

**Leadership in early childhood education:**  
**The journey of Pasifika educators**

**Written by**

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## **Abstract**

Leadership theory and practice are well developed in the business sector, corporate organisations and in the compulsory schooling sector. However, leadership in the early childhood sector lacks direction and effective support from Government (Cooper, 2014; Thornton, 2005). Furthermore, these mainly Western notions of educational leadership, in relation to a definition and guidelines for practice, are predominant in contrast to literature concerning the cultural paradigms and indigenous ways of leading that are yet to be fully acknowledged (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Statistics collected by the Ministry of Education about early childhood teachers reveal that, of the six percent of teachers from Pasifika ethnic groups working in the sector, an even smaller proportion of this statistic accounts for Pasifika educators in leadership roles (Ministry of Education, 2014). The purpose of this study was to critically examine the aspirations and perspectives of Pasifika educators in regard to leadership in early childhood education, in order to identify the factors that have led to the appointment of leadership roles among these educators, and the challenges they have faced along the way. A qualitative research methodology was employed in this research to emphasise the voices of Pasifika leaders and educators in examining the issue of the under-representation of Pasifika women in leadership roles in the early childhood sector.

The major findings from this study indicate that traditional Pasifika approaches to leadership that apply to male leaders are at odds with the early childhood sector in which females dominate. Women tend to be relational in their leadership approach and several authors canvas the need to develop a leadership model that emphasises the strengths of women and that aligns with early childhood pedagogical approaches (Cooper, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2006; Thornton, 2005; Thornton et. al., 2009).

This study concurs with the position of Scrivens (2003) who argues, that women prefer leadership models that embrace power for rather than power over people.

The findings highlighted several challenges faced by Pasifika women in leadership in early childhood education. The most significant challenge that most Pasifika women face has been described as “walking between two worlds” (Fitzgerald, 2006, 2010). As Indigenous women in stereotypically male dominated leadership structures and as Indigenous Pasifika women working and living in a Western society, whilst trying to preserve their cultural values, beliefs and identity (Fitzgerald, 2006, 2010).

The findings also suggest that professional development specific to leadership is integral for future leadership development within the sector. Professional mentoring and coaching offers a starting point to building and sustaining Pasifika leadership in early childhood education. Furthermore, this study indicates that models for leadership should be developed that recognises: Indigenous ways of leading, in order to address the issues of uncertainty and reluctance of educators to participate in leadership, and to promote leadership among Pasifika educators in early childhood education. This study has provided insight into the association between leadership in the cultural contexts of Pasifika leadership and the concept of servant leadership in early child education. It is concluded that servant leadership offers a valid culturally appropriate paradigm of leadership that may inform the future development of Indigenous ways of leading in the early childhood sector. This research study affirms a structure of direction and effective support that aligns with the statement by Thornton (2005); “There is not just one way to be a leader and leadership will vary from culture to culture and situation to situation” (p. 2).

## **Attestation of authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Emeavallie Moodley

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emeavallie Moodley", is written over a light blue rectangular stamp. The signature is cursive and includes a period at the end.

Date: 29/11/2016

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis marks a significant milestone not only in the journey of my study, but also in my life and for that; I want to give thanks firstly to my Heavenly Father for his blessings of knowledge and strength. I dedicate this thesis to my parents, the late Mr and Mrs Govender. My commitment to embark on this journey emanated from the inspiration and unwavering support from my grandmother Mrs Naidoo and my uncle, the late Mr Rajah Naidoo. The relationships cherished with family and friends back home in South Africa, is what has contributed largely to who I am today.

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In accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC),  
I attained ethical approval to undertake this study on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015 from  
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# **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

## **Background for the study**

I have been working in the early childhood sector since 2007. I started my career as an untrained teacher in a Samoan Centre in Mangere. I completed my Bachelor of Education in early childhood education in 2010 and aspired toward the supervisory position in the Samoan centre in which I worked. I continued with further study at Auckland University of Technology to complete my Post Graduate Diploma in Education in 2014. I was contracted to Manukau Institute of Technology as a casual evaluative lecturer in ECE. I also worked at New Zealand Career College for one year as a lecturer in the ECE Level 5 Diploma. I am also in the unique position of having a leadership role as a Centre Director of three Pasifika centres at the organisation I am currently working at, the Pasifika ECE Alliance. I have developed much experience and knowledge of Pasifika cultures by working with colleagues, children, families and communities from various Pasifika backgrounds (such as Samoan, Niuean, Fijian Indian, Tongan and Cook Island Māori) which has sparked my interest in the topic of this thesis.

## **Rationale for the study**

The purpose of my study is to examine the perspectives of Pasifika educators in regard to leadership in early childhood education, in order to identify the factors that lead to the appointment of leadership roles among these educators, and the challenges they may face along the way. In addition, my research aimed to enquire into the aspirations and successes of Pasifika educators in pursuing leadership roles in the early childhood sector.

My interest in Pasifika cultures (namely Samoan, Niuean, Fijian Indian, Tongan and Cook Island Māori), is a result of my work in Pasifika ECE centres since arriving in New Zealand in 2007.

I have also been studying alongside many Pasifika colleagues and educators in the field since 2008. During this time, I have become interested in the reasons that educators do pursue leadership roles and the influences that those in leadership positions have experienced in their leadership journey. My focus on Pasifika educators and their aspirations to leadership has intensified as, having completed their studies and acquiring a degree or postgraduate qualification, these educators sometimes do not pursue leadership roles when they have the skills, knowledge and qualifications to do so. My research stems from my commitment to encouraging and motivating Pasifika educators in the uptake of leadership roles in the early childhood sector.

### **Defining the term ‘Pasifika’**

The term “Pasifika” incorporates people from all South Pacific Island nations in a broad sense. The New Zealand Census (Statistics New Zealand, 1996) defines Pasifika ethnic groups in a narrower sense as being from six neighbouring nations, namely Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue, Fiji, Tonga and Tokelau. It is important to acknowledge that Pacific peoples are not confined to a homogenous group, but rather Pacific people are represented by various ethnic cultures from different Pacific nations (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). These ethnic groups, although defined in a Pan-Pacific web, embrace their individuality, language, cultural beliefs and practices (Anae et al, 2001). As such, educators have to be mindful not to generalise or hold onto stereotypical views of Pasifika children (Irving, 2013).

The New Zealand Census (Statistics New Zealand, 2014) reveals that Samoan people make up over half of the Pasifika population in New Zealand. The Samoan culture is predominant in the use of the term Pasifika, and is largely influential over Pasifika cultural perceptions in New Zealand. Data gathered by the New Zealand Census (Statistics New Zealand, 2014) also confirm an increase in Pasifika groups and the diversity of cultural identities because of the intercultural, nuclear families that now exist in Pasifika communities.

### **Historical overview of Pasifika people in New Zealand**

The migration of Pasifika people from various Pacific nations over the past sixty years was largely due to the dreams and aspirations of these people to secure higher paying jobs and to access quality, formal education for their younger generations (Irving, 2013; Latu, 2009). New Zealand was viewed as “the land of milk and honey” by Pasifika parents (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014, p. 1712). Not only did this mean greener pastures for migrants coming to New Zealand, but also that traditional, cultural familial obligations to support their families back in the Island could be met (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014).

Immigration policies were mainly dictated by the economy in the 1950s and at the time a mere 2000 Pasifika people lived in New Zealand (Irving, 2013). A fluctuating economy and labour shortages in the 1960s and 1970s forced the relaxation of immigration policies, resulting in large cohorts of migrants to New Zealand. The economic downturn followed in the late 1970s, and the perception that Pasifika people were taking jobs that belonged to New Zealanders resulted in harsher immigration policies being introduced (Irving, 2013). The implementation of these policies resulted in dawn raids being carried out that targeted over-stayers and deported them back to their native Pacific country (Irving, 2013; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014).

In the 1980s, the National-led government faced labour shortages and the immigration laws were relaxed once again to meet the demands of increase in industry and the service sectors. As a result, the Pasifika population increased rapidly in comparison to the broader national population of New Zealand (Irving, 2013). In 2006 the population of Pacific people was recorded at 265,975 (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Currently there are approximately 296,000 people living in New Zealand that identify as belonging to a Pacific ethnic group (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). The Samoan ethnic group has remained the largest Pasifika ethnic group, with a population of approximately 144,000 people being recorded by the Census in 2013 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Furthermore, it was recorded that the Pacific population also has the highest proportion of children aged 0-14 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

### **Participant group**

To provide culturally diverse perspectives of leadership in early childhood education, various Pasifika Supervisors, Assistant Supervisors and educators were invited to participate in the study. The participants comprised of supervisors and educators from centres under the umbrella of the Pasifika ECE Alliance and from other bilingual Pasifika centres. The study aimed to form an understanding of the participants' perspectives in regard to leadership, as well as their experiences and the challenges that they have faced in pursuing leadership roles in early childhood education in New Zealand.

### **The aims of the study**

The purpose of my study was to examine the perspectives of Pasifika educators with regard to leadership in early childhood education. In order to identify the factors that lead to the uptake of leadership roles among these educators, and the challenges they may face along the way, my research aims were:

1. To identify and critically examine Pasifika educators' perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education;
2. To enquire about the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in the early childhood sector;
3. To identify and examine the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education; and
4. To identify and critically examine the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education.

### **Research questions**

1. What are Pasifika educators' perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education?
2. What are the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in early childhood education?
3. What are the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education?
4. What are the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education?

These research questions were also used as the main interview questions in this research.

### **Significance of the study**

The key findings of a recent literature review indicated that Pasifika cultural concepts are influential in Pasifika children's learning and that further research on culturally-suitable ways of involving Pasifika leadership is needed (Chu, 2012).



Hence, research that emphasises the voices of Pasifika educators, and identifies the enablers and challenges that impact on Pasifika educators' aspirations to and experiences of leadership positions, is essential in adding to the strongly emerging body of literature concerned with educational leadership in our multi-ethnic society in the early childhood sector.

My research endeavours to benefit Pasifika ethnic groups in the early childhood sector. The issue of the under-representation of Pasifika women in leadership roles may be addressed by highlighting the barriers faced by Pasifika educators in aspiring toward leadership roles. This may provide valuable insight on how best Pasifika educators can be supported in leadership roles. Apart from adding to the emerging body of literature on ethnic groups and leadership, my research may also assist in building Pasifika leadership capacity, which is significant in promoting positive learning outcomes, language and culture for Pasifika children and families in early childhood education in New Zealand.

## **Overview of the study**

This thesis is set out in six chapters, each emphasising an aspect of this research study. The first chapter introduces the background for the study, the rationale and a section that defines the term Pasifika. An historical overview of Pasifika people living in New Zealand is presented, followed by the research aim, the research questions, and an explanation of the significance of the study is provided. This chapter concludes with this section.

The second chapter offers a review of literature that explores leadership in early childhood education. The context and historical overview of early childhood education in New Zealand is described.

Leadership in early childhood; Pasifika in early childhood education; diversity, gender and leadership in the early childhood sector are the focal themes included in the literature review.

Chapter three outlines the rationale of the methodology employed in this study. My epistemological stance, justification for the selection of a qualitative approach and the use of semi-structured interviews as a method for data collection is discussed. A brief introduction of the nine participants is provided. In addition, the procedures undertaken to analyse the data collected, ethical considerations, and aspects of validity, credibility and trustworthiness are examined.

Chapter four presents the findings from the data collected in the semi-structured interviews from the nine participants. The findings are presented according to the questions that guided the interviews and several themes that emerged from the data are identified.

Chapter five provides a discussion of the findings based on several themes that were categorised into major themes. The major themes namely, society's perceptions of leadership in early childhood education, cultural perceptions of leadership held by Pasifika educators, career aspirations held by Pasifika educators, the challenges and enablers experienced by Pasifika educators in pursuing leadership positions and the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership, are critically examined and linked to the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Chapter six summarises the major findings of this study and discusses the implications for professional development.

Suggestions for the way forward, and the strengths and limitations of this study are recognised. Recommendations for future research are identified with my concluding comments in the final section of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Literature review**

### **Introduction**

The field of leadership in early childhood education has been of interest to practitioners and researchers for at least the last 15 years (Cooper, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2003; Weisz-Koves, 2011). Effective leadership in the early childhood sector is closely related to the quality of care and education that is provided to children (Bush, 2007; Cooper, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2003; Weisz-Koves, 2011). Leadership theory and practice are well developed in the business sector, corporate organisations and in the compulsory schooling sector. Furthermore, these mostly Western notions of educational leadership, in relation to a definition and guidelines for practice, are predominant in contrast to literature concerning the cultural paradigms and indigenous ways of leading that are yet to be fully acknowledged (Fitzgerald, 2003). As Thornton (2005) states “there is not just one way to be a leader and leadership will vary from culture to culture and situation to situation” (p. 2).

### **Context of early childhood education in New Zealand**

Early childhood education is primarily community-based and partly publicly funded in New Zealand. Whilst being non-compulsory and providing for children from infancy to primary school entrants at five years old, licensed and chartered services are accountable to the Ministry of Education (Anning, Cullen & Flear, 2008; Thornton et al., 2009). Education and care programmes are provided by five services namely:

- Kindergartens and play centres which historically provided sessional educational programmes for children. Due to the changing social and policy documents, kindergarten associations now also approve full day sessions for education and care services;

- Ngā Kōhanga Reo Māori immersion centres that provide early childhood education and care with a focus on preserving Te Reo and Māori culture as indigenous to New Zealand;
- Education and care services that offer part-time and full-day programmes for children. In alignment with government policies, economic and social development, this is an area within the sector that has been growing rapidly in the past few decades. Services with distinct philosophical foundations such as Montessori, Pasifika centres namely A’oga Amata (Samoan language nests), community based services, privately owned services and corporate chains have become prevalent in recent years; and
- Home-based education services provide intimate adult-child ratios in a home environment. Home based educators receive professional support from programme co-ordinators within a network that is professionally managed and overseen by a home based organisation.

Each of the above services hold different requirements in terms of licencing, ratios for the supervision of children and minimum criteria for teaching qualifications.

### **Historical overview of early childhood education in New Zealand**

The Department of Education took over the responsibility of childcare services in 1986 from the Department of Social Welfare. Subsequent to the establishment of the Kohanga Reo Movement in 1982, many Pacific Island language nests were developed from 1986 (Cooper & Tangerere, 1994). The increase in early childhood services at the time, such as Kohanga Reo, play centres, Pacific Island centres, homebased services and childcare services, provoked the government’s interest in investing in early childhood education (May, 2002).

Initial plans in the 1980s by the then Prime Minister David Lange to align early childhood with equal status within the education sectors, were interrupted by a change in government.

However, with the replacement of the Department of Education in 1988, the 1990s introduced a focus on expectations of professionalism, a national curriculum and academic goals in relation to postgraduate study, which sparked debate and enquiry that focused on quality in early childhood education (Anning et al., 2008). In 1990, the Ministry of Education sought proposals for the development of curriculum guidelines for early childhood education (May, 2002; Nuttall, 2003). Previously the government had no concern about an early childhood curriculum and each service implemented their own, individual approaches to teaching and learning. Despite concerns within the sector at the time that a national curriculum would limit the essence of their individuality and diversity, this was a political strategy employed by government to fulfil their need to control what was to be taught in early childhood services (Duhn, 2006). As May (2002) states “The development of a national curriculum framework for both early childhood centres and schools was part of an international trend to strengthen connections between the economic success of the nation and education” (p. 29).

Following the draft *Te Whāriki* in 1993, the National government led by Jim Bolger promulgated and approved the final version of *Te Whāriki*, (Ministry of Education, 1996) the national early childhood curriculum document in 1996 (May, 2002). The intention of the development of *Te Whāriki* was to emphasise Te Tiriti O Waitangi partnership between Māori and Pakeha, whilst acknowledging Māori as indigenous to New Zealand (May, 2002). The curriculum made a political statement about the uniqueness, ethnicity and rights of children in New Zealand.

Further, it encompassed the cultural diversity of the people in New Zealand and, for people from various Pacific nations, *Te Whāriki* offered a platform for language and cultural identity to be acknowledged and respected (May, 2002). *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) is now widely accepted within the sector as enunciating the aspirations for quality early childhood education in the hope that it will produce the ‘good or ideal’ child as a future global citizen (Duhn, 2006).

The ten-year strategic plan, *Pathways to the future-Nga Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002), was introduced by the Labour government, led by Helen Clark in 2002. At the time, it was envisaged that the plan would lay the foundation for future changes within the early childhood sector with three main goals: to increase participation in early childhood services; improve the quality of services; and promote collaborative relationships (Duhn, 2006). The plan would be fuelled by funding commitments and regulatory systems put in place by government and it also outlined targets to be met in stages to ensure professionalism and that all teachers were qualified by 2012 in the early childhood sector (May, 2007).

The New Zealand Teachers’ Council was established in 2002 to provide a professional platform for teachers. The Council introduced a teacher registration system that became mandatory in 2005 to ensure that there was a minimum quality standard applied to all teachers in the education system in New Zealand (May, 2007). Teachers welcomed these changes as it would bring about acknowledgement, respect and professional status to the sector. This also meant that centres that employed a higher ratio of qualified teachers would receive higher funding and resources invested by government in their teacher led policy (May, 2007).

In 2009, the National government led by John Key announced the funding cuts that would have many repercussions on the early childhood sector. With these severe cuts to funding, came the abolishment of the 100 percent target of qualified teachers in early childhood services; this was reduced to 80 percent and the target was pushed back to 2012. To further undermine the progress made in the past eight years within the sector, the 2010 budget announced further cuts to the funding that supported services in employing 80 percent qualified teachers, resulting in further implications for the quality of services, participation and to the profile of the early childhood profession (May, 2007; Te One, 2010). The ensuing section considers the different concepts of educational leadership.

### **Concepts of educational leadership**

The concept of leadership in early childhood education is yet to be fully developed (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Muijs et al., 2004; Thornton et al., 2009). Literature on leadership in early childhood education is limited; therefore, it is necessary to draw on literature concerned with leadership in the schooling and business sectors (Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). The concept of leadership has numerous definitions (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Leithwood, 2003; Robertson, 2012). Authors such as Yukl (2002) define leadership as specific to a role and associated with social influence. However, Leithwood (2003) argues that leadership can be associated to both a specific role and social influence, thereby creating opportunities for formal and informal leadership within a group. Many early childhood educators step into leadership roles without much preparation or formal training and are often unaware of their leadership styles, which influences the way they lead, and how their followers perceive them (Nupponen, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009).



Recent views of leadership recognise character, personal values and beliefs, self-awareness, emotions, moral capabilities, and the development and empowerment of individuals as significant attributes of a leader (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003; Yukl, 2002). This view focuses on the character and personal attributes of a leader as opposed to the traditional view of leadership as an act of leading. Several authors argue that personal characteristics and the process of social influence are important in leadership (Bush, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992). This concept is identified as 'moral leadership'. The idea of a leader as servant arises from these views (Sergiovanni, 2001). Educational leadership requires a unique definition apart from the general definitions of leadership (Bush, 2003; Robinson, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2001; Youngs, 2002). Educational leadership is founded on teaching and learning opportunities that focus on educational outcomes as a goal (Youngs, 2002).

Educational leadership comprises of several theoretical perspectives. Some are drawn from general views of leadership, namely: transactional, transformative, interpersonal, charismatic, distributed leadership and moral leadership (Bush, 2003; Robertson, 2012). Transformational and charismatic leadership styles acknowledge charisma, influence and motivation as features for educational leadership (Robertson, 2012; Youngs, 2011). A transformational leader sets the direction of the organisation and this leadership style is in alignment with educational reforms over the past 20-30 years. Youngs (2011) associates these styles with expectations of leadership in the school sector to be heroic first, rather than effective educational leadership that embraces and drives learning. Closely linked with moral leadership is the concept of servant leadership. The notion of servant leadership is associated with the interconnectedness of the head, heart and hands in relation to the leader's enactment of leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Distributed leadership is another contemporary view of educational leadership that involves delegation of tasks to several people within an organisation and is more prominent in the school sector (Robertson, 2012). Distributed leadership associates leadership with a group of people where the focus of leadership shifts from an individual (Heikka et al., 2012; Waniganayake, 2014). Robertson (2012) cautions that all approaches to educational leadership cannot be assumed to be appropriate in an early childhood setting, as there are different expectations of diverse levels of education in New Zealand.

Traditional and generic approaches to leadership such as ‘trait’ leadership are competitive, and the leader is concerned about the product or goal of the organisation, which is not in alignment with leadership in early childhood education. Leadership in the early childhood context is complex, diverse and yet unique, and requires a unique form of leadership that is suited to a range of smaller organisations (Robertson, 2012). Leadership in the early childhood sector is concerned with collaborative approaches that are more flexible and suited to gender context of early childhood services (Waniganayake, 2014). Early childhood education is dominated by the majority of females and given the relational nature displayed by many women, it would be appropriate that a leadership model is developed to suit the traits of females (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Muijs, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs, 2004; Nupponen, 2006).

Leadership in early childhood education involves influencing and inspiring teams that work together, as opposed to the influence of an individual (Rodd, 2006). Team building, collaboration, compassion, patience, tolerance, resilience, listening and empathy are identified as significant elements of leadership in early childhood education (Nupponen, 2006; Waniganayake, 2014).

Further, Rodd (2006) affirms that these attributes and skills are important in effective leadership that is in alignment with the relational styles of leadership, as opposed to more controlling, authoritative leadership styles. These key characteristics are also acknowledged as being in alignment with the concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Sergiovanni 1992; 2001).

Concepts of teacher leadership have also recently emerged as contemporary views of leadership that encourage educators to work collegially and engage in collaborative approaches to leading in early childhood education (Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Muijs et al., 2004). Expectations of leaders in early childhood contexts extend further than teaching and learning and incorporate parents and the community (Leape & Sauni, 2014; Robertson, 2012). Again, these characteristics are in alignment with key attributes to servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Sergiovanni, 1999; Robertson, 2012). Servant leadership differs from transformational leadership. While both styles are people orientated there are differences in the enactment.

Transformational leaders are more likely to focus on organisational goals whereas servant leaders focus on the needs of the followers (Robertson, 2012). Further, the way in which followers are influenced and motivated differs: in some cases transformational leaders influence their followers by being charismatic, as opposed to servant leaders who influence their followers by the enactment of actual service (Sergiovanni, 2001; Robertson, 2012). Servant leadership aligns with the literature in early childhood education that emphasises teamwork, shared decision making, and an ethic of care that is central to feminist approaches to leadership (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Rodd, 2006; Sergiovanni, 1992; 2001; Waniganayake, 2014). Servant leadership is closely linked to 'Tautua' and is discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

## **Leadership in early childhood education**

Leadership structures in early childhood education are characterised by great diversity, similar to the diversity that exists in the early childhood sector in New Zealand. Leadership has been identified as significant to the quality of early childhood education and as having a profound impact on teaching and learning (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2006). Yet there is still confusion regarding the definition of leadership and a common understanding of the requirements of an effective leader in the early childhood sector (Meade, 2008; Nupponen, 2006; Thornton, 2006). Several authors emphasise the need for a clear definition of leadership in early childhood education, and for educators to develop an understanding of and engage in the concept of leadership in the sector (Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). Whilst leadership is well developed in other sectors, leadership in the early childhood education sector lacks direction and effective support from Government (Cooper, 2014; Thornton, 2005). The corporate, hierarchical structures of leadership that exist in some schools and businesses are perceived to be a mismatch to leadership structures within the early childhood sector due to the collaborative, non-hierarchical and relational nature of teaching and leadership practice within the early childhood context (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Thornton, 2005).

Further, exactly how leadership is to be constructed at the individual early childhood centre level remains unclear to some leaders (Scrivens, 2002). This has contributed to the reluctance among educators in pursuing leadership roles and positions within the early childhood sector (Cooper, 2014; Thornton, 2005). There is growing concern about and advocacy for developing specific models and concepts of leadership for early childhood education, and, particularly, for indigenous leadership models to be fully acknowledged (Cooper, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2003; Weisz-Koves, 2011).

Therefore, research that emphasises the voices of Pasifika educators and identifies the enablers and challenges that impact on Pasifika educators' aspirations to and experiences of leadership positions, is essential in adding to the strongly emerging body of literature on educational leadership concerning Pasifika communities in the early childhood sector in New Zealand.

### **Pasifika in early childhood education**

The history of education for Pasifika people has been widely documented as linking to colonial history (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; May, 2002; Mara, 2005). Many Pacific people sacrificed their religious beliefs to follow the teachings of missionaries whose purpose in educating these people was to convert them to Christianity (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). For Pacific peoples, knowing their place in society was linked to knowing their genealogy and embedding collective knowledge of the values and beliefs in their communities (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). The educational practices of Polynesian people were hierarchical in nature. For example, the teachings to children focused on "Fear for God not to question or challenge authority, to be obedient and listen to adults" (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014, p. 1713). These traditional values and customs was held fast by Pacific people migrating to New Zealand. The first Cook Island playgroup was set up in the 1970s in Tokoroa, which marked the origin of Pasifika services in early childhood education in New Zealand. The playgroup operated from a church hall (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014).

Early childhood centres, playgroups, language nests and home based services were primarily run by Pasifika women and by the church Ministers' wives. The preservation of Pacific cultural heritage was of utmost importance to these Pasifika educators, who were later also involved in the consultation process of the development of the early childhood curriculum (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; May, 2002).

Early childhood education for Pasifika people had undergone radical educational reforms over the proceeding decades that continuously threatened Pasifika within the sector. One such threat was the development of the curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the ‘pushdown’ effect it would have on the uniqueness of Pasifika cultures. As early pioneers in the sector, Pasifika women steered on, despite continuous shifts to an emphasis on teacher qualifications and teacher registration criteria over the past years. Mara (2005) states that “every time our teachers have upgraded their qualifications, the goal posts or criteria for “trained” staff and the person responsible has also been lifted” (p. 8). The implications of these shifts for Pasifika educators has resulted in some being in training for many years in order to stay in the profession (Mara, 2005). Recent statistics collected by the Ministry of Education about early childhood teachers reveal that, of the 23, 580 people working in the sector, 75 % are European, 14% are Māori, 12% Asian and only 6% are from Pasifika ethnic groups (Ministry of Education, 2014). An even smaller portion of this statistic accounts for Pasifika educators in leadership roles in the early childhood sector.

Formal professional support for leadership in the early childhood sector was non-existent prior to the release of the strategic plan, *Pathways to the Future* (Ministry of Education, 2002 as cited in Thornton, 2005). *Pathways to the Future* (Ministry of Education, 2002) was the first official government document that sought to strengthen professional leadership development in the early childhood sector (Scrivens, 2002). A more recent government initiative, the *Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013), is aimed at increasing Pasifika participation, Pasifika achievement and Pasifika engagement in education in New Zealand.

However, the plan offers no commitment or strategic goals relating to increasing the number of Pasifika educators in leadership roles.

Furthermore, there is still no equivalent support for leadership in early childhood education, which is in contrast with the leadership training and support that is available within the school sector (Thornton, 2005).

A review of literature concerned with Pasifika education published since 2001 was aimed at improving learning outcomes for Pasifika learners (Chu, 2012). The key findings of the review indicated that Pasifika cultural concepts are influential in Pasifika children's learning and much of the literature reviewed focused on language, culture and culturally responsive pedagogies (Chu, 2012). The review also highlighted the lack of research on governance and leadership in early childhood education and the need for further research on culturally suitable ways of involving Pasifika leadership (Chu, 2012).

### **Diversity, gender and leadership**

Traditionally, leadership has been largely characterised with "homogenised, mono cultural and often masculinist images thus discouraging female, minority and indigenous applicants" (Blackmore, 2006, p. 182). In the 1980s and 1990s, male educational leaders were characterised as visionary, goal oriented, self-regulatory, multi-skilled and service orientated. Female leaders, on the other hand, were portrayed as being nurturing, supportive, flexible and socially just (Fitzgerald, 2003). Blackmore (1999) also offers a comparison of the power relations that exist within school leadership - namely the normative role of male leaders that is closely linked to hegemony, masculinity and hierarchical leadership structures. Female leaders, compared to their male counterparts, are linked to nurturing, caring qualities that are perceived as inferior to the commonly accepted leadership characteristics.

Furthermore, leadership structures in schools and the male-dominated images of leadership continue to pose a challenge to educators in early childhood education. Kavaliku (2007) discusses the “environments of tension” faced by indigenous leaders in diverse communities in New Zealand (p. 18). Women in leadership encounter the pressures of living in different worlds. Indigenous women live and work in a Western society, while endeavouring to maintain their cultural identity and be guided by cultural values of respect, love and service. Viewing leadership through a cultural lens is significant in order for knowledge of cultural ways of leading to emerge and be recognised. As Fitzgerald (2003) states, “silences surrounding indigenous women and educational leadership are deafening” (p.10).

## **Conclusion**

Culturally diverse leadership promotes a culturally responsive curriculum in early childhood education, that acknowledges language and culture as significant to the identity of that Pacific community. The implementation of any plan or strategy requires effective leadership. In order for the *Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013) to successfully achieve its goals, responding to challenges associated with Pasifika achievement, teaching and leadership is essential. The under-representation of Pasifika women in leadership roles in early childhood education is one such challenge that needs to be addressed. Further research that emphasises cultural ways of leading is also called for if a diversity of ethnic groups are to be included in early childhood education at all levels: “Cultural leadership includes deep understanding of the culture” (Cardno & Auva’a, 2010, p. 82). Gathering the voices, perceptions and experiences of leadership held by Pasifika educators offers a starting point in empowering and enabling Pasifika educators to pursue leadership roles in the early childhood sector.



## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have reviewed literature in the context of leadership in early childhood education, whilst also drawing on literature from the schooling and business sectors. The literature review has provided an insight into the development of the research aims below:

1. To identify and critically examine Pasifika educators' perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education;
2. To enquire about the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in the early childhood sector;
3. To identify and examine the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education; and
4. To identify and critically examine the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education.

The following chapter outlines the research methodology that guided this research and provides a justification of the use of the qualitative approach to methodology, data collection and analysis employed in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an outline of the methodology and approaches used in this study. A rationale for the theoretical context chosen, together with a justification for the use of semi-structured interviews for the gathering of data, are discussed. The following sections then incorporate the questions that guided the research, describe how the data was analysed and provide a description of the participants involved in the study. Finally, a discussion is provided on the ethical considerations that were integral to all stages of this study, and the limitations that were taken into account are discussed, including how these were mitigated during the study.

### **Theoretical context**

Philosophical assumptions of the researcher and the nature of the research inquiry inform the research design and research methods employed in undertaking a research study (Creswell, 2014). Research approaches can be defined as plans and process to be followed when undertaking a research study. Philosophical worldviews have a direct impact on the researcher's practice during a study (Creswell, 2014; Mutch, 2005).

One perception is that there are four worldviews, or epistemologies, that are widely acknowledged as underpinning research are: Postpositivism; Constructivism; Transformative and Pragmatism (Creswell, 2014). Postpositivism is a view that emerged in the nineteenth century. This epistemological view is characterised by empirical observations, measurements and verification of theory in order to challenge traditional knowledge when researching human activity (Mutch, 2005). A positivist approach incorporates quantitative and scientific reasoning rather than qualitative methods.

A Transformative worldview is influential for researchers who set out to advocate for people in society who have been ostracised in relation to political social justice, discrimination, issues of power and inequality (Creswell, 2014). The history of transformative writers traces back to the works of Ardon, Marx, Marcuse, Habermas and Freire (Creswell, 2014). Research and inquiry is interwoven in a political context with outcomes aimed at political change and reform in the lives of the research participants (Mertens, 2010).

A Pragmatic worldview originated from the work of Dewey, James, Mead and Peirce (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism does not confine the researcher to a single approach to undertaking research, but rather encourages researchers to use multiple approaches and methods to develop understanding of a problem. Pragmatism offers researchers multiple worldviews, as well as the use of mixed methodologies in data collection and data analysis to create knowledge (Creswell, 2014).

My epistemological stance in regard to this study was that of constructivism. Creswell (2014) affirms that understanding the philosophical ideas held by the researcher assists in justifying their choice of research methodology they engage with in their research. Several authors have confirmed that constructivism is an approach to qualitative research founded on the social interactions, cultural and historical norms of people rather than individuals (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2010). My research was situated within a subjectivist framework, which was in alignment with constructivism theory, as my study focused on the participants' perspectives of leadership, the experiences of Pasifika educators and the challenges they face in aspiring toward leadership roles. Mutch (2005) affirms that the subjectivist theoretical worldview views individuals' experiences and social interactions as significant in discovering multiple explanations as to how people perceive and make sense of their world.

I employed an interpretive approach in my data collection to gather and analyse the unique lived experiences of the participants in my research.

## **Research design**

There are many different approaches to undertaking research. According to Creswell, (2014) the three main approaches to research are: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. I decided against using the quantitative research approach as it employs methods of gathering numeric data and uses random sampling to select the participants to generalise the broader population (Mutch, 2005). In comparison, the qualitative research approach was more suited to my study as this approach uses “methods that gather descriptive accounts of the unique lived experiences of the participants to enhance understanding of particular phenomena” (Mutch, 2005, p. 19).

My research methodology utilised a qualitative research approach in order to acknowledge the social and cultural context of my participants and to provide richness to the data collected. Latu (2009) affirms the focus of qualitative researchers as being to develop an understanding of how people construct meaning from their lived experiences and how these impact on how they make sense of the world in which they live. Qualitative research design emphasises the key ideas found in the data provided by the participants and, in this study, uses purposive sampling techniques in the selection of participants. Researchers select the participants that suit the purpose of the phenomena they are researching (Mutch, 2005; Punch, 2009). The participants in my research were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling refers to the researcher selecting potential participants that suit the purpose of the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 2014).

Therefore, given that the purpose of my research was to enquire about the aspirations and successes of Pasifika educators in pursuing leadership roles in early childhood education, I selected participants using the following criteria: educators and supervisors from various Pasifika ethnic backgrounds were chosen to participate in my research study. In alignment with a subjectivist perspective, I viewed the participants as having the critical role of sharing their experiences, challenges and cultural perspectives on leadership. The information shared by the participants was critically analysed to identify how Pasifika educators can be supported in aspiring toward leadership roles in early childhood education.

My research has also been informed by the principles of Talanoa (Vaiotele, 2006). Given my experience in the Pasifika community and my interactions with Pasifika people, I have developed an interest in cultural epistemologies and research from a cultural perspective. I have read extensively on Talanoa as a research approach, which is employed by researchers when undertaking research involving Pasifika participants. The principles of Ofa Fe 'unga were central to my study and the principles of love, generosity, integrity and respect were incorporated (Vaiotele, 2006).

## **Research questions**

The purpose of the study was to critically examine the perspectives of Pasifika educators in regard to leadership in early childhood education, in order to identify the factors that have led to the appointment to leadership roles among these educators, and the challenges they have faced along the way. The following questions guided the study and provided insight into the aspirations and successes of Pasifika educators in pursuing leadership roles in the early childhood sector.

1. What are Pasifika educators' perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education?
2. What are the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in early childhood education?
3. What are the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education?
4. What are the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education?

### **Data collection and analysis**

The data required to achieve the research aims for my study were gathered by conducting one semi-structured interview with each of the nine participants. These participants were Pasifika women who had worked in the early childhood sector, and who had experience as both educators and supervisors in early childhood centres. Semi –structured interviews are guided by the research questions in an open-ended manner (Mutch, 2005). An interesting view of a qualitative research interview as a construction site is offered by Mutch (2005). It is described as a forum where the exchange of views from two people engaging in dialogue about a mutual interest can be shared (Mutch, 2005). The use of semi-structured interviews within a qualitative approach assisted me in understanding the unique perspectives of the participants and enabled me to enquire about the aspirations and successes of Pasifika educators in pursuing and acquiring leadership roles in early childhood education.

Further engaging in open-ended discussions with the participants provided insight into their perspectives and experiences of leadership within the Pasifika cultural context.

Collaborative conversations are deeply rooted in Pacific cultures, and the *Pasifika Education Research Guidelines* (Anae et al., 2001) acknowledge that the use of spoken as opposed to written communication is the appropriate way to interact with Pacific people (Latu, 2009). The semi-structured interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and then transcribed. The interviews were held at venues selected by the participants, which included coffee shops and meeting rooms at the Auckland University of Technology South Campus. Following the completion of the interviews, I attended to the transcribing of the interviews which assisted me in becoming familiar with the data that had been collected. Further, this also ensured the confidentiality of the data collected as it had not been furnished to a third party for transcription. The data were analysed from the transcripts by identifying patterns and themes using coding and categorising techniques (Creswell, 2014; Mutch, 2005). For example, one participant made the following comment “*In the Samoan culture there is a Matai to lead the family and the male Chief will speak at weddings and gatherings.*” This was coded into ‘cultural perceptions of leadership’. Another participant mentioned, “*When it comes to our generation we are drifting away from being male dominant and now there are some village structures that include females in their leadership groups.*” This was coded into ‘diversity, gender and leadership’.

## **Participants**

Participants of various Pasifika backgrounds from centres under the umbrella of the Pasifika ECE Alliance and other bilingual centres were invited to participate. Supervisors and educators meeting the criteria, as indicated on the Information Sheet (Appendix A), were personally invited to participate in the research. Initially ten participants indicated their interest in the study.

One participant engaged her right to withdraw from the study prior to the interview taking place. Hence, the study was conducted with nine participants who provided written consent to participate in the research using the consent form (Appendix B). In order to maintain privacy and to protect the identities of the participants, each participant is identified in this thesis by a pseudonym.

### **Participants' background:**

#### **Participant one - Tracey**

Tracey migrated from Samoa and she has worked in the early childhood sector as an educator. Since completing her qualification, she has advanced to an assistant supervisor position at a bilingual childcare centre in South Auckland.

#### **Participant two - Kate**

Kate has worked in the early childhood sector as a centre supervisor and she migrated to New Zealand from Fiji together with her family.

#### **Participant three - Rose**

Rose is from the Cook Island cultural background and New Zealand has become her home since migrating from Raratonga. She started working as an administrator and later worked as a manager/supervisor in various early childhood centres in Auckland.

#### **Participant four - Brianna**

Brianna is from Niue and she has experience working as an assistant supervisor at an early childhood centre in Auckland.



#### Participant five - Martha

Martha migrated from Niue to New Zealand. One year after arriving in New Zealand, she became a mum and this is how her career in early childhood began. Martha has since completed her qualification, which was a stepping-stone to her current position as a supervisor at an early childhood centre in Auckland.

#### Participant six - Trish

Trish is a Samoan and she has been working as a supervisor for the past twelve years. The early childhood service she works at falls under the umbrella of the Samoan church.

#### Participant seven - Sandy

Sandy is an educator at a centre in Auckland. She identifies with the Niuean and Tongan cultural backgrounds.

#### Participant eight - Jasmine

Jasmine was born in New Zealand and she is Niuean. She works as an educator at a early childhood centre in Auckland.

#### Participant nine - Gemma

Gemma migrated from Niue to New Zealand. She has been involved in the early childhood sector for the past seventeen years. She is passionate about promoting her Niuean culture and language and she has experienced various positions such as educator and supervisor positions at Niuean early childhood services in Auckland.

## **Validity and credibility**

Validity and credibility are significant to any research study that is undertaken, to ensure that the data collected and the methods used in determining the findings can be trusted (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2005; Punch, 2005). In qualitative research, validity is particularly important in convincing the readers in the field that the study is credible and can be trusted (Mutch, 2005). Validity represents the value in the research outcomes based on the data gathered and how the data was gathered (Mutch, 2005; Punch, 2005). To ensure validity the researcher needs to consider elements such as honesty and richness, the participant's perceptions, and the impartiality of the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Mutch (2005) discusses the principles of validity, trustworthiness and credibility as being important for researchers to consider in ensuring their study can be trusted.

Trustworthiness and credibility denotes the ethical approach adopted by the researcher in documenting the research designs, decisions, methodology and techniques used in the data analysis (Maxwell, 2005). Although the nature of qualitative research impacts on the replication of the results of the study, people need to be sure they can trust the findings of the research. Qualitative research acknowledges the individual views of each participant, rather than seeking to generalise the findings to an entire social group or population (Mutch, 2005). The technique of triangulation is used in qualitative research to strengthen the research process. This includes using multiple methods in practise of gathering and analysing data to ensure the validity and credibility of the research study (Cohen et al.' 2007; Mutch, 2005). Multiple sources of information validate the data collected and multiple perspective triangulation includes looking at a phenomenon from various perspectives (Cohen et al., 2007). This study gained two perspectives from educators and supervisors on leadership in early childhood education.

Multiple perspective triangulation involves cross checking the data to strengthen its credibility (Cohen et al., 2007). If different sources namely, educators and supervisors are saying the same thing then the research has greater confidence in the validity of the findings.

For this study I have employed the following techniques and methods to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of my research. Prior to the semi-structured interviews taking place, the research questions were reviewed by my cultural advisor who provided feedback and guidance on Pasifika cultural protocols and ensured that they were adhered to. Cultural concepts such as “Faka apa’apa,” which refers to being respectful to elders when engaging in face to face conversations and using acceptable attire according to cultural contexts, (Vaiotele, 2006, p. 30) were also embedded. Cultural validity requires researchers to appreciate the cultural values of the participants being researched (Cohen et al., 2007). For my research study this involved appreciating and respecting the different Pasifika values and perspectives that the participants shared with me. This was not problematic for me being an outsider, as cultural validity involves developing an understanding of Pasifika values and cultures and using acceptable research approaches suitable to the research participants.

All the participants were clearly informed of all aspects of the research project and these were outlined on the information sheet (see Appendix A) furnished to each participant. I arranged to attend a staff meeting at the centres to invite possible participants personally, who were also given the opportunity to ask questions or clarify the process involved in the research. I adopted an open and honest approach with all participants in all stages of carrying out my research, which enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of my research study.

The semi-structured interviews were then recorded using a voice recorder. The use of these techniques mitigated the issues of authenticity and credibility. Further, as Latu (2009) and Vaioleti (2006) affirm, trust and confidentiality is significant to Pacific cultures. Mutch (2005) affirms member checking as a technique to further ensure trustworthiness and credibility of a research study. As such, the transcripts were returned to each participant for their confirmation that their transcript was true and correct. Authenticity is an aspect of research that ensures the information gathered is accurate and honest (Creswell, 2014). As described in the Information Sheet (Appendix A) provided to the participants, final approval of the transcripts was sought from each participant to ensure the validity and credibility of my research findings and the report.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethics is underpinned by the moral principles that guide the actions of people (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative research involves ensuring that the rights of the participants and the needs of the researcher are balanced (Mutch, 2005). Researchers need to consider ethical issues to confirm that their research study is fair and accurate and that the participants are treated with respect and dignity (Yin, 2011). Several authors have confirmed that the key concepts of ethics are fairness, trust, respect and confidentiality (Creswell, 2014; Mutch, 2005; Punch, 2005; Yin, 2011).

Upon embarking on my research study, I submitted an ethics application to, and was granted approval by, the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

The ethical principles considered in relation to the rights of the participants were informed consent; research adequacy; voluntary participation; permission; mutual respect and good faith; respect for the rights of privacy and confidentiality; minimisation of risk; truthfulness and limitation of deception; avoidance of conflict of interest; respect for intellectual property; and cultural sensitivity.

Informed and voluntary consent requires the researcher to provide all information to the participants and to allow sufficient time for possible participants to decide whether or not to participate in the research (Mutch, 2005). I requested permission from the Pasifika ECE Alliance to approach centre supervisors to arrange attendance at a staff meeting in order to invite educators and supervisors, and present relevant information about the research project to them. The meetings provided a face-to-face opportunity to present the aims and purpose of my study, for educators and supervisors to ask questions or seek clarification, and to ensure that possible participants understood what would be required of them as a participant. I ensured that the processes of the research were transparent by providing information about myself and my research topic. The Information Sheet provided all the relevant details to enable participants to make an informed decision regarding their participation. Sufficient time, which is particularly important in Pasifika contexts, was allowed for participants to make contact either by phone or email with the researcher and indicate their interest in participating in my study.

Mutch (2005) advocates for the rights of participants, particularly in regard to not being coerced into participating in research due to the researcher being in a position of power. This was a relevant concern in my research given that I am a centre manager at early childhood centres under the umbrella of the Pasifika ECE Alliance.

Therefore, to avoid power differences in the relationship between manager and staff, educators and supervisors from the three centres I manage were excluded from participating in my research study. The minimum criteria of adequacy was maintained throughout the research by consistently employing the research design in order to achieve the research goals. My experience in the early childhood sector, my interest in the leadership journey of Pasifika leaders and my commitment to encourage and motivate Pasifika educators in their pursuit of leadership roles in the early childhood sector, was adequate for me to gain approval to undertake the study. As an acknowledged outsider, I have developed much experience and knowledge of Pasifika cultures by working with colleagues, children, families and communities from various Pasifika backgrounds (such as Samoan, Niuean, Fijian Indian; Tongan and Cook Island Māori). Further, I hoped that my research would add to the strongly emerging body of literature concerned with educational leadership in our multi-ethnic society in the early childhood sector.

Pasifika communities are close knit and this could have caused participants to feel embarrassed or intimidated about participating in my research; therefore protecting their privacy and confidentiality was essential (Vaiolleti, 2006). The privacy and confidentiality of each participant was ensured by using a pseudonym to identify participants in this thesis and to prevent members of their family or community from identifying participants. Each participant also had the option to attend their interview at a location away from their workplace to remove the likelihood of their colleagues would see them being interviewed by me. Further, participants included early childhood educators, assistant supervisors and supervisors from various Pasifika backgrounds, thereby decreasing the risk of them being identified in the thesis by members of their family or community.

Mutual respect and good faith was maintained by my commitment to ensuring that my research would be beneficial to Pasifika early childhood educators and communities. I was guided by Pasifika cultural protocols from the beginning until the conclusion of the research. Respect, honesty, fairness, trust and confidentiality are significant in establishing trusting partnerships between the participants and researcher during the conduct of research (Mutch, 2005). I also respected my participants and valued their experiences and stories that they shared with me. The *Pasifika Education Research Guidelines* (Anae et al., 2001) also highlight these principles as significant for both Pacific and non-Pacific researchers to be mindful of when conducting research about Pacific issues pertaining to Pacific people. Participants were made aware that this study would result in a thesis that I hoped would add to the current body of literature concerned with Pasifika perspectives of leadership and how this might influence the appointment to leadership roles by Pasifika educators in early childhood education.

Cultural sensitivity was also another concern, which I had to mitigate in order to undertake this study. Being of Indian ethnicity, I positioned myself as an outsider, in the sense that I am not of Pacific descent. However, I have maintained and established trusting professional relationships with the Pasifika community over the past eight years. As a result, I have gained much exposure, knowledge and basic language skills relating to Pacific communities. Vaoleti (2006) encourages researchers to gain an understanding of the cultural background of their participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. I also approached a Pasifika early childhood lecturer who agreed to being my cultural advisor to support and guide me during my research and to ensure that the values, practices and beliefs of Pasifika cultures were respected and upheld throughout my research study.

Every possible measure was taken to minimise risk to participants and to ensure that participants were safe. A safe environment was provided for participants to meet. Pasifika communities are close knit and the emotional risk of having their names exposed to their family or members of the community was managed by the use of pseudonyms in this thesis to protect their identity. I also reassured participants that ethical principles such as confidentiality and privacy were adhered to during the research.

No deception was involved in this research study and potential conflicts of interest between participants, and participants and the researcher, were considered. Where supervisors and educators from the same centre agreed to participate in my research, meetings with these participants did not take place at their workplace in sight of their colleagues in order to protect their privacy. Alternate venues, such as meeting rooms at AUT South Campus, away from employers and work colleagues, were arranged according to the preference of the participant.

Intellectual property and the transfer and use of knowledge between participants and researcher is also a concern for Pacific people (Anae et al., 2001). I have acknowledged that a collective approach to ownership of intellectual knowledge binds the participants and researcher. I am also mindful that participants have shared their knowledge and experiences as they are confident that I have ensured all ethical and cultural protocols have been respected and adhered to, as described by Anae et al., (2001).



## **Summary**

This chapter has described the methodology implemented in this study. The rationale for adopting a constructivist epistemological stance has been justified. This chapter has also explained the selection of a qualitative approach to methodology and the use of semi-structured interviews to gather the data and for data analysis have been clarified.

Further, the ethical issues relating to this study has been explained and finally there has been a discussion of the criteria implemented to ensure the validity of the data in this research study. The next chapter discusses the findings that this research methodology and data collection methods provided in this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: The research findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. The purposes of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the Pasifika educators and supervisors were:

- To identify and critically examine Pasifika educators' perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education;
- To enquire about the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in the early childhood sector;
- To identify and examine the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education; and
- To identify and critically examine the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education.

The research questions as indicated in Appendix C guided the semi-structured interviews. I conducted nine interviews with the participants and the data were transcribed and collated into common themes.

Extracts from the transcripts are also included in this chapter to validate these themes. More importantly, they serve to emphasise the voices of the participants and to allow their views and experiences to speak for themselves. The following sections make use of the questions used in the interviews to form the headings for the data being presented. The frequency of the sub-themes that were identified from the data is outlined in a table format. The sub-themes were used to frame the perceptions, experiences and lived experiences of the participants in relation to leadership in early childhood education.

## Interview findings

### Question one

Question one asked: What are Pasifika educators' perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education?

The participants had varied perceptions of leadership that fell broadly into two groups- perceptions of leadership in an early childhood context; and views of leadership that were influenced from a cultural perspective.

### Perceptions of Pasifika educators on leadership in early childhood education

Table 4.1 below aggregates the participants' responses to this question in an early childhood context and indicates the frequency of the sub-themes mentioned in their responses.

*Table 4.1:* Educator's perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education.

Sub-themes	Q1: Number of responses from each participant									
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
<b>Leadership in ECE is related to:</b>										
<b>Team/collaboration</b>	5	5	3	8	5	5	4	4	4	<b>43</b>
<b>Title/position</b>	1	2	5	5	3	3	2	3	3	<b>27</b>

The participant sample comprised of leaders in the supervisory roles and educators who shared their views of leadership having worked closely with their supervisors in their centres. The participants' perceptions of leadership in early childhood education were narrowed down to leadership being represented by either a title or position, and leadership being associated with an effective leader that drives their team. The most common view projected by the participants, however, was that leadership was not about a title or position. The participants felt strongly that leadership in early childhood education is closely related to leading the team and working in collaboration with leaders and educators in early childhood education. This is shown in the participants' quotes below:

*Participant two Tracey: I believe a leader is to serve but the title is just there for the structure but I believe the leader is to serve.*

*Participant four Briana: For me leadership in early childhood education is just knowing how to lead the team with skills and values that I already have in place. You know they are the primary drivers in early childhood education or the primary drivers of the centre and that is who the staff kind of look up to. So I don't see it as a title where you know you are superior to the other staff.*

*Participant seven Sandy: To me leadership is not so much as a role, but more like how you drive your team and communication is very important.*

Rather, the participants noted that the “actions” taken by a leader were more important in that person being recognised as a leader as opposed to the fact that they held a leadership title and position. Participants were of the view that the practice components of building and supporting the team were more important than the title or position. Leading the team effectively and facilitating a collaborative work milieu were emphasised as skills an effective leader should possess. This is shown in the participants' quotes below:

*Participant one Kate: For me it is practice and I believe in you know not being authoritative. I always inspire my educators. Supporting each other and working together. As a leader to build up my team.*

*Participant two Tracey: Even though we are, the supervisors, we are there to support the team. To lead by examples doing action. I led with a commitment and with that comes everything collaboration, relationships.*

*Participant four Briana: Trying to build the team that is like solid and in sync and you know leaders they lead by example.*

*Participant five Martha: I have to stand on my own two feet and try to maintain and lead the team. Pasifika people we lead by example...supporting them in whatever they are doing so if you want your team to do well you need to be active, you need to have the ability to multi task.*

*Participant six Trish: I'm not the kind of person that just say do this, do that, I sort of always talk through things with the staff. Yeah so leadership is not about me being a supervisor or well it's good to have leaders someone there to look up to. You know when the staff asks what the best way is and then we talk about it and discuss what the best way to do things is.*

*Participant seven Sandy: Yeah leadership is just a title but it's how you work with your team. It comes down to communication and how you drive your team.*

*Participant eight Jasmine: It's definitely about practice, it's definitely about being able to lead your team.*

One participant acknowledged that there was a link between a leadership title and skills relating to leadership practice. She stated that:

*Participant nine Gemma: A bit of both, yes leadership is a role yes you have a duty to do, you have a responsibility to do, it's all about you, and you know to lead.*

### **Cultural perceptions of leadership held by Pasifika educators**

Table 4.2 below shows the participants responses to this question in relation to their perceptions of leadership in their cultural contexts and indicates the frequency of the sub-themes mentioned in their responses.

*Table 4.2: Cultural perceptions of Pasifika educators on leadership.*

Sub-themes	Q1: Number of responses from each participant									
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
<b>Culturally leadership is related to:</b>										
<b>Title/position</b>	2	2	10	6	8	3	2	6	5	<b>44</b>
<b>Gender</b>	10	6	10	9	0	0	3	0	4	<b>42</b>
<b>Structure</b>	1	4	4	2	7	4	2	8	4	<b>36</b>

Participants' view of leadership in their cultural contexts contrasted with their views of leadership in early childhood education. Culturally they aligned leadership with that of a title and position. They also described the different structures of leadership in their cultures, churches and families. The leadership structures varied in different settings and so too did the level of authority and respect that these titles and positions would command.

For example:

*Participant two Tracey: In the Samoan culture there is a Matai there to lead the family. So at most Samoan gatherings, you hardly hear the female unless the female has a Matai title. But, at every gathering, it is only the male, the Chief that speaks like at a wedding or something.*

*Participant three Rose: In our cultural context (Niuean) yeah like, I have said someone who is knowledgeable, who is a community person who can relate well and look after your community. In a family in a hapu or in the tribe, you have your speaker that you have nominated and it should be like, in this hapu there is seven subs, and you have a leader for each sub. To talk on your behalf, it runs from the head the first-born and then the second-born.*

*Participant six Trish: Yeah like culturally, as a Samoan leader you always have that respect, especially to the Faifeau and the Faletua. The leaders especially with the ministers.*

The participants also highlighted their affiliation with the church and the leadership structure within the church as being significantly influential on their cultural views on leadership. They viewed their church Ministers and their wives as their leaders at the top of the church structures and therefore they were to be highly respected and acknowledged.

For example:

*Participant five Martha: The church is the biggest component for us Pasifika people you know you grow up in a church. Therefore, leadership for us is about respect you know we learn to respect people.*

*Participant six Trish: I don't know about other centres or other schools they all have their own different, structures. But with us we have a Faifeau like a pastor who is the licensee because we fall under the umbrella of the church. So always, the licensee is the Faifeau and the centre manager as the Faletua, the Faifeau's wife and then there was a board. There is a church, the board, and the licensee. Like me I always respect you know our minister and the Faletua.*

*Participant nine Gemma: With the village structures the Pastors, they are the leaders of our village.*

In comparison to the Samoan culture, three participants shared their views in relation to the Niuean culture. They explained that roles and titles like Chieftainship did not exist in the Niuean culture. The elders of their families who were confident and capable of representing and advocating for their families practiced leadership roles. Leadership positions were evident, though, in their church structures. For example:

*Participant four Brianna: In the Niuean culture, there is not so much of a hierarchy in terms of where certain people sit. In the church, we have our minister then it comes to the secretary who acts as a leader for the group, for the congregation for the Ekalesia, which is what they call it. The elders they are called Ulumotua. They are the elders, who are over the age of 80, then they are given that title and we give the same respect that we give to the secretary. So in terms of my family it's usually just the head of the family as well as the extended family. I know in certain cultures they do have like certain titles and that but in Niuean culture there is not that.*

*Participant five Martha: For us Niuean's we don't have roles like chiefs you know. We don't have that so growing up you look at your mum and dad those are your you know the people that you look up to then you have your pastor of your village.*

*Participant eight Jasmine: We don't have chiefs. For example in the Samoan culture, you have a high chief for the village whereas for the Niuean culture we have the Tangata Whenua. The Matua, they are our leaders, especially in church*

*we have our elders in church. The reverend but the Matua is our older parents, but we don't have chiefs.*

The participants' responses also indicated a tendency for these leadership titles and roles to be more likely the domain of males rather than females, whilst sharing their cultural perceptions of leadership. For example:

*Participant one Kate: Fiji Indian women, females are not given the top chair jobs, these are usually given to the boys. If the child is born a girl, because of the dowry system, it will affect the parents their money will go out of the home but if it is a boy he will bring money into the family. Even having work to a girl it will be a good thing, but if it is a boy he will bring honours to his family. Most religious leaders are also male. They always give priority to male.*

*Participant two Tracey: In Samoa and I think it happens here too, the male is always the one that takes the lead. Within the family, the husband speaks and then the mum, the father is the leader. When it comes to the Lotu, the father is leading the Lotu, when it comes to talking and representing the family in front of people, the dad has to talk on behalf of the children and the women.*

*Participant seven Sandy: From the Tongan side the male is the head of the family. Yeah, they have the title and they own all the land. The first-born male in the family owns the land.*

The participants acknowledged the notion that gender as a factor in leadership positions and hierarchical structures has started to change. Traditionally males dominated leadership roles and structures; however, there has been more support and acknowledgment of females in leadership roles and structures in recent times. This is evident in the participants' quotes below:

*Participant three Rose: Things have changed now, I believe before it started as a first-born. Because when I grew up males have always been the dominant. Because they have the qualifications and females were at home, raising the family. Now it's equal, equal responsibilities and females are coming up the ladder,*



*doctors, you know female doctors coming up female roles in parliament and government jobs coming up.*

*Participant nine Gemma: When it comes to our generation, we start drifting away from being male dominant. So in terms of that, there are some village structures that include the female in the group. So when the village comes into a meeting females are allowed to participate now. And they provide great support to the male leaders. Leadership in New Zealand in terms of leadership structure, I don't think that we have respect in our Pasifika centres, even if we have a leadership structure in the centre, I don't think we have that respect and we don't maintain that respect.*

### **Participants' experiences of leadership in early childhood education**

The participant supervisors and assistant supervisors shared their experiences and journeys of how they acquired leadership positions within the early childhood sector.

#### **Participant one-Kate**

Kate shared her struggle of pursuing a leadership position living in an Indo Fijian home. Kate mentioned that in her culture females were not given the opportunity to pursue higher-ranking jobs. These were usually reserved for males and she viewed this as authoritative. Kate mentioned that a female had to attain the permission of her father or husband if she wanted to study.

Kate recalled the missed opportunity for her to come to New Zealand to study earlier. However, her father did not give her permission to leave as her brother in law who lived in New Zealand at the time refused to accommodate her. Kate always had a desire to study and even though her husband agreed and supported her, there would always be that pressure and doubt.

*She mentioned: "my husband supported me in many ways, but lots of questions that can be you know discouraging, like are you sure you going to pass? You are going on leave without pay."*

Kate mentioned that these questions caused her to doubt her abilities and added pressure due to financial commitments. However, her persistence and faith in her abilities assisted her in succeeding. Kate said, *“I struggled a lot, but I got through.”*

#### Participant two-Tracey

Tracey acknowledged that her leadership journey was due to her commitment to study in the field of early childhood education. She completed her degree in early childhood teaching and continued with her postgraduate studies. She pursued the leadership role of assistant supervisor after completing her postgraduate studies. Tracey recalled her experiences of leadership and she discussed her commitment as being most significant.

She stated *“Commitment because that is where the word Tautua comes from and means to serve. When you are serving with commitment you are actually serving or Tuatua from your heart, so that’s my experience.”*

Tracey believed that when a leader serves with commitment it results in collaboration and the building effective relationships with the team. Tracey described her inspiration to pursue a leadership position as emanating from motivating and sharing her knowledge with her team. She also acknowledged spirituality and her beliefs in the Christian faith as being most influential in her practice as a leader and her successful journey.

#### Participant three-Rose

Rose recollected that her journey in early childhood started began when she worked as an administrator in a childcare centre. She only realised her passion to study and work with children after the birth of her niece and she developed a strong bond with her. Rose started her studies in early childhood in 2004 and after completing her degree, she aspired into several supervisory positons over the years.

#### Participant four-Briana

Briana completed her degree in early childhood education and she accepted the challenge of being an assistant supervisor at the centre she works at. She described the team of educators as comprising of many elderly educators; however, she is confident that she is coping well even though she is younger than some of the educators in her team. Briana is mindful of communicating and approaching the educators in a respectful way. She believes respect is reciprocal and acknowledges the respect she receives from the team:

*“Seeing as they (some educators) are older than me, I think about approaching them in a respectful manner and I think they also look up to me as well. When I talk to them from a leadership position, you know someone that is younger than them I think they are quite open and they are quite thankful for the knowledge that I kind of bring to the team.”*

#### Participant five-Martha

Martha is a mother to four children who were her inspiration in pursuing a career in early childhood education. She recalls having her first child in New Zealand with little knowledge about early childhood. The differences between raising children in New Zealand and in the Islands where she emigrated from, motivated her to enrol in the early childhood programme. Martha is also passionate about promoting her Niuean culture and even though she did not have any formal leadership training, she was appointed as a centre supervisor as she was the only one in the team that held a qualification at the time.

#### Participant six-Trish

Both Trish and Martha shared similar experiences as they were appointed in supervisory positions due to them being the only educator at the time who had completed their teaching qualification. Trish has been in her supervisory role for the past twelve years. The centre falls under the umbrella of the church and Trish remembers her journey starting when the centre operated from the church hall twelve years ago:

*“We started at the hall and there were no teachers. Mostly parents worked at the centre and when I got my qualification, I was the only qualified teacher at the time. So I was appointed as the supervisor.”*

#### Participant nine-Gemma

Gemma was born into the home of a Pastor and she was raised in an environment where leadership was part of the family. These strong leadership influences have been significant in her attaining leadership positions in early childhood education. She has been involved in leadership roles in early childhood for the past sixteen years. Gemma's motivation stemmed from her commitment to preserve her Niuean language, culture and identity for her children.

#### Question two

Question two asked: What are the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators' in early childhood education?

Table 4.3 indicates the participants' career aspirations in relation to the sub-themes mentioned in their responses.

*Table 4.3: Career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in early childhood education.*

Sub-themes	Q2: Number of responses from each participant									
Participants' intention to:	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
Pursue leadership position				Yes			Yes	No	No	2
Undertake further study	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	3
Currently in a leadership position	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	5

Overall, five of the nine participants were currently in a leadership position at the time this study was undertaken.

Two participants indicated that they intended to pursue a leadership position in the future.

They stated:

*Participant four Briana: Hopefully one day to be managing my own centre. But that's further down the track. I hope to step into a supervisory role you know sometime in the next few years.*

*Participant seven Sandy: Yeah and like before, I was second in charge over here. But taking on a supervisor role it's really hard. I have seen some of my friends really struggle with their family and it's really hard. Maybe five to six years from now, in the future, not at the moment.*

Three participants indicated that they had an interest in undertaking further study in early childhood education.

*Participant one Kate: Yes, because I already did my masters and I was thinking of going further with my studies.*

*Participant five Martha: Yes, the only reason why I did not continue with post-graduate studies was my children were growing up at the time. One was in year eleven, she needed support, and I thought it's my turn to look after and support my children with their study. Now they have grown up and I feel I can step away.*

Two participants stated that they had no intention to pursue leadership positions or undertake further study in the future. When asked why they felt this way, they explained:

*Participant eight Jasmine: Personally I am quite a shy person and very quiet. I don't feel that I have that kind of confidence and I don't think that I will receive that response from other people seeing me as a leader. The shyness holds me back from trying.*

*Participant nine Gemma: My journey ended here, because I am looking at my age, I only got about seven years until retirement.*

### **Question three**

Question three asked: What are the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators' in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education?

Table 4.4 below displays the challenges identified by the participants in attaining leadership positions in early childhood education.

*Table 4.4:* Challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in leadership in early childhood education.

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>	<b>P7</b>	<b>P8</b>	<b>P9</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Status of ECE</b>	2	2	1	2	3	1	3	5	4	<b>23</b>
<b>Lack of support/team development</b>	4	1	1	5	3		3		3	<b>20</b>
<b>English language</b>			2	2	3	1	2	1	3	<b>14</b>
<b>Unclear leadership structure</b>		1		2	3		2	5	1	<b>14</b>
<b>Workload</b>		1		1	1	1	5	3	1	<b>13</b>
<b>Diversity</b>	4		7						2	<b>13</b>
<b>Low pay</b>	5	2	1	1		2	1			<b>12</b>
<b>Cultural influences</b>	2	4			2		3			<b>11</b>
<b>Teacher leadership</b>	1		3		1	4		2		<b>11</b>
<b>Family commitments</b>	1				2	1	1	1		<b>6</b>
<b>Time management</b>		1	1				3			<b>5</b>
<b>Church</b>						4				<b>4</b>
<b>ICT skills</b>			1				2	1		<b>4</b>
<b>Government policies</b>	2				1					<b>3</b>

The participants discussed several challenges that they have experienced in their leadership journeys. They mainly talked about the status and stigma attached to the early childhood profession and the effects these have on leadership roles within the sector. Because of the stigma attached to early childhood education, that of caring and a being “baby sitting” facility, several participants associated this with the low income within the sector. The low income was also viewed by the participants as being in non-alignment with the workload and expectations of leaders in early childhood centres. For example:

*Participant one Kate: I think females who are qualified are not recognised for their expertise. Yes both money and title. I don't think that I am paid very well for what I do.*

*Participant seven Sandy: Yes, it is a lot of work but some people think it is just being a babysitter. They don't know how hard working in ECE is. I think we are underpaid because it is a lot of work especially with the younger children.*

*Participant eight Jasmine: Yes, well you hear all this nonsense all the time pretty much, you can't miss it you hear people saying that it's just a babysitting service and that kind of hurts me. We are more than a babysitting service. We care for the children and we educate the children. Some parents just bring them (children), and just leave them and you have those that really do care about what goes on in their children's lives at preschool. It's also knowing the work that goes into being a leader, especially the older teachers here, they have been given the opportunity but they turn it down because of those reasons, it is quite a lot of work.*

Further, in comparison to the status, respect and authority associated with leadership roles in the compulsory schooling sectors and corporate business structures, the participants believed that there was a lack of status, respect and authority given to leaders in the early childhood sector. The unclear leadership structures within early childhood was also the cause of uncertainty, which resulted in many educators being hesitant in pursuing leadership roles.

The participants mentioned the following:

*Participant one Kate: Yes and for ECE, if you compare an ECE leader with a leader in a bank or offices, there is a stigma attached to ECE. And the government does not support ECE. I think it is a question about the calibre of ECE, if the government recognises ECE then so will society. .*

*Participant eight Jasmine: Yeah because you need to be able to look up to your leader, not only take suggestions from them and the help that you are hoping to get from them. But you need to be able to have the same respect for them, so I don't feel we have that in ECE. In primary school, it is clear-cut, you know exactly who they are, you know their role and you know that there is a different level as well and you understand that. It's not like for instance, I just can't go in and have a casual conversation with him (referring to the principal in a primary school).*

*Participant nine Gemma: Leadership in NZ in terms of leadership structure, I think that Pasifika centres have that structure but we don't maintain the respect for the structure.*

The lack of support for leaders within early childhood services was also emphasised by the participants.

The participants stressed the need for professional support, as some leaders were not equipped or did not receive any formal training to prepare them for the responsibilities of the leadership roles they were in. Two participants mentioned:

*Participant nine Gemma: There is lack of support, professional development and a lack of authority and respect for someone in that leadership role. At the time when I was at the centre I found that I had to do everything on my own, not much support.*

*Participant five Martha: Definitely lack of support. Being a supervisor in a Niuean centre there was lack of professional support. Because I really needed that support even though I had a great team but there are gaps. There is no help for being a leader in an ECE Pasifika centre. To prepare you as a person to become a leader. You may have the leadership ability, you may have some qualities, but*



*insecurity causes many to stepdown and prevents educators from taking up the role.*

English being the second language spoken by most of the participants was another challenge identified by the participants as having significant impact on leadership in early childhood education. Some educators viewed their English language skills and abilities as a barrier to them accepting a leadership role. Whilst they possessed basic English language skills, they were not confident in public speaking or advanced English skills. Some participants also discussed their challenges they faced with computers ICT and their abilities in using computers and technology. This is evident in their comments below:

*Participant five Martha: Definitely the language. This would be the number one barrier to accepting a leadership role if you are offered. For example, for those of us who were brought up in the Island and moved here, that's the first thing you going to think about. Am I going to be able speak to these people? And this causes you to question your abilities. This is my own personal experience if I am talking to my colleagues in the centre I am ok, but when it comes to an interview I sometimes struggle to answer because of that language barrier. Yes, at first you know you can talk in English, but it's always at the back of my mind, am I going to say the right words.*

*Participant eight Jasmine: Yes, definitely the language barrier for our older teachers here because they speak in their mother tongue and they are more comfortable in their mother tongue rather than English. And our older teachers miss out on opportunities because they don't have the ability to use computers.*

*Participant three Rose: The other thing that I noticed, is IT is too hard for them, technology is a challenge. Technology is one of the challenges and the older educators they find it hard because they have not learned it from school.*

Diversity and gender was another challenge the participants identified. The early childhood sector embraces diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of children, teachers and families from various parts of the world. Whilst in most instances cultural diversity was embraced positively, this also posed a challenge for educators and leaders in practise.

As mentioned by the participants:

*Participant three Rose: Being challenged by other ethnic groups, the diversity challenges me so I have failed in some ways because of not understanding different cultures and not knowing what to do.*

*Participant one Kate: From my experience, I have found that even if a female has experience and is more educated, males are always given priority for leadership positions. It is always more difficult for females to receive promotions than males.*

Pasifika communities have a strong affiliation with the church and spiritual upbringing is an important component of their family lives. Many early childhood services were founded by the community church and was led by ministers, their wives and the leaders in the church. Some centres continue to exist under the umbrella of the church and some participants felt that this challenged their spiritual values and beliefs and their professional duties and responsibilities. There was some tension between balancing their spiritual values and beliefs with that of the demands of their professional roles and duties. For example participant six-Trish stated “A big challenge for me because I also go to this church. As part of my long service here I feel like it’s part of my commitment not just as my job but I’m serving my church and the community as well. For me the pay does not matter, being a Christian, I don’t moan about how much I get paid I’m just happy about what I’m doing here for my church. The challenge for me is when the staff want a pay rise and I have to face the board. But I feel really bad because it’s the church.”

Equally challenging was the participants cultural practices that were sometimes in non-alignment with their professional practises. Cultural practices of time management and respect for elders were identified as challenging from time to time. Maintaining a balance between cultural ways of doing things, and professional practise, was also identified as a challenge.

Participant two discussed that some educators bring their cultural thinking and practices to work and these sometimes contradict practise in early childhood education. As stated by the participants:

*Participant two Tracey: One of the challenges is for our colleagues to bring their cultural practices, which is conflicting and contradicting our work on the field. Like you know the basics of time management and the Pasifika way of timing or like Island time, which conflicts with punctuality and professionalism. Sometimes our cultural nature is challenging to me. But I also believe that there are some beliefs and values that can be significant to our practice.*

*Participant seven Sandy: In our culture, the Niuean culture we have to respect the elders. Sometimes it is hard working with the older colleagues.*

Some participants cited family commitments as challenging and therefore they had to postpone their studies and hesitated in pursuing leadership roles. Their commitments to their families and having young children who were sometimes demanding was another challenge many female educators faced in their careers. For example:

*Participant five Martha: The only reason why I didn't continue with postgrad is because my children were growing up at the time, and I needed to support my children with their study.*

*Participant seven Sandy: It's just that family commitments and taking on a supervisor role it's really hard. I have seen some of my friends really struggle with their family and work, it's really hard.*

*Participant eight Jasmine: They (educators) turn it down because it's a commitment that will take them away from their families.*

The participants currently in supervisory roles also discussed the views of teacher leadership amongst their team. Some of their team members had a negative approach to opportunities for teacher leadership that were created.

One participant mentioned:

*Participant six Trish: One of the challenges is sharing my role as a supervisor, doing newsletters and giving them (educators) responsibilities to lead in something. Such as self-review and things like planning and I want them to lead but they say oh that is not our job.*

Table 4.4 below shows the key enablers identified by the participants in attaining leadership positions in early childhood education.

*Table 4.5* The enablers identified by Pasifika educators in attaining leadership positions in early childhood education.

<b>Enablers</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>	<b>P7</b>	<b>P8</b>	<b>P9</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Personal attributes attitude/culture</b>	1	1	7	1	3	1			2	<b>16</b>
<b>Inspiration/Family support</b>			1	3	5	1	2	1	1	<b>14</b>
<b>Leadership skills</b>	2	2		4			2	1	1	<b>12</b>
<b>Qualification</b>		2		1	1	1			2	<b>7</b>
<b>Spiritual inspiration</b>	1		3	3						<b>7</b>
<b>Government/external support</b>		2								<b>2</b>

The participants identified their personal attitudes and cultural upbringing as being most significant in their leadership journeys.

*Participant three Rose: I treat challenges as a positive, something for me to learn. I don't see it as a negative thing, I see it as positive towards my career as being a supervisor.*

Participant nine: Gemma was raised in a home environment that had many leaders in their village and community.

*I was born into that environment. In terms of my family and the village structure, they are the leaders of our village. Therefore, I grew up in that leadership environment, knowing what to do.*

The support the participants received from their families and their children was also inspirational in them pursuing and continuing in their leadership roles. For example:

*Participant five Martha: I suppose it will have to go back to my children, because they are the ones that inspired me and now they are grown up and I want them to see that I have come this far.*

*Participant four Briana: My family has been very encouraging and supportive in all the leadership roles that I have taken up over the years.*

Three of the nine participants acknowledged that their spiritual commitments were also, what supported them in their leadership roles. For example:

*Participant one Kate: My prayers as well, really helped me. Sometimes there is so many emotions but then I always knew that I can do it and I will be able to manage it.*

*Participant three Rose: I think for me I learned from that spiritual feeling inside me. I don't dwell on things, I know there is only one man that can help me.*

Seven of the nine participants credited their leadership journeys to having the qualification that was a catalyst in them attaining a leadership position. For example:

*Participant six Trish: I was the only qualified teacher at the time and no other teacher had their qualifications. I became the supervisor at the time, Yeah I automatically, got the position.*

*Participant two Tracey: The most important enabler, I think for me personally was my study that supported me. .*

*Participant five Martha: I did not study leadership but I was encouraged into the role of leadership because of my piece of paper, no one in the centre had the qualification at the time.*

#### **Question four**

Question four asked: What are the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education?

Table 4.6 below indicates the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators and supervisors in relation to leadership in early childhood education.

*Table 4.6 Implications for professional development identified by Pasifika educators.*

Type of PD	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
<b>Prof. development specific to leadership</b>	2	7	5	4	6	4	2			<b>30</b>
<b>Mentoring/support for supervisors</b>					5		1	2	6	<b>14</b>
<b>Government support</b>	2			1	5				1	<b>9</b>
<b>Advance English</b>					3	1	1	1	2	<b>8</b>
<b>Effective communication</b>						2	3	1		<b>6</b>
<b>Team development support</b>							1	2	1	<b>4</b>
<b>Technology/ICT</b>			1				2	1		<b>3</b>

Overall, the participants emphasised the need for professional development specific to leadership. The participants also highlighted the need to develop and sharpen their leadership capabilities and skills in the areas of team development and effective communication.

Four of the nine participants that were or are currently in supervisory roles stressed the need for support in relation to mentoring. Further professional development was identified as being needed in developing advanced English skills and effective technological skills as indicated by the participants. The participants also indicated the implications for government support in areas of professional development specific to Pasifika people.

*Participant one Kate: I think we should be allocated more money in ECE. I know the degree is supported but if an educator has the desire to further her studies, like postgraduate or masters, there is no financial support. We have so many commitments with our families. This is why after completing the degree most of us are not able to develop themselves professionally.*

*Participant three Rose: They (educators) should take any professional development that is available. It will be beneficial when you in a leadership role.*

*Participant four Briana: I think having ongoing leadership workshops, specific to leadership. Workshops around effective communication and team building for leaders.*

*Participant five Martha: There is a lack of support. I have been asking for support in terms of leadership. I really need that professional support, even though I got a great team, there are gaps. Professional support to prepare you as a person to become a leader. The Ministry identifies us as Pasifika centres for support, but what are they offering? It would be good to have consistent leadership pd like mentors as a starting point and maybe deliver them in the mother tongue. I think we need mentoring specifically in leadership.*

*Participant seven Sandy: More pd about how to be a good leader. Communication is very important because if you don't deliver or communicate correct information, that's when things go wrong. English is my second language and especially the management they speak a different language and it's really hard to understand, for me personally.*

## **Summary**

This chapter has presented the data collected through the semi-structured interviews about Pasifika educators' perspectives and experiences of leadership in early childhood education. Pasifika educators identified several enablers and challenges that influenced their aspirations toward leadership positions in early childhood education.

Finally, the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education were also identified.

The next chapter will examine these findings in more detail and link these findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter two.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion of findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the important main findings from the data gathered in the semi-structured interviews as presented in the previous chapter. The sub-headings that frame the discussion were derived from the research questions:

- Perceptions of leadership in early childhood education held by Pasifika educators;
- Cultural perceptions of leadership held by Pasifika educators;
- Career aspirations held by Pasifika educators;
- Challenges and enablers experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions; and
- Implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership.

This chapter will also examine the links between the research findings and relevant literature reviewed.

### **Perceptions of leadership in early childhood education held by Pasifika educators**

Several authors have debated the bureaucratic nature of leadership in corporate settings as inappropriate to the early childhood context (Aitken, 2005; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). The collaborative nature, flexibility and diversity of early childhood education in New Zealand is unique from other corporate settings and therefore the generic view of leadership as hierarchical is mismatched. Authors such as Kagan and Hallmark (2001) and Aitken (2005) also support this view.

The analysis of the data gathered in this research study revealed the most common views of leadership held by Pasifika educators were not related to a title or position. Rather, the participants felt strongly that the skills and practices implemented by a leader were more significant than holding a position or a title. Leadership was seen as the ability to lead a team. Effective communication skills were emphasised by the participants as important in leading and driving the teaching team. The participants believed that collaboration and effective teamwork are closely related to strong leadership, which is supported by the research data. Similarly, Siraj-Blatchford et al., (2002) support consistency, good communication and collaborative methods of working among staff in early childhood education. The views of the participants in this research study concur with other research studies in early childhood education. For example, Scrivens (2002) confirmed in a study undertaken in New Zealand that a leader in the early childhood sector is characterised by the skills of being supportive and collaborative in practice.

The participants and supervisors in this research study highlighted that working collaboratively and supporting staff are key elements to effective teamwork. Rodd (2005) and Scrivens (2002) echo this finding, describing perceptions of leadership within the early childhood context as being closely in alignment with notions of support, motivation, teamwork and building effective relationships between staff and the leader. Nupponen (2006) advocates that shared forms of leadership are suitable to early childhood settings, and that open and effective communication, empowerment and group engagement are key components of a shared leadership approach. The enactment of this type of approach requires the leader to let go of power and results in the empowerment of the team, similar to distributed leadership (Heikka et al., 2012; Muijs, et al., 2004; Nupponen, 2006).

Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003), Scrivens (2006), Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007), and Waniganayake (2014) affirm that distributed leadership models are suitable in early

childhood contexts. These views are similar to the participants' views that teamwork and a collaborative approach to leadership are conducive to early childhood context. Distributed leadership reconceptualises the notion of leadership as being associated with an individual, to being a collaborative approach to leadership that is based on the collective efforts of the team (Heikka et al., 2012; Scrivens, 2006; Spillane 2007). This study confirms that the leadership styles preferred by women promote empowerment and collaborative decision making toward achieving shared goals. The findings in this study also indicate that leadership styles that are relational in nature and flexible are more suited among women in early childhood sector. The views of authors such as Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003), Rodd (2006), Thornton et al., (2009), and Waniganayake (2014) affirm that tolerance, patience, teamwork, building relationships and trust are significant to leadership in early childhood education. Further alignment can be made when comparing this to the data collected in this study. The findings revealed in this study place emphasis on practice rather than leadership roles and titles, a characteristic of distributed leadership (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Spillane, 2007).

### **Cultural perceptions of leadership held by Pasifika educators**

The participants' cultural views of leadership in a Samoan context contrasted with their views of leadership in the early childhood sector. Culturally the participants associated leadership with that of a title and position. Titles of "Matai" and "Chieftainship" are highly regarded and respected within their Pasifika communities. Leadership structures in the church are also influential among Pasifika families and communities.

The participants confirmed that titles and positions in the church structures are considered to be of high status and authority and are therefore highly respected within Pasifika communities.

According to the participants, patriarchal, hierarchical leadership structures do exist and are accepted in Pasifika communities. Further, the participants' responses revealed that, in their cultural contexts, males rather than females held most leadership positions and leadership titles. Similarly, males in religious leadership positions comprised aspects of the Fijian Indian culture. In the Tongan cultural context, leadership was also associated with males in the family having titles and ownership of property. The majority of the participants confirmed this assumption however; some did acknowledge that the practice of patriarchy was changing among the younger generations and that females were more recognised in leadership roles in recent years.

Critical analysis of the data reveals that the participants "are walking between two worlds" as noted by Fitzgerald (2010, p. 99). For Pasifika educators this implies challenges that are two-fold: firstly, as Indigenous women working within leadership structures traditionally populated by males; and secondly, as Indigenous Pasifika women facing the challenge of working and living in a Western society whilst trying to maintain a balance between their cultural values, beliefs and identity (Fitzgerald, 2006; 2010).

Spirituality is also a significant element of Pasifika life and education (Leauepepe & Sauni, 2014; Sauni & Toso, 2009). The findings of this research confirm that the participants have a strong affiliation with the church. Numerous authors also confirm that Pasifika communities have strong connections with the church and the church is equally influential in Pasifika cultures (Kavaliku, 2007; Latu, 2009; Sauni & Toso, 2009).

Further, the findings of this study echo the views of Leaupepe and Sauni (2014) and Sauni and Toso (2009) who describe spirituality as being significant to Pasifika cultures as it enhances their cultural identities and self-esteem.

Servant leadership is another concept confirmed by the participants' that is highly acknowledged and respected in Pasifika cultures. Servant leadership in the Samoan cultural context is associated with values and beliefs, which come from the teachings of Christianity wherein a leader is respected by the enactment of service, 'Tautua', to the followers. In the context of early childhood education, this characteristic is linked to leaders supporting and motivating their team. In alignment with moral leadership, the model of the head, heart and hand, and their interconnectedness with leadership, provides an understanding of the behaviours of leaders (Sergiovanni, 1992). The vision, values and beliefs of a leader are linked to the heart; the experience developed by the leader and theories that are practiced are associated with the head, and actions, behaviours and decisions made by the leader are linked to the hands (Sergiovanni, 1992). Sergiovanni (1992) affirms this model as significant in understanding the leader's actions, behaviours and decision-making. The greatness of a leader is dignified by their commitment to serve (Greenleaf, 1977).

The notion of servant leadership is one such model that is closely related to the strengths women display in leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Thornton et al., (2009) advocates for a leadership model that acknowledges the leadership strengths and abilities of women such as empathy and people skills. As such, the characteristics of servant leadership are in alignment with the strengths displayed by women in leadership, which suggests that servant leadership offers a more collaborative approach to leadership for Pasifika educators in early childhood education.

## **Career aspirations held by Pasifika educators**

The findings of this research confirm that of the nine participants, five were currently in a supervisory role at the time the study was undertaken. Three of the five participants in supervisory roles showed an interest in continuing with post-graduate studies. The data also revealed that several Pasifika educators do aspire to become centre managers and owners of early childhood centres in the future. This study also confirmed the commitment of Pasifika educators to further upskill and develop their capabilities in leadership. This shows the Pasifika educators who were interviewed do aspire to take up leadership positions in early childhood education.

Two of the nine Pasifika participants indicated that they had no intention to pursue leadership positions in the future. The findings from this study suggest that most of these Pasifika educators and supervisors do aspire to advance in their careers in leadership in early childhood education. However, the difficulties and the challenges they face in pursuing leadership roles were overwhelming. The ensuing section discusses these challenges in detail.

## **Challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions**

### **Refining the findings into sub-themes and categories**

In total 14 challenges were identified from the data collected during the semi-structured interviews. These sub-themes were categorised into major themes, namely: Society's perception of early childhood education; Leadership skills; Leadership practice; Diversity in early childhood education; Family commitments; and Cultural influences.

This was done by identifying key words and similarities with the challenges voiced by the participants. The data confirmed that the participants also identified challenges and enablers that came from the same source.

The challenges categorised into sub-themes and major themes are presented in Table 5.1 below. The table is divided into two columns that identify the sub-themes and the major themes. These major themes will frame the discussion of the challenges identified by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education.

*Table 5.1: Challenges categorised into sub-themes and major themes.*

<b>Sub-themes/challenges</b>	<b>Major themes/categories</b>
<b>Status of ECE</b>	Society's perception of leadership in ECE
<b>Lack of support/team development</b>	Society's perception of leadership in ECE
<b>English language</b>	Leadership skills
<b>Unclear leadership structure</b>	Leadership practice
<b>Workload</b>	Leadership practice
<b>Diversity</b>	Diversity in ECE
<b>Low pay</b>	Society's perception of leadership in ECE
<b>Cultural influences</b>	Cultural influences
<b>Teacher leadership</b>	Leadership practice
<b>Family commitments</b>	Leadership practice
<b>Time management</b>	Leadership practice
<b>Church</b>	Cultural influences
<b>ICT skills</b>	Leadership skills
<b>Government policies</b>	Society's perception of leadership in ECE

## **Societies' perceptions of ECE as a barrier to leadership**

In the past leadership in the early childhood sector has virtually been ignored (Muijs et al., 2004; Thornton, 2005). As a result, literature and research has in the past been limited in relation to leadership in early childhood education (Chu, 2012; Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006). The status of early childhood and professionalism within the sector has lacked advancement. Professional leadership could be envisaged as a catalyst in advancing the professional credibility and status of the early childhood sector (Thornton, 2005). The theme of society's perceptions of early childhood education that emerged from the findings is supported in the literature by Thornton (2005), who also describes the status of the early childhood profession as being stifled. The data collected in this study revealed that common misconceptions of early childhood services as a babysitting facility continue to haunt the early childhood profession, affecting the status and stigmas attached to early childhood education. These views of society and the lack of acknowledgment from government can be directly linked to the low profile of the early childhood profession (Thornton et al., 2009). This has a significant impact on the hesitancy of leadership structures and the status of leadership roles within the early childhood sector.

The participants identified the diverse range of leadership titles such as supervisor, head teacher, team leader and professional leader, as a cause for confusion and uncertainty among practitioners in the field. Further, unclear leadership structures and a lack of understanding of leadership among many educators contributes to the lack of interest by educators in leadership within the early childhood sector (Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013). Traditional views and terminology such as 'baby sitters' continue to impact on the professional status of early childhood educators.



Early childhood education has evolved theoretically and pedagogically. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, practitioners still have to substantiate the role of early childhood educators as being more than babysitters could be construed insensitive and demeaning as mentioned by several participants.

The findings in this study also highlighted the excessive workload faced by leaders given the increasing expectations of documentation and evidence required by government agencies such as the Education Review Office and the Ministry of Education. The data confirms that low pay structures are another challenge faced by Pasifika educators in leadership roles. The participants were of the view that, despite holding a degree in early childhood teaching, the pay structures varied in each service and were agreed on by the owners of each service. Waniganayake (2014) also supports this view and confirms that low financial remuneration packages can also discourage Pasifika educators from taking on leadership roles and positions. Pasifika educators continue to struggle with issues of low pay, yet they remain committed to promoting their Pasifika languages and cultural heritages (Mara, 2005). According to the participants that were currently in supervisory positions, the pressure and workload associated with leadership positions could also be a deterrent to many educators pursuing leadership roles in early childhood education.

The government's involvement in terms of policy and strategic planning is also questionable in recognising the importance and status of early childhood education. The sector has to continuously contend with a lack of finances and resources with little recognition of its importance (Chu, 2012; Thornton, 2005). The lack of government support and recognition can also be directly linked to the stigma and status of early childhood education (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014).

The participants also made comparisons between leaders in the primary school sector to that of leaders in the early childhood sector. This suggests that the status and authority given to leaders in the primary sector was far greater. The findings also suggest a lack of support for leadership in the early childhood sector from the Ministry of Education. Government policies failed to include leadership development in early childhood education until the release of the strategic plan *Pathways to the future* (Ministry of Education, 2002 as cited in Thornton, 2005). *Pathways to the future* (Ministry of Education, 2002) incorporated leadership development at step four of the plan. The findings of an evaluation of the strategic plan carried out by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research revealed that the key stakeholders in early childhood education viewed the strategic plan as an important document that could have a major influence in improving the quality of early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 2008). However, no details on what leadership programmes specific to early childhood education have been confirmed (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The data collated from this study also confirm the lack of support and training for leadership development from government in early childhood. The participants argued that leaders in the compulsory schooling sectors received more recognition and support than leaders in early childhood education. Comparisons made by the participants in respect of training programmes and support available to school leaders, far outweighed the few training opportunities offered to early childhood leaders. Thornton (2005), Thornton et al., (2009) and Waniganayake (2014) advocate for equivalent and effective leadership training and support in the early childhood sector. Even though research has proven that effective leadership is directly linked to the quality of care and education in early childhood education, little or no training or support has been made available to the sector.

Several support structures from the Ministry of Education, such as induction programmes for first time principals, workshops aimed at developing the skills of aspiring principals, and electronic network systems for professional development for principals, are currently implemented in the schooling sectors (Ministry of Education, 2005; Thornton et al., 2009). Furthermore, several scholarships and grants including sabbatical leave are available in the schooling sector for leaders to complete their postgraduate qualifications (Ministry of Education, 2005). In the early childhood sector, there are no financial supports or grants made available for postgraduate studies.

However, one such initiative by the New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI), not by the Ministry of Education, is the *Leadership Management Kit* (Thornton et al., 2009) that was designed to provide practical support and guidance to leaders in early childhood education. At present, some opportunities for leadership development do exist, such as the *Education Leadership Project* (ELP). The ELP however, is part of general professional development aimed at curriculum development and teaching practice of all educators in the centre (Thornton et al., 2009). This programme is funded by the Ministry of Education and involves contractors and facilitators offering cluster workshops and in-centre follow-ups. Further, these professional development workshops are not specific to leadership development and representatives that attend the workshops become the main facilitator for improvement back at their centres.

### **Issues relating to leadership skills and practice**

Professional development initiatives as discussed in the preceding section are important in developing leadership capability and skills.

Recently some leadership programmes and qualifications on a national level such as postgraduate diplomas in education and professional development courses have been developed; however, affordability remains a barrier for most practitioners – this hinders educators’ aspirations to become leaders (Cooper, 2014). Leadership professional development and teacher refresher courses that currently exist have to compete for financial resources with other professional development areas; leadership training is not a priority (Thornton, 2009; Waniganayake, 2014). Several authors argue that, in order for any government policies or strategic plans to be implemented successfully, effective leadership development is essential and crucial (Leaubepe & Sauni, 2014; Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006; Thornton, 2005). The findings in this study also revealed that seven of the participants currently in leadership roles were pushed into their positions because they were the only ones who held a qualification or degree at the time their appointments were made. The findings confirm that they did not undergo any formal training or receive any support in developing as a leader new to the role.

The participants admitted that they had the interest and the aspirations; however, they did not have any support in developing their leadership skills. The challenges identified by Pasifika educators in this research study were in areas relating to effective team development, effective communication skills, conflict resolution, confidence in public speaking and essential skills in leading a team. This causes undue pressure for newly qualified educators who assume roles and responsibilities in leadership. Thornton et al., (2009) advocates against newly qualified teachers having conflicting roles and responsibilities of leaders in services, having to support other adults and work alongside young children, and therefore having little or no time to develop and practice leadership.

The participants in this study confirmed these challenges and described the increased workload as a hindrance to them developing their own leadership skills and abilities. The workload is another deterrent that is preventing educators from pursuing leadership positions, as suggested by the findings of this study.

This study also revealed the lack of understanding of educational leadership theories and notions of teacher leadership among early childhood teachers. Teacher leadership is a concept that promotes leadership in teachers' everyday practice, and is founded on the principles that committed and knowledgeable teachers have the potential to lead, irrespective of position or title (Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013). The findings in this study confirmed that some Pasifika educators have turned down opportunities for teacher leadership due to unfamiliarity with the concepts of shared and distributed leadership. Cooper (2014) also discusses the lack of understanding of shared and collaborative approaches to leadership among educators who are therefore reluctant to participate in teacher leadership. Furthermore, some educators are of the view that leadership is reserved for those in formal leadership positions (Cooper, 2014). Thornton (2005) reported on a study of educators carried out with six *Centres of Innovation* (Meade, 2003a) in 2004. The educators were also reluctant to identify themselves as leaders personally (Thornton, 2005).

Teacher leadership includes and engages all educators in leadership opportunities to develop their leadership skills that support collective decision-making and collective action (Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Harris, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Thornton, 2005). Cooper (2014) affirms that opportunities for teacher leadership encourage team members to actively participate in the leadership of the centre. Teacher leadership is being

misunderstood as releasing those in formal leadership positions from their duties and responsibilities as indicated by some participants.

Harris (2003) re-iterates that those in formal leadership positions continue to hold the responsibilities of fostering productive relationships and driving the whole team to ensure the functionality of the organisation.

The view held by educators in this study was that teacher leadership can be construed as passing the responsibilities of those in leadership position to the team members. Contrary to this view, teacher leadership is in alignment with collaborative leadership models such as shared and distributed leadership (Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Harris, 2003). These leadership models shift the focus of leadership as individual, to a collective and collaborative model (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Heikka et al., 2012; Thornton, 2005). However, the findings of this study confirm that there is still a lack of understanding of leadership theories and models among early childhood practitioners. This poses a challenge for Pasifika leaders when promoting opportunities for teacher leadership among Pasifika educators in early childhood education.

## **Cultural barriers to leadership**

Church ministers and the ministers' wives lead some early childhood centres founded by the churches in their communities. Historically the mutual location of the church and early childhood centre was beneficial, as buildings and facilities were shared, and their co-existence provided easy access to culture, language and spiritual support by the church community (Mara, 2005). However, the findings in this study revealed that Pasifika educators found some of their cultural practices to be a challenge in their professional practice. This caused some tension between Pasifika educators' spiritual values and beliefs and their professional roles and responsibilities.

Cultural values, such as respect for elders, posed a challenge in some situations to both educators and supervisors in Pasifika centres. The findings in this study suggest that supervisors find it difficult to discuss issues concerning, for example, pay rises for staff, with the management committee of the centre who were also the church leaders. Cultural practices of time management and punctuality were also cited as challenging from time to time. Maintaining a balance of cultural ways of doing things with professional practice was found to be challenging by the participants. Many teaching teams in Pasifika centres are comprised of more experienced, older educators within the team who have significant cultural knowledge to share with their colleagues. Older educators have greater experience; however some educators tend to develop habits and sometimes hold on to traditional views of teaching and learning (Knowles et al., 2005). Respect for elders is a cultural value and custom that is held fast by Pasifika communities (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Vaioleti, 2006). However, leaders from younger generations find this to be a challenge, especially when delegating tasks to the older team members, as this can be misinterpreted as being disrespectful to their elders.

The findings confirm that some Pasifika educators are hesitant to view themselves as leaders, especially where the early childhood centres falls under the umbrella of the church. This is a result of the leadership structure of the church being interconnected with the centre. Given the respect Pasifika educators have for their elders, they find this challenging and even more so if the church elders like the Ministers and their wives are involved in the running of the centre.

The data confirm that family commitment also influenced some educators' decisions not to pursue leadership roles. Various reasons such as having young children and starting their families resulted in educators having to put their careers 'on hold'.

The findings in this study confirm that many Pasifika educators and their families are actively engaged in the church life by serving in the church and community. Therefore, due to being committed in serving and being involved in the life of the church and community, Pasifika educators were reluctant to take on the workload and responsibilities of leadership in their workplace. Fitzgerald (2006) also affirms the challenges of community expectations and responsibilities placed on Indigenous women.

For many Pasifika educators English is their second language. This study revealed that the participants speaking their mother tongue was valued as empowering to their cultural identity. Leaupepe and Sauni, (2014) confirm that the first language, a Pasifika language, is a significant component of Pasifika cultural identity. However, the participants also cited that English being their second language was another significant barrier in Pasifika educators pursuing leadership positions in early childhood education.

The participants currently in supervisory positions confirmed that although they possess good English skills, they believed that they required further support in developing comprehensive English language and comprehension skills. The difficulties they faced included writing reports, communication with board members at meetings and articulating their professional knowledge and practices in English to external professional agencies such as Education Review officers. The relaying of messages from management and board meetings is dependent on the level of understanding of the English language of the leaders that attend the meetings. The finding of this study suggest that this contributes to miscommunication and confusion among the team.



## **Diversity, gender and leadership**

Gender and ethnicity present a “dual challenge” that poses barriers for Indigenous women and leadership within the education sector (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 207). The data collected in this study revealed the perceived disadvantages faced by Pasifika educators in relation to gender and ethnicity. The participants’ perspectives in relation to gender and ethnicity strongly suggest that males are privileged both culturally and in the workplace. Traditional approaches to leadership focus on the influence of one individual, and have largely been characterised as mono-cultural and masculine, which continues to discourage females and indigenous practitioners from exploring or associating themselves with the notion of leadership (Blackmore, 2006; Dalli & Thornton, 2013). The data collected in this research indicates that Pasifika educators find it challenging to view themselves as leaders as, traditionally and culturally, leadership positions and titles were reserved only for males in their cultures. Leadership structures in other sectors and patriarchal structures of leadership continue to pose a challenge in early childhood education.

The findings in relating to gender and ethnicity in this study confirm that generic approaches to leadership that apply to male leaders are at odds with the early childhood sector that is dominated by females (Cooper, 2014; Heikka et al., 2012; Rodd, 2006). Nupponen (2006) advocates for an examination of ways that women lead considering the high numbers of females in early childhood education. Male educational leaders are characterised as visionary, goal-orientated, self-regulatory and service orientated (Fitzgerald, 2003). Female leaders, on the other hand, are portrayed as being nurturing,

supportive and flexible which is perceived as inferior to the commonly accepted masculine leadership characteristics (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Women are often highly relational and several authors canvas the need to develop a leadership model that acknowledges the strengths of women that align with early childhood pedagogical approaches (Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009).

This study found that participants in supervisory roles were able to share leadership with capable members within their team. Scrivens (2003) argues that leadership models that embrace power for, rather than power over, someone is preferred by women. Indigenous leaders in diverse communities in New Zealand also face “environments of tension” (Kavaliku, 2007. p. 18). When comparing male and female leaders in relation to gender, Fitzgerald (2006) contends that comparisons between indigenous women to “white male or female leaders is theoretically flawed” (p. 205). Indigenous women experience prejudice and face tensions related to gender and ethnicity: firstly, as females in a patriarchal structure; and, secondly, as indigenous women in a minority group (Fitzgerald, 2006). Indigenous women in leadership encounter the pressures of living in different worlds. The voices of the participants in this study emphasise the challenges Pasifika educators face that are associated with gender and ethnicity. These challenges relate to Pasifika educators working and living in a western society in New Zealand, trying to maintain their cultural identity, and being guided by their cultural values of respect, love and service. As Thornton (2005) states “there is not just one way to be a leader and leadership will vary from culture to culture and situation to situation” (p. 2). As such, the findings of this study advocate for Pasifika cultural paradigms of leading to be valued, acknowledged and adopted in educational leadership in the early childhood sector.

## **Enablers in Pasifika educators attaining leadership positions**

The participants highlighted the enablers that contributed to them attaining their leadership positions. As discussed in the previous section some of the enablers came from the same source as the challenges however the enablers are cited as inspirational by the participants and are viewed in a positive perspective. The findings from the data collected during the semi-structured interviews identified six enablers that were categorised into sub-themes and major themes.

The themes are presented in Table 5.2 below. The table is divided into two columns that identify the sub-themes and the major themes. These major themes will frame the discussion of the enablers identified by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education.

*Table 5.2:* The enablers categorised into sub-themes and major themes.

<b>Enablers/sub-themes</b>	<b>Major themes/categories</b>
<b>Personal attitudes/capabilities</b>	Personal attributes
<b>Family/cultural Support</b>	Family and culture as inspiration
<b>Leadership skills</b>	Personal attributes
<b>Qualification</b>	Academic training
<b>Spiritual inspiration</b>	Family and culture as inspiration
<b>Government/external support</b>	Academic training

### **Personal attributes**

The findings emphasised the participants' personal attributes as the key factor in them attaining leadership positions.

Personal characteristics such as passion, enthusiasm and determination, along with having a positive attitude, were highlighted in semi-structured interviews as significant factors in Pasifika educators moving out of their 'comfort zones' and taking on the challenge of leadership. Thornton (2005) describes teachers having leadership capabilities such as rising to the challenge and taking risks as significant qualities for leadership enactment. The transformation of educators' perspectives of leadership begins with the educators reflections of self and attitudes toward notions of leadership in early childhood education.

The transformational approach is significant for educators to develop their understanding of leadership which, in turn, positively influences their attitudes toward pursuing leadership rather than being reluctant and hesitant to take on leadership roles. Mezirow (1997) encourages transformative learning as a process of effecting change. The two dimensions involved in the transformation process are: Habits of Mind- the habitual ways of thinking and society's influence on education and culture; and Points of View which are subject to change by reflecting and identifying the need to adapt one's assumptions during times of change (Mezirow, 1997). Habits of Mind in this study refers to educators' habitual ways of thinking and practicing leadership that have been influenced by society's traditional and stereotypical perceptions of leadership. Points of View in the context of leadership require educators to review their interpretations of and attitudes towards leadership. This may enable Pasifika educators to adopt contemporary views on leadership that focus on relational, collective and shared approaches to leadership (Cooper 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013).

## **Family and culture as inspiration**

The data acknowledge the special place that family and cultural influences have in enabling the participants to venture into their leadership journeys. The findings reveal that the participants were inspired by their families to take on the challenges of their journeys in leadership, and believed that by taking risks and moving out of their comfort zones, they would prove their accomplishments to their children and families. The participants' self-motivation stemmed from their desire to do the best for their children and to provide for their families. Cultural influences such as the values and belief systems of Pasifika culture were also emphasised as being influential in the participants' leadership journeys. Some participants were born and raised in environments that practised their respective cultural leadership structures, and this provided both role models of leaders and support for their leadership capabilities. The experiences of the participants in this study are similar to the findings of a study undertaken by Airini (2010) regarding Pasifika leaders' perspectives on strategy implementation for Pasifika advancement in education. Airini (2010) reported that the upbringing of the participants in learning environments grounded in community and family developed their skills and competencies in leadership and dealing with people.

The theme of spiritual foundations was also emphasised by the findings in this study. The majority of the participants in this study aligned their personal spiritual beliefs with that of the Christian faith. Two of the participants were leaders of centres that fell under the umbrella of the community churches. The significance of leaders understanding their personal values and beliefs has been emphasised to enable leaders to then pass on good

values to their teams (Robertson, 2012). Spiritual foundations have also been linked to the way individuals relate to each other within their workplace (Robertson, 2012).

The findings confirm that the participants strongly believed in their spiritual values and beliefs as their strength and source of motivation and support to overcome the challenges they faced in their leadership journeys.

### **Academic training**

Seven of the nine participants confirmed that their leadership journeys started because they had a qualification in early childhood education. It was interesting to note that the data revealed the majority of the participants as being obliged to step into the leadership positions because they were the only ones who were qualified at the time of their appointments in their centres. Despite being overwhelmed with no formal training or support in leadership, the participants were committed to developing their abilities and skills in leadership. Their dedication and perseverance was evident in their discussions.

The need to fulfil development or personal growth is viewed as a personal act by humanist theories (Merriam et al., 2007). Humanism promotes the freedom and responsibility to become and achieve what one is capable of achieving and becoming. Maslow (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) considers the need for self-actualisation and reaching ones full potential as the optimal need of a person. Hence, the need of an adult learner to learn comes from within the learner and motivation to learn is intrinsic (Merriam et al., 2007). The data in this study reveals the inspiration the participants received from their children and families in order to venture into their leadership positions. Further, it is clear that the participants' academic qualifications enabled them to be promoted into leadership positions in early childhood education. It is also evident from the data that venturing into

leadership roles and the commitment from the participants can be equally attributed to their intrinsic motivation to learn and persevere in their individual leadership journeys.

### **Implications for professional development**

The participants identified several implications for professional development that they espoused to be significant in supporting Pasifika educators in leadership, based on their leadership journeys. The findings revealed the participants' emphasis on professional development specific to leadership as being most important. The participants discussed components such as effective communication skill, team development, and conflict resolution as the areas they needed support in to nurture their leadership capabilities. The participants also highlighted the need to develop and sharpen their leadership capabilities and skills in the areas of team development and effective communication.

Further, the need for professional development was identified in developing advanced English skills and effective technological skills as mentioned by the participants. The participants also indicated the implications for government support in areas of professional development aimed specifically at Pasifika people. Professional development delivered in Pasifika language mediums was also suggested.

The findings imply that the Ministry of Education needs to develop leadership development programmes, equivalent to that which exists in the schooling sector, for the early childhood sector. Professional development specific to leadership is scarce and is yet to be acknowledged as priority. Further participation in these workshops is limited, as a result of accessibility, which remains restricted. Universities have restructured their programmes to include postgraduate programmes in early childhood over recent years (Thornton et al., 2009). However, participation in these programmes has been limited due to affordability and financial commitments of educators and the lack of financial resources from government for postgraduate studies. Further maintaining a balance

between work, home and community involvement limits many Pasifika educators from committing to further studies.

Unlike educators in the compulsory school sector who are able to access paid study leave and sabbaticals to complete their postgraduate qualifications, no such support is available to educators in the early childhood sector.

Based on the challenges the participants have endured on their individual leadership journeys, they are able to identify areas where effective support is needed that would be beneficial to them. Adults have specific situations in respect of their work, and are therefore able to identify areas specific to their interests, and needs for learning (Knowles et al., 2005). The theory of adult learning, andragogy, affirms that adults learn best when life situations create a need to learn and knowledge is presented in real-life contexts (Knowles, et. al., 2005). Therefore, professional development in leadership aimed at strengthening the capabilities of Pasifika educators as leaders, is essential if Pasifika educators are to be persuaded to take up leadership roles within the early childhood sector. Many educators in early childhood are reluctant to explore leadership due to the lack of understanding of notions of leadership within the sector (Cooper, 2014; Rodd, 2006; Thornton, 2009; Waniganayake, 2014). Adult learners learn new knowledge and develop skills most effectively when they can relate to the context of real life situations (Knowles et al., 2005).

The analysis of the data reveals the need for professional mentoring and coaching to develop leadership in the early childhood sector. Four of the nine participants currently in supervisory roles stressed the need for support such as mentoring and coaching. Mentoring and coaching are recognised as effective strategies for the development of



leadership skills and practice in early childhood education (Murphy & Thornton, 2015; Waniganayake, 2014).

Mentoring is defined as a relationship between a mentor and mentee for the purpose of providing support, motivation, guidance and encouragement for the mentee to reach their full potential (Murphy & Thornton, 2015). Coaching refers to the process of facilitating people to reflect and empower themselves to promote transformation which brings about positive change (Murphy & Thornton, 2015). Both concepts of mentoring and coaching are asserted as complimentary, relevant and inter-related in leadership development and learning (Solansky, 2010). Mentoring and coaching are strategies implemented to support effective leadership and, when used efficiently, can promote leadership among teams as well as individual leaders (Murphy & Thornton, 2015; Solansky, 2010). Ongoing mentoring develops the mentee's sense of security and self-efficacy in their leadership roles for both new and experienced leaders in early childhood education (Murphy & Thornton, 2015; Solansky, 2010; Waniganayake et al., 2012).

Similar to the findings of this study, Thornton (2005) carried out a study that explored the notions of leadership in the *Centre of Innovation Programme* that also highlighted the lack of support in leadership preparation and professional development specific to leadership. The quality of care and education in the early childhood sector has been directly linked to effective leadership (Chu, 2012; Cooper, 2014; Rodd, 2006; Thornton, 2005). As such, effective professional development specific to leadership is integral in supporting Pasifika educators in developing their understanding and skills in leadership roles (Chu, 2012; Waniganayake, 2014). Ongoing professional development and professional mentoring and coaching is priority if Pasifika educators are to be encouraged in the uptake of leadership roles in early childhood education.

## **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the major themes that emerged from the data in relation to literature presented in chapter two. The discussion has focused on the following themes:

- Perceptions of leadership in early childhood education held by Pasifika educators;
- Cultural perceptions of leadership held by Pasifika educators;
- Career aspirations held by Pasifika educators;
- Challenges and enablers experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions; and
- Implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership.

In the final chapter, chapter six I will summarise the key conclusions in response to the research questions. An analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study will be discussed and recommendations for leadership development and future research within the early childhood sector will be made.

## **CHAPTER SIX: Conclusions and recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This final chapter presents a brief summary of the key conclusions followed by an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study. The implications for future leadership development are proposed and the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research within the early childhood sector. The conclusions are presented in ensuing sections, which are related to the four research questions that have guided this study.

### **Conclusions**

Research question one: What are Pasifika educators' perceptions of leadership in early childhood education?

#### ***Conclusion one***

#### **Perceptions of leadership in early childhood education held by Pasifika educators:**

The study concludes that the views of leadership most commonly held by Pasifika educators were strongly related to the skills and practice implemented by a leader as being more important than the title or position. Collaboration, effective communication skills and teamwork were emphasised by the participants as being significant in strong leadership to lead and drive the teaching team. Rodd (2006) and Scrivens (2002) confirm that perceptions of leadership within the early childhood context are closely in alignment with notions of support, motivation, teamwork and building effective relationships between staff and the leader. The similarities between distributed forms of leadership and

the participants' views on teamwork and collaboration was discussed in the preceding chapter.

Distributed leadership reconceptualises the notion of leadership from being associated with an individual, to a collaborative approach to leadership that is based on the collective efforts of the team (Scrivens, 2006; Spillane, 2007). The findings of this study align with distributed forms of leadership, which place emphasis on practice rather than leadership roles and titles. This study has highlighted that the leadership styles of women as being conducive to empowerment, relational and promoting collaborative decision making toward shared goals in early childhood education, which is also supported by several authors (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009).

### ***Conclusion two***

#### **Cultural perceptions of leadership held by Pasifika educators:**

This research concludes that the views of leadership held by the participants from a cultural perspective contrasted with their views of leadership from the perspective of women working in an early childhood education setting. Titles and structures of leadership were evident in some Pasifika communities' cultural contexts. Traditional male hierarchical structures were accepted; however, females in leadership roles within church and community structures are more visible in recent years. Further, it was concluded that the challenge that most Pasifika women face has been described as "walking between two worlds" (Fitzgerald, 2006; 2010). Firstly, as Indigenous women working in stereotypically male dominated leadership structures; and secondly, as Indigenous Pasifika women working and living in a Western society whilst trying to preserve their cultural values, beliefs and identity (Fitzgerald, 2006; 2010).

It was also concluded that spirituality was a significant element of Pasifika life and education. As such, the church was identified as being influential on leadership practices in Pasifika cultures.

The notion of servant leadership emerged from the data as being most in alignment to Pasifika cultural ways of leading. Several authors such as Cooper (2014), Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003), Rodd, (2006) and Thornton et al., (2009) advocate for a leadership model that acknowledges the leadership strengths of women. This study contends that the concept of servant leadership is one such model that acknowledges the leadership strengths of women.

Research question two: What are the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in early childhood education?

### ***Conclusion three***

#### **Career aspirations held by Pasifika educators**

It is concluded that Pasifika educators do aspire to pursue leadership positions and those currently in leadership roles have emphasised their intentions to further upskill and continue with post-graduate studies in the future. Given the challenges that Pasifika women face by walking in two worlds, as Indigenous women and also as Indigenous women working in the Western world, Pasifika women are devoted to preserving and maintaining their cultural values, beliefs and identities. Further, Pasifika educators are enthusiastic and committed to supporting the cultural needs of Pasifika children so that they can reach their full potential and attain education success.

Research question three: What are the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education?

### ***Conclusion four***

## **Challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions**

This study has documented several challenges faced by Pasifika educators in leadership in early childhood education.

Society's perceptions, the lack of government recognition relating to leadership policies and strategies, low budgets allocated to the sector, and the low pay structures, remain as contributing factors to the low status of leadership in the early childhood sector. Several issues relating to leadership skills and practices are also concluded from the findings. The scarcity of formal leadership training, a lack of professional support and mentoring for leadership development, diverse and unclear leadership structures, and the lack of understanding of theories of leadership within the early childhood sector, were emphasised as challenges and deterrents for Pasifika leaders and educators. Some Pasifika cultural practices were also discussed as being challenging by the participants in this study. Such challenges included spiritual values and beliefs that conflicted with professional roles and responsibilities, the need for advanced English language skills, and cultural expectations of respect for the elderly, were cited as challenging in terms of leadership structures that fell within church leadership structures and for teams where the younger generation lead-older generations.

Family responsibilities and service in the life of the church were other commitments that took priority over career advancement for some Pasifika women. Diversity and gender also created barriers for leadership in early childhood education. Traditional approaches to leadership focus on the influence of one individual who has largely been characterised as mono-cultural and masculine; this continues to discourage females and Indigenous practitioners from exploring or associating themselves with the notion of leadership (Blackmore, 2006). The generic approaches to leadership that may be applied to male leaders appear to be at odds with the early childhood sector in which females dominate

(Cooper, 2014; Rodd, 2006). Women are often relational and several authors canvas the need to develop a leadership model that emphasises the strengths of women and that aligns with early childhood pedagogical approaches (Cooper, 2014; Thornton et al., 2009; Thornton, 2005). As Scrivens (2003) argued, this study concluded women prefer shared leadership models that embraces-‘power for’ rather than ‘power over’ people.

Tensions faced by Indigenous leaders in diverse communities in New Zealand were also highlighted (Kavaliku, 2007). Indigenous women face prejudice and tensions related to gender and ethnicity: firstly, as females in a patriarchal structure; and, secondly, as indigenous women in a minority group living in different worlds (Fitzgerald, 2006).

This study concludes that the many issues that have impacted on early childhood education in the past continue to stifle leadership development in the sector even today.

### ***Conclusion five***

#### **Enablers in Pasifika educators attaining leadership positions**

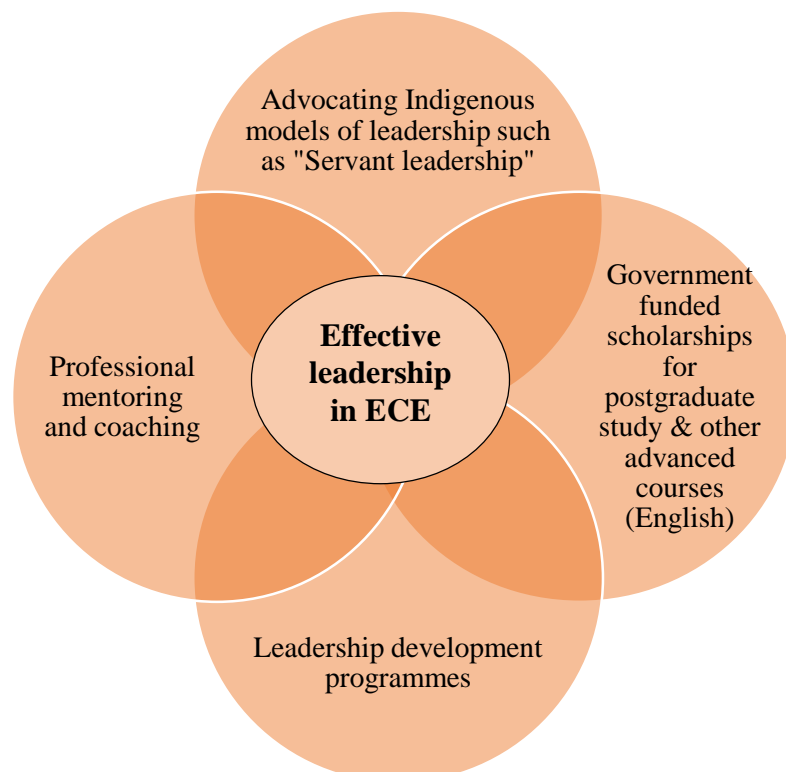
This study concludes that there are several enablers that contributed to Pasifika educators attaining leadership positions. Personal attributes such as positive attitudes, passion and determination were found to be the key enablers in educators attaining leadership positions. The study confirmed that the majority of the participants attributed their leadership positions to having a qualification at the time of their appointment. It was also interesting that some enablers came from the same source as challenges and were cited as being inspirational in their leadership journeys. For example, family and culture were cited as challenges but also as inspiration to pursue leadership positions. The findings confirm that spiritual values and beliefs were a significant source of strength, motivation and support.

Question four: What are the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education?

### *Conclusion six*

#### **Implications for professional development**

This study concludes that the following professional development specific to leadership is necessary to enhance leadership development and to support Pasifika educators in the uptake of leadership roles in early childhood education. The implications for professional development emphasised in this study have been integrated to develop a framework that acknowledges Indigenous ways of leading and can also be applied to early childhood to promote effective leadership within the sector. The following figure illustrates a conceptual framework.





*Figure 6.1: A framework for effective leadership in early childhood education*

- Leadership development programmes: The participants emphasised professional development specifically to develop their leadership skills in areas such as effective communication, team development and conflict resolution.
- Professional support for Pasifika educators to develop advanced skills in English and digital technology as indicated by the participants.
- Government funded scholarships and sabbaticals equivalent to what is accessible in the schooling sector to enable Pasifika educators to afford and participate in postgraduate studies.
- Professional mentoring and coaching to develop leadership capability in the early childhood sector. Ongoing mentoring and coaching have been acknowledged as effective for the development of leadership skills and practice by providing support, motivation, guidance and encouragement for the mentee to reach their full potential.
- Models for leadership that recognises Indigenous ways of leading, such as the servant leadership model, needs to be promoted within the early childhood sector. This will address the issue of uncertainty and the reluctance of Pasifika educators in participating in leadership. Further, the acknowledgement of Indigenous ways of leading will promote leadership among Pasifika educators in early childhood practitioners.

## **The way forward**

Distributed leadership has evoked much debate and theorising of late in early childhood education (Heikka et al., 2012). Several authors have explored the concept of distributed leadership in early childhood and have reported that similarities between distributed leadership and shared leadership has caused confusion by encouraging the use of these

terminologies interchangeably (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Scrivens, 2006; Heikka, et. al., 2012).

However, distributed leadership and shared leadership refer to different concepts and the implication that they are equal is cause for confusion in practice and among practitioners (Spillane, 2006). Therefore, Spillane (2006) advises that distributed leadership merely offers another framework in assisting study on leadership.

In a recent study conducted by Torrance, (2013), her findings highlighted several commonly held assumptions of distributed leadership that are debatable. Although the study undertaken was in the schooling sector, these tensions can be associated within the early childhood context. Contrary to the assumption that every staff member wishes to and is able to lead, her study revealed that this was unrealistic (Torrance, 2013). Given the lack of formal leadership training and that some staff may not embrace leadership roles, it is unrealistic to assume that all staff can and want to be leaders (Waniganayake, 2014). Contrary to the view that distributed leadership may promote teacher leadership and the best interests of the team, positional power over the team by those in leadership positions may also dictate the delegation of tasks (Torrance, 2013; Waniganayake, 2014). Further tensions relating to ethnicity, gender and age were also cited as problematic in the enactment of distributed leadership (Torrance, 2013; Waniganayake, 2014).

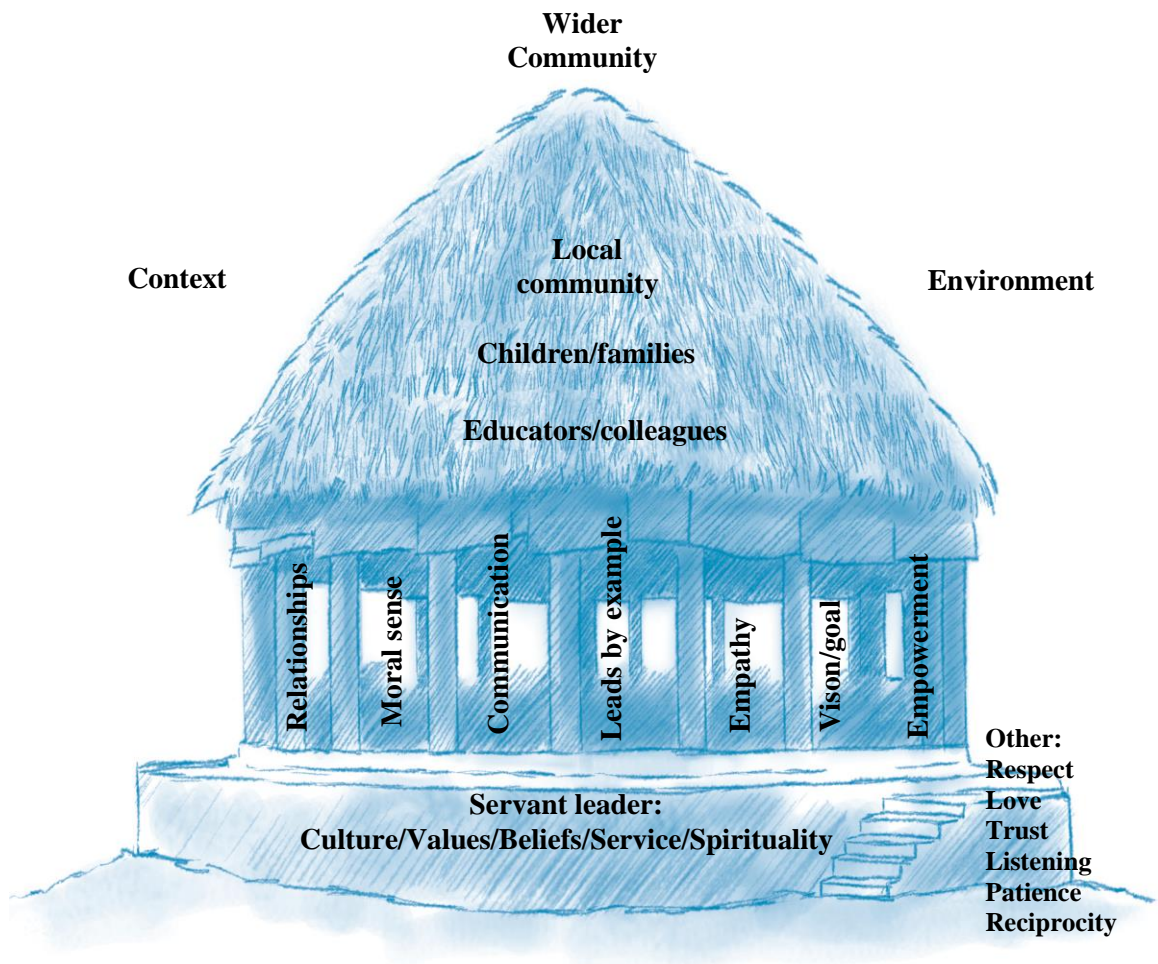
In comparison to servant leadership, distributed leadership can also include hierarchical and non-democratic ways of leading a team. On the other hand, servant leadership starts with an intrinsic desire to serve, progresses to an inspiration to lead and serve the community (Greenleaf, 1977). Robertson (2012) acknowledges that for some, the term ‘servant’ may have a negative inference due to the historical oppression of many. However, the contradiction of the word ‘servant’ and the association to leadership brings

about a new definition in the notion of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Robertson, 2012).

Servant leaders are people orientated and seek to empower others by sharing power and delegating tasks based on the abilities and strengths of their team as opposed to leadership models that focus on organizational goals only (Rodd, 2001). Servant leaders develop trust and respect for the capabilities of their team members and thereby empowers others to make decisions and utilize their strengths (Robertson, 2012). The moral nature and service or ‘Tuatua’ done by the leader is what motivates and influences the team to follow their leader (Greenleaf, 1977 and Sergiovanni, 1992).

The data provided by the participants from this study aligns with the values and beliefs of the Christian faith that has influenced their work in centres that fall under the umbrella of the Church. The Christian faith and their cultural experiences have supported their perspectives of servant leadership. Servant leadership offers direction for many Pasifika educators that aligns with their spiritual beliefs as Jesus Christ led his followers. This spiritual underpinning influences their leadership practice as to how people ought to be treated and the way leaders should behave toward their follower: “Servant leadership was not just following the example of Jesus Christ but rather an act of serving God and being an ambassador of Christ” (Robertson, 2012, p. 109). Servant leaders lead by example, are empathetic and recognise their responsibility to serve others first and therefore gain the trust of their followers (Sergiovanni, 1992). The following figure illustrates the servant leadership model.

## The Fonofale Servant Leadership Model



*Figure 6.2 Fonofale Servant Leadership model (Adapted from Pacific Island Health model)*

The model depicted in Figure 6.2 is a leadership model that has been developed from the findings of this research study. The Fonofale is a Pacific Island health model that was developed by Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann and was first published in 1995 (Agnew et al., 2004). This model has been chosen as it incorporated the findings of all the participants from various Pacific ethnic backgrounds in this study and promotes servant

leadership as an indigenous leadership model. The Fonofale model integrates Pacific Island concepts of culture, family, spirituality, values and beliefs (Agnew et al., 2004).

The Fonofale represents the Samoan house and the model depicts the floor, which is the foundation of the house; the posts; the roof and the connection with each other. This model has been adapted to illustrate servant leadership as an effective leadership model that recognises Pasifika Indigenous ways of leading in the early childhood context. Servant leadership is an authentic practice of leadership that values people, their development and building communities (Robertson, 2012). This model of servant leadership takes the traditional, hierarchical, top-down structures of leadership in the business and school sectors and “turns it upside down” (Robertson, 2012, p. 20).

*The servant leader* is positioned at the bottom of the Fonofale model and is symbolic of the firm foundation a strong leader provides for the followers and the organisation. The leader implements effective strategies that influence the followers by the enactment of service, which emanates from a spiritual connection and a natural desire to serve. Historically the foundation is linked to the spirituality of Pasifika people which is significant in Pacific cultures (Agnew et al., 2004; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014).

*The seven pillars or posts* represent the connection and interactions between the foundation and the roof (Agnew et al., 2004). In relation to servant leadership the posts represents the key characteristics of a servant leader. These key attributes such as relationships; moral sense; communication; leads by example; empathy; vision/goals and empowerment interrelate with each other and are significant in connecting and influencing the leader and the followers.

*The roof* of the Fonofale signifies the shelter for the family and in the context of early childhood; it represents the educators, families, children and the key stakeholders that are influenced by the servant leader.

The educators and families in the services are dynamic and constantly changing, therefore the servant leader will have to adapt the service enactment according to the needs of the educators and families in the service. The local community, educators, children and families are encapsulated in the roof at the top of the Fonofale and this is symbolic of the work of a leader that drives the team effectively thereby resulting in productive teams that ensure successful educational outcomes for children in early childhood education.

The Fonofale is enclosed in a circle of variables that directly or indirectly influence servant leadership such as context; environment and wider community. The context relates to the range of services in the early childhood sector such as kohanga reo; homebased; kindergartens; education and care services. The environment represents the environment educators work in and the uniqueness of Pacific ethnic groups. The wider community refers to the socioeconomic, governmental and political influences.

Several writers, such as Cooper (2014), Thornton (2009) and Rodd (2006), promote the need for collaborative ways of leading that align with the feminist approach to leadership in early childhood education. Effective teamwork and leadership that focuses on inspiring, building and empowering the team is emphasised in leadership in early childhood education (Thornton, 2009). The characteristics of servant leadership that is founded on an ethic of care where the team is valued and empowered and decision making is shared affirms that servant leadership offers a more collective approach to leadership. This study has also presented findings from the participants that further aligns with these characteristics. Therefore, it is my position that servant leadership is best suited to the

cultural values, beliefs and practices of Pasifika communities and Pasifika cultural ways of leading.

As such, this study advocates that servant leadership offers a valid cultural paradigm of leadership that may inform the future development of Indigenous ways of leading in the early childhood sector.

### **The strengths and limitations of this study**

Several strengths can be recognised in this research study. The methodology employed was appropriate to gather the information in Pasifika contexts. A qualitative approach was utilised in order to acknowledge the social and cultural context of the participants and this provided richness and meaning to the data collected. A significant strength was that of familiarity and trust between the participants and the researcher as this enabled the participants to share their views and experiences in both their work and cultural contexts ensuring the data collected was reliable. The findings have provided constructive and relevant suggestions for ongoing improvements and have identified areas for professional development specific to leadership. This study has provided an opportunity for the voices of Pasifika early childhood practitioners to share their experiences and perspectives of leadership within the early childhood sector which contributes to the developing body of literature on leadership in early childhood education in New Zealand.

Some limitations were experienced during this study; these were minimised and addressed and did not affect the results of this study. The recruitment of participants was challenging and took a bit more time than initially planned. Many educators and supervisors were reluctant to participate in the study. However, this was overcome by

being persistent and continuing to invite possible participants until the required number of participants were recruited.

As I have positioned myself, the primary researcher, as an outsider, I have also acquired a Pasifika cultural advisor who committed to supporting me through my research study. My cultural advisor has provided feedback and guidance on Pasifika cultural protocols, the questions that were used during the semi-structured interviews and the analysis of the data collected and the conclusions. Ofa Fe 'unga has been central to this research study incorporating love, generosity, and integrity as guiding principles for ethical behaviour in conducting research in Pasifika cultural contexts (Vaiote, 2006). I am confident that Pasifika cultural protocols such as confidentiality, respect, honesty, trust and fairness to all participants were adhered.

### **Recommendations for future research:**

- Valuable insight into the challenges Pasifika educators face in pursuing leadership positions in early childhood education was emphasised in this study. I espouse that other researchers will draw upon and extend on my findings in other areas of leadership to support and promote Pasifika educators in leadership roles in early childhood education.
- The findings of this study highlighted the lack of professional support for Pasifika leaders in early childhood education. Mentoring and coaching was discussed as a way forward in facilitating the development of effective leadership skills and building capability for Pasifika educators who aspire to take on leadership roles. It is therefore my suggestion that further research in a



new study be undertaken on the effectiveness of mentoring and coaching Pasifika educators in leadership positions.

- This research study has argued that there is a correlation between leadership in the cultural contexts of Pasifika leadership and the concepts of servant leadership in early childhood education. It is my contention therefore that further research is undertaken to highlight Pasifika cultural ways of leading that might aid in the possibility of developing leadership models suitable for the early childhood sector.

### **Concluding comments**

This study has offered an opportunity to Pasifika educators to share their voices and add their perspectives to the body of research on Pasifika leadership in early childhood education. This has empowered them not only by acknowledging their journeys and achievements, but also to inspire Pasifika educators to pursue leadership positions in early childhood education. Further, the process of undertaking this research study has greatly influenced my personal, professional learning and understanding of Pasifika cultures and the experiences and perspectives of Pasifika practitioners working within the early childhood sector.

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## *Appendix A*

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

01 April 2016

#### **Project Title**

Leadership in early childhood education: The journey of Pasifika educators.

#### **An Invitation**

My name is Emeavallie Moodley (Vanessa), I am a student enrolled in the Master of Education programme at AUT. I am of Indian ethnicity and I have been studying alongside many Pasifika colleagues and educators in the field since 2008. I would like to invite you to participate in the research study that I am undertaking as part of the Master Programme. This research will contribute to my completion of the Master of Education programme and will result in the compilation of a thesis. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time prior to the completion of data collection. I acknowledge that if you decide there are issues of potential conflict of interest, whether you choose to participate or not will not disadvantage you.

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of my study is to examine the perspectives of Pasifika educators about leadership in early childhood education in order to identify the factors that lead to the uptake of leadership roles among these educators, and the challenges they may face along the way. My research aims:

1. To identify and critically examine Pasifika educators' perceptions and experiences of leadership in early childhood education.
2. To enquire about the career aspirations held by Pasifika educators in the early childhood sector.
3. To identify and examine the enablers and challenges experienced by Pasifika educators in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education.
4. To identify and critically examine the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education.
5. To add to the emerging body of literature on educational leadership in our multi-cultural society in the early childhood sector.

### **How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You have been selected as a potential participant as you have responded by contacting me after hearing me introduce my research study at your staff meeting. You have also been invited, as you are an experienced educator/supervisor from a Pasifika background. My research specifically aims to enquire into the aspirations and successes of Pasifika educators in pursuing leadership roles in the early childhood sector.

### **What will happen in this research?**

I plan to conduct semi-structured interviews with Pasifika educators and supervisors. We will engage in open-ended conversations to enable you to provide insight into your perspectives and experiences of leadership within the Pasifika cultural context. Upon receiving this information sheet and informing me of your intent to participate in my research study, I will provide you with a consent form which you will need to sign to confirm your participation. I will collect your signed consent form prior to commencement of the interview, which will be held at your workplace or a venue off-site depending on your preference. Prior to the interviews taking place, you will be supplied with the interview questions upon request, to ensure that you are comfortable and familiar with the questions that will guide the discussions. I will provide a safe and comfortable environment, such as a meeting room at AUT South campus, for the interviews to be held, if this is your preference. The semi-structured interviews will be recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed. Final approval of the transcripts will be sought from you to ensure that your interview has been transcribed accurately. The information shared by you will only be used for the purpose of my research thesis, academic publications and presentations.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

It is unlikely that you will feel any discomfort but you are free not to answer any questions or to stop the interview. There will be no financial burden placed on you from the research. Your consent will be voluntary and no information will be shared or will your identity be divulged to any person. Being a non-Pasifika researcher may also cause discomfort to you and this may result in you not wanting to proceed further, which will also be respected. You will be given the option to bring a support person to the interview, should you choose to. However, I reassure that ultimately my research findings are aimed at positive outcomes for Pasifika educators, children and communities.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

Every measure will be taken to ensure that you will be safe by providing a safe environment to meet. The interview questions will be reviewed by my cultural advisor to ensure they are culturally sensitive. Pasifika communities are close knit and the emotional risk of having your name exposed to your family or members of the community will be managed by the use of pseudonyms in the final thesis to protect your identity.

**What are the benefits?**

My research endeavours to benefit Pasifika ethnic groups in the early childhood sector. The issue of the under-representation of Pasifika women in leadership roles can be addressed by highlighting the barriers faced by Pasifika educators in aspiring toward leadership roles, thereby providing valuable insight on how best Pasifika educators can be supported in leadership roles. Apart from adding to the emerging body of literature on ethnic groups and leadership, my research will also assist in building Pasifika leadership, which is significant in promoting positive learning outcomes, language and culture for Pasifika children and families in early childhood education in New Zealand.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Each participant will be identified using a pseudonym to ensure your privacy and the information shared will be strictly confidential and stored in a safe and secure location known to me, the Primary Researcher. You also have the option to attend interviews at a location away from your workplace and sight of other colleagues.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

One to two hours in total for the interview and to provide feedback on transcripts.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

1-2 weeks from date of receiving information sheet.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

Should you decide to participate in my research, kindly contact me using the details provided below. You will then be required to complete a Consent Form, which I will provide to you. If you decide not to participate in my research, you will not be required to do anything further and I would like to thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes. Participants will be given a choice of receiving and providing feedback on research findings electronically via email or provided with hard copies. There will also be opportunities to meet face to face to discuss and share feedback with the Primary Researcher.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Alison Smith, [alsmith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alsmith@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 7363.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?****Researcher Contact Details:**

Emeavallie Moodley (Vanessa), [vanessa.moodley@hotmail.com](mailto:vanessa.moodley@hotmail.com), 02102502914.

## Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Alison Smith, [alsmith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:alsmith@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 7363.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 16  
December 2015, AUTEK Reference number 15/438.

**AUT**

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKĪ MAKĀU RAU

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

*Project title: Leadership in early childhood education: The  
journey of Pasifika educators.*

*Project Supervisor: Alison Smith*

*Researcher: Emeavallie Moodley (Vanessa)*

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 01 April 2016.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's  
signature:.....

Participant's  
name:.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on  
16 December 2015, AUTECH Reference number 15/438.*

**AUT**

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O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions

*Project title: Leadership in early childhood education: The  
journey of Pasifika educators.*

*Project Supervisor: Alison Smith*

*Researcher: Emeavallie Moodley (Vanessa)*

### Research Questions:

1. What is your perception of leadership as a Pasifika educator/supervisor in early childhood education?
2. What are your experiences as a Pasifika educator/supervisor of leadership in early childhood education?
3. What are your aspirations in early childhood education as an educator/supervisor?
4. What are the enablers and challenges you have experienced as a Pasifika educator/supervisor in gaining leadership positions in early childhood education?
5. What are the implications for professional development for Pasifika educators in relation to leadership in early childhood education?

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 16  
December 2015, AUTECH Reference number 15/438.*