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An unfamiliar face, an unfamiliar environment: Investigating educators' understanding of their attachment relationships with infants and toddlers in Early Childhood Education and Care settings

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An unfamiliar face, an unfamiliar environment: Investigating educators' understanding of their attachment relationships with infants and toddlers in Early Childhood Education and Care settings.

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ABSTRACT

Attachment theory has influenced research, policy and practice over the last six decades, offering a framework for understanding risk and protective factors in early childhood. However, this work has primarily been influenced from a medical health or psychological perspective. Despite the literature highlighting the importance of attachment relationships, there is limited research relating to educators' knowledge and understanding of attachment theory. The first years of life are considered a sensitive period for attachment development, and with families increasingly utilising formal care for their infants and toddlers, educators are in a prime position to use attachment theory to inform their practices within education and care (ECEC) settings. The aims of this study were to investigate educators' knowledge and understanding of attachment theory and the practices they use to support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships.

Drawing upon an interpretive theoretical framework, this study focused on understanding attachment theory and practice from multiple perspectives through the voices of early childhood educators. Using multiple methodologies such as a mixed method design enhances an interpretive framework. Data was collected via an online survey through a closed Facebook page as well as personal contacts of the researcher, email and snowballing. From this survey, 488 Australian educators responded demonstrating a wide interest in the topic of attachment. One early childhood service was selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Observations of their attachment practices were documented using the Reflect, Respect, Relate tool. Quantitative data was analysed using Qualtrics software with Nvivo used for qualitative data to code key concepts and emerging themes. A national survey provided a general picture of educator perceptions and practices whilst the observations and interviews supported a deeper exploration into themes emerging from the survey.

Findings highlighted educators' desire to access further support to understand how to interpret the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and associated documents in relation to attachment theory. The EYLF proposes that children feel "safe, secure and supported" when they develop attachment relationships with educators (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009, p. 21). However, little guidance is provided within the framework or accompanying resources about how educators should approach this relationship development. Educators who participated in the study drew upon multiple approaches to support the development of attachment relationships. Their approach varied according to knowledge, understanding and personal experiences of participating in attachment relationships. Additionally, findings indicated

that educators require support and access to sufficient knowledge and ongoing professional development relating to attachment theory that is specifically targeted toward ECEC settings.
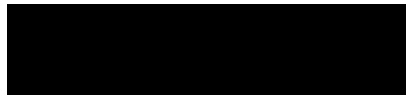
This study is unique in that it investigated the challenges of attachment theory from an educator's perspective rather than a psychological lens. This research hopes to build upon the existing knowledge of educators and highlight the importance of attachment theory to inform strategic direction and policy development.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

I.   incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education

II.   contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or

III. contain any defamatory material

Signature   █████████████   Date   01/12/2018

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Chapter 1   Introduction

1.1   Context

This study investigated educators' knowledge and understanding of their attachment relationships with infant/toddlers in Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC] settings. Attachment theory was developed in the early 20th century by John Bowlby (1952) as a means of explaining infant behaviour towards their attachment figure. Fundamental to the theory is the concept that attachment behaviours formed in infancy will shape future attachment relationships and affect social, emotional and cognitive development of young children (Slater, 2007). Thus, attachment theory has influenced research, policy and practice over the last six decades, offering a framework for understanding risk and protective factors in early childhood.

Research has highlighted the importance of children having a consistent primary caregiver to ensure they feel safe and secure (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). In an early childhood setting, children need the security of an attachment relationship with a consistent educator in the absence of their primary caregivers to feel safe (Rolfe, 2004).

The demographics of Australia are changing and there has been a steady increase in the number of primary caregivers returning to work after a child is born. The number of infants and toddlers being cared for by someone other than their primary caregivers in settings such as ECEC has grown to 10% for children under one year of age and 36% for children under two years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2018); these infants and toddlers are separated at times from their primary caregiver during a period considered sensitive for attachment development. Consequentially, there is an increased focus on educators supporting children to develop attachment relationships (Australian Association for Infant Mental Health [AAIMH], 2013) and an attention to the quality of ECEC settings in infant/toddler education and care provision. It is widely accepted that high-quality care supports positive developmental outcomes for children; however, research additionally suggests that secure attachment relationships between educators and infant/toddlers are developed through a combination of both quality of care and quality of interactions [AAIMH, 2013].

The introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012 aimed to improve developmental and educational outcomes for children attending approved services such as Long Day Care (LDC). As part of the NQF, services participate in an assessment and rating

process through their state regulatory unit, where the overall service quality is assessed against seven quality areas in the National Quality Standard (NQS). In 2018, following a consultation process, a revised NQS came into effect in all states and territories of Australia. Significantly, the revised NQS highlights the importance of responsive and meaningful interactions and their role in supporting learning and development (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2018).

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) was introduced as part of the NQF as a national framework for Australian children aged birth to five years. An additional resource that accompanied the EYLF, titled *Educators belonging, being & becoming: Educators' guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, provides educators with further support on how to use the EYLF in their daily practice (DEEWR, 2010). Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the NQF, highlighting the different components that contribute to quality outcomes for Australian children. Additionally, a further resource related to the EYLF, *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (Department of Education and Children's Services [DECS], 2008)*,* was distributed to services in conjunction with the EYLF for use as a tool for self-assessment within ECEC settings.
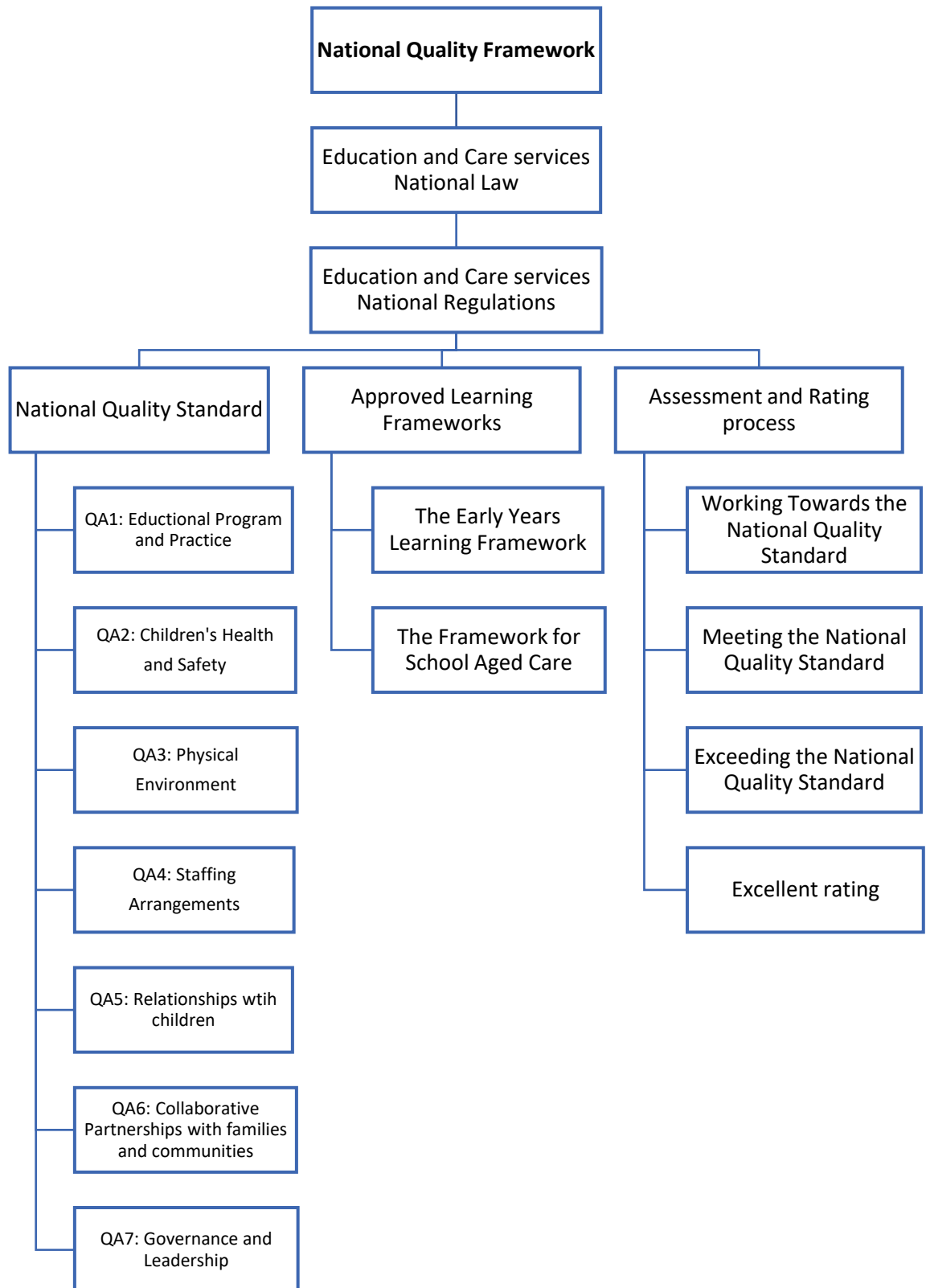
Figure 1.1: An overview of the NQF (ACECQA, 2017)

1.2   Problem

Recent research has considered the impact of non-familial care such as LDC on children's development, debating the effect it may have on their attachment relationship with their mother-figure (AAIMH, 2013). While many of these studies have focused on variables such as quantity and quality of care, few have focused on educators' beliefs, and their practices which supported attachment relationships between educators and children.

This investigation is the result of the researcher spending many years working in, and consulting to, a variety of ECEC settings. Observations highlighted the different practices utilised to support relationships between educators and infant-toddlers, such that some supported a model of primary caregiving and were guided by attachment theory and others did not. Degotardi and Gill (2017) propose that educators' understanding is a combination of both knowledge and beliefs, which collectively inform practice. Thus, this study aims to investigate educators' knowledge and understanding of attachment theory and to observe and document their attachment practices in ECEC settings in the birth–2 age group.

1.3   Rationale

The first years of life are considered a sensitive period for attachment development, and with families increasingly utilising formal care, the use of attachment theory to inform practice is becoming an area of focus in ECEC settings. The impact of non-familial care on children's attachment development has long been debated in the literature; it is proposed that in the absence of their primary caregivers, children need the security of an attachment relationship with a consistent educator to feel safe, secure and supported. These attachment relationships are thought to support development, and educators are in a prime position during this time of sensitive development. Despite the literature highlighting the importance of these relationships, there is limited research relating to educators' knowledge and understanding of attachment theory.

1.4   Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate educators' understanding of the attachment relationships they hold with infants and toddlers. Additionally, the study aims to determine educators' beliefs relating to attachment relationships, and the practices they use to support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships.

1.5   Research questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. What are early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop?
2. What are early childhood educators' beliefs about attachment relationships?
3. How do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships?

This study utilised a mixed-method design and the research questions were addressed through three data collection instruments: an online survey, a semi-structured interview and an observation tool to assesses the quality of relationships. A summary of how each of the research questions were addressed is provided in the table below.

Table 1.1: Research methodology and constructs which will address the research questions

Research question	Research methodology and constructs investigated
Question 1: What are early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop?	**Phase 1: Online survey** • Understanding of attachment theory • Understanding of how attachment relationships develop • The role of educators in developing attachment relationships • Key practices supporting attachment relationships with infants/toddlers **Phase 2: Semi-structured interview** • The process of developing attachment relationships • Developing attachment relationships with new children • Explanation of documentation chosen to share at interview
Question 2: What are early childhood educators' beliefs about attachment relationships?	**Phase 1: Online survey** • Verbal language exchanges with non-verbal children • Proposed link between physical affection and dependency • New infants/toddlers spending 'too much time' with one educator • Communicating transitions to non-verbal infants/toddlers **Phase 2: Semi-structured interview** • Characteristics of a healthy infant/toddler-educator relationship
Question 3: How do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships?	**Phase 1: Online survey** • Use and inclusion of information from children's family and culture in program and routines • Familiarity with, and understanding of the Circle of Security • Self-settling • Familiarity with, and understanding of primary caregiving • Times when attachment relationships are developed **Phase 2: Semi-structured interview** • The ongoing development of attachment relationships • Developing an attachment relationship with new children • Supporting infants/toddlers with separation anxiety • Explanation of documentation chosen to share at interview **Phase 3: Observation tool** • Observations of educator interactions in relation to the four signals of quality relationships

1.6   Significance

This research aims to build on the existing knowledge of attachment theory, in the context of educators' understanding of the infant/toddler–educator relationship. Using the recommendations from Drugli and Undheim (2012), the researcher will include observations

and a tool for observing practice as part of the study. It is expected that this research may highlight the importance of attachment relationships for infants/toddlers in ECEC settings and may be of use to service management to inform strategic direction and/or policy development. Additionally, it may serve as a reflective tool for educators working with children aged birth–2 and inform the development of modules that focus on working with very young children. Families utilising ECEC may also use this research to inform their choice of setting for their child.

1.7   Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background to attachment theory, the context of the ECEC sector in Australia, the problem the research investigates and the research questions of the study. It highlights the significance of the research and explains how the thesis chapters are organised. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relating to attachment theory, and how it applies to ECEC in Australia. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to collect the data and provides information about the recruitment of participants, research instruments used and how the data were analysed. It additionally considers the research from the perspective of validity, reliability and ethics. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the two phases, interpreting data collected from the online survey, interviews, observations and documentation and identifying common themes. Chapter 5 elaborates on these identified themes and organises them in relation to the three research questions. The concluding chapter, Chapter 6, summarises the key findings and identifies limitations, recommendations and implications for future research.

Chapter 2   Literature review

2.1   Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to introduce and discuss attachment theory—the theoretical framework guiding this study. The following sections will provide an overview of attachment theory and its importance. Factors affecting attachment classification such as cultural influences and the use of non-familial care will be considered. Methods to classify and measure attachment in both adults and children will be investigated, leading into the implications of these classifications. Finally, the application of attachment theory in the context of an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) setting will be discussed, providing examples of practices supporting the development of supportive relationships.

2.2   Attachment theory

Attachment theory was first developed by John Bowlby in the early 20th century as a way to understand how children react to the short-term loss of their mother. It has since affected the way that the development of personality and relationships are understood (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) developed the theory through his trilogy *Attachment and Loss,* in which he defined attachment between a child and their mother-figure as "the bond that ties him to that figure" (1969, p. 177), and claimed that as part of normal development, infants in their first year of life develop an attachment relationship with a mother-figure. He concluded that this attachment figure would typically be the mother but could also be any other person assuming the role of mother-figure for that child.

Bowlby (1969) described secondary attachment figures as people a child develops a close attachment relationship with and whom their primary attachment figure knows well, such as fathers, siblings and grandparents. He proposed that in contrast to enduring primary attachments, secondary attachments could vary both in identity and quantity with changes, typically reflecting the happenings within the infants' household at the time. He advocated that these secondary attachments could provide children safety and security in the absence of their primary attachment figure and promote positive development.

Attachment behaviours are defined by Bowlby as "seeking and maintaining proximity to another individual" (1969, p. 194). He proposed that these instinctive behaviours allow infants

to remain close to their attachment figure to stay safe, and classified them into two broad groups:

1. signalling behaviour, where the objective is to get the mother-figure to the child (examples of these include smiling, crying and calling)
2. approach behaviour: where the objective is to get the child to the mother-figure (examples of these include approaching, following and clinging).

Bowlby suggested that while the attachment bond is enduring regardless of circumstance, attachment behaviours only activate when required in situations such as when a child is sick, excited or scared (1969).

As part of his theory, Bowlby (1969) proposed that individuals build Internal Working Models (IWM), which are mainly subconscious and serve as a blueprint to help choose behaviours required when navigating relationships based on previous experiences of attachment relationships. Bowlby (1973) suggested individuals build models of their world, themselves, and the connection between the two. A key aspect of the IWM is the identity of the attachment figure, their location, and an anticipation of the behavioural response of that person. The individual also builds an IWM of their self-worth in the opinion of their attachment figure, which is influenced by how responsive their attachment figure is. While Bowlby acknowledged the probability of infants developing several IWMs, he also concluded that the IWM developed by an individual in their early years will be the least resistant to change.

Researchers have debated Bowlby's beliefs around the endurance of IWMs developed in the early years. Harris (2009) argues that attachment theory underestimates the child's ability to form IWMs for the different attachment figures in their lives, and to differentiate behaviour from the person and context. She maintains an infant's insecure attachment to one caregiver does not "carry over" to other caregivers, and that they can hold secure attachments with others. Meins (1999) agrees and suggests children have an IWM for each of their attachment relationships.

2.3   The importance of the development of attachment theory

The development of attachment theory is important because it provides a way to understand how secure attachments can support children's development in all areas (Siegel, 2012). It has implications for the way in which we view infant and toddler development, particularly as neuroscience has found a link between attachment relationships held in early childhood and future brain development. John Bowlby's son, Richard, built on his father's theory of

attachment, proposing that an infant's brain is shaped by their early experiences (R. Bowlby, 2007) and the quality of these experiences has a substantial effect on development. These experiences provide the basis for optimal functioning of neural pathways, building "the architecture of the brain and the developmental trajectories for the learning, behaviour, and health of individuals and populations" (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007, p. 32). The primary caregiver plays an important role in providing children with the opportunity to develop to their potential (Colmer, Rutherford, & Murphy, 2011) and exchanges between infants and caregivers lay down the foundation for the child's signalling system (the way infants signal to caregivers, for example, crying and smiling), influencing future physical and mental wellbeing (McCain et al., 2007). This relationship is important because it supports infants to feel emotionally safe, protects them from stress, and is believed to have a significant impact on personality development (Slater, 2007; Bowlby, 1969).

Siegel (2012) proposes that the mind is developed from the foundation of attachment relationships and that attachment relationships may either support or hinder mental wellbeing, in conjunction with other factors. He describes how recent developments in neuroscience suggest attachment classifications can change over time because of the brain's ability to continue to grow over our lives. If infants have secure relationships, their brain may continue to grow and develop; however, if an infant experiences insecure attachment relationships, the brain may be less open to future development and growth.

2.4   Maternal deprivation

While Bowlby (1952) acknowledges the possibility of children holding multiple attachments, he considers mothers the main attachment figure, maintaining that most infants will turn to them first when distressed, opting for their father as a second choice. Bowlby proposed in his early research that the quality of attachment between an infant and their mother-figure could affect the infant's future mental health, arguing that infants need secure attachments to their mothers to avoid maternal deprivation. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines maternal deprivation as "the condition of lacking the experience of having been mothered" and suggests there is an impact on normal development when infants fail to develop attachments to their primary caregiver (2004, p. 54).

Colmer et al. (2011) propose that Bowlby's notion of maternal deprivation was perceived by critics to suggest that mothers were solely responsible for their young children. Slater (2007) suggests many criticisms were based on a misinterpretation of Bowlby's work, claiming some

researchers interpreted Bowlby's theory as advocating for mothers to stay at home with children instead of working to avoid maternal deprivation. While he used the term 'mother' throughout his 1952 WHO report, Bowlby was careful in his 1969 publication to clarify that he was referring any person who assumed primary responsibility for the child and to whom the child was attached; for most children, their birth mother.

While most attachment research has focused on the mother-figure, Thompson (1988) argues that the mother-figure is not exclusively important as a child's attachment is influenced by factors such as the involvement of the father, stress within the household, the infant's personality and the parents' relationship. Meins (1999) suggests an infant's personality has little effect on their likelihood of forming secure attachment relationships and proposes caregiver characteristics influence the type of attachment an infant develops, considering maternal sensitivity to be one of the most important. The argument that it is the characteristics of the caregiving received rather than the gender of the parent is important to note when considering same-sex families. Thompson (1988) maintains that while attachment may lay the foundation for personality development, experiences later in life will either maintain or alter this foundation.

2.5   Cultural influences on attachment

Some disagree with Bowlby's suggestion that a child will develop a special bond primarily to a single primary caregiver. van Ijzendoorn, Sagi and Lambermon (1992) argue that culture influences attachment between infants and caregivers, describing how the notion of one person primarily being the attachment figure for an infant is typically not economically possible in many western cultures. They suggest that instead of one consistent attachment figure, a child may have multiple attachment figures who together provide a secure base for the child; for example, in Dutch households where both parents work, there can be at least three adults involved in caring for an infant: two parents and a professional caregiver.

Similarly, in their study on attachment between infants and mothers in China, Archer et al. (2015) describe how infants often benefit from a multiple caregiving network, typically consisting of their parents and grandparents. Mothers commonly return to work when the infant is three-months old, with the grandparents assuming a primary caregiving role. Almost two-thirds (64%) of their sample group of children spent more time in the care of someone other than their mother, with 29% considered closer to someone other than their mother, typically their grandmother. The study implemented the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) to

measure the attachment classification of the participants and compare with global norms. The findings concluded that classifications of secure attachment in China were consistent with global norms, which may suggest that living within a multiple caregiving network does not have an adverse effect on secure attachment classifications.

2.6   Classifications of attachment

Mary Ainsworth worked alongside Bowlby to devise a method of assessment to investigate how attachment may vary between children and their caregivers. Bowlby (1969) proposed that to understand the bond between an infant and their attachment figure, one must observe their response to separation from that figure. Ainsworth built on this hypothesis, conducting a longitudinal study in Baltimore to investigate this separation, administering the SSP in a laboratory setting. The SSP involved infants and mother-figures being exposed to eight circumstances, including separation, reunion and the presence of a stranger in an unfamiliar setting (Bowlby, 1973). The procedure began with the infant and mother both present in the environment, and gradually built to the mother leaving the infant alone with a stranger to observe the infant's response with and without the mother present. The situations were designed to cause no more alarm or distress than what an infant would experience in daily life (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Responses to the laboratory circumstances were recorded and from this, children were categorised into three main attachment classifications (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970):

1. **secure:** children showed some distress when their mother-figure left, and on their return
2. **insecure-avoidant:** children showed little distress when separated or reunited
3. **insecure-ambivalent:** children were very distressed when their mother-figure left and when reunited.

After experiencing difficulty in classifying some infants within the initial three classifications, a fourth category was proposed in later years (Main & Solomon, cited in Rolfe, 2004, p. 28):

4. **disorganised:** disorganised/disoriented behaviours in the presence of the mother-figure.

Rolfe suggests that this fourth category is rare in children who are not at risk, and due to the subtle nature of this category, it can be hard to observe.

There have been several criticisms of the SSP in the literature. The choice of infants from white middle-class American families was considered not reflecting all cultures or family

situations, and Thompson (1988) argued that the SSP should not be used to interpret the behaviour of infants with a background different to the participants of the original study, as researchers suggest that difference between and within cultures can affect how an infant reacts to the SSP. The procedure was conducted under laboratory conditions, limiting the sample of interactions observed between mother and infant (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Observations were restricted to children placed in stressful situations but included no observations of children when they were not stressed and interacting with their mother-figure (Field, 1996). Thompson (1988) suggests that how an infant reacts to the SSP is dependent on their early experiences, and advocates for researchers to take a child's history and context into account, including experience with stranger exposure, history of separation from their mother and the child-rearing norms to which they have been subject. After identifying different types of attachment classifications, researchers began to assess the impact of these attachment classifications on behaviour.

2.7   The impact of attachment classification

A child's attachment classification during infancy is believed to have a subsequent effect on behaviour during school years. Building on Ainsworth's study of the middle-class participants of the SSP, Erickson, Sroufe and Egeland (1985) selected participants from the Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction project from a varied socio-economic background to investigate if there was a link between attachment classification and behaviour in school. Participants were observed at 12 and 18 months using the SSP, then again at 24, 30, 42 and 48 months completing varying tasks and observations. The findings indicated infants with secure attachments were more likely to be "independent, compliant, empathic, and socially competent" (Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985, p. 149) in a school situation in contrast to children classified as infants as anxiously attached. Anxiously attached children did not function as well as securely attached children in school, with researchers finding a strong correlation between quality of attachment and behaviour in preschool.

Studies of adult attachment classifications have demonstrated the possibility of predicting adult caregiving styles based on attachment classifications proposed by Ainsworth. Main (2000) worked alongside Ainsworth to investigate the relationship between an adult's personal early attachment experience and their ability to develop attachment relationships with their own children. She devised the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), which requires participants to answer questions about their relationship with their parents and, based on their response, provides one of three classifications:

1. **secure autonomous:** realistic about their attachment relationships and can acknowledge the effect of previous experiences

2. **dismissing**: deny the impact of childhood attachment experiences on themselves

3. **preoccupied**: still preoccupied or angry about their previous attachment experiences.

These classifications were found to correlate to attachments participants form with their children: adults with a secure autonomous attachment classification are likely to develop secure attachment relationships with their children (Rolfe, 2004). According to Rolfe, this may have implications for educators working with young children in an ECEC setting, as their attachment experiences may influence their behaviour when developing relationships.

2.8   Stages of attachment development

Bowlby (1969) proposed that there were four stages of attachment development that a child will encounter in the first three years of life. Ainsworth, who worked closely with Bowlby, took his proposed phases of attachment development in the early years and assigned them specific titles. Three of the phases occur within the first year of life, with the fourth phase occurring towards the end of the third year or beginning of the fourth year (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1979/2014). The phases include:

1. **Pre-attachment phase**. From birth through the first few weeks, infants use attachment behaviours to attract caregivers. These behaviours include crying, grasping and eye contact maintenance. In this phase, infants can show attachment behaviours but no preference between people, with no separation or stranger anxiety present.

2. **Attachment in the making phase**. Occurring from one month to six–eight months, infants begin to show a preference for familiar people and to discriminate between familiar and unfamiliar people. Infants direct their attachment behaviours to a small group of preferred people.

3. **Clear-cut attachment phase**. This phase lasts from six months of age until 18–24 months. During this phase, the attachment bond is considered truly developed, with infants seeking to maintain proximity to their primary attachment figure. Infants are cautious of strangers and have selected a primary attachment figure and some secondary attachment figures. Separation and stranger anxiety begin to emerge, and infants demonstrate an ability to plan how to remain in proximity to attachment

figures using attachment behaviours. They also begin to develop an expectation of how that attachment figure may respond.

4. **Goal corrected partnership.** It is suggested by Bowlby (1969) that this phase does not begin until towards the end of the third year. In this phase, the child begins to predict their primary caregiver's departure and return, understanding that the attachment figure and themselves are two separate beings. Dependency on the attachment figure by the child lessens, and the child begins to view the relationship as a 'partnership'.

How a child experiences these phases of attachment development were thought by Bowlby (1969) to influence their self-worth and IWM.

2.9   Application of attachment theory in ECEC settings

The first year of life is considered a critical period for attachment development and infants require a secure base in ECEC settings in addition to at home to develop secure attachments (Lee, 2016). Attachment theory has had a significant impact on policy and practice in early childhood over the past decades (Slater, 2007). The introduction of key documents, including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), the National Quality Standard (NQS) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2013) and *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (Department of Education and Children's Services [DECS], 2008), highlight the importance of supporting educators in developing safe, secure and supportive relationships with children in their settings.

Researchers have debated the effect of ECEC on children's attachment to their primary caregivers. In the Pennsylvania Infant and Family Development Project, Belsky and Rovine (1988) studied the association between non-maternal care and insecure attachment. For this study, non-maternal care was considered care provided by anyone other than the mother, including family day care, LDC and care provided by the father or extended family. The findings indicated infants attending more than 20 hours of non-maternal care per week in their first year were more likely to be classified as insecurely attached.

In contrast, the longitudinal study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] (2006) found no developmental difference between children cared for by their mothers exclusively and children utilising non-maternal care. The study also considered non-maternal care to be family day care, LDC or care by fathers or extended family. The length of time spent in non-maternal care had only a slight association with

developmental outcomes for children in their emotional wellbeing. In Israel, the Haifa Study of early child care examined non-maternal care such as child care, paid and unpaid care by extended family or babysitters/nannies, and family day care. The study concluded that children attending group care were more likely to be classified as insecurely attached as opposed to those utilising individual care (either maternal or non-maternal). Ratios between children and caregivers, not length of time spent in non-maternal care, increased the chance of infants developing insecurely attached relationships with their mothers compared with infants receiving individual care (Sagi, Koren-Karie, Gini, Ziv, & Joels, 2002).

It is proposed that instead of needing an attachment with only a primary attachment figure, a child needs access to a consistently available attachment figure, which can include a combination of their mother, father or paid caregiver/s (van Ijzendoorn et al., 1992). With this attachment network, separation from a specific attachment figure does not imply that a child is also separated from their secure base. Given the emerging evidence highlighting the importance of attachment relationships, recent developments in early childhood have brought to light the importance of recognising and measuring the relationships between educators and children in ECEC settings.

In their study of the development of relationships between infants and educators, Lee (2016) studied the process of relationship development between three children and their educators. The findings highlighted the importance of high-quality education and care for infants and concluded that it took up to 11 weeks for a relationship to develop between an infant and caregiver when they spent limited time together. The study recommends that educators need to have a concentrated focus on non-verbal communication and planning for one-on-one opportunities with infants/toddlers. A second recommendation suggested that ECEC settings should adopt a relationships-based approach such as primary caregiving in their practice with infants.

Drugli and Undheim (2012) interviewed 35 educators on the perspectives of parents and educators of the child–educator relationship. Their findings indicated almost all participating educators perceived their relationships with children as positive, while at the same time voicing their concerns on the quality of child–educator relationships. The researchers concluded that educators may have overestimated how positive their relationships were, suggesting it is possible for negative child–educator relationships to occur in even the highest quality settings. Recommendations for future studies included a more varied mix of participants, and for researchers to include observations as part of their study, advocating for

the development and use of assessment tools to support the identification of both positive and negative aspects of the child–educator relationship.

2.10 Practices that support the development of secure relationships in ECEC settings

With an increased use of ECEC in Australia, there are implications for education and care settings when considering how to support infants and toddlers to develop secure relationships with educators. R. Bowlby (2007) recommends that to facilitate the development of secondary attachments within ECEC, children must receive personalised continuity of care that stretches over several years. He proposes a model outlining guidelines for attachment-based education and care, including only accepting babies nine months and older, reducing educator-to-child ratios and supporting educators to maintain relationships.

2.10.1 Primary caregiving / key worker / key educator approach

The EYLF defines curriculum as "all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9). The literature suggests that some aspects of the curriculum have higher value than others to educators. Fewster (2010) argues that while up to 80% of an infant/toddler's day consists of routines and transition times, these times are not as highly valued as other experiences within the curriculum. Degotardi (2010) also considers routines less valued than other experiences within the curriculum, suggesting that educators are more focused on complying with procedures than ensuring interactions are sensitive and engaging. Lately however, a relationships-based approach to curriculum known as primary caregiving is of growing interest to settings in Western Australia, and already popular in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The approach places high value on caregiving practices and rituals, such as nappy changing and feeding, proposing that these moments help infants/toddlers understand that they are worthy of love. The original version of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), defines primary caregiving as:

> *A staffing arrangement, particularly suitable for infants and toddlers, in which one staff member has primary responsibility for a small group of children. The rationale for primary caregiving is that it facilitates the attachment of very young children to one adult.* (p. 99)

Lee (2016) describes how in a primary caregiving system, each child is assigned an educator who maintains responsibility for the child's needs throughout the day and provides "the 'secure base' for the child within the centre" (Colmer et al., 2011, p. 18). As the relationship develops, the child becomes confident in exploring the environment and developing additional relationships. The social experiences that children are exposed to in the early years are considered contributing factors relating to their IWM of their selves and others (Lee, 2016). Colmer et al. (2011) advocates for a primary caregiving system that promotes the ability for children and educators to develop secure relationships through the involvement of activities relevant to the individual child, enabling the child to feel more secure in the setting. The system recognises that primary caregivers cannot always be present, however, fostering a secure relationship supports children to feel safe in their caregiver's absence as they have already been supported to feel secure in the environment. The English early learning framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage, describes a similar system to primary caregiving, mandating that all children must have a 'key worker' up to the age of five. The key worker's role is to "help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs … offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents" (Department for Education, 2014, p. 21).

In 2013, the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMH) published a position statement on non-familial care for young children. Significantly, they identified primary caregiving as a key feature of high-quality ECEC for infants and toddlers. They concluded that educators are considered attachment figures for children in education and care settings in the absence of their parents, however, the type of attachment relationship is perceived as different to that of a child and their primary attachment figure. While it is common for educators to describe their relationship with young children using the term 'love', there has been scant use of this term in the literature. In recent years, however, an increasing number of researchers have begun to acknowledge this special relationship and use the word 'love' in its description. Recchia, Shin and Snaider (2018) argue that the term 'love' has been replaced with more scientific terms including attachment by researchers. In their study with student educators and infant/toddlers, they investigated the conditions in which a loving relationship was developed, and concluded that it was through routine caregiving moments, such as nappy changing and feeding, that this love relationship developed. They additionally proposed that the process of concentrating on a key or focus child provided the educator with the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the child on a deeper level as an individual and invest in the relationship.

Page (2017) coined the term 'professional love' to describe this authentic and close relationship between educators and infant-toddlers, which has the permission of the child's parents, considering this type of relationship a 'professional attachment relationship' where educators have increased self-awareness of their own feelings to support children's needs. However, Rolfe (2004) proposes that the formation of quality relationships can be hindered by an educator's attachment experiences from their childhood. Their sensitivity towards infants will affect the development of a bond (Meins, 1999) and educators must be able to emotionally commit to the relationship, otherwise this bond may not develop (R. Bowlby, 2007).

2.11 Supporting quality in ECEC settings

2.11.1 Introduction of a National Quality Framework

In 2008, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) published a report detailing ECEC in 25 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), suggesting international minimum standards such as subsidised care, minimum staff-to-child ratios, and priority of access for disadvantaged children. Of the 25 countries, Australia ranked third from the bottom, meeting only two of the 10 minimum standards (UNICEF, 2008). The National Quality Framework (NQF) was introduced in 2012, aiming to improve educational outcomes for children attending approved services. As part of the NQF, services partake in an assessment and rating process where they are rated against seven quality areas of a National Quality Standard (NQS). Quality Area 5 assesses educators' ability to develop and maintain respectful and equitable relationships, described as "responsive, warm, trusting and respectful" (ACECQA, 2018, p. 224).

A revised NQS came into effect across Australia in February 2018 and, significantly, now includes key concepts that aim to provide increased clarity in relation to what specifically is being assessed within the standards and elements, and to support the sector in the quality improvement process. Within Quality Area 5, the revised element 5.1.1 provides more explicit guidance for the sector to understand that trusting relationships that provide security, inclusion and confidence to children, are based on interactions that are meaningful and responsive (ACECQA, 2017). Figure 2.1 illustrates a comparison between the previous and current NQS element in Quality Area 5.

Previous description of element 5.1.1	Revised description of element 5.1.1 (from February 2018)
Interactions with each child are warm, responsive, and build trusting relationships	Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included

Figure 2.1: Comparison between previous and current NQS (ACECQA, 2018)

The concept of self-regulation has been introduced into Standard 5.2, and there is a deviation from language previously used to describe how children manage their behaviour to how children are supported to regulate their behaviour. This shift in language echoes emerging literature highlighting the association between attachment and self-regulation and suggests that young children learn to self-regulate through guidance from their caregivers (Siegel, 2012).

The idea of quality, and what constitutes quality, has been debated in the literature. Ishimine and Taylor (2014) propose that quality is a "values-laden construct" (p. 272), influenced by theoretical and philosophical beliefs. They suggest that quality can be loosely defined as either structural quality (measures such as educator-to-child ratios, environments, resources, groupings, staff conditions and professional learning) or process quality (interactions between educators and children and effective educator-led learning activities). Whilst structural quality is easier to measure, process quality is believed by many to be a greater determinant of quality. The introduction of the NQS resulted in a focus predominantly on structural measures of quality including improved educator-to-child ratios and qualifications of educators. These measures are critical to overall quality, however Torii, Fox and Cloney (2017) recommend that the ECEC sector now needs prioritise process quality, as it is interactions between educators and children which significantly impact children's learning and development.

The Effective Early Educational Experiences, also known as the E4kids study, conducted the longest-running longitudinal study into ECEC in Australia. The study randomly recruited 2,494 children attending ECEC settings in Queensland and Victoria to participate in the five-year study to assess the impact ECEC settings had on children's learning and development (Taylor et al., 2016). The researchers suggest that while the NQS may be useful to identify overall quality, settings still require a tool that can probe further and pinpoint more specifically the impact of teaching and learning strategies on a child's development. One of the most significant findings of the study was the confirmation that quality interactions between educators and children have a positive impact on development.

2.11.2 The Early Years Learning Framework

As part of the implementation of the NQF, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) was introduced as a national early learning framework for children aged birth to five years. Educators develop a curriculum based on the framework, which includes five outcomes, with the first outcome focusing on children's development of their sense of self through their relationships with families and community. Educators use the principles and practices of the framework to inform and guide their practice, with the principle "secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12) focusing on how educators develop relationships with children. This principle describes how important adults in infant/toddler lives, including educators, provide a secure base from which they can explore their environment and engage in learning and makes a clear link between an infant/toddler's own sense of wellbeing and the interactions in which they engage with an educator.

ECEC settings also received copies of *Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia,* which aims to provide educators with support on how to use the framework in daily practice (DEEWR, 2010). It is interesting to note that unlike other frameworks for ECEC, the consortium who developed and trialled the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) chose not to distinguish between children aged birth to three and children from three to five years of age, as there was a suggestion that to do so would shift the focus from infants' and toddlers' capabilities to their vulnerabilities (Sumsion et al., 2009). Davis, Torr and Degotardi (2015) suggest that the EYLF is more focused on older children and that the responsibility lies with educators to locate infants and toddler in the document. They argue that by not distinguishing between the two different age groups, educators may encounter difficulty when trying to interpret the EYLF in the context of infants and toddlers to plan learning experiences that meet their developmental needs.

2.11.3 Reflect, Respect, Relate

In addition to receiving the EYLF documents during the introduction of the NQF, ECEC settings received *Reflect, Respect, Relate*, an instrument designed to assess the overall learning environment and quality of relationships in ECEC settings through four observation scales (DECS, 2008). The instrument was developed as a research instrument used as part of a study into ECEC settings in South Australia, with the intent that the observation scales would be available to educators to self-assess within their settings on completion. The study identified four variables relating to curriculum quality (*Wellbeing, Active Learning Environment,*

Relationships and Involvement). Scales to measure the quality of these variables were developed for three variables; the fourth variable, involvement, used an existing scale—the Leuven Involvement Scale for Toddlers (DECS, 2008). Findings highlighted the link between educators' pedagogy and their relationships with children and children's wellbeing and involvement in the curriculum. The resource was developed for educators to use formally to assess overall quality in a local setting or informally to reflect on practice. It advises that there is no specific starting point and suggests that educators choose to start with the scale of their choice.

At the end of each chapter of *Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2010), suggestions are provided as to how *Reflect, Respect, Relate* relays to the EYLF, which is heavily referenced throughout. A literature search provides no examples of studies using this instrument in practice.

A review of the literature demonstrates that attachment theory has significant implications for practice in ECEC settings. Attachment classifications in infancy have been demonstrated to predict future behaviour and socio-emotional development, highlighting the need for secure relationships in the early years. The research on attachment theory and emerging information highlighting the relationship between attachment and brain development has important implications for educators working in ECEC. It is critical that educators understand the importance of secure relationships that promote healthy brain development and are aware of their impact on future wellbeing. Whilst there are many studies on attachment theory, quality of care in ECEC and the effect of non-familial care on a child's attachment to their primary caregivers, Drugli and Undheim (2012) argue that there are limited studies considering attachment from educators' perspectives. Similarly, Recchia et al. (2018) propose our understanding of attachment development is largely based on the relationship between parents and their children, and questions whether this understanding can translate to ECEC settings. They suggest there is limited literature explaining what the concepts believed to support the development of attachment relationships look like in practice for infant/toddler educators.

This is an identified gap in the literature, and this study aims to investigate and report on educators' perspectives of attachment in ECEC settings. A literature search relating to the three research questions highlighted the limited literature currently available relating to educators' knowledge and understanding of attachment development, their beliefs about attachment relationships and the process that they take to support the development of these

relationships.

The questions that will guide this study are:

1. What are early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop?
2. What are early childhood educators' beliefs around attachment relationships?
3. How do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships?

2.12 Conceptual framework

Figure 2 is a visual representation of the conceptual framework to guide this study and presents the components of the literature review. A conceptual framework provides the frame from which the research will be directed and accomplished, drawing key concepts together and highlighting the relationships between these concepts (Bell, 2014). The need for this study is demonstrated through the increased demand and use of ECEC settings for Australian children under two in conjunction with the emerging research on how early experiences shape future brain development. The introduction of the NQF to improve outcomes for children has resulted in an increased focus by policy makers, service providers and educators on the relationships that children develop with educators. Consequently, it is appropriate to investigate the relationship between how educators perceive they support children to do this and what is observed in their settings.

Attachment Theory
-Bond between child and mother figure
-Enduring regardless of circumstance

Classifications of attachment
-Insecure
-Secure
-Disorganised

Implications of attachment theory
-Early attachment linked to future behaviour
-Can affect future relationships
-Can affect caregiving style of an adult with their children

Importance of attachment theory
-Relationship development
-Social and emotional wellbeing
-Brain development
-Impacts personality development

Perspectives on nonmaternal care and effect on children

Supporting children to develop secure relationships in LDC settings

Educators' understanding of how they support children to develop secure relationships

Investigating the relationship

Educators practices to develop secure relationships

Insight into educator practices supporting secure relationships

Figure 2.2: Conceptual framework

2.13 The academic impact of the study and original contribution to knowledge

Using the recommendations from Drugli and Undheim (2012), the researcher will include observations and a tool for observing practice as part of the study. Although the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and NQS emphasise the importance of secure relationships between educators and children, the process of developing attachment relationships between educators and infant/toddlers is not explicitly explained; this study hopes to draw attention to its importance.

This research may be of use to ECEC service leadership teams to inform how they support their educators working with infants/toddlers to develop practices that support the development of attachment relationships. Educators may use this research as a basis for reflection on current practice and to inform their future curricula. This research could contribute to policy development relating to infants/toddlers in ECEC settings. Additionally, teacher education programs at universities and Registered Training Organisations may find this research useful when planning infant/toddler curricula. Families utilising formal care may also use this research to inform their choice of setting for their child.

2.14 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature relating to the research topic. Themes including attachment theory and the importance of attachment theory, maternal deprivation and cultural influences on attachment were discussed. Additionally, attachment in relation to the ECEC context was explored, highlighting practices supporting the development of attachment relationships and how quality is supported in ECEC settings. The next chapter will introduce a framework for this research study.

Chapter 3   Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used to conduct this study. It provides an overview of the research design and data collection for Phase One and Phase Two. Within each section, a description of the context, participants, instruments, data collection and data analysis are provided. The final sections consider issues of validity and reliability and address ethical considerations.

The aim of this study is to investigate educators' understanding of the attachment relationships they hold with infants and toddlers. The research questions are:

1. What are early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop?
2. What are early childhood educators' beliefs around attachment relationships?
3. How do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler– caregiver relationships?

3.2   Research design

This study utilised a mixed method design and drew on an interpretive theoretical framework, in which the focus is on understanding attachment theory and practice in a comprehensive, holistic way, through the voices of early childhood educators. Interpretive methods focus on analytically disclosing the meaning-making practices of the research participants, exploring the why, how or by what means people do what they do. In addition, interpretive methods allow the researcher to recognise their connection to the phenomena under investigation and acknowledge the ways in which their assumptions and values influence interpretation and conclusions (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

Creswell, Shope, Plano, Clark and Green (2006) argue that a mixed method approach can enhance the use of an interpretative framework because it can provide a greater depth of knowledge than a singular method offers, and by combining the two strands, provides triangulation, increasing validity of the data. Interaction occurred between the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study as quantitative data collected provided the foundation for the development of the qualitative data. Data were collected sequentially, commencing with the qualitative strand, with data analysis informing the development of the quantitative phase.

In Phase One, data were collected from participants through an online survey. The survey provided the researcher with a general picture of participants' perceptions and practices. In Phase Two, the data were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for deeper exploration into emerging themes, allowing the researcher to tease out some of the emerging generalised conclusions. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to follow up and build on ideas emerging from the survey, probe responses and investigate and clarify concepts and practices. The observations provided a further form of data collection, documenting interactions and identifying aspects of practice supporting the development of secure relationships discussed in the semi-structured interviews. A representation of the research design can be seen in figure 3.1.

Phase 1

Survey distributed throughout Australia through closed
Facebook page, personal contacts of the reserarcher,
email and snowballing

Participants: educators working with children aged birth-2
in LDC and educational leaders

Phase 2

Interviews and observations building
upon Phase 1

Participants: one Perth metro service
LDC educators working
with children aged birth-2 and
educational leader
One service in Perth metro
Four children aged birth-2

Figure 3.1: Research design overview

3.3 Phase One

3.3.1 Phase One context and participants

This section outlines the first phase of data collection. The aim of Phase One was for the researcher to obtain a general picture of the participants' perceptions and practices. The following paragraphs describe the participants and context, the procedure for data collection, the instrument used to collect data and how the data were analysed.

Educators and educational leaders aged 18–65 years and working with children aged birth to two in Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings were invited to participate in Phase One of the study. There was no minimum qualification required to participate.

3.3.2 Phase One instruments and data collection procedures

Data from Phase One were collected through an anonymous online survey. The purpose of the survey was to gain a general understanding of early childhood educators' relationships with infants and toddlers from a wide range of educators. The survey was developed using Qualtrics, an online research tool that allows researchers to conduct and analyse surveys and was anonymous to motivate participants to freely share their opinion.

The survey consisted of 29 questions grouped by common theme into four sections. The first section contained five questions related to the demographics of the participants, including their age, experience, qualifications, position and state. Instead of being asked to provide a specific age and number of years of experience, the participants were invited to select from ranges of ages and years of experience to support their feeling comfortable sharing personal information (Cox & Adams, 2008).

The second section had 12 questions and related to participants' knowledge and understanding of attachment theory, the stages of attachment development and key approaches that support the development of attachment relationships. The questions in section two were based on the key concepts of attachment theory derived from the literature review. The survey was designed so that when respondents selected 'no' for if they had heard of a concept or term, they were automatically skipped the questions that asked them to rate and explain their understanding.

The third section consisted of eight questions and related to participants' beliefs in relation to attachment theory as an educator. The questions probed the importance of attachment theory to the educator and required them to rate their perceptions of statements about practices that were either helpful or unhelpful to the development of supportive relationships based on indicators from *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (Department of Education and Children's Services [DECS], 2008).

The fourth section related to participants' practices as an educator. This section contained three questions to ascertain how educators develop supportive relationships with children in their care. The questions were derived from indicators from *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008) and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) that related to supporting the development of secure attachment relationships between educators and young children. Participants were offered the chance to provide further comments for the concluding question.

Table 3.1: Online survey questions content

Phase 1: Online Survey	
Section of survey	Content
Part A: Background Information	Geographical location Current position Qualifications Age range Level of experience
Part B: Knowledge of Attachment theory	Attachment theory Stages of attachment Primary and secondary attachment Circle of Security Primary Caregiving How attachment relationships develop
Part C: Attachment Beliefs	Beliefs about the development of attachment relationships with infants/toddlers Impact of attachment relationships Beliefs about cuddling and dependency Importance of verbal exchanges Intentionally planning for one-on-one interactions Beliefs about infants/toddlers spending too much time with one educator Beliefs about the importance of advising non-verbal children about what is about to happen Beliefs about self-settling
Part D: Educator practices	Use of home language and culture Key practices used to support the development of attachment relationships Times of the day during which attachment relationships are believed to develop Any additional comments

The survey consisted of a mix of open- and closed-ended questions, to support the development of a complementary survey. Zohrabi (2013) argues both question types have strengths and weaknesses: the limited answer choices make closed-ended questions easy to analyse, however, researchers may miss themes that may have emerged if participants were given the opportunity to voice them. In contrast, open-ended questions allow for a variety of responses and allow respondents to articulate their opinion and concerns, yet the data can be more difficult to analyse. Closed-ended questions were selected to elicit factual and yes/no responses such as demographic information and to ascertain if the participants were aware of key terms and approaches. Likert-scale questions were used at various stages of the survey to

elicit the participants' perceptions and attitudes to attachment and relationship development between educators and infants/toddlers. An example of questions and the response options are provided in table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Question and response options in online survey

Question	Response options
Q10. How would you rate your understanding of attachment theory?	Extremely familiar Moderately familiar Somewhat familiar Slightly familiar Not at all familiar
Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: **"The more you cuddle infants and toddlers, the longer they will be dependent on you"**	Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree

Some questions commenced with simple factual questions and, depending on the respondents' answer, led to more complex questions that probed deeper. Open-ended questions were selected to prompt responses to participants' perceptions and practices, in the manner that they wished. An open-ended question concluded the survey, inviting participants to provide further comments if desired. At the end of the survey, participants were invited to express an interest in Phase Two of the project. To maintain confidentiality, participants were invited to click on a hyperlink that redirected them to a second survey to capture their contact details.

The survey was distributed electronically, as this typically returns a higher response rate than posted surveys (Zohrabi, 2013) and allowed the researcher to reach a broader group than would have been financially and geographically possible in four weeks. To obtain a sample consisting of a range of educators with a range of qualifications and experience across Australia, the researcher utilised several strategies to recruit participants:

- Personal contacts of the researcher via email, including peak bodies, alliances and organisations in the ECEC sector. The networks were supportive of the research, sharing the information with their members via email, social media or face-to-face conversations.

- The social media platform Facebook, where a flyer advertising the study was posted to closed Facebook groups for Australian educators.

- Snowballing, where participants suggested other potential participants to the researcher.

- A database developed by the researcher of ECEC settings catering for children aged birth–2. The database was developed with information from publicly listed websites and emails were sent out in bulk by jurisdiction, at times and days considered optimal by the researcher. This proved the most successful way of receiving responses.

The data were collected in June 2017 over a period of four weeks. A reminder was posted to Facebook and sent via email two weeks after the initial communication. The reminder thanked those who had participated, highlighting the importance of the research and the direct benefit to educators in participating. This second post resulted in the number of completed surveys increasing significantly in the proceeding days. In total, 488 people responded to the survey, with representation from all states and territories, all age groups from 18–65 and all qualifications and levels of experience.

Prior to distribution, the survey was piloted to assess face validity, ease of comprehension and approximate length of time taken, providing the researcher with a final opportunity to fine-tune the survey prior to a large distribution (Bell & Waters, 2014). The pilot survey supported the researcher in understanding how the questions were interpreted by participants and provided an opportunity to consider using issues encountered during the pilot to improve on the final survey. Pilot participants with a wide range of demographics, qualifications and experience were recruited to consider levels of understanding and interpretation of the survey (Cox & Adams, 2008). The 12 pilot participants were known to the researcher and varied in age and experience, holding qualifications ranging from a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care to a Bachelor of Education. The participants were situated in Western Australia and Queensland and were provided with a link via email inviting them to complete the survey. Upon completion, participants were asked to answer five further questions relating to the survey experience and the option to provide additional comments if needed.

All participants agreed that the instructions were clearly written and easy to read on their device and had no further suggestions to improve on the questions. One participant noticed a grammatical error at question two, which was corrected by the researcher. It was noted by the researcher that some of the answers for question 13 were very similar, which suggested that the participants may have used the internet to search for the answer to the question. The question was revised to include the statement "there are no right or wrong answers" to reduce any possibility of participants feeling pressured to have the correct answer to the

question.

3.3.3   Phase One data analysis

The data were analysed through the Qualtrics software, which allowed the researcher to generate reports and tables of results. The data were collated under each of the survey questions and the researcher was able to filter through the results by age, qualification and level of experience to ascertain any emerging trends. The Qualtrics program was used to create graphs as a visual representation of the quantitative data, and the program allowed the researcher to search for key words or phrases and code the qualitative data by theme. Once the researcher had completed categorising the themes, they were re-examined and combined to reduce overlap.

3.4   Phase Two

This section outlines the second phase of data collection, which consisted of interviews and observations. The aim of Phase Two was to extend on the themes emerging from Phase One. Surveys are useful in obtaining information from a large group of people in a cost- and time-effective way; however, Cox and Adams (2008) remind us that they are dependent on the subjectivity of participants' memories. They are also limited to the questions asked by the researcher and may miss important issues if they are the only research approach taken. To ensure no issues or themes were missed, semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide the researcher with a richer understanding of perceptions, allowing the researcher to tease out some of the generalised conclusions emerging from the quantitative data from Phase One (Bell & Waters, 2014). The observations documented interactions between educators and children aged birth–2 and identified aspects of practice supporting the development of secure relationships discussed in interviews. The following paragraphs describe the participants and context, the procedure for data collection, the instrument used to collect data and how the data were analysed.

3.4.1   Phase Two context and participants

At the end of survey in Phase One, participants working in Long Day Care (LDC) and located in the Perth metropolitan area of Western Australia were invited to express their interest in continuing onto the subsequent phase of the study. To maintain anonymity, interested participants were provided with a second link, which brought them to a second survey (to ensure they could not be linked to their survey responses) to provide their service contact

details. In total, 28 participants in the online survey expressed an interest in their service participating in Phase Two, of which 12 were eligible. The ineligible 16 were either known to the researcher or not located in the Perth metropolitan region. The researcher chose one service at random by placing all service names in a hat and drawing one. The service coordinator was contacted to confirm that they would like to participate and requested to seek approval from their manager prior to proceeding. Once approval was granted, the coordinator was provided with an information letter outlining the purpose of the study and the process for collecting data to sign to provide informed consent.

The educational leader and educators aged 18–65 years working with children aged birth to two in the selected ECEC were then invited to participate in Phase Two of the study. There were no minimum qualification requirements, however, participants were required to have been employed at the service for a minimum of three months prior to the request. In total, six educators including the educational leader participated in semi-structured interviews. All educators had a minimum of a diploma-level early childhood qualification and had been employed at the service for more than three months. Observations were conducted in two rooms within the service, which educated and cared for children aged birth-2, and the semi-structured interviews were conducted in the central seating area.

3.4.2   Phase Two instruments and data collection procedures

In Phase Two, observations and semi-structured interviews were used as instruments for data collection. While the nature of a structured interview facilitates analysis, Cox and Adams (2008) argue the structured nature can make participants feel less at ease than semi-structured interviews, which allow participants to relax, permitting the emergence of key issues that may not have been previously identified by the researcher. A flexible approach allows the researcher to move between questions, supporting the flow of conversation and avoiding answer repetition. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to facilitate the researcher building on ideas and themes emerging from the survey. The researcher was able to probe responses and investigate and clarify concepts and practices. Questions were based on the survey questions and derived from indicators from *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008) and the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), but were open-ended to extend on emerging themes from the initial survey findings. Two semi-structured interview question sets were developed: one for educators and one for the educational leader. The interview questions for the educational leader were similar to the educator questions but focused on how the educational leader supported the educators to develop attachment relationships with infants/toddlers. Section one contained background information questions

about the educator. Section two contained questions relating to the educator's thinking about attachment. The third section focused on how educators supported attachment with infants/toddlers and offered educators the opportunity to comment on initial findings from the online survey. An additional question was included in this section after commencing observations: "During my observations, I noticed that routines such as nappy changes, feeding and sleeping take up a large part of the day. What is your view of this? Does this impact on attachment?" The fourth section discussed how the educators were supported in their understanding of attachment theory, and the fifth and final section provided educators with the opportunity to add any additional comments that had not been discussed. The documentation that educators shared during the semi-structured interviews related to their relationships with infant/toddlers and supported their responses to the interview questions. This documentation included learning stories, observations, jottings, critical reflection and program evaluation.

Table 3.3: Content of semi-structured interview questions

Phase 2: Semi-structured interview	
Section of interview	Content
Opening	Study purpose Assurance of confidentiality Data management Duration of interview
Background	Participants' experience and qualifications Current position and length of service Number of educators and children in room
Thinking about attachment	Importance of educators developing attachment relationships with children Awareness and use of stages of attachment development Supporting the ongoing development of attachment relationships and challenges faced
Supporting attachment	Ways in which participant supports attachment Participants' opinion of online survey results Respecting and including Using and inclusion of family and culture Discussion of participant's documentation related to supporting attachment Impact of routines on attachment development Physical and emotional availability
How educators are supported in understanding attachment	EYLF Professional development National Quality Standards Reflect, Respect, Relate
Debrief/understanding	Summary of discussion Opportunity for participant to make further comments

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators from the selected service who had agreed to participate in Phase Two. In total, all six educators who were approached agreed to participate. The group consisted of five educators working directly with infants/toddlers, and the educational leader who supported these educators. The participating educators were provided with a choice of location for the semi-structured interviews, which was agreed to be held onsite at the service in the shared seating area. The interviews varied in duration from 20 minutes to one hour and were recorded to avoid the researcher having to stop and take notes, maintaining a natural flow of conversation. Permission for audio-recording was obtained prior to commencing Phase Two of the project, which eliminated the possibility of participants

initially agreeing to participate but then disagreeing to being audio-recorded at the last minute. At the beginning of each semi-structured interview, the researcher highlighted that the purpose of the audio-recording was to ensure participants' responses were accurately represented. As the type and size of a recording device can influence how comfortable a participant feels (Cox & Adams, 2008), the interviews were recorded using an application on the researcher's mobile phone and were subsequently downloaded and transcribed. The participants were requested to bring work samples and observations, which were discussed during the semi-structured interview in relation to how they demonstrated evidence of supporting secure relationships.

Observations were conducted in the two rooms in which infants/toddlers attended and documented interactions between educators and children aged birth–2 to identify aspects of practice discussed in the semi-structured interviews.   The researcher used the observation tool from the relationships variable of *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008). The observation sheet required the researcher to score observations based on indicators within each of the four signals of quality relationships. This was then recorded onto a rating sheet, with which the researcher took the results from the observation sheet scores and made a judgement of overall quality of each signal as being either low, medium or high.

Table 3.4: Content of observation tool (DECS, 2008)

Phase 2: Observations	
Section of observation tool	Content
Responsiveness	Receives reliable responses
	Use of home culture
	Physical and emotional access to educator
	Observation of signals and cues
	Reaction to nonverbal and verbal cues
	Mood considered
	Comforted quickly when distressed
Positive interactions	Interactive play
	Positive communication
	Welcoming gestures
	Affection display
	Educator interest in activity
	One-on-one involvement
	Efforts are praised
	Access to conflict support
	Positivity displayed towards child
	Questions and comments made to child by educator
	Extension of social cues
	Suggestions of what to do, rather than what not to do
Quality verbal exchanges	Respectful communication between educators and parents
	Sustained interactions
	Educator- initiated interactions
	Child given time to respond and be understood
	Extension of initiated interactions
	Discussion of activity
	Response to child's exclamations and comments
	Educator initiated social language games
	Educator's use of non-verbal language
	Use of home language
	Greeted on arrival or departure
Appropriateness	Home language spoken where possible
	Culturally familiar contact
	Caring behaviours displayed amongst educators
	Sustained interactions
	Acknowledgement of effort
	Fair treatment
	Educators modelling non-discriminatory language and behaviour
	Transitions explained to child
	Realistic expectations
	Supported when overwhelmed
	Labelling and support of emotions
	Correct pronunciation of name
	Constructive discouragement of aggression

A total of four children (two children from each of the two rooms being observed) were selected within the birth–2 age group with equal gender distribution to observe for 10 minutes each hour, over six hours, in a range of situations and activities such as separation from families, meals, sleep routines and experiences offered within the setting. Observations were conducted for four days over a six-week period, on the same day and time for each visit. The observations took place in the usual environment in which the children spend their time at the service. The researcher used the observational approach of being inactive but known to the group: educators were aware of the researcher's presence, but the researcher avoided active participation with the educators and children as much as possible (Newby, 2014).

3.4.3   Phase Two data analysis

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and uploaded to the analysis software, NVivo. The researcher read each individual interview multiple times to code key concepts and identify emerging themes. The interviews were then compared with each other to identify consistent themes across the interviews and labels were created within the software for each theme to categorise the excerpts from each interview relating to the theme. Once the themes were identified, the data were organised according to the interview question to which it related. The researcher additionally completed word frequency searches to identify words or topics mentioned most frequently throughout the interviews. Documentation samples were coded in relation to the emerging themes and included in the question responses as evidence of what was being discussed.

The researcher conducted six ten-minute observations per child in a range of settings for four children each day. Observations were rated in real time as the researcher conducted the observations, as per the recommended guidelines from *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008). Indicators for each of the variables were rated as being positive, negative, missed opportunity or no opportunity. From these ratings, an overall judgement was made as to whether the overall observation scored low, medium or high for each of the global signals of quality. Once all the observations were completed, the researcher developed a table, collating the high, medium and low scores and calculating the percentages for each room in relation to each of the four signals of a quality relationship. During each observation, the researcher was required to document a brief description of the observation context and the factors affecting observation, and these were recorded to use as examples of high, medium and low scores.

3.5   Validity

Zohrabi (2013) suggests it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure each phase of the research incorporates validity: how valid the research is and whether the researcher has evaluated what they intended to evaluate. They argue that the use of different types of data collection instruments combined with collecting data from different participants improves the validity and reliability of data. To enhance the validity of the study, the researcher utilised several methods, including triangulation, member checks and longer-term observation.

Triangulation is the "term given to the use of other qualitative methods, literature and experimentation to evaluate research findings", and uses different methodologies to examine the same topic (Cox & Adams, 2008, p. 25). By mixing methods and using data from multiple sources, triangulation supported the researcher to overcome the confines of a single method used alone and reduce potential bias (Zohrabi, 2014).

At the end of each semi-structured interview, the researcher confirmed the main points that the interviewee had made to ensure that there was a true representation of the interview. Once the interviews were transcribed, a copy was provided to the interviewees so that they could conduct a member check and seek clarification if necessary to ensure conclusions were not drawn by the researcher. This aimed to confirm that what was recorded and transcribed was a true representation of the interview. Providing the participants with the opportunity to conduct a member check confirms and validates what the researcher thinks they observed and discussed (Zohrabi, 2013). At the end of each day's observations, the researcher held short conversations with the participants to explore the happenings of the day and ensure that what they had observed was a true representation of what had occurred. No educators had any additional feedback to provide.

Zohrabi (2013) suggests that validity is improved when observations are extended over a longer period of time over different sites. In Phase Two, the researcher observed practice over four weeks in two different age groups to increase the validity of the study. *Reflect, Respect, Relate* recommends observing each child for five minutes; by observing for ten minutes, the researcher was able to sufficiently observe interactions between educators and children.

3.6   Reliability

Obtaining similar results from both the questionnaire and observation would be easy for another researcher because of the quantitative nature of the instruments used. The tool for

observation is freely available for both formal and informal researchers. Explanations of each stage of the research project were provided in the methodology chapter, alongside copies of all information letters, consent forms and the questions in the questionnaire. Details of the data collection process and how both the qualitative and quantitative data were analysed were provided. Details of the participants such as qualifications, age range and number of years of experience were provided in the methodology chapter, alongside information relating to the context of the setting. Using a combination of instruments and a mix of participation supported triangulation of data, which can enhance the reliability of a study.

A pilot test was conducted for the Phase One online survey, however, as the semi-structured interview questions in Phase Two grew from the online survey in Phase One, it was not possible to pilot test the semi-structured interview. The observation tool from *Reflect, Respect, Relate* has been tested for reliability, achieving an 85% consistency rating, which is well above minimum ratings (DECS, 2008).

3.7   Research bias

To remain as impartial as possible through each stage of the process to reduce any possibility of bias, the researcher did not shortlist ECEC settings she was currently working with or had previously worked with in her current or any previous roles for Phase Two. This was to ensure that she did not arrive with a pre-conceived notion of expectations. The researcher was also conscious of her experience in working in a setting using a primary caregiving approach and was mindful not to allow this experience to influence her interpretation of observations and interviews.

3.8   Limitations of the study

Due to time limitations, the study only conducted interviews and observations at one ECEC service. Despite only enlisting one service, the study interviewed six educators with a range of experience and in a range of positions in the service.

3.9   Ethical considerations

All data were stored securely, with pseudonyms used and confidentiality assured. Ethics approval was sought from the Edith Cowan University ethics committee prior to commencement. As the researcher is a member of the closed Facebook pages on which she posted the survey, a separate Facebook page was created for the study to avoid any perceived

coercion. To ensure all participants had given informed consent, the first page of the survey contained an information letter outlining the purpose and participants needed to select "I agree" to proceed. After completion, participants were invited to continue with the study interviews and observations and, if interested, needed to provide contact details. Parental consent was sought to permit the researcher to observe the interactions between their child and educators.

The researcher's employment during the time of the study may have been considered a risk factor as she has visited and was known to many ECEC settings in Western Australia as a consultant. The researcher has many years' experience using a system of primary caregiving, which could be considered to influence the researcher's perception of quality practices.

To reduce this risk, the researcher invited only those ECEC settings to participate in the interviews and observations that she had not previously worked with. The use of an observational tool was intended to help to reduce bias when observing practice. In the information letter, participants were advised of the procedure for information storage, outlining who would have access and reassured that their answers would be kept confidential.

Informed consent was not sought from the babies and toddlers participating in the study: their parents provided consent on their behalf. Regardless, the researcher believed she had an ethical duty to maintain the rights and dignity of all children at all times. The *Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics* details specific ethical considerations when children are participants in research, maintaining that researchers should consider children's right to privacy, energy levels, whether they feel safe and whether they are interested in participation (Early Childhood Australia, n.d.). The researcher was mindful to consider the infants'/toddlers' needs at all times and explained to educators prior to commencing that in the case that an infant/toddler signalled verbally or non-verbally that they were uncomfortable with her presence, she would immediately remove herself from the environment. During the four days of observations, no child appeared to be uncomfortable with her presence and conversations at the end of each day with educators confirmed that they agreed.

3.10 Summary

Using an interpretive theoretical framework, the data in this study were collected in two phases. Data from the online survey in Phase One informed the development of the semi-structured interview questions in Phase Two and allowed the researcher to further explore and clarify the emerging themes. Observations provided a third form of data collection and helped

the researcher to document aspects of practice that support the development of attachment relationships. The results of the data analysis are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4   Findings

4.1   Introduction

This study aimed to investigate educators' perceptions of the attachment relationships they hold with infants and toddlers. This chapter reports on the findings from Phase One and Phase Two of this study based on the data collected through an online survey, observations and semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed to interpret the three research questions:

1. What are early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop?
2. What are early childhood educators' beliefs around attachment relationships?
3. How do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler– caregiver relationships?

The data collection was conducted in two phases. In Phase One, the online survey provided a broad overview of educator perceptions and practices in relation to attachment theory and supporting the development of attachment relationships. Phase Two provided the researcher the opportunity to build on the initial findings of the online survey through semi-structured interviews with a small group of six educators, and to observe their practices in their Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) setting.

4.2   Phase One results – Online survey

Data from Phase One were collected through an anonymous online survey. The survey was developed using Qualtrics and was anonymous to motivate participants to freely share their perceptions. The survey was distributed through email, social media, snowballing and via a database of emails developed by the researcher.

The survey consisted of a mix of open- and closed-ended questions and contained five sections: the results are reported under each of these sections. Section one related to the respondents' demographics. Section two was designed to elicit knowledge and understanding of attachment theory and approaches that support the development of attachment relationships. The third section consisted of eight questions and related to participants' beliefs in relation to attachment theory, as educators. The fourth section related to participants' practices as educators. This section contained three questions about how educators develop

supportive relationships with children in their care. In the fifth and final section, participants were offered the opportunity to provide any further comments in a text-free box.

A total of 563 people clicked on the link to enter the survey. After reading the information letter, 488 agreed to participate; two participants selected "I do not agree" and were automatically exited from the survey. Varying numbers of respondents answered each question, of which the exact numbers are documented through this chapter. A total of 205 participants completed the survey from the beginning to the end. Where comments were requested, respondents often made more than one comment for each answer: this number of comments for each question is documented through the chapter. Whilst the survey was anonymous, the researcher had the ability to isolate each individual survey response. To identify individual responses, the researcher assigned a code to each of the survey responses relating to their qualification (see Table 4.1). This was done to disaggregate some of the data and identify any emerging patterns in relation to the qualifications of the respondents.

Table 4.1:Codes and corresponding qualifications

Symbol	Explanation
WTC3	Working towards Certificate III
C3	Certificate III
C4	Certificate IV
D	Diploma
AD	Advanced Diploma
B	Bachelor

Throughout the chapter, quantitative data were rounded up if at and/or above 0.5 and down if below 0.5, and therefore, the totals may not equal the sum of the individual components of each question. Throughout the survey, there were occurrences of "false responses" to questions. These include responses with randomly typed letters, the use of n/a or special symbols inserted into the text field. These false responses were not included in the findings of the survey.

4.2.1   Section One – Background Information and demographics

To understand the background of the participants of the online survey, this section asked a series of questions on the location, position, qualifications, age and experience of the respondents. Responses were received from participants located in all Australian states and territories (n = 486). The highest number of respondents were from New South Wales (33%),

followed by Western Australia (24%). The high number of respondents relative to the total number of services in Western Australia may be due to the researcher being in this state, and educators knowing the researcher. The lowest response was received by Tasmania (2%) followed by the Northern Territory (2%). Two respondents were located outside Australia and were automatically directed to the end of the survey. The location of respondents is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Location of respondents

Category	Option	Number	%
	NSW	159	33%
	WA	116	24%
	QLD	82	17%
Q1. In which state or territory are you located?	VIC	67	14%
	SA	25	5%
	ACT	13	3%
	NT	12	2%
	TAS	10	2%
	Not located in Australia	2	1%
	Total	486	100%

All respondents were working in Long Day Care (LDC) settings (n = 486).

Positions of participants in their LDC service

Just over a third (35%) were service directors or coordinators of a setting with enrolled children aged birth to two (n = 85). A quarter were educators working directly with children aged birth to two years, and 13% were educational leaders at ECEC settings with children aged birth to two. Educators working directly with children over the age of two years accounted for 11% of responses. The 8% of respondents who selected "other" provided the following additional descriptions of their current positions:

- Cultural liaison and engagement officer in an LDC with children aged birth to two.
- An educator working with children aged one–three years of age in an LDC.
- Trainee educators in an LDC with children aged birth to two.
- Second in charge in an LDC with children aged birth to two.
- Educators working with children aged birth–18 months in an LDC.

- "Float" educator working with all age groups including children aged birth to two in an LDC.
- Supervisor in an LDC with children aged birth to two.

Participant qualifications

All respondents were either working towards a minimum of a Certificate III qualification, or held qualifications ranging from a Certificate III to the postgraduate level (n = 465). The largest group held a diploma-level qualification (42%), followed by those with bachelor-level qualifications (22%). Nine (3%) selected "other", comprised of respondents holding an associate diploma, and those currently working towards a diploma, bachelor or postgraduate qualification. It is interesting to note that the highest level of representation was a diploma-level qualification.

Table 4.3: Highest qualifications held by respondents

Category	Option	Frequency	%
	Diploma	197	42%
	Bachelor	100	22%
Q3. What is the	Advanced Diploma	60	13%
highest qualification	Certificate III	40	9%
you hold?	Postgraduate	43	9%
	Working towards Certificate III	13	3%
	Other (please state)	9	2%
	Certificate IV	3	1%
	Total	465	100%

Age ranges represented

Respondents represented all age groups (n = 464), with the largest cohort aged 25–34 years (32%), followed closely by the 34–44 years age group, which made up 26% of the responses. Respondents aged 45–54 accounted for 19%, those aged 15–24 accounted for 13% and those aged 55–65 accounted for 9% of responses. The least represented age group was 65–74 years, at 1%.

Table 4.4: Age of respondents

Category	Option	Frequency	%
	25–34	148	32%
	34–44	121	26%
	45–54	89	19%
Q4. What is your	15–24	61	13%
age?	55–64	43	9%
	65–74	2	1%
	Total	**464**	**100%**

Level of experience

All levels of experience were represented (n = 464). Over half of the respondents had more than 10 years' experience (53%) and almost a quarter had 5–10 years of experience (23%). Ten percent of respondents had 3–5 years' experience. Respondents with less than one year, one–two years and two–three years' experience were the smallest groups, at 5% each.

4.2.2   Section Two - Knowledge of attachment theory

This section reports on the knowledge and understanding of attachment theory and the approaches respondents took to support the development of attachment relationships.

It is interesting to note that of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, just over half answered the questions about knowledge of attachment theory (n = 270). Most educators stated that they had heard of attachment theory (91%), while 9% of respondents stated that they had not heard of attachment theory. Of those who had heard of attachment theory, 60% reported that they were either moderately (37%) or extremely (23%) familiar with attachment theory, while almost a third reported that they were either somewhat familiar (20%) or slightly familiar (11%). A small group reported that they were not at all familiar with attachment theory (11%). The data were considered in relation to the qualifications of the respondents, however, no significant difference was found.

To elicit further information, respondents were asked to describe their understanding of attachment theory in a few dot points. The overall number of comments for this question was 268. The comments were coded, with three themes identified relating to the definition of attachment, impact of attachment and development of attachment.

Definition of attachment

Respondents made a total of 132 comments around what they believed the definition of attachment to be. The most frequently occurring theme in the responses was centred on the notion of a relationship between a child and at least one adult. One respondent (B15) defined this broadly as "*a strong emotional and physical attachment to at least one primary caregiver".* Another respondent extended this definition, proposing that the purpose of this attachment to one adult was to *"have a sense of security"* (B69). Many respondents drew attention to this relationship specifically between educators and children, with one individual suggesting that it is *"when a child gets attached to one particular staff"* (D17). The theorists associated with attachment theory were cited in some of the responses, including *"John Bowlby & Mary Ainsworth"* (AD67), and one response suggested how early attachment can influence later relationships, proposing *"the bond between infant and caregiver, that can impact the attachments they create for their life"* (D68). Respondents also explained that there were differences in the quality of attachment relationships, with one respondent (D49) offering that these differences can impact "*on an individual's social-function, wellbeing and competency and can influence every aspect of her/his life".* Some respondents were less sure of what they believed attachment to be, providing responses including "*I've heard about it in tafe but I don't have a understanding about what it is*" (C371), "*I'm assuming it's like attachment parenting*" (C373) and "*I'm not familiar with the subject*" (C372).

Impact of attachment

Ninety comments were made around the impact of attachment on infants and toddlers. Many educators commented on how attachment supports young children in the absence of their primary caregiver, proposing that "*babies need to have caring attachment to feel safe, supported and nurtured when away form their primary care giver*" (D30), and how this safety leads to the development of *"confident and involved learners"* (D76). Attachment was also perceived as promoting a child's *"sense of independence and enhancing their ability to take risks"* (D70) and affects young children by helping them "*to feel safe and secure and feel a sense of belonging*" (D75). The impact of a lack of a secure attachment was suggested to "*cause problems now and later in life"* (D35).

Development of attachment

Five comments related to how attachment develops. One educator (D16) suggested *"a child builds attachment with a parent, and then secondary caregivers"*, while another offered their opinion on how they believed attachment develops specifically within ECEC settings:

> *"The children whom we educate and care for come into a new environment. They form strong attachments with adults who are responsive and fulfill child's needs (emotional and physical). Children will show this attachment in different ways." (E17)*

When initially asked about their knowledge of attachment theory in the previous question, 9% of respondents commented that they were not at all familiar. It is interesting to note that when asked to provide a brief comment on their understanding, several other educators revealed that they were not at all familiar, increasing this number from 9% to 11%.

Knowledge of stages of attachment

Following from knowledge of attachment theory, respondents were asked about their familiarity with the stages of attachment (n = 270). Some 42% of respondents claimed to be either moderately or extremely familiar, with 39% reporting that they were either slightly (20%) or somewhat (19%) familiar. A total of 19% reported that they were not at all familiar. To elicit further information, respondents were asked to describe their understanding of the stages of attachment theory in a few dot points. Again, interestingly, just over half of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey answered this question (n = 268). Their responses were coded, and the following four themes emerged relating to the four stages of attachment: separation anxiety, attachment classifications, and the development of primary and then secondary attachment figures.

Four stages of attachment

In total, 57 comments were provided that made varying references to the four stages of attachment. Some stated only names for these stages such as an educator (C318) who identified the four stages as *"1. pre-attachment phase 2. Attachment is Making 3. Clear cut 4. Formation of reciprocal relationship"*. Others offered a more detailed definition, such as B19:

> *"During the first few weeks of life a baby begins to form an attachment with parent or other primary caregiver however will still be comfortable being left with another person. During the following months the attachment to the primary caregiver deepens and babies show a preference for the primary caregiver, will be comforted quicker with them than with someone they are not as familiar with. From around 9 months babies will start to show separation anxiety when separated from their primary caregiver and show a definite preference for them. From around 18mths–2 years, with developing language, babies begin to understand their primary caregivers comings and goings."*

Separation anxiety

In total, 24 comments suggested that separation anxiety was a stage of attachment development. Some grouped it with other indicators, such as an educator (D44), who expressed their understanding of the stages of attachment as *"Stranger Anxiety Separation Anxiety Social Referencing"*. Others cited solely separation anxiety or offered a description of how they believe that separation anxiety would look in a young child.

Attachment classifications as stages of attachment

Respondents made 20 comments that identified classifications of attachment as stages of attachment. One educator (AD21) defined stages of attachment a:

> *"Secure, where the child believes that their needs will be meet. Avoidance, where the child believes that their needs probably will not be meet. Ambivalent, where child cannot rely on others. Severely disorganised, where child has no strategies on having their needs meet."*

The development of primary then secondary attachment relationships

Twenty-eight comments proposed that the process of attachment development involved first developing a primary attachment and subsequently a secondary attachment relationship, as voiced by D20:

> *"Generally a child's strongest (primary) attachment is with their parents, family or primary caregiver (their main carer). Other attachments (secondary) are formed with other primary/familiar carers i.e. grandparents, other family or carers."*

Some educators commented on the impact of the primary attachment figure on the child's ability to form secondary attachments, with B22 believing *"Children can form supportive attachments as secondary attachments if they have positive primary attachments".*

Difference between primary and secondary attachment

To establish an understanding of respondents' awareness of different attachment relationships, participants were asked if they were aware of the difference between a primary and secondary attachment. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, again, over half answered this question (n = 270). Some 73% of respondents believed they knew the difference between a primary and secondary attachment, with over a quarter (27%) stating that they were unaware. The data were considered in relation to the qualifications of the respondents, however, no significant difference was found. Respondents who stated that they did not know the difference were automatically skipped to the next questions, with the remaining respondents asked to describe their understanding (n = 185). Comments were coded, and six themes emerged, relating to parents as attachment figures, longevity of primary attachment figures, the role of extended family, the role of educators and secondary attachment figures being an alternative in the absence of the primary attachment figure.

Parents as primary attachment figures

Seventy-four comments related to primary attachment as an attachment relationship between a child and their parents, with a variety of perspectives on the definition of 'parent' expressed. Definitions ranged from defining 'parent' specifically as the mother or mother-figure, to both mothers and fathers, to the more general view as the person assuming guardianship or

identified as a parent. Most of the respondents used words and terms such as *"usually the mother"* (AD58), *"usually but not necessarily their birth mother"* (B59) and *"carers like parents"* (C360), which suggests there is flexibility in who assumes the role of primary attachment figure.

Primary attachment figures as lifelong attachments

Primary attachment figures as lifelong attachment figures was a theme expressed in 18 comments describing the difference between primary and secondary attachment figures. One educator (D23) defined the primary attachment figure as *"the person with whom a child maintains their main lifelong bond, and whom they want to be most comforted by when they are frightened or hurt, typically mother or mother figure".* Interestingly, no educators commented on the longevity (or lack of) of a secondary attachment figure.

Extended family as secondary attachment figures

Forty-five respondents believed extended family were secondary attachment figures for infants and toddlers. One educator (D24) suggested *"the secondary attachment refers to few special people in children's life whom they have developed a subsidiary or secondary attachment bond such as siblings, grandparents, nannies and especially father".* Twenty-seven comments identified grandparents specifically as secondary attachment figures.

Secondary attachment figures as alternate attachment figures in the absence of the primary attachment figure

Fourteen comments suggested secondary attachments acted as alternate attachment figures in the absence of the primary attachment figure, and that *"when primary is not available then secondary steps in"* (D25).

Primary and secondary caregivers in ECEC settings

Nine respondents described the difference between a primary and secondary attachment figure in terms of caregivers in ECEC settings. Some identified themselves as secondary attachment figures alongside other family members, with one describing that "*primary attachment is the attachment with the primary/significant person in the child's life. Generally this is the mother. Secondary attachments are other family members and children's educators and early learning centres*" (B61). Another educator (AD1) described this in terms of educators with no reference to parents or family, suggesting that:

> *"Primary refers to a 'Main' primary educator for the child. Secondary is a 'backup' educator who also knows the child and is able to cater to their needs should the primary be available at times."*

Familiarity with the Circle of Security (CoS)

Participants were next asked to identify their familiarity with the Circle of Security (CoS). Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 256 answered this question. Some 77% answered that they were familiar and 23% unfamiliar with the CoS. The data were considered in relation to the qualifications of the respondents, however, no significant difference was found. To elicit their understanding, educators who stated they were familiar were asked to describe the CoS in a few dot points (n = 186). The comments were coded and categorised as in the following sections.

Definition of CoS

Respondents offered differing perspectives of the CoS. Eighty comments defined the CoS in terms of the safety, security or secure base provided to children by both educators and parents, with one educator describing it as *"Adults to provide a secure base for children from which to explore their world and return to when needed to have emotional support and repair"* (B27). Nine comments proposed it was *"designed to enhance attachment security between parents and children"* (C462). Thirty comments described the CoS as providing emotional support for children through relationships:

> *"The base is the educator who is available to support children's emotional needs to give them the confidence to go out and explore. When they need more support they can return the educator for the necessary support to build the confidence to go out and explore again" (D46).*

Nineteen educators (10%) defined the CoS through their personal beliefs of what they thought it was, which could imply that they had not heard of the approach before. One educator suggested "*that children have a group of other children and adults they can talk to about anything*" (D31), while another commented *"The circle of security to me is the people in the family and the caregivers that nurture and care for the child"* (AD2).

The practical application of the CoS

In total, 26 comments described what CoS would look like in practice for both parents and educators. In practice ECEC settings, one educator suggested it was *"having educators is the same parts of the room each time, then child is aware of where to find those particular educators in time of need"* (D28), while another described the impact of the CoS on a child's confidence in exploring the environment (D29):

> *"Where a child is given the opportunity to have your attention, once confident given the opportunity to explore alone, your attention again to elevate learning and confidence, then comes back to you again. Knowing the flow of where the child is sitting at this point in time and what is required from you to best suit that child's personal needs."*

A third educator described it succinctly as *"attending to the child's needs. Protecting the child. Enjoying the child's company. Encouraging the child to explore their world around them"* (D30).

Familiarity with primary caregiving

The next question introduced the concept of primary caregiving: of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 246 answered this question as to whether they were familiar with the approach. Some 87% of respondents stated they were familiar and 13% stated they were unfamiliar. Those identifying as unfamiliar were skipped to the next question, while those familiar were asked to describe their understanding of the approach (n = 177). The themes that emerged are described below.

Who assumes the role of primary caregiver?

Twenty-four comments identified the primary caregiver as a parent; that *"parents are seen as primary caregivers to raise and care for their children, educators and agencies as supports"* (PG32). Forty-seven comments described a primary caregiver in more general terms, extending beyond the term 'parent', believing it to be *"the person that meets the child's needs and wants first, a cry, nappy change, hunger etc" (AD58)*. Another stated *"primary caregiving. One person who looks after the child's needs that forms an attachment to the child"* (AD51)*.*

Primary caregiving as an educational approach

There were 67 comments that described primary caregiving in terms of an educational approach to ECEC. Most respondents who commented on this used four terms- 'key worker', 'key educator', 'focus educator' and 'primary caregiver'. One respondent provided a definition of key worker focused on the responsibility of process-driven tasks throughout the day:

> *"Also called key worker system; where educators are assigned to specific focus children and take primary responsibility for meeting their needs throughout the day; drop off, changes, meals, sleep time, etc … to support consistency for the child and the development of a strong relationship with one key care giver" (B54).*

Another respondent (AD79) built on this definition, considering how the key educator supports learning for the child during this time in their service:

> *"We refer to this as the key educator in our service where each educator has a small group of children they are tie key educator for. They ensure that they know all about the child and their family and what the child needs. They ensure the chid is supported to meet developmental mile stones and they take the primary role in health and hygiene routines for those children."*

In contrast, a third respondent did not mention the process-driven tasks associated with the role but focused on the goal of relationship building to describe a 'focus educator', defining how *"a focus educator is given responsibility to care for the child and their well-being. They*

provide loving and respectful care and, they form an attachment with the child to promote their sense of security in the environment" (B12).

Several responses linked primary caregiving to the CoS, with one respondent (D29) claiming that a:

> *"Primary Care Giver is the person the child tends to come back to as their person in the circle of security. It is knowing where the child is at and what is needed from you. Being there for the child and documenting what you can."*

One respondent spoke of the benefits of primary caregiving for supporting attachment development and drew comparisons between general group care without a primary caregiving or similar approach, and factory lines, claiming that "*because the group is smaller the children attach to each other as well as the educator. It allows for more meaningful interaction and each child is heard, trusted and nurtured on a more intimate scale thus attachment forms rather than being on a production line as care sometimes ends up being in a busy day*" (PG80). Another claimed that the approach is used in Reggio Emilia (a region of Italy famous for its approach to ECEC), explaining that they *"use the Primary Care giving approach as in Reggio Emilia. Educators move with their children into new classrooms to maintain primary care giving*" (B78).

What a primary caregiver does

Twenty comments described what a primary caregiver does, suggesting *"primary caregiving addresses the basic needs of the child … this ensures the survival of the child" (D36).* Another comment offered the more holistic overview that *"primary caregiving addresses the needs of the child in totality. Emotional, physical and social needs and most trusted person in child's life"* (D37).

How attachment relationships are developed

Following on from the questions around primary caregiving, the next question asked respondents to provide a couple of dot points to describe how they believed an attachment relationship developed. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 209 answered this question.

Trust

Trust was identified as a theme in how attachment relationships develop in 56 comments. One educator focused on solely the child and perceived the development of trust as a learning experience facilitated through *"spending time and sharing experiences and providing for the child's needs so they learn to trust you"* (B22). Others suggested that developing trust

extended beyond the child and educator's relationship, built *"between the family and the educator and the infant and the educator"* (B46). Other respondents offered a perspective of trust as a support to the educator consisting of *"Assistance from other trusted people around you. Trust in yourself"* (D49).

Time

In total, 55 comments were made about time. Some comments proposed that both quantity and quality of time was important for developing attachment relationships, *"by the amount of time we spend with a child and also the quality of time we spend with them"* (AD45), while others commented on the devotion of time to the attachment relationship, believing *"it is great for the carer to spend the additional time with the baby/child and time is quality time so the child establishes trust with the carer"* (PG47).

Security

The development of attachment relationships through providing a sense of security to children was identified in 48 comments. Brief comments were made about security and how it can act as an enabler for children to develop further relationships by *"forming a secure relationship with a trusting adult then able to form attachments with others"* (PG63).

Responsiveness

Many respondents described responsiveness as an important component of development of an attachment relationship. Twenty-five comments provided a general description of responsiveness, while others offered more detailed descriptions of features such as "*warm interactions, smiles, eye contact, responding to children's needs understanding children's individual temperament, cues, rituals routines consistent familiar caregivers talking with infants when changes in routines are occurring"* (AD40).

Thirty-three educators believed attachment relationships developed through responsiveness to *"meeting the basic needs of the child"* (D64), while others believed meeting a child's needs went beyond basic needs, arguing *"Whilst the basic needs are met, food shelter etc to form secure relationships we need to go beyond the basics needs and connect with the child building trust"* (D36). The importance of positive interactions was highlighted as a key aide in relationship development, with one educator (AD51) describing the process as follows:

> *"Attachment develops with interactions that are caring and encouraging. The child becomes comfortable and feels able to interact and then is able to move into the next phase which allows them to feel safe enough to play or interact with the other educators."*

It was interesting to note that one educator argued that *"by definition, a normally developing child will develop an attachment relationship with any caregiver who provides regular physical and/or emotional care, regardless of the quality of that care"* (D23).

Love

The presence of love between an educator and infants/toddlers was identified by 15 comments as a factor supporting the development of attachment relationships. Attachment relationships were perceived to develop *"through ultimate love"* (PG52) or by *"allowing the child to feel loved"* (D53).

4.2.3   Section Three – Attachment beliefs

In this section, respondents were asked to answer questions relating to their beliefs around attachment relationships. An overview of the questions and responses is provided in Table 4.5. The first question asked if they believed developing an attachment relationship with infants and toddlers was important to their role: 207 of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate answered this question. Almost all respondents believed developing an attachment relationship with infants and toddlers was important to their role (99%), with just one respondent believing that it was not important (1%). The next question related to respondents' beliefs around their relationship with infants and toddlers affecting the child's attachment to them. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 207 answered this question. In total, 97% of respondents believed their relationship with infants and toddlers affected the child's attachment to them, and 3% believed that it did not. The subsequent series of six questions used a Likert scale to ascertain the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with statements relating to attachment beliefs. The responses to these questions were considered in relation to qualifications, however, no significant difference was found. The responses to the six questions are presented in the following section.

Respondents were asked about whether they believed cuddling an infant/toddler influences their dependence on educators. Of the 486 respondents agreeing to participate in the survey, 207 answered this question. More than half of the respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement (52%), and 23% somewhat or strongly agreed that the more infants and toddlers were cuddled, the longer they would be dependents on an educator. Twenty-six percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Respondents were next asked to agree or disagree about a statement relating to speaking with very young infants. Out of 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 207 answered this question. Most respondents (98%) somewhat or strongly believed that conversations with 3-month old babies had equal importance to conversations with 3-year old children, with 1% either somewhat or strongly disagreeing; 1% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Respondents were next asked to identify whether opportunities for one-on-one interactions between infants/toddlers and educators were planned in their program. Of the 486 respondents agreeing to participate in the survey, 207 answered this question. Some 87% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that there were opportunities for one-on-one interactions between infants/toddlers and educators in their service program, with 5% either somewhat or strongly disagreeing that this occurs in their service program. Seven percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Question 23 asked if respondents agreed or disagreed that infants should not spend too much time with one educator when they commence care. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 207 answered this question. Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) either somewhat or strongly disagreed that it was important that infants and toddlers were discouraged from spending too much time with one educator when they first commence care, and 23% either somewhat or strongly agreed. Some 15% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Respondents were then asked to agree or disagree with their belief on the importance of speaking to a non-verbal child about what is going to happen to them. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 207 answered this question. Most respondents (98%) either strongly or somewhat agreed it was important to discuss with non-verbal children what was about to happen to them. Only 1% strongly disagreed, with no respondents somewhat disagreeing. A further 1% neither agreed nor disagreed.

The following question asked respondents opinions of children settling themselves independently. Out of 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 207 answered this question. There were 15% of respondents who either somewhat or strongly agreed that it was better for infants and toddlers to self-settle when upset rather than being comforted by an educator. Seventy percent either somewhat or strongly disagreed with this statement and 15% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 4.5: Questions relating to educator beliefs

Question	Response (%)					
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Q20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The more you cuddle infants and toddlers, the longer they will be dependent on you"	10 (5%)	37 (18%)	54 (26%)	52 (25%)	54 (26%)	207 (100%)
Q21. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is as important to have conversations with a 3-month old baby as it is to have conversations with a 3-year old child"	187 (90%)	15 (7%)	3 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	207 (100%)
Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Opportunities for one-on-one interactions between infants/toddlers and educators are planned in my program or my service's program"	126 (61%)	54 (26%)	15 (7%)	9 (4%)	3 (1%)	207 (100%)
Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "To ensure infants and toddlers develop relationships with all educators, it is important that they do not spend too much time with the one educator when they first commence care"	9 (4%)	39 (19%)	31 (15%)	54 (26%)	74 (36%)	207 (100%
Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is important to explain to a non-verbal (not yet talking) child what is about to happen to them during their time in your service. For example, 'I am going to clean your face now'"	195 (94%)	8 (4%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	207 (100%)
Q25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is better for infants and toddlers to settle themselves independently when upset than to be comforted by an educator"	8 (4%)	23 (11%)	31 (15%)	48 (23%)	97 (47%)	207 (100%)

4.2.4   Section Four - Educator practices

Section four consisted of questions relating to educator practices to support attachment relationships in their setting. This section relates to research question three: "how do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships?"

Participants were first asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed about whether information from children's families and culture should be used to inform the development of the service routines and program. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 204 answered this question. In total, 96% of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that information from children's families and culture should inform service routines and program, with one person (1%) strongly disagreeing. Three percent neither agreed nor disagreed. No respondents selected "somewhat disagree". The data were considered in relation to the qualifications of the respondents, however, no significant difference was found.

Table 4.6: The use of home language and culture in service routines and program

Category	Option	Frequency	%
Q26. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Information, including language, from children's families and culture should be used to inform service routines and the program"	Strongly agree	172	84%
	Somewhat agree	24	12%
	Neither agree nor disagree	7	3%
	Strongly disagree	1	1%
	Somewhat disagree	0	0%
	Total	204	100%

To gain a better understanding of their attachment practices, respondents were asked to identify three key things that they do to create attachment relationships with infants and toddlers. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 204 answered this question. The responses were coded and categorised under the following themes.

Getting to know the child, their interests, their routines, their culture and their family was mentioned in 105 comments. Within this theme, there were several components that respondents identified. The importance of orientations was highlighted by respondents, with one (B54) describing it as:

> *"Settling period/transition visits in advance of starting with us gathering as much information about the child and family as possible; food preferences, favourite activities, how they like to be put to sleep etc … Doing our utmost to provide children with a warm, comforting and consistent response to any distress they may experience in their transition to the service."*

Another respondent (AD38) highlighted the importance of a slow start, and advised that educators should:

> "get to know primary caregiver, slowly introduce the children to the day start with visits then move to visits for a few hours without parents and slowly increase the time spent at the centre. A slow start creates firmer bonds. This is where the trust and reciprocal relationships can be seen."

Using children's interests to support the development of an attachment relationship with children was articulated in 17 comments, in addition to using these interests to *"show an interest in their interests"* (D55). Home routines were also considered an important factor, and 33 respondents made comments around routines and how to incorporate them into settings:

> *"We try to follow the same routine as home as best we can in our setting. We suggest we use linen from home so it smells like home and is familiar. We spend time finding out their routines, likes and dislikes. And about the families' dynamics, whether they have family close by etc" (D56).*

Another respondent suggested *"programming the child's culture into the program learning and using some of the child's own language"* (AD57).

Communication

Sixty-eight comments were made relating to communication, which included both verbal and/or non-verbal communication. Several respondents suggested *how* educators should communicate with infants and toddlers, with one respondent suggesting to *"communicate with smiles give them eyecontact, words"* (AD40). One respondent described the type of non-verbal communication that was helpful in developing attachment relationships, advising educators to "*use non-verbal communication that is encouraging, supporting and responsive to children's needs*" (PG42). Crying as a form of communication was considered by some respondents, with one respondent suggesting that to support the development of attachment relationships, educators should "*attend to their crys and comfort them*" (D74).

Another respondent (AD41) shared specific phrases and information-sharing practices that they used to support attachment relationship development between educators and children and educators and family, such as:

> *"tell them mum/dad are coming back later its ok … nursing i get many conversations in with the parents as they know their child best, they can tell me how their night has been if they have been eating properly and all the rest of the important information to help get to know their child".*

It was interesting to note that only one respondent believed that communication involved not just the communication with the child and family about their background but was instead a two-way process that involved sharing some information about their lives too. The respondent shared that to create a secure attachment they would "*communicate with families about regular routines and caregiving strategies. Share information about myself with them. Spend time with family/child to create bonds*" (D84).

Communication through routines such as feeding, sleep settling, and nappy change was a theme present in many responses. One respondent considered these routine times "*a special one on one time with talking and smiling sing and talk and smile*" (D74). Respondents identified that routine times were a unique opportunity for educators to have one-on-one time with children and one respondent argued that while this one-on-one time may occur naturally, educators should consciously *"plan one on one for all children and particularly during routines and transitions times"* (PG42). Another respondent emphasised the importance of explaining the process of routines, offering that educators should have "*discussions during nappy changes explaining what is happening*" (D83). In contrast, a third respondent considered the importance of creating sleep-time rituals, advising that *"when putting the child to sleep you go through a routine like cuddles and stories"* (C373).

Time

Many respondents believed that time was a factor when developing an attachment bond with a child. Respondents advocated for time to be spent with both the family and the children when in their care. In total, 56 comments were made about time. Many spoke of the importance of one-on-one time and to *"plan one on one for all children and particularly during routines and transitions times"* (PG42)*.* Others highlighted that it is important that *"time is spent with families"* (B43) to get to know the child.

Cuddles

Fifty-six comments mentioned the provision of cuddles to support the development of an attachment relationship. Respondents specified times throughout the day when children may need cuddles, such as "*when putting the child to sleep you go through a routine like cuddles and stories*" (C373), and advocate to "*CUDDLE them lots when mum/dad leaves especially if they are new*" (AD41). One educator made mention of young children's choice in *who* should cuddle them, suggesting that we should "*Let children chose who they would like to interact and get cuddles from*" (PG77).

Physical and emotional availability

Twenty-four comments cited physical and emotional support as a key way to create attachment relationships with infants and toddlers. One educator (PG13) defined this as "*Physical contact (cuddles), emotional support (when they need help or upset)*". Some suggested this was "*emotionally availability*" (PG39), while others spoke of availability as "*offering comfort when require*" (B65).

Consistency

Twenty-two comments identified consistency as a key way to create attachment relationships with infants and toddlers. The theme of consistency comprised consistency of staff, consistency of interactions, the general concept of consistency and consistency of environments.

Building trust

Sixteen comments suggested that trust is required for an attachment relationship to develop, which not only consisted of trust between the child and educator, but also "*trust between family and educator*" (PG32).

When attachment relationships are developed

Following on from *how* they developed attachment relationships, participants were next asked to identify *when* they developed attachment relationships with children in their care. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 205 answered this question. The majority (94%) believed they developed attachment relationships throughout all activities and experiences, with 6% believing they developed these relationships mainly at sleep times, mealtimes and nappy change times. One percent of respondents believed attachment relationships were developed mainly at planned play activities. The data were considered in relation to the qualifications of the respondents, however, no significant difference was found.

Table 4.7: Times when educators develop attachment relationships with children

Category	Option	Frequency	%
Q28. When do you develop attachment relationships with children in your care?	Throughout all activities and experiences	192	94%
	Mainly at sleep times, mealtimes and nappy change times	12	6%
	Mainly at planned play activities	1	1%
	Total	205	100%

4.2.5   Section Five – Conclusion of survey

The fifth and final section concluded the survey and offered respondents the opportunity to provide other comments that they wished to add. Of the 486 respondents who agreed to participate in the survey, 55 (11%) provided further comments; these were coded and categorised as follows.

Initial qualifications and ongoing professional development

Eighteen comments were made around initial qualifications and ongoing professional development in relation to attachment theory and educating and caring for infants and toddlers. Eleven comments articulated a desire to provide further comment content in relation to the presence of attachment theory in initial ECEC qualifications and ongoing professional development. One educator (B3) commented:

> *"I am really pleased to hear of further research in this area. As a graduate from a 4-year Bachelor in Early Childhood Education I entered the early childhood profession with a limited understanding of infants and toddlers as I feel the course content was strongly focussed on the 3–5 age group."*

A second educator commented *"These theories definitely need to be taught more when training to be an early childhood educator"* (B66). Seven comments voiced a motivation to learn more about attachment theory because of the survey or were inspired to refresh existing knowledge that they held on the topic.

Sharing current practices that support attachment relationships

Ten comments provided examples of how respondents used attachment theory in their practices. One educator (E6) reiterated the use of primary caregiving as *"a practise that builds relationships and attachments between educators and children"* (B6)*.* Another (B7) highlighted

that in addition to developing an attachment relationship, *"the environment in which the child will spend its time away from his parent should be warm, welcoming and friendly"*.

Sharing of personal beliefs around relationships

Nine comments expressed respondents' personal beliefs around attachment relationships and relationships in general between educators and infants and toddlers. Four comments emphasised the impact of attachment relationships on a child's ability to learn, suggesting *"when a child feels happy, safe and secure within a service and his needs are being met, then he can be open to further learning. It our job to make this happen"* (D8). Another (D9) proposed a link between secure relationships and a child's resilience:

> *"I believe on making a child resilient. I deal with 18 months to 2.5 years, and make them feel secure, safe and supported and build them into resilient little people who engage with all children as a group, I need to form a bond with each child, so they feel safe."*

One educator (D10) spoke of the importance of unconditional love when educating and caring for children, voicing their belief that *"infants, toddlers and children from whichever culture or country they come, whether they understand the language or not, they all understand 1 language is the language of LOVE with our arms wide open, an unconditional love"*.

The importance of attachment theory

Six comments emphasised respondents' understanding of the importance of attachment theory in their work with young children, suggesting the theory should *"inform everything we do for children"* (B11). Another (B12) proposed that *"forming positive attachments with infants is the primary work of educators. Without establishing this special bond, and if children do not feel loved and secure, they cannot learn and develop."*

Barriers to developing attachment relationships with infants and toddlers in ECEC

Three comments voiced concerns in relation to barriers to developing attachment relationships with infants and toddlers in education and care settings. Two of the respondents identified other educators as the main barrier to developing attachment relationships, with one respondent (D5) commenting:

> *"I feel that forming attachments with children is vital for their wellbeing and development and believe forming attachments should be a priority and the first thing we do. I do find it frustrating when other educators don't see it as important or think forming these attachments make it harder it terms of the child only wanting one particular carer."*

The second respondent (AD51) stated that "*some educators do not feel that children should be attached to an educator and will discourage this*". The third respondent (B54) believed that ratios were a contributing factor and questioned the option of group care for infants and children, commenting:

> "*There are many challenges in centre based care to consistently meeting the needs of very young children in a 1:4 ratio, despite our very best efforts managing to cater for each child's unique needs in the way that you want to and know you should can prove extremely difficult with the limitations of group care. I do sometimes wonder if group based care is the best alternative care option for very young children.*"

Justification on survey responses

Two comments provided further information to justify why they selected certain answers for the survey questions. Both respondents had selected neutral responses and wrote further information about why, citing the context of the situation and the child as an individual as justification. One educator (WTC34) suggested that:

> "*In terms of comforting a child who is upset I chose to neutral as it depends on the situation. We would like all our children to be independent and as self-sufficient as possible and while we will offer comfort to them when they are upset, especially early on in the relationship, sometimes it is more beneficial for the child for us to talk with them about their feelings so we can help them navigate the situation rather than just cuddling them to stop the crying.*"

4.3   Phase Two results – Observations

After the survey, participants were invited to express an interest in participating in Phase Two of the research, for which a service was drawn at random. The criteria for eligibility to participate in Phase Two of the data collection included being in the Perth metropolitan region and catering for infants and toddlers aged birth to two years of age. The purpose was to identify the quality of the relationships between educators and infants/toddlers and to triangulate data between the interviews, observations and online survey. The chosen service consented to participate, and from there, the educational leader and educators working directly with infants and toddlers were invited to participate in interviews and observations.

Prior to commencing the data collection, the researcher visited the service to introduce herself, provide an overview of the purpose and the intended process of observations and interviews, and to offer participants the opportunity to ask questions. All five educators and the educational leader consented to participate. In total, the researcher planned to observe four children, two from each room. However, participation was sought and obtained from the legal guardians of eight infants and toddlers, to ensure that in the event of a child ceasing their

enrolment or no longer wishing to participate, the researcher could commence observations with another child with minimal disruption.

The service had two rooms, each catering for a maximum of eight babies and toddlers with two educators in each room. A fifth educator was responsible for lunch cover in both rooms. All staff (100%) had a minimum of a diploma-level early childhood qualification, well above the regulated requirement of 50%, and had varying experience as documented below in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Educator experience, qualifications and positions

Name (pseudonym)	Position	Qualification(s)	Number of years' experience
Layla	Qualified educator, babies Room One	Certificate in Child Care Associate Diploma Certificate III in Training and Assessment Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care	30 years +
Emily	Room leader, babies Room One	Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care	21 years
Raj	Assistant Director and educational leader	Associate Diploma in Social Science Advance Diploma Children's Services Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care	27 years
Hannah	Casual qualified, Babies Room Two	Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care	9 years
Amelia	Room leader, Babies Room Two	Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care	7 years
Jane	Qualified educator babies Room One and Two (lunch cover)	Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care	6 months

Observations were conducted four times over a six-week period on Mondays between September and October 2017. During each day of observation, the researcher completed six observations on the selected focus children. Each observation lasted 10 minutes and, in total across the data collection period, each focus child was observed 24 times. Each observation was conducted not less than 15 minutes apart.

Within each room, two children were chosen by the service coordinator (gender balance was attained) and observations were conducted using a verified tool: the relationships scale of the

resource *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (Department of Education and Children's Services [DECS], 2008), which focuses on the quality characteristics of the relationship between educators and children. Information about the focus children such as age and pattern of attendance is documented below in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Focus children

Name (pseudonym)	Sex	Age	Room	Frequency of attendance
Oliver	Male	18 months	Babies Room One	3 days per week
Aisha	Female	13 months	Babies Room One	5 days per week
Molly	Female	22 months	Babies Room Two	3 days per week
Eli	Male	14 months	Babies Room Two	2 days per week

All focus infants and toddlers were present and participated in all four days of observation. The same educators were present for three of four of the days of observation, with one educator ill on the first day. The educational leader, Raj, who had agreed to participate in the study, replaced the unwell educator.

Babies Room One was staffed by Emily and Layla, and Oliver and Aisha were the focus children. Babies Room Two was staffed by Amelia and Hannah, and Molly and Eli were the focus children. All aspects of the day were observed apart from nappy changing and sleep settling, however, the research was able to witness the transition from the play areas to nappy changes and sleep. Nappy and sleep settling were not included in the observations to protect the child's right to privacy during these intimate caregiving moments. The tool explicitly describes indicators for four signals relating to supportive relationships: responsiveness, positive interactions, quality verbal exchanges and appropriateness.

These signals were observed and documented during the observations on a two-page observation sheet (refer to Appendix G). Page one required the researcher to score indicators relating to the four signals as being present, absent, a missed opportunity or observed in a negative manner. On page two, the researcher was required to consider the indicator scores for each signal in each observation and assign an overall rating to each of the four signals as being either low, medium or high. The supporting documents recommended that users assigned this rating based on their own judgement (DECS, 2008). The researcher then recorded a brief description of the environment and documented factors affecting the observation, and then assigned a rating to the overall observation of between one and five.

The ratings and further information about the observation were recorded directly onto the observation sheet.

Children experienced a variation in educator interactions throughout the day and across the period of observation, which typically reflected the happenings in the room such as routine times (e.g., meal times, nappy change times, sleep times) and separation and reunion between families and their children at the beginning and end of each day. There were also times when children were engaged in play with their peers for long periods of time, during which they did not require the support of an adult. Example of these are documented below under each of the four signals. Pseudonyms are used to preserve educators' and children's anonymity.

4.3.1 Miscellaneous

Throughout the observations, there were times when the research recorded observations that were rated as low but did not align with the definition. As these observations would make a difference to the overall rating, they were removed. An occasion when responsiveness was rated as 'low' for Eli but removed from the overall calculations as a miscellaneous observation was during a period of play where he was enjoying hiding himself away from educators in a tent with his peers. During this play he was hidden from educators and did not require any support from an adult. The data were read and re-read to ensure observations were accurately documented and identified as miscellaneous.

4.3.2 Responsiveness

The responsiveness indicator relates to how educators responds to children's needs through their physical and emotional availability in a respectful, prompt and sensitive manner. Educators who are responsive consider information from a child's home or cultural background and use this, along with their knowledge of the child and their temperament, to make decisions on how to respond to the child (DECS, 2008). The indicators from the responsiveness signal are documented in the table below.

Table 4.10: Responsiveness indicators

Responsiveness
Receives reliable/predicable/consistent responses
Information from child's family, home, culture is used
Child has physical and emotional access to educator
Signals and cues are observed and listened to with attention and respect
Non-verbal and verbal cues and social signals (eye contact, waving, reaching, smiles, cries) are reacted to sensitively and promptly; child's lead is followed
Temperament, current mood and situation is considered respectfully
Is comforted quickly when distressed

In Room One, an example of when responsiveness was rated 'high' in the observations was when Emily responded to Oliver's cues of distress when an educator from another room entered the environment. The vising educator acknowledged Oliver's feelings and moved herself away from him while Emily moved closer and offered comfort.

An example of a low rating for responsiveness when observing Oliver and Aisha was when educators Emily and Layla were both engaged in routine activities at the same time. At this point in time, there was no interaction to judge, as one educator was busy completing nappy changes and the other educator was preparing and serving afternoon tea to the remaining six children.

In Room Two, an example of when responsiveness was rated high was when an educator supported three children to engage in small group play using a shape sorter. It was noted by the researcher that during this observation, there were no routines occurring such as nappy change, bottles or sleep settling, and that the educator was able to solely focus on the group play. In total, 41% of the observations in Room One and 35% of the observations in Room Two were rated 'high'.

Table 4.11: Ratings for responsiveness

Responsiveness	Low	Medium	High
Room One	21%	39%	41%
Room Two	38%	27%	35%

4.3.3 Positive interactions

Positive interactions are reflected in the way educators interact with children, taking an interest in what they are currently interested in and providing acknowledgement of their attempts. Positive interactions include times for one-to-one interactions and educators actively participating in children's play in a positive way (DECS, 2008).

Table 4.12: Positive interactions indicators

Positive interactions

Is engaged in interactive play with educator
Communication towards the child has a happy, respectful tone (soothing/caring, not harsh, controlling, irritated)
Welcoming gestures and eye contact (smiles, vocalisations) are directed towards child
Warmth and affection are shared with child
Active interest is taken in the child's activity
Is involved with the educator one-on-one
Is given encouragement through support and acknowledgement of effort and process rather than products or attributes
Has access to models and help for peaceful resolution of conflicts
Receives expressions of positive feelings
Positive feelings are directed towards child e.g. laughs/smiles together
Questions and comments of interest to the child are made
Child's social bids are extended/elaborated
Guided by suggestions of what to do rather than what not to do

In Room One, an example of a positive interaction that was rated 'high' was when educators Layla and Emily were sitting with five children supporting them to eat lunch. The researcher noted that educators were physically and emotionally present during feeding and engaged in both verbal and non-verbal interactions in a positive manner.

An example of an observation where positive interactions were rated low for Molly was when children from Room Two were combined with children from Room One and were transitioning to afternoon tea. During the observation, one educator was serving the afternoon tea, another was warming bottles and a third was changing nappies.

In Room Two, an example of when an observation was rated high for positive interactions was when Molly was supported to spend some time in the age group she was transitioning into.

Amelia took Molly with one other child into the next age group and supported Molly when she was hesitant. Amelia communicated verbally and non-verbally with Molly and ensured that she felt safe and secure in the new room.

An example of an observation rated low for positive interactions between educators and Eli was when one educator was inside the sleep room settling a new child and the second educator was speaking with a parent who had just arrived back after a holiday with their child.

In total, 54% of the observations in Room One and 56% of the observations in Room Two were rated high for positive interactions.

Table 4.13: Ratings for positive interactions

Positive Interactions	Low	Medium	High
Room One	8%	39%	54%
Room Two	19%	26%	56%

4.3.4   Quality verbal exchanges

Indicators of quality verbal exchanges include educators engaging in sustained two-way turn-taking conversations with children and building on children's attempts to initiate interactions. Educators respect the child's home language and communicate with the child's family in a respectful manner. During quality verbal exchanges, educators recognise that children need time to both verbally express themselves and to respond verbally to educators' attempts at communication (DECS, 2008).

Table 4.14: Quality verbal exchanges indicators

Quality verbal exchanges

Educator engages in respectful, reciprocal communication exchanges with parents
Is engaged in sustained two-way, turn-taking conversational interactions
Communication/interaction/conversations are initiated that reflect the child's developing understandings and interests
Is given time to make expressions understood
Is given time to respond
Initiated interactions are built upon
Engaged in discussions of an activity in which they are both engaged, chatting about what is going on, what is being observed, what is being experienced
Wonder, exclamations, questions and comments are responded to
Shares in social language games initiated by educator
Non-verbal language is used to add meaning to words e.g. gestures
Child's home language (if other than English) is respectfully recognised and reflected in exchanges
Is greeted when arrives, awakens, leaves

In Room One, an example of an observation rated high for quality verbal exchanges was when Aisha was not sleeping and was upset in the cot room. An educator brought Aisha back into the play room where she was greeted warmly by the other educator. The educator engaged her in sustained, two-way, turn-taking conversations, using non-verbal cues such as gestures to add meaning to communication.

An example of an observation rated low in Room One was after lunch. The educators were busy cleaning up, putting children to sleep and feeding the remaining three children in their high chairs.

In Room Two, an observation that was rated high for quality verbal exchanges was during a planned experience of playdough at a table with four children. The educator initiated conversations and provided children with time to express themselves and respond to her conversations. The educator discussed the activity with the children and was speaking with the children as the experience progressed. Overall, 30% of Room One's and 35% of Room Two's observations were rated high in terms of quality verbal exchanges.

Table 4.15: Ratings for positive interactions

Quality verbal exchanges	Low	Medium	High
Room One	26%	43%	30%
Room Two	38%	28%	35%

4.3.5   Appropriateness

Appropriateness is demonstrated in educators' ability to correctly pronounce a child's name or speak to a child in their home language, if able.   Educators discuss current and future transitions with children and provide them with advanced warning where possible. Educators identify and respectfully support children's emotions and are aware of what is developmentally appropriate for the children in their care (DECS, 2008).

Table 4.16: Appropriateness Indicators

Appropriateness
Is spoken with in own home language (if other than English) where possible
Close contact is in culturally familiar ways
Has access to models of caring behaviours amongst educators
Is engaged in sustained interaction
Efforts (rather than attributes) are acknowledged
Is treated fairly (is not discriminated against or judged)
Has access to models and guidance in the use of non-discriminatory language and behaviour
Is told what is going to happen, what is happening (prepared for transitions)
There are realistic expectations of what a child can/will do
Receives indirect forms of support and guidance (rather than discipline) when overwhelmed – distraction, suggestion, choice, reminder, redirection
Emotions are recognised, labelled and respectfully supported – trust and safety support harmful/overwhelming emotions
Is called by name, correctly pronounced
Hostility and aggression are constructively discouraged

An example of an observation where appropriateness was rated high by the researcher in Room One was when Oliver was playing in a tent with his peers. The educator was engaged in sustained interaction with the children, throwing balls to them and supporting and guiding children to throw the ball back to her.

In Room Two, an observation where appropriateness was rated high was when Molly was playing outside and communicated that she would like to play on climbing equipment that was a little too difficult for her. Educators engaged Molly in sustained interaction, role modelling how to use the climbing equipment and acknowledging her efforts while maintaining a realistic expectation of what she could do. For the signal of appropriateness, 39% of Room One's and 48% of Room Two's observations were rated high.

Table 4.17: Ratings for appropriateness

Appropriateness	Low	Medium	High
Room One	6%	56%	39%
Room Two	18%	34%	48%

Due to the complexities of educating and caring for young children, there were times when educators had to prioritise some children's needs over others within the group. An example of this was when a child was experiencing separation anxiety and the educator was so focused on supporting this child that they were unable to engage with the focus child being observed by the researcher. As a result, observations such as the example above, were excluded.

4.4   Phase Two results: Semi-structured interviews

The same educators who participated in the observations were invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews commenced two weeks after the observations, to provide the educators the opportunity to become comfortable with the researcher. Interviews were conducted in a shared area and were recorded using an application on the researcher's phone. Prior to participating in the interviews, the educators were provided with a copy of the questions. Educators were requested to bring documentation relating to supporting children to develop attachment relationships with educators. All educators had a minimum of a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, with varying years of experience. The semi-structured interview responses were analysed and categorised into themes, which are documented below.

4.4.1   Practices that support attachment development

Throughout the interview, educators mentioned different practices that support attachment development. These practices are categorised into themes and discussed below.

Educators described and discussed the process of supporting families with children commencing at the ECEC setting. Several themes emerged and are discussed below. Overall, from the discussion, it emerged that there was no 'one-size-fits-all' approach utilised by the educators to support families' transition into the service, and that the educators drew on a wide range of strategies to support families in this regard. When discussing the orientation process, Raj explained how "*Each situation is different, some parents can't do long orientations but definitely, you make it available when you can".* While educators spoke positively about this process, they also touched on the realities of supporting families to leave their children in their care—as Amelia shared, "*it is quite hard*" trying to settle a child experiencing separation anxiety.

A supportive relationship with families

Developing a relationship with children's family members and how this consequentially supported the development of an attachment relationship between educators and children was discussed by educators. Layla explained that she believed that the relationship between families and educators was integral to supporting the child, and that "*from the beginning it was really having that relationship with that parent. And acknowledging what they were after for their child*." Emily suggested that there was a link between how young a child was and the importance of developing a personal relationship with the parents, commenting "*I think in our age group that we have a little bit more close relationship with our parents looking after babies than with some of the older children and yeah just being able to message them throughout the day on a personal level*". Jane agreed, emphasising that it is "*very important to develop relationships with the family as well so it begins from home, right from the beginning, right through".* Layla discussed the importance of all staff welcoming families to their ECEC setting, regardless of whether or not they worked directly with their child, sharing that, at their centre, "*right from the office, parents are greeted, it's how they are greeted they are made to feel welcome".* Educators highlighted the importance of background information about the child and family to support the child in developing an attachment relationship with educators. Amelia commented that she would *"like to have information form. Ask the parents to fill the form and tell us what they children like, what's their favourite toys, and what their day's like and about their family members how many people in the family, what language do they speak."*

The transition into service was also mentioned several times when discussing how to support children to develop attachment relationships with educators. Raj described how the orientation process commenced prior to the child even enrolling, recalling how for one child, she commenced communication with the parent three months before the child enrolled at the service. Educators acknowledged that this transition into an ECEC setting was a big step for both children and families, with Jane even considering this transition a form of "*trauma*" for young children. Layla believed that the environment was critical in supporting this transition from a familiar home to "*to another face – an unfamiliar face, an unfamiliar environment*", explaining that *"the environment plays an important part, whether it's the person in it or the people, and the sound and how it's set up and how it's created*". Hannah agreed with Layla and proposed that "*the child needs to feel comfortable with the environment and not until they feel completely comfortable do I believe that child will completely settle*". Jane described how she not only introduced herself and her colleagues to the family, but also consciously tried to "*introduce the environment to parents and asking them what can we support them more*", echoing previous comments around the importance of the environment.

Educators at this service took a proactive approach to problem solving issues that may arise, and Jane explained that if there was a problem, "*maybe we have chat with parents we find out a solution to support them".* Raj explained that as an educational leader, a large part of her role was supporting families and educators in the family's transition into the service. She described how she would often relieve educators so that they could have conversations with families without supervising children, or remain in the room to support the remaining children while the educator interacted with the parent and child:

> *"In my role, I actually can step in and allow – and provide that time. It's one of the things I do get to do so I can say to parents; look you know, I'm happy to be here, sit with the other children … we did all these visits, and we did about five weeks of visits, quite lengthy this process, cos we always say in the beginning that we'll start with maybe three visits and we will see how we go. But we were quite aware that the parent felt quite anxious that her child is settled in the environment and she could really feel the cues of her child, how anxious her child was and the child not being social and emotional before. So then, so it was over a long length of period."*

Raj also described how extended family members such as grandparents can play an important part in the child's life and how these extended family members can become involved in the child's orientation and enrolment into ECEC. She explained how ECEC was very new to these grandparents who have "*built quite rich relationships with the children", s*haring how *"they have quite their own beliefs about childrearing".* Raj revealed that *"some parents face … issues when they bring their child into a child care environment because for their parents, they've*

never experienced that". Raj illustrated how the service not only supports the primary caregivers such as parents to transition into ECEC, but also includes the important extended family members too:

> *"We frequently find a way where we share, where the grandparents … can come and attend, they can see what actually happens in there. Sometimes we will have a grandparent who will actually come and … be involved when the parents go back to work … they've actually helped to actually settle that child and feed that child. For recently one of our parents because the grandparents … they said, can we have ongoing photos, so we've just given them a whole load of photos of what their child's doing at the moment. They've said a couple of words and we're trying to share the information to share what happens in the child care setting. And we encourage them after they've done their first visit to the centre to an orientation to bring those significant people through so they can have a look and see, what the environment will be that their children come through."*

Using and including information from children's families and cultures

In addition to developing the relationship with the family, educators saw great value in the information that families provided to them about their child to support the child to feel secure. This information was collected in a variety of ways including face-to-face conversations, completed information forms as part of the enrolment process, telephone conversations, photographs, videos and emails. Layla described how, at their service, "*we gather information from them – their background, their family, and if any cultural areas are there – so that we can follow all that through with, maybe with their diet – anything, to make their day easier*". Amelia appreciated the information form that formed part of the enrolment process and explained that when commencing a relationship with a new child:

> *"First I would like to have information form. Ask the parents to fill the form and tell us what they children like, what's their favourite toys, and what their day is like and about their family members – how many people in the family, what language do they speak".*

All educators provided examples of how they not only collected this information from families but incorporated it into the program in an authentic way that was respectful of the family's wishes. Emily provided an example of how culture was incorporated in the program on the day she was being interviewed when a parent emailed through a video of her son:

> *"This morning, Raj showed us one of the mothers had sent some Irish dancing that her son did at the Irish club on the weekend. Irish descent family. Through parent celebrations- could be Diwali, and that's my own culture – we celebrated as one of the parents. St. Patrick's day … on St. Paddy's day our cook cooked Irish stew as a request from the babies. NAIDOC week, we did NAIDOC week as well."*

It was important to educators that a family's wishes were respected, or, if it was not possible to incorporate their requests into the service, that a compromise was agreed on. Hannah strongly advocated for the parent's wishes to come first:

> *"If a parent asks us to do something or suggests something or has a routine for that child, then obviously if it doesn't go against our policies and procedures we've got to do that because it's their child, and I'm happy to do that because it's their child. And I guess with including cultural, like differences – not differences but requirements and stuff, you just do it. No questions asked! Unless it's against something then maybe we have to talk about it and come to a different agreement. That's never really happened."*

Amelia provided an example of how if a parent has request that cannot be met due to meeting the needs of all children in the room, a compromise can be made with the family to respect their wishes as much as possible, sharing how a child's place for sleep was moved into the play room so that he could have lights on while he slept:

> *"you know the different habits some children, their manners, sleeping in cot, but when they come here we have to put them in cot. But if there's some particular child, like we got a child – I put him in a cot and mum just said 'Oh that's too dark. Can you turn the light on?' We couldn't because we got other babies in the room so we just ask mum if we can put him on the mattress … we just try to meet the family's needs."*

Jane echoed Hannah's opinion of supporting the family's wishes for their child's time at their ECEC service, explaining "*We also respect that. We always respect parents' will.*" Jane gave an example of how, at the service, "*we would like to include parents' view of their culture to our curriculum planning. Like some parents they would like share cultures so all their dress up, and sometimes they will bring their culture food if they want to do, you know, the cooking.*"

Layla explained how educators use the information and input shared by families in the babies' room, describing what was done with the video provided by the mother that morning in terms of program planning and documentation of learning:

> *"Through the program. Through special days, we acknowledge families, or the culture, their background … this morning – well you've seen one side of it … where the parents sent in a video of him dancing at the Irish club. And of course, they put on a song that he's familiar with, at the centre. So that's where that relationship too comes in … this is what I was talking about before with the open door, this all starts from the front door, this relationship, so she'd sent it through to the office that was shared with us, so that would go on to the program … and then also too it was shared with the child again. So that's what we would follow through with. And to acknowledge, there's a lot of things that will happen spontaneously. So that would be shared. And so today; 'Oh guess what? We saw the video. That's great!' So that will go back. Even though it's verbal. Because sometimes you just can't write everything up. But we can make note of it. So next time – does he do this – or something if it's on a checklist – 'yes, video sent through or where does this … yeah tick'. That will support it with some words."*

Throughout the interviews, educators described how they used the child's interests to support the development of an attachment relationship within the ECEC setting. Amelia shared how she would "*do something that they like*" so that she could then provide that interest within the setting and gave the example of reading a book if a child was interested in books. Emily described how a new child enjoyed playing with older children, so educators ensured there were "*some of the older children available to her while she settles*". She also spoke about how provisions were made to ensure the child had her favourite foods available to her and that an educator "*offered her a bunny toy so she can build an attachment with that if she's upset*". Raj shared an example of a child who required extra support to settle. She explained that to support this child, "*an extra caregiver was put on in the room*," so that the educator could spend time with the child in ways that interested them. Raj went on to explain how the process of making this child feel secure continued over time as the educators learned more about the child's interests and personality:

> "*It was finding the interests, need and kind of the strength of that child, and working with those and then doing lots of modelling and then slowly the child began to be able to spend time in the room, feeling more comfortable in the room, and a lot of time was also spent – we found that because the child didn't like to be crowded, liked her own space as well so we went for initially, found a space to try to be alone, we used the highchair time with books and resources. We also used the pram for sleeping … to slide in with the child, so it was step by step. Step by step.*"

Love

Amelia shared how when supporting a child to develop a secure attachment relationship with her, she would "*let the children know I love him. I just cuddle him, say 'it's ok', play together.*" Emily stated that to develop a secure relationship, she practices "*loving them. Just loving them.*" Jane echoed this statement in discussing the relationship between children and educators: "*I understand it's love. Give more love!*"

One-on-one interactions

Educators considered how one-on-one interactions provided the opportunity for attachment relationships to develop between educators and infants/toddlers. Several educators made quick references to this practice, such as "*And then we try like one-to-one interaction*" (Jane), "*Spending a lot of one-on-one time-especially if they are upset*" (Hannah) and "*one-on-one. Lots of one-on-one*" (Emily). However, Layla extended on this, and proposed that routines were a great opportunity to spend time developing attachment relationships with children,

commenting "*I would support that like when I do nappy change, that's my one on one with that little one so I make the most of that*".

Amelia acknowledged that when a child commenced care and are unsettled, they initially "*must build a primary attachment; they trust one person, then they settle, maybe they can play with different, different educators*". However, she also proposed that if a child was settled into the service, that educators should encourage the child by "*not spending too much time with one educator*", but instead should develop relationships with more than one person. She gave the reasoning that "*when this person they go holiday or lunch break they still need somebody*". Emily echoed Amelia's concerns in relation to what happens when an educator goes on holiday or lunch break, stating "*I get it. Because if that caregiver is away or they go to tea or lunch that child is – I've seen it happen – that child is distraught – and it makes it very hard on the other children and the caregivers left in the room. That bond and attachment.*" She proposed that one-on-one time with children should be "*equally shared out",* acknowledging, however, that children will have a preference for certain educators and may be "*more attached to one caregiver",* but recommending that educators should "*help to even it out across the service",* saying that children being very attached to one educator can make it "*very hard for others".*

Hannah considered one-on-one time effective, "*especially if that child is having a hard time settling – one child care – one staff member – is probably gonna be the best way to get in there*". Like Emily, she outlined the process of developing primary attachment relationships and subsequent secondary attachment relationships, commencing with "*just one and then you introduce the other … the other one is always introduced like with Amelia and I both even now, with the settled children, each child has their kind of favourite or stronger bond".*

Jane explained that "*when children just came new to the environment, they need one-on-one engagement*", suggesting that they would be "*freaking out if we just changed the educator all the time, make children feel more upset and more insecure*". In terms of determining which educator was the primary caregiver for the child, she advocated for educators to "*respect children's choice first*" as the best method. Jane suggested for the child to "*stay with one, the educator like he or her feel comfortable with first. After that, as long as children feel comfortable, the environment, the relationship build up with one educator, we can smooth the transfer to another educator.*" Jane gave the example of a new child who was very unsettled on her first day, and how the child "*didn't eat well".* Educators tried one-on-one time with the child as a strategy to help her feel secure, and Jane said that "*she feel much comfortable".*

Layla also advocated for children to develop a relationship with the primary caregiver first, and then others, sharing:

> *"I really strongly agree that they do need to have a bond with a primary carer. I still believe that they need that in that initial introductory area for a given time maybe, small timeframe, until they become familiar with others … because it's like anything. From here- boom! You could have a very distressed child, I think. And I think you really need to have some sort of a slow, smooth transition."*

She explained that it was not always possible to always have *"full one-to-one",* but that she would *"share in that with another staff member".* She provided examples of how she made time for one-on-one during routines, sharing the example of *"when I do nappy change, that's my one-on-one with that little one so I make the most of that".* Raj strongly advocated for educators to spend one-on-one time with children, sharing how it eventually leads to children developing a sense of security within the environment:

> *"I think that … you can't spend too much time with children when they first start out … it's really crucial to be available and accessible. And I understand that that can feel both confronting and demanding for an educator, depending on the educator they can have another eight children, they could depend on the ratios in her room or in his or her room. However, being actually available and accessible, it is manageable when you realise that it doesn't have to be a really big thing it can be as simple as sitting on the floor, down with the children and making sure that you're in proximity. It can be making sure how you use your voice when you're down with the children and that you're available and stuff. And also, I think … some people feel if you spend too much time it will be harder when you can't spend that time but actually that works the opposite way. Most children know you're available and you're recognised to meet their needs and that, that actually builds a layer and actually then eventually you can reduce that."*

Educators identified certain circumstances that affected the development of attachment relationships. Both Jane and Emily stated that one of the big challenges that they faced was when there was an unwell child in their room. Emily spoke about how this affected the other children: "*It could be just having an unwell child in our room … because they need the one-to-one and your attention is on them, so it gets taken away from the other ones*". Jane agreed, making the same connection between an unwell child requiring increased support, proposing that:

> *"they kind of not settle. And we like, educators you know, we have staff to child ratio, we have to focus the sick children, that's hard. Sometimes we do something and then we don't have hand to hold another – that's kind of hard. Very hard."*

She shared that, in her experience, sick children do not wish to engage as much as they *"want mummy"* and that they want more physical affection from educators.

Educators had varied opinions on self-settling, but overwhelmingly believed that for an infant or toddler to be able to settle independently, they first must feel secure in the environment, with the physical and emotional support of a trusted educator. Amelia explained that she preferred that babies did not self-settle, as they were too young to understand the situation. She also considered self-settling "*really bad for their development*". Emily believed that children should be settled by educators, but also that educators needed to:

> "*teach them to regulate their emotions … yes, the goal is self-settling, but we have to teach them. So, if it means we have to sit with them and comfort them or sit and pat them to sleep so they can learn … teaching them trust, not to be fearful.*"

Hannah argued that a child should be supported when they are distressed, but also believed it was "*important to allow them time to comfort themselves, see if they can, and that's how they will learn to … regulate emotions*". Regarding younger babies, she advocated that educators should settle babies before they become distressed but believed that there may be occasions where a child needed to settle themselves, which educators could gauge, such as "*if it's just a little whinge … I guess know the child as well and know what their limit is and give them time to settle themselves*". Jane also discussed how educators should gauge the situation based on the child's behaviour and the "*frequency the child demonstrates this behaviour*", and if there were challenging behaviours that the child may need some "*self-regulation time to calm down by themselves first*". She named specific circumstances when children may need extra support such as "*when they upset, or … sick, they definitely need a comfort to settle. Or they feel insecure … or they feel scary – they need to settle.*" When considering self-settling, Layla expressed "*I just can't*". She discussed the realities of group care and how "*you might be able to give a dummy for one … and that would be ok. While you might have to sit and cuddle a child. So, this child needs actual physical comfort. You take that one first … we're talking group care.*" Layla also believed that as children grew older they needed to learn self-regulation, but that "*you have to start with the physical contact and that security*". Raj considered self-settling "*a high stage, for a child",* sharing her opinion that there are children that can *"supposedly"* self-settle, but not without first having their needs met:

> "*really knowing the child in your room, and then knowing how a child reach for comfort. Some children are happy to have a cuddle, some children don't want to be touched. And they just want to be near … close proximity to you and for you to make eye contact, smile and share the bodily language and stuff. Some children need physical objects. All those areas of comfort, must be reached. If they're not reached, the self-settling just doesn't occur. As I said, self-settling, is a high level. But first the comfort actually needs to be … it needs to happen first. Always.*"

A range of opinions were elicited when educators spoke of cuddling and dependency. Emily believed that it was important to cuddle babies *"because you are just teaching them about trust and security"*, and proposed that it was educators' responsibility to teach them *"how to play and interact with others"*, suggesting that it was a "*goal as educators is to teach them that, so it's for them to go off and play, and then they can come back and feel a cuddle, and then go back off and play"*. Hannah echoed the same sentiment, proposing that babies "*need lots of cuddles and the more cuddles you give I guess the more secure they're gonna feel and the more safe and further they're gonna explore and stuff*". Layla reflected on the term 'dependent' and suggested that it was a positive term:

> *"Of course they probably will get dependent on that carer. But then it's up to that carer maybe if it gets into that toddler stage maybe there's a gradual … It is ok to share that child with another – you know, cos it's very easy to 'my turn with so-and-so' … especially if there are strong attachments … I don't think there's anything wrong with it – but I think that carer needs to be aware that that could happen and it might make it difficult … I mean you are going to give them cuddles and whatnot anytime … knowing when they need that support … You can give cuddles anytime – you don't have to wait until they are upset or anything like that … I think once they get to the toddler stage, there's nothing wrong with it, but I think be aware of other staff and sharing that and encouraging that child that it is ok and giving them that confidence, to build their wellbeing and whatnot to have a strong sense of belonging."*

In contrast, Amelia mentioned that when a new baby commences care, for educators to cuddle them all the time was:

> *"actually not good. Firstly, we are child care centre we got a lot of children around us, so we cannot cuddle only one baby the whole day long. So, we have to sit with them, play with them, follow their interests also after that let them find something they can play with themselves. And we can look after all the children much easier. If we only cuddle one child for long time, it's so hard and we can't do anything."*

Raj also questioned the term dependent, explaining that:

> *"if a child is happy to be held and cuddled and that is what they want and if that meets their needs, it goes back to security. If it makes a child secure, once a child is secure then in time it will confidently explore its environment it will explore other people. So therefore I don't think it creates a relationship dependency, it creates a relationship of trust in that child if that's what it wants to have its needs met."*

Jane believe that it depended on the situation, arguing that some children do not like a lot of cuddles, and that a child's personality can affect their need for physical affection. However, she did suggest that children should not be cuddled "*all the time … because we need to respect every child, you know. Everyone needs our … support – not just focus one child."*

The educators spoke around separation anxiety and how they supported children who experienced separation anxiety while in their care. All the educators were positive in their approach to separation anxiety, understanding that it was common and developmentally appropriate for the ages of the children in their rooms. Amelia provided a recent example of a new child who experienced separation anxiety despite her multiple efforts in supporting this child:

> *"We did everything, but she was still unsettled. But I fully understand it still needs time especially for the younger one. Also think about the situation she faced because too much for her – you understand that her behaviour and be patient. I believe she will be ok. She never come to day care before and dad look after her all the time and all of a sudden dad needs to go overseas for something and the same time she came to day care and the primary attachment person leave and the mom actually not the primary attachment carer and also she came here and she is also so young only 9 months it's all overwhelming for her."*

Emily shared how she identifies if there is a chance that a child will experience separation anxiety, she encourages the family to participate in multiple visits to the service to familiarise the child and family with the environment and begin to develop relationships with educators prior to being left alone in the service:

> *"For babies, depending on the child, how much time parents have before they go back to work, I do encourage them, if their child has only been with them there's gonna be a chance of separation anxiety. I encourage as many as possible. So, to stay with us at first, to start establishing a relationship between us and the parent, and then they get to see some sort of familiarity and then to start leaving the child for short periods and then build up on the time. And it just normally helps cos they see the first example as their mum that they communicate with, and on familiar terms with us, and build trust."*

Jane spoke about sensitive ages for separation anxiety and expressed that while it was a common developmental stage for babies, it had a significant effect on their wellbeing, going so far as to consider it "*trauma*":

> *"After 9 to 12 months the babies understand who is the parents … at this stage I think the relationship between baby and parents is quite strong and quite connection. Like our room I see one baby when they just came here they quite struggle with separation anxiety. I think the most the baby will demonstrate this kind of situation because they doing new transition from home to the centre that is a big step. But it's kinda called trauma. But it's quite common."*

Hannah spoke about how in the "*baby room it's young, so it's really hard for them to understand that their parents are coming back and it's just a temporary thing they just want their parent and that's it*". She shared that babies *"cry a lot when they first start"* and explained how it was a challenge as they were not old enough to understand the situation,

that *"they were ok, and they were safe, and their parents were coming back"*. During the interview, Hannah also questioned whether or not they know if their parents were coming back, questioning *"I am sure they know a little bit that their parents are coming back?"*

Raj shared that she uses Bowlby's stages of attachment to guide her practice when considering how to support children experiencing separation anxiety, sharing that it reminded her to "*be aware of some of those critical periods like when there's separation anxiety, what happens there. And then – what is the child displaying? How can we actually respond to that child, how important is our physical response and emotional?"*

When asked to provide some practical examples of how educators supported children with separation anxiety, Amelia shared that she would make decisions around the program based on the child's interests, as *"once they get involved play they love the activities and they feel happy and also good for their brain development"*. She also described how another educator supported a child with separation anxiety: "*whenever he cried she just sit with him and play or read book for him and he actually settled"*. Jane depicted a similar situation, sharing how a girl in her care "*want mammy, just came to here, that's quite a bit hard, but we try our best like give her more cuddle? Cuddle – she feel comfortable. She will always ask me 'cuddle' and I will cuddle her! And read a book*." Emily advocated for "*one-on-one. Lots of one-on-one. And just having fun with them. The small groups. Loving them. Just loving them."* Raj expressed how ensuring that parents felt secure at the service would in turn lead to the child feeling secure. She revealed an example of a parent who was not ready to leave her child in the ECEC setting and had not yet developed trust in the educators. Raj acknowledged that gaining the parent's trust was:

> *"hard because a parent actually needs to be able to see what's going on. So, we … sent regular photos of the child at play so they could actually see the evidence of that. Made lots of telephone calls to the parent during the day … ask the parents to come and visit, view their child."*

Routines and rituals

Routines and rituals were discussed and mentioned frequently throughout the interviews. Amelia shared that she liked routines and how even babies can predict the pattern of the day based on verbal and non-verbal cues such as "*When we go outside, and I say 'time to sit down for sun cream on', they just they all sitting down ... I like routines!"* Amelia reflected that children appeared to enjoy routines and that "*when they go to the bathroom they were so happy"*. She shared that each child in her room had their individual daily routine on display in the room and believed that it was important to afford "*lots of feeding, toileting and sleep*

time", sharing that *"if they hungry they cannot play happily. They are very tired and must cry, especially babies."*

Jane acknowledged that adjusting to the centre routine can be difficult at first for babies and provided an example of families providing home food for children as it helped them to *"feel comfortable".* She acknowledged that even though there was centre food provided for children enrolled at the service, that some children would have a preference for their home food, and that they would *"respect parents' requirements"*.

Layla valued the opportunity for interactions between educators and children during routines and described how children's behaviour became more interactive when educators were interacting with them while changing their nappy. She provided an example of some of the things that she would do during a nappy change:

> *"I would talk to the child. I would give the child eye contact and facial expression … and like I said to the mother say a month ago 'oh she's getting very vocal, isn't she' and that was the time when she was very vocal on the nappy change and I suppose … when you're in a room with a group of children … And I've noticed that with one or two other children … one little child will start babbling and pick up more, I think when that nappy change area is supported and then that little transition from the nappy change to bed. And then even they might have a little cry you put them in the cot as a safety net while you wash your hands. And you're still talking 'it's alright I'm here' and then they gradually self-settle over time and they know what's happening and we put a little toy and that in the cot that they will play with. So that's that support. And you know, feeding and sleeping and going through their routine and being there with them at the time that they need you to … there was another child that I noticed that he'd babbling to a stage, whereas his mother was a bit concerned … with his language … he said jacket one day … we had been on the change table, but I got his jacket and his shoes … for when mum comes in … And I said to his mother, I didn't make a big hoo-ha about it but I said 'he actually said jacket today' so I was saying 'oh yes we will put your jacket on when mummy comes but we will put your shoes on now', so he understands a lot with that repetition of the speaking to the child in the one word sentences and that, it does I think bring a little bit more out too with all the other development with language and everything, so and also that's that attachment too."*

Raj considered rituals as *"just core"* in a baby room, and that they were *"the daily way, part of the child's day. It's how … we talk about their prime needs being met and what is happening."* Raj proposed that attachments were built with children through the routines of the day and how respecting the parents' wishes in relation to their child's routines such as sleep was:

> *"an opportunity to be both respectful of how families choose to settle their children, how a child individually settles, and through a caregiver through actually respecting and doing that a way which shows connectedness between all of those, they build a relationship with that child. And it's through those routines that we do actually build relationships and we build our attachments with the children."*

Raj described how routines and rituals provided *"one-to-one time for the child, they develop a*

relationship the way they emotionally connect, the body language that goes between the caregiver and the child and that, and that is there again". She explained how nappy change provided educators with time for "*lots of language, lots of that face all that facial, all that emotional".* She acknowledged that they did take up "*a large volume of time but it's all part of our relationship building with a child. And they need to feel safe and secure with us. They're fundamental."* Emily also recognised that a large part of the day was consumed by routines, particularly when "*you have full numbers and one that are so young and rely on us".* She suggested that educators had a choice, and that they could "*make it about attachment … just because you are changing a nappy … you can still give a cuddle, have a tickle, talk to them, saying through your tone, your smiles, so at all times. You can still have fun – even during routine times."* Hannah believed that "*a lot of the time of the day is taken up with feeding and moving to the next routine"* and suggested that routines influenced the programming or educators' ability to engage children in learning experiences, sharing that "*sometimes you have to push them back or skip that one or come back to it".* Hannah thought that the time consumed by routines throughout the day could affect attachment relationships with children, as:

> *"it can get so hectic that day you didn't have time to really play with the children … sometimes you come in and you go home and you're like 'all I did was this and this all day I don't even remember like really spending much time with the children' … I like to think that our children are happy?"*

Jane gave an example of how a new child was having difficulty adjusting to being in and ECEC setting, so educators used the strategy of keeping her in her pram (a familiar object from home) to support her to feed and sleep:

> *"We sing a song alongside the pram – she feel comfortable sitting on the pram on first day. And then we go out. And we feed her on the pram. And then after that we just walking around outdoor and she feel comfortable outside. And not very long she fell asleep. Yay! We were proud of that. And slowly slowly, after the second week she kinda settled and then we put her into cot to try her … she slept – even though with a little bit upset but she quickly settle."*

Sleep at home and sleep in an ECEC setting

Sleep practices at home in comparison to sleep patterns within the ECEC setting was a recurring theme when educators spoke about practices that support the development of attachment relationships. Emily shared the difficulties of "*parents wanting them to settle into day care but them not having proper sleep routines or anything at home yet".* Layla shared how "*if they co-sleep, that's where it can be a little bit hard and then they come back into a little routine here there might be a little bit of a bump".* Raj explained how within the families at the service, there were varied approaches to sleep practices and suggested through her

response that educators have a duty of care to build respectful relationships with families to support them in safe sleeping practices:

> *"I think sleep's a really interesting thing because … different cultures have different practice whether it be that they swaddle their babies, or they co-sleep … So we have to actually acknowledge that that happens but at the same time we have to build a relationship with the parents where we can actually can engage and make discussions about … you would say the health risks and the other risks that actually occur, but also at the same time explain to them that they can still have those relationships with their children and provide them with other ways they can have those special close times with their children … and suggest to them other ways they can, their children will get to sleep and will settle – you know like sometimes and likewise we will have parents that will come sometimes and think they have to all of a sudden be able to get their child to sleep in a cot whereas they may have been rocking their son … and we all say to them from the beginning, 'ok, what you have been doing, we will do. So, we will rock your child, we'll sing to your child we will do all of those, we want to have continuity, continuity is really important, so please tell us what it is you do with your child, how you do it with that child and then we will attempt to meet that in the same way. We can't? We will find another way.' But first of all, we want to know. So, from the beginning, we ask parents to share … how they feed, how they sleep, all the things they do with their children, what does their children like, when their child is sad how is their child best settled, when the child is happy, what are the things that delight it. So, having those really rich communications, and with your culture what the things that they do."*

Physical and emotional availability

Educators were asked what it meant to be physically and emotionally available to infants and toddlers. They spoke of how both physical and emotional availability involved educators leaving home problems at the door when entering the ECEC setting. Amelia advocated for educators to stay at home if they were tired as it could affect the care provided to children, sharing that *"physically, if you say maybe stay at home if you are tired you cannot look after babies well"*. Emily also touched on this theme, believing *"no matter what happens at home, you leave the day at the door, and you don't bring it into work. So, I don't bring anything. It's being professional. Being professional. Being mindful."* Amelia also thought that to be emotionally available, educators need to "*always be happy, be patient, if you have some mood, like maybe you argue with husband or, just leave that behind, it's your job when you come here be professional and ready for the job"*. Emily believed that home stressors could affect the care provided to children, for example, *"if you and your partner may have had a fight or something, you can't bring it into work and be adult because supervision, the attachment, is just not there with the children"*. Hannah shared her opinion that educators had a responsibility to be physically and emotionally available to children when at work, arguing that:

> *"For a little child cos, they're very little and they don't really understand words I guess it makes them feel like you're inviting and stuff, I mean. I don't know – it's kind of like everyday stuff. You can't come in with a bad attitude and be closed off to the children and expect them to be ok for that day. It's just when you walk in I guess it's game face, even if you're having a bad day and just … Make yourself available and if they need you, you need to be there for them."*

Jane also elaborated on educator responsibility to ensure that they were present when working with infants and toddlers:

> *"That means that as an educator we have to take our responsibility for our positions. So, we have to focus when we go to a child care centre we have to focus on children's needs or children first. We not put our mind to somewhere else. To think another step, not responsibility to the children. We have supervising children all the time. So be responsibility child's healthy, safety, it's a big part of service. We work for parents as well as our community."*

Layla was aware of her stress levels and how it affected her emotional availability to infants/toddlers. She shared she would have increased stress levels at the end of the day if processes such as making beds for the following day were not completed, explaining that she likes to complete things. She had a relaxed approach to the stresses of group care, advising that *"it's like, don't cry over spilt milk … I don't make a big, a big thing out of it. Just as long as they're safe, and they're happy"*. She acknowledged that there are times when a child may be crying that might be stressful for educators but that she had strategies that she drew on during those times:

> *"if the baby's crying and upset, I might say to someone 'I don't know what's wrong with so and so I've done this this this this and that would you like to take them for a moment and see if – what you can do'. Something like that. To share that. Because I think you've got to have a bit of empathy – empathy, sense of humour, knowledge. You know, all that. And you've got to be able to have good relationships. Different backgrounds and things like that."*

Raj reflected on the different ways of being physically and emotionally available to children and strategies that educators could use to be available:

> *"Physical availability depends on the child and can be as much as just allowing the child be able to touch you, you're down on the floor, it's good for children, you've got 3 or 4 children who are actually unsettled. So … to settle them you might gather them closely, one child might be on your knee if he feels comfortable there, another child might just be touching other two might sit on the side, and then also it's … your eye contact with those children, the gesture, the smile you might have with them. Make sure you acknowledge all of them, responding to what they say. It's all of those things that go on between the child and the emotional … the tone of your voice, it's the way you hold a child, you know. And yes, you can do it individually and also you can do it as a group. So, you're mindful – oh I have those individuals, you have to know all their cues and their temperament. All those things about the children. And if you're aware of that, you can be emotionally available."*

Amelia believed it was possible to be physically and emotional available to infants/toddlers in an ECEC setting, however, she did articulate that she felt that it was dependent on both the educators' approach to working with young children and the child's personality – *"if you love children … some are funny … maybe some child they crying and try to understand them maybe they tired and they sick like that".* Layla suggested that being physically and emotionally available at all times was an obvious part of the role of educator in an infant/toddler room, stating *"If I wasn't, I wouldn't be able to do my job. I wouldn't be able to provide for their needs and interest. I wouldn't be in this work."* She proposed that this availability was intrinsic, disclosing:

> *"I think it is very important, well I mean I think it comes from within so that if you're going to care for someone it comes from within. There's something there. So, you need to have those qualities … I think you have to be a very competent and confident person."*

After identifying circumstances that prevent physical and emotional availability, Emily concluded that she did not believe that it is possible in ECEC settings at all time:

> *"Sometimes … you are taken away with either a sick child or a child that needs extra care. And you can't because if you're in the cot room patting one child or two children … and if you've got full numbers – there's still six others out there that need you, as well. So, no."*

Hannah thought that it was *"definitely"* possible to be physically and emotionally available to all children at all times, but added that:

> *"some children are bonded more with other carers. So, they come to me, I'll be their second choice or in other children Sophie will be the second choice, so we don't have to – well it's not that we don't have to be so open but those children – we're seconds. They go to the other staff member first."*

Jane also believed that it was possible, and confidently responded with *"definitely. We have to treat every child as individual. You know, respect each child's rights."* After weighing up the conditions that support educators to be physically and emotionally available at all times, such as getting to know the child as an individual, the parents, communication, consistency, commitment and rituals, Raj concluded that it was possible:

> *"I think you can. I think if you take the time to know each child. Get to know them and you've built really solid relationships with the parents. You use both written and also oral communication. Times – you have staff who actually are on, consistency on morning and late shifts that are consistent. You have consistent relief, you make sure your environments aren't changed too often, you keep some familiar items there for the children. You have rituals in your own room which pertain to your own room for infants. I think you can be. It's about, and also making sure you've got the commitment of all the educators within those rooms and management. Management as well. So yes definitely."*

4.4.2   How educators are supported in their understanding of attachment theory

Educators discussed the various ways in which they can access further information relating to the development of attachment relationships and attachment theory.

Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Educators were asked whether they felt that the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) supported their understanding of attachment relationships. Emily initially stated that she believed that the EYLF supported her understanding of attachment relationships, but after further reflection, changed her mind and concluded that it did not:

> *"I think … yes, it does … but. It is one's own personal knowledge that actually defines it and what we have been taught through development which I don't believe that all students are actually taught through development units – about attachment and all the theorists, not enough work is done cos, for infants especially that's where it starts. All children, it is a very big part, so no I do not think it does."*

When probed further as to how she felt it covered attachment relationships, Emily suggested that the EYLF was *"very broad. Very broad. It's not about the intricate stuff about forming those relationships with parents. Having the knowledge of, almost common sense, being taught."* Amelia was unsure if it supported her understanding of attachment relationships, commenting *"it's not very clear, to be honest. But I think they say the first outcome is that children have strong sense of identity. It mentions the relationship … but not very strong."* Layla believed that the EYLF had *"a lot of information"*, adding *"here's our EYLF book. It's all there. And also, too with the principles and practices come in too, in line with that."* Hannah was unsure at first but after further reflection decided that it did support her understanding of attachment relationships:

> *"I guess so? I don't really – yeah! I guess it does. I like the new framework. It isn't new anymore but it's definitely better than the last one. And yes, I think – is that like the Being, Belonging and Becoming? I think those three are definitely the main focus I even like preach that at my friends that are parents that this is what needs to happen. No, I do, it's very good."*

Jane gave practical examples of how the EYLF supported her understanding of attachment relationships, specifying that *"in our physical environment, curriculum planning, and programming and practice, we are told children's rights … We respect child's background, culture … sometimes we might include our children's community as well. Ask for their cultural information."* Layla immediately agreed that it did support her understanding, stating that *"it's all there"*. Raj believed that it did support her understanding but also voiced that she believed that there was capacity to create a separate area that focuses on attachment:

"In one way yes. I think in the being, becoming belonging module, definitely. Ok, we take that model, it definitely does talk to me, it can be interpreted and looked at in terms of attachment because it does look at relationship building, it looks at the importance of a child's culture, and it looks at the importance of the whole macro and micro system. So, I think that's really valuable … There are other areas where I think you probably need to look a little bit closer at babies and toddlers. But … I think in the being becoming model I think it definitely does link towards that and as our relationships are core. And the other thing I think it's probably quite good at is some of the principles and practices – our partnerships with our parents, our respect for diversity. So, I say yes, it does address it in those areas. I'd like to see it even more so, I would probably like to see it as its own separate area. Because I think it's a beginning, you know … I think we're already talked for a long time about the significance of the early years and early brain development, I think probably I would like to see a bit more of that in the document."

National Quality Standard (NQS)

Educators were asked if they believed that the NQS (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2013) supports their understanding of attachment relationships. A variety of responses were elicited, with some more political than others. Emily proposed that the NQS takes away from opportunities to 'be' with children, arguing:

"I've just been in the industry for so long. The relationships that you form with the parents, you become, sometimes you might be the first person that's actually ever, ever looked after their child. Which is a big thing. And you are bound by all the ethics, all of the everything being having to be documented. And it's taking away from the child. Letting them be themselves. You know, oh you need to work on this because we need that, to be ticked off the box for you. I personally feel nowadays in the National Quality Standards it's more for legal aspects. It's not about the care anymore, the children, and the more paperwork that they make us provide, it actually takes away from the children."

Layla believed that the NQS supported her understanding of attachment relationships, explaining how *"in our physical environment curriculum planning and programming and practice, we are told children's rights … we respect child's background, culture, we … might include our children's community as well. Ask for their cultural information."* When considering relationships with children, Raj thought that the NQS *"definitely focuses on how crucial that is. It talks about in terms of individuality of children with our program processes and that. And partnerships with our families."* Amelia thought that the NQS did *"mention"* relationships with children and developing partnerships and communication with families but added that this was her *"daily job",* believing that this was *"not enough. We need to understand more, to do more."*

Five of the six educators who participated in the interviews had not heard of *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008). Once she received the interview questions from the researcher, Jane conducted her own personal research into this resource and concluded that *"They support educators how to reflect on practice and reflect on how engage with children's relationships. This is very important. But I haven't got the real copy of that document yet."* Raj was aware of the resource but stated that *"we'd like to be able to break it down I guess you could say cos it's quite a big document."* She believed that *Reflect, Respect, Relate* was helpful to use:

> *"a tool to look at the practices of your educators and I don't know if we have had a tool before that lets us to look at our practices, and to actually see quite specifically where we can actually improve the quality of it. So, I think it is a very good diagnostic tool in terms of that. And now that one thing which it have grown from the quality system and what we have learned about critical reflection, so I think it's gonna work hand in hand with our critical reflection."*

Participation in professional development relating to attachment theory

Educators were asked about whether they had access to professional development relating to attachment theory. While some stated that they had participated in professional development that had mentioned attachment theory, Hannah disclosed that *"it wasn't all attachment theory, but attachment theory was covered I think in one".* Raj had attended *"RIE training"*, which was an information evening hosted by a local service, however, none of the educators were aware of any professional development specifically focusing on attachment theory in Perth.

All educators stated an interest in learning more about attachment theory, and Raj voiced her disappointment that:

> *"most of the training is Sydney/Melbourne based, and a lot of the stuff I have looked at is very much eastern states … we need a lot more. A lot more to be actually based this side here. We are very limited with training in our state."*

Hannah expressed that she enjoyed attending professional development, reflecting that *"there's always room for improvement".* She shared that she would like to engage in additional professional development to *"better, explain myself as to – I guess I can't explain myself so well because maybe I don't have a firm understanding as to why I do things, I just know I do them".* Emily believed that there was always a capacity to learn something new from professional development such as different techniques and strategies to improve practice and support educators to create a *"calming environment".* She also believed that professional development would have a subsequent effect on educators' stress levels, adding *"even for*

yourself it's stress management, to make a calmer you. Not to take things on board." Amelia expressed a desire to learn more about attachment theory, to support challenging behaviours, explaining *"I really want to know about attachment theory, I want to learn more than handle with like challenging behaviour? ... Once you build good relationships it will be easier to handle challenging behaviour but have lots of things to learn."*

4.4.3   Documentation relating to attachment theory

Educators who participated in the semi-structured interviews were asked to bring documentation relating to their attachment relationships with children in their education and care. In total, four educators shared documentation at the interview. The documentation of children's learning and the educational leader reflective documentation provided insight into the priorities of educators when considering children's progress when they first enrolled into the service and how educators continue to support the development of attachment relationships in their settings.

There were several types of documentation analysed in this study, including service-level documents such as the 'orientation sheet' and service philosophy, documentation of children's learning presented in a variety of formats according to the educators' choice and educational leader reflective documentation.

Room notes

Room notes were used by Emily and completed weekly. When asked whether they were a service document or Emily's personal document, she shared:

> *"This is my personal choice. I always do it, every week I write a list of room notes, other notes from parents that have given me or any updates on the children so that if somebody was to come in they could just see how the room as an overall and individually the kids what is going on. Gives a broad picture."*

The notes contained information on children and their progress towards settling into group education and care, with Emily *explaining "we have quite a few number of children who are settling. So, we are building their attachments."* She read an example of information about a child's settling at home, which included *"she is patted. This will take some time for her to settle as she is waking during the night at home with mum and continuing to breast feed."* Emily had documented the researcher's attendance in the room notes for the week in question, explaining in the interview:

> *"It can affect the running of our room. Can affect children's moods, and just things overall in the room … Some children because of their attachment to us being familiar*

> *caregivers don't like it when strangers are around ... they become a little bit fearful and very wary of new faces. So, it was just about that adding to our room to explain why."*

Educators shared a service template that was developed to record the orientation process for families and their children. The template included several lines to record information from each visit, and educators completed information under the headings of "*Communication between educator and parents", "What happened during visit"*, and "*Where to next"*. Raj shared a completed template, which included the child's sleep pattern ("*sleeps on breast. Wakes throughout night. Anxious when mum not around"*) and information relating to the visit (*"Stayed for 2/3 hours. Left her for 10/15 mins ... Was obviously stressed. Offered dummy, did not want comfort hold. Was soon settled when mum came back – no tears. Spoke about getting ready for child care"*). For 'where to next', Raj had documented that the mother was going to start leaving the baby more with her father and commence a self-settling routine for sleep.

Raj also shared a document entitled 'Educational Leadership Reflections', which were her practice notes as educational leader. This reflection sheet was written under the heading 'transitions', and she explained during the interview why she had shared this document, which reflected on babies transitioning to toddlers:

> *"I know we've talked about attachment ... but I also think transitions involve attachment relationships as well. So, this one talks about what we did with two children who were transitioning from babies to toddlers. And what happened there, what was involved there. Because I just think that it's really, I don't think that attachment and relationships stop at infanthood or toddler, it just talks about that and what was involved there and what happened."*

In the document, Raj had documented the strategies that had been put in place to support the transition, noting that *"key educators from the baby room have settled the children to sleep each day and children's individual rituals and comforters have remained a constant"*. Family feedback was also noted on the reflection, with Raj writing *"I have received positive feedback, highlighting how importance they view their child transitioning in friendship groups and the recognition by educators of their child's readiness. Conversations with families reaffirms the significance of building and maintaining partnerships with parents."*

Service philosophy

The service philosophy was visible at the entrance of the service and on display in both rooms. Amelia shared the service philosophy, which stated that the service *"believes in strong healthy relationships"* and *"relationships are strengthened by parents and educator's sharing*

responsibility and working together leading to the success of each child". Educators were required to link aspects of their educational program to the service philosophy.

Babies Room Two Program

Amelia shared the program for Babies Room Two, which is created every two months. The program contained different headings including *"Creative art and craft, dramatic play, gross motor/music, language/cognitive learning, intentional teaching, fine motor play, transition and routine, parents input and spontaneous".* When asked how the program linked to supporting children's attachment relationship, Amelia shared"

> *"our older children … they can talk, and they like playing in the tent and they like playing hide and seek then they put a tent inside and they playing in there. And this is Molly. The girls Molly, Anna and Sofia they also like dramatic play so we set dramatic table for them to play picnic, like that."*

Within the program document, each of the learning areas was linked to EYLF outcomes (DEEWR, 2009), and the philosophy. Within one of the activities, puzzles, Amelia had documented that this activity was intended to be *"one-on-one skill building".*

Observation sheet

An observation sheet was shared by Amelia who used this template to capture information about a child. The observation sheet had pre-populated headings that Amelia completed to update information on how children separate on arrival, their routines such as feeds and sleeps, their current interests and their development. At the end of the document educators completed a 'what is next' section, which allowed them to identify the next steps for that individual child. Amelia shared a completed observation that documented a child's journey with separation anxiety over two weeks:

> *"Kelly started getting separation anxiety … in Babies room (6–10 Feb 2017). She cried, screamed when parent passed her to educator. The first week was very hard to settle her even moved back to our room, Kelly cried and looked for cuddles all the time. We did mat session before meal time, we sang song, danced to music which Kelly really likes and enjoys. The second week (13–17 Feb 2017) dad wrote to Raj to her us that Kelly's mum was upset when she dropped her off in the morning. Raj printed out the article "how to make day care drop off easier without separation anxiety" to me. I had a quick talk with Kelly's dad on Wednesday: I asked if he could tell Kelly that they will come to pick her up after job. Kelly's dad is very good. He gave Kelly a kiss and asked her to put the kiss in her pocket, then he asked her for kiss and put in his pocket, then he waved bye to Kelly and left quickly. Kelly was not cranky like before, she sat down with educator, they played together."*

Emily disclosed an observation sample that she had completed for Molly. The observation sheet had no pre-determined headings, and she shared that the information captured included

"things that we need to work out as we're teaching about being supported in their own emotions". The information included Molly's peer groups, play, sleep settling, adjustment to centre food and self-regulation. Layla brought an observation that she had completed on one of the focus children in her room, Oliver, to the interview. She disclosed that she had chosen this piece of documentation to demonstrate the relationship between herself and Oliver and how she used her knowledge of his personality and their relationship to scaffold his physical development:

> *"So, this child has shown an interest in cars. So, I set up a few of the cars on the small table. But not only that, it's for his physical development as well. And his interest. I set up a few of the cars on the table – (oh I nearly mentioned his name) – for "O" as he is able to pull himself up into a standing position. Now – (exclamation – now) and doesn't he think he's the greatest (and I've got in brackets 'Mr. Confidence') ... By setting the cars up on the table (in brackets – 'I've been doing so at the shelving as well') has increased his area of play. So and so has taken a liking to the large pink car as well as the smaller ones. He has shown he likes to push them and see them fall from the table (so along the table). He is also happy to stand and push them back and forth and having a quiet play. Just him getting involved in it all. (Oh, and I've got that 'just him' and referred to the photo which I have). Today I sat the end of the table while he pushed the cars towards me. Then I pushed the cars back to him. This little game between us brought lots of smiles and chatter between us.*

> *And that's my relationship. So that's some sort of attachment. And there he is. He's on his tippy toes. He was always wanting to stand. Now, he couldn't. But here is the pink car. Proud little boy. And now he's using the wall car. And even this one – "I feel that he is proud of his accomplishment, by demonstrating what he can do with big smiles". And there's my outcome. And this follows through – "we will provide opportunities for him to develop coordinator strength with experiences for his confidence and self- esteem" … So even though I can sit by and watch how he does this, this, this, this, and this – but then I actually got him far. And that's our little relationship. And I've got it with this song that I sing, and he just loves it. One foot up and one foot down. Because he was always trying (sings) "One foot up, and one foot down. Here we go, off to town." Oh here he is! He's standing, but he's holding on. He's holding on, to the table. So little things like that. Simple. Simple."*

4.5   Summary

This chapter reported the findings from data collected in Phase One and Phase Two of the study. The online survey participants (n = 496) represented all states and territories, qualifications, age groups and experience levels.

The results show that most respondents had heard of attachment theory, primary caregiving and the Circle of Security. Some key themes that emerged from the online survey relating to how attachment relationships are developed included trust, time, security, responsiveness and love. Key themes emerging from the online survey relating to practices supporting attachment

development included getting to know the child and family, communication, time, cuddles, physical and emotional availability, consistency and building trust.

On completion of the survey, respondents who were working with infants and toddlers and located in the Perth metro region of Western Australia were invited to express an interest in continuing to Phase Two. In total, respondents from 28 settings expressed in interest in continuing to Phase Two. From the chosen service, a total of six educators were interviewed, and four children were observed in two different rooms, over the course of six weeks. As a service and as individual rooms, the results indicated a supportive environment for infants and toddlers.

Several key themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews, including supporting new children commencing ECEC, the use and inclusion of information from families to support attachment development, one-on-one interactions, self-settling, dependence, routines and rituals, and physical and emotional availability.

The results from Phase One and Phase Two are discussed in Chapter 5: Discussion. This chapter will explore the themes emerging from the data in relation to other research.

Chapter 5   Discussion

5.1   Introduction

This chapter summarises the research findings in relation to the three research questions and the literature. The findings from phases one and two were reported under two separate sections in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the findings are organised under each research question, and identify themes that emerged from phases one and two of the data collection.

This study aimed to investigate educators' understanding of the attachment relationships they hold with infants and toddlers. The research questions are:

1. What are early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop?
2. What are early childhood educators' beliefs about attachment relationships?
3. How do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships?

Degotardi and Gill (2017) argue that it is important to acknowledge the influence that educators' beliefs have on their practice. They suggest that, historically, there appeared to be a disparity between beliefs and knowledge, implying that beliefs are based on opinion in comparison to the factual aspect of knowledge. They propose that emerging research highlights that educators' understanding is a combination of knowledge and beliefs, which collectively inform their practice.

While there are many studies on attachment theory, quality of care in Long Day Care (LDC) and the effect of non-familial care on a child's attachment to their primary caregivers, there are limited studies considering attachment from educators' perspectives (Drugli & Undheim, 2012), which inspired the researcher to conduct this study. This discussion chapter is based on findings from an online national survey, semi-structured interviews with six educators at an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service in Western Australia, and observations in two different rooms of the selected ECEC service. In total, 488 early childhood educators throughout Australia, representing all states and territories, responded to the online survey. Within Western Australia, 28 settings expressed an interest in partaking in Phase Two, which involved participating in semi-structured interviews and observations. One ECEC setting was chosen for Phase Two and all eligible educators within the setting agreed to participate. The

large number of respondents to the survey suggests that this topic is of importance to educators working with infants and toddlers across Australia. It is important to point out that there was a difference between the qualifications of the online survey respondents and the participants in the semi-structured interviews and that educators were provided with the questions prior to the interview. Seventy-seven percent of the online survey respondents held a diploma-level or higher qualification in ECEC, in comparison to 100% of educators participating in the semi-structured interviews.

5.2 Educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop

This section reports findings related to educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop. It relates to research question one: "What are early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of how early attachment relationships develop?" Respondents to the online survey were asked questions relating to their knowledge and understanding of attachment theory, stages of attachment development, the different types of attachment relationships and their understanding of how attachment relationships develop. These survey questions were further explored in the semi-structured interview questions.

From the response to the online questions, the following themes emerged:

- knowledge and understanding of attachment theory
- importance of attachment theory
- stages of attachment development
- primary and secondary attachment figures
- educators being supported in their understanding of attachment development.

These sub-headings are discussed below.

5.2.1 Knowledge and understanding of attachment theory

Attachment theory is one of the key concepts of outcome one of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF): "Children have a strong sense of identity" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009, p. 21). This outcome proposes that children feel "safe, secure and supported" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 21) when they develop attachment relationships with educators. Data from the online survey revealed that 91% of educators working with children aged birth to two years of age were aware of attachment

theory, and of these educators, 60% were either moderately or extremely familiar with the theory. All educators participating in semi-structured interviews were aware of attachment theory. These are significant percentages reflecting the prominence of attachment theory in infant-toddler pedagogy and practice, and a legacy which continues today. This echoes Rolfe's (2004) observation that interest in attachment theory in the ECEC context is continuing to grow.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, it is important to note that from the online survey there still remains a percentage of educators (9%) working with infants and toddlers who have not heard of attachment theory, and 11% who have heard of attachment theory but with only slight familiarly. This suggests they had little knowledge of the term 'attachment', although it is recognised that they may be supporting attachment relationships through their practices without understanding the term. Within the EYLF, there is no detailed explanation of how educators should approach this relationship development. Thus, the interpretation and understanding of attachment development could be based on many different experiences, including educators own personal attachment experiences. This view is confirmed by Rolfe (2004), who proposed that the quality of the formation of attachment relationships can be influenced by an educator's own attachment experiences from childhood. This has implications when considering the plethora of literature highlighting the importance and influence of attachment on a young child's development (R. Bowlby, 2007).

Educators in both the online survey and the semi-structured interviews were asked to explain their understanding of attachment theory. Using a thematic analysis, a definition of what they understood about attachment theory emerged. The findings revealed that educators' understanding of attachment centred around two main themes: first, that attachment was a bond between a child and at least one adult, and second, that attachment supported the child to have a sense of security. This is similar to Bowlby's (1969) definition of attachment, which described it as a bond between a child and a person assuming the role of mother-figure who offers safety and security to the child.

Survey respondents who stated an awareness of attachment theory were asked to explain their understanding of attachment theory in a few dot points. Several comments identified that attachment served to provide a sense of belonging and security within the environment, and to promote cognitive development. Siegel (2012) also proposed a link between secure attachment and cognitive development. He additionally considered attachment to be crucial to the development of self-regulation, proposing that it is through social interactions that a

child can regulate emotionally, however, self-regulation was not mentioned by any respondents to the survey. Three of the six educators who were interviewed referenced self-regulation in the semi-structured interviews, however, it is acknowledged that the educators shared that they had recently attended a professional development workshop on this topic. Given that no educator in the online survey mentioned self-regulation, it is possible that some educators are not aware of the concept or the recent literature linking attachment to self-regulation or did not connect it to attachment theory. This has implications, given that from February 2018, the revised National Quality Standard introduced the concept of self-regulation for Standard 5.2: *Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive relationships* (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] 2018). The majority of survey respondents and all educators participating in the semi-structured interviews were clear about key functions of attachment referring to belonging leading to security, security within the environment, and the promotion of cognitive and emotional development. They explained these at length, describing the development of belonging and security through an attachment relationship with at least one person, which in turn, supports cognitive and emotional development.

In addition to naming key functions, 15% of educators in their online survey responses identified John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth as two theorists in relation to attachment theory. Only one of six participants in the semi-structured interviews referred to the theorist John Bowlby when discussing attachment theory.

5.2.2   Importance of attachment theory

At the end of the comments section of the online survey, educators provided additional information relating to their knowledge and understanding of attachment theory. Some argued that attachment theory should inform everything that they did with infants and toddlers. Others proposed that forming positive relationships with infants and toddlers is the primary work of educators, and that learning and development is affected when children do not have positive relationships. R. Bowlby (2007) also advocated for infants and toddlers to develop secondary attachments within ECEC settings and even argued that he felt that these attachment relationships were an absolute necessity for infants and toddlers to cope with separation from their parents.

5.2.3   Stages of attachment development

Forty-two percent of educators who responded to the online survey claimed to be either extremely or moderately familiar with stages of attachment. Educators were invited to describe their understanding of the stages of attachment development in their own words, to further elicit their knowledge and understanding of attachment. Fifty-seven comments acknowledged the four stages of attachment development, and the names of each of the stages were consistent with either Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall's (1979/2014) or Schaffer and Emerson's (1964) stages of attachment development. Ainsworth et al. (1978/2014) proposed the following four stages: 1. pre-attachment phase, 2. attachment in the making phase, 3. clear-cut attachment phase and 4. goal corrected partnership. Shaffer and Emerson (1964) proposed four similar stages: 1. asocial, 2. Indiscriminate attachment, 3. specific attachment and 4. multiple attachment.

All six educators who participated in the semi-structured interviews were aware of the stages of attachment and listed stages consistent with Ainsworth et al. (1978/2014). The educators articulated their use of these stages in their practice with infants and toddlers.

It appeared that in both the online survey and the semi-structured interviews, educators identified characteristics of stages of attachment development. Respondents to the online survey recognised characteristics including 'stranger anxiety', 'separation anxiety' and the development of primary and subsequently secondary attachment relationships. In the semi-structured interviews, Raj, the educational leader at the participating ECEC service, argued that the characteristic of separation anxiety was a critical aspect of early development. Jane, a diploma-qualified educator who covers lunches in both rooms of the participating service, suggested this period of development occurred typically between 9–12 months of age and could be difficult in terms of separation anxiety, as at this point, she believed that infants had developed a strong bond with their parents. Whilst acknowledging that this was a common occurrence, she also proposed that this separation anxiety was a form of trauma.

Separation anxiety, stranger anxiety and the development of a primary and subsequent secondary attachment figures are characteristics typical of the third stage of attachment development according to Bowlby (1969). He suggested that in this third stage, typically between six and 24 months of age, stranger anxiety and separation anxiety begin to emerge, and infants develop primary and subsequent secondary attachment relationships. This would suggest that educators are aware of characteristics of the more visible attachment phase. It may also suggest that they are unaware of the preceding and proceeding stages, or do not

have a 'formal' definition of these stages. This has implications for educators in understanding the continuum of attachment development to support a child through each of the stages.

5.2.4 Primary and secondary attachment figures

In the online survey, educators were asked to describe their understanding of primary and secondary attachment figures. Despite many educators naming the primary attachment figure as the mother, the concept of primary attachment figure as mother was not as prevalent as terms including primary attachment figure as mother-figure, father and parents. The concept of this primary attachment figure being a lifelong bond was expressed by 18 educators, which echoes Bowlby's (1969) emphasis on the enduring nature of the primary attachment bond.

Educators defined secondary attachment figures as extended family and close family friends, and also viewed themselves as secondary attachments in an ECEC setting. Bowlby (1969) considered these secondary attachments as special bonds with whom infants develop a close relationship, but also highlighted that these attachment relationships can vary in both quantity and quality. When defining secondary attachment figures, educators made no mention of longevity in relation to the secondary attachment figure.

Some educators in the online survey considered themselves 'primary caregivers' as opposed to secondary attachment figures. This concept of primary caregivers as educators is consistent with the concept of primary caregiving proposed by Colmer, Rutherford and Murphy (2011), who describe how at home, the parent is the primary caregiver, however, in the ECEC setting, the primary caregiver is the educator. Ebbeck, Phoon, Tan-Chong, Tan and Goh (2015) proposed that primary caregiving is one of the key determinants of a secure attachment relationship between educators and children. Participants in the semi-structured interviews did not mention the concept of secondary attachment figures but spoke about the primary caregiver as an educator within the ECEC setting.

Three respondents in the online survey considered a child's ability to develop positive secondary attachments to be dependent on the primary attachment relationship also being positive, and that the primary attachment affects the child's ability to form secondary attachment relationships. This is contradictory to the literature, which suggests that a child can have several Internal Working Models (IWMs) and that a secure secondary attachment relationship can act as a buffer to an insecure primary attachment relationship. Harris (2009) argued that infants can concurrently have both insecure and secure attachment relationships with primary and secondary caregivers. Meins (1999) also proposes that children can have a

different IWM for each of their attachment relationships. This is significant as educators are well placed to provide children with insecure attachment relationships with the opportunity to experience a secure attachment relationship and IWM and support positive development.

5.2.5   Educators being supported in their understanding of attachment development

To further examine the support educators may have received to enhance their understanding of how early attachment develops, respondents to the semi-structured interviews were asked how they felt supported in their understanding of attachment development through the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and National Quality Standard (NQS) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2013). In the online survey, respondents chose to discuss this topic in the additional comments section. It was interesting to note that, overall, in both the online survey and semi-structured interviews, educators did not feel that they were supported in their understanding of how attachment relationships develop. In the online survey, educators suggested that more work was required to fully support pre-service teachers and educators in their knowledge and understanding of attachment theory. Educators participating in the semi-structured interviews explained that they had participated in professional development on self-regulation, which had covered attachment theory as a component of the overall workshop, however, no educator had attended professional development specifically to support educators to understand attachment theory within an ECEC context. No educator was aware of any attachment workshops specific to the ECEC sector. Raj, one of the interviewees, voiced her concern about the lack of available training in Perth in comparison to Melbourne and Sydney, considering Perth ECEC settings as geographically disadvantaged and suggesting that more learning opportunities were required in relation to attachment theory. The Australian Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMH) (2013) recommended that as part of high-quality care, educators need to receive ongoing training including focused training in infant mental health for educators working with infants. Colmer et al. (2011) also propose that ongoing professional development and opportunities for teams to reflect, support each other and engage in dialogue is required in relation to attachment theory and suggest that this is critical to the provision of a high-quality service.

While no explicit link was made between the Circle of Security (CoS) and attachment theory based professional development, when asked about their familiarity with the CoS, 77% of respondents to the online survey stated that they were familiar with the CoS, which they defined as an approach that enhances attachment security between adults and young children. The number of respondents familiar with the approach would indicate that some

information had been made available to them. The six participants in the semi-structured interviews were asked about their awareness of tools or programs available to support their understanding of attachment relationships. None of the participants in the semi-structured interviews mentioned CoS, however, it is important to note that it was not an explicit question in the interview.

In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked about educators' awareness of *Reflect, Respect, Relate*, an instrument designed to assess the overall learning environment and quality of relationships through four observational scales, which was freely made available to all ECEC settings across Australia in conjunction of the introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) (Department of Education and Children's Services [DECS], 2008). Five of six of the educators had not heard of the resource, and despite the resource having a tool to assess quality of interactions within ECEC settings, none had used it. A lack of awareness of the existence of the resource is significant, as within *Educators Belonging, Being and Becoming: Educators' guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia,* suggestions are provided as to how *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008) relates to the EYLF and is continuously referenced throughout (DEEWR, 2010). While the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) references attachment theory and the importance of developing secure relationships with young children, as Raj explained, it is very broad, and there is no specific guidance provided to educators as to how to approach the process of developing a relationship with young children.

Educators who participated in the semi-structured interviews believed that the NQS had a role to play in supporting their understanding of attachment relationships. One educator proposed that the standards promoted not only the development of secure relationships with young children, but respectful and collaborative partnership with families. Another educator believed that the NQS prompted her to respect a child's background, culture, their community and their rights, and asked educators to reflect this in their documentation. This is a similar position to the AAIMH, which proposes that in relation to attachment and non-parental care, educators need to engage in reflective practice that supports them to reflect on their beliefs and to consider practices from the perspective of the "child, the worker and the system itself" (2013, p. 3). At the time of the semi-structured interviews, the revised NQS had not come into effect, and therefore, the concept of self-regulation was not yet included in Standard 5.2: *Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive relationships*. With the revision of the NQS (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2017) and the inclusion of the concept of self-regulation, it may be timely for educators to access professional development related to their role as educators in supporting a child's self-regulation.

In summary, the majority of educators participating in this study appeared to have knowledge and understanding of attachment theory, with their understanding centred around the notion of attachment being a bond between a child and an adult providing security to the child. The majority viewed themselves as secondary attachment figures alongside key adults in an infant's/toddler's life such as immediate and extended family. Educators believed attachment theory is critical to infant/toddler practice, with some suggesting the theory should inform everything that an infant/toddler educator does. The majority of educators believed attachment promotes emotional and cognitive development and that an absence of an attachment relationship in an ECEC setting could have an adverse impact on infant/toddler development. Educators were aware of Ainsworth's stages of attachment development, however, they appeared to focus more on the third stage, where attachment behaviours are more prevalent, as it is during this stage that stranger and separation anxiety peak. Educators voiced their concern in relation to being supported in their knowledge and understanding of how attachment relationships develop. They suggested that there was scope for more training and development to be implemented for educators in increasing their knowledge and understanding. No educator was aware of professional development currently available to the ECEC sector specifically on the topic of attachment.

5.3   Early childhood educators' beliefs about attachment relationships

This section reports findings related to educators' beliefs about attachment relationships. It relates to research question two: "What are early childhood educators' beliefs around attachment relationships?" Ebbeck et al. (2015) propose that sensitive and responsive care is key in the process of developing attachment relationships between educators and infants/toddlers. They suggest that through sensitive and responsive caregiving, educator practices become more child-centred and consequentially, support the development of secure attachment relationships. One of the practices of the EYLF, responsiveness to children, details how educators respond to children's "strengths, abilities and interests", valuing their knowledge and building on this to support learning (DEEWR, 2009, p. 14). Responsiveness is one of the four signals in *Reflect, Respect, Relate* used to assess the quality of the relationship through interactions between educators and young children. The resource proposes that responsiveness includes the ability to recognise and respect times when children do not require the support of an adult. *Reflect, Respect, Relate* considers responsiveness central to the socio-constructivist approach, one of the theoretical approaches that underpins the EYLF.

Responsiveness means that educators follow a children's cues in relation to the situation and the child's behaviour, and that distressed children are comforted quickly (DECS, 2008).

To ascertain educators' beliefs about attachment relationships, respondents to the online survey were asked to respond to statements related to sensitivity and responsiveness, which included self-settling, planning for one-on-one time, dependency and communication, which are presented in the following section. The themes were pre-selected based on some of the indicators from *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008) and respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements. Based on the initial findings from the online survey, the researcher was able to extend and explore each of the emerging themes in more detail through the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, observations were introduced as an additional data source relating to the emerging themes.

5.3.1   Self-settling

In the online survey, 15% of educators either '*somewhat agreed*' or '*strongly agreed*' that it was better for infants/toddlers to self-settle when upset rather than being responded to by an adult. Seventy percent either somewhat or strongly disagreed with this statement. In the semi-structured interviews, educators were asked their opinion of these survey results. While they had varied opinions, the majority of educators believed that infants or toddlers needed the physical and emotional responsiveness of a trusted educator within an environment in which they felt secure, to be able to self-settle. One educator believed that babies were too young to self-settle as they were too young to understand the situation or context. Three educators believed that it was their responsibility to gauge the situation to ascertain if the child was going to be able to self-settle before responding. Educators considered self-settling a learned skill, which they linked to self-regulation, and believed that as part of their role they needed to support children in developing self-regulation skills. The educators also discussed the realities of group care, sharing how they would prioritise which child to respond to first when distressed, depending on their self-settling needs. An example was given of how one child may self-settle with a dummy whereas another may require the physical proximity of an educator. While there were some educators who believed infants/toddlers were better self-settling than to have an educator comfort them when distressed, this contradicts Ebbeck et al.'s (2015) claim that educators' responsiveness to young children's distress contributes to the process of the development of attachment relationship.

In the observations, 41% of the observations in Room One and 35% of the observations in Room Two were rated high for responsiveness. However, it is important to acknowledge that the observations did reflect times when children did not require the support of an adult, or times when the educator was responding to another child's needs, which may have been more urgent than the observed child.

5.3.2   Planning for one-on-one time

Eighty-seven percent of respondents to the online survey either '*somewhat agreed'* or '*strongly agreed'* that they planned for one-on-one time within their program, with 5% somewhat or strongly disagreeing that they planned for these opportunities. All six educators who participated in the semi-structured interviews stated that they planned for one-on-one time when an infant first commenced care to support them to feel secure in the new environment. Interestingly, throughout the interviews, it appeared that their beliefs changed once the child was settled. One educator described that once an infant or toddler appeared to feel secure, they then should be encouraged to develop relationships with other educators in the room. Additionally, several educators suggested that once an infant or toddler was settled, they should be actively discouraged from spending too much time with the one educator. Reasons cited for this included to avoid the infant or toddler becoming upset if, for example, the educator went on holidays or left the service. Concerns about infants/toddlers spending too much time with one person differs from Drugli and Undheim's study (2012), in which educators voiced concerns about young children not being able to spend enough time with educators, believing that time was required to not only develop a positive relationship but to maintain it on an ongoing basis.

Layla, one of the educators participating in the semi-structured interviews, provided an example of how she used routine change times to facilitate one-on-one conversations with children in her care, sharing her observations of how she had witnessed an increase in vocabulary when a child was engaged in these one-on-one interactions. This is similar to the findings reported by Ebbeck et al. (2015), which concluded that spending time with and giving undivided attention to infants/toddles helped to develop the bond between infant/toddlers and their educators. Spending one-on-one time with children is one of the indicators in the first outcome of the EYLF, "Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 24), where it is suggested that educators promote this learning through the initiation of one-on-one interactions during routines throughout the day and particularly with infants and toddlers. Within *Reflect, Respect, Relate*, spending one-on-one

time with children is one of the indicators of positive interactions, one of the four signals in the relationship module of the resource (DECS, 2008). The resource considers positive interactions as the way in which educators interact with children, and how interested they are in the child's interests, acknowledging their attempts to interact and participating in their play. Another educator who participated in the semi-structured interviews, Emily, argued that the documentation associated with the NQS took away from her time to spend with children, suggesting that the 'care' aspect of education and care is being lost in the legislative requirements.

Of a total of 96 observations undertaken across four days at the selected ECEC service, 54% of the observations in Room One and 56% of the observations in Room Two were rated 'high' for positive interactions. As previously noted in Chapter 4, it is important to acknowledge that there were times where a child did not require interactions with educators, or when an educator was engaged in positive interactions with a child other than the observed children, which would have affected the ratings of observations.

5.3.3   Dependency

In the online survey, 52% of educators somewhat or strongly disagreed that the more an infant or toddler was cuddled, the longer they would be dependent on an educator. Twenty-three percent somewhat or strongly agreed that the more that an infant or toddler was cuddled, the longer that they would be dependent on an educator. This is a significant number of educators, more than one in five, believing that dependency is linked to physical affection. However, it can be argued that this finding can be interpreted in neither a positive nor negative manner, as each educators' perception of whether dependency is a positive or negative concept is different.

Educators participating in the semi-structured interviews were asked their opinion on the survey results in relation to dependency, to further extend the online survey questions. Educators had mixed responses relating to the term 'dependency'. Emily and Hannah considered dependency in a positive manner and as an essential requirement for care for infants and toddlers. Amelia considered dependency as a physical dependency and argued that this was not 'good' in group care as there were many children requiring an educator's support. Raj argued that physical cuddling of children did not create a relationship of dependency, but instead, suggested that this created a relationship of trust. When asked this question, Jane believed it was important to consider the child as an individual and how their individual needs may vary, but also suggested that it was not feasible in group care to cuddle

children all the time, believing all children needed support, not just one child. It was interesting to note, however, that when speaking about one child in particular in her room, she shared that when that child asked for a cuddle, she gave them a cuddle on demand. Layla defined dependency as not just the notion of a child being dependent on an educator, but that educators also become dependent on children, and advocated for educators to "share" children with other educators. Bowlby (1969) viewed dependency in a positive manner, proposing that it leads to independence in later life. He suggested that securely attached infants seeking contact with their attachment figures for reassurance will be more self-reliant than those who are insecurely attached. This is echoed by Erickson, Sroufe and Egeland (1985), who in their study into the relationship between attachment classification and later behavioural problems in school, found that children who were classified as anxious/avoidant were considered highly dependent on their teachers, with less agency than their securely attached peers.

5.3.4   Communication

In the online survey, educators were asked about their beliefs around communication with infants and toddlers. The first question asked about their belief in relation to the importance of conversations with a 3-month old baby in comparison to a 3-year-old child, and the second question asked about their belief in the importance of verbally discussing future transitions or events with non-verbal children. In total, 98% either somewhat or strongly agreed that it was important to undertake both practices.

Discussing future transitions and providing advanced warning where possible is one of the indicators of appropriateness, one of the four signals in *Reflect, Respect, Relate*. The resource considers indicators of appropriateness to include identifying and respectfully supporting children's emotions and educators having an awareness of what is developmentally appropriate for the children in their care (DECS, 2008). In the EYLF, appropriateness is mentioned as a strategy that educators use to support children to feel a sense of security (Outcome 1), through ensuring that they interact with each child in their care (DEEWR, 2009).

To summarise, early childhood educators' beliefs about attachment relationships were explored through their responses to statements relating to themes from the relationships assessment tool in *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008). The majority of educators believed that infants/toddlers required the physical and emotional support of an educator instead of being expected to self-settle. Intentionally planning for one-on-one time was practiced by the majority of educators responding to the online survey, however, according to the semi-

structured interviews, their prioritisation of planning for this time was dependent on the length of time a child had been in their ECEC setting and whether they had settled into the environment. Educators participating in the semi-structured interviews believed that once a child had settled, they should be supported to develop relationships with people other than the primary caregiver and should be actively discouraged from spending too much time with one educator. The term dependency was one that educators interpreted differently with mixed responses and questioned whether it was a positive or a negative term, however, more than half the participants in the online survey believed that physical affection led to a dependency on the educator. Further discussion through semi-structured interviews led to questioning the feasibility of providing physical affection as requested within group care. The majority of educators believed that verbal communication was as important to a baby as it was to a three-year-old child and that it was important that educators verbalised future actions or events to let the infant know what was going to happen next.

5.4 Supporting the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships

This section relates to research question three: How do early childhood educators support the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships? In Part D of the online survey, educators were asked questions that directly related to their practices that supported the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships. These questions were explored further with participants in the semi-structured interviews. The following themes emerged from the analysis of comments:

- supporting children through separation anxiety
- routines and rituals to support attachment
- love
- a supportive relationship with families
- physical and emotional availability.

5.4.1 Supporting children through separation anxiety

Twenty-four comments named separation anxiety as a stage of attachment development in the online survey. Some respondents cited separation anxiety as a standalone stage, with others considering it part of a particular stage of attachment development. In the semi-structured interviews, all educators had a positive view of separation anxiety and it appeared that there was an understanding that it was a developmentally appropriate phase of development for infants/toddlers and an acknowledgement that infants/toddlers were not

able to understand that their families would return. Educators discussed the strategies they utilised to support children to overcome separation anxiety during the orientation process, which included strategies to familiarise both children and families with both the environment and the educators. Physical availability was a practice mentioned by educators as a way of supporting children through separation anxiety. Raj shared that she felt that gaining the parents' trust through communication throughout the day in turn ensured the child felt settled in the environment. Educators' view of separation anxiety as a normal phase of development is consistent with Ainsworth et al. (1979/2014), who proposed that separation anxiety was a feature of the clear-cut attachment phase of the stages of attachment development. They suggested that during this phase, infants are wary of strangers and become unsettled when their primary caregiver leaves their environment, aiming to remain in proximity to them using attachment behaviours.

5.4.2   Routines and rituals to support attachment

From the online survey, a theme that emerged was communication through routines. Thirty-three comments identified incorporating routines from home into an ECEC setting. Routines were considered a key time when educators had the opportunity to spend one-on-one time with infants/toddlers. One respondent argued that while this one-on-one occurred naturally, it should also be planned for. From the observations of educators interacting with children, the researcher noticed that a significant part of an infant's/toddler's day was consumed by participation in routine activity such as nappy change, feeding and supporting a child to sleep. The researcher asked the educators to comment on this during the semi-structured interviews. Five of the six educators who participated considered routines positively, in various ways. One educator enjoyed having routines as she believed that the group enjoyed the predictability and structure of understanding what happens and at what time. Others considered routines as core to the learning environment, and a key opportunity to develop attachment relationships with infants/toddlers. The sixth educator considered routines as a barrier to program implementation, sharing how on occasion she would return home and reflect that she was so busy, she did not remember spending much time with the children. In the literature, researchers such as Degotardi (2010) argue that routine times are not as privileged as other components of the curriculum. She suggests that there is a difference in interactions between educators and children during routines and interactions during play, arguing that educators are more focused on the process of the routine than the interactions. Similarly, Fewster (2010) suggests that educators may place a lesser value on routines than other aspects of the

curriculum in their ECEC setting, questioning the extent to which educators reflect on their routines for their particular group of children.

5.4.3 Love

The presence of love between an educator and infants/toddlers was identified in 15 comments in the online survey as a factor supporting the development of attachment relationships. Attachment relationships were perceived to develop *"through ultimate love"* (PG52), or by *"allowing the child to feel loved"* (D53). Within the semi-structured interviews, love was mentioned as a practice that supported the development of attachment relationships by half of the participants. Recchia et al. (2018) concluded through their study that attachment relationships or 'love relationships' are developed through the previously mentioned routine caregiving moments such as feeding, nappy change and putting a child to sleep. Use of the term love has been debated in the literature, with researchers such as Page (2017) questioning the professionalism of the term to describe a paid role of education and care. Historically, the term love has been substituted by more scientific terms such as attachment, however, educators appear to be returning to this terminology.

5.4.4 A supportive relationship with families

Respondents participating in the online survey mentioned gaining information from families as an important aspect of developing an attachment relationship. In total, 105 comments mentioned using information from families as one of the three things they did to develop attachment relationships. Respondents participating in the semi-structured interviews considered a supportive relationship with families as a key practice that in turn supported the development of an attachment relationship with their child. Educators considered it even more important to develop this relationship with families when working with younger children such as infants and toddlers in comparison with older children. This aligns with the EYLF, which was developed for educators to use in collaboration with families to support children's learning and development. The EYLF proposes that *Partnerships with families* (Principle 2) supports learning outcomes for children. This principle encourages educators to facilitate the contribution of families to the curriculum decision-making process, proposing that, as a result, the planned curriculum will have experiences meaningful for each child (DEEWR, 2009).

All educators who participated in the semi-structured interviews were vocal in explaining how they used and included information from children's families and cultures as part of their program. Educators held the information provided by families in high regard and shared a

variety of ways in which they collected it. Some educators spoke of using the information to ensure that a child had an enjoyable day in the absence of their families; others shared how the small pieces of information shared from families were used to support curriculum assessment in terms of the child within the program. This emphasis on the importance of a supportive relationship with families by participants in this study was confirmed in the literature by Lee (2006), who found in their study that one of the keys to the development of a secure relationship between educators and infants/toddlers was the collaboration between parents and educators.

5.4.5   Physical and emotional availability

Within the online survey, participants defined and stated that physical and emotional availability was a key practice that supported the development of attachment relationships. To extend this, the researcher asked participants in the semi-structured interviews what they believed physical and emotional availability was and if they believed that it was possible to be physically and emotionally available at all times in group care such as ECEC. Educators spoke of physical and emotional availability in terms of the ability to leave home problems at home when at work. Educators considered it their duty of care to be responsible for their availability, proposing that it was better for the infants/toddlers in their care for educators to stay at home rather than come to work when unable to physically and emotionally support children in their care due to the effect it would have on children in their care. This opinion of the negative effect of the unavailability of an attachment figure is comparable to R. Bowlby's (2007) view that an infant/toddler without an available primary or secondary attachment figure will experience an increase in the levels of the stress hormone cortisone in their body. He suggests that if they can develop an attachment relationship with at least one educator available to them, they can avoid stress and anxiety.

The researcher asked educators if they believed it was possible to be physically and emotionally available at all times; five of six educators believed that it was possible. Some went as far as suggesting that it was not possible to work as an educator in an infant/toddler room if you were not able to provide this availability to children. The sixth educator, who did not agree it was possible, shared their experience of sick children or other children requiring support and as a result taking away other children's time with educators in their room. This finding was similar to the findings of Brebner, Hammond, Schaumloffel and Lind (2014), who highlighted the challenges of providing care within the busyness of an infant/toddler ECEC setting in their study. The participants of the study shared how they prioritised children with

the greatest need of support from an educator while trying to meet the needs of the other remaining children in the setting.

To summarise, educators shared how they supported the development of secure infant/toddler–caregiver relationships in several ways. Separation anxiety was acknowledged as a normal part of development, and was viewed in a positive manner by those participating in the semi-structured interviews. Separation anxiety was supported through familiarisation with both the environment and the educators, in addition to communication with families and educators' physical availability. Routine activities were considered by the majority as a core part of the learning environment and a time when educators had one-on-one time with a child, which supported children to develop an attachment relationship with educators. However, one educator participating in the semi-structured interviews viewed routines as a barrier to program implementation. Some educators believed that attachment relationships were developed through allowing infants/toddlers to feel love from the educator. Educators believed a supportive relationship with families was necessary to support the development of secure infant/toddler and caregiver relationships. Educators participating in the semi-structured interviews used and included information from families to plan their program and held this information in high regard. Physical and emotional availability was considered key to the development of secure relationships and some educators participating in the semi-structured interviews believed it impossible to work with infants/toddlers if you were unable to provide this physical and emotional availability to them.

5.5   Summary

This study found that many educators are aware of attachment theory, but that there are still some educators who may not be aware of the term, even if they are enacting attachment practices with infants/toddlers in their care. It was found that educators considered attachment theory very important to their work with infants/toddlers and viewed themselves as secondary attachment figures. Educators' beliefs about attachment relationships varied and some educators believed that physical affection could lead to a relationship of dependency. Educators use a range of strategies to support the development of secure attachment relationships and valued the relationships and input received from families. It was found that educators did not feel supported in their understanding of attachment and that further guidance was required in relation to interpreting the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and NQS documents to support secure relationships with infants/toddlers.

Chapter 6   Conclusion

6.1   Introduction

This study aimed to investigate Australian educators' understanding of the attachment relationships they hold with infants and toddlers. Additionally, it sought to determine how educators developed these relationships and what their beliefs were in relation to these. This chapter is divided into seven sections, commencing with an introduction and followed by an overview of the study and an outline of each chapter. A summary of the key findings is then discussed, along with the limitations of the study and identification of recommendations and implications for future research. The chapter concludes with final remarks.

6.2   Overview

The overall structure of this thesis took the form of six chapters, including this concluding chapter. Chapter 1 provided a general background to attachment theory and the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) context. It outlined the research problem and questions, highlighting the significance of the research topic investigated. Chapter 2 provided a review of literature in the areas related to the study and considered how it applied to ECEC settings. The third chapter was concerned with the methodology used and informed the reader about the participants, instruments and approach taken to analyse the data. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study, identifying the main themes from each phase of data collection. The fifth chapter presented the data analysis in relation to the three research questions. This final chapter will draw on the entire thesis and tie the various strands to summarise the findings, limitations, recommendations and implications.

6.3   Summary of key findings

The key findings, structured according to the two phases of data collection, are presented in this section.

6.3.1   Phase One survey

The majority of the 486 Australian educators who participated in the online survey were aware of attachment theory, which suggests that it may influence their practices. However, there remained a group of educators working with infants and toddlers unaware of attachment

theory. Given the plethora of literature outlining the importance of the theory, particularly when working with infants and toddlers, this could be an area of focus when considering how to support educators working with children under two years of age.

There were differences between educators in relation to their understandings of, and responsiveness to, attachment behaviours. For example, some educators believed that it was better to leave a child to self-settle when upset than to provide comfort. This is not reflective of the literature, which suggests a link between an educator's responsiveness to a child in distress and how this contributes to the development of an attachment relationship (Ebbeck, Phoon, Tan-Chong, Tan, & Goh, 2015).

Less than half of the educators participating in the online survey stated that they were aware of stages of attachment development, however, their focus was predominantly directed to the visible characteristic of separation and stranger anxiety, which occur in the third stage of attachment proposed by Ainsworth et al. (1978/2014). Thus, the researcher proposes that while the majority of educators were aware of the concept of attachment theory, many did not have an understanding of the associated theorists, stages of attachment development and the correlation between their responsiveness and the development of attachment relationships with infants and toddlers in their care.

A key finding was that educators required further resources and support to further develop their understanding of attachment theory. The theory is one of the key concepts of outcome one of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009); additionally, in the National Quality Standard (NQS) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2017), educators are challenged to reflect on how they build attachment relationships and the theories that influence their practice. However, only a small percentage of educators who participated in the online survey referenced theorists associated with attachment theory. If educators are unaware of these theorists, there is a concern as to what they are using to support their practice and interpret their observations of children's learning. As outlined in the discussion chapter, the literature suggests that educators' understanding is a combination of knowledge and beliefs (Degotardi & Gill, 2017). If educators' knowledge is lacking in relation to attachment theory, they may rely on their beliefs, which could be influenced by their experience of participating in an attachment relationship themselves. This influence may affect the way they approach relationship development with infants/toddlers in their care. The demand for professional development is evident from the online survey responses, as

educators expressed a clear interest in engaging in further professional development in relation to attachment theory. They additionally proposed that further professional development was required for pre-service teachers and educators to support their knowledge and understanding.

6.3.2   Phase Two observations

In total, 96 observations were completed across the data collection period of six weeks using the observation tool from *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (Department of Education and Children's Services [DECS], 2008). This study found that there were complexities associated with educating and caring for infants and toddlers that were not supported in the observation tool. For example, there are times when educators need to prioritise one child's needs over others, such as when a child is highly distressed due to separation anxiety. If this occurs, an educator would make a professional judgement to support this child over others. When considering the observation tool, this could, and did, affect the scoring for the focus child as they did not receive any interactions from their educator. This, however, does not take into consideration whether the educator was engaged in a high-quality interaction with another child.

From the observations, it was apparent that routine times were a contributing factor to the level of interactions that an infant/toddler experienced in their day. There were variations in the level of interactions throughout each day and period of observation, which were reflective of events occurring in the room including sleep, meal and nappy change times, and the presence of families arriving or departing with their child. Additionally, there were times during which children were engaged in self-directed play and appeared to not require an educator's support.

6.3.3   Phase Two semi-structured interviews

Six educators, including the service's nominated educational leader, participated in the semi-structured interviews. All educators held a minimum of a diploma-level qualification and were provided with the questions prior to the interview. From the data, practices that supported attachment relationship development were identified, including supporting new children commencing ECEC, the use and inclusion of information from families to support attachment development, one-on-one interactions, self-settling, dependence, routines and rituals, and physical and emotional availability. Again, routines and educators' perception of routines including sleep setting, nappy changing, and meal times comprised a key finding; it was apparent that routines were considered by the educators to either support or hinder their

ability to develop attachment relationships with infants/toddlers. Some believed that the time that routines took prevented educators from spending time with infants/toddlers in their care; others believed that it was through these routine times and with the presence of love that these attachment relationships were developed.

Educators articulated how they were currently supported to understand attachment theory and interpret the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and associated documents and discussed how they believed they could be further supported in their understanding. *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (DECS, 2008) appeared to be an underutilised resource for quality improvement as, despite the service having a copy onsite, no educators were familiar with it.

This study highlighted the need for educators to access professional development in relation to attachment theory, specifically in an ECEC context. Educators participating in the semi-structured interviews were unaware of professional development available in Western Australia directly related to attachment theory. While the EYLF highlights attachment theory in outcome one, not all educators are familiar with attachment theory, and those who were found that the guidance within the EYLF documents was too broad for practical application.

6.4   Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations and constraints. The first limitation related to the small sample size selection of just one ECEC setting located in Western Australia to participate in the Phase Two observations and semi-structured interviews. In total, six educators and four children from one service participated in Phase Two. Therefore, the results that relate to Phase Two of the study cannot be generalised across all ECEC settings in Australia with enrolled infants and toddlers.

While all educators participating in the semi-structured interviews stated that they had heard of attachment theory, they had been provided with the interview questions in advance. The setting's expression of interest to participate may also indicate that attachment theory was a topic in which they were interested and familiar. Therefore, while some findings may be applicable to some ECEC settings, the findings from the semi-structured interviews and observations cannot be generalised to all.

The observational tool did not factor in times when a child did not need the support of an adult, or when an educator made a professional judgement as to whether there was another child who was in greater need of support in the group. Additionally, the tool did not factor in times when an educator was being responsive to another child, as the researcher could only

record whether the educator was interacting with the current focus child. Whilst the tool was a verified tool, the observations were completed by the researcher alone.

6.5   Recommendations

The findings highlighted three recommendations: professional development, supporting information and reflective practice.

Recommendation 1: Professional development

The large response to the survey in conjunction with the findings suggest that there is a demand for effective professional development relating to attachment theory and development. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) proposes professional development provision can be effective through ongoing tailored learning opportunities and field-based training offering feedback on practice. Additionally, the OECD recommends effective professional development for educators working directly with infants/toddler offers practical learning opportunities catered to this particular age group (2012).

Professional development to support educators in understanding attachment theory and development could include ongoing workshops tailored to the audience to introduce the information and generate discussion, followed by field-based mentoring to ensure the information is confidently embedded into practice by someone who will challenge thinking and provide feedback on practice.

Recommendation 2: Supporting information

Educators stated they are unaware of attachment theory, yet there are explicit references to attachment theory in the mandated national curriculum. There is a need for more specific instruction on how to interpret outcome one of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and the standards in the NQS that relate to attachment. Clearly articulated, practical information to support educators' understanding of attachment theory and the practices that support the development of attachment relationships in the group care environment of an ECEC setting are required. This could include written documents, textbooks or videos. Further information on how to embed primary caregiving in ECEC is recommended and access to a mentor with experience in primary caregiving would be beneficial.

Recommendation 3: A tool for reflection

Critical reflection and reflective practice have been widely accepted as a key component of high-quality ECEC settings. In both the online survey and semi-structured interviews, educators considered the questions as a tool which supported reflection on their understanding of attachment, prompting them to revisit the theory. There is a need to develop or further investigate existing tools which support educators to reflect on their practices which support attachment relationships.

6.6   Implications for future research

The study highlighted the demand for professional development relating to attachment theory. Educators require further support in understanding attachment theory and practical guidance as to how to support the development of attachment relationships. Further research that develops professional development and evaluates its effectiveness is warranted.

Educators working with infants/toddlers are in a prime position to support secure attachment relationships that have a lasting impact on a child's future development. The establishment of written guidance that supports educators to interpret the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) through a lens of attachment theory should also be investigated as a focus of future research.

Conducting semi-structured interviews and observations at only one service for four days was a limitation of this study. Future studies could extend this to additional ECEC settings and for a longer period of time.

6.7   Concluding remarks

The purpose of the National Quality Framework (NQF) is to provide all children with high-quality ECEC in the years of life considered critical in laying down the foundation for future development. Secure attachment relationships support this development, and consequently, educators need to understand attachment theory and be aware of how to support the development of attachment relationships. This study indicates that educators require access to sufficient knowledge and ongoing professional development, given the fast pace by which our understanding of the importance of these relationships is being confirmed by research. The dilemma faced is how to support educators to understand and embed this information into practice, while considering the realities of a group care environment in an ECEC setting.

The title of this thesis, *"an unfamiliar face, an unfamiliar environment"* is a direct quote from one of the participants of the semi-structured interviews. This quote frames the research and explains what the research is about.

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Appendix A: Information letter and consent form: service management

ECU
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

MOUNT LAWLEY CAMPUS

2 Bradford Street,
Mount Lawley
Western Australia 6050
Telephone 134 328
Facsimile: (08) 9370 2910
CRICOS 00279B

ABN 54 361 485 361

INFORMATION LETTER TO SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

My name is Nadia Wilson-Ali and I am a postgraduate student in a Master of Education degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. You service is invited to participate in this research project, which is being undertaken as part of the requirements of my degree. The research project has ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

This research project aims to gain understanding of educators' perceptions of the relationships that they hold with infants and toddlers in Long Day Care settings. There are few studies into educator perceptions of attachment and this study aims to provide them with the opportunity to voice these perceptions. The findings of this study aim to highlight to the wider community the importance of relationships in the first two years of life between educators and children. To do so, I am inviting educators and educational leaders to participate in this study who are

- Over 18 years of age
- Employed at the service for a minimum of three months
- Working with or supporting those who work with children aged 0-2

Educators and educational leaders who choose to participate will be asked to

1. Attend an interview at a time and place convenient to them, which will be audio recorded by the researcher. This interview will take no longer than one hour.
2. Bring documentation to the interview relating to how they support educators in how they develop secure relationships with children aged 0-2 (educational leader)
3. Bring documentation to the interview relating to the development of relationships between educators and children (educators).

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research project, you may contact:

Research ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup, WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Thank you for your time

Nadia Wilson-Ali

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

Student Researcher:

Nadia Wilson-Ali

Email: ██████████████████

School of Education

Research supervisors:

Caroline Barratt-Pugh   Marianne Knaus

Telephone: 08 9370 6346   Telephone: 08 6304 2986

Email: c.barratt_pugh@ecu.edu.au   Email: m.knaus@ecu.edu.au

- I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter
- I have read and understand the information provided
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction
- I am aware that if I have any further questions I can contact the research team
- I understand that the project will involve the researcher
  - audio recording interviews with educational leaders, and educators working with children aged 0-2
  - observing interactions between educators and children
  - viewing and making copies of de-identified documentation completed for children such as learning stories and observations
  - discussing observations with educators

- I understand part of the project involves participants being interviewed using a digital audio recorder. I understand that the data obtained from the interviews will be
  - transferred onto an external hard drive as soon as possible
  - stored in a locked filing cabinet at Edith Cowan University for five years
  - destroyed after the completion of the project.
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential and that the identity of the service and/or participants will not be disclosed without consent
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research study, and I understand how this information will be used
- I understand that the service is free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty and that no further data will be collected. I understand that data already collected will remain part of the research project.
- I have the authority to permit the service to participate in this project
- I freely agree for the service to participate in the project

Name: …………………………………………………………
Signature: …………………………………………………....
Position: …………………………………………………….
Date: ………………….

Appendix B: Information letter and consent form: families

INFORMATION LETTER TO FAMILIES

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

My name is Nadia Wilson-Ali and I am a postgraduate student in a Master of Education degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. Your child is invited to participate in this research project, which is being undertaken as part of the requirements of my degree. The research project has ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

This research project aims to gain understanding of educators' perceptions of the relationships that they hold with infants and toddlers in Long Day Care settings. As a parent of a child aged 0-2 years who attends this service, I am inviting you to consent for your child to participate. There are few studies into educator perceptions of attachment and this study aims to provide them with the opportunities to voice these perceptions. The findings of this study aim to highlight to the wider community the importance of relationships in the first two years between educators and children.

The project has two phases
      Phase 1: Online Questionnaire
      Phase 2: Face-to-face interviews and observations

If you choose to consent for your child's participation, you are providing consent for the following;

- Consent to educators sharing de-identified documentation about your child
- Consent to the researcher observing educators interact with your child using an observational tool. The observations will occur one day per week over four weeks, and will be completed using an observational tool called *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008).

All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so participants remain anonymous. Educators will be requested to remove any identification of your child, family, service or educator from any documentation prior to providing me with a copy. All data

collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the project has concluded and will then be confidentially destroyed. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your child's identity will not be revealed. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request. I anticipate that there are no associated risks with participating in this project.

Participation in this research in voluntary and you and your child can withdraw from the project at any time without any consequences. If you or your child withdraw from the project no further data will be collected, however data that has already been collected will remain part of the research project.

If you agree to your child's participation, please complete the attached consent form and return to me. If you have any questions about the research project or require further information you may contact the following:

Student Researcher: Nadia Wilson-Ali
Email: nwilsona@our.ecu.edu.au

Supervisor: Caroline Barratt-Pugh
Telephone: 08 9370 6346
Email: c.barratt_pugh@ecu.edu.au

Supervisor: Marianne Knaus
Telephone: 08 6304 2986
Email: m.knaus@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research project, you may contact:

Research ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup, WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Thank you for your time

Nadia Wilson-Ali

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

Student Researcher:

Nadia Wilson-Ali

Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

School of Education

Research supervisors:

Caroline Barratt-Pugh	Marianne Knaus
Telephone: 08 9370 6346	Telephone: 08 6304 2986
Email: c.barratt_pugh@ecu.edu.au	Email: m.knaus@ecu.edu.au

- I have been provided with a copy of the participant information letter
- I have read and understand the information provided
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction
- I am aware that if I have any further questions I can contact the research team
- I understand that participation in the project by my child will involve the researcher
    - observing educators interacting with my child
    - viewing and making copies of de-identified documentation completed for my child by educators such as learning stories and observations
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential and that my identity or the identify of my child or will not be disclosed without consent

- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research study, and I understand how this information will be used
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty or any further data being collected. I understand that data that has already been collected will remain a part of the research project.

- I freely agree to allow my child to participate in the project and consent to the researcher completing the following
    - Observing educators interacting with my child
      (please circle) YES/ NO
    - Viewing and making copies of documentation educators completed for my child such as learning stories and observations
      (please circle) YES/ NO

Child's Name: …………………………………………………………….

Parent's Name: …………………………………………………………..

Parent's Signature: ……………………………………………………

Date: ……………………

Appendix C: Information letter and consent form: educational leader

INFORMATION LETTER TO EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

My name is Nadia Wilson-Ali and I am a postgraduate student in a Master of Education degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. You are invited to participate in this research project, which is being undertaken as part of the requirements of my degree. The research project has ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

This research project aims to gain understanding of educators' perceptions of the relationships that they hold with infants and toddlers in Long Day Care settings. To learn about how educational leaders support educators to develop secure relationships with children in their care, I am inviting educational leaders to participate in interviews who are

- over 18 years of age
- employed at their service for a minimum of three months
- working in a service with children aged 0-2

As the educational leader of your service, I am inviting you to participate. There are few studies into educator perceptions of attachment and this study aims to provide you with the opportunity to voice these perceptions. The findings of this study aim to highlight to the wider community the importance of relationships in the first two years of life between educators and children.

The project has two phases
    Phase 1: Online Questionnaire
    Phase 2: Face-to-face interviews and observations

If you choose to participate you will be asked to participate in phase 2 and complete the following:

1. Attend an interview at a time and place convenient to you, which will be audio recorded by the researcher. This interview will take no longer than one hour.
2. If applicable, provide copies of de-identified documentation related to your role as the educational leader which relates to the development of relationships between educators and children e.g. notes taken during critical reflection conversations around relationship development.

All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so that you remain anonymous. The researcher, the research supervisors and transcribers will have access to the data. The transcribers will only access the data once they have signed a confidentiality form. Participants providing documentation to the researcher will be asked to remove all identification of service, educator, child and family prior. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the project has concluded and will then be confidentially destroyed. The results of this project will be presented in a written report and may also be presented at conferences or in journal publications. There will be no information included that will identify participants. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request. I anticipate that there are no associated risks with participating in this project.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time with no penalty for doing so, and without any further data being collected. Data already collected will remain part of the research project.

If you would like to take part in the project, please complete the attached consent form and return to me. If you have any questions about the research project or require further information you may contact the following:

Student Researcher: Nadia Wilson-Ali
Email:

Supervisor: Caroline Barratt-Pugh
Email: c.barratt_pugh@ecu.edu.au
Telephone: 08 9370 6346

Supervisor: Marianne Knaus
Email: m.knaus@ecu.edu.au
Telephone: 08 6304 2986

- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research study, and I understand how this information will be used

- I understand that participation in this research in voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any time without any consequences, with no further data collected. I understand that data already collected will remain part of the research project.

- I freely agree to participate in the project

Participant Name: ………………………………………………………….

Participant Signature: …………………………………………………….

Date: ……………………

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: EDUCATIONAL LEADER

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

Student Researcher:

Nadia Wilson-Ali

Email:

School of education

Research supervisors:

Caroline Barratt-Pugh   Marianne Knaus

Telephone: 08 9370 6346   Telephone: 08 6304 2986

Email: c.barratt_pugh@ecu.edu.au   Email: m.knaus@ecu.edu.au

- I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter

- I have read and understand the information provided

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction

- I am aware that if I have any further questions I can contact the research team

- I understand part of the project involves participants being interviewed using a digital audio recorder. I understand that the data obtained from the interviews will be

    o transferred onto an external hard drive as soon as possible

    o stored in a locked filing cabinet at Edith Cowan University for five years

    o destroyed after the completion of the project.

- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential and that the identify of participants will not be disclosed without consent

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research project, you may contact:

Research ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup, WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Thank you for your time

Nadia Wilson-Ali

INFORMATION LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

My name is Nadia Wilson-Ali and I am a postgraduate student in a Master of Education degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. You are invited to participate in this research project, which is being undertaken as part of the requirements of my degree. The research project has ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

This research project aims to gain understanding of educators' perceptions of the relationships that they hold with infants and toddlers in Long Day Care settings. In order to do so, I am inviting educators to participate in interviews and observations who are

- over 18 years of age
- employed at their service for a minimum of three months
- working with children aged 0-2

There are few studies into educator perceptions of attachment and this study aims to provide you with the opportunity to voice these perceptions. The findings of this study aim to highlight to the wider community the importance of relationships in the first two years of life between educators and children.

The project has two phases
>   Phase 1: Online Questionnaire
>   Phase 2: Face-to-face interviews and observations

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Attend an interview at a time and place convenient to you, which will be audio recorded by the researcher. This interview will take no longer than one hour.
2. Allow the researcher to observe you in your setting using an observational tool. The observations will occur one day per week over four weeks, and will be completed

using an observational tool called *Reflect, Respect, Relate* (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008).

3. Provide copies of documentation for children in your care such as learning stories and observations relating to the development of relationships between educators and children.

The researcher will discuss their observations with educators afterwards to ensure that the child-educator relationship is being understood through the eyes of educators. All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so that you remain anonymous. Participants providing documentation to the researcher will be asked to remove all identification of service, educator, child and family prior. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the project has concluded and will then be confidentially destroyed. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your identity will not be revealed. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request. I anticipate that there are no associated risks with participating in this project.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time with no penalty for doing so, and without any further data being collected. Data already collected will remain part of the research project.

If you would like to take part in the project, please complete the attached consent form and return to me. If you have any questions about the research project or require further information you may contact the following:

Student Researcher: Nadia Wilson-Ali
Email:

Supervisor: Caroline Barratt-Pugh
Email: c.barratt_pugh@ecu.edu.au
Telephone: 08 9370 6346

Supervisor: Marianne Knaus
Email: m.knaus@ecu.edu.au
Telephone: 08 6304 2986

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research project, you may contact:

Research ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup, WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Thank you for your time

Nadia Wilson-Ali

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: EDUCATORS

Title of Project: Attachment Theory and Relationship Development

Student Researcher:

Nadia Wilson-Ali

Email: ███████████████████

School of education

Research supervisors:

Caroline Barratt-Pugh   Marianne Knaus

Telephone: 08 9370 6346   Telephone: 08 6304 2986

Email: c.barratt_pugh@ecu.edu.au   Email: m.knaus@ecu.edu.au

- I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter

- I have read and understand the information provided

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction

- I am aware that if I have any further questions I can contact the research team

- I understand that the project will involve the researcher

    o observing my practices using an observational tool

    o viewing and making copies of documentation I have completed for children such as learning stories and observations

    o discussing their observations with me

- I understand part of the project involves participants being interviewed using a digital audio recorder. I understand that the data obtained from the interviews will be

    o transferred onto an external hard drive as soon as possible

    o stored in a locked filing cabinet at Edith Cowan University for five years

    o destroyed after the completion of the project.

- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential and that the identify of participants will not be disclosed without consent
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research study, and I understand how this information will be used
- I understand that participation in this research in voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any time without any consequences, with no further data collected. I understand that data already collected will remain part of the research project.
- I freely agree to participate in the project

Participant Name: ………………………………………………………

Participant Signature: …………………………………………………

Date: …………………

Appendix E: Phase One survey

Start of Block: Information and Consent

Q1 My name is Nadia Wilson-Ali and I am a postgraduate student in a Master of Education degree at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. You are invited to take part in this research project, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. The research project has ethics approval from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.   This research project aims to gain understanding of educators' perspectives of the relationships that they hold with children in Early Childhood settings. The project has two phases. Phase 1 is an online survey which will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Upon completion, you will be invited to express your interest in participating in Phase 2 of this project.   Phase 2 involves the researcher:

- attending your service and interviewing educators working with children aged 0-2 about the child/educator relationship
- attending your service to observe interactions between educators and children using an observational tool

Prior to commencing Phase 2, the researcher will seek written consent from the Service Director and families of children aged 0-2 to participate in the project. All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ECU premises for five years after the project has concluded and will then be confidentially destroyed. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your identity will not be revealed. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request. I anticipate that there are no associated risks with participating in this project. Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time and with no penalty for doing so.   This project is being completed by Nadia Wilson-Ali. If you have any further questions or require further information, please email nwilsona@our.ecu.edu.au. Alternatively, you may contact the research supervisors below:

Supervisor: Caroline Barratt-Pugh

Telephone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

If you have any concerns or complaints and wish to contact an independent person about this research project, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer

Edith Cowan University

Phone: 08 6304 2170

Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Q2   By selecting "I agree" you are consenting to the following:

- I am over 18 years of age I have read and understood the above information letter

- I have been provided with the opportunity to answer any questions I may have and had these questions answered to my satisfaction
- I am aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team

- I understand that my participation in this phase involves the completion of an online survey
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential and that the identity of participants will not be disclosed without consent
- I understand that the information provided is only for the purpose of this research and I know how this information will be used
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without any explanation or penalty.
- I freely agree to participation in this project

Please indicate your consent to participate in this research by selecting one of the boxes below

◯ I agree

◯ I do not agree

Q3 Part A: Background information

The following questions are about you, your experience and qualifications. Please select the option that applies most to you.

Q4 In which state or territory are you located?

○ ACT

○ NSW

○ NT

○ QLD

○ SA

○ TAS

○ WA

○ VIC

○ I am not located in Australia

Q5 Which of the following **best** describes your current position (tick all that apply)

○ Educator working directly with children aged 0-2

○ Educator working directly with children over 2

○ Educator working directly with children in multi-age grouping including children aged 0-2

○ Educational Leader at a service with enrolled children aged 0-2

○ Service Director or Coordinator at a service with enrolled children aged 0-2

○ Other (please state) _____

Q6 What is the highest level of qualification you hold

○ Working towards Certificate III

○ Certificate III

○ Certificate IV

○ Diploma

○ Advanced Diploma

○ Bachelor

○ Postgraduate

○ Other (please state) _____

Q7 What is your age?

○ 15-24

○ 25-34

○ 35-44

○ 45-54

○ 55-64

○ 65-74

Q48 How many years of experience do you have working in Long Day Care?

○ Less than a year

○ 1-2 years

○ 2-3 years

○ 3-5 years

○ 5-10 years

○ 10 years +

Q46 Part B: Knowledge of attachment theory

This section is about your knowledge of attachment theory as an educator

---

Q9 Have you heard of attachment theory?

○ Yes

○ No

Q10 How would you rate your understanding of attachment theory?

○ Extremely familiar

○ Moderately familiar

○ Somewhat familiar

○ Slightly familiar

○ Not at all familiar

Q11 Please describe your understanding in a few dot points below

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q12 How familiar are you with the stages of attachment?

○ Extremely familiar

○ Moderately familiar

○ Somewhat familiar

○ Slightly familiar

○ Not at all familiar

Q13 Please describe in your own words the stages you know about in a few dot points below. Please note there are no right or wrong answers

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q14 Do you know the difference between a primary and secondary attachment?

○ Yes

○ No

Q15 Please describe your understanding of the difference between a primary and secondary attachment below

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q16 Are you familiar with the "Circle of Security"

○ Yes

○ No

Q17 Please describe the "Circle of Security" in a few dot points below

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q18 Are you familiar with the approach known as "primary caregiving"?

○ Yes

○ No

Q19 Please describe your understanding in a few dot points below

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q20 How do you think an attachment relationship develops? Please provide a couple of dot points below

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q21 Part C: Attachment Beliefs

 This section is about your beliefs in relation to attachment as an educator. Please select the response most applicable to you.

Q22 In your role as an educator, do you think that developing an attachment relationship with infants and toddlers is important?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Q23 In your role as an educator, do you think the relationship that you have with infants and toddlers affects their attachment to you?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Q24 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"The more you cuddle infants and toddlers, the longer they will be dependent on you"

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q25 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"It is as important to have conversations with a 3-month old baby as it is to have conversations with a 3-year old child"

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q26 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"Opportunities for one-on-one interactions between infants/toddlers and educators are planned in my program or my service's program"

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q27 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"To ensure infants and toddlers develop relationships with all educators, it is important that they do not spend too much time with the one educator when they first commence care"

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q28 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"It is important to explain to a non-verbal (not yet talking) child what is about to happen to them during their time in your service. For example 'I am going to clean your face now'"

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q29 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"It is better for infants and toddlers to settle themselves independently when upset than to be comforted by an educator"

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q36 Part D: Educator practices.

This section is about your practices as an educator

Q30 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
  "Information, including language, from children's families and culture should be used to inform service routines and the program"

◯ Strongly agree

◯ Somewhat agree

◯ Neither agree nor disagree

◯ Somewhat disagree

◯ Strongly disagree

Q31 What are three key things you do to create attachment relationships with infants and toddlers?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q32 When do you develop attachment relationships with children in your care?

◯ Throughout all activities and experiences

◯ Mainly at sleep times, mealtimes and nappy change times

◯ Mainly at planned play activities

Q33 Do you have any other comments that you would like to add?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix F: Phase Two expression of interest survey

Q1 Thank you for expressing an interest to continue with Phases 2 and 3 of the research. If you are working in Long Day Care in Perth, Western Australia, please fill in your contact details below and the researcher will be in contact as soon as possible.

Q2 Name of service

_____

Q3 Name of contact person at service

_____

Q4 Your name, if different

_____

Q5 Phone number of contact person at service

_____

Q6 Email of contact person at service

_____

Relationships Scale: Cover sheet

Site: ....

Number of sessions per week: .... Age: .... Sex: ....

Observer: .... Child: .... Date: ....

INDICATOR DESCRIPTIONS

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	
✓	Positive	Indicator observed occurring positively
✗	Negative	Indicator observed occurring negatively
—	Missed opportunity	Indicator not observed through missed opportunity
o	No opportunity	Indicator not observed through no opportunity

RATING DESCRIPTIONS

LEVEL	ENVIRONMENT	OBSERVATION
0	Absent	No interactions with educator
1	Totally non supportive	Negative, restrictive, controlling, dominating interactions; social bids or cues for comfort go unnoticed or are rejected, discounted, avoided or ignored
2	Mainly non supportive	Detached, delayed or brief interactions; minimal social or emotional involvement or direct contact/affection
3	Neither supportive or non supportive	Functional; interactions are routine, technical, mostly organisational or in response to physical need; superficial contact
4	Mainly supportive	Social bids and cues are responded to quickly and sensitively; some intense; reciprocal interactions, but with interruptions; educator initiates contact; not all signals are present
5	Extremely supportive	Securely attached, special togetherness and reciprocal warmth; invites and shares positive reciprocal, sustained interactions; all signals present

Relationships Scale: Observation sheet

SIGNALS WITH INDICATORS

	Indicator Observations					
Responsiveness Receives reliable/predictable/consistent responses	1	2	3	4	5	6
Information from child's family, home, culture is used						
Child has physical and emotional access to educator						
Signals and cues are observed and listened to with attention and respect						
Non-verbal and verbal cues and social signals (eye contact, waving, reaching, smiles, cries) are reacted to sensitively and promptly; child's lead is followed						
Temperament, current mood and situation is considered respectfully						
Is comforted quickly when distressed						
Positive interactions Is engaged in interactive play with educator						
Communication towards the child has a happy, respectful tone (soothing/caring, not harsh, controlling, irritated)						
Welcoming gestures and eye contact (smiles, vocalisations) are directed towards child						
Warmth and affection are shared with child						
Active interest is taken in the child's activity						
Is involved with the educator 1:1						
Is given encouragement through support and acknowledgment of effort and processes (rather than products or attributes)						
Has access to models and help for peaceful resolution of conflicts						
Receives expressions of positive feelings						
Positive feelings are directed towards child eg laughs/smiles together						
Questions and comments of interest to the child are made						
Child's social bids are extended/elaborated						
Guided by suggestions of what to do rather than what not to do						
Quality verbal exchanges Educator engages in respectful, reciprocal communication exchanges with parents						
Is engaged in sustained two way, turn taking conversational interactions						
Communication/interaction/conversations are initiated that reflect the child's developing understandings and interests						
Is given time to make expressions understood						
Is given time to respond						
Initiated interactions are built upon						
Engaged in discussions of an activity in which they're both engaged, chatting about what's going on, what's being observed, what's being experienced						
Wonder, exclamations, questions and comments are responded to						
Shares in social language games initiated by educator						
Non-verbal language is used to add meaning to words eg gestures						
Child's home language (if other than English) is respectfully recognised and reflected in exchanges						
Is greeted when arrives, awakens, leaves						
Appropriateness Is spoken with in own home language (if other than English) where possible						
Close contact is in culturally familiar ways						
Has access to models of caring behaviours amongst educators						
Is engaged in sustained interaction						
Efforts (rather than attributes) are acknowledged						
Is treated fairly (is not discriminated against or judged)						
Has access to models and guidance in the use of non discriminatory language and behaviour						
Is told what is going to happen, what is happening (prepared for transitions)						
There are realistic expectations of what a child can/will do						
Receives indirect forms of support and guidance (rather than discipline) when overwhelmed – distraction, suggestion, choice, reminder, redirection						
Emotions are recognised, labelled and respectfully supported – trust and safety support harmful/overwhelming emotions						
Is called by name, correctly pronounced						
Hostility and aggression are constructively discouraged						

Relationships Scale:
Rating sheet

Using the results from the Indicator Observations make a judgement
of the global quality of each signal and assign low (l), medium (m) or high (h) for each signal.

Rating Observation 1: *Time*
Brief description of Observation Context:

											Factors affecting observation:
Responsiveness	l	m	h								
Positive interactions	l	m	h								
Quality verbal exchange	l	m	h	0	1	2	3	4	5		
Appropriateness	l	m	h								

Rating Observation 2: *Time*
Brief description of Observation Context:

											Factors affecting observation:
Responsiveness	l	m	h								
Positive interactions	l	m	h								
Quality verbal exchange	l	m	h	0	1	2	3	4	5		
Appropriateness	l	m	h								

Rating Observation 3: *Time*
Brief description of Observation Context:

											Factors affecting observation:
Responsiveness	l	m	h								
Positive interactions	l	m	h								
Quality verbal exchange	l	m	h	0	1	2	3	4	5		
Appropriateness	l	m	h								

Rating Observation 4: *Time*
Brief description of Observation Context:

											Factors affecting observation:
Responsiveness	l	m	h								
Positive interactions	l	m	h								
Quality verbal exchange	l	m	h	0	1	2	3	4	5		
Appropriateness	l	m	h								

Rating Observation 5: *Time*
Brief description of Observation Context:

											Factors affecting observation:
Responsiveness	l	m	h								
Positive interactions	l	m	h								
Quality verbal exchange	l	m	h	0	1	2	3	4	5		
Appropriateness	l	m	h								

Rating Observation 6: *Time*
Brief description of Observation Context:

											Factors affecting observation:
Responsiveness	l	m	h								
Positive interactions	l	m	h								
Quality verbal exchange	l	m	h	0	1	2	3	4	5		
Appropriateness	l	m	h								

INDIVIDUAL'S MEAN SCORE:

Appendix H: Phase Two semi-structured interview questions: educators

Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewee name:

Room:

<u>Opening:</u>

- Thank interviewee for participating
- Study purpose
- Confidentiality assurance
- Data management post-study
- Anticipated duration of interview

1. **<u>Background</u>**
    1. Number of years' experience in early childhood
    2. Qualifications
    3. Position at service
    4. Number of years at current service
    5. How many children and educators in your area/room?

2. **<u>Your thinking about attachment</u>**
    1. Do you believe it is important for educators to support the development of secure relationships with children? Why?

    2. Have you heard of the stages of attachment? Are these helpful? Do they inform your practice?

3. How do you support the ongoing development of secure relationships in your room? What are some of the challenges that you face?

4. Have you heard of the theory of attachment? What do you think attachment theory is about? Does this help to inform your practice?

3. **How you support attachment**

1. I would like you to think about the newest enrolled child in your room. Can you provide some examples of how you have supported this child to develop a relationship with you? What strategies did you use? What challenges did you experience?

2. In the survey, 23% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that it was important for infants and toddlers to be discouraged from spending too much time with one educator when they first commence care. What is your view on this?

3. In the survey, 15% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that it was better for infants and toddlers to self-settle when upset rather than being comforted by an educator. What is your view on this?

   How do you respect and include information from children's families and cultures? Can you provide some recent examples?

4. In the survey, 23% of educators either somewhat or strongly agreed that the more infants and toddlers were cuddled, the more they would be dependent on an educator. What is your view on this?

5. Prior to attending this interview, I requested you to bring some documentation relating to children's development of attachment relationships. What documentation did you choose and why?

6. During my observations, I noticed that routines such as nappy changes, feeding and sleeping take up a large part of the day. What is your view of this? Does this impact on attachment?

7. What do you think it means to be physically and emotionally available to all children?
   i.   Is this possible in a Long Day Care setting?

4. **How you are supported in your understanding of attachment**

    1. Do you feel that the EYLF supports your understanding of the development of attachment relationships? In what way?

    2. Have you had the opportunity to access professional development in relation to attachment theory? Are you aware of any available professional development in relation to attachment theory?

        1. How helpful was this Do you feel you need more?

    3. Do you feel that the National Quality Standards support your understanding of the development of attachment relationships? In what way?

    4. Have you heard of Reflect, Respect, Relate before? How have you used it? How helpful was it?

5. **Debriefing/shared understanding**

    1. Summary of points discussed
    2. Anything else you would like to add that has not been discussed already in relation to attachment relationships in Long Day Care?

Thank interviewee for their time and sharing of information

Appendix I: Phase Two semi-structured interview questions: educational leader

Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewee name:

Room:

Opening:

- Thank interviewee for participating
- Study purpose
- Confidentiality assurance
- Data management post-study
- Anticipated duration of interview

1. **Background**

    1. Number of years' experience in early childhood
    2. Qualifications
    3. Position at service
    4. Number of years at current service
    5. How many children and educators in your area/room?

2. **Your thinking about attachment**

    1. Do you believe it is important for educators to support the development of secure relationships with children? Why?

    2. Have you heard of the stages of attachment? Are these helpful? Do they inform your practice?

    3. As educational leader, how do you support the ongoing development of secure relationships in the infant and toddler age groups? What are some of the challenges that you face?

4. Have you heard of the theory of attachment? What do you think attachment theory is about? Does this help to inform your practice?

3. How you support attachment

1. I would like you to think about the newest enrolled child in the service. Can you provide some examples as educational leader of how you have supported educators to support this child to develop a relationship with them? What strategies did you use? What challenges did you experience?

2. In the survey, 23% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that it was important for infants and toddlers to be discouraged from spending too much time with one educator when they first commence care. What is your view on this?

3. In the survey, 15% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that it was better for infants and toddlers to self-settle when upset rather than being comforted by an educator. What is your view on this?

4. How do you respect and include information from children's families and cultures? Can you provide some recent examples?

5. In the survey, 23% of educators either somewhat or strongly agreed that the more infants and toddlers were cuddled, the more they would be dependent on an educator. What is your view on this?

6. Prior to attending this interview, I requested you to bring some documentation relating to children's development of attachment relationships. What documentation did you choose and why?

7. During my observations, I noticed that routines such as nappy changes, feeding and sleeping take up a large part of the day. What is your view of this? Does this impact on attachment?

8. What do you think it means to be physically and emotionally available to all children?
    i.   Is this possible in a Long Day Care setting?

4. How you are supported in your understanding of attachment

1. Do you feel that the EYLF supports your understanding of the development of attachment relationships? In what way?

2. Have you had the opportunity to access professional development in relation to attachment theory? Are you aware of any available professional development in relation to attachment theory?

    1. How helpful was this Do you feel you need more?

3. Do you feel that the National Quality Standards support your understanding of the development of attachment relationships? In what way?

4. Have you heard of Reflect, Respect, Relate before? How have you used it? How helpful was it?

5. **Debriefing/shared understanding**
    1. Summary of points discussed
    2. Anything else you would like to add that has not been discussed already in relation to attachment relationships in Long Day Care?

Thank interviewee for their time and sharing of information

Appendix J: Phase Two collated observation scores by room

	Responsiveness			Positive interactions			Quality verbal exchanges			Appropriateness		
	L	**M**	**H**	**L**	**M**	**H**	**L**	**M**	**H**	**L**	**M**	**H**
Room One	10	18	20	3	19	26	14	20	14	3	27	18
Less: Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total (Adjusted)	10	18	20	4	18	26	12	20	14	3	27	18
% of total score for each indicator	21%	39%	41%	8%	39%	54%	26%	43%	30%	6%	56%	39%
Room Two	18	13	17	13	11	24	21	11	14	12	15	21
Less: Misc	0	0	0	5	0	0	6	0	0	4	0	0
Total (adjusted)	18	13	17	8	11	24	15	11	14	8	15	21
% of total score for each indicator	38%	27%	35%	19%	26%	56%	38%	28%	35%	18%	34%	48%