcripts had been corrected or approved by the corresponding leaders, I began reading over each interview transcript multiple times to understand what the leader participant was saying. As I analyzed the data from the interviews, themes began to emerge. I color-coded by theme according to

the most frequent responses to the question. I made notes where similarities or

differences occurred in the leaders' responses. I also noted statements that were

impactful. I had to contact one leader participant to clarify her background as an early

childhood leader because in the interview she gave one answer, then corrected herself,

giving another. I contacted her for clarity. After I had analyzed the data from the

interviews many times, I took each individual question and placed all 10 responses under

that question. This allowed me to view the participants' answers together; in this way,

additional themes emerged. Similarities and differences between the responses began to

appear. I color-coded the similarities in turquoise and the differences in gray. A table

was created by placing the responses for each individual question under the assigned

leader participant number. Creating the table allowed me to look for specific answers or

patterns of similarities or differences in the responses to each question. Originally, I was

going to use NVivo to assist in analyzing the data; however, my answers were so specific

that it was easier to determine the themes by completing the analysis by hand.

To answer Research Questions 2 and 3, I used the Leadership Trait Questionnaire,

which allowed the leaders to self-report their traits. This same questionnaire was used for

the teachers and parents from each school to indicate their perceptions of the leader's

traits. Once all the questionnaires had been received from each school, I used the scoring

guide that accompanied the questionnaire. First, I scored the teacher questionnaire, and

then I scored the parent questionnaire. Scoring involved totaling the score of each rater

and then dividing it into the number of participants to determine an average for each

school. For the teachers, I added their total score and divided it by 5 because there were

five teacher participants from each school. For the parents, I added their total scores and divided the result by 3 because there were three parent participants from each school. For the schools with fewer participants, I totaled participants' scores and divided the sum by the number of teacher or parent participants. From those results, I noted the three traits that received the highest score from the teachers. I repeated this process with the questionnaires that the parents from each school completed. In some cases, I could not choose the three highest scored traits because more than three traits received the highest score of 5. Similarly, some of the parents scored all 5s, so a top three could not be chosen for that individual leader.

Next, I took the scores of all the teacher participants from each school and added them together. For example, articulate was the first trait listed on the questionnaire. There were five teacher participants from each school. I totaled the scores that the five teachers from each school had given the characteristic articulate. Ten schools participated in the study, so I had ten scores for articulate. I totaled the ten scores together and came up with a total for the characteristic articulate for all schools. Next, I divided the total combined score by 46, the number of teacher participants, to find the average score that the teacher participants had given the leader participants for the characteristic articulate. I repeated this process with the scores from the parent participants.

There were three parent participants from each school. I totaled the scores that the three parents from each school had given on each characteristic. Because 10 schools participated in the study, I had 10 scores for the individual characteristic. Next, I totaled

the 10 scores together for each characteristic to get the total combined score for each characteristic. Then I divided the total combined score by 28, the number of parent participants, to find the average score that the parent participants had given the leader participants. I repeated this process for each characteristic listed on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire.

I also took the self-reported scores of the leader participants from the 10 schools and added them together. There were 10 leader participants. Each leader self-reported a score for each characteristic on the questionnaire. For example, I took the 10 scores for the characteristic articulate and totaled them to get a combined score. Then I divided each score by the total number of leader participants, which was 10. I repeated this process with each characteristic on the questionnaire. This gave me the overall average of the self-reported scores the leaders gave themselves, showing the strongest traits among the group.

Two open-ended questions were also included at the end of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire completed by the teachers and parents. The first question was: What do you perceive to be the three most positive characteristics of your leader? Explain. Each teacher and parent participant listed what they perceived to be the three most positive characteristics of the leader at the school where they work or had at least one child enrolled. I created a table and listed all traits that the teachers from each school had listed as being the most positive traits of their leader. From there I noted how many times each trait had been listed and then ranked them highest to lowest. I repeated this same process with the top three positive traits that the parents listed.

Next, I made a table using the traits that every parent participant listed to find the three top perceived traits of all participating leaders. I placed them in a table and tallied the number of times each trait was mentioned. I verified these numbers three times to assure accuracy. I repeated this same process with the top three positive traits that the parents listed, placing them in a table and tallied the number of times each trait was mentioned. I also verified these numbers three times to assure accuracy.

After analyzing the teacher and parent data individually, I combined the data to see what the overall top three traits would be across sites. I made a table and placed each trait as perceived by the teacher participants. Then I tallied the numbers to find the top three traits, mentioned most by the teacher participants. Next, I made a table and placed each trait as perceived by the parent participants. Then I tallied the numbers to find the top three traits, mentioned most by the parent participants. By creating tables and listing the traits as perceived by teacher and parent participants across groups, I was able to determine the frequency of responses and triangulate the data to answer the research questions, increase dependability, and validate the findings. Finally, I put all the data collected from the leaders, teachers, and parents into a table (See Table 4) and found the top three early childhood leader characteristics across all groups participating in this study.

Discrepant cases were found in School 3 where the parents scored the leader 5s on self-confident and self-assured, whereas; the teachers gave the leader the lowest scores of 3.8 on self-confident and self-assured. Additionally, data from one of the parents from School 5 were left out of the study because of contradictory information in the parent's

questionnaire and open-ended question responses. The open-ended question asked the respondent to state the top three positive characteristics of the leader. On the questionnaire section, this parent gave the leader very low ratings, but on the open-ended question, the parent provided three of the characteristics that were indicated as reasons for a low rating on the questionnaire, indicating that the parent was ranking the same characteristics as being the highest and lowest, which led to a contradiction within the data. Another discrepancy was at School 7, where a parent answered the open-ended question with responses she thought were positive characteristics of a leader, but not specifically their leader. These data were also left out of the study.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. These characteristics were self-reported by the leaders chosen to participate in this study, and the leader's characteristics as perceived by teachers working with the leaders and parents from the early childhood educational centers where they worked or had a child enrolled. Each research question was addressed using the interview protocol or the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. The first three interview questions provided demographic and background information on each leader and explained the setting of the participating sites. The remaining five questions answered the first research question. Research Question 2 was answered by the leaders who completed the Leadership Trait

Questionnaire. Research Question 3 was answered by the teachers and parents who completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked was as follows: What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs? For this question, data were analyzed based on the following interview questions:

1. Positive and negative characteristics might include integrity, loyalty, wisdom, dishonesty, or being unethical. What positive or negative personal characteristics or traits influence who you are as a quality leader? Give examples of them.

2. What is the single most significant characteristic that you would use to describe your leadership ability?

3. How do you think your own personal characteristics influence the overall climate in the day-to-day operations of your early childhood program?

4. How do you think your own personal characteristics affect the way you interact with the children and families in your program?

5. In your opinion, what are characteristics or traits of successful quality early childhood educational leaders?

Positive and negative characteristics. When asked what positive or negative personal characteristics or traits influence who they are as a quality leader, six of the ten

leaders stated that honesty was a characteristic that is important to them. Participant BUL601 stated "If you ask me a question, I am going to tell you the truth, so expect me to be honest with you." She went on to state that if you do not tell the truth, "It's going to come back to bite you in way. You don't know how or when, but it definitely will." Another participant, YL801 stated "honesty and integrity" are important to her.

Sometimes that's hard for people, but I value it in myself and I value it in other people. There's been one or two staff members who have been terminated because they weren't honest, and they didn't have good integrity… I look for that when hiring and look for it in myself. Those are the two biggies.

Similarly, participant FL1101 stated that she works with her staff, teaching them to be a "person of their word… mean what you say and say what you mean." Three of the ten leaders indicated that being ethical was of great importance to them, stating "Being unethical kind of undermines most of what you are trying to do" (PKL701). Another stated "I am not unethical. Ethics is a very strong part of my core belief" (NL1001).

When indicating the negative characteristics that influence who they are as a quality leader, a variety of responses were given. Participant AL1201 stated "I am not always mindful to show appreciation to my teachers." While participant RL101 explained that when she first started out in the leadership position, she was unsure of herself. What she did know was how she wanted to treat people.

I think for me, being the type of supervisor, manager that I am came from having a lot of bad examples. I had a couple of supervisors that were very aggressive

and very insensitive in their tone and word choice and so I always thought if I

was ever a supervisor or a manager, I would not treat people like that. They

really taught me how to treat people and how not to treat people and so, when I

did get the opportunity, I was actually really afraid to even take the position. I

just knew how I didn't want to treat people or make people feel.

Interestingly, participant OL501 felt she had no choice:

I felt I had no other choice but to be in the field of education. Because of so many

people in my family being in the field of education. I often think things like why

did I come into education? I mean, why didn't I opt out to go elsewhere? I think

it was just like growing up, my mind was tuned in that way, that I have to be in

the field of education. That is a negative I would think. Although, I am happy. I

am glad I chose it. I have no regrets, but I think I came into this field by no

choice.

Two of the leaders gave more specific responses that were quite different

than other responses. Participant YL801 stated:

If I'm not careful, I tend to be transactional and I have to just stop that… You

check yourself and say, you know, just fire everybody. You don't really mean

that, you're having a day and that's what you want to say. So, you just have to

check it and not use it. It's just an instinct that I think everybody has. Its human

nature and you just have to check it as a leader. You can't use that. It doesn't

lead to good things.

Participant NL1001 indicated that she is autocratic in her type of leadership style by stating:

I'm not a rule breaker, don't ask me to… That negative piece is that kind of autocratic piece of leadership that I believe is still necessary in this environment. I don't always have a warm and fuzzy relationship. And I don't think that is necessarily who I am in the world in terms of a leader.

Most significant characteristic describing leadership ability. When asked the most significant characteristics that would describe their leadership ability, the responses varied from reflective (PL301), honesty (NL1001), self-confident (OL501), being positive (PK701), making emotional deposits (GL401), and empowering (AL1201). Two leaders stated that persistence best described their leadership. Participant FL1101 spoke of being persistent in making the hard decisions. She stated, "Even when it feels uncomfortable, because a decision has to be made no matter what… when it comes to children, it has to be made."

Participant YL801 faces the issue of teacher/student ratio daily. She explained her persistence helps to address that problem. "This probably drives my staff crazy, but I push through. I am persistent… You have to deal with it and you just have to keep pushing through."

In contrast to the autocratic and transactional leaders, two other participants stated that they are nonauthoritarian or "hands-off" in their leadership. Participant RL101 stated "I'm not controlling… I don't get involved in micro managing on how things are

done. You have the flexibility to be yourself and you do what you need to do… just

don't mistreat my kids."

Similarly, participant BUL601 indicated that she is nonauthoritarian:

> I don't do everything myself. If you have the skill to do something, I'm going to
>
> let you do it. I'm not going to micromanage you. I'll explain what the
>
> expectation is and do it the way you see fit to get it done. That's basically my
>
> leadership style in the sense that I'm not authoritarian. I want everybody to be a
>
> part of the process and feel confident with their ability to do the work and get the
>
> work done.

Personal characteristics influencing the overall climate day to day. When

responding to how the leaders think their own personal characteristics influence the

overall climate in the day-to-day operations of their early childhood program, six leaders

stated they create the tone for the environment of their program. "It's the positive

environment. If you come in with a bad attitude, I try and nip that right away because

that's not good for anyone. Having a positive atmosphere at the center is huge"

(PKL701). Participant BUL601 also stated "I am relatively calm. I like to have fun, I

think I'm friendly, I have a sense of humor. I think that makes the atmosphere; the

culture relaxed… it's the calmness…" Similarly, Participant RL101 spoke of calmness

she brings to her center.

> I am told all the time that I am very calm… I always try to instruct the staff that
>
> the kids are going to follow your lead. I try to prepare the staff as much in

advance for things, but if something does happen, we need to be calm and we need to think it through. I just try not to panic because it doesn't help.

Participant YL801 stated "I think I have a much bigger influence sometimes than I realize, because I've realized if I'm in a bad mood, I have to watch it because other people will pick up on that bad mood. You don't want to be the toxic employee."

Two other participants stated that they influence the overall climate by building communities of family and friendship among the staff, children, and families in their program. Participant GL401 indicated that her skills have allowed her to invest in her staff and create reciprocal relationships stating "It just kind of treating each other like family. That's kind of our pivot point." Participant AL1201 stated "We really build family and community among staff. We have teachers… one just retired after 28 years… we set a tone of trust and encouragement for each other."

In contrast, one leader stated she realizes "perception is everything" (N1001) because the staff or parents will see her demeanor and attribute that to a bad mood or being angry at one of them.

> They see that face and they say "Oh, why is she mad at me?" No, I'm mad because my printer is out of paper and I have this document I need to get done because I need to proof it before 2:00… And I don't want to have that conversation because for me, it personalizes too much. I don't want to be your buddy. I want us to have a friendly, respectful working environment and relationship….

How personal characteristics affect interactions with children and families.

The participants spoke of interaction with children and parents in their program. Five of the participants specifically spoke of going into the classrooms and knowing the names of the children. Participant GL401 stated:

> I love these kids, even the ones that drive you crazy. Those ones tend to be my favorite. I'm so connected to my families. It's one of my greatest traits, that a kid comes in here and say goodbye to me at the end of the day… Every time I see them, they are so excited to see me. If I see them here or there, or if I see them outside of work, it's like "Ah, Miss (GL401)!" How do you not love that feeling? How do you not love walking in to a hundred children who love you every day?

> Another participant (OL501) stated that the children love it when she comes into the classroom because of the interactions she has with them.

> Sometimes I join them for lunch. I can get goofy when I am with the kids. I talk to them on their level and everything. I sing to them and I do finger play songs with them. I play with them and kids love me.

> Similarly, participant NL1001 explained her interaction with the children by stating:

> The children are always delighted when Miss (NL1001) comes in because Miss (NL1001) always has a trick in her bag. Science is my forte… I'm strong in Math. We were talking about polygons yesterday and doing mathematical things… And we make messy mixtures…My relationship with the children is very good.

On the other hand, participant AL1201 stated that she did not have a lot of classroom interaction with the children but that she was friendly and encouraging to the children. She stated, "I see children all the time and I am greeting children all the time, but in terms of in the classroom, occasionally I have to fill in someplace but it's usually pretty briefly." She went on to state "We had a sick child in the office today that I was reading books to and spending time with, but it's not like being the child's teacher and really having the relationship with children."

Two of the leaders felt the most important part of their interactions with the children was to provide a safe environment. Participant RL101 stated

> At no point do we want to be a bear in a child's life. We talk a lot about toxic stress and things like that, so I have to make sure that we're being respectful to the kids and their families because you never know what it took for them to get here that day.

As a child, participant PL301 knew what it was like to be a child at risk. She stated "I remember that, and it has helped me in my school… I learned don't judge people, don't jump to conclusions. All those little things influence how I am working with this specific population."

When dealing with families in their program, five participants stated they had a good rapport with the parents. Participant FL1101 felt communication is key to interactions with parents.

> I'm grateful that I'm able to communicate with all the parents. I have a one-on-one with all of them. I am grateful to communicate effectively and resolve issues

they have and to know their names. I think they like that I at least know who they are as well as their kids.

Additionally, participant BUL601 feels that she listens and makes families feel comfortable.

I've had a couple of parents say to me that they feel like I'm their mother because I listen to them and they share. I have people come on tours and one person just stared crying. She said "I don't know why I'm crying to you. I don't even know you…" When they share with me, I'm not judgement and I try to let them know whatever your family structure is, your beliefs… we have an antibias philosophy as part of our program. We value differences and appreciate that.

Participant PKL701 similarly stated the importance of making the families feel comfortable.

Having a relationship with the families and the children, it is very important for families to feel comfortable to bring in such young children. Sometimes we have six-week-old babies and I am the first one they meet… I love interacting with families.

In contract, participants YL801 and AL1201 experience a different type of interaction with parents. "There's different levels of interaction with parents. Some parents we don't see very much… they hardly ever talk to me and other parents talk to me a lot" (AL1201). In even greater contrast YL801 explained how some parents do not want to follow policy by stating:

I let parents know…in the past we've had some rough times with a few parents.

We had to institute a civility policy… if they are not civil to my teachers, if they

are not civil to me, they get three chances and I will ask them to leave… That

pays off and I think people respect you.

Characteristics of successful quality early childhood leaders. There was a
wide variety of responses to the characteristics these participants thought successful
quality early childhood educational leaders should possess. Seven of the leaders felt that
having knowledge was important. Participant BUL601 stated:

It is important for them to participate in development as being a leader. If you are

a leader, you are in that role by yourself…. It is important to put yourself in that

environment where you can communicate with other leaders and grow as a leader

yourself, get professional development, professional training, leadership trainings

that are ongoing and consistent. It's important.

Leader (NL1001) spoke of being well educated:

Early childhood leaders, especially now, have to keep their finger on the pulse of

what's happening in our society, what's happening in government. We have to

fetter out and be a force of influence… You have to read, you have to stay

connected, and you have to know how every decision is influencing the families

you are specifically caring for.

Another participant (PL301) stated that a quality leader should have knowledge on how
to work with others.

Knowledge, but what I am saying by that, I don't mean academic knowledge,

being something that you have, but you need have knowledge on how to work

with the teachers and others. You need to know how to communicate with them

in the most understandable way.

Being a good listener was another characteristic that was mentioned by three of

the participants as being a characteristic of a successful quality early childhood

educational leader. "Listening. A lot of people will come to you and often times you

actually don't have a solution for them. If you listen and guide them, they will get there

on their own" (PL301). Participant AL1201 stated "Being a good listener… not always

having to have the answers." Various other characteristics were mentioned such as

visionary (RL101), be a mentor (GL401), integrity (YL801), be present (OL501), be

honest (FL1101), and be ethical (PKL701).

Research Question 2

The second research question asked the following: What are the self-reported

characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership

Trait Questionnaire? For this question data were collected from the Leadership Trait

Questionnaire.

The purpose of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire is to measure to what degree

the leader has specific characteristics. The characteristics listed are articulate, perceptive,

self-confident, self-assured, persistent, determined, trustworthy, dependable, friendly, and

outgoing. The leader was to indicate to what degree they agreed or disagreed whether or

not this was a characteristic they possess. The scale was 1- strongly disagree, 2-disagree,

3-neutral, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree. Once completed, the leader's self-reported

ratings were compared to those of five teachers and three parents from their individual

schools.

Each leader completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire following the one-on-

one interview. The self-rating showed that eight of the leaders gave themselves 4s or 5s

under each characteristic listed. One of the leaders (BUL601) gave herself a 3 on

perceptive and the rest 4s or 5s, while another leader (NL1001) gave herself 3s on

friendly and outgoing, and 4s and 5s on all other characteristics.

After collecting all Leadership Trait Questionnaires from the 10 participating

leaders, I placed their scores in a table (See Table 1) and totaled them. Next, I divided the

total by 10 and found the average for each characteristic listed to determine what the

leaders perceived to be their three strongest characteristics. The self-reported scores

show determined, trustworthy, and dependable as being the three highest scored

characteristics among the leaders. Collectively they gave themselves a 4.8 out of 5.0 on

these three characteristics. All other characteristics were collectively scored lower:

perceptive-4.6, self-confident-4.6, persistent-4.6, friendly-4.5, outgoing-4.5, self-assured

-4.4, articulate-4.3.

Table 1

Leadership Trait Questionnaire Scores From Leaders at Each School

School	1	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12	Avg
Articulate	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4.3
Perceptive	5	5	5	5	3	5	4	4	5	5	4.6
Self-confident	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	4.6
Self-assured	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	4.4
Persistent	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	4.6

Determined	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.8
Trustworthy	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.8
Dependable	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.8
Friendly	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	3	5	5	4.5
Outgoing	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	5	4	4.5

Note: Schools 2 and 9 are not showing due to being excluded from the study

Research Question 3

The third research question asked: What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs? For this question, data were analyzed from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire.

The purpose of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire is to measure characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders as perceived by teachers and parents who work with the leader or have a child enrolled in their program. The characteristics listed are articulate, perceptive, self-confident, self-assured, persistent, determined, trustworthy, dependable, friendly, and outgoing. The teachers and parents indicated to what degree they agreed, disagreed, and whether or not this was a characteristic their leader possessed. The scale was 1- strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree.

Additionally, there were two open-ended questions on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. The first question was: What do you perceive to be the top three most positive characteristics of your leader? Explain. The second question was: Do you have any questions or additional comments?

Teacher responses to the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. Once the teachers completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, their scores were totaled and averaged to

compare them to their leader's self-reported scores from their individual schools. Apart from two of the leaders, the teachers most often gave the leaders a lower score than the leader self-reported. The scores from schools 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12 were less than one point different from the leader's self-reported score. The exception was School 3, where teachers and parents gave their leader a 3.4 for the dependable characteristic and that leader gave a self-reported score of 5, being a difference of 1.6. Additionally, teachers and parents at School 6 rated their leader a 5 on perceptive and that leader gave a self-reported score of 3, being a difference of 2.0, and the largest in the study for teacher data.

Two leaders were given equal or higher scores on all but one characteristic by the teachers than the leaders self-reported. The leader from School 12 received 5s from the teachers on nine of the 10 characteristics listed, exactly matching the characteristics where 5s were given, and giving that leader the overall highest scores. The leader from School 3 received the lowest score of 3.0 on determined from the teachers at this school. The scores from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire completed by the teachers are found below in Table 2.

Table 2

Leadership Trait Questionnaire Scores From Teachers at Each School

School	1	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12
Articulate	5.0	3.2	4.4	4.8	4.6	4.5	3.8	5.0	4.0	5.0
Perceptive	4.6	3.8	4.8	4.8	5.0	5.0	3.6	3.5	4.0	5.0
Self-confident	4.8	4.0	3.8	5.0	4.4	4.0	4.6	4.7	4.4	5.0
Self-assured	4.4	3.8	3.8	5.0	4.4	3.5	4.6	4.5	3.8	5.0
Persistent	4.6	3.6	4.8	5.0	4.6	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.2	5.0
Determined	4.2	3.0	4.8	4.8	4.4	4.0	4.2	4.2	3.8	5.0
Trustworthy	4.6	3.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	5.0	4.0	4.7	4.0	5.0

Dependable	4.8	3.4	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.0	4.7	4.4	5.0
Friendly	4.2	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.5	3.6	4.7	4.2	5.0
Outgoing	4.2	4.6	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.8

Note: Schools 2 and 9 are not showing due to being excluded from the study.

Teacher responses to the first open-ended question. After comparing the scores, I analyzed the first open-ended question which was: What do you perceive to be the top three most positive characteristics of your leader? Explain. Some of the schools had three distinct most positive characteristics and other did not due to the teachers expressing a variety of their perceived three most positive characteristics.

School 1. Teachers at school R100 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader. They stated their leader is a good listener, knowledgeable, problem solver, and patient. Good Listener – RT105 explained how their leader is a good listener by stating:

When I go to her and say, "I would like to talk to you," she always welcomes me in and says "come in and close the door. What can I help you with?" I then will start to talk about my situation. She listens to me while I am talking and waits till I am finished to give her opinion or suggestion of what I could do.

Knowledgeable – Participant RT106 stated [RL101] "is very knowledgeable about the field of early education and what is needed to be a child care director." Problem solver – RT102 stated that their leader helps everyone solve problems themselves. "She will ask questions for you to consider the different outcomes and guide you to decide for yourself what action to take." Patient – "Works through all situations in a calm manner" (RT103)

School 3. Teachers at school P300 stated the top most positive characteristics of their leader are friendly, caring, persistent, and outgoing. Three teachers stated that their leader is friendly, three stated their leader is caring, two teachers stated their leader is persistent – goal oriented, and two stated she is outgoing – easy to talk to.

When describing their leader as being friendly, participant PT304 stated "I can communicate openly with her." Participants PT303 and PT305 just stated "Friendly" without giving an explanation. Caring - PT302 stated "Her caring nature puts the staff and children at ease." One of the participants stated their leader is persistent – goal oriented. "She is especially goal oriented and works hard to find the resources needed to achieve goals" (PT302). Participant PT304 also indicated that their leader is persistent by stating "Persistent, a go getter, especially when it comes to purchasing things for the center, good at grants." Participants PT305 and PT306 both state their leader is outgoing and "easy to talk to."

School 4. Teachers at school G400 stated the top three most positive characteristics of their leader are determined, business minded, and understanding. Determined – "[GL401] has set out on a journey to reach her life goal and everything she does reflects that" (GT402). Participant GT406 also stated "She is determined, and I like that because she is always there to help us get our goals done." Business minded – "Her knowledge of running a business with many different personalities and needs is vast" (GT404). Participant GT403 stated "She has a good business mind. She runs her business well and is aware of all that goes on inside the center." Understanding – Participant GT403 stated:

She is understanding to both teachers and parents. When I or a parent has
concerns, she addresses it and takes into account the problems we are dealing
with. She understands that not everyone is the same, and cares about the
outcome.

School 5. Teachers at school O500 stated the three most positive characteristics of
their leader are persistent, self-confident and supportive – willing to help others.
Persistent – goal oriented - "Goes after what she wants until she has reached her goal"
(OT502). Participant OT503 also stated "She has a list of goals for herself and all her
staff. She makes sure everyone has first aid, CPR, and has completed 25 hours of in-
service training!" Self-confident – Participant OT503 stated "I believe my leader is very
confident! She shows this by communicating to staff and the parents of our students in a
positive form." Supportive – willingness to help others – "Willingness to help staff
members in whichever task" (OT504). Participant OT502 stated "Makes it mandatory
for all staff to get trainings."

School 6. Teachers at school BU600 stated a variety of most positive
characteristics of their leader. Two teachers stated that their leader is friendly/kind.
Otherwise, there was a list of various characteristics the teachers felt were the most
positive. Friendly – Participant BUT602 stated:

She hired me after being a student observing here in our school. From the very
start I felt her kindness and strength. She explained to me the school's
philosophy, that we respect the child's inner world, in a way that exemplified her
compassion for children.

Other characteristics the teachers listed were trustworthy – She trusts staff to do what's right and represents the school in a positive manner" (BUT606). Professional – "She is always professional and part of that is how she is respectful of her employees" (BUT602). Supportive – Participant BUT605 stated "Uplifts teachers to get them to their full potential, work related and personal. She works with us individually during our reflective supervision meetings, in small group, during team meetings, and as a large group during staff meetings." Fair minded – "Doesn't take sides when disputes occur but seeks to resolve them" (BUT603). Participant BUT604 stated "Flexible with schedules and otherwise, personable with all, supportive of staff."

School 7. Teachers at school PK700 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader. This school did not have complete participation for all teachers, but enough of them completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire to be a part of the study.

The teachers gave a list there was a list of various characteristics they felt were the most positive. Good Listener – "Understands where staff is coming from with concerns" (PKT702). Dependable – "Dependable and ready to help when needed" (PKT706). Follow Through – Participant PKT702 stated "Actually acts upon concerns and lets staff know she is with them." Positive – "Has a positive future outlook" (PKT706). Confident – "She don't be [*sic*] wishy-washy and speaks with confidence" (PKT702). Supportive - Participant PKT706 stated "Believes in you and your capabilities (supportive)."

School 8. Teachers at school Y800 stated various most positive characteristics of their leader. Two teachers stated their leader is knowledgeable and a delegator. Otherwise, the leaders gave a list of various characteristics such as knowledgeable, delegator, candor, compassion, self-confident, works well with others, persistent – goal minded, caring, business-like, deals well with parents, leads by example, and encourager.

Knowledgeable - Participant YT802 stated:

[YL801], through her many years of being an educator, has consistently kept our program at or ahead of the ever-changing rules, regulations, and best practices. She knows how and when to engage the staff, hold them accountable by consistent review. She holds regular scheduled meetings with the directors, with the entire staff during in-service meetings, and regularly stops and checks with individuals throughout the week. She has a complete understanding of the task at hand.

Delegator – Two participants stated that their leader is a delegator. Participant YT803 stated "She is able to delegate responsibilities," while participant YT805 similarly stated "Good at delegating work." Caring – Participant YT804 stated "She shows genuine care/concern for families in our program. Encourage – "Encourages staff to learn and attend trainings. Knowledge is power and in the field of education and development things are always changing. She is always supportive of employees wanting to attend a training" (YT806). Candor – Participants YT802 stated:

Like it or not [YL801] is very to the point on key issues. From parent conflict to praising someone for a job well done, we are rarely in the dark in regard to

expectations, what has happened, what will happen, and time frames [*sic*]. If the answer, is I do not know, you can be assured that is not where it ends.

School 10. Teachers at school N1000 stated various most positive characteristics of their leader. They are available – open door, problem solver – finds answers, caring, strong, professional, inspiring, dependable – reliable, and supportive. One of the participants did not answer this question.

Available - Participant NT1004 stated "Open door policy is available when we have concerns and she helps us find answers." Inspiring - Participant NT1006 stated "[NL1001] is a true gem to the early childhood center." They went on to state "She is an absolute inspiration and works diligently to continue to provide an extraordinary early childhood center."

School 11. Teachers at school F1100 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: builds relationships, confidence, determination, outgoing, focused, integrity – honest, passion, creative, God-fearing, picks activities based on needs, wants things done decent, articulate – communicates well, open minded, and knowledgeable – aware of current trends. Builds relationships - Participant FT1106 stated that their leader encourages the staff to develop relationships. "Allowing us to build relationships with all of the families in the center." Additionally, participant FT1102 stated, "My leader is very outgoing. That is very important because her staff and parents will know that their children are happy with us. She gets along with all parents and has great communication with both her staff and parents." Integrity – "Her integrity. She leads by example. Her employees are a direct reflection of her. Each one has at least

one of her many characteristics" (FT1103). Participant FT1105 stated "Communication –

very informative with staff." Determined – Participant FT1102 stated that their leader is

determined:

> My leader's determination is great. If she needs to get things done, she will.
>
> Also, in this field one needs to understand that everyone and any situation is
>
> different. I feel that my leader is very well prepared and takes a firm stand when
>
> needed.

School 12. Teachers at school A1200 stated the top three perceived most positive

characteristics of their leader are trustworthy, articulate, and dependable. Trustworthy –

Participant AT1204 stated "[AL1201] is completely trustworthy. You can go to her with

any problem and she will keep it confidential. She listens to all of us with great intent

and will stop whatever she is doing to help." Participant AT1202 also stated "[AL1201]

inspires confidence and is easy to confide to." Articulate – "Excellent communicator –

she knows how to reach a variety of people in many different ways" (AT206).

Participant AT1202 stated "[AL1201] is able to connect and collaborate with others."

Dependable - Reliable – Participant AT1204 stated "[AL1201] is dependable. You can

count on her 100% every day. Her work never seems to end, yet she never complains.

She will even run the dishwasher." Another participant stated "You can count on her.

She is always available to talk or lend a hand" (AT1205).

Teacher responses to the second open-ended question. The second open-ended

question was: Do you have any questions or additional comments?

School 1. One participant (RT104) gave additional comments:

Our director has been around for a long time in early childhood. She wants us to be the best we can for us and the center. When we make a mistake, she helps us to know what we could have done better.

School 3. "Respect her as a person. Like her as a person" (PT305). Participant PT306 stated, "I will miss her very much!"

School 4. No teacher participants from school G400 had additional comments.

School 5. Participant OT504 had additional comments:

[OL501] is a fantastic director. She is always willing to lend a hand to whomever is in need. She is extremely knowledgeable when it comes to children and is always helping us learn. She's passionate about her job, which leads us as teachers to be just as passionate.

Schools 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11. No teacher participants from these schools had additional comments.

School 12. Four of the participants from school A1200 had additional comments to answer the second open-ended question.

Participant AT1203 stated "I think our director is amazing." Another participant (AT1204) stated:

I have had a lot of bosses in my 59 years on this earth, but none like [AL1201]. She is extremely intelligent yet treats us with all the kindness in her heart. She looks for the good in us and encourages us every day. She has a warmth and kindness in her soul like no other. She is an angel.

Parent responses to the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. Once the parents completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, their scores were totaled and averaged to compare them to the leader's self-reported scores from their individual school. Except for two leaders, the parents most often gave the leaders a lower score than the leader self-reported. The scores were less than one point different from the leader's self-reported score. The exception would be that School 7 gave their leader a 3 for the determined characteristic and School 8 gave their leader a 3 for the dependable characteristic, while both leaders gave themselves a self-reported score of 5, being a difference of 2.0 and the largest in the study for parent data.

The leaders from Schools 6 and 10 were given all 5s on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire by the parents. The leader from School 10 scored all 5s from the parents but gave herself 3s on friendly and outgoing. The leader at School 6 received 5s from the parents on nine of the 10 characteristics listed, and a 4.5 on trustworthy. Results from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3

Leadership Trait Questionnaire Scores From Parents at Each School

School	1	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12
Articulate	5.0	4.0	4.6	5.0	5.0	4.0	3.6	5.0	5.0	5.0
Perceptive	4.3	4.3	4.6	5.0	5.0	3.5	3.6	5.0	4.6	5.0
Self-confident	5.0	4.6	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	5.0	5.0	4.6
Self-assured	4.6	4.3	5.0	5.0	5.0	3.5	4.0	5.0	4.6	4.6
Persistent	4.3	4.0	4.6	5.0	5.0	3.5	3.6	5.0	5.0	5.0
Determined	4.6	3.6	4.6	5.0	5.0	3.0	3.6	5.0	5.0	4.6
Trustworthy	5.0	4.3	5.0	5.0	4.5	4.0	3.3	5.0	5.0	5.0
Dependable	5.0	3.3	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.5	3.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
Friendly	5.0	4.6	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	3.6	5.0	4.6	4.6
Outgoing	5.0	4.6	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	3.6	5.0	5.0	5.0

Note: Schools 2 and 9 are not showing due to being excluded from the study.

Parent responses to the first open-ended question. After comparing the scores, I then analyzed the first open-ended question which was "What do you perceive to be the top three most positive characteristics of your leader? Explain." Some of the schools had three distinct most positive characteristics and others did not due to the parents expressing a variety of their perceived three most positive characteristics. Two of the parents did not respond to this question, and three of the parents only listed two positive characteristics. Two parents listed three positive characteristics of a leader, not specifically of their leader. Data from their open-ended responses were not included in the analysis.

School 1. Parents at school R100 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: honesty, present/available, caring, straightforward friendly/warmhearted, and dedicated/giving. Friendly/warmhearted – Participant RP108 stated "She is a warmhearted, giving individual that strives to lead by example…." Caring – "She definitely cares for the future of the children. They are taught throughout the day about manners and being respectful" (RP107). Straightforward – "Straight forward [*sic*] with parents and staff. She does not engage in negative communications that some parents may display during disagreements" (RP108). Available – Participant RP107 stated "She is always available and present at any time. By phone or pickup."

School 3. Parents at school P300 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: consistent, friendly, articulate, trustworthy, listens, persistent, and brings out the best in others.

Dependable/reliable – Participant PP307 stated that their leader is dependable by simply stating "consistent and reliable." Friendly – "Friendly – makes friends with everyone and always wears a smile even in difficult situations" (PP308). Persistent – Participant PP309 stated "She goes after what she determines to be a priority." Trustworthy - "Inspiring others is a piece of cake to her. You can always go to her when trouble arises" (PP308).

School 4. Parents at school G400 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: trustworthy, good communicator, knowledgeable, caring, and perceptive/insightful. Participant GP408 did not respond to the question. Two of the participants stated that their leader is trustworthy. Participant GP409 stated:

[GL401] is very trustworthy and I feel very confident that if an emergency happened that my children, all the kids in the daycare, and staff would get clear direction from [GL401] to keep everyone safe and that is very important to me about the places my kids spend time.

Participant GP407 stated that they feel the three most positive characteristics of their early childhood leader is that she is a "good communicator, trustworthy, knowledgeable." They did not give any further explanation.

Caring – Participant GP409 stated that their leader caring. "I know [GL401] cares so much about my girls. It is important to me that those watching my kids will treat them with the love and care that I do." They also stated that their leader is perceptive. "[GL401] cares about how my kids' early development skills progress. She gives me

great insight and advice when I ask. My 4-year-old is now in the kindergarten level and I could not be happier with where she is at."

School 5. Parents at school O500 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: friendly, articulate, hardworking, understanding, dedicated, unconditional love, involves all parents, caring, and promotes diversity. Unconditional love – Participant OP508 stated:

She cares. She knows everyone's name, their situation, their difficulties and successes. She easily and openly connects with them, offering "I love you's" and hugs, which as a parent, truly pleases me to no end. One of the reasons I enrolled my children was for "socialization" and there is no better in my opinion.

Articulate – "Communicates well with others and encourages parents to take part at the center" (OP507). Promotes diversity – Participant OP509 stated "Our director is very open to diversity and multiculturism [*sic*]. The center does a lot of family events to promote diversity and inclusion." Understanding – Participant OP508 states that their leader is understanding:

Not only does she thoroughly understand children, their ups and downs, developmental challenges, and what they truly need to blossom, she also understands their parents. This dual understanding allows her to see and solve problems before they surface. Her understanding of her role and her facility and what it needs, I believe, are why [OL501] continues its gold standard of childcare.

Involves all parents - "She involves all parents from the center. She is always available to talk to us" (OP509). Dedication – Participant OP508 stated that their leader is dependable:

> She is never content. She always has the best interests of her children, parents, teachers, staff, and the family on her mind and continually works to improve all. Sometimes fight! But she doesn't shrink from challenges, instead she handles whatever is thrown at her with grace and compassion, while still holding steadfast to her goals.

School 6. Parents at school BU600 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: articulate, friendly, good listener, and persistent. Articulate – Two participants stated that their leader is articulate. Participant BUP608 stated "Articulate because in order to have a consistent, reliable program for our kids she has to be able to communicate policies, curriculum, and goals to staff, parents, students, and the board." Friendly - Two participants stated that their leader is friendly. "Warm/friendly/approachable, involved, outgoing: She is fantastic with kids and parents alike. She's not just hold [*sic*] up in her office all day; rather, she spends time sitting and playing with the kids and getting to know them individually" (BUP607).

Persistent – Participant BUP608 went on to state "She constantly seeks out new ways to enhance the program through grants and awards which would be unlikely achieved without such an approach." Good listener – "I feel I can bring to her any concerns I have about the classroom environment and my kids' experiences, and she takes them seriously and follows through on plans of action" (BUP607).

School 7. Parents from school PK700 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: friendly, problem solver/resolves problems, trustworthy, available, and communicative. This school only had two parent participants instead of three. Friendly – Both participants stated that their leader is friendly. Participant PKP707 stated "Often will greet parents/kids as they enter the childcare center." Problem solver/resolves problems – Participant PKP707 also stated that their leader resolves problems. "Works expeditiously to resolve concerns raised by parents." Trustworthy – They also stated that their leader is trustworthy, indicating that she "instills confidence that she will do what she says she will." Participant PKP709 listed three positive characteristics but did not explain any of them. They stated that their leader is friendly, available/visible, and communicative.

School 8. Parents from school O800 stated the top three perceived most positive characteristics of their leader are friendly, outgoing, and respectable. Friendly/kind – Two parents stated that their leader is friendly. Neither one of the parents explained why they chose friendly as one of the three most positive characteristics of their leader.

Friendly – Participant YP808 stated that their leader is "friendly" and "outgoing." Participant YP809 stated that their leader is "kind, friendly, and respectable." Neither participant explained why they chose these characteristics.

School 10. The parents from school N1000 stated four topmost positive characteristics of their leader are articulate/good communicator, friendly, trustworthy and dependable. Of the three parent participants, only one explained their reason for choosing those characteristics. Each of the other two participants just listed three

characteristics. Articulate – Two participants stated their leader is articulate. Participant NP1009 stated "Communicates very effectively with me, my child, and teachers." Participants NP1007 and NP1008 stated their leader is friendly and trustworthy but did not give an explanation. Dependable - Additionally, two participants stated their leader is dependable. "Have never had a problem with being promised something that couldn't be or wasn't delivered. I am completely confident and comfortable with the care and education provided" (NP1009).

School 11. Parents from school F1100 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: hands on, knowledgeable/informative, caring/nurturing, articulate/communicative, dependent, and confident. Only one participant explained their reason for choosing those characteristics. The other two participants just listed the characteristics. Two of the participants stated their leader is articulate. Articulate - Participant FP1108 stated "Being articulate which helps us as parents be more proactive in the learning/teaching of my child." Determined - Participant FP1108 also stated "Determined. She takes pride in all the kids and staff, showing this is not just her job but her passion." The other participants stated their leader is hands on, informative, nurturing, confident, and dependent but did not give explains for their responses.

School 12. Parents from school AP1200 stated a variety of perceived most positive characteristics of their leader: extremely thoughtful, caring/nurturing, dependable, articulate, trustworthy, calm, knowledgeable, and dedicated. One participant explained one characteristic and the other two participants only listed three characteristics. Participant AP1209 stated "She remains calm and confident; always

knowledgeable. Dedicates her time to staff and parents of the school. [AL1201] is always available to handle issues and provide support to all in our school." Participant AP1207 stated that their leader is extremely thoughtful, caring/nurturing. Additionally, participant AP1208 stated that their leader has experience and depth of knowledge, dependable, and articulate and trustworthy. No further explanations were given for their choices of characteristics.

Parent responses to the second open-ended question. The second open-ended question was: Do you have any questions or additional comments?

School 1. Participant RP107 stated:

When kids are done with the program at [R100], they are ready for the world –

academically and emotionally. They are taught to be verbal in a positive way to

get their points across. [RL101] and her team are making future leaders.

Participant RP108 stated "[RL101] is a great woman to work with."

Schools 3 and 4. No parent participant from these schools had additional

comments.

School 5. Participant OP507 had additional comments and stated "She is very

friendly, approachable, and open to new ideas. She encourages parents to be active in the

center and most importantly she provides a safe and positive environment for my

children."

School 6. Participant BUP608 had additional comments and stated:

[BUL601] is top-notch. We adore her which is why even though our

children are nearly six years apart we sent our second child to [BU600]

because [BUL601] was still the executive director and had retained much

of the same staff in that interim period.

Schools 7, 8, 10, and 11. No parent participant from these schools had additional

comments.

School 12. Participant AP1209 had additional comments and stated:

This program runs so smoothly because of [AL1201]. It's not surprising that staff

has been with [AL1201] for years and years, and years. Great teachers stay with a

great leader/director. And, the reputation of [A1200] in the community is great

because of this!

Additionally, AP1208 stated "She's a wonderful example of commitment and

dedication to the growth and success of the school."

Data collected from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire across sites. To

compare the data across sites, I first compared the leader self-rating scores. Next, I

compared the teacher scores, then the parent scores.

Leader scores. Eight of the leaders rated themselves 4s and 5s on the 10

characteristics. Two of the leaders rated themselves 4s, 5s, and at least one 3. I totaled

the scores and divided each one by 10 to find the average score for each characteristic.

The highest scoring characteristics were determined, trustworthy, and dependable with a

score of 4.8. The second highest scoring characteristic was self-confident with a score of

4.6, and the third highest scoring characteristics were friendly and outgoing with a score

of 4.5. The characteristic with the lowest score was articulate with a score of 4.3.

Teacher scores. Forty-six teachers participated in this study. I totaled the scores from the teachers and divided each one by 46 to find the average score for each characteristic. For the characteristic "perceptive," I divided the total score by 45 because one of the teachers left that characteristic blank, not giving a score. Teachers across sites scored trustworthy – 4.55, friendly – 4.50, and outgoing – 4.49 as being the top characteristics they have observed from their leaders. The teachers scored determined as being the characteristic with the lowest score of 4.24.

Parent scores. Twenty-eight parents participated in this study. I totaled the scores from the parents and divided each one by 28 to find the average score for each characteristic. The highest score the parents across sites gave the leaders was on the characteristics self-confident and outgoing, with both scoring 4.82. The second highest scoring characteristic was friendly with a score of 4.74. The third highest scoring characteristic was trustworthy, receiving a score of 4.61. Parents scored determined as being the characteristic with the lowest score of 4.40.

Interestingly, the teachers and parents rated the leaders highest on the same characteristics. Both groups scored trustworthy, friendly, and outgoing as being the top three ranking characteristics. The parents also included self-confidence, having a tied score with outgoing. The leaders self-rated trustworthy in the top three characteristics, which was also scored high by the teachers and parents. The leaders self-scored determined in the top three highest characteristics but the teachers and parents scored determined as being the lowest characteristic.

Data collected from the open-ended question across sites. To compare the data from the open-ended question across sites, I first made a table and noted the number of times each trait was listed by the teachers from each school. Next, I made another table and noted the number of times each trait was listed by the parents from each school. This gave me the total top characteristics as perceived by the teachers and parents participating in this study.

Teacher responses. In responding to the open-ended question of the top three most positive characteristics of their leader, teachers across sites most often listed 1) persistence/stays fixed on the goal, 2) Supportive/Guidance/Helps Meet Goals, and 3) It was a tie with various characteristics listed the same amount of times. The characteristics were friendly, trustworthy, dependable, self-confident, knowledgeable, and good listener.

Parent responses. In responding to the open-ended question of the top three most positive characteristics of their leader, parents across sites most often listed 1) articulate, 2) friendly, and 3) trustworthy.

The data indicate that there are similarities in observed leader characteristics noted by the teachers and parents across sites participating in this study. In listing the top three most positive characteristics of their leader, the characteristics friendly and trustworthy are both mentioned by the teachers and parents in response to the open-ended question. Differences seen in the data were characteristics such as persistence, supportive, dependable, self-confident, knowledgeable, and good listener only mentioned by the teachers across sites in response to the open-ended question. The difference in the data from the parents is the characteristic articulate, only mentioned by the parents across

sites in response to the open-ended question. Additionally, the parent participants stated articulate as one of the top three most positive characteristics of their leader, but on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, the leaders self-reported the lowest score for articulate.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The four aspects of evidence of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

To assure credibility I audio-taped the leader interviews, then I transcribed them verbatim. I emailed the transcripts back to all 10 leaders for review to ensure accuracy. Of the 10 leaders, three of them did not send the transcript back or verify that it was correct, nor did they respond to a second email to check for accuracy of the transcript. One of the leaders sent the transcript back, having made corrections on the number of years she has worked in the field of early childhood education. The other six leaders sent the transcripts back stating that they were accurate.

I analyzed the data from the leader interviews, looking for themes that emerged, indicating similarities or differences. Next, I analyzed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire completed by the leaders and the Leadership Trait Questionnaire completed by the teachers and parents. Data from these sources were triangulated to substantiate the findings. To triangulate data, I used leader interviews, the Leadership Trait Questionnaire completed by the leader, and the Leadership Trait Questionnaire completed by the teachers and parents as data sources. I compared the data from the different sources to help present accurate conclusions and corroborate the findings

through triangulation (Yin, 2014). The leader interviews helped to answer the first research question of: What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs? By asking various interview questions, I was able to track the number of times a characteristic was mentioned by the leader. They responded to questions such as what are their positive and negative characteristics and one significant characteristic that describes their leadership ability. I also asked them to explain their personal characteristics that influence the daily operation of their program, and the interaction with the children, and families. Finally, I asked their opinion of characteristics of successful quality ECE leaders in general.

The Leadership Trait Questionnaire completed by the leaders answered the second research question of: What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire? By the leaders completing the questionnaire, their self-reported responses indicated to what degree they feel they possess the characteristics listed on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. I totaled the scores and was able to find the top characteristics self-reported by the leaders.

The Leadership Trait Questionnaire, along with two open-ended questions completed by the teachers and parents, helped answer the third research question of: What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs? Teachers and parents completed the questionnaire, giving what they perceived to be the characteristics of their successful

early childhood leader. I totaled the scores and was able to find the top characteristics of the leaders, as perceived by teachers and parents from each school.

The teachers and parents also answered an open-ended question of: What do you perceive to be the top three most positive characteristics of your leader? Each teacher and parent indicated what they perceived to be the top three positive characteristics of their leader. Then, I made a list of the characteristics they gave and marked the number of times each characteristic was mentioned. After totaling the frequency, I found the top three most positive characteristics of the leader participants from each school. Next, I totaled all the scores and then I totaled all of the parent scores to find the top three most positive characteristics across sites. I was able to triangulate the data sources to corroborate the findings and answer the research questions.

Transferability

This study was limited to 10 leader participants representing quality early childhood leaders, five teachers per site, and three parents from each early childhood program purposely selected. This study was originally limited to my local county but had to be extended to surrounding counties in the northern half of the study state. It is not the intent of this study to generalize the data to the total population but rather, allow the reader to have enough information for transferability to his or her own situation. Selected leader participants came from different counties and various styles of early learning centers and could have the potential to be transferred to the larger population and be useful in other counties in this Midwestern state and elsewhere by contributing to the development of high-quality leaders in other programs. The data collected indicated that

honesty, determined, self-confident, outgoing, persistent, articulate, friendly, trustworthy, dependable, knowledgeable, supportive, good listener, and sets the tone for the environment are traits of the high-quality leaders who participated in this study.

All these characteristics will influence how a high-quality leader directs the program, interacts with others, and how they lead their staff. The staff will be influenced because they will see a leader that sets high standards for moral and social behavior. The children will have an example of moral behavior (Ho, 2011) and can be influenced by their environment. High-quality early childhood leaders need to be honest. Studies have shown that honesty is one of the characteristics that leaders should have, to work well with others and establish strong relationships with the staff and families (Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos & Maloney, 2014; Mistry & Sood, 2012). Other studies (Greaves, Zacher, McKenna, & Rooney, 2014; Zacher et al., 2013), indicate that leaders exhibiting personal wisdom demonstrated more supportive behavior among their staff. When teachers feel supported by their high-quality leader, they display stronger teaching skills, increased classroom organization, a higher quality of language curriculum, and an overall improved classroom environment (Casbergue et al., 2014; Jeon et al., 2014). High-quality leaders create high-quality early childhood programs that support learning at every level. Early learning classrooms are full of children from a variety of backgrounds and levels of learning. When high-quality science programs are offered in early childhood classrooms, an increase has been seen in math skills, reading and language skills, and improved social skills (Gerde, Schachter, & Wasik, 2013). Children from low income families, those with special needs, and children considered disadvantaged due to

their family environment receive support from high-quality program as well as services from agencies outside of the early learning program to better support the children and families in these early childhood educational programs (Ang, 2012). The quality of early childhood leadership and the setting will influence how children advance or decline in every aspect of development. In this Midwestern state, there was a marked difference in the quality of early childhood education leaders in private early childhood entities, and this could potentially be the case in other states. Data from this study could be transferred to similar situations and contribute to the development of high-quality leaders in other counties or states.

Dependability

In this study, I collected data from the leader interviews, leader completion of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, and the teacher and parent completion of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. I triangulated the data in order to substantiate the findings. Leader participants were given the transcripts of their interview to check for accuracy, and all participants could review a draft of the findings. I included direct quotes from the leader interviews and open-ended questions from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire to support the findings. Additionally, in order to avoid biases or misinterpretation of the data, I used a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer is an individual with a graduate degree and has worked for 28 years in teacher and administrative roles in the field of early childhood education. This individual reviewed the data and asked questions concerning the study for clarity. After reading over the study several times, they stated that no biases were found, and the study was clear, concise, and easy to follow.

Confirmability

A reflexive journal was used to assure that the findings were derived from the personal experiences and perceptions of each participant and not from my own perceptions. I used this journal to make sure that my personal background did not influence the findings of this study. I made notes expressing my thoughts after the interview at each school, noting any changes I needed to make in my interview process, or expressing the things that went well. I also made note of any questions I had concerning the interview process or how an event may have played out.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I discussed the findings of characteristics of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood educational program as self-reported by the leaders through interviews and the completion of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. Next, I described the findings of characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs based on their completion of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. Then I looked for similarities and differences across sites in the data.

This chapter included an explanation of the settings and demographics of each school. I also discussed the number of participants, the duration of data collection, and how the data were recorded. Additionally, I discussed each research question, the results of the data collected, using quotes to support the findings, and discrepant cases.

Evidence of trustworthiness was addressed by discussing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The first research question asked was: What are the self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs? Five of the interview questions answered the first research question, six leaders stated that the positive personal characteristic or trait that influence who they are as a quality leader was honesty. Three of the leaders indicated that being ethical was of great importance to them. Negative characteristics mentioned that influenced who they are as a quality leader were being unsure of one's self and feeling that this was a negative characteristic, forgetting to show appreciation to staff, and having the feeling that she had no choice but to go into education to follow in the footsteps of her family. While the leader initially felt this had been a negative, she ended up loving what she does. Two other leaders felt that a negative characteristic in their leadership style was being transactional and autocratic.

When asked the most significant characteristics that would describe their leadership ability, the responses varied. Two leaders stated that persistence best describes their leadership abilities. Two leaders also responded that they are nonauthoritarian in their leadership style which contrasts with the transactional and autocratic leaders. Other leaders stated that being reflective, honest, self-confident, positive, and empowering best describes their leadership ability.

When responding to how the leaders think their own personal characteristics influence the overall climate in the day-to-day operations of their early childhood

program, six leaders stated that they feel they are responsible for creating a positive and calm tone for the environment of their program. Two other participants stated they influence the overall climate by building communities of family and friendship among the staff, children, and families in their program. Another leader responded that for her, perception is everything. If the parents perceive her as being angry or upset, that will influence the daily climate of her program. Another stated she influences the overall climate of her center by building reciprocal relationships and treating everyone like family.

The participants responded to the question of how their personal characteristics affect their interaction with the children and families in their program by stating that going into the classroom is very important to them. Five of the leaders stated they go into the classrooms and speak with the children and know them by name. They stated that the children enjoy it when they interact with them. Two other leaders felt it was more important for them to create a safe environment for the children in their program. Another leader stated she did not usually go into the classroom, but she always greets them when they enter and leave the building daily.

When dealing with families in their program, five participants stated they had a good rapport with the parents and found it important to listen to the parents and make them feel comfortable. In contrast, one of the leaders felt they have varying levels of engagement with the families. If they make themselves available, she has more contact with them. She stated some of the parents she seldom sees because they do not make themselves available. Another leader stated that her contact with the families is not

always positive due to the families wanting to go against school policies and she must stand up to them and be firm about following the protocol of the program.

The leaders gave a wide variety of responses when asked what they feel are characteristics of successful quality early childhood leaders. Seven leaders felt that having knowledge about early childhood policies, professional development, and working with others is a characteristic of successful early childhood leaders. A variety of other characteristics were mentioned, such as a good listener, being a visionary, mentor, having integrity, being honest, present, and ethical.

The second research question asked was: What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire? The Leadership Trait Questionnaire lists 10 characteristics, articulate, perceptive, self-confident, self-assured, persistent, determined, trustworthy, dependable, friendly, and outgoing. The leaders indicated to what degree they agreed, disagreed, and whether this was a characteristic they possessed. The scale was 1-strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, and 5 – strongly agree. The self-reported scores across sites showed determined, trustworthy, and dependable as being the highest scored characteristics among the leaders. Collectively they gave themselves a 4.8 out of 5.0 on these three characteristics. All other characteristics were collectively scored lower: perceptive 4.6, self-confident – 4.6, persistent – 4.6, friendly – 4.5, outgoing – 4.5, self-assured – 4.4, and articulate – 4.3.

The third research question was: What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by

teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs?

When looking at the data from the teachers and parents some of the schools had three top

averaged rating for their leader on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire and other schools

gave various responses, making it impossible to narrow the data down to three

characteristics. Data indicated that the teachers most often rated trustworthy as the top

characteristic of their leader with a score of 4.55 showing that this characteristic was the

strongest among the leaders participating in the study, followed by friendly 4.50, and

outgoing – 4.49. Parent data indicated that outgoing and self-confidence were most often

rated the top characteristics of their leader with a top score of 4.82, followed by friendly –

4.74 and trustworthy – 4.61. The data also show that parents were more liberal in their

rating with 5s than were the teachers.

There were two open-ended questions on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. The

first question was: What do you perceive to be the top three most positive characteristics

of your leader? Some of the schools had the top three most positive characteristics for

their leader from the teachers and other schools gave various responses, making it

impossible to narrow the data down to the top three characteristics. The teachers most

often reported that their leader is self-confident and supportive. Other reported

characteristics were trustworthy, knowledgeable, friendly, persistent, and dependable.

Parent data indicated that articulate, friendly, and trustworthy were most often reported as

being the top three most positive characteristics of their leader.

In responding to the second open-ended question of: Do you have any questions

or further comments, most of the teachers did not have any further comments to add to

the data. Teachers who added further comments indicated how their leaders want the very best for their programs, are supportive of them, know their leader respects them, is kind and warm, and is always willing to help. Most parents did not have any further comments to add to the data. The parents who added further comments indicated how their leaders are investing in future leaders, are wonderful to work with, friendly, is an encourager to the parents, offers a safe environment for the children, feels the teachers are of high-quality because the leader is of high-quality, and feels the success of the school is due to the hard work of the leader.

In looking at the data across sites, the self-rated leader data from the Leadership Trait Questionnaire indicated that the highest scoring characteristics were determined, trustworthy, dependable, self-confident, friendly, and outgoing. Teachers across sites scored trustworthy, friendly, and outgoing as being the top characteristics they have observed from their leaders. Parents across sites scored self-confident, outgoing, friendly and trustworthy as being the top characteristics they have observed from their leaders. Teacher and parent data indicated that self-confident, outgoing, and friendly were the top perceived characteristics of their leaders. The teachers included trustworthy as being a top characteristic of their leader. When looking for similarities or differences in the data, I noticed that the leaders included the characteristic of determined as being one of their top three characteristics. However, the teachers and parents perceived determined as being the lowest scoring of all the characteristics.

Across sites, teacher data from the open-ended question of the top three most positive characteristics of their leader was self-confident and supportive – guidance –

helps meet goals were the top two responses from the teachers. There were a variety of responses, making it impossible to indicate the top three. The data indicated that friendly, trustworthy, dependable, persistent, knowledgeable, and good listener received the same top scores. Across sites, parent data from the first open-ended question of the top three most positive characteristics of their leader, show that articulate, friendly, and trustworthy received the three top scores.

Data indicated that there are similarities in perceived leader characteristics noted by the teachers and parents across sites participating in this study. In listing the top three most positive characteristics of their leader, the characteristics friendly and trustworthy are both mentioned by the teachers and parents in response to the first open-ended question. Differences seen in the data were characteristics such as persistence, supportive, dependable, self-confident, knowledgeable, and good listener only mentioned by the teachers across sites in response to the first open-ended question. The differences in the data from the parents is the characteristic articulate, only mentioned by the parents across sites in response to the first open-ended question.

In Chapter 5, the interpretation of the findings, comparing them to the peer-reviewed literature are all included. I discussed how the findings answered each research question. I also included various perspectives on trait theory from the literature review. Limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and implications of the study for positive social change were also discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in a Midwestern state. Due to there being a small amount of research that focuses specifically on high-quality early childhood leadership characteristics, the purpose of this study was to fill a gap (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Ho, 2011; Liborius, 2014) in research by exploring characteristics of successful early education leaders. It was important to determine whether the leaders shared specific attributes that could identify them as successful leaders who had the potential to contribute to the development of high-quality leaders, build successful early childhood programs, and influence the quality of care that young children receive (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013).

The findings indicated that there were similarities and differences among the successful early childhood education leaders participating in this study. Differences were found in the leaders' personalities. One of the leaders indicated that she was transactional, and another leader stated that she was autocratic in her leadership style. The other eight leaders stated that they were hands off, nonauthoritarian, empowering, calm, and supportive.

The self-reported top characteristics that the leaders in this study possessed, per the interviews, were being honest, being a good listener, being knowledgeable about all aspects of early childhood education, and creating the tone for their early learning environment. The leaders completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire and indicated

that determined, trustworthy, dependable, self-confident, friendly, and outgoing were the top characteristics they possessed. The teachers and parents also completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire indicating the characteristics they perceived the leaders to possess. The teachers perceived trustworthy, friendly, and outgoing to be the traits most possessed by the leaders in this study. The parents perceived self-confidence, outgoing, friendly, and trustworthy as the traits most possessed by the leaders in this study. When combining teachers and parents across sites, the top three characteristics were trustworthy, self-confident, and dependable (see Table 4).

Interpretation of the Findings

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, researchers were interested in how traits and characteristics influence leadership (Bryman, 1992). Trait theory was one of the first leadership theories studied (Northouse, 2016) and has continued to be studied (Carlyle, 1849; Galton, 1869; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Mann, 1957; Stogdill, 1948; Stogdill, 1974; Zacarro et al., 2004). Various perspectives have been offered as to what characteristics make a leader. In his approach to trait theory, Carlyle (1849) held to what he called the *great man theory* and strongly supported the thought that the heroes of that time were the true leaders. He assumed that the characteristics of leadership were only possessed by men. In my study, all the leader participants were women who were considered to be successful leaders in early childhood education according to the QRIS in this Midwestern state.

This qualitative, descriptive case study was based on leadership trait theory (Northouse, 2016) because the need for leadership has remained constant over time; what

has changed is how leadership is carried out in early childhood education. This study was guided by the three research questions. The data sources were interviews with leaders, leader-completed Leadership Trait Questionnaires, and teacher- and parent-completed Leadership Trait Questionnaires with an open-ended question. The conceptual framework helped in designing the interview questions and structuring the first research question. The Leadership Trait Questionnaire helped in answering the second research question as the leaders self-reported the characteristics they possessed. The Leadership Trait Questionnaire also helped in answering the third research question as the teachers and parents indicated their perceptions of the characteristics that the leaders possessed. The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in this Midwestern state.

Research Question 1

The first research question was the following: What are self-reported characteristics and personality traits of successful leaders in high-quality early childhood programs? The findings indicate that being honest, being a good listener, and being knowledgeable of all aspects of early childhood education and its environment/setting the tone for the environment of the program were the top characteristics that the leaders self-reported through the interviews (see Table 4).

Through interviews, the leader participants indicated that they saw themselves as being honest and having integrity. They felt that it was important to always tell the truth and be sincere with others. Being honest was a characteristic they expected of

themselves and of others. Studies conducted with preservice leaders have found that such

leaders felt that every leader should be honest (Campbell-Evans, Stamopoulos, &

Maloney, 2014: Mistry & Sood, 2012), validating the assertion that honesty is an

important trait for leaders. Green, Duncan, Salter, and Chaves (2012) further supported

this finding in research indicating that a higher educated individual equated to certain

positive and negative characteristics and qualities of a leader. Among those

characteristics were honesty, uprightness, magnetism, dominance, egotism, and positive

self-esteem.

The leaders also felt that it was important to be good listeners. Many of them felt

that listening was important but that they did not necessarily need to have all the answers,

in that sometimes a parent, child, or teacher just wanted to talk. Others felt that listening

allowed them to help guide parents, teachers, or children in the correct direction to

resolve problems. It gave them tools to work with and showed that they were being

supportive as they listened to staff suggestions. This was in contradiction with previous

research by Bolton et al. (2013), who found that employees held back on providing input

for fear of their leader not listening. Otherwise, throughout my literature review, no

research was found in relation to early childhood leaders self-reporting good listening

skills. This finding seems to extend knowledge in the discipline concerning

characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders.

The leader participants also indicated that being knowledgeable of all aspects of

early childhood education was a trait they possessed. Two leaders indicated that it was

important to be a lifelong learner and participant in their own leadership development.

Others felt that being knowledgeable was important as it related to knowing the culture of their own center; having knowledge about technology, community, and government issues; and being well read and connected. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that quality leaders continue learning and improving their leadership skills in the areas of planning, staff development, technology, program operations (Wilcox-Herzog et al., 2013), and learning about diversity (Wise & Wright, 2012) in their programs.

Additionally, through the interviews, the leader participants stated that creating the tone of the environment was a trait they felt that they possessed that influenced their programs. They created positive environments of trust in which they were role models and set the tone for a friendly and respectful workplace. The leaders further stated that they created an environment that was safe, happy, and for the children. This finding validates the assertion that leaders have varying effects on staff and early childhood programs (Aubrey et al., 2013). Yaffe and Kark (2011) found that leading by example could have positive or negative effects on staff and programs because leaders' behaviors or attitudes were emulated by others. Being positive bred positive attitudes and being negative bred negative attitudes. Additionally, when ethical behavior was noticed by employees, it sparked creativity among them when there was positive leader-member exchange (Gu et al., 2015). Furthermore, a study conducted with African American children indicated that when a child was placed in a safe environment with high-quality teaching that was conducive to learning, the child received a higher quality education. This experience contrasted with that of children placed in programs where optimal

learning did not take place and the children encountered education quality of a lower

level (Iruka & Morgan, 2014).

Research Question 2

Leader participants completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, which helped

to answer the second research question. The second research question was the following:

What are the self-reported characteristics of successful early childhood educational

leaders based on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire? Ten leader participants completed

the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, indicating self-reported characteristics. The top

characteristics that the leaders indicated that they possessed were determined,

trustworthy, dependable, self-confident, friendly, and outgoing with the first three

characteristics receiving equal scores. Stogdill (1948) studied trait theory and surveyed

leaders. He found that there was not a specific set of characteristics to distinguish a

leader. Traits found in leaders and in those not in leadership included intellect,

insightfulness, responsibility, socialization, self-confidence, and alertness (Northouse,

2016). However, Lamorey (2013) stated that leaders who participated in leadership

development demonstrated stronger characteristics of determination, teamwork,

fearlessness, and deliberation than those who did not participate. Additionally, Okoko,

Scott, and Scott (2015) found that in Nairobi, leadership was achieved by sheer

determination to work up through the ranks in order to achieve a higher position, which is

in line with how the leaders in this study obtained their positions of leadership. In my

literature review, I found no research that would support all the findings of the self-

reported characteristics of a high-quality early childhood leader, indicating a gap in the literature.

Research Question 3

Parent and teacher participants also completed the Leadership Trait Questionnaire and answered two open-ended questions, which helped in answering the third research question. The third research question was the following: What are the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders of high-quality early childhood programs as perceived by teachers who work with these leaders and parents whose children attend these programs? The first open-ended question was the following: What do you perceive to be the three most positive characteristics of your leader? The second was as follows: Do you have any additional comments?

On the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, the teachers gave the highest scores to the same characteristics as did the parents. The only difference was that the parents scored a fourth characteristic as equal to the other three. The teachers indicated that trustworthy, friendly, and outgoing were the top characteristics of their leaders. The parents perceived self-confident, outgoing, friendly, and trustworthy as the top three characteristics of their leaders. This finding was neither confirmed nor disconfirmed in the literature. Stogdill (1948) conducted a study to determine whether there were certain characteristics found in leaders that were not found in nonleaders. Self-confident was one of the characteristics that he found to be a possible characteristic in leaders and nonleaders alike. Cowart, Gilley, Avery, Barber, and Gilley (2014) studied ethical conduct of leaders and how employees understood the ethical behaviors of a leader. They found that the more that a

leader created strong relationships of trust, the more the leader was possessing strong ethics. Other studies indicated that employees' personalities play a role in how they determine the trustworthiness of their leaders (Krasman, 2014; Parmer, Green, Duncan, & Zarate, 2013). Otherwise, throughout my literature review, I found no previous research to support the finding that self-confident, friendly, and outgoing are characteristics of high-quality early childhood leaders, indicating a gap in the literature.

The teachers responded to the open-ended questions indicating that they perceived self-confidence, supportiveness, dependability, friendliness, being a good listener, persistence, trustworthiness, and being knowledgeable to be the top characteristics of their leaders. The parents responded similarly, stating that they perceived articulate, friendly, and trustworthy as the top three most positive characteristics of their leaders. The teachers and parents gave similar responses, with the addition of other characteristics. The literature reviewed partially supports the findings from the teacher and parent open-ended questions by suggesting that a leader can possess personal wisdom (Zacher, Pearce, Rooney, & McKenna, 2013) and intellectual wisdom (Blickle et al., 2013). Knowledgeable leaders, or those possessing personal wisdom, were found to demonstrate supportive behavior, whereas those with intellectual wisdom did not. On the other hand, Blickle et al. (2013) determined that successful leaders demonstrated intellectual wisdom by using their knowledge to understand complex social interaction, understand the intent of others in social settings, exercise the ability to influence others, understand conflict resolution, and know how to adjust their behavior to fit the setting.

Table 4

The Top Three Characteristics Across Groups

	1	2	3
Top 3 leader self-reported characteristics from interviews	Honesty	Good listener	Being knowledgeable of all aspects of ECE, environment-creates tone
Leader self-rated LTQ	Dependable Determined Trustworthy	Self-confident	Friendly Outgoing
Teacher rating leader on LTQ	Trustworthy	Friendly	Outgoing
Parent rating leader on LTQ	Self-confident Outgoing	Friendly	Trustworthy
Teacher top 3 characteristics of leader on open-ended question	Self-confident	Supportive – guidance	Dependable, friendly, good listener, persistent, trustworthy, knowledgeable
Parent top 3 characteristics of leader on open-ended question	Articulate	Friendly	Trustworthy
Across groups top 3 characteristics of leader	Trustworthy	Self-confident	Dependable

Note. ECE = early childhood education; LTQ = Leadership Trait Questionnaire. Characteristics ranked in the order of score and most mentioned. Columns with more than one characteristic indicates that those characteristics received the same score when rated by all 10 leaders.

Limitations of the Study

For this study, there were no clear limitations to trustworthiness that arose from the execution of this study, as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were maintained. After transcribing all the interviews, I gave each leader participant the opportunity to review the transcript from her interview to check for accuracy, assuring that the transcript conveyed what she had stated and preventing

researcher bias. I analyzed and then compared the data from the different sources to help ensure that I presented accurate conclusions and corroborated the findings through triangulation (Yin, 2014). The qualitative descriptive case study design remained the same as was originally proposed. There was a minor change, in that the proposed 12 leader participants became 10 leader participants due to lack of enough data to include two of the leaders in the study. One of the schools did not have any teachers who were willing to participate, and the other school did not have any parents who were willing to participate; therefore, I was unable to collect enough data, making these discrepant cases. Another change was that I had originally stated that I would collect data in my county. Due to lack of participation and a low number of qualifying leaders, I extended the study to the surrounding counties. With this study, I am not trying to transfer the findings to the total population; rather, allow the reader to have enough information for transferability to his or her own situation. I used a peer reviewer in order to avoid biases or misinterpretation of the data. This individual reviewed the data and asked questions concerning the study for clarity. After reading over the study several times, the reviewer stated that no biases were found and that the study was clear, concise, and easy to follow. I kept a reflexive journal to ensure that the findings reflected not my own perceptions but those of each participant.

For this study, purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012) was used to select leader participants and their early childhood program. The selection was intentional because I was selecting early childhood educational leaders meeting the highest standard as determined by the QRIS of this Midwestern state. This study was originally limited to 12

leader participants. Out of the 12 leaders responding to the invitation to participate in my study, one was a male, but I did not receive enough data from his school for it to be included in this study. I ended up with 10 female leader participants and no male participants. Even if there had been some male leader participants, it is unlikely that there would have been enough male participants to effectively represent both genders. Other potential leader participants included high-quality in-home childcare leaders. Those high-quality leaders were not included in this study due to them not meeting the criteria on the number of teachers to participate.

Additionally, I felt there could have been a change in the order I collected data from the teacher and parent participants. I had the teachers and parents complete the Leadership Trait Questionnaire and then answer the two open-ended questions. When analyzing the data, I noticed that when they answered those questions, most often they listed the same characteristics that were listed on the questionnaire. By changing the order of data collection, and collecting the data from the open-ended questions first, then completing the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. The responses might have been different had the order been reversed.

Recommendations

In this study, I explored the characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in this Midwestern state. The leader participants were all females, making it impossible to explore characteristics of high-quality male leadership in early childhood education (Ponder & Coleman, 2001; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994). The

invitation to participate in this study was sent to six men meeting the criteria to participate as a leader in my study. Recommendations for further research would be to include male leaders in this type of study, even if it meant expanding the area of invitation to find an appropriate number of male participants to effectively represent both genders.

When analyzing the data, I realized that many of the teacher and parent responses to the open-ended questions were the same characteristics used on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire. The responses might have been different had the order of data collection had been reversed, to answer the open-ended questions first. I would recommend, should these same procedures be used in further studies, perhaps the open-ended questions should be asked to the teachers and parents before having them complete the questionnaire. The invitation to participate in this study was extended to early childhood programs in urban and rural settings. Nine of the 10 leader participants responding to the invitation were from early childhood programs located in rural areas, while one leader was from an early childhood program located in an urban area. Future studies could be conducted in urban locations, or a combination of rural and urban to draw from participants with varying community settings and experiences. I would also recommend that this study, using similar procedures, be conducted in other locations throughout the United States to gain a better understanding of characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders across a larger geographical area. Additional information is also needed to discern the leadership traits necessary for early childhood leaders to be

successful. By examining traits of successful early childhood education leaders, recommendations can be made for early childhood programs.

Implications

Characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders was explored in this study, with the hopes of promoting social change. Successful early childhood leaders contribute to the value of the program and the quality of education a child receives (Aubrey et al., 2013). They understand the significance of the family and make a meaningful contribution to the community. Exploring the characteristics of a successful early childhood leader could lead to a better understanding of characteristics or traits that contribute to successful leadership of a high-quality early childhood program. Positive social change can come about by the development of high-quality leaders. In turn, these leaders will be more aware of the needs for children and families and better assist families in areas such as parenting skills, family involvement, and be able to provide an early learning program that may positively develop the emotional, physical, social, and academic needs (Branch et al., 2013) of those children considered at risk (Borg & Slate, 2014; Henkel & Slate, 2013; Smith & Slate, 2014).

Positive social change could be brought about through communication and collaboration as the successful high-quality leaders begin to work to develop other leaders who understand their worth in the field of early childhood education. Furthermore, quality leaders could help create professional development, assisting other leaders to see their own potential (Hallet, 2013) in becoming a high-quality early childhood leader while promoting the need for them to choose educational paths that

direct them toward becoming successful early childhood educators. They could work together to bring about improved professional development into early childhood program and promote higher education so that early childhood leaders can invest positively into the lives of every child in their program. Leaders and teachers contribute toward developing high-quality programs and the outcomes the program quality has on children, their families, and the community, playing a great role in the success of a program.

Conclusion

The results of this qualitative descriptive case study exploring the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders determined the leaders self-reported honesty, good listener, determined, dependable, trustworthy, self-confident, friendly, outgoing, knowledgeable in all areas of early childhood education, and sets the tone for the environment to be the top characteristics they most possess. The teacher participants perceived trustworthy, friendly, outgoing, self-confident, supportive, dependable, good listener, trustworthy, persistent, and knowledgeable as the characteristics the leaders most possess. The parent participants perceived self-confident, outgoing, friendly, trustworthy, and articulate to be the characteristics the leaders most possess. These data were collected by leader interviews, the completion of the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, and open-ended questions.

This study was guided by leadership trait theory which explored characteristics of successful leaders. The literature review supported the findings from the leader interviews but did not totally support the findings from the teacher and parent data; therefore, finding a gap in the literature. The analysis of the data showed emerging

themes and was triangulated to corroborate the findings. While there were a few different characteristics listed among the three participant groups, there were similar characteristics highest scored or most mentioned by two or more groups, such as good listener, dependable, trustworthy, knowledgeable, outgoing, self-confident, and friendly. These characteristics were highest scored or most mentioned by the participants as being the top characteristics possessed by the leaders in this Midwestern state.

As a researcher in the field of education, I can promote social change in the educational community. Having successful leaders in our early childhood programs, will give them the opportunity to better assist parents in meeting their childcare needs, and invest in quality teachers, as they work together to build quality programs that positively meet the emotional, physical, social, and academic needs of all children in their care. In order to gain better insight to the characteristics of successful early childhood educational leaders as explored in this study, it would be beneficial to build on the findings by expanding it to other geographical locations and including both male and female participants in the study. Over time, many individuals have studied trait theory. The study of this theory has indicated that men, more particularly those who were heroes, meaning those who fought in war, (Carlyle, 1849), were considered the leaders of that time. The participants in this study are all women and they are not seen as heroes by society today. When I started the data collection for this study, I did not know any of the leader participants. Through meeting them, I came to understand that the characteristics they displayed were so deeply embedded in the heart of each leader I interviewed. These

high-quality leaders make a difference by investing in the lives of young children and families.

The leaders in this study came from diverse educational backgrounds and became early childhood educational leaders for a variety of reasons (Galvao & Brasil, 2014; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Preston, 2013). The characteristics they displayed were a part of the day-to-day operations of the early childhood programs where they led. Through the leader interviews, it was indicated that some of the leaders work strongly with the community to find sources (Ang, 2012; Stamopoulos, 2012) to help families and children in need of resources that are not immediately provided by their early learning program. Some of the leaders helped educate parents to learn skills of caring for young children, and other leaders worked specifically with the teachers to help develop future leaders. Quality leaders invest in others (McKie et al., 2012), helping them to see their own potential in becoming a high-quality leader. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore characteristics of high-quality leadership in early childhood education based on the examination of successful early childhood programs as identified by the QRIS used in this Midwestern state. As a result of this study, one can see the value the leader places on the early learning program, the quality of education each child receives, and the significance a quality program has on the family.

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Appendix A: Leadership Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol   Interview RL101

Time of Interview: _____   Date: _____   Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee:_____

Gender: _____   Education Level: _____   Number of Children Served: _____

Number of Staff (full and part time): _____   Ages of Children Served in Program: _____

How many years have you worked in a leadership position? _____

Thank you for meeting with me today and participating in my study. As we discussed on the telephone, the study is about characteristics of high-quality early childhood educational leaders.

At this point, the interviewer will describe the project to the interviewee, explaining the purpose of this study, types of data collected, what will be done with the data once it is collected, and give the assurance of protection from harm, confidentiality. The interviewer will explain approximately how long the interview will last and ask if the participant has any questions.

Informed Consent: Have the participant read and sign the consent form. Ask interviewee if they have any questions.

As discussed in our previous conversation, the interview will be audiotaped. I encourage you to be as honest as possible in your responses. These questions will be asked about you and your personal characteristics, so please answer from that perspective. If you do not understand a question, please ask me to explain it further. All information you provide will be kept in strict confidence. You have been assigned a participant number and you, your school, and all participants from your school will only be addressed by the assigned participant number. Do you have any questions?

Interview Questions:

1. How many years have you worked in the field of early childhood education and in what capacity?

2. How many years have you worked at your current position as an ECE leader?

3. How and why did you decide to be an early childhood educational leader and what does it mean to you?

4. Positive and negative characteristics might include integrity, loyalty, wisdom, dishonesty, or being unethical. What positive or negative personal characteristics or traits influence who you are as a quality leader? Give examples of them.

5. What is the single most significant characteristic that you would use to describe your leadership ability?

6. How do you think your own personal characteristics influence the overall climate in the day-to-day operations of your early childhood program?

7. How do you think your own personal characteristics affect the way you interact with the children and families in your program?

8. What are characteristics or traits of successful quality early childhood educational leaders?

Thank the interviewee for their time and participation.

Appendix B: Leadership Trait Questionnaire

Leader: _____   Date: _____   Time: _____

<u>Instructions</u>: The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure personal characteristics of leadership. The questionnaire should be completed by the leader and five individuals who are familiar with the leader.

For each adjective listed below, indicate the degree to which you think the adjective describes you, the leader. Please select one of the following responses to indicate the strength of your opinion.

Key: 5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly disagree

1. Articulate—Communicates effectively with others.   1   2   3   4   5

2. Perceptive –Discerning and insightful.   1   2   3   4   5

3. Self-confident—Believes in oneself and one's ability.   1   2   3   4   5

4. Self-assured—Secure with self, free of doubts.   1   2   3   4   5

5. Persistent—Stays fixed on the goal(s), despite interference. 1   2   3   4   5

6. Determined—Takes a firm stand, acts with certainty.   1   2   3   4   5

7. Trustworthy—Acts believable, inspires confidence.   1   2   3   4   5

8. Dependable—Is consistent and reliable.   1   2   3   4   5

9. Friendly—Shows kindness and warmth.   1   2   3   4   5

10. Outgoing—Talks freely, gets along well with others.   1   2   3   4   5

Appendix C: Leadership Trait Questionnaire and Open-Ended Questions

Participant Number: _____   Date: _____   Time: _____

Instructions: The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure personal characteristics of leadership. The questionnaire should be completed by the leader and five individuals who are familiar with the leader.

For each adjective listed below, indicate the degree to which you think the adjective describes your leader. Please select one of the following responses to indicate the strength of your opinion.

Key: 5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly disagree

1. Articulate—Communicates effectively with others.   1   2   3   4   5

2. Perceptive –Discerning and insightful.   1   2   3   4   5

3. Self-confident—Believes in oneself and one's ability.   1   2   3   4   5

4. Self-assured—Secure with self, free of doubts.   1   2   3   4   5

5. Persistent—Stays fixed on the goal(s), despite interference. 1   2   3   4   5

6. Determined—Takes a firm stand, acts with certainty.   1   2   3   4   5

7. Trustworthy—Acts believable, inspires confidence.   1   2   3   4   5

8. Dependable—Is consistent and reliable.   1   2   3   4   5

9. Friendly—Shows kindness and warmth.   1   2   3   4   5

10. Outgoing—Talks freely, gets along well with others.   1   2   3   4   5

What do you perceive to be the three most positive characteristics of your leader?

Explain.

Do you have any questions or additional comments?

Appendix D: Northouse Permission

Darla Tucker <darla.tucker@waldenu.edu>

June 10, 2016

Dear Dr., Northouse,

I am a current doctoral candidate in the EdD program at Walden University and am working on the proposal section of my doctoral study. My topic is Characteristics of Successful Early Childhood Educational Leaders. In my local area there is a disparity in the quality of early childhood leaders in private early childhood programs. My study will focus specifically on the characteristics of the few early childhood leaders who are considered high-quality leaders as determined by the state quality rating improvement system.

I have found your book *Leadership Theory and Practice* to be helpful in my own leadership and especially have drawn great value from the various styles of leadership when training individuals in my program. However, for this current study I want to explore specific characteristics of early childhood leaders and would like to request your permission to use the Leadership Trait Questionnaire as an instrument to measure leadership characteristics. Each leader would fill out the questionnaire about themselves. I would also like to administer the questionnaire as recommended in the text, by examining the characteristics of the successful early childhood leaders as perceived by parents whose children attend these programs, and teachers who work with these leaders. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your response.
Sincerely,

Darla Tucker
darla.tucker@waldenu.edu

Peter G Northouse <peter.northouse@wmich.edu>

Mon 6/20/2016 8:29 AM

To:

Darla Tucker <darla.tucker@waldenu.edu>

Darla,

Thank you for the kind words regarding my leadership book. I am pleased it has been useful to you.

You have my permission to use the Leadership Traits Questionnaire for research purposes only. Because it is intended as a self-assessment tool, it does not have established reliability and validity. Exploring "What predicts or explains the effectiveness of early childhood leaders?" is a salient and valuable area of study. While leader traits may be related to effectiveness, there may be other leadership concepts and theories that provide more substantive explanations of this process. You might want to look at my introduction to leadership book which explores many variables that are related to effectiveness.

All the best in your research work.

Peter G. Northouse, Ph.D.

Appendix E: IRB Approval

IRB Materials Approved

|

IRB <irb@mail.waldenu.edu>

Reply all|
Wed 3/15/2017, 10:03 AM
Darla Tucker <darla.tucker@waldenu.edu>;
IRB <irb@mail.waldenu.edu>;
<donna.brackin@waldenu.edu>

Dear Mrs. Tucker,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Characteristics of Successful Early Education Leaders."

Your approval # is 03-15-17-0379790. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on March 14th, 2018. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden website:http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec
Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.
Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Congratulations!
Bryn Saunders
Research Ethics Support Specialist
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
Email: irb@mail.waldenu.edu
Phone: (612-)312-1336

Walden University
100 Washington Ave. S, Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link:http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec