REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review aimed to locate the national and international research and documentary evidence relating to leadership in the early years sector. A wide-ranging search was undertaken, including electronic databases and search engines such as ERIC, Google Scholar, a range of websites including research associations and government sites, as well as a trawl of printed and electronic journals on leadership and early years. The choice of material to include was based on clear management, leadership and early years criteria. As we found the literature to be limited, we approached particular authors known to have published in this area to enquire after further sources – this has allowed us to tap into a number of theses and unpublished papers: where we have done so we have relied on the research records of the authors as validation of the sources: their research methodology and a clear evidence base for any claims made was important. While articles in peer-reviewed journals form a major part of reviewed materials, there was much of interest to be found in conference papers, books, professional journals and research reports, and we have therefore included materials from these sources as well. We present an overview of findings, followed by key points to be drawn out of the review. We finish with a section which provides a summary of each of our sources.

Overview

‘Good leadership is critical to a successful school. Success comes from aiming high with the clear vision, ethos and communication that good leadership brings. We will act to support high quality school leadership and inspired, ambitious school communities.’

(Ambitious, Excellent Schools – Our Agenda for Action, Scottish Executive, 2004, p5)

The Scottish Executive states that it ‘sees the role of leadership in schools and the wider educational community growing in importance’ (Scottish Executive, 2005, p2). The importance the Executive attaches to leadership and development of leadership capacity is reflected in the leadership agenda set out in Ambitious, Excellent Schools (Scottish Executive, 2004a; Scottish Executive, 2005). These documents make the link between effective leadership, leadership development and pupils’ school success. The stated intention is that by assisting schools in their leadership work, not adding to their workload (Scottish Executive, 2005), schools will be more able to develop pupils’ ‘capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible
citizens and effective contributors to society’ (A Curriculum for Excellence, Scottish Executive, 2004).

This literature review reveals that before our new Scottish initiative to address the curriculum 3–18, leadership in the early years sector has been virtually ignored at governmental level – this is an international rather than a purely Scottish phenomenon, and is reflected most strongly in the growing literature on leadership in early childhood emerging from New Zealand (McLeod, 2003; Meade, 2003; Scrivens, 2003, 2004; Thornton, 2005). It should be acknowledged that the New Zealand context for early childhood services is different from our own. In Scotland since 2000 early childhood education has become a duty of provision on local authorities, and the connection with the statutory school sector is a long established one, whereas in New Zealand state provision of early childhood services is relatively new and not yet universal. Where experience converges is in the complex and different nature of leadership in early childhood by comparison with the statutory school sector, and the importance of early childhood services being managed in informed collaborative, co-operative and community-oriented ways.

Leadership in the early years assumes great importance in this context and earlier assumptions that a focus on early years leadership was unnecessary because of the existing team approaches which mark early childhood services can be seen through evidence reported in this review to be no longer tenable. Indeed, the academic sector in Scotland continues to respond to this need through provision of undergraduate and postgraduate early childhood (0–8) degrees (eg University of Strathclyde, BA in Childhood Practice, BA in Education and Social Services, and Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and MSc in Early Childhood Studies). Such courses promote reflection, enquiry and self-evaluation, all qualities of effective leadership (Harris and Lambert, 2003), and provide important opportunities for leadership development. In England these have become more specific through the advent of the Early Excellence Centres, and opportunities such as the MA in Leadership and Management in Early Childhood (Whalley, 2003) and the National College for School Leadership (2005) courses. A few main texts also support practitioners, particularly Jillian Rodd’s book, now in its third edition (2005), and Sadek and Sadek (2004), whose book is specifically written for Vocational Qualifications’ Level 3 (practitioner) and 4 (lead practitioner) students and those working in management within a childcare setting.

The relationship between effective leadership and pupils’ achievement is strongly evidenced through school inspection. Effective leadership has a perceptible impact on pupils’ learning (HMIE, 2000). While leadership has been found to be central to successful schools, equally there is scope for improving the quality of that leadership (HMIE, 2000): managers often focused overly on the day-to-day without being strategic in the longer term. The complementary nature
of leadership and management is often assumed; however, in the educational literature a distinction is clearly drawn: leadership is perceived to include vision, based on shared values. Leaders are better placed to provide both motivation and direction to colleagues (HMIE, 2000).

Key aims of SEED’s broad leadership programme include increased collaboration among the key groups who contribute to the development of leadership capacity in Scottish education and developing excellence and capacity building across the educational system. Leadership development priorities should be identified, innovation generated, expertise and new approaches developed in order to contribute to a general strengthening of leadership capacity (Scottish Executive, 2005).

This link between leadership and effective provision is also true for early childhood settings, where research indicates that leaders play an important part in the provision of quality services. Effective leadership has been found to be a key element of effective early childhood provision (Muijs et al, 2004; Harris et al, 2002; Rodd, 2005). Other factors that have contributed to the focus on leadership include pressure for increasing professionalisation and accountability from within and outside the profession (Rodd, 2005).

Definitions of Leadership in the Early Years

Traditionally leadership in the early years has been associated with individual skills characteristics and personal qualities in the leader (Nivala and Hujala, 2002). A more recent view of leadership is that it is not an isolated activity invested in a single person, but rather that a variety of people contribute to effective leadership, and that leadership is therefore distributed. If this is the case, then preparation for leadership has to go beyond individual management training since leadership capacities will need to be more widely developed in the team: how then can leadership qualities be developed? Currently in England the National College for School Leadership is actively promoting development opportunities. As part of its Community Leadership Strategy it has introduced the first national programme to address the needs of leaders within multi-agency early years settings. The new qualification is called the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (National College for School Leadership, 2005): it recognises that leadership in the early years has a distinctive focus, particularly as integrated services develop and mixed staffing models continue to be a feature of early childhood work.
A view that leadership is about personal attributes and therefore about a single person playing a leadership role into which is built notions of competition and power (Thornton, 2005) does not sit easily with the collaborative approaches upon which early childhood practice is predicated. Early years prior-to-school services are often non-hierarchical and most employees are women (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2005). This fairly flat structure means that distributive leadership models tend to be preferred in early childhood settings, though the Pen Green website (Pen Green, 2005) asserts that if we are to transform children’s life chances this can only be done through ‘visionary leadership’.

The early childhood sector is growing and a vast majority of our families now take advantage of pre-school education (Scottish Executive, 2004a). Childcare and early education settings are diverse, including nursery classes, primary schools, private and voluntary settings (Dunlop, 2003; Muijs et al, 2004; Solly, 2003). These different settings often have contrasting philosophies, structures and a range of quality assurance models: Muijs et al (2004) report that they are inspected by different bodies. In Scotland there has been an integration of Care Commission and HMIE inspection through the joint inspection process.

A study conducted by Solly (2003) found that there was a difference in who was seen as a leader in various types of early childhood settings. In nursery classes, primary schools, private and voluntary settings, respondents saw the official leader (owner, headteacher) as the only leader, but responses from nursery schools and excellence centres gave broader interpretations. Early years educators interpret their leadership differently according to the setting in which they are based. For example, Osgood reports that private-sector providers were more likely to apply business principles to the management of their settings, while those managing voluntary-sector settings were much less comfortable with an entrepreneurial agenda (Osgood, 2004). Private nursery managers tend to have a less collaborative and community-centred approach to leadership because of fears of competition (Osgood, 2004) endangering making profits.

In a study of nursery teachers’ concepts of leadership conducted in the West of Scotland, nursery teachers working predominantly in nursery schools and nursery classes see themselves with a strong leadership obligation that is not always recognised by their managers: they draw a distinction between leadership and management (Dunlop, 2002; Dunlop, 2005). These teachers recognise distinctive areas of work on which they lead including teaching, planning, observing children, undertaking assessments, evaluation, identification of team development needs, record keeping, working with and reporting to parents, organising time, space and resources, and organisation of people. They also identify a responsibility to report to the head of establishment to keep that person informed of current work in the nursery class: this last activity is confined to
teachers in nursery classes, as opposed to a nursery teacher in a free-standing nursery where the sole focus of effort is on early years provision. Nursery teachers reported a role ambiguity, as they were expected to perform a day-to-day role as both team members and team leaders whilst not being accorded a specific leadership or management role.

The early years workforce comprises a wide range of personnel, each with different experience, training and qualifications. Solly (2003) highlights the number of young and inexperienced staff working in the sector and emphasises that the specific leadership context is multi-professional, primarily female, and socially and culturally varied. In June 2004 a news release on the Review of the Early Years Workforce in Scotland showed that the number employed in the early years nursery sector had risen to over 30,000 people in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2004). Focusing on five key areas, this review aimed to:

- examine and define the role and responsibilities of staff in all areas of the early years and childcare workforce
- improve workforce planning, to ensure that there are adequate staff numbers in each area
- simplify and modernise the early years and childcare qualifications system
- provide greater opportunities for staff in one area of the workforce to move to another
- consider the potential implications of this work for pay and conditions.

Role definition is reported in the literature to be problematic in terms of leadership in the early years. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project found a strong relationship between the ‘qualifications of the centre manager and quality of service provision in early childhood settings’ (Muijs et al, 2004, p7). The diversity of this workforce makes a particularly complex arena for leadership (Osgood, 2004; Rodd, 2005). Additionally there is a serious lack of leadership training for early childhood managers: it is likely that many are significantly under-prepared for this role. Research based on and drawing from the work of early childhood practitioners suggests that too often positions of leadership in early childhood settings tend to be held by ‘accidental leaders’ with minimal training to carry out their responsibilities (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2005). Ebbeck and Waniganayake call for clear definitions of roles.
and lines of responsibility, and in turn explore ways in which obstacles to effective leadership and management can be identified and overcome.

Characteristics traditionally associated with effective early childhood leaders include kindness and warmth. The study conducted by Solly (2003) showed that parents who entrust their young children to staff must see them as warm and gentle, thereby adding to the perception that the early years phase is the phase before ‘real education’. Solly found that the early years phase appeared to educators and others outside as lacking academic rigour, based on the perception that society perceives the education of older children to be more difficult and more academically demanding. The huge range of qualifications, multi-professional career structure and conditions of service, together with the stigma of early years only being about ‘play’, may have created a divide between early years and later school education. In Scotland, where primary teachers have traditionally been trained to work with children aged 3–12 years, the current volume of teachers in initial teacher education (ITE) has led to difficulties in placing ITE students in pre-school settings staffed by qualified teachers: a situation exacerbated by government initiatives that have opened the door to a notion of teacher ‘presence’ that may not be full-time.

**Leadership and Gender in the Early Years**

Leadership in early years services very often (though not exclusively) resides in female heads of centre. The gender of leadership may be a way in which leadership in early childhood is set apart from other sectors of education. According to Rodd (2005), women have problems identifying the concept and need for leadership: they may lack understanding of what leadership may mean in an early childhood service. In this sector the concept of leadership can involve sets of reciprocal relationships (Dunlop, 2005) and these have more in common with the early childhood pedagogical approaches than with traditional business concepts of leadership. There is a view that suggests that leadership styles differ between male and female leaders: recent studies do not provide the evidence to support this (Muijs, 2004).
However, Solly (2003) found that the vast majority of early childhood leaders in her study thought there was a difference in leadership styles between their sector and others. A social constructivist model of learning is often advocated in early years, and Solly finds that early childhood leaders’ own positive learning dispositions enable others. Participants saw their strengths as advocacy, inspiration, passion and enthusiasm along with being a lifelong learner and having a team ethos (Solly, 2003).

In Osgood’s study the sample was almost exclusively female. They voiced concerns based on perceptions that government’s push towards commercial models of childcare management favoured masculinised entrepreneurialism over an ethic of care. The emphasis on caring amongst managers in early childhood settings was paramount. However, Osgood (2004) found that managers in early childhood settings believe that their commitment to care and to the local community and parents could embrace more commercial approaches provided these were feminised and took account of their emotional investment and commitment to work. They wish to enhance their professionalism, whilst maintaining an ethic of care and resisting a form of entrepreneurship that in their view might be detrimental to provision (Osgood, 2004) and overly masculinised. Past models and traditional leadership theories may not have been appropriate to the early childhood field in that they reflected a hierarchical, top-down, male-oriented orientation (Kagan and Bowman, 1997) mostly adopted from those used in the business world.

The majority of practitioners in Osgood’s studies thought that businesslike approaches to management were inappropriate in childcare. The importance of collaboration and mutual support was stressed and this is more in concert with new theories on leadership: in the voluntary sector this extended to managers of voluntary sector provision working within their own settings and with other provision to develop collaborative practices (Osgood, 2004). In these studies women saw the importance of ‘emotional’ management skills – essential in the nurturing environments which are children’s right. Many women in early childhood education thus feel that most ‘masculinised’ leadership models are inappropriate to early childhood education as they do not recognise and respect the collaborative aspect crucial to this phase (Scrivens in
Leadership and Professionalism

Dalli (2005) in reflecting on professionalism in the early years highlights the importance of relationships and responsiveness in effective early childhood practice. She asserts that the discourse of early childhood professionals has changed from childcare workers to educators and that this is part of constructing a scholarly base for the early childhood profession. She voices ‘love’ as a legitimate part of early childhood practice. In arguing for a new definition of professionalism to fit early childhood work, by extension the implication is for new concepts of leadership as well. She conducted a survey of ethics and professionalism (2003) which aimed to establish a grounds-up definition of professionalism, and found three key themes in childcare teachers’ statements about what matters in professionalism in the early childhood field in New Zealand: these were pedagogy, professional knowledge and skills, and collaborative relationships including management. In this last theme teachers felt it was important to be able to demonstrate leadership by exhibiting management knowledge and skills, being able to articulate concerns in a confident manner, demonstrating a knowledge of current educational research, and being aware of the educational political environment.

Additionally, Scrivens, also working in New Zealand, highlights that women prefer a model of leadership which, citing Hall (1996), embraces ‘power for’ rather than ‘power over’ someone. Nevertheless, women in leadership roles appear both to be able to share leadership and to take the lead when required (Scrivens, 2002).

Effective Educational Leadership in Early Years – models and key aspects

Beyond early childhood there is a growing consensus about the methods and approaches which contribute to effective educational leadership development (Scottish Executive, 2005). There is a wide range of theories on leadership (Nivala in Nivala and Hujala, ed, 2002). Many of the authors writing in Nivala and Hujala argue that leadership, change, collaboration and improvement will happen only if there is interaction between leaders and followers. Leadership
is realised in relationships between the leader and the followers and is not just a personal quality but happens in a social context. Leaders set the standards and the expectations for others to follow. The more recent statements around educational leadership sit well with perceptions held within early childhood that effective early childhood leaders need characteristics and skills which are related to teamwork, motivation, support, role definition and goal setting (Rodd, 2005). Building relationships, shared decision-making and empowerment of others are seen as important characteristics of good leadership in early years (Scrivens in Nivala and Hujala, 2002).

According to Bloom (2000) early childhood leaders need to be competent in three key areas:

- knowledge, including group dynamics, organisational theory, child development, and teaching strategies
- skills, including technical, human and conceptual skills (eg budgeting)
- attitudes, including moral purpose,

and should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- being goal-oriented, using planning, assertiveness, vision, and confidence (this was a change from earlier research, where these factors had not been identified)
- having good working relationships with staff, who participate in leadership
- being responsive to parents’ needs and able to communicate with them.

Bloom’s three areas and key characteristics overlap significantly with the ways in which Dalli highlights that leadership in early childhood can be demonstrated. Although the importance of leadership across most educational levels is widely recognised and well researched, the research on leadership in early childhood settings is still limited. Furthermore,Muijs et al find that most of the leadership research in this area is more narrowly informed by theorising about early childhood contexts and qualities and avoiding the broader field of research studies (Muijs et al, 2004).
A clear definition of an early education leader does not exist although leadership conventionally has been equated with management. A need for a broader definition has arisen as responsibilities of early leaders have expanded. Professionals in the early years have viewed themselves first and foremost as educators and child developers. They have held a narrow view of their role, mainly as practitioners, and do not fully recognise that their roles have expanded to include financial and leadership responsibilities (Muijs et al, 2004; Rodd, 1998; Rodd, 2001; Scrivens in Nivala and Hujala, 2002; Morgan in Kagan and Bowman, 1997). By interpreting the meaning of activities, one can categorise them into five different frames: educational, caring, managing, practical and personal. (Rosemary and Puroila in Nivala and Hujala, 2002).

According to Solly (2003), we need to develop high-calibre leaders in the early years who can both ‘maintain’ and ‘enhance’, but studies (Rodd, 2005; Bloom, 1997, in Muijs et al, 2004) show that most leaders in early childhood settings in the UK found that roles most common to their work could be described as focusing more on maintenance than development; there was more emphasis on management than on leadership (Muijs et al, 2004). Scottish nursery teachers saw leadership as an essential element of their role while acknowledging that they did not themselves hold management positions (Dunlop, 2002). The concept of ‘lead-practitioner’ as someone who promotes shared values and ethos in early years is increasingly articulated in Scotland (Adams, 2005).

An important part of early childhood leadership is co-ordination between different players or interest groups (Nivala in Nivala and Hujala, 2002), including family, school and community (Muijs et al, 2004; Osgood, 2004). These interest groups have their own view on early childhood education (Nivala in Nivala and Hujala, 2002). Practitioners see themselves as contributing to the cohesion and strength of local communities (Osgood, 2004) and adopt collaborative approaches to management. There is a strong emphasis on working with parents in early childhood leadership (Muijs et al, 2004). However, leadership studies in New Zealand report a downplaying of the importance of this kind of work – a perspective that the EPPE project outcomes can be understood to refute.
As part of the International Leadership Project (ILP), a research project on leadership in early childhood context established between 1998 and 2000 by five countries including England, Nivala proposes a contextual leadership model in early childhood education, in which four contextual elements seem to be important for a successful leadership in the early years. These elements are: paradigms, actions, education in the substance meaning of early childhood education, and environment- it is asserted that the more the interest groups in early childhood education share the meaning of these elements, the better the everyday reality of leadership will function (Nivala in Nivala and Hujala, 2002).

The importance of community-orientated provision does not match with an entrepreneurial managerial approach (Osgood, 2004) nor with masculinist constructs of leadership associated with aggressiveness, forcefulness, competitiveness and independence (Scrivens in Nivala and Hujala, 2002). Kagan speaks of collaborative leadership, which fits with a systems theory and integrated services that conceptualises work across agencies and disciplines (Kagan, 1993).

Multi-agency working in early childhood requires co-ordination and the ability to deal with conflict (Muijs et al, 2004). Muijs et al cite an audit undertaken by Atkinson et al (2001, 2002), in which it was found that the key to success of early childhood programmes like Sure Start involved effective leadership and multi-agency work. The early childhood field is complex because of its diversity and scale but also because of the aspect of community leadership (Muijs et al, 2004; Waniganayake in Nivala and Hujala, 2002). Kagan and Hallmark (2001) make a focus on community aspects of early childhood leadership; their model embraces five styles of leadership, shows the need for different types of leaders, and emphasises the need for training and development in these aspects:

- Community leadership
- Pedagogical leadership
- Administrative leadership
- Advocacy leadership
- Conceptual leadership.
More detail of these styles is given in the synopses of research that follow. Like Dalli (2003), they see a need for early years leaders to be educationally and politically aware. Additionally they see community leadership as a core capacity for development.

Shared leadership models, promoted in several studies of leadership within the sector, provide a contrast with the assumption in much of the literature that leadership is linked to a role, and open up the possibility that several people within a centre/service may be involved in leadership. Louise Hard (2004) has proposed the concept of formal and informal leaders. She suggests that the formal leader is recognised because of their position whereas the informal leader is one who shows leadership qualities even though they may not hold a recognised leadership position. This accords well with Scottish teachers’ concepts of leadership as reported by Dunlop (2002).

Janet Moyle’s publication Effective Leadership and Management in the Early Years is a research-based text which draws from the project ‘The Effective Leadership and Management Scheme for the Early Years’. The project produced ELMS – a tool for those who are in leadership and management roles in early years settings so that they may evaluate their effectiveness. It is claimed that the purpose of evaluation of leadership and management is to ensure the best possible experiences for children and early educators; in other words, effective leadership and management are central to the quality agenda. Moyle highlights leadership qualities, management skills, professional skills and attributes, and personal characteristics and attitudes. She endorses Ebbeck and Waninganayake’s (2002) view that ‘there are few publicly acknowledged leaders and no set of common expectations for leaders in early childhood’. Moyle juxtaposes leadership and management, whereas Rodd (2005) distinguishes between them: her typology of what managers and leaders do includes the following aspects:

Managers plan, organise, co-ordinate and control, whereas leaders are typified as people who give direction, offer inspiration, build teamwork, set an example and gain acceptance. Often the literature reinforces the view that leadership and management are separate but related concepts.
In their Effective Leadership in the Early Years Study (ELEYS), Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) highlight the effective leadership practices identified in the settings that took part in the study:

- Identifying and articulating a collective vision
- Ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals
- Effective communication
- Encouraging reflection
- Commitment to ongoing, professional development
- Monitoring and assessing practice
- Distributed leadership
- Building a learning community and team culture
- Encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships
- Leading and managing: striking the balance

Here the idea of striking a balance between leadership and management is highlighted. The work drew from the REPEY study – also part of the wider EPPE project.

Nupponen (2006a, 2006b) also considers that effective leadership is vital to quality services for young children. Effective leadership frameworks are needed as a starting point towards ensuring quality. Nupponen emphasises the complex external social environment in which early childhood settings operate (Bergin-Seers and Breen, 2002) and the consequent need for self-reflection. As elsewhere she finds that there has been little Australian research that focuses on the leadership and management role of heads (directors) of centre-based child care. National figures of children entering childcare is unavailable in Australia (OECD Country Note, 2001), but in Queensland where she was researching, more children attend private provision rather than community-managed centres. Her study included case studies of directors of child care centres, based on interviews with them. She concludes that training and experience in business management and leadership is needed in order to enhance the competence of centre managers.
Solly (2003) highlights enthusiasm, passion, inspiration and advocacy as leadership qualities. Whalley (2005) emphasises influence rather than authority as an important element of leadership. What comes through most sources is that there is a high potential for leadership activity in the field of early childhood. What is less clear in the literature is who provides quality leadership, and agreement about who might do so in early childhood services in the future is still more elusive and under-researched. The paucity of research into early childhood leadership in the UK is beginning to be addressed through studies led by Janet Moyle (2004) and Carol Aubrey (2007). The new Scottish workforce categories include ‘Lead Practitioner’ and herald a need for research into the roles played by the various professionals responsible for early childhood services, integrated services and schooling in Scotland.

There is however ample research cited to support the claim that the higher the quality of early childcare and education, the greater the contribution to positive learning outcomes for children (Vandell and Wolfe, 2000). Such evidence supports education and training initiatives that aim to raise the level of education of practitioners, and to include a leadership level in that training. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory offers the idea that children’s development takes place through the interrelationships between the various levels of environment they occupy and interactions with others who form part of their environment. It is possible to reflect that unless those out-of-home environments are led by practitioners with ‘formal leadership training or credentials’, quality is less likely to be sustained. Since most early childhood settings are presently led by practitioners who have lacked until now the opportunity to engage in leadership training – a crucial variable in ensuring quality (Nupponen, 2003b), a political commitment or culture is required, so creating the opportunity for improvement in the quality of early childhood services as newly trained leaders become agents for change.

Bella and Bloom (2003)’s study Zoom: The Impact of Early Childhood Leadership Training on Role Perceptions, Job Performance, and Career Decisions was conducted with a sample of 182 participants who took part in two different models of leadership training up until 2003. The study
set out to look at the impact of the forms of training on role perceptions, job performance and career decisions in the sample group. Self-report questionnaires were used as well as follow-up interviews. The research questions guiding this study were clustered into four areas:

1. current job status and motivations for staying or in leaving the field
2. perceived short- and long-term outcomes from having participated in leadership training
3. subsequent professional development experiences and knowledge of professional development resources
4. feedback on the design and delivery of training.

Participants reported the link between their sense of empowerment following training, their consequent raised sense of self-esteem and the impact of both on their leadership role. This new confidence had been sustained and continued to allow participants to take on new challenges. Ratings of ‘novice’, ‘capable’ and ‘master’ were used in this study to provide data for change in feelings of competence. The percentage viewing themselves as ‘master’ changed from 10% to 50% as a result of the ‘Taking Charge of Change’ model of leadership training.

In this study further statistical analyses were undertaken to establish which background variables correlate strongly with participants’ perceptions of competence in a leadership role. It was found that perceptions of competence are linked most strongly to the level of education of the participant and less to years of experience either in the field or in an administrative role. New perspectives on their leadership role allowed individuals to move beyond ‘nitty-gritty’, day-to-day matters, and to adopt a more strategic role in which they developed a vision of what they wanted their service to become and a strong sense of what this meant in their community.

In terms of job performance, the results of the Zoom study (Bella and Bloom, 2003) found that respondents agreed they had improved their management skills, were more reflective about their leadership behaviour, and felt they had practical resources to help. In terms of career decisions,
86% remained working in early childhood, which seems to endorse the renewed focus leadership training brings, as well as the potential for change – ‘The rich empirical and anecdotal evidence from respondents provides compelling evidence of how leadership training can change the early childhood profession from the inside out and from the bottom up, through changes in early childhood educators themselves. The results of this study underscore the need for systematic, intensive, and relevant training focused on the unique needs of early childhood directors.