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Perceptions of Early Childhood Educators Who Left the Field: A Case Study

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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Perceptions of Early Childhood Educators Who Left the Field: A Case Study

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Transformational Leadership

Leslie Loughmiller, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) educators' roles in promoting the positive development of children are consistently deemed essential in research. Research also presents the severe problems of burnout and turnover in the ECE field. Specific factors such as low compensation, lack of professional development opportunities, and high-stress environments are causing continued rates of burnout across the early education arena, resulting in ECE educators leaving the field. Therefore, it is important to understand the reasons ECE educators are leaving so these challenges are recognized and remedied. A qualitative descriptive case study was used to examine the issue of ECE educator turnover due to burnout. Participants in the study consisted of ECE educators who had previously worked in an ECE program in the Midwest, and recently left this employment of their own accord. Data collected through semistructured interviews gathered the participants' perspectives to better understand what motivated them, what challenged them, and what influenced their decision to leave. This data provides identification of the factors that ECE leaders should recognize, understand, and address to increase ECE educator retention.

Keywords: burnout, case study, child development, early childhood education, educator perspective, environment, retention, stress, trust and attachment, turnover

Dedication

This work is dedicated in memory of my mom, Glory. I am sorry she was not able to see from

this side of heaven the completion of my degree.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my committee chair, Dr. Loughmiller, whose scaffolding helped me grow and always made me feel like my work had purpose. My appreciation goes to my committee members, Dr. Allison and Dr. Everts, whose dedicated time and expertise perpetuated this growth. To all my family, including my husband Jim, my children Joey, Naomi, and Jamie, and my father Kirk, thank you for your patient yet perseverant cheerleading as I completed this project. I am thankful that my work colleagues allowed me to stretch myself through this degree work, reminding me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. May all who participated so graciously in my study be empowered and blessed by their contributions as early childhood educators. May God be honored through this work as an offering of my service to Him.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is recognized as a significant influence on children's development and educational trajectories (Goffin, 2013). While ECE educators' roles in promoting the positive development of children are consistently researched to be deemed essential, many experts present the severe problems of burnout and turnover in the ECE field (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Rolland, 2014). Researchers have provided numerous articles and inventories that detail the causes of burnout and turnover in ECE, which ultimately interrupts children's development and negatively impacts the community overall (Curbow, Spratt, Ungaretti, McDonnell, & Breckler, 2000; Goffin, 2013). ECE educators are vulnerable to burnout due to stress and emotional exhaustion, which is magnified by their lack of coping skills (Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007; Rolland, 2014). Specific factors such as low compensation, lack of professional development opportunities, and high-stress environments are causing continued rates of burnout across the early education arena (Bechtold, 2011; Chang, 2009; Cleveland & Hyatt, 2002; Goddard, O'Brien, & Goddard, 2006; Hale-Jinks, Kemple, & Knopf, 2012; Nagel & Brown, 2003; Rentzou, 2012; Rolland, 2014; Totenhaugen et al., 2016).

Completed studies have also identified favorable characteristics that contribute to ECE educators' success (Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007; Douglass, 2017; Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2007; Klinkner, Riley, & Roach, 2005). The purpose of the study was to understand the perspective of ECE educators who leave the field by researching the problem of burnout and turnover among practitioners. This research may provide insight regarding ECE educator resiliency, which may result in long-term careers in the field, contributing to high-quality early education experiences.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework

Professionalism in ECE has long been grounded on practitioners' successful efforts to provide varied, quality learning experiences for their young students. Educator consistency and aptitude are substantial keys to successful child development since children thrive under the care of quality ECE educators (Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008; Langford, 2008; Machado, 2008). Many experts have presented the severe problems of burnout and turnover in the ECE field (Chang, 2009; Porter, 2012; Rentzou, 2012; Rolland, 2014). While research shows that ECE educators burn out and therefore leave the field (Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Kagan et al., 2007; Passe, 2015), the purpose of this study was to identify why they burn out to help reverse the problem. If the reasons for burnout can be identified, then a larger number of practitioners with long-term capacity may stay in the field and have longer tenures as quality teachers (Hale-Jinks et al., 2012).

Avoiding burnout could build retention, ultimately benefiting children and families since long-term relationships and strong attachments can build educators' proficiency and fuel children's development. This is supported by Erikson's (1950) theory of trust and his psychosocial stages of development (Faris & McCarroll, 2010; Mooney, 2000). Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of trust and attachment is demonstrated when educators can develop relationships with their students. Teachers are more likely to feel fulfilled in their work when they can demonstrate their ability to provide stable and reliable relationships with their students (Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009; Mooney, 2000; Rolland, 2014). Erikson (1950) believed that in the earliest years of life, mainly during infancy, patterns of trust or mistrust form that control or influence a person's actions or interactions for the rest of his or her life (Mooney, 2000). This level of influence stresses the value of teacher consistency for

extended periods of time (Faris & McCarroll, 2010). Through these relationships, educators play

a critical role in supporting and building children's development via the teachers' level of

attachment (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Bryant, & Clifford, 2000; Witherell, 2013). However,

this theory is challenged with the increasing number of ECE educators becoming victims of

burnout due to factors including low compensation, stressful work environments, and lack of

preparation and education (Goddard et al., 2006; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Rentzou, 2012). By

gathering more specific information from practitioners about the reasons they leave the ECE, the

field can identify ways to support them and help them avoid burnout. The resulting longevity of

well-equipped, quality educators will provide a strong framework to support trust and attachment

in the ECE setting through relational teaching (Holochwost et al., 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in the present study is that many ECE educators burn out and

leave the field. Across the United States, 25% to 40% of ECE educators leave their ECE

workplaces annually (Goffin, 2013; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Kagan et al., 2007). Having this

many workers leave one program each year causes inconsistency in the workplace and disrupts

the programming. This trend sustains a high turnover rate that contributes to lower quality

experiences for children (Porter, 2012; Rentzou, 2012). Children's development can be delayed

due to the resulting lack of consistency and frequent severance of the attached relationships

between children and caregivers (Burchinal et al., 2000; Rolfe, 2005). It is challenging to

identify educators who are a good fit for the field and ensure they have the skills and tools

necessary to avoid burnout, and appropriately position them for a long, successful career (Boyer,

2000; Langford, 2008; Rolland, 2014; Rolfe, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gather the ECE educators' perspectives to determine why they leave the field, so a strategy can be developed to retain educators to support quality trust and attachment in early education settings. Research points to common characteristics in high-quality ECE educators (Copple & Bredekemp, 2009; Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008; NAEYC, 2015); however, a gap in identifying what keeps early childhood educators working long-term in the field exists in the research literature. This study was placed within the historical context of the problem of ECE educator burnout and the need to remedy the turnover within the ECE field (Goffin, 2013; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012). This qualitative research was conducted as a descriptive case study that examined the perspectives of faculty who worked at one program (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Through an interview process, the participants described the reality of their ECE careers. Participants shared what motivated them in their work as well as what challenged them as ECE educators. An additional archival data sample further identified the qualifications and characteristics of the workforce with the intention of discovering commonalities and impacting elements, such as higher education level and amount of ECE specific experience.

The data from this study provided the researcher with an understanding of the motivations behind the participants' enjoyment of their work as well as challenges that influenced their desire to leave the workplace (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Insight shared through the interview responses confirmed common components to the participants' motivations, while the archival data identified characteristics such as an achieved level of education, attainment of a credential, or impact of experience. This study is unique because it addresses a gap of gathering data directly from educators after they have left the field. The goal was to identify the

motivations that both fueled their work and influenced the participants' choice to leave the workplace, so a strategy can be developed to retain quality ECE educators to support the framework of trust and attachment. Increased retention of these educators ultimately benefits children and families with high quality ECE experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the present study:

- What are the perspectives of the ECE educators who have left the field?

- How does burnout potential impact ECE educators' perceptions of their work?

- What best practices could support ECE educators to overcome the challenges of the field that cause so many ECE educators to leave?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

The areas of preliminary study emphasized the importance of ECE, reviewed the state of the ECE practitioner landscape, and identified what factors contribute to burnout and the resulting turnover. Compensation, work conditions, regulations, and work expectations all factor into an educator's satisfaction and performance, and the status of these can impact the levels of energy and expertise needed to continue in the field (Kagan et al., 2007; Klinkner et al., 2005). Identifying these factors could increase understanding of what makes these educators leave the ECE field, to anticipate these challenges and better equip educators who are authentic long-term fits for ECE.

Definition of Terms

Early Childhood Education (ECE): Elements related to the work with children ages birth through eight years old, and their families; may include settings, educators, and programming (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

ECE Educators: A specific sector of education practitioners who have specialized skills and qualifications to work with children ages birth through eight years old (NAEYC, 2015).

Burnout: The state of chronic stress leading to physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of ineffectiveness (Carter, 2013).

Turnover: The number of persons hired within a period to replace those leaving or dropped from the workforce (Mayhew, 2018).

Assumptions

Best practices of relationship building and engagement with the site and students are assumed foundations in the ECE educators' practice. A fondness for children and an understanding of early childhood development are assumed to be primary indicators of these employees working at this site. While these are presented as valued, elements of burnout are assumed to impact the educators' performance and stamina. It was assumed the subjects wanted to participate in the study. It was also assumed that they completed the interviews authentically and honestly, with hopes of providing insight about these ECE topics to create a valid study.

Limitations

The directions had to remain clear and consistent in the implementation of timelines and interview scheduling to exercise diligence to produce timely results and progress the study. The process included communication about the study's logistics to the case site's Board of Directors and potential participants with allowance for distribution and collection of the information. It was anticipated that some participants would respond more thoroughly than others, depending on the capacity or level of personal transparency. There may also have been a response bias in regard to whether the participants chose to participate or not, depending on the attached feelings toward the case study site and the request for information. The study utilized information and

participants from one single site; therefore, the information is representative of just one set of ECE educators who worked in the same venue.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to former employees of the selected site, who left their employment at the site of their own accord across a specified four year period. Each participant had been employed in this early childhood education center with qualifications matching the state DHS requirements for this type of licensed setting. This created a variety of educational and experience backgrounds that included aides, assistant teachers, and teachers. The aides were employees that had little or no experience working in an ECE setting, and little to no college credits. Assistant teachers had some experience working in an ECE setting and some college credits in courses related to education. Teachers had experience in the educational classroom as well as a college degree or multiple credits in courses related to education.

Chapter 1 Summary

The conceptual framework and existing research show that ECE has a quality impact and sustained, consistent relationships are vital for children's growth and development. This occurs when ECE educators are consistently building these relationships through retention in their early childhood workplaces. Yet there is other convincing research that proves educators are burning out and leaving the profession (Boyd, 2013; Douglass, 2017; Kagan et al., 2007; Porter, 2012). Specific factors such as low compensation, lack of professional development opportunities, and high-stress environments are causing continued rates of burnout across the early education arena (Bechtold, 2011; Chang, 2009; Goddard et al., 2006; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Nagel & Brown, 2003; Rentzou, 2012; Rolland, 2014; Totenhaugen et al., 2016; Witherell, 2013).

The desired result of this study was to highlight the positive impact of increased longevity of passionate, competent educators, and avoid the harmful effects of the turnover epidemic on young children's development (Douglass, 2017; French, 2010; Totenhaugen et al., 2016). If educators do not succumb to burnout, the resulting longevity will increase the overall quality across the ECE field through sustained quality trust and attachment occurrence in early education settings (Witherell, 2013).

The review of the literature in Chapter 2 will discuss the elements of the problem of burnout and turnover and explain the need to remove the burnout potential and increase educator longevity. Various research works will be explored and synthesized to support the conceptual framework and present the existing literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is recognized in research as having a significant influence on children's development and educational trajectories (French, 2010; Goffin, 2013). While early childhood educators' promotion of the positive development of children is deemed essential, many experts present the severe problems of burnout and turnover in this field (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Rolland, 2014). The purpose of the study was to understand why ECE educators leave the field by researching the problem of burnout and turnover among practitioners.

The Study Topic

Researchers have provided numerous articles and inventories that detail the causes of burnout and turnover in ECE, which ultimately interrupts children's development and negatively impacts the community overall (Curbow et al., 2000; Douglass, 2017; Goffin, 2013). Specific factors, such as low compensation, lack of professional development opportunities, and high-stress environments, are causing sustained rates of burnout across the early education arena (Bechtold, 2011; Chang, 2009; Goddard et al., 2006; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Nagel & Brown, 2003; Rentzou, 2012; Rolland, 2014; Totenhaugen et al., 2016). Several completed studies have also identified favorable characteristics that contribute to ECE educators' success (Colker, 2008; Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007; Machado, 2008). The present study provided insight regarding ECE educator resiliency that may result in long-term careers in the field, contributing to high-quality early education experiences to support Erikson's (1950) theory of trust and attachment. Research shows that ECE educators leave the field. However, a gap exists in following up with these educators to gain their perspective regarding their work experiences and the reasons they

left (Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008; Marshall, Dennehy, Johnson-Staub, & Robeson, 2005). This study is placed within the historical context of the problem of ECE educator burnout equating to lack of retention, and the need to remedy the proven trend of ECE field turnover (Goffin, 2013; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Kagan et al., 2007).

The Context

Professionalism in ECE has historically been grounded on the practitioners' sustained efforts to provide varied, quality learning experiences for their students (Hall & Rhomberg, 1995; McMullen, Alat, Buldu, & Lash, 2004; Stone, 1995). Children thrive under the care of these quality ECE educators, with educator consistency and aptitude being significant to successful child development (Boyd, 2013; Colker, 2008). Quality ECE educators exhibit characteristics such as patience, creativity, compassion, dedication, and passion for children and families (Boyd, 2013; NAEYC, 2015). These educators must be highly skilled and continue their growth as practitioners in order to be equipped to produce high quality field work (Passe, 2015).

The lack of retention of these quality educators can negatively impact the quality of the program overall. Parents lose trust because they do not know who will be caring for their children and have considerable doubt in the health of the ECE environment because of high turnover rates (Rolfe, 2005; Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes, 2001). Other educators in the program may be further stressed due to the turnover, as they may have additional work duties and must work with new staff constantly. Children may hesitate and become fearful because they do not know or trust their ever-evolving caregivers (Mooney, 2000). The study researched what causes this burnout and turnover to create awareness and increase the ability to identify,

recruit, and equip the consistent educators, so they continue to work long-term in the ECE field (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012).

The Significance

The areas of preliminary study emphasized the significant importance of ECE, reviewed the state of the ECE practitioner landscape, and identified what factors contribute to burnout and the resulting turnover. Compensation, work conditions, regulations, and work expectations factor into an educator's satisfaction and performance, and the status of these can impact the levels of energy and expertise needed for practitioners to continue in the field (McCormick Center, 2014; Porter, 2012). Identifying these factors could help to identify educators who are authentic long-term fits for ECE, as well as understand what motivates them stay working in the field.

The Problem Statement

The problem addressed in the present study is that 25% to 40% of ECE educators leave their ECE centers each year (Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007. For instance, an early childhood center in the Midwest had twenty-three of their teachers leave their positions over a four-year period, which is a 44% overall turnover in staff within that time. In a four year time period, almost six teachers have left each year in that center, demonstrating the field-wide trend. This trend creates a high rate of field turnover that contributes to lower quality experiences for children (Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Porter, 2012). While there have been several qualitative studies that explored if ECE educators are prone to burnout, causing them to leave the ECE field, there has been a scarcity of research that has specifically identified what factors influenced these educators to leave (Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Rentzou, 2012). The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of ECE educators who have left the field, so a strategy can be

developed toward retaining educators to support increased quality trust and attachment in early education settings better.

The Organization

The literature review, guided by the conceptual framework, synthesizes the necessary information used to format the present study. The review of the related literature emphasizes the importance of ECE, discussed with the application of Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development. Data identifies the issue of ECE educator burnout and the resulting turnover, including the researched causes of burnout and the impact it has on the ECE field (Rentzou, 2012; Rolland, 2014; Whitebook et al., 2001). Analyzing studies of burnout and turnover supported the need for this study to identify the impact within a specific case. Next, the need for educator retention is stated, affirming the study's purpose of determining why educators continue to leave the field to understand how to reduce turnover. A discussion of methodological issues and the conclusion of prior research results concludes the chapter. This study presented a more specific assessment of burnout from a practitioner's point of view, providing a current assessment of burnout potential for ECE educators.

Conceptual Framework

Professionalism in ECE has been grounded on the practitioners' successful efforts to provide varied, quality learning experiences for their young students (Stone, 1995; NAEYC, 2015). Educator consistency and aptitude are substantial keys to successful child development because children thrive under the care of quality ECE educators (Boyd, 2013; Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008). Passe (2015) provided an extensive guidebook that identifies the disposition traits and actions that promote successful growth for ECE practitioners. Thus, the present study would further support these notions toward discovering how such proficient educators could avoid

burnout in the field to support Erikson's (1950) theory of trust and attachment. The idea of trust and attachment relies on teachers' reliability to meet young children's needs, which develop confidence and a strong sense of trust between child and caregiver. If reasons for burnout can be identified, then higher amounts of practitioners with long-term capacity may stay in the field because they can recognize and avoid the factors that cause burnout and have longer tenures as consistently attached teachers.

Many experts have presented the severe problems of burnout and turnover in the ECE field (Chang, 2009; Porter, 2012; Rentzou, 2012; Rolland, 2014). While research shows that ECE educators burn out and therefore leave the field, the purpose of this study was to identify why they experience burnout to help reverse the problem (Kagan et al., 2007; Torquati, Raikes, & Huddleston-Casas, 2007; Totenhagen et al., 2016). Avoiding burnout could build retention, which would ultimately benefit children and families. Furthermore, long-term relationships and secure attachments would build educators' proficiency and fuel children's strong developmental growth, as supported by Erikson's theory of trust and his psychosocial stages of development (Mooney, 2000; Torquati et al., 2007).

Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of trust and attachment is demonstrated when educators help develop relationships with their students. ECE educators will feel more fulfilled in their work when they can demonstrate their ability to provide stability and strong relationships with their student body (Mooney, 2000; Rolland, 2014; Whitebook, 2003). Erikson (1950) believed that in the earliest years of life, mainly during early childhood, patterns of trust or mistrust are formed that control a person's actions or interactions for the rest of his or her life. This level of influence stresses the value of teacher consistency for extended periods (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Faris & McCarroll, 2010). Through these relationships, educators play a critical

role in supporting and building young children's development via the teachers' level of attachment (Burchinal et al., 2000; Groark, McCarthy, & Kirk, 2014).

However, this theory is thwarted with the increasing number of ECE educators becoming victims of burnout due to factors, including low compensation, stressful work environments, and lack of preparation and training (Goddard et al., 2006; Nagel & Brown, 2003; Rentzou, 2012; Witherell, 2013). By gathering more specific information from practitioners about the reasons they have left the ECE arena, the field can identify ways to support them and help them avoid burnout. The resulting longevity of well-equipped, quality educators will provide a robust framework to support trust and attachment in the ECE setting through relational teaching (NAEYC, 2015; Rolland, 2014).

Field experts such as Goffin (2013) and Kagan et al. (2007) have provided articles and teacher performance assessments designed to detail the causes of this crisis and identify components, including education level and skill set, that support the successful tenure of ECE educators. It is challenging to identify educators who are a good fit for the field and ensure they have the skills and tools necessary to avoid burnout, and appropriately position them for a long, successful career (Bechtold, 2011; Boyd, 2013; Colker, 2008; Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007).

Suggested Study

The literature review includes a review of the state of the ECE educators and what factors cause burnout and turnover. Compensation, education level, work conditions, regulations, and curriculum expectations can factor into an educator's satisfaction and performance. Thus, the status of these can impact the levels of energy and expertise needed to continue in the field successfully (Boyd, 2013; Fuller & Strath, 2001; Kagan et al., 2007). The purpose of this study was to determine why ECE educators leave the field. How do successful educators overcome the

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challenges that cause many of their peers to burnout and leave and strengthen the potential of quality trust and attachment in early education settings? This study also considers what contributes to educator success and what factors positively influence retention. If such positive and effective motivators are identified, focus can turn to increasing the motivators while also addressing the challenges that lead to burnout.

Psychosocial Theories of Erikson

While Erikson (1950) addressed the lifespan development of individuals, the stages of psychosocial development help to understand the process of students' development. These developmental stages are strongly impacted by the quality and stability of the students' ECE educators (Burchinal et al., 2000; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Groark et al., 2014). Increased longevity in the ECE setting supports educators in maintaining practices that support Erikson's (1950) first four psychosocial stages relating to children's development. These stages relate directly to the ECE sector:

1. Trust versus mistrust: includes ages 0–18 months

2. Autonomy versus shame: includes ages 18 months–3 years

3. Initiative versus guilt: includes ages 3–5 years

4. Industry versus inferiority: includes ages 5–12

According to NAEYC (2015), the early childhood sector includes infants (0–18 months), toddlers (18–36 months), preschoolers (3–5 years) and young elementary students (5–8 years). Educators in this sector must understand these four psychosocial stages in order to effectively teach across these ages and stages (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Incorporating these stages into their curriculum and daily direct approaches with their students will guide the educators' relationship building toward positive response from their students (Groark et al., 2014). If

educators could maintain consistent relationships with students, they would be more likely to feel more fulfilled in their career work (Chang, 2009; Mooney, 2000; NAEYC, 2015; Porter, 2012).

Stage one: Trust versus mistrust. Erikson's (1950) framework of beliefs is organized into eight stages of psychosocial development. The first three stages are most applicable to the ages of zero to five years, representing the core group receiving ECE programming. Proficient educators apply these stages to direct early care and education practices (NAEYC, 2015). Stage one is the foundational principle for work with infants and younger toddlers. The idea of trust versus mistrust directly guides the interactions of teachers with infants, supporting individual development of identity and social adaptations (Groark et al., 2014). Ideally, infants will develop "faith in the environment and self" rather than "wariness of others" (Groark et al., 2014, p. 19). Quality educators who are reliably present and consistently responsive during an infant's first year build a level of trust and attachment with the child (Hale-Jinks et al., 2012). Educators who are nonresponsive lack the ability to strengthen this attachment, causing a negative impact on the educational environment. Educator turnover can also disrupt the attachment theory, due to the inconsistency of present adults (Totenhagen et al., 2016).

Erikson's (1950) theory framed that teachers' reliability to meet infants' needs will develop confidence and a strong sense of trust and attachment. Teachers' responsiveness could be evidenced in certain classroom behavior. For instance, if the infant wakes up and is crying, the infant will develop a sense of trust if a recognized teacher quickly responds by picking up the infant and offering a bottle. Because of this quick response, the child experiences another positive instance of cause and effect because the child's needs are met, confirming the educator's quality work performance. When teachers can quickly and consistently meet an infant's needs, the infant's trust is strengthened (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mooney, 2000).

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Strong relationships with consistent teachers in the first year of life will impact a child's ability to progress socio-emotionally, which contributes to the evidence of successful teaching. If a lack of consistent teachers exists, this reliability is compromised (Mooney, 2000; NAEYC, 2015). Frequent teacher turnover poses a detrimental block in this trust development (French, 2010). An infant may not be comforted by a teacher the infant does not recognize, as fear may cause mistrust. This could continue a pattern of the infant's apprehension and stress in the ECE setting, as the teachers are not able to offer comfort due to the lack of relationship. When children are continuously reintroduced to new teachers and must continuously develop a new sense of trust due to the high turnover of educators, the educational environment suffers and the children will not thrive in the setting (Goddard et al., 2006; Nagel & Brown, 2003; Porter, 2012). Consistency of educators and strong relationships will lead to the desire toward autonomy that the growing toddler will exhibit in psychosocial stage two.

Stage two: Autonomy versus shame and doubt. When an infant develops a strong sense of trust and attachment, it means the infant is developmentally ready to progress to stage two as a toddler (ages 18–36 months), demonstrating the quality impact teachers have on infants and toddlers (Groark et al., 2014). Erikson (1950) argued that the only way one progresses to the next stage of development is to "resolve the crisis within the current stage" (Groark et al., 2014, p. 19). These crises are considered standard parts of human development and are individually paced due to genetics and environmental influence. This is evidenced in the rapid growth a child experiences in the infant and young toddler stages (Burchinal et al., 2000).

Toddlers struggle to progress at the same rate of development across the domains of physical, intellectual, language, emotional, and social growth areas (Faris & McCarroll, 2010). A toddler must have a solid, trusting relationship with the teacher to know that that adult will

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respond appropriately when the toddler is struggling. For instance, a toddler who has reached the height of emotional domain capacity must have underlying trust that the teacher will come to patiently comfort the child during a tantrum. Likewise, a teacher who understands this autonomy stage will understand that the 2-year-old wants to try to use the spoon while eating applesauce, with additional understanding that the child is still developing that skill and may create a mess with the applesauce that falls off the spoon. This understanding teacher will encourage the child, will know to offer the child a bib assuming there will be some spills, will offer additional guidance on how to use the spoon, and will then clean the meal area when the child is finished. The teacher will not punish the child for the mess, because there is foundational understanding and realistic expectations of what the toddler-aged child can accomplish. The teacher anticipates there will be some spilled applesauce because of the understanding that the child is not yet proficient with the spoon. These knowledgeable teachers in high-quality ECE settings responsively provide an environment that appropriately incorporates this understanding of the autonomy stage (Colker, 2008; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mooney, 2000).

Toddlers in this stage of autonomy trust their teachers to have appropriate understanding of their developmental needs. Children will learn what to expect from teachers who respond to their needs (Erikson, 1950; Mooney, 2000). These understanding teachers develop this knowledge regarding each student due to their consistent presence and performance in the ECE setting that has fostered the attachment relationships (Faris & McCarroll, 2010). Toddlers in these settings will have confidence and excitement in their attempts to assert themselves, which will lead to their increased capacity as preschoolers in psychosocial stage three.

Stage three: Initiative versus guilt. Educators who work with preschoolers (between the ages of three and five) must understand that these children will exhibit a learned ability to

initiate activities. A child's developed can-do attitude is validated by an increase in their physical and mental capacity (Groark et al., 2014; Mooney, 2000). This growth occurs when teachers recognize that a child has developed a sense of trust in others and their environment and has become independent as a problem-solver. The preschooler will take increased initiative to attempt the next level of skills and abilities, knowing the knowledgeable, trustworthy teachers will support this growth (Burchinal et al., 2000; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The child will trust that the teacher will provide a setting that is safe and conducive to working on new skills that are appropriate for the aging child (McMullen et al., 2004).

Preschoolers are becoming more proficient in their abilities, and this increasing confidence inspires them to continue initiating new skills. For instance, children may attempt to tie their shoes if previous experience has shown them that the teacher will not only patiently wait but will also provide appropriate encouragement. If previous experience has rather shown the child that the teacher will be upset while waiting, or that the teacher will not praise the child for the independence demonstrated in show tying, the child will not be inspired to make the attempt (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; McMullen et al., 2004). When there is frequent turnover in an ECE setting, the children will lack opportunities to develop these beneficial relationships and could instead exhibit feelings of guilt for their desire to explore and grow (Erikson, 1950; Mooney, 2000). This sense of trust can only develop when the same teachers consistently work with the same children because the consistency helps build an informative relationship between the teacher and child (Porter, 2012). Both the child and teacher know what to expect from each other, and likewise know how to respond to each other in communication methods that work most effectively (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This growth in confidence and understanding of

expectations will launch the preschooler into the school-age years in the fourth psychosocial stage.

Stage four: Industry versus inferiority. NAEYC (2015) identifies children ages 5–8 years as still included in the defined ages of ECE. Children entering these elementary years will still be greatly influenced by their relationships with teachers. At this stage, children's peer relationships also grow in impact. They will be encouraged for their industriousness, or competence, by both the adults and peers in their lives. They could also be negatively impacted toward feeling inferior if positive influences are lacking (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Erikson, 1950). These school-agers are building more specific and sophisticated skills such as reading, writing, and advanced problem solving. They will benefit from the same strong relationships from understanding teachers, who know how to set them up for success (Porter, 2012). The students will trust the teachers and will desire to please them while demonstrating their growing proficiency (Mooney, 2000). If the teachers are not encouraging, or peer influence is negative, the child may exhibit feelings of inferiority which will impact the child's ability, or desire, to reach the full potential of learning (Erikson, 1950; Stone, 1995).

Furthermore, teachers much understand what is individually appropriate for each student, and this can be possible when teachers are consistently present and have repeated interactions (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2015; Stone, 1995). Erikson (1950) emphasized the potential weaknesses and stunting of development that could result if a child failed to master each of these first stages and miss progressing to the next one. Furthermore, a teacher's consistent attention and assessment serves as the link to avoiding such failure (Stone, 1995; Whitebook, 2003). This demonstrates the influence of Erikson's (1950) work by showing that children develop the foundation for socio-emotional development and mental health in these

early psychosocial stages of life, creating a substantial responsibility for educators. This confirms the importance of retaining high quality educators in ECE environments, who understand early childhood development and who build consistent, encouraging relationships with their students (Douglass, 2017; Mooney, 2000; NAEYC, 2015; Porter, 2012).

<div align="center">**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**</div>

The literature review synthesizes multiple studies focused on the definition and importance of quality ECE, the contributing factors to this quality, and the negative influences impacting the field. Research promotes the importance of ECE as a sector, influencing children's early development and strengthening families (Whitebook & Bellm, 2005). Multiple studies identify the strengths and needs of ECE educators. The literature also consistently uncovers the challenges of burnout and turnover in the ECE sector, identifying these as common problems that have negative rippling impact on the field.

Important Impact of Quality ECE

Quality learning methodologies promote the empowerment of both educators and children and are critical indicators of successful early educational experiences. This principle has continued to affirm the significance of ECE. Professionalism is grounded on practitioners' success in building relationships with their young students through varied, quality learning experiences (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Douglass, 2017). Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) continues to be a hallmark of relationship-building methods that shape young children's minds in quality learning environments (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The core concepts of DAP guide educators to teach in ways that are age-appropriate, individually appropriate, and socio-culturally appropriate for the children in their care. Teachers' consistency

and aptitude in these DAP concepts are key to children's developmental success (Burchinal et al., 2000; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2015).

Erikson's theory promotes the DAP connection of educators to the overall quality of early education experiences for children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This is substantially proven in the three child-care landmark quantitative studies from Burchinal et al. (2000). They used the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) tools to assess the outcomes supporting their hypothesis that program quality impacts children's development, resulting from the quality provided by the educators. The ECERS is an assessment tool that rates the ECE setting's best practice components, providing a fair and consistent base for observation and assessment. These assessment tools consider the specific developmental needs across the varying age groups of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-agers. Additional research supported these studies, which applied the same ECERS tools, showing that practitioner longevity resulted from using DAP methods with the children (Burchinal et al., 2000; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Torquati et al., 2007). These studies demonstrate the power of strong relationships built between quality educators and at-risk children. Providing sustained accommodations for meeting children's developmental needs highly motivates practitioners' continued DAP work in the field (Bechtold, 2011; NAEYC, 2015). The practitioners in these studies experienced the positive results of their best practices meshed with their strong relationships with their students.

High-quality ECE programming includes parent involvement, teamwork, a healthy environment, and DAP curriculum (Groark et al., 2014; NAEYC, 2015). These quality elements depend on the education and experience of the teachers. Well-trained educators are needed for high-quality programs to promote children's development, so it is necessary to recruit and

maintain a highly qualified workforce that will work long-term in the field (Bechtold, 2011; Colker, 2008; Douglass, 2017). ECE practitioners with a deeper understanding of their jobs, obtained by the clarity of role and ongoing training, are more prone to longevity in their workplaces (Bechtold, 2011; Colker, 2008; Douglass, 2017; Marshall et al., 2005).

Influence of Field Practices

The variations across ECE workforce requirements challenge educators' levels of engagement. Practitioner expectations within program types are inconsistently communicated across geographic areas and among policymakers, creating difficulty in the standardization of qualification and compensation expectations (French, 2010; Fuller & Strath, 2001; Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al.; 2007). For instance, one center may pay a lead teacher $16.00 per hour, while a similarly-structured center two miles away may pay its lead teacher only $13.00 for the same job. Furthermore, one center may require that all their lead teachers have a minimum of a 4-year degree, while another only requires a 2-year degree at the entry for the same type of position (Boyd, 2013; Love et al., 2003; Machado, 2008; Torquati et al., 2007; Wat, 2018). These varied pay differences may impact the quality of programming, as well as result in varying competency and satisfaction among teachers in these positions (Wat, 2018). Educators can leave one program to work at another program with higher pay or better employee benefits such as vacation time and health insurance, even if the quality of the program is not comparable (Cleveland & Hyatt, 2002; Fuller & Strath, 2001; Goffin, 2013; McCormick Center, 2014; Torquati et al., 2007).

Agreement on best practices, including the identification of a minimum education level for teachers, has sustained over multiple decades. Field pioneer Katz (1977) identified foundational principles that are consistent with current best practices. These principles include

the presence of higher education degrees and dispositions such as patience, creativity, and resilience. Research identifies these dispositions as precursors to successful teacher performance, producing higher quality learning experiences for children and increased sustainability and retention of quality educators (Colker, 2008; Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007; Katz, 1977; NAEYC, 2015). This importance of the disposition at the beginning of educators' careers is particularly supported by the mixed method research of Garvis, Fluckinger, and Twigg (2012), who defined and guided emerging teaching practices through both demographic study and questionnaires. Themes emerged that showed some consistent traits among quality educators. The traits included confidence and reliability, which were recognized to promote quality ECE experiences for teachers, both at recruitment and after working in the ECE workplace (Garvis et al., 2012; Whitebook, 2003). Additional recognized traits included patience, compassion, creativity, and stamina (Garvis et al., 2012). This study suggests there could be consistent disposition traits exhibited by ECE educators across the field. This recognition could support field longevity if these traits are identified and cultivated at the beginning of educators' careers in the field (Rolfe, 2005; Torquati et al., 2007).

Influence of Environment's Expectations

While employers focus on recruiting and retaining highly qualified employees, the social-emotional environment of the workplace may define the climate (Klinkner et al., 2005). An increase in the needed childcare market, combined with the high number of seasoned educators who are retiring from the field, has caused less qualified workers to fill positions and more educator turnover (Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005; Machado, 2008; McCormick Center, 2014). The decline in expected qualifications in educators will hinder long-term developmental outcomes for children. For improved results of children's developmental growth in early

education programs, qualification expectations should be raised, not lowered (Bechtold, 2011; Bloom & Bella, 2005; Langford, 2008; McCormick Center, 2014). Improved qualifications, such as higher education and skill levels, are required for an increase in quality (Goffin, 2013; Herzenberg et al., 2005; McMullen et al., 2004). ECE workers must also each employ their own sense of motivation to overcome the challenges of the fieldwork (Douglass, 2017; Klinkner et al., 2005; Rolfe, 2005). Knowledgeable, highly trained, stable practitioners will produce high-quality early education results, and this quality will be sustained if educators feel encouraged to stay in the field (Whitebook & Bellm, 2005).

Contributing Factors to ECE Educator Burnout

While research proves that ECE is essential, there is still other research that says educators are burning out and leaving the profession (Rentzou, 2012; Rolfe, 2005). Research has presented the problem of educators' vulnerability to burnout magnified by their lack of coping skills (Chang, 2009; McCormick Center, 2014; Rolland, 2014). Literature identified the common elements of stressful work environments, emotional exhaustion, and low compensation as highly influencing burnout across ECE settings.

Stressful environments. Research using the Child Care Worker Job Stress Inventory (CCW-JSI) showed that educators demonstrated high levels of occupational stress (both environmental and emotional), which pointed to burnout (Rowland, 2014). Occupational stress leads to the negative impact of severed relationships between teachers and children (Curbow et al., 2000; Rolland, 2014). These quantitative studies using educator stress inventories identified the path to burnout and its impact on children's development. Burnout decreases effectiveness of educators while in the workplace, and ultimately leads to educators leaving their work. Curbow et al.'s (2000) literature review affirmed two decades of this negative impact of burnout.

This trend has been further proven in Rolland's (2014) year-long mixed methods study that comprehensively identified the burnout factors and recurring impact on ECE educators. Long work shift hours, year round programming without breaks, challenging children, demanding parents, mandatory regulations, budget challenges, and unrealistic expectations from administrators form the stressful environment (Curbow et al., 2000, Rolland, 2014).

Emotional exhaustion. The Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators' Survey (MBI-ES), created in 1981, is an assessment questionnaire designed to identify burnout tendencies in educators. The MBI-ES is a leading measure that is validated through extensive research and addresses three scales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment as self-identified by the educator (Chang, 2009). In multiple studies using the MBI-ES, emotional exhaustion was the most prevalent contributor to burnout, caused by experiences of unpleasant emotions and teachers' inabilities to cope with emotional stress (Chang, 2009; McCormick Center, 2014). These findings identified the need for teachers to improve their skills in managing emotions, to ensure adequate coping, avoid burnout, and remain in the field. Educator qualifications and workplace climates are influential to this coping ability (Chang, 2009; McMullen et al., 2004; Witherell, 2013). Studies of ECE workers, which included administration of the MBI-ES after only a few years of working in the field, pointed to the impact of negative workplace environments (Goddard et al., 2006; McCormick Center, 2014). While the existence of these negative workplace environments is proven by the literature, there is a gap in identifying action to improve these environments toward decreased burnout.

Low compensation. A substantial variation in ECE educator wages exists, which is impacted by employee characteristics and the expectations across program sectors (Kagan et al., 2007; Mocan & Tekin, 2003; Torquati et al., 2007). For various reasons, teachers with the same

qualifications may earn different pay rates, or teachers who are less qualified may earn higher

pay rates compared to teachers who are more qualified (Totenhagen et al., 2016). Individual

program budgets and perceptions of fair wage amounts can impact these variations in

compensation rates across ECE settings.

As research affirms, educators often leave to work in other fields where they can make

more money (Fuller & Strath, 2001; Goffin, 2013; Torquati et al., 2007). The impact of low pay

and meager benefits proves to be too unattractive for quality educators, especially considering

the high stress of the work; thus, resulting in more inexperienced or incompetent workers

(French, 2010; Herzenberg et al., 2005). Researchers have argued that this discrepancy of

quality will continue if wages remain low because quality educators are not motivated by pay to

stay in the field (French, 2010; Kagan et al., 2007; Marshall et al., 2005).

The Epidemic of ECE Educator Turnover

ECE educators burn out because of low compensation, lack of training, and stressful

work environments (Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Rentzou, 2012). These factors initially challenge

teachers' abilities to engage in high-quality interactions with children, which then leads to their

departure from the field and severed relationships (Curbow et al., 2000; Rentzou, 2012).

Research indicates that educator turnover is at 40% per year, which is strongly fueled by poor

working environments and low wages (Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007; Machado, 2008;

McCormick Center, 2014). Studies suggest that program quality increased when educators'

wages were raised, but the raises were not enough to retain quality educators (Cleveland &

Hyatt, 2002; McCormick Center, 2014; Rolland, 2014).

Additional research has revealed that the ECE workforce is unstable due to the high

turnover of staff because of burnout (Porter, 2012; Rentzou, 2012). While educators indicated

some intrinsic satisfaction from their work, low wages continue to promote the cycle of burnout (Fuller & Strath, 2001; Kagan et al., 2007). This cycle of turnover causes multiple structural inefficiencies across the ECE arena (Whitebook et al., 2001). The combined factors of low compensation, environmental characteristics, and personal disposition must all be comprehensively considered when looking to raise educator retention (Chang, 2009; Porter, 2012; Kagan et al., 2007).

The Quest to Retain ECE Educators

High-quality ECE is dependent on the longevity of quality teachers, who need continued support and benefits from their workplaces (Douglass, 2017; Holochwost et al., 2009; Kagan et al., 2007). Workplace employment offerings may influence educator retention, but field-wide inconsistency in these practices exists (French, 2010; Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007). Programs that offered benefits, such as health insurance and professional development training, demonstrated higher retention of their teachers (Holochwost et al., 2009; Machado, 2008). The National Child Care Staffing Study (2008) included observations and interviews from practitioners in 227 ECE centers across five American cities. This study indicated a need for increased benefits for educators to build retention (Machado, 2008). When the educators' basic needs are met, this can build confidence that they can remain in their workplace and continue in their ECE careers.

Passe (2015) recommended that ECE workplaces must also invest in the training and support of their teachers, with intentional nurturing toward quality performance and workplace satisfaction. This increase in performance capacity and job satisfaction could empower ECE educators to avoid burnout and stay working longer in the field (Douglass, 2017; Holochwost et

al., 2009). If the educators' basic needs are met and they are also feeling equipped and empowered in the workplace, they may have the capacity and desire to work longer in that site.

Education level of ECE workers. The ECE field is in urgent need of improved expectations to ensure systems are in place to support retention of suitable educators (Kagan et al., 2007; Wat, 2018). Totenhagen et al. (2016) deducted that both education level and dispositional characteristics contribute to educators' abilities to succeed and stay longer in the field. Research points to higher education as an indication of teacher proficiency and longevity (French, 2010; Holochwost et al., 2009; Wat, 2018). College-degreed educators have proven to demonstrate higher confidence, because their advanced education helped them better understand and value their work as educators (Bechtold, 2011; Bloom & Bella, 2005; Wat, 2018). Higher education points to increased practitioner success, resulting in positive outcomes for children in quality early education programming. Earning a bachelor's degree in ECE has consistently equated to educators' success throughout the literature (Totenhagen et al., 2016; Wat, 2018; Whitebook, 2003). While this education level has influenced educator quality, there is a lack of support that this degree earning directly influences ECE educator retention. If higher education levels equate to higher wages, this could remedy the negative impact of low wages that contributes to burnout (Douglass, 2017; Kagan et al., 2007; Whitebook, 2003).

ECE educator disposition. ECE educators' dispositions have been directly shown to impact the quality of programs (Colker, 2008; McMullen et al., 2004). For instance, a teacher's patience contributes to a positive classroom environment where children are comfortable and exhibit developmental growth. However, identifying and supporting educators with favorable dispositions is a substantial challenge (Boyer, 2000; Colker, 2008; Douglass, 2017). Lanford (2008) argued that more could be done to equip educators, so they are set up for long-term

success. This includes identifying and recruiting more practitioners who possess complementary dispositions that suit ECE fieldwork.

Kremenitzer and Miller (2008) specifically studied emotional intelligence about ECE educator compatibility. This is an influential study because it considers the personal dispositions of educators both at career entry and long-term. They identified that teachers with high emotional intelligence produced higher-quality programming, working longer in the early childhood setting than colleagues with lower emotional intelligence competencies (Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008). Teachers that demonstrated higher amounts of patience, creativity, flexibility, and understanding could better cope with stress, meaning such traits should be identified when recruiting educators (Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008).

Colker (2008) used the literature review, experiential knowledge, and surveys of 43 ECE educators to identify what personal beliefs attracted practitioners to the ECE field. The study revealed twelve specific characteristics of teachers with high capabilities who were poised to remain teaching in the field (Colker, 2008). The desire to make a difference in children's lives was the most substantial characteristic revealed in Colker's (2008) study. This study interpreted that these characteristics were not only learnable skills but also stemmed from an intrinsic personal disposition.

Review of Methodological Issues

Creswell (2014) identifies quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods methodologies; each having specially designated tools for data gathering. Methodological patterns in the studied research included many mixed methods studies, connecting the concurrent research information gathered with both quantitative and qualitative studies. Much of the research includes practitioner surveys, some accompanied by formal assessment tools and others followed by

interviews and narratives. Some case studies evolved from researchers' curiosity about

following educator performance across different ECE settings to further interpret the available

data. For example, Bechtold (2011) studied burnout using a six-question survey, a quality

ratings instrument survey (QRIS), reflective journal narratives, interviews, and accompanying

field observations. This diversity of information strengthens the study's usefulness (Bechtold,

2011; Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Offering these varying rich perspectives from different angles

provides insight to the dynamic needs of this sector of educators.

Size and Scope of Studies

An extensive sample size for surveys and assessments was included in the researched

literature. Some studies included as few as 10 practitioners (Rolland, 2014) and some as high as

815 (McMullen et al., 2004). However, the average sample size surveyed was 40 to 90

practitioners. Larger sample sizes produced more information and were generally deemed to be

strongly reliable. While Rolland's (2014) study used a smaller sample, it produced in-depth

information. Rolland's mixed-method study of 10 ECE teachers was one year long and included

an extensive literature review. Furthermore, it used two survey studies, examining multiple

aspects of practitioner characteristics and perspectives. Rolland (2014) succeeded in providing

comprehensive information about risks for educators and the resulting connections to quality in

the field, demonstrating a continued need to address practitioner burnout.

Surveying ECE practitioners was a standard methodology used in the reviewed studies.

Practitioner types ranged from entry-level teachers, such as in the skill surveys administered by

Garvis et al. (2012), to more seasoned teachers, such as the sample used by Kremenitzer and

Miller (2008). Because these studies were typically conducted as self-assessments wherein the

participant rated his or her self, some questions remain, mainly about the validity of the surveys

regarding varying interpretations of the survey questions and the ability of the sample to effectively communicate responses (Creswell, 2014).

Reliability of Studies

Reliable studies also included assessment tools that have already been researched and deemed credible across the ECE field. Tools such as the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (EWES), Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators' Survey (MBI-ES), and Child Care Worker Job Stress Inventory (CCW-JSI) provided field-specific components in the assessment of ECE educators' capacities (McCormick Center, 2014). Studies endorsed by or using tools from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) were considered reliable and applicable, because of the credible knowledge of this ECE-specific organization (McCormick Center, 2014; McMullen et al., 2004).

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Synthesis of Research Findings

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Much of the research has defined quality ECE best practices, positively identifying the critical significance of quality experiences for children's optimal developmental growth and school readiness. The research pointed to the many benefits of having skilled educators that stay in the field. Implementation of DAP pedagogy by competent, passionate educators has positive results for children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Goffin, 2013; NAEYC, 2015; Stone, 1995). Multiple intelligences and characteristics are identified as necessary for ECE educators to perform well and thrive in their work (Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007; Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008). These range from degrees earned, to credential attainment, to personal disposition growth of the ECE educators. These elements mesh to build their capacities to succeed as educators in this sector. The literature affirms that educators who obtain and develop these characteristics

bring value to the sector with a presumed capacity to remain in the field longer as successful practitioners (Passe, 2015; Whitebook, 2003; Whitebook & Bellm, 2005).

Erikson's (1950) theory of trust and attachment is consistently identified as an integral influence for successful ECE practices through the retention of quality educators (Groark et al., 2014; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012). The first four stages of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development apply to the age range included in early childhood development and are directly impacted by the proficiency and retention of ECE educators (NAEYC, 2015). Educators who exhibit the understanding of these stages and apply that understanding to their teaching approaches will support DAP resulting in children's success across the psychosocial stages of their development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). These educators have the skills necessary to promote longevity in the field because they are equipped for successful impact on their children (Rolland, 2014; Whitebook, 2003).

Though this positive impact of ECE educator retention was never disputed, the issues associated with the burnout and turnover epidemic were consistently emphasized and declared to be common multifactorial trends universal to the field (Goddard et al., 2006). There was comparable research that pointed to the harmful trends of educator burnout and turnover. Multiple studies systemically pointed to the specific elements of stress, emotional exhaustion, and low wages as the consistent influencers on educator burnout (Holochwost et al., 2009; Rentzou, 2012).

Stress results from ECE educators having to work long hours, having to work with active and sometimes behaviorally-challenged children, and not having as many breaks as other educators working in different sectors (Boyd, 2013; Goddard et al., 2006). The work's demands cause emotional exhaustion as these educators give their all to support their students and

program families (Witherell, 2013). Even ECE educators who have education-specific degrees,

specialized credentials, and ample field experience feel the impact of these demands (Boyer,

2000; Faris & McCarroll, 2010). The stresses of the work environment and job responsibilities

are presented throughout the literature as too much for many ECE educators to bear.

The low wage trend is a field-wide issue consistently addressed by the research. With

regards to the rigor and skill required of ECE educators, the lack of adequate pay adds to the

stress of feeling overworked and undervalued (Fuller & Strath, 2001; Goddard et al., 2006).

Many ECE educators work in year round programs yet earn much less than other educators who

work in sectors that receive regular calendar breaks such as K-12 and higher education (Fuller &

Strath, 2001; Kagan et al., 2007; Porter, 2012). Many ECE educators are earning less than other

educators which also equates to not enough to afford their basic lifestyles. Educators may leave

to work in other fields that will pay more, just so they can afford their daily living expenses

(Totenhagen et al., 2016).

These trends are decades old, and while they are consistently evidenced, they have not

been proactively addressed (Blau, 1992; Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007; McCormick Center,

2014). This provides a convincing direction toward the need to retain quality ECE educators in

the field. However, the issue remains whether a more influential factor determines educator

turnover, and how the field could unite to solve the burnout problem toward increased

satisfaction and retention of ECE educators (Fuller & Strath, 2009; Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al.,

2007).

Critique of Previous Research

Many studies demonstrate and promote the importance and benefits of ECE.

Neverthless, other research relates to the identification of the problem of burnout and resulting

turnover in the field, stating the negative impact these tendencies continue to cause across the ECE arena (Boyd, 2013; Porter, 2012; Rentzou, 2012). Both quantitative and qualitative studies continued to confirm high numbers of teachers exhibiting burnout and leaving the field of ECE.

Quantitative studies followed the numbers of ECE educators who work in various aspects of the ECE field. Elements such as educators' amount of education, specific college degrees earned, and amount of experience are tracked in effort to find a correlation to quality and retention. These elements were proven to raise children's developmental growth and positive experiences, supporting the conceptual framework of trust and attachment (NAEYC 2015). Research promoted that a higher degree specific to education will impact the educators' ability to effectively teach, and that additional experience supports an educator's capacity (Goffin, 2013; McMullen, 2004). While the research has promoted that these factors should positively impact and increase these educators' longevity in the field, the reality of practitioner turnover does not support this research (Kagan et al., 2007; Nagel & Brown, 2003; McCormick Center, 2014). Researchers missed considering the negative factors that overwhelm these positive elements. While their research supported theoretical best practice, they do not represent reality in the present field environments.

Qualitative studies have defined the characteristics connected to capacity of a quality ECE educator. Multiple studies continue to identify the elements of environment and program practices that should contribute to positive retention of quality educators. This has not been enough to triumph over the reality of practitioner turnover (NAEYC, 2015). While ECE educators have even self-identified these elements that should keep them engaged in the work force, multiple studies also demonstrate self-identification of the challenges that cause these educators to leave the ECE field (McMullen et al., 2004; Rentzou, 2012).

Much of the research reviewed has presented credible, mixed-method studies that systematically investigated the ECE landscape and its practitioners, identifying practitioner capacity within field settings (McCormick Center, 2014; Passe, 2015). While burnout and turnover are constantly regarded as perpetual issues harming the ECE field, research has not fully identified what keeps educators working in the field longer. Much of the research depends on the statistics that are presented regarding the characteristics of the practitioners, assuming this knowledge will positively impact their work quality and longevity. There is a lack of research that specifically approaches ECE educators with personal inquiry of their real perceptions of their workplace dynamics and field experiences. The literature also does not confirm that the responses directly from educators are comprehensive and honest. Educators may not have had the emotional energy to share comprehensively and objectively about their experiences in specific settings or specific situations. There is a lack of research that focuses on gathering perspectives from ECE educators who have left the field, to gain authentic perspectives from their authentic workplace experiences.

Chapter 2 Summary

The review of the literature emphasized the significant impact of ECE and explained many challenges that contribute to many educators' experiences of burnout and turnover. The conceptual framework and a review of the research and its methodologies all point to important field-wide issues across the ECE arena, unpacking current findings on ECE settings and their educators. Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development supports the researched positive impact of consistent relationships between children and stable, knowledgeable ECE educators.

While research demonstrates this importance of ECE, there is still other convincing research that says educators are burning out and leaving the profession (Boyd, 2013; Douglass, 2017; Kagan et al., 2007; Porter, 2012). Specific factors, such as low compensation, lack of professional development opportunities, and high-stress environments, are causing sustained rates of burnout across the early education arena (Bechtold, 2011; Chang, 2009; Goddard et al., 2006; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Nagel & Brown, 2003; Rentzou, 2012; Rolland, 2014; Totenhaugen et al., 2016).

The goal of this study was to highlight the positive impact of passionate, competent educators, and avoid the harmful effects of this turnover epidemic on young children's development (Douglass, 2017; French, 2010; Goffin, 2013; Totenhaugen et al., 2016). If educators do not succumb to burnout, the resulting longevity will increase the overall quality across the ECE field through sustained quality trust and attachment within ECE settings. The discussion in Chapter 3 details this study as a qualitative case study approach to address this problem of burnout and turnover, and the need to remove the burnout potential and increase educator longevity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The literature review has demonstrated a history and continued potential of ECE educator burnout and turnover. This turnover problem is driven by a lack of understanding of what keeps ECE educators working in their careers (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; McCormick Center, 2014). This study investigated ECE educators who recently left employment of their own accord and gathered perspectives about their work. A single case study was used for gaining an in-depth view from practitioners common to one similar work experience.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the perspectives of the ECE educators who have left the field?

- How does burnout potential impact ECE educators' perceptions of their work?

- What best practices could support ECE educators to overcome the challenges of the field that cause so many ECE educators to leave?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The problem addressed in this study is that many ECE educators experience burnout and leave the field. One-fourth to one-half of ECE educators are no longer employed in the field after one year of work (Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007). This trend matches the turnover in an early childhood education center (ECEC) in the Midwest, which was the single site for this case study. Twenty-three of the ECEC teachers had left their positions across a time period of four years, which is a 44% overall turnover of staff within that time period. Across a four year time period, six teachers left that workplace each year. This demonstrates a trend of high turnover,

which research has demonstrated lowers the quality of early childhood education experiences (Goffin, 2013; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; Porter, 2012). The purpose of this study was to discover the perspectives of ECE educators who have left the field of their own accord. The hope is to develop a strategy toward increased retention in the ECE field.

This qualitative research was conducted as a descriptive case study that examined the perspectives of a specific center's faculty (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The descriptive case study is an intensive analysis and description of a bounded phenomenon, yielding a detailed description from the study's data (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). This design allowed an emphasis on this specific site's situation, with a flexibility that could introduce new and unexpected results (Shuttleworth, 2008; Yazan, 2015). The interview participants could tell their stories through their responses, describing their views of their ECE career reality. This information provided an understanding of the participants' desire to leave the workplace (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The insight shared through the sample responses showed standard components such as achieved level of education or personal disposition that influenced the respondents' work in the field. By analyzing the insight shared through this case study, the goal was to identify what influenced the study participants to leave the workplace of their own accord.

This type of descriptive case study was selected because it described the real-life context of working in the ECE field and described the phenomenon surrounding educator turnover (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). This case included a group of study participants who worked for one early childhood center, which provided the common element as it focused on the specific issue of their discontinued work in this setting (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The selected instruments for this study included semistructured interviews, member checking, and an archival data checklist. The study data was coded for identifying similar components,

showing trends that lead to practitioner turnover. This study was unique because it gathered

perspectives and information from ECE educators who have already left the field. Theories

discovered from this group's responses were assumed to represent the broader ECE educator

group who have similar work conditions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach could identify

ideas for a specific strategy to decrease educator burnout; thus, decreasing turnover.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The within-site case was an early childhood education center (ECEC) in the Midwest.

The multi-classroom center is state-licensed and holds two national accreditations, serving

approximately 120 children with approximately 30 faculty members across the infant, toddler,

and preschool classes. This single site was the vehicle to research the issue (Stake, 1995; Yazan,

2015). Using this site provided a common baseline of industry regulation and job expectations

from which to collect the data and gain an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, 2014).

The knowledge gained from this case study serves as a resource for other similar programs

seeking to lessen educator turnover by potentially avoiding factors that cause burnout.

Twenty previous faculty members who worked at this ECE site were invited to

participate in the interview portion of the study, creating a diverse sample of educators'

perspectives. These educators all left their employment at the center of their own accord during

the specified four-year timeframe. These educators worked as either a teacher, assistant teacher,

or aide. All educators met the state requirements for their worked positions, demonstrating they

are appropriately identified as qualified ECE educators for this study. Diverse backgrounds and

positions were represented because of the varied history and roles of the participants. Some

ECEC faculty had worked for years in the ECE field, while others were new to ECE teaching.

Some had worked in other education arenas that had some correlation with the early childhood

field. Furthermore, a broad spectrum of education levels was present across participants. Some had advanced degrees while others had not completed college. While the maximum sample size was 20, the minimum goal of interview participants was 10 so that multiple perspectives were collected.

An initial introductory letter was given to the center's Board of Directors to communicate the purpose of the study, with the request for permission to conduct the study with participants who previously worked in the center. Once approval was received, an email list was provided by the site of eligible participants and a cover letter was sent via email to each of the potential participants. The cover letter provided an overview of the study, explained that the study had been approved by the site's Board of Directors and the Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board, and requested participation. Written communication notified the participants that each was invited because of his or her connection to the case and explained the instrumentation so they could decide if they would like to participate. Confidentiality was also guaranteed, as the cover letter explained that the interview responses were to be used for research purposes only with coding that does not explicitly identify the participants.

The participants were asked to participate in the interview process by responding to the study invitation within the noted timeline. A reply email to the researcher in response to the consent to participate indicated the educator's desire to participate and served as the agreement to schedule an interview. A reminder email was sent one week later to participants if there was no response by the first deadline. A lack of a response within the final deadline was considered a withdrawal from participation.

Instrumentation

Semistructured Interviews

Semistructured interviews provided opportunities for the descriptive data that characterizes descriptive case studies (Yazan, 2015; Zorn, 2010). This format was intended to prompt discussion with the identified sampling of participants from the case site (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews based on the set of semistructured questions. There was a common baseline of industry regulation and participant expectations for this data collection instrument because the sample participants worked in the same setting with the same job descriptions (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Responses were collected in a natural setting, as the participants participated in the interviews at the time and location of their choosing (Creswell, 2014). The researcher offered a designated interview location of the study room at a local county library. If a participant preferred another location, the researcher accommodated this for the comfort and convenience of the participant.

It was important to pose questions that invoked insight about each participant's personal experiences, which revealed perspectives from their ECE fieldwork at the case site. This method invited respondents to frame answers in their style (Creswell, 2014; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). These interviews gleaned a full description of the motives and opinions of the educators (Zorn, 2010). They provided the opportunity to explore emerging themes further, while ensuring the researcher consistently addressed the same issues in each interview (Yin, 2014; Zorn, 2010).

The semistructured interview questions probed the participants about the various aspects of their work at the ECEC, as well as solicited their current perspectives surrounding the ECE field (see Appendix A). The interviews were conducted following the established interview guide to ensure ethical and reliable delivery (see Appendix B). Discussed aspects included

participants' education, their perception of their work environment, their understanding of their job responsibilities, and their assessment of the importance of their work. A deadline was set for the last allowed date of participation. Though a time limit did not constrict the interview itself, it was anticipated that each interview would take 45 minutes. Thus, the researcher blocked one hour for each scheduled interview.

Interviewees reviewed and responded, per the Institutional Review Board's approved consent letter, before participating in the interview process. The interview protocol designed by the researcher allowed both recording and note-taking during each interview. An audio recording device was used with each interviewee's written and verbal permission. The researcher supplemented the recorded interviews with notes taken during the interview using Microsoft Word, which supported the recording of the participants' responses. The responses were shared only with the researcher. Everyone's interview had its unique coding key for the researcher's note gathering. All respondents were asked questions from the same interview questions following the same protocol, which ensured the same baseline. The researcher operated as an observer who noticed and interpreted the exhibited trends expressed through the interviews (Shuttleworth, 2008). The interview recordings were transcribed, and the scripts were saved onto the researcher's secure MAXQDA storage account. MAXQDA is a research software program that aided in the collection, organization, and analyzation of the research data. The audio-recordings were deleted when the written transcriptions were completed and stored.

Field Testing for Validity of Instrument

The interview questions and protocol were field-tested before conducting the study. Field testing is necessary to test the clarity of the interview questions and the effectiveness of the interview process for data collection (Yin, 2014). This process affirmed the appropriateness of

the instrumentation and the research procedure, establishing that the sampling frame and technique were effective (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The researcher invited two ECE experts to participate in a field test interview process. One pilot participant was the department chair of the school of education at a college in the Midwest.

The second pilot participant was the chair of graduate teacher education at a university in the Midwesst. Both are experts in the field of ECE and well-versed in graduate research procedures. The researcher received their feedback and applied their recommended revisions before conducting the study interviews (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The interview questions and protocol were then deemed suitable and valid for this research study.

Member Checking

The semistructured interviews were followed by member checking to review, clarify, and ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses (Koelsch, 2013). Member checking is used in qualitative studies to help the researcher improve the credibility and validity of the interview recordings (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Koelsch, 2013). The member check was accomplished through a phone call with each participant. If a participant refused audio-recording, the researcher needed to primarily rely on the member checking process to affirm accuracy with the original interview's typed notes (Creswell, 2014). The researcher presented summaries of the interviews to each participant. Next, the interviewees agreed with or redirected the summaries to reflect their authentic perspectives, as well as shared any additional views or opinions they had about the subject matter (Birt et al., 2016). This ensured that both parties were confident in the authenticity of the responses and the accuracy of the data collection (Creswell, 2014; Koelsch, 2013). These responses were charted within MAXQDA to synthesize with the

archival data, allowing the researcher to discover and affirm the emerging themes that addressed the study's purpose (Birt et al., 2016).

Archival Data Checklist

Archival data is information that already exists, often for the purpose of reporting and as an internal record. This information can inform research or an evaluation, deemed useful when it references a population that is being studied. Archival data is relevant when it helps the researcher answer the study's questions (Cuffaro, 2011). Archival data was collected to provide comparison of a similar population as the interview participants (Fawcett & Rabinowitz, 2008). This data was intended to show trends for the program's workforce as a whole, as a community-level indicator (Cuffaro, 2011).

The archival data document used was the Department of Human Services Personnel Information Form (PIF), which is a license-mandated document that summarizes the experience hours, education credits, and qualification level of educators in a licensed ECE center. This PIF document is completed for educators and remains in the internal record. A site representative reviewed PIF documents and used the checklist to summarize the position qualifications, total years of service at the site, total years of service in the ECE field, the highest level of education obtained, other credentials earned, and total clock hours earned of continuing education. No educators were identified by name or any specific identifier.

Summaries of the archival data were gathered and provided to the researcher as specified in the initial approval from the site's Board of Directors. The archival data checklist followed the researcher's checklist items for 15 PIF document reviews (see Appendix C). This archival data was assessed for commonalities of educators, including the following:

- Is there a standard length of time educators worked at this center?

- Did the highest degree level impact the educators' positions?

- Did educators only have a specific education level, such as an earned degree?

- Did position qualification have any impact or merit?

The data from the archival data checklist provided field trend information to compare with the interview responses while searching for overall trends (Cuffaro, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This information was graphed and cross-compared within the MAXQDA-stored data in search of connections and themes.

Identification of Attributes

Early childhood is defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children as children aged birth through eight years (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). An ECE educator is a practitioner who works per program-defined qualification with children across this age group in classes of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Qualification designations vary from state to state. This study's case site is in the state in the Midwest, which identifies ECE positions as a teacher, assistant teacher, or aide. These positions are identified by combinations of higher education and the number of hours of experience. Necessary attributes include creativity, flexibility, stamina, patience, and a nurturing disposition. All ECE educators must have a specialized set of qualifications, fostering unique skill sets in managing classrooms, and understanding child development specific to children ages zero to eight years. This study attempted to uncover why many of these uniquely-trained educators experience burnout and leave the field.

Data Analysis Procedures

Archival Data Checklist

Archival data was reviewed per the collection checklist provided by the case site representative to the researcher in a summary format (see Appendices C & D). The information was coded for confidentiality. This information collected was securely stored in the researcher's MAXQDA account, then matched and cross-compared with the interview data.

Interview Responses

A methodical approach to data analysis fosters authentic interpretation of the information gathered during the study (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). This approach was crucial in documenting and interpreting the interview data. Interview responses were recorded with the researcher's typed notes using Microsoft Word as well as audio-recording. All notes and interview recording transcriptions were stored in the researcher's MAXQDA account. This software program aided in producing visual models and organizing propositions that answered the research questions. Each participant had a dedicated set of interview transcripts that were highlighted for coding purposes and summarized into narrative sheets within MAXQDA. The audio recordings were deleted after they were transcribed. The transcription records will be securely stored for 3 years and then be destroyed.

Coding

Themes were represented in a pattern-matching analysis from what influenced each participant in his or her decision to leave this ECEC workplace (Creswell, 2014). An analysis guided the narrative to communicate the stories shown through the participants' interview responses (Harding, 2013; Yin, 2014). The interview responses presented the opinions and perceptions of the study group, which were interpreted as a sample of the ECE educator

population overall (Creswell, 2014). After careful review of the notes and transcripts, the information was coded using typologies that exposed emerging themes and determined patterns of categories (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Harding, 2013).

Insight regarding career success, education level, time worked, and disposition identification was documented and tracked for emerging themes within the participants' perceptions. A uniform code that applies to the full group of interviewees emerged, using vivo codes that were the exact words used by the participants, which presented nine general themes (Creswell, 2014). Spreadsheets within the researcher's secure MAXQDA account organized and presented clear and descriptive reports synthesized from how the response information was filtered, tagged, and weighted by theme. This process supported the analysis that was aligned with the research questions, which kept the study's data interpretation focused and succinct (Harding, 2013).

Limitations of the Research Design

This study was limited in that the directions had to remain clear and consistent in the implementation of timelines and response expectations. In this case study methodology, it was assumed the subjects wanted to volunteer to participate in the study and that they completed the interview authentically and honestly. It was anticipated that some participants would respond more thoroughly than others, depending on the capacity or level of personal transparency. There may also have been a response bias if the participants chose to participate or not, depending on the attached feelings toward the case study site and the request for information.

The case study investigated a specific group of this site's previous educators' perceptions of their workplace and roles as ECE professionals. Furthermore, the study utilized information and participants from one single site; therefore, the information was representative of just one set

of ECE educators who worked in the same venue. The compiled data and results are considered

a starting point of transferable results of practitioner perspectives, and the process used to gather

information in this study may be transferable for additional, broader studies.

<div align="center">**Validation**</div>

Credibility

The interview questions were appropriately piloted ahead of time and were thus valid for

this study. The interview responses were noted through audio-recording and the researcher's

note-taking. Writing and highlighting insight into the interview responses led to the

identification and clustering of topics to form categories and identifications. This process

demonstrated the researcher's attention to fully validating and utilizing the participants' shared

data (Creswell, 2014). Crafting the detailed description with the researcher's reflection

strengthened the credibility of the data (Yin, 2014). The researcher's understanding of the

topic's previous research, combined with the closeness of her fieldwork to that of the

participants, added value to this study's substance (Creswell, 2014). The researcher knows the

culture of the ECE field and could, therefore, channel attention to what was salient and relevant

to the study (Creswell, 2014; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz., 1991). During the

interviews, the researcher avoided expressing opinions or beliefs that could have presented bias

and influenced the interview responses. Careful transcribing of actual interview responses

supported this goal to avoid bias and ensure accuracy of data collection.

Dependability

The participants were direct representatives of the population being studied. Clearly

communicated intentions and directions, confidential data collection, and thorough analysis

supported dependability as the participants' perspectives were gathered and analyzed in this case

study (Yin, 2014). The researcher's dedication to confidential and accurate data collection supported the organization of the study findings, and her thoroughness demonstrated a sincere interest and careful consideration of the data. Systematic steps of analysis started with a thorough review of the interview responses, careful data analysis, and member checking. This plan ensured a dependable process (Shuttleworth, 2008). As a standard of dependability, the data was subject to triangulation through semistructured interviews, an archival data checklist, and member checking (Stake, 1995). This process provided layers of data that offered multi-faceted insight toward the detailed descriptions needed for this type of case study (Yin, 2014).

Expected Findings

There continues to be significant research showing that ECE educators may burn out and leave the field (Goddard et al., 2006; Goffin, 2013; Hale-Jinks et al., 2012; McCormick Center, 2014). In the search to discover the impact of burnout on the ECE educators in this case study, finding a reference to burnout in their responses was expected. Burnout may be influenced by low wages, long work hours, a stressful workplace environment, and lack of support (McCormick Center, 2014). These educators identified education level, financial considerations, personal disposition, and passion for the work as influences on their career positions. Because this study requested direct insight from the practitioners, the findings were expected to be authentic and directly relevant to understanding this issue in the ECE field. This both supported the current research as well as further highlighted what is needed to reverse the field's high burnout tendency. This learning could present a transferable theory that would influence the perspective of ECE program directors and higher education faculty members and could help understand how to support ECE educators toward longevity by avoiding the study's identified burnout influencers.

Ethical Issues in the Study

The research procedure for this case study was submitted to Concordia University–

Portland's Institutional Review Board for approval before the study began. The dissertation

committee was consulted during the study, which ensured compliance and ethical approaches.

The interview questions and protocol were appropriately piloted before the start of the study.

The stakeholders of the case study site were appropriately informed of the study and gave

permission for the study to be conducted. Each participant had the proper notification and

explanation through the informational cover letter and interview structure. There was no

intention to use deception in this study. Study participants were free to remove themselves from

the study at any time and stop participation for any reason, if they communicated this to the

researcher. Participants were ensured confidential participation as they were identified in notes

and reports alphanumerically, with numbers assigned to the interview participants and alphabet

letters used in the archival data checklists as pseudonyms.

Conflict of Interest Assessment

In this format, the researcher cautioned not to impose personal biases while still

demonstrating an understanding of the participants' experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The

researcher had no supervisory responsibility for these participants, and responses had no impact

on their current or future employment. The interviews were intentionally offered to be

conducted off-site, so the participants did not have to revisit the campus. This aided in

preserving confidentiality and ensuring comfort for the participants. The researcher offered the

designated interview location of the study room at a local county library. This provided a quiet

and appropriate interview venue while serving as an unbiased location. One participant preferred

another interview location, and this was accommodated for the participant's comfort and

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convenience, in accordance with the researcher's offer to accommodate such requests in respect to the participants.

Researcher's Position

To manage the researcher's potential bias while conducting the semistructured interviews, the researcher focused on following the same interview guide for each participant. This also ensured consistency across the data gathering. Using MAXQDA supported accurate transcription of the interviews to ensure there was no misinterpretation from the interview responses. The interview recordings were deleted after transcription and member checking to show the participants that their recordings will not be accessed beyond the study, and the transcriptions will be securely stored for 3 years in MAXQDA and then will be destroyed (Creswell, 2014). A site representative provided the archival data checklist summary to the researcher, with the reviewed documentation already deidentified for confidentiality. The researcher had no knowledge of whose archival documents had been reviewed. The anonymity of the interview participants' responses addressed the need for confidentiality in the data reporting, as the same alphanumeric coding that was originally used for identifying the participants continued through the researcher's collection and analyzation process. All documentation was kept confidential and secured within the researcher's dedicated MAXQDA account.

Summary

The problem addressed in this study is that many ECE educators experience burnout and leave the field, causing high rates of turnover across the ECE landscape. Using this single site case study provided a unique vehicle to generalize findings of a transferable theory that impacts this overall population. Interviewing ECE educators who have recently left this site of their own

accord allowed the researcher to collect data from a directly affected population, filling a gap in

field research. This study attempted to provide a real-life window into these educators'

perspectives to examine what may have produced feelings of burnout and see what factors drove

their desire to leave the ECE work site. By analyzing the insight shared through this case study,

the goal was to identify what influenced the study participants' resignation from the workplace

so that a strategy can be developed toward retaining quality ECE educators.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate ECE educators who have recently left their employment of their own accord at a specific ECE program and gather their perspectives about their motivations for leaving. A single case study was used for gaining an in-depth view from early childhood practitioners common to one similar work experience. The researcher collected and analyzed data to discover the perspectives of a sample of ECE educators who have left this site of their own accord. This chapter includes the data analysis and results found during the case study research that included interviews, member checking, and an archival data checklist. Interview questions used in this study were semistructured to encourage participants to share authentic experiences from their time at this site and in the ECE field. The researcher conducted the interviews and used the MAXQDA computer software tool to store information, assist in transcribing, code the data, and identify the resulting themes. These study results may offer insight into what influences ECE educators to leave the field and provide an understanding to support future initiatives toward retention of ECE field practitioners.

Description of the Sample

The target population for this study included former employees of an early childhood education center (ECEC) in the Midwest. The multi-classroom center is state-licensed and holds two national accreditations, serving approximately 120 children with approximately 30 faculty members across the infant, toddler, and preschool classes. This site served as the vehicle to research the issue (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). Using this site provided a common baseline of industry regulation and job expectations from which to collect the data and gain an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, 2014).

Race and Gender Demographics

The limited number of potential participants hindered the researcher's attempt to

represent a diverse population. All 10 interview participants were females. Concerning

ethnicity, seven of the interview participants identified as White, two identified as Black, and

one identified as Hispanic. Table 1 shows this information.

Table 1

Interview Participants by Ethnicity and Gender

Frequency	Ethnicity	Gender
7	White	Female
2	Black	Female
1	Hispanic	Female

Interview Participants

Twenty eligible educators, who had left their position at this site of their choosing across

a specified four year time period, were invited into the interview portion of the study. Ten

recruits volunteered to participate in the interview process. These educators participated in an

interview, followed by a member check to confirm the accuracy and validity of the transcript

(Birt et al., 2016). All interview participants consented to engage in the study and were given a

number code to protect their confidentiality. The qualified participants represented multiple

positions including one aide, one assistant teacher, and eight teachers. As all participants

identified as female, each is referred to as she or her in the data summaries. These participants'

length of employment at the site ranged from 3 months to 5 years. Table 2 shows the position

qualifications and length of time employed at the site of the interview participants.

Table 2

Position Qualifications and Employment Length of the Interview Participants

Participant	Qualification	Length of time at site
1	Teacher	2 years, 3 months
2	Teacher	2 years, 3 months
3	Teacher	2 years, 6 months
4	Assistant Teacher	4 years
5	Teacher	5 years
6	Teacher	2 years
7	Teacher	4 years
8	Teacher	9 months
9	Teacher	3 months
10	Aide	2 years

Participant 1 was teacher qualified according to state licensing rules and had a four year degree in education with an ECE emphasis from a private Christian university. She worked with toddlers, and had previous experience working in a similar ECE center setting in addition to student teaching in an elementary school. She left her work at the case site to start and manage a nonprofit organization serving underprivileged children in another country. She had returned to the area as a remote worker during the time of this study's interview process.

Participant 2 was teacher qualified and had a four year degree in social work from a state university. She worked with toddlers and had previous experience working in a similar ECE center setting. She left her work at the case site to work as a social worker at a nonprofit organization in another state. She had returned to the area to visit family during the time of this study's interview process.

Participant 3 had started as an assistant teacher and became teacher qualified during her employment at the case site. She had earned credits in liberal arts from a state university but had not completed a degree. She had previous experience working across various age groups as an aide at a similar ECE center setting and worked with older infants and young toddlers at this site. She left her work at the case site to work as an actress and print model.

Participant 4 had started as an aide and became assistant teacher qualified during her employment at the case site. The case site was her first experience working in an ECE center setting, and she worked in various classrooms across different age groups. She had worked at the site during her college breaks while she earned her bachelor's degree from a private Christian college in another state. After leaving her employment at the case site to become an accountant, she completed a master's degree in accounting.

Participant 5 was teacher qualified and had a bachelor's degree in elementary education from a private Christian college. She had previous teaching experience as an elementary school teacher and worked exclusively with infants at this site. Her previous work experiences included retail and hotel customer service positions. She left employment at this site to become a small retail business owner.

Participant 6 was assistant teacher qualified and became teacher qualified while working at the case site. Her previous work experiences included small business ownership and work as an interior designer, but she did not have previous experience working in an ECE setting. She had an associate degree in liberal arts from a community college. She left employment at the site to work as a retail brand manager.

Participant 7 was teacher qualified and worked with the older infants and young toddlers. She had a bachelor degree in family life education from a private Christian university and was a

nationally certified family life educator. She had identified no previous work experience and began this position to use the learning from her degree. She left her employment at the case site to be a stay-home mother.

Participant 8 was teacher qualified and worked with the older infants and younger toddlers. She had a master's degree in religious studies from a private university and had previously worked in retail management, with some pre-college experience working in an ECE setting as an aide. She left her employment at this case site to become a small business owner in another state. She had returned to the area at the time of the study's interview process.

Participant 9 was teacher qualified and worked with toddlers. She had a bachelor degree in elementary education with an ECE concentration as well as a graduate degree in K–12 administration. In addition to student teaching in an elementary school, she had previous experience teaching and directing in an ECE setting. She left her employment at the case site to work as a supervisor of youth programming at a gymnastics school.

Participant 10 was aide qualified and worked as a floater across various age groups. She was a high schooler when she began her work at the case site. She had no previous work experience but had provided individual child care services to some neighborhood families. She left the case site after her high school graduation to attend a private Christian university to major in nursing.

Archival Data Checklist

This study also included an archival data checklist, creating of a summary of employment information from 15 randomly selected former employees of the case site who had left their employment of their own accord across a period of four years. The document used was the Department of Human Services Personnel Information Form (PIF), which is a license-mandated

document that summarizes the experience hours, education credits, and qualification levels of educators in a licensed ECE center. This PIF document is completed for each educator and remains in the internal record.

The data collected from these forms highlighted employment length and qualification characteristics, providing a comparison of the general population of this study (Fawcett & Rabinowitz, 2008). Identifying information from these documents was never presented to the researcher. The summary from these PIF documents showed former educators' length of employment at the site ranged from 2 months to 7 years.

Summary of Sample

Interview participants were recruited based on their eligibility of being a former employee of the case study site, having left their employment at the site of their own accord across a specified four year time period. Twenty former employees were invited to participate in the interview process, and 10 agreed to participate. All study participants had worked in the qualification of aide, assistant teacher, or teacher, and represented varying levels of higher education completion. Degrees earned included Master's, Bachelor's, and Associate's degrees. Not all of the interview participants had completed a higher education degree at the time of the study. Length of time employed at the site varied from as few as 3 months to as long as 5 years. Table 3 provides an overview of the total 10 interview participant demographics concerning qualification, years worked at the site, and education level.

Table 3

Summary of Total Sample Interview Participants

Interview Participant Demographics	*n*
By qualification	
Teacher	8
Assistant Teacher	1
Aide	1
By length of time worked at site	
Less than 1 year	2
1–2 years	2
2–3 years	3
3–5 years	3
By education level	
Bachelor's degree or higher in education-related area	4
Bachelor's degree or higher in other area	3
Associate degree in education-related area	0
Associate degree in other area	1

Research Methodology and Analysis

The researcher used an explanatory case design for this qualitative study to gain an understanding as to why ECE educators leave the field. Yin (2014) defined this type of study as a tool to guide research in discovering why certain behavior happens. The focus of the study was to investigate the characteristics of this set of practitioners to understand what may have influenced their choices to stop working as early childhood educators at this site. Through this single-site study, the researcher could gather data regarding the perspectives of a group of ECE educators who left a specific site.

Coding using thematic analysis was used for the interview transcripts, which was processed and stored in the researcher's secure MAXQDA account. This inductive analysis approach allowed the researcher to gather and interpret the data toward a deeper understanding of the interview participants' perspectives and capture key themes to answer the research questions (Thomas, 2003). The participants' confidentiality was protected through the application of a coding system that identified the participants by numbers. All interview participants were provided with the Concordia IRB consent form that explained the study's purpose and the research process, and research activity did not begin until the signed consent form was received from each interview participant.

The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the perspectives of the ECE educators who have left the field?

- How does burnout potential impact ECE educators' perceptions of their work?

- What best practices could support ECE educators to overcome the challenges of the field that cause so many ECE educators to leave?

Interviews

With IRB approval from Concordia University, the researcher obtained project approval from the case site's Board of Directors after submitting a request detailing the study details. The researcher outlined and assured the confidentiality of the participants and any associated data. Interview participants' names were protected by using a coding system that identified participants by numbers. All participants were recruited from one case site, having previously worked at the site as a teacher, assistant teacher, or aide. All participants share the commonality that the site previously employed them and left that employment of their own accord sometime

between a specified four year time period. The researcher provided a consent form to each interview participant that included the purpose and process of the study.

An initial group of 20 possible eligible participants was recruited for the interview portion of the study. The response rate was 50%, as 10 recruited participants responded in agreement to engage in the interview process. By signing the consent form and returning it to the researcher, the participants agreed to be interviewed and have the interviews recorded with an audio recorder. Interviews were conducted over one month at the offered neutral site, except for one participant who requested to be interviewed at the case site. The recorded interviews lasted an average of 22 minutes.

The interview questions were designed to solicit information to answer the study's research questions, while allowing for open-ended responses based on each interviewee's perceptions of their experiences at the case site and in general. The researcher was guided by the interview question list (see Appendix A) and asked the same following eleven questions of each interviewee:

1. When did you work at this early childhood education center, and what was your position?

2. What is your current level of education or credentialing?

3. What initially led you to work at this center?

4. What did you enjoy the most about your work at this center?

5. What do you think contributed to your ability to fulfill your work position at this center?

6. What did you find most challenging during your employment at this center?

7. What do you think contributed to those challenges at this center?

8. Why did you leave your position at this center?

9. Do you still work in the early childhood education field? If so, what is your current work setting and position? If not, what is your current career field?

10. What do you think is the most challenging aspect of being an early childhood educator overall?

11. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about these topics?

During the interviews, the researcher typed the responses to each question and additional notes into a Microsoft Word document to help process meaning as participants quoted their answers. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim onto separate Microsoft Word documents to document the participants' responses accurately. The interview recordings and transcripts were filed into MAXQDA, accessible only by the researcher for 3 years before deleting the records. The coding of the gathered data was completed using MAXQDA to document themes from the interviews.

Member Checking

After the interviews were transcribed and filed, the researcher used member checking to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of the interviews. This process allowed the participants to confirm that their answers were recorded and interpreted accurately (Zorn, 2010). The member check was conducted by individual phone calls within one month of the interviews. For each participant, the researcher read the original answers that had been transcribed from the participant's interview. All 10 interviewees stated they had no additional information to share from their original interviews, and no changes or revisions to the original interview responses were requested. This data was added to the notes for each participant in MAXQDA, and the interview audio-recordings were deleted after the member checking confirmation.

Archival Data Checklist

The researcher also received a summary of archival data from an internal record document. This archival data was organized into checklists by a site representative to gain further insight into the characteristics of this sector of educators who had left their employment at this site of their own accord across a timeframe of four years. The intent was to summarize education, experience, credentials, and average length of employment at the case site. The archival data was used to identify trends of characteristics that impacted ECE educators' work longevity (Cuffaro, 2011; Fawcett & Rabinowitz, 2008).

The archival data document used was the Department of Human Services Personnel Information Form (PIF) summarizing experience hours, education credits, and qualification level of educators in a licensed ECE center. This PIF document is completed for educators and remains in the internal record. The site representative completed the archival data checklists using the PIF documents and presented the data summary (see Appendix D) to the researcher. The researcher had no knowledge of whose information was collected as it was already coded for deidentification. The researcher then entered the information in MAXQDA for organization, coding, and analysis. This information will be accessible only by the researcher for 3 years and then the records will be deleted.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the collected data using a thematic analysis coding process through MAXQDA. There were several themes discovered from this coding process that are presented in this section. Phases of thematic analysis—the examination of data to find common themes—were followed to become familiar with the data, apply codes, search for themes, review

the identified themes, and weave the data together to identify main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Summary of Findings

Through the member check, the researcher confirmed that all participants had approved the accuracy of the information in the transcripts from the interviews before beginning the thematic analysis, then proceeded to color code information using MAXQDA. Using this program allowed for detailed coding identification and alignment with the research questions. After multiple readings, the researcher became familiar with the data and identified multiple codes for labeling the data that corresponded with common elements of the participants' responses. The researcher reviewed each answer and matched it to an emerging theme, documenting when different responses highlighted similar ideas toward common themes.

Interviews

By analyzing the data, repeated elements and patterns were identified from the participants' interview responses. Repeated terms included *relationships, support, Christian, faith-based, families,* and *encouragement.* MAXQDA allowed for various shades of colors for coding, and the researcher moved from specific identifications toward connecting identifications that connected into common ideas. Fourteen elements were initially identified and coded by the researcher, which were then coded further toward common themes based on similarities. Table 4 identifies the initial codes, their corresponding colors, and the resulting common themes.

Table 4

Initial Codes that Developed Themes

Idea	Color Code	Resulting Common Theme
Faith-based (Christian)	Yellow	Faith-based setting
Personal connection	Purple	Relationships
Support	Teal	Encouraging support
Relationship with parents	Red	Relationships
Relationship with staff/coworkers	Turquoise	Relationships
Relationship with children	Light Blue	Relationships
Encouragement	Royal Blue	Encouraging support
Babysitter	Brown	Lack of professional value
Turnover/inconsistencies	Violet	Turnover and inconsistency
Child behavior	Maize	Children's challenging behavior
Burnout	Dark Green	Burnout tendencies
License regulation	Green	Turnover and inconsistency
Lack of support from parents	Lavender	Lack of professional value
Pay	Light Green	Low pay

Archival Data Checklist

Information was collected from already existing Personnel Information Forms (PIF) to gain further insight regarding the characteristics of ECE educators in comparison to the characteristics of the study's interview participants and to find common themes overall. The PIF's identified that the average employment length for educators was 2 years and 4 months at the site; similar to the interview participants' average employment length of 2 years and 6 months. Table 5 shows the number of earned degrees that were noted in the archival data forms. The percentage of the archival data forms showing an education-specific degree was 33%,

compared to the 40% of interview participants who had education-specific degrees. The

deduction was that the average employment length at the site remained consistent and the

number of educators with education-related degrees was also consistent between the archival

data summary information and the interview participants. No substantial influence was

discovered across education level and retention, experience level or retention, or credentialing

and retention. No additional themes emerged from the archival data checklist summary.

Table 5

Earned Degrees identified from the PIFs in the Archival Data Summary

n	Degree Type	Education Related
4	Associate's	1
4	Bachelor's	2
3	Master's	2
4	Some College	

Analysis Summary

After reviewing the final data and accompanying coding, the researcher could no longer

categorize additional codes, and major themes had emerged. A summary was produced that

details the themes that emerged from the study. Nine main themes emerged; four main themes

of motivators and five themes that represented the challenges that impacted the participants'

work. No significant difference of education earned or the experience level between the

interview participants and the archival data summary was found, and the education and

experience levels did not present significant impact or reveal important data in response to the

research questions. There were no substantial themes or differentiations discovered that

correlated with education level, experience level, or qualification status.

Presentation of Data and Results

This section presents the data analysis results organized in correspondence to the emerged themes. The researcher started with entering all data elements into the secured MAXQDA software account. Multiple categories were coded using the entered data. As the analysis became more deductive than inductive, categories were consolidated (Merriam, 2009). This point of saturation pointed to the main emergent themes, as no new themes were discovered while the data continued to replicate itself. The researcher identified themes in support of answering the three research questions. The themes detail the participants' perspective regarding their motivation to work at the site, the challenges they experienced in their work, and their overall perception of working as an ECE educator. Table 6 shows the main themes that emerged from this study's data. Four themes evolved that address both research questions one and three, and five themes emerged that address research question two.

Table 6

Developed Themes

Research Question	Color Code	Theme
One and Three	Red	Relationships
	Blue	Encouraging Support
	Gold	Faith-based Setting
	Teal	Positive Impact on the Children
Two	Black	Burnout Tendencies
	Maroon	Lack of Professional Value
	Yellow Green	Children's Challenging Behavior
	Dark Green	Low Pay
	Pink	Turnover and Inconsistency

Research Question One

The interview questions were created to provide a semistructured format and provide ample freedom for the participants to share authentic perspectives about their work and field experiences as well as their feelings. Because these interviewees had left their work as ECE educators at the site of their own accord within a recent period, their responses provided answers to research question one. Their responses presented two main perspectives; there were clearly identified positive motivators to their work, and there were also clearly defined negative challenges to their work. This section will continue to describe the perspectives that were identified from the data.

In the interview process, participants shared their perspectives on what had motivated them to work as an ECE educator, and particularly what they found positively motivating during their time of working at the case site. From the findings, four major themes emerged regarding the participants' identified motivations. The themes are relationships, encouraging support, faith-based setting, and seeing the positive impact on the children.

Theme one: Relationships. All interview participants identified "relationships" as a vital part of their experience at this site, influencing how relationships led them to work at the site and how they made their work enjoyable. These references equally included relationships with coworkers, the parents and families, and their students. Multiple participants identified that a previous relationship was what initially brought them to work at the site. Participant 4 stated that she "knew many people who worked at the center for many years, so got plugged into working at the center." Participants 2 and 10 shared that they were friends with someone who was already working at the site, so their friends connected them to the site for a job. Participants 5, 8, and 9 all identified that they had already known the site director from previous experiences,

and they were invited to work at the site through that connection. This evidence demonstrates that networking was a positive connector for recruiting and retaining ECE educators into a specific program.

Continuing to build relationships was central to the shared perspectives of what the interview participants enjoyed most about their work. Participant 1 stated the "strong sense of community between faculty and families" as the main reason for working at this site. Participant 2 responded that she "enjoyed getting to know all of the children enrolled at the center, being able to build a relationship with them all." Participant 7 stated that "it is all worth it when you see and create relationships with families and children." The connection with families and their children emerged as the main motivator for these educators' work at this center. Participants expressed they felt more fulfilled in their work when they were building meaningful relationships with the center's children and families.

Participant responses placed equal emphasis on the relationship building with the children and families as much as with their coworkers. Participant 4 identified "getting to know both the staff and children" as the main reason she enjoyed working at the site, and that she "got to work with some absolutely wonderful staff members." Some relationship-building was specific to the structure that two or more educators would be team teaching together in the same classroom and were spending eight or more hours together daily. Building positive relationships with these other educators offered them support and camaraderie, which helped their workday be more interactive and enjoyable. These relationships were integral in the encouraging support they identified across numerous aspects of the site.

Theme two: Encouraging support. Interview participants specifically identified elements of "encouraging support" as necessary to their desire to work at this site as well as having a positive impact on their work. Feeling supported provided additional motivation to continue building relationships and encouraged their desire to do their best work for the children and families in the program. Participant 1 "enjoyed the strong teacher support and constant encouragement." Participant 8 specifically mentioned that she "truly enjoyed the collaboration and support between all staff." She went on to state, "When you have a team which is supported in every aspect, they work harder for you." Participant 10 indicated that "the staff were approachable and open to ideas." Participant 7 shared that "it is very important in this career that teachers get support and recognition from their employers and coworkers." The supportive environment provided a sense of professional value for the team, demonstrating an investment in each other and the programming.

The interview participants expressed that encouraging support from administration and coworkers provided a positive impact on their work on this site. Participant 1 said she worked there because of the amazing leadership. Some responses specifically referenced the program director's influence, including her specific actions, on their motivation to work in this site. Participant 2 said the "director helped me find my passion and inspired me." Participant 5 described her appreciation of when "the leader rolls up her sleeves right alongside her staff, that speaks volumes of support to the staff." Participant 7 described how the director "started the little notes to leave for coworkers about positive things we saw they did or appreciated." Participant 10 stated that the director "was sure the school functioned at its best and stewarded the resources well." Participant 8 closed her interview by sharing she "enjoyed working with and under the direction" of the director. These are notable perspectives that indicate the site's

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leadership support was a factor in the workers' motivation and one of the supportive coworker relationships that made a positive difference in their desire to work at the site.

Theme three: Faith-based setting. Half of the participants specifically mentioned the "faith-based setting" of this Christian program as a major influencer on their original decision to work at the site and why they enjoyed the workplace. The case site is an ECE program that is a ministry of a Lutheran church, and, therefore, publicly promotes a Christian philosophy and faith-based curriculum and programming. This was a notable factor as half of the participants specifically addressed the faith element in their perspective sharing. Participant 1 stated that she "originally started working there because of the strong faith-based learning" and that she "enjoyed the faith-based education." Participant 3 shared she "was looking for a childcare center that was Christian based" and that she "enjoyed the enriched faith-filled work environment" and it was "so encouraging to [her] walk with Jesus Christ." Participant 5 shared that she enjoyed "having Bible studies for moms" on the site. Participant 6 simply stated that "the Christian focus" was what she enjoyed the most about her work at the center. Participant 7 stated that she "loved the Christian aspect" and "loved watching the children grow closer to and learn more about Jesus" as the main components that led her to work and stay working at the site. She went on to state that her "biggest joy was watching the children develop and learn new skills and knowledge in a Christian setting." These responses communicate a preference by these participants in seeking the Christian environment, considering the faith-base as their motivation in selecting this specific workplace and a source of their continued support.

As this is a single-site case study, the participants all shared the commonality that they worked in this faith-based environment. While it cannot be expected that all ECE programs have Christian influence or that all ECE educators would place similar value on the faith-based

components, it could be deducted that the ECE program's philosophy and purpose are a substantial aspect influencing educators' work perspectives.

Theme four: Positive impact on the children. Participants expressly indicated that the "positive impact on the children" they served was a motivator for working as an early childhood educator at this site. Participant 1 stated, "it is beautiful to watch children develop physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally." Participant 2 expanded, stating that "knowing the positive impact that I leave on the children" as a response to what inspired her as an educator. Participant 7 indicated that to "see the joy in children's eyes when they conquer a new skill" motivated her work efforts, while Participant 4 declared that she found joy in "seeing life through the eyes of the young children." The direct positive impact on children's growth and development was a motivator for these educators and perceived as a reward for their efforts. The participants perceived the overall impact on the children to be a visible and continued product of their efforts as educators. This was also fueled by the motivation of the Christian aspect for Participant 7, who stated, "I loved watching the children grow closer to and learn more about Jesus."

These four themes were the most prominent positive perspectives shared during the study. The participants continued to share their perspectives regarding the challenges of their work. This will be discussed in connection with research question two.

Research Question Two

This question was specifically addressed in question six of the semistructured interview. Burnout elements were specifically discussed in half of the participant responses. Participants included descriptions of their experience with terms related to burnout, including *overwhelming, consuming, hard to focus, sheer exhaustion, demanding, thankless*, and *challenging*. As the

literature review demonstrated, these terms represent feelings and characteristics that contribute to burnout. Respondents mentioned low pay and the lack of feeling of professional value. These elements contribute to burnout due to the nature of their discouraging impact. Five main themes emerged regarding the challenges that the participants experienced in their work as ECE educators. Burnout tendencies was identified as a central theme, though the other challenges are historical contributors to burnout, as identified in the literature review.

The semistructured interview process allowed participants to share their perspectives of what they found challenging in their work as ECE educators, and particularly what they found negatively challenging in working at the case site. In communicating the challenges, the following five themes emerged: Burnout tendencies, lack of professional value, children's challenging behavior, low pay, turnover, and inconsistency.

Theme one: Burnout tendencies. While there was not a question that specifically addressed the term "burnout," interview question six asked about the most challenging aspect of being an ECE educator. It is notable that burnout elements strongly shaped many of the participants' perspectives, as this was a prominent influencer on ECE educators evidenced in the literature and the main purpose of investigation for this study. Throughout the participant responses, the researcher identified concepts that relate or lead to burnout, as defined and identified in the literature review.

Some participants explicitly used the word "burnout" in their responses, while others identified other challenging factors that the literature review identified as potentially causing burnout. The exact terms *overwhelming, consuming, hard to focus, sheer exhaustion, demanding, thankless*, and *challenging* were gathered over multiple interview responses. These terms are all elements that tend to result in a burnout (McCormick Center, 2014). Participant 6

stated that "easy teacher burnout" was the most challenging aspect of being an ECE educator. Participant 3 shared that the work could be "very overwhelming with large class sizes" and that the work "consumes a lot of time" with "not much flexibility in a work schedule." Participant 4 thought the work was "a struggle sometimes, you never know what is going to be thrown at you" and "when challenging situations come up, it was hard to focus." Participant 5 stated that the "feeling of exhaustion some days was overwhelming."

Participant 7 stated that there "is a high burnout for many teachers" because of multiple aspects. She described her job as an ECE educator as "a very challenging, demanding, many times thankless job," but went on to say that "it is all worth it when you see and create the relationships with families and children." This leads back to the previously identified motivator of relationships as a necessary tool to combat such burnout. These perspectives answer research question two, confirming that burnout potential is directly impacting the perceptions of many ECE educators' work at this site.

Theme two: Lack of professional value. While the presence of encouraging support was the main theme from the participants' perspectives, participants also indicated they feel a lack of professional value in their roles as ECE educators. Responses included varying descriptions of how they feel they are inaccurately perceived as educators of very young children in the ECE setting. Participant 1 stated that "the majority of people believe child centers are glorified babysitters." Participant 7 shared a similar concept in stating that "many people look at you as a babysitter who just plays all day." Babysitting is a collective term that references casual, occasional, non-educational caregiving (NICHD, 2002). Therefore, the term does not equate the professional value of the specialized training and expertise that an ECE educator must have to work in a school or formal center setting. The reference to being considered a *babysitter*

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as an inaccurate label lacking professional value matches the field-wide perspectives indicated in the literature review.

Some participants explicitly stated words of encouragement to highlight the specialized skills and persona valued in this work. Participant 8 indicated that "early educators are the unsung heroes of this field." Participant 4 stated, "It takes a special type of person to do this day after day and work in this field." These types of perspectives point back to the earlier recognition of encouraging support as a motivator to work in the ECE educator role. Educators may support each other through their workplace relationships to compensate for the discrepancies in feeling valued by others professionally.

Theme three: Children's challenging behavior. It is expected that ECE educators will be trained and skilled at responding to children's challenging behaviors and that such a response will be a part of their everyday job responsibilities within the developmentally-appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Multiple participants responded with specific reference to children's challenging behavior as a problematic aspect of being an ECE educator. The behavior challenges were described as contributors to educators feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. Participant 4 shared that "it was a struggle sometimes, that sometimes kids listen and other times they simply don't." She went on to say that "it was hard to focus and deal with that one challenging situation because you are still responsible for caring for all the other kids." Participant 10 stated that the most challenging aspect was "knowing how to respond to children's behavior." Participants 10 and 9 both referenced the parents' responsiveness and the home connection as influencers on the children's behavior. Participant 10 noted there were "inconsistencies between what was going on at home and school in behavioral monitoring" while Participant 9 called out the "lack of support from parents, who are in denial of an underlying

behavior issue that needs to be addressed" as a most challenging aspect of being an ECE educator. This identifies that the earlier identified motivators of relationships and encouraging support could be valuable tools to potentially combat this consistent challenge.

Theme four: Low pay. While no interview participant had referenced pay rate as a motivator for working at the site, it is notable that multiple participants directly mentioned that "low pay" was a challenging element of working in the ECE field. Participant 6 indicated "lack of pay" as the most challenging aspect of being an early childhood educator. Participant 7 indicated that employment as an early childhood educator, in general, is a "low paying job." Participant 8 suggested that "the most challenging aspect is having a loyal staff who is paid better." These ideas about the field-wide challenge of low wages for ECE educators match the literature review's findings, which ties into the challenge of not feeling valued professionally, as wage amount can equate to a career's perceived worth.

Studies had suggested that program quality increased when the educators' wages were raised, but the raises were not enough to overcome the stressful situations, and ultimately, the educators burned out and left the field (Cleveland & Hyatt, 2002; McCormick Center, 2014; Rolland, 2014). This is supported by this study's participants' perspectives, as they shared their challenges and have indeed left the ECE field. It is important to note that all the interview participants are no longer working in the ECE field, though it is unknown if each study participant's new employment wages are higher than their previous rates of pay at the site.

Theme five: Turnover and inconsistency. Research continues to indicate ECE educator turnover to be at 40% per year, which is strongly fueled by the stressful working environments and low wages (Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007; Machado, 2008; McCormick Center, 2014). Therefore, it is notably supportive of the literature that participants specifically mentioned the

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elements of turnover or inconsistency as challenges to their work at this site. Additional research

reveals that overall, the ECE workforce is unstable because of the high turnover of staff due to

burnout (Porter, 2012; Rentzou, 2012). Participant 2 elaborated on this in stating, "The most

challenging aspect for me was teachers coming and going." Having to work with new and

different staff members is stressful, as they do not know the classroom routines. This participant

went on to explain, "Whether it was co-teacher going on vacation or just her personal life, having

to work with a sub was difficult."

The challenges of inconsistencies in policy and regulatory compliance were also

identified in the literature as additional stressors for ECE educators, contributing to burnout

tendencies (Chang, 2009; McCormick Center, 2014). Participant 6 identified "inconsistencies in

center rules/regulations" as the most challenging aspect of helping educators want to stay in their

roles. Participant 5 discussed her perspective of this regulation compliance at length, explaining

that she "sometimes felt that the numerous rules and regulations were a little extreme and

excessive." She continued to share that "it is as if we have to comply with rules that have been

put in place for those with little to no common sense, and it seems to belittle those with a caring,

nurturing spirit." This points to the motivators of relationships and encouraging support as

important focal points to equip educators toward success in their work and overcome these

stressful or belittling feelings expressed in the participants' perspectives. Educators who are

supporting each other to consistently implement regulatory practices will ideally feel less stress

and more success in their work environment (Rowland, 2014).

Research Question Three

The perceived challenges communicated by this study's interview participants were

identified with all themes aligning with the literature's identified trends. These challenges are

now deemed to be the "challenges of the field" that research question three is referencing. To answer research question three, the researcher returned to the four themes of motivators, identified as support for answering research question one. The participants' perspectives provided indicators of motivation, support, and success as decisive factors in their previous roles at this site.

The theme elements of *relationships, encouraging support, faith-based setting*, and *positive impact on the children* were strongly and repeatedly identified by the participants who worked at this site as to what they found enjoyable in their work as ECE educators. Participant 7 referenced having "a passion for this career" as influencing the relationship building with the children and families, which kept her working at this site. Participant 1 comprehensively acknowledged that "the strong teacher support, faith-based education, community between faculty and families, and constant encouragement" kept her working at the site. While the Christian, faith-based aspect is specific to the study site and cannot be considered representative of the entire early childhood education field, it could indicate that an early childhood program's specific philosophy and purpose are important factors in motivating and shaping the employed educators' practices.

If the identified motivators discovered from this study were prioritized, developed, and well-supported in each ECE setting, then the educators could use these tools to overcome the challenges toward burnout as strongly identified in the answers to research question two. This study's identified challenges all detract from the strength of the identified motivators, so the motivators must be elevated while the challenges are diminished to overcome them in response to research question three.

Summary

These research findings provided insight into the perceptions of early childhood educators who have left the ECE field. The purpose of this case study was to discover the perspectives of former employees who left the early childhood center case site of their own accord across a four year period. Earned education and experience level were not identified as having a prominent impact on the retention factor of the ECE educators at this site, as discovered through analysis of the archival data checklist sample. Data collected from the interviews provided insight from the participants' perspectives regarding what motivated them in their work, what they found challenging in their work, and what characteristics they shared. Elements of burnout were discovered as strong influencers, as were common themes of motivation and challenges that shaped the overall perspective of their work. The study's results and conclusions are shared in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate ECE educators who have recently left their employment of their own accord in a specific ECE program and examine why they left. The study results offer insight into why ECE educators leave the field and provide an understanding to support future initiatives toward retention of ECE field practitioners. This study showed there are identifiable motivators and challenges in working as an early childhood educator. The participants' reported motivators and challenges supported those established in the literature.

This chapter provides a summary with a discussion of the study's results. It includes an evaluation of the results in relation to the literature on what motivates ECE educators and what elevates burnout potential across the ECE field. The chapter includes the study's limitations and the implications for the field's practices, policies, and theories. The recommendations for further research support increased understanding of what ECE educators perceive about their work, what these educators need for success in their roles, and how the field can respond to strengthen the motivators and resolve the field challenges.

Summary of the Results

The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the perspectives of the ECE educators who have left the field?

- How does burnout potential impact ECE educators' perceptions of their work?

- What best practices could support ECE educators to overcome the challenges of the field that cause so many ECE educators to leave?

The questions were intended to investigate ECE educators who have recently left their employment of their own accord at a specific ECE program and examine why they left. The

present study provided insight into why ECE educators leave the field toward understanding the perceptions of this specific population of educators. The interview process provided descriptive data regarding the participants' perspectives. The archival data checklist summary offered information regarding educators' characteristics to investigate if common characteristics exist in this representation of ECE educators. The commonalities between the samples included the average employment time as 2 years and 6 months, with over one-third of the sample having earned an education-related college degree, and the same percentage of professional development hours earned across their years working in the ECE field. The level of education, amount of experience, and type of credentials did not reveal a specific impact on the educators' interview responses or retention level.

The results showed that this sample of ECE educators found some aspects of their work motivating, while other aspects were challenging. These educators identified relationships, encouraging support, the faith-base of the program, and the participants' positive impact on the children as key motivators in their decisions to work at this site. This included relationships with the children they cared for, the family members of those children, and their coworkers at the site. The interview data showed that multiple participants recognized these themes as necessary in their work experience. These same educators also identified burnout tendencies, a lack of professional value, children's challenging behavior, low pay, staff turnover, and inconsistency in following regulation as common challenges in their experiences at this site. The data results showed that multiple participants shared these perspectives and noted their frustration with the impact of these challenges to their work. The emerged themes reflected and supported the field-wide motivators and challenges, as identified in the literature.

Discussion of the Results

The first research question asked about the perspectives of the ECE educators who have

left the field. Results from the present study demonstrated that these educators enjoyed the

relationships, the support from the site, and the purpose and impact of their work. These

relationships included those with the children they cared for, the family members of those

children, and their coworkers at the site.

Perceived Motivators Impacting ECE Educators' Work

The following four themes were identified that showed motivators for the educators'

work in this setting: relationships, the encouraging support, the faith-base of the program, and

the positive impact they had on the children.

Relationships. All participating interviewees spoke to the value of the relationships they

built and established in their work. This included relationships with the children they cared for,

the family members of those children, and their coworkers at the site. These different

relationships created connections across the ECE program and made work enjoyable as well as

valued. One participant stated multiple times that there was a "strong sense of community"

because of the network of relationships. Another participant expressed that she "enjoyed being

able to build a relationship with them all." This relational aspect motivated the educators in their

work at this site, promoting the theoretical foundation of trust and attachment (Mooney, 2000).

Encouraging support. The interviewees' responses included multiple references to

feeling encouraged and supported. The educators discussed the support they felt from the

administration, particularly the center director, and their coworkers. A participant identified that

she appreciated that the director "showed care, compassion, and concern for the staff" and "the

sense of teamwork was so evident." Another participant identified a specific site experience of

receiving personal notes from coworkers about "positive things they saw or appreciated that we did." This support contributed to the sense of community that was developed through the relationships.

Faith-base. The faith-based philosophy, particularly the Christian culture, was explicitly identified by the interview participants as the main motivator. It was a specific reason the educators sought employment at this specific site, and an element they valued and appreciated about their work in this program. Responses indicated that the faith-based emphasis influenced the workplace culture, shaped the educational programming, and inspired their sense of purpose as educators at this site. One participant voiced that she was looking for a center that was "Christian-based" and that the "faith-filled work environment was so encouraging." Another participant stated that the "Christian focus" was what she enjoyed most about her work at this center. There was a strong perspective that the mission of the workplace was an important motivator. While all ECE educators will not be looking for a specifically Christian-based program, the study results suggest that educators can benefit from the workplace's established sense of purpose and well-defined philosophy of programming.

Positive impact on the children. The final motivation-related theme produced from this research was that participants valued the positive impact their work had on the children. This was a motivator that provided additional purpose and a sense of productivity to their work at this site. One participant stated that "it is beautiful to watch children develop" across developmental domains. Another participant shared that "the children thrived in the safe and loving environment" the educators were providing at this program. One interviewee said her "biggest joy was watching the children develop and learn new skills." The impact of their teaching

efforts on the program's children gave these educators satisfaction and enjoyment in their work at the site.

Perceived Challenges Impacting ECE Educators' Work

The results also showed that these educators felt challenged by some aspects of the work duties and the workplace. Interview participants shared their feelings, stating that as early childhood educators, they did not feel valued professionally. They also expressed frustration with children's challenging behavior. These educators shared that they worked hard for the low pay while perceiving they were compensating for the site's turnover and inconsistency.

Lack of professional value. Multiple interview participants shared that they felt they were not valued professionally by the parents or the public overall. One participant identified "being misunderstood by many people" and "people do not give us the credit we deserve" as the most challenging aspect of her work. She mentioned that she felt viewed as a "glorified babysitter," mirroring another participant's identification that "many people look at you as just a babysitter who just plays all day." That participant went on to say that it is imperative in this career that "teachers get recognition" from the community, while another participant declared that "early educators are the unsung heroes" of the education field.

Children's challenging behavior. Multiple participants also identified children's behavior as stressful and difficult to manage. One participant emphasized that she struggled to "keep a positive attitude even in trying situations" with the children, as it "was hard to focus and deal with that one" because the educator is "still responsible for caring for all the other kids." Another participant identified "not knowing how to respond to some children" as the most challenging aspect of her work at the site. The struggle to remain patient and appropriately-responsive to these children was identified as an element of potential burnout tendency.

Low pay. While no participants specifically identified their pay rate at this site to be a deciding factor in why they chose to leave their employment, participants mentioned low pay as the most challenging aspect of being an early childhood educator overall. Their stated descriptions of "lack of pay," being a "low paying job," and trying to "pay better than other centers" demonstrate that the pay scale is commonly known to be modest for early childhood educators and a critical factor in these educators' perspectives.

Turnover and inconsistency. Multiple participants mentioned staff turnover as stressful and challenging for their work. One participant identified "teachers coming and going" as the most challenging aspect of her work. She stated that having to work with a substitute teacher when the regular teachers were gone was stressful for her and the children. Other participants mentioned the "inconsistencies" of staffing as challenging, with one explicitly stating there are "not enough teachers." This inconsistency challenges the research proof that stable, consistent ECE educators support the relationship building that is necessary for high-quality ECE impact.

Results: Research Question Two

The second research question asked about how burnout potential impacts ECE educators' perceptions of their work. No participant specifically stated that "burnout" was the reason for their choice to leave their employment at this site, but burnout tendencies emerged as a strong theme from the interview data. Half of the participants included specific descriptions of their experience with terms impacting burnout, including terms such as *overwhelming, consuming, hard to focus, sheer exhaustion, demanding, thankless*, and *challenging*. These terms replicated the identifications from the literature of burnout tendencies across the field. The elements of low pay and lack of feeling valued professionally are contributors to burnout due to the nature of their discouraging impact. There is a potential of burnout as identified by the perceived

challenges that negatively impacted these educators' experiences, as evidenced by their responses.

Results: Research Question Three

The third research question asked what best practices could support ECE educators to overcome the challenges of the field that cause many of them to leave the field. The archival data checklist sample mirrored the representation of the interview participants, with the mean time worked at this site being two and one-half years across both samples. The number represented in the sample, which had earned education-related higher education degrees, was also similar between sample groups, representing between 35%-40% of participants. The present study's data did not indicate that education and training had a significant impact on the educators' work performance or their choice to leave their employment at the workplace.

As previously identified in relation to research question one, participants shared specific identifications of both motivators and challenges in the field. This data heightens awareness regarding those challenges so that stakeholders can address them as valid, consistent, and current practitioner concerns. The identified motivators are then highlighted as essential components to build successful workplace environments and results. Building upon the motivators could provide tools and benefits that aid in overcoming the identified challenges.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Important Impact of Quality ECE

The literature revealed that professionalism in the ECE field is grounded on the educators' success in building relationships with their young students through varied, quality learning experiences (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Douglass, 2017). This aligns with Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of trust and attachment that is demonstrated when educators can

develop strong and sustained relationships with their students. The participants in the present study indicated that they felt fulfilled in their work when they had abundant and reliable relationships across the workplace, reflecting the research discussed in Chapter 2 (Mooney, 2000; Rolland, 2014; Whitebook, 2003). Relationships were identified to be the primary motivator for their work as educators and at this site. Through these relationships, the educators perceived that they played a critical role in supporting and building young children's development via the teachers' level of attachment (Burchinal et al., 2000; Groark et al., 2014). This was communicated as highly motivating to the educators in their continued developmentally-appropriate work at this site, which is consistent with the literature (Bechtold, 2011; NAEYC, 2015).

Colker (2008) used the literature review, experiential knowledge, and surveys of 43 ECE educators to identify their personal beliefs that attracted them to the ECE field. The desire to make a difference in children's lives was the most substantial characteristic revealed in Colker's (2008) study, which aligns with the present study's emerged theme that participants view the positive impact on the children as the main motivator and contributor to quality ECE.

Influence of Field Practices

The literature demonstrated that an agreement of best practices, including identification of a minimum education level for teachers, has sustained over multiple decades. Field research identifies that these factors of education and experience levels may be precursors to successful teacher performance, producing higher-quality learning experiences for children and increased sustainability and retention of quality educators (Colker, 2008; Da Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007; NAEYC, 2015). The present study did not identify that education level or experience level specifically impacted the participants' work performance, success, or longevity at the site. Out

of all the present study's interview participants, not one still works in the ECE field. Therefore, the literature's understanding that educators will leave one program to work at a higher-paying one, even if the quality is not comparable (Cleveland & Hyatt, 2002; Fuller & Strath, 2001; Goffin, 2013; McCormick Center, 2014; Torquati et al., 2007), was not directly supported in the present study.

Influence of Environment's Expectations

The literature emphasizes that while employers focus on recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators, the social-emotional environment of the workplace may define the climate (Klinkner et al., 2005). ECE workers must also each employ their sense of motivation to overcome the challenges of the fieldwork (Douglass, 2017; Klinkner et al., 2005; Rolfe, 2005). The present study demonstrated that the workplace expectations combined with the encouraging support of the site and its leadership could be the main motivator influencing ECE educators. As the main theme identified through the perspectives of the interview participants, the workplace and its environment may strongly impact the educators' desire to select and work at a site. This aligns with the literature's theme of emphasizing a healthy social-emotional environment (Klinkner et al., 2005).

Contributing Factors to ECE Educator Burnout

The literature systemically pointed to stress, emotional exhaustion, and low wages as the consistent influencers on educator burnout. These trends are decades old, and while they are consistently evidenced, they still lack proactive address (Blau, 1992; Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007; McCormick Center, 2014). In multiple studies using the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators' Survey (MBI-ES), emotional exhaustion was the most prevalent contributor to burnout, caused by experiences of unpleasant emotions and the teachers' inabilities to cope with

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the emotional stress (Chang, 2009; McCormick Center, 2014). This has identified a need for teachers to improve their skills at managing emotions, to ensure adequate coping to avoid burnout, and to remain in the field. Educator qualifications and workplace climates have been suggested as influential on this coping ability (Chang, 2009; McMullen et al., 2004; Witherell, 2013). While the present study did not point to educator qualifications, such as level of education and experience, as having an impact on success and retention at this site, the identified motivators identified elements of the workplace climate as noticed and important. The present study's participants' responses included the descriptors *overwhelming, consuming, hard to focus, sheer exhaustion, demanding, thankless*, and *challenging*. These facets aligned with the literature's identification of the tendencies of burnout in the ECE environment, demonstrating that burnout is a concern of this group of ECE educators, pointing to a continued trend that is detrimental to the ECE field.

The Epidemic of ECE Educator Turnover

The present case study's sample demographics aligned with the literature's statistics. Research has indicated continued ECE educator turnover of 40% per year, strongly fueled by the challenging working environments and low wages (Goffin, 2013; Kagan et al., 2007; Machado, 2008; McCormick Center, 2014). This turnover trend is reflected in the present case study's site. Twenty-three of this site's teachers have left their positions over the past four years, which is a 44% overall turnover in this workplace staff within that time. Across a period of four years, almost six teachers have left each year, demonstrating the continued trend. This contributes to the high rate of field turnover that contributes to lower quality experiences for children (Porter, 2012; Rentzou, 2012).

Larger sample sizes produced more information and were generally deemed to be strongly reliable throughout the literature. Rolland's (2014) study had a small sample size but produced in-depth information. Rolland's sample size was the same size as the present case study's interview participant group. Rolland's mixed-method study of 10 ECE teachers was one year long. It included an extensive literature review and the use of two survey studies, examining multiple aspects of practitioner characteristics and perspectives. Rolland (2014) succeeded in providing comprehensive information about risks for educators and the resulting connections to quality in the field, demonstrating a continued need to address practitioner burnout. Similarly, the present case study elicited the challenges the educators experienced and their perspective of burnout tendencies that were indeed manifested in their work.

The literature affirmed that ECE educators often leave their workplaces to work in other fields where they can make more money (Fuller & Strath, 2001; Goffin, 2013; Torquati et al., 2007). The impact of low pay and meager benefits proves to be unattractive for quality educators, especially considering the high stress of the work. Researchers have argued that there will be a continued discrepancy of quality while the wages are low because quality educators are not motivated by pay to stay in the field (French, 2010; Kagan et al., 2007; Marshall et al., 2005). While no participants in the present case study directly identified a wage connection as the reason for leaving this workplace, it is important to note that some participants identified low wages as a challenging issue, and they all left to work in a different career field.

Limitations

The following limitations have been identified regarding the present study: the study focuses on ECE educators from only one site, the reliance on each participant's desire to participate, the semistructured interview format, and the possibility of participant bias. As a

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single-site case study, the sample was limited to a specific group of ECE educators who were connected to this ECE center and representative of one geographic location. The sample did not represent all ECE educators across varying types of ECE settings, experiences, and locations. Therefore, this data must be considered applicable to the participants of this single site.

The present study relied on the responsiveness of the recruited participants. Out of the 20 recruited eligible educators for the interview portion, one half responded and participated in the study. Reliability could have been raised if more of the recruited educators had chosen to participate, as there would have been a larger sample size. Using a multi-site case study model could have increased the number and diversity of participants in the sample, providing broader perspectives on the topics.

The semistructured interview format provided limitations because of the variation in both the length and depth of participants' answers. Some interviewees shared more information than others, leading the researcher to interpret the data based on as much perspective as was shared by each participant. The researcher could not guarantee that each participant answered the questions honestly or thoroughly.

There was a possibility of potential participant bias. Because the interview participants had worked in the same field of work as the researcher, they may have assumed the researcher would interpret their answers in a certain way. Participants may have relied on the researcher's understanding of common terminology or typical systems within early childhood programming and may not have explained their answers or perceptions further. Because participants were aware of the study's purpose, they may have responded with intent to provide answers to what they perceived to be the researcher's intended results.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Practice

  The perspectives gathered from the present study's ECE educators who have left the field of their own accord suggest that burnout is still the main field concern, and turnover is still an unfortunate trend. The interview participants offered valuable identifications of motivators that positively supported their efforts as ECE educators, as well as described the challenges that negatively impacted their work. While there are positive aspects to working as an ECE educator, the challenges must be overcome by either an elevation of the motivators' impact or active combat of the challenges. These participants identified burnout as a real threat to their work, which matches the problem identified in the literature. If ECE educators continue to burnout and leave the field, children and families will continue to suffer from the lack of educator consistency and its hindrance to relationships toward trust and attachment (Groark et al., 2014).

  The ECE field stakeholders should consider how to increase the positive motivators across ECE arenas and practitioner preparation programs while acknowledging and directly addressing the identified challenges that influence educators toward burnout. This could be particularly vital for program leaders due to their direct impact on teams of ECE educators. Program administrators can benefit from this research that influences their cultures of encouraging support and relationship-building within their workplaces. Administrators should equally be aware of the burnout tendencies and strive to provide healthy, stress-free, and well-remunerated workplace experiences for practitioners.

  This awareness can build through additional program assessments, employee surveys, and classroom observations. Program directors and school administrators may utilize assessment tools such as stress surveys and employee satisfaction surveys to assess educators' perspectives

and attitudes about the workplace and their roles. Supervisors may schedule regular and intentional classroom observations to assess educators' performance and identify where resources may be channeled to increase classroom management proficiency. Purposefully incorporating these opportunities for feedback, assessment, and response may increase administrators' awareness so they can incorporate best practices and useful responses to ensure the educators are feeling encouraged and supported.

Policy

Since the present case study only represented one group of 10 ECE educators from a typical program and geographic area, it cannot be considered inclusive of the entire ECE field. Nevertheless, the present study's results aligned with the literature and point to continued trends within the ECE field. The interview participants shared that they are impacted by research-illuminated challenges, influenced mainly by burnout tendencies. The impact of low wages and lack of feeling valued professionally were clearly and repeatedly articulated as trending among the participants' responses. This matches the concerns discussed in the literature regarding the negative impacts on the quality of the ECE landscape. Policymakers across geographic areas should be aware of the continued trends that are impacting the ECE arm of education.

Policymakers have a direct impact on the regulation of multiple ECE programs, as well as a direct impact on the funding streams that are distributed to the ECE demographics impacting workplace quality and educator earnings. ECE educators should be actively advocating toward improvements in these areas, sharing their perspectives with their local policymakers and other direct stakeholders. As these practitioner testimonies increase awareness of the research and current trends, the policy may be swayed toward improving the impact of the motivators and

combatting the challenges so that more ECE educators feel equipped and encouraged to continue working in the ECE field.

Through testimonies and legislation suggestions, educators can offer rule and system changes, as well as budget insight, to legislators for implementation. Educators may personally share real stories directly from the field with their assigned legislators, developing relationships as constituents. Legislators will gain knowledge about the ECE field's realities and needs surrounding work environments and wages, creating informed platforms to mesh with research in crafting legislation to directly impact the ECE arena.

Theory

The present study's results support Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of trust and attachment manifested when educators develop relationships with their students. ECE educators feel more fulfilled in their work when they can provide stability as well as reliable relationships with their student body (Mooney, 2000; Rolland, 2014; Whitebook, 2003). Erikson (1950) believed that in the earliest years of life, mainly during early childhood, patterns of trust or mistrust are formed that control or at least influence a person's actions or interactions for the rest of his or her life. This level of influence stresses the value of teacher consistency for extended periods (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Faris & McCarroll, 2010). Through these relationships, educators play a critical role in supporting and building young children's development via the teachers' level of attachment (Burchinal et al., 2000; Groark et al., 2014). This theory was supported by the present case study's results. The interview participants consistently identified the relationship element as the strongest motivator for their work as ECE educators. Their relationships and the resulting positive impact on the children they taught provided a definite purpose for their work.

This theory is interrupted by the increasing number of ECE educators who are becoming victims of burnout due to the identified factors of low wages and stressful work environments (Goddard et al., 2006; Nagel & Brown, 2003; Rentzou, 2012; Witherell, 2013). The specific information gathered directly from the present study's participants can highlight ways to support these educators so they will avoid burnout. The potential of increasing the retention of well-supported, quality educators will provide a robust framework to support trust and attachment in the ECE setting (NAEYC, 2015; Rolland, 2014).

Recommendations for Future Research

Areas for Improvement

Areas for improvement of this study include the use of additional data collection tools, such as questionnaires or surveys. Utilizing additional tools to solicit educators' perspectives could provide additional views about desired topics. The researcher could expand the questions for more open-ended responses or use formatting that gathers more specific insight about certain topics. The researcher could also implement follow-up activities to continue the process of gathering data from the participants. Furthermore, the study could be elongated to gather feedback from participants for a more extended period to see if their perspectives change over time.

Participants

This study could be replicated with a larger sample size, either by recruiting a larger number of participants or by studying multiple sites. Expanding the sample would provide an opportunity for increasing the demographic represented and gaining the perspectives of a more diverse group of ECE educators. This could provide a more productive study that may present additional motivators or challenges that were not addressed by the initial 10 interview

participants. Furthermore, this could provide more universally important data regarding the trends of ECE educators and their needs overall.

Additional Recommendations

Further research could be conducted to get a more detailed understanding of how much the motivators positively impact the retention of ECE educators, and if the motivators can outweigh the challenges. Additional research may identify additional challenges or more specific workplace causes of burnout tendencies. These motivators and challenges may have varying impacts across different demographics and within different program sizes and styles. A lived experience study could be used as an additional qualitative phenomenological research tool to represent the experiences and choices of a sample of ECE educators. Such a study could more fully test if educators' education and experience levels have an impact on their ability to overcome the challenges and continue working in the ECE field.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate ECE educators who have recently left their employment of their own accord at one specific ECE program and examine why they left. The present study's results, as discussed in this chapter, offer insight into what influenced this group of ECE educators who left the field and increase the understanding to support future initiatives toward retention of ECE field practitioners. This study is important in that it showed there are identifiable motivators and declared challenges in working as an ECE educator. The participants' shared perspectives supported those elements established in the literature, particularly regarding the motivator of relationships and the potential of educator burnout. It was a unique study because it addressed a gap of gathering data directly from this population of educators after they had left the field. Educators were invited to share their perspectives about

their authentic work experiences, discussing what motivated them and what challenged them. The researcher was able to gather information directly from the population and gather data to compare with the literature's perspective.

The first research question investigated the perspectives of ECE educators who have left the field. The participants in the present study had been working at the site for an average of 2 years and 6 months, and none of the participants were continuing to work directly in the ECE field at the time of the interview. Over one-third of the sample had earned an education-related higher education degree, which compared similarly to the archival data collected from the Personnel Information Forms. Participants candidly identified specific motivators and challenges, and these aligned with the literature's identified factors and trends. Their insight demonstrated that while there were positive elements to working as an ECE educator, there were substantial challenges to the work that increased the potential for burnout. This addressed the second research question, which specifically asked how burnout potential impacts ECE educators' perceptions of their work. This question was intended to further investigate the information discovered in the literature review that prominently highlighted burnout as a field-wide issue.

The interview participants specifically identified multiple elements that were directly related to burnout tendencies. This aligns with the literature's definitions and supports the prevalence of burnout across the ECE field. The present study answered that the potential for burnout was experienced within this site and caused a negative impact on the educators' workplace perceptions. The interviews produced multiple responses that identified burnout tendencies within the participants' work experiences.

The third research question asked what best practices ECE educators could overcome the challenges that cause many of them to leave the field. The interview participants identified specific challenges they had experienced in this workplace, though they did not identify all of them as the reasons they left the workplace or the field overall. This data provides identification of the elements that ECE leaders should be aware of and address so that they can combat the challenges field-wide through encouraging best practices and working together to find solutions for burnout and turnover. If such challenges are recognized and remedied, the motivators will have a more positive impact with the goal of better retention for increasing quality across the ECE field.

This dissertation was designed to investigate the issue of ECE educator turnover and discover how the potential of burnout impacts educators' decision to leave the field. This qualitative case study supported the conceptual framework of Erikson's (1950) trust and attachment as necessary for high-quality ECE experiences for both children and their educators, as evidenced through the psychosocial stages. The literature supports that retention of quality ECE educators is beneficial and necessary for developing relationships that enhance children's developmental growth in early childhood settings. The literature also affirmed that burnout and turnover continue to be common problems providing negative impact on the ECE field, directly impacting the ECE workforce.

Overall this study addressed the gap in gathering the perspectives and characteristics of ECE educators who have left the field of their own accord. The study's goals was to better understand what motivated this group of educators, what challenged them, and what influenced their decision to leave their work in ECE. This sector of educators was intentionally given a voice through this study, to share their perceptions of the ECE field. In fulfilling the study's

design, insight is offered toward increasing educator retention toward a higher quality ECE

landscape.

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Appendix A: Interview Question List

1. When did you work at this early childhood education center, and what was your position?

2. What is your current level of education or credentialing?

3. What initially led you to work at this center?

4. What did you enjoy the most about your work at this center?

5. What do you think contributed to your ability to fulfill your work position at this center?

6. What did you find most challenging during your employment at this center?

7. What do you think contributed to those challenges at this center?

8. Why did you leave your position at this center?

9. Do you still work in the early childhood education field? If so, what is your current work setting and position? If not, what is your current career field?

10. What do you think is the most challenging aspect of being an early childhood educator overall?

11. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about these topics?

Appendix B: Semistructured Face-to-Face Interview Guide

I. Descriptive Information

   a. Participant contact information

   b. Code assigned for participant

   c. Date

   d. Interview start and end times

   e. Name of audio file

II. Opening

   a. Thank participant, state the purpose of the study

   b. Verbally confirm participant's consent to match the written consent, specifically requesting permission to record the interview

III. Overview Questions

   a. Opening questions

      1. When did you work at this early childhood education center, and what was your position?

      2. What is your current level of education or credentialing?

   b. Case-specific questions

      1. What initially led you to work at this center?

      2. What did you enjoy the most about your work at this center?

      3. What do you think contributed to your ability to fulfill your work position at this center?

      4. What did you find most challenging during your employment at this center?

      5. What do you think contributed to those challenges at this center?

6. Why did you leave your position at this center?

c. Final questions

1. Do you still work in the early childhood education field? If so, what is your current work setting and position? If not, what is your current career field?

2. What do you think is the most challenging aspect of being an early childhood educator overall?

3. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about these topics?

IV. Closing

a. Thank participant, restate the purpose of the study

b. Inform participant of next steps

1. Distribution of information

2. Member checking process

c. Cease recording, review researcher notes

Appendix C: Archival Data Checklist

Document code:

Date of access to document:

DOCUMENT	**CONFIRM**	**NOTES REVIEWED**
MN DHS Personnel Information form (PIF)		
Job Description –		

Position_____

**College – **

Some College _____

Associates _____

Bachelors_____

Graduate _____

**Credentials - **

CDA earned _____

License earned _____

Other_____

Other_____

Other Information:

FORM IDENTITY CODE CONFIRMED: _____

COLLECTION COMPLETE: _____

Date   Representative Initial

Appendix D: Archival Data Checklist Summary

Form Code:_____

Personnel Information Form

- First day employed at site _____

- Last day employed at site _____

- Total hours of experience in ECE_____

- Total hours of experience at site_____

- Highest degree obtained_____

- Major area of study_____

- Number of total college credits earned_____

Credentials/Certificates

- CDA earned? _____

- Teaching license earned?_____

- Other credential earned? _____

Notes:

Position Qualification

- Position qualification per credentials: _____

- Position description match_____

Additional Notes

Appendix E: Consent Form

Research Study Title: Perceptions of Early Childhood Educators Who Left the Field: A Case Study
Principal Investigator: Tosca Grimm
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Leslie Loughmiller

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this case study is to gather ECE educators' perspective, in order to determine why educators leave the field, so strategy can be developed toward retaining educators in ECE settings. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on May 1, 2019, and end enrollment on May 15, 2019.

To be in the study, you will participate in an initial face-to-face interview with the investigator, based on the established set of open-ended questions. You may participate in the interview at a time and location of your choosing. I will offer a designated interview location of the study room at a local county library. If you prefer another location, I will accommodate this for your comfort and convenience to assure maximum comfort and minimal risk.

The initial semistructured interview questions will ask about various aspects of your work, as well as solicit your current perspective surrounding the ECE field. The interview will be conducted following the established interview guide to ensure ethical and reliable delivery. Though the interview itself will not be constricted by a time limit, it is anticipated that the interview will take 45 minutes. I will block one hour for each interview. The interview protocol will allow both recording and note-taking during the interview.

The initial semistructured interview will be followed by a second face-to-face interview to review, clarify, and ensure accuracy of your responses. I will present a summary of your initial interview via a follow-up face-to-face interview. You then can agree or redirect the summary to reflect your authentic perspective, as well as share any additional views or options you have about the subject. I will then synthesize both interviews to interpret and present the study's findings. Participation should take no more than two hours of your time.

Risks:
There is a slight risk for participants in feeling awkward while talking about former employment, even though they each left the place of employment of their own accord and have volunteered to participate in this study. However, we will protect your information.

Assurances:
Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. When we look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption and stored securely in the investigator's secure software storage MAXQDA account. Your information will be kept private at all times. Recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member checking. All other study-related materials will be kept securely for three years from the close of the study, and then will be destroyed.

Benefits:
Information you provide will help the ECE field in its effort to understand the impact field work has on ECE educators, and why these educators so often burn out and leave the field. There is potential significant contribution toward sustaining the ECE profession due to the increased understanding from participant insight. We hope to build an understanding to aid in strategy to better retain quality educators in the ECE arena.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us about abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. As a volunteer, you are free at any point to choose not to engage or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required; it is fully voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Tosca Grimm, at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I am choosing to participate, and I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____   _____
Participant Name   Date

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____
Investigator Name   Date

_____   _____
Investigator Signature   Date

Investigator: Tosca Grimm email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor: Dr. Leslie Loughmiller
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix F: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–
   Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this
   dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the
   production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has
   been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or
   materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the
   Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.

Digital Signature

　　Tosca Grimm

Name (Typed)

　　11/23/2019

Date