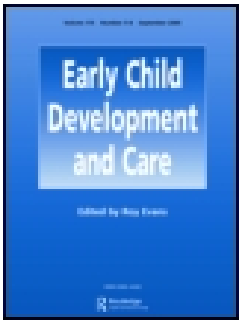

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A review of the literature on leadership in early childhood: examining epistemological foundations and considerations of social justice

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing acknowledgement of the benefits of early childhood education, there is a need to ask critical questions about whether ample leadership exists for guiding ambitious systemic change in the field. This review of leadership in early childhood educational contexts between 1995 and 2015 examines the epistemological assumptions embedded in the literature (and those advantaged and marginalized as a result), the expressed *purposes* of leadership work and specifically, whether, and to what extent, considerations of social justice and equity have been included in leadership theorizing. Eighty-one publications were identified through a search of major electronic databases and analysed using an analytic review template that includes definitions of leadership, modern and postmodern epistemologies underlying these texts, and considerations of social justice. Findings suggest that while traditional hierarchical conceptions are common, there is a shift towards more distributed and relational understandings of leadership. More recently, leadership is being described as a socially constructed, situated, culturally informed and dynamic process. There has also been an increase in the number of scholars emphasizing postmodern thinking in discussions of leadership over modernist conceptions. Still, there is less explicit discussion of postmodern intersectional identities in leadership. In addition, most literature does not include explicit discussion of social justice in theorizing about leadership, or the expressed purposes of leadership. This suggests the importance of critically examining the epistemological assumptions represented in leadership discourse and of more intentional links between leadership and goals that address social injustices for children, families and the early childhood workforce.

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Leadership; early childhood; social justice; postmodern

> The leader is vulnerable and prepared to take risks and support others to be vulnerable and/or to be risk takers. A leader would also work to make visible how power, knowledge and truth intersect to limit and/or provide opportunities for early childhood educational leaders and recognize, engage with and challenge the gendered and raced social and political construction of knowledge and identity. In enacting this image of leadership, early childhood professionals could indeed 'run amuk' (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 346) in ways that construct imaginative possibilities and open up lives and as such, 'produce knowledge differently as we work for social justice … ' (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 27) in early childhood communities. (Davis, Krieg, & Smith, 2015, p. 144)

The field of early childhood education is experiencing a surge in national attention as empirical research continues to provide unequivocal evidence of the benefits that result from investing in

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young children and their families (Barnett, 2008; Heckman, 2011; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Zaslow et al., 2010). A wide range of state and federal policy initiatives are being directed at creating comprehensive, coordinated and aligned early childhood systems – differentially named P-3, 0-8, Birth-8 – that begin with supports during pregnancy and continue throughout the early elementary grades (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015; Jacobson, 2016). Given so much momentum placing early childhood in the public spotlight, it is no surprise that many scholars are asking critical questions about whether ample leadership exists for guiding ambitious systemic change in the field (Goffin & Washington, 2007).

It is common for the profession of early childhood to be described as suffering from a paucity of leadership capacity (Goffin, 2013; Goffin & Washington, 2007). Explicit barriers believed to impede leadership development in the field include the lack of an agreed upon definition of leadership, early childhood professionals' feelings of ambivalence about authority, their limited opportunities for informing policy or engaging in professional collaboration, the field's historically low compensation rates, the low value and disrespect accorded to teacher and care provider skills in society, the absence of a professional career ladder, and positioning of leadership training within institutions of higher education (Cox, 1996; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Whitebook, 1997). The import of these challenges is significant. However, it is critical to recognize that traditional conceptualizations of leadership, borrowed from literature describing both corporate and K-12 public school environments, have severely limited theorizing about leadership for the field of early childhood. Such traditional frameworks have left a legacy within early childhood that 'leaders' are programme directors or those with field roles commensurate with the highest levels of formal authority within organizations. Furthermore, being on a 'leadership track' in our field's history has often been unquestioningly equated with ascending a hierarchy increasingly distanced from direct service work with children and families (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Contemporary discussions of leadership in early childhood have challenged these assumptions, expanding thinking about leadership beyond traditionally privileged business and educational leadership models. More recent thinking about leadership emphasizes ideas more aligned with the field of early childhood including an explicit value on relationships and collaboration, teaching and direct service, family engagement and multidisciplinary perspectives (Hallet, 2013; LaRocco & Bruns, 2013; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013).

As leadership involves influencing oneself and others towards change (Northouse, 2015), engaging in leadership is inherently political as it involves the negotiation of power relationships. As Sinclair (2007) states, we must continuously ask ourselves, 'what is all this leadership for?' in order to evaluate how our individual and collective beliefs, actions and inactions work to both oppress and/or privilege ourselves and others in society and then to use this information to inform responsive adjustments to our leadership practice. Without such clear parameters to focus capacity building for leadership in early childhood, we risk finding that the current swell of enthusiasm and activity directed at the field will result in a deluge of change that may do little to create more equitable outcomes for our most vulnerable children and families and our historically marginalized workforce. It is important to continually critique who is advantaged and disadvantaged by particular social constructions and theories of leadership. Given the increasing diversity in the demographics of our nation's families, and the growing importance of culturally and linguistically responsive approaches in work directly with – or on behalf of – children from a diversity of backgrounds (Ramsey, 2015; Souto-Manning, 2013), it is especially critical that our understandings of leadership reflect epistemological perspectives that value, and make visible, diversity and the complexity of human experience. Further, as a field there must be intentionality to query about the intended purposes motivating leadership for our field and a commitment, we propose, that the objectives of leadership be aligned with improving social injustices in society (Nicholson, 2017).

Several extant literature reviews summarize how leadership has been defined in the field of early childhood (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Dunlop, 2008; Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004). To date, however, no one has systematically examined the epistemological assumptions embedded in the literature (and those advantaged and marginalized as a result), nor the expressed *purposes*

of leadership work and specifically, whether, and to what extent, considerations of social justice and equity have been included in leadership theorizing. The objective of this study is to address these omissions by completing a comprehensive literature review of the international scholarship representing discussions of leadership in early childhood with these frames in mind. Specifically, the study aims to analyse the modern and postmodern epistemologies underlying these texts, and document if and how conceptualizations of leadership include considerations of social justice and equity. Our review is framed by the following research questions:

- Who is included in the definition of leadership?
- What are the epistemological foundations assumed in the literature?
- How are the purposes of leadership aligned with improving equity/social justice for children, families and the early childhood workforce?

We begin with a brief introduction of the conceptual framework informing our study. First, we define the term 'early childhood' as there is no commonly accepted understanding represented across the literature. Second, we provide a brief history of the small but expanding body of research describing leadership in early childhood contexts. This is followed by an introduction of the characteristics of modern and postmodern epistemology and how distinctions in epistemological perspectives are reflected in different conceptions of leadership. We end with a description of literature integrating considerations of social justice in theorizing about leadership.

Conceptual framework

Defining the early childhood field

The terminology and definitions used to describe the early childhood field are inconsistent in the research. In this literature review, we refer to what Kagan and Kauerz (2012) describe as the 'early childhood system' (p. 9). Here the early childhood field is recognized as a complex system that includes a diverse range of professionals who address the needs of young children from birth to age 8 working in early care and education (birth to preschool), early elementary school (K-3rd grade) and delivering a wide range of comprehensive services including health, mental health and family support. Using this definition, the term 'early childhood professionals' includes those involved in direct service (infant, toddler and preschool teachers, programme directors, family child care owners, family support personnel, infant mental health specialists, professional development and coaching staff), and individuals who work in infrastructure and ancillary organizations that support the design and implementation of early childhood services and programmes (e.g. resource and referral agencies, child and family policy and advocacy organizations).

It is important to note that this review includes international literature and different countries have distinct terminology for describing services provided to young children (e.g. long day care, child care, preschool, early years provision, nurseries, playcentres) and the early childhood workforce that serves them (teachers, directors, Early Years Professionals (EYPs), early childhood education and care practitioners). As we are primarily scholars working in the U.S.A., we have chosen to use the terms most familiar to American readers throughout this manuscript.

Leadership in early childhood education: an unfolding history of reclamation

Discussion of leadership in early childhood education has historically drawn from research in business and educational leadership literature, contexts that are markedly different from early childhood environments. These traditional models of leadership place value on individual performance, competition, certainty and decisiveness in decision-making, authority 'over' others and career progressions that march steadily 'up' a hierarchy from direct service towards management. Traditional approaches aligned with corporate values and public school contexts have been critiqued by many early

childhood scholars as drawn from male-dominated business environments that valorize 'great man theor[ies] of leadership' (Hard, 2008) that have little similarity to the female dominated and relationship-based field of early childhood (Hard, 2008; Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000; Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; Waniganayake, Nienhuys, Kapsalakis, & Morda, 1998; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). For example, Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) suggest that defining leadership as directorship is too limited as this excludes the sociocultural diversity and gender orientation of the field.

A number of scholars have called for emancipating leadership as a construct from management orthodoxy in order to be more inclusive of a wider range of early childhood professionals who work with children and families (Ho, 2012; McDowall Clark & Baylis, 2012; Thornton, 2010; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). As a result, leadership is now sometimes discussed as belonging to every role in the profession instead of being limited to administrative positions (Hard, 2008; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Sullivan, 2010). For example, Murray and McDowall Clark (2013) reimagined leadership as participative pedagogy between early childhood professionals, families and community members. This conception of leadership emphasizes 'the co-construction of learning through active involvement, dialogue and shared knowledge … [in] relationships with parents, professionals and the wider community' (p. 292).

Early childhood scholars have also worked to position leadership as less associated with character traits and positions and instead foreground leadership as participatory, decentralized, collaborative and situated within multiple spheres of activity (Ho, 2012; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Waniganayake, 2003). Waniganayake's (2003) writing on leadership reflects this shift suggesting that within organizations there can be many leaders with specified domains of expertise and experience who each engage in leadership by organizing and implementing activities to share their knowledge with others. Leadership, therefore, is associated with access to pedagogical and practical knowledge and the use of such skills as reflection, analysis and collaboration, and promotion of others' professional learning and growth (Sarros & Butchatsky, 1996). Parallel to the opening up of this more inclusive view is a juxtaposition of modernist vs. postmodern epistemology and the questioning of modernist assumptions in conceptions of leadership.

Modernist and postmodernist epistemological foundations of leadership

Modernist epistemology is based in neo-classical beliefs about the relationship between knowledge construction and scientific reasoning (Spretnak, 1997; Toulmin, 1972). Modernism is based on assumptions that the world can be understood as rationally structured, ordered, and influenced by universal laws and regularities (Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1990). Modernist descriptions of identity are characterized by stable, coherent and fixed categories that are independent from culture and context. Further, modernism posits progress as a linear, sequential and measurable process that unfolds predictably, often in hierarchical steps, over a period of time (Capper, 1998; Cooper & Burrell, 1988). Modernist assumptions about knowledge construction assume that there is an 'objectively knowable reality that is ontologically independent of our creation of it' (Uba, 2002, p. 4).

Modernist thinking reserves leadership for individuals at the 'top' of the organizational hierarchy, typically programme and agency directors, who have the highest levels of formal authority. Modernist discourse creates conceptions of an ordered world where strict binaries exist, as seen in discussions of individuals being either leaders *or* followers. In this perspective, the process of becoming a leader is conceptualized as a linear progression forward in predictable steps. Scholars who equate becoming a leader in early childhood with a process of ascending from a teaching job (associated with 'following') towards a leadership role directing a programme in a series of 'stages' exemplify this perspective (Catron & Groves, 1999). Describing leadership as identified with stable characteristics – e.g. being visionary, confident, assertive – is a hallmark of modernist thinking.

Postmodern epistemology strongly diverges from modernism, most importantly, destabilizing beliefs in universal objective 'truth' and conceptions of progress that assume rational, predictable movement forward (Hollinger, 1994; Keller, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1990; Rosenau, 1992). Knowledge construction in postmodern thinking is contextualized, socially constituted and dynamic (Gavey, 1989; Racevskis, 1993; Uba, 2002). What counts as knowledge, therefore, is tension-laden as intersections between cultural, social, historical and political contexts are understood to impact how individuals make sense of their experiences, resulting in a world defined by complexity (versus bounded and neatly defined categories) and multiple 'truths.' For postmodern scholars, identities cannot be easily classified into social address boxes (e.g. Black, Latino, male, educated; Rogoff, 2003), as they are continuously negotiated and transforming (Bromberg, 2006; Davies, 1989; Ewing, 2004).

Postmodern thinking leads to very different conceptions of leadership than modernist theory. For example, whereas modernism posits leadership is hierarchical, rationally ordered and progressive, postmodernism assumes that leadership is nonlinear and a circular process involving ambiguity and uncertainty. Working with diverse perspectives (Shields, 2004), continuously negotiating tensions, engaging in questioning and revising prior thought and actions, are conditions inherent to leadership work from a postmodern perspective. Complexity and tension are central to postmodern understandings of leadership because beliefs and actions are understood to be influenced by social, cultural, political and historical contexts instead of universal laws and/or objective 'truths.' Therefore, leadership decisions, in this viewpoint, must be continuously reflected upon to analyse whose voices and ideas are privileged and which individuals and agendas are silenced in order to make visible the political consequences that result.

Postmodern beliefs would highlight the multiple selves/identities of early childhood professionals enacting leadership. By rejecting the tidiness of simple binaries (e.g. leader/follower) postmodernism invites recognition that individuals can fluidly navigate across these boundaries even within a single interaction. Furthermore, postmodern perspectives recognize the intersectionality of identities (Núñez, 2014) as multi-dimensional (e.g. preschool teacher, Latina, 1st generation college graduate, grass roots advocate), dynamic, and variably influenced by the inequitable distribution of power in society. Postmodern sensitivity to the influence of social, cultural, political and historical contexts suggest that conceptions of leadership would address power relationships and resulting issues of social justice and equity.

Social justice and equity in discussions of leadership in early childhood

Impact of injustice on the lives of children and families

Tremendous attention has been marshalled for increasing public investment in young children to protect their civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights validated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Children are the most vulnerable subgroup in America as evidenced in the most recent Innocenti Report Card on inequality and child well-being where the U.S.A. was ranked *last* among 21 OECD industrialized countries (Adamson, 2013).

A central tenet of early childhood education is the belief that all children are valued for their unique complement of strengths, capacities and vulnerabilities, and early childhood programmes are responsible for designing environments to include them (Kunc, 1992; Sapon-Shevin, 2003). This includes calls among early childhood educators to recast disability discourse from its historical roots in deficit perspectives towards more equitable representations of special needs as simply one element of diversity and difference across complex continua of ability (Fennimore, 2011; Ferri & Bacon, 2011). Social justice is central in a framework for early childhood described as 'diversity informed practice' (Ghosh Ippen, 2009; Ghosh Ippen & Lewis, 2011; DIP; Ghosh Ippen, Noroña, & Thomas, 2012). DIP expands traditional ideas of cultural competence to incorporate additional components of human diversity (e.g. age, gender, immigration history, culture of origin, acculturation, social class and trauma history) and considers power dynamics and equity among the intersecting

influences that impact professional relationships with young children and their families, research designs, policies and systems of education and care (Seymour, St. John, Thomas, & Noroña, 2012).

Finally, decades of research have emphasized the inequities of poor working conditions and the lack of compensation associated with work in early childhood educational settings (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). Fighting for more equitable conditions for children and their direct service providers continues with modest progress today (Whitebook et al., 2014).

Yet despite the impressive body of work addressing issues of social justice in the field of early childhood, little scholarship exists that combines explicit discussion of social justice with writing on leadership. There are exceptions where scholars make broad generalizations touting associations between leadership and improving outcomes for children and families or one chapter at the end of a leadership text touching upon the importance of ethics in leadership work (Rodd, 2013). Although there are a few recent publications (Long, Souto-Manning, & Vasquez, 2015; Nicholson, 2017), intentional theorizing between social justice, equity and the definitions and purposes of leadership is not well developed in early childhood scholarship.

Social justice themes in K-12 leadership literature

Scholars have discussed social justice in relation to leadership; however, this literature exists in primarily K-12 contexts and *not* early childhood environments (Blackmore, 1999; Bogotch, 2002; Bogotch & Shields, 2014; Brown, 2004; Dantley, 2002; Furman, 2012; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Marshall & Ward, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). A common thread shared across this literature is an understanding that 'social justice focuses on the experiences of marginalized groups and inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes' (Furman, 2012, p. 194). Social justice leaders are commonly described as change agents and activists who use their knowledge of how oppression and marginalization operates in society to 'resist, dissent, rebel, subvert' reimagine and transform schools (Rapp, 2002, p. 226).

Other themes in K-12 social justice leadership literature highlight: (a) the need for maintaining persistence, commitment and courage in one's work (Jansen, 2006; Merchant & Shoho, 2010; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003); (b) building inclusive and participatory processes that engage students, families and educators and widen the voices contributing to decision-making in schools (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Merchant & Shoho, 2010; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008); (c) valuing caring relationships and continuously investing time and effort towards building and strengthening relationships (Dantley, Beachum, & McCray, 2008); (d) engaging in ongoing critical self-reflection and personal work to gain clarity on one's own perspectives, motives and biases and to expand and challenge them (Brown, 2004); and (e) continuously analysing the evidence of student learning to determine where inequities exist that require immediate and responsive intervention (Furman & Shields, 2005; Kose, 2007).

Explicit connections between social justice and leadership in education

Furman (2012) proposed a comprehensive conceptual framework for social justice leadership based on three central concepts. First, leadership for social justice is conceptualized as *praxis* (Freire, 2002; Foster, 1986; Brown, 2004) which she defines as:

> Praxis involves the continual, dynamic interaction among knowledge acquisition, deep reflection, and action at two levels – the intrapersonal and the extrapersonal – with the purpose of transformation and liberation. At the intrapersonal level, praxis involves self-knowledge, critical self-reflection, and acting to transform oneself as a leader for social justice. At the extrapersonal level, praxis involves knowing and understanding systemic social justice issues, reflecting on these issues, and taking action to address them. (p. 203)

Second, Furman sees leadership praxis as being *enacted across diverse dimensions* – personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic and ecological – which she represents as a nested model with the personal dimension positioned in the centre and the others spiralling around it symbolizing the additional layers and contexts for engaging in social justice leadership. The third concept in

Furman's framework for social justice leadership suggests that the central purpose of leadership preparation should be the *development of the capacities* required for individuals to engage in both aspects of praxis, reflection and action, across each of these dimensions.

Shields (2004) states that the heart of social justice leadership is the facilitation of moral dialogue about difference. Dialogue, she suggests, is a format for supporting individuals to learn about diverse realities and worldviews and helping them to discover that diversity is 'the basis for human relationships, for organizational life, and certainly for leading and learning' (p. 116). Yet, she cautions that educators' discomfort with difference is a significant barrier that too often leads to 'pathologies of silence' where the voices and stories of the diverse children and families in our schools are left unspoken (p. 117). For Shields (2004), a central responsibility for those engaging in social justice leadership is to create inclusive spaces where individuals can learn to overcome pathologizing silences by inviting people to give voice to their own realities, sharing how they 'make sense of things' in conversations in order to promote deeper understanding, strengthened relationships and an increased commitment to address social injustices made visible in these contexts of relational dialogue (p. 117). Working to improve unjust conditions for children and families begins when and if spaces are created to make them visible.

For Theoharis (2007), the expressed purpose of social justice leadership is to take 'purposeful steps' to change schools, keeping 'equity and justice consciously in mind' in order to support all students but specifically, marginalized students, to 'receive the education they deserve' (p. 250). In fact, 'leadership that is not focused on and successful at creating more just and equitable schools for marginalized students, is indeed not good leadership' (Theoharis, 2007, p. 253).

Theoharis (2007) emphasizes the need for leaders to learn to work with resistance in order to sustain their equity agenda. Social justice leadership, he believes, begins by focusing one's professional practice on reducing the historical marginalization of individuals. Second, leaders need to learn how to manage and cope with the strong and sustained resistance they will face in reaction to their emphasis on changing inequitable structures, policies and programmes in schools. And third, developing resistance and personal resiliency skills in order to sustain an equity agenda in a context where one continuously faces resistance from others.

Literature on social justice leadership provides a useful window for imagining how leadership theorizing in early childhood could be fundamentally integrated with explicit goals of advancing equity and social justice for children, families and communities.

Method

Data collection and analysis

The method for our study was inspired by the critical review completed by Compton-Lilly, Rogers, and Lewis (2012) and integrates several analyses. First, a search and filtering process was created in order to identify the most relevant international literature for our study. Second, a template was developed and used to analyse each text in terms of how leadership was conceptualized, the epistemological assumptions embedded within the discussion of leadership, and how and to what extent, if any, issues of social justice and equity were included in theorizing and discussions of leadership.

Search and filtering process

We searched Google Scholar, nine databases (ProQuest, JSTOR, Taylor and Francis, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Springer, Sage, Wiley and Science Direct), and the Amazon website as well as the library catalogues of a liberal arts college (Mills College), a major university in the Bay Area (UC Berkeley) and one on the east coast (Univ. of Pennsylvania) to identify texts that discussed leadership in early childhood. Using a variety of different words combinations and phrases, our results were very broad in scope. For example, searching Google Scholar for *leadership in early childhood* resulted in

429,000 texts and searching for *management in early childhood* returned 2,170,000. We refined our search by using quotes around the phrases 'leadership in early childhood' and 'management in early childhood' to identify results that apply to all the words in that exact order. We also decided to limit our search to items published from 1995 to 2015.

This refined search in Google Scholar resulted in a total of 673 results for the phrase 'leadership in early childhood' and 148 for 'management in early childhood.' We then applied a first level filter by excluding patents and citations, and texts not written in English reducing the number to 532 texts for 'leadership in early childhood' and 102 for 'management in early childhood.' A second level of filtering was applied by eliminating texts that did not mention *any* of the following terms, or variations thereof, in the title: (a) early learning, early childhood education or early care and education; (b) children, childhood or early childhood; (c) social justice or equity; (d) leading, leaders or leadership, professional identity; and (e) managing or management. For example, there are research articles discussing 'professionalism' in early childhood that do not mention leadership. Although there are some conceptual linkages, we chose not to include this literature in our review. It is important to note that in the case of peer-reviewed articles some exceptions to this criterion were made based on the importance of their source. If an article title did not contain the above-mentioned terms but was published in a major early childhood education (ECE) journal, we proceeded to the third level of filtering. Two articles passed this test and were kept in our database.

The third level of filtering was completed by reviewing abstracts and/or introductions and aimed at determining the general focus of the text. Texts that did not focus on, or mention, any of the key terms considered in the second level of filtering were eliminated, as well as texts that did not explicitly discuss leadership in any depth. Our search was for texts in early childhood environments (i.e. primarily with birth-five years, however, we included if the focus of the text fell within the PreK to 3rd grade domain). Texts that only discussed public schooling (K-12) were eliminated. Finally, duplications were eliminated at this point. This last filter left us with 97 results from the 'leadership in early childhood' search and 2 results for 'management in early childhood.' As such, the search through Google Scholar resulted in a total of 99 texts to analyse.

We then proceeded to check these results against the search in nine databases (ProQuest, JSTOR, Taylor and Francis, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Springer, Sage, Wiley, and Science Direct) using the same filtering process. This additional search produced fourteen new texts to add to our database. Finally, the search through Mills College, UC Berkeley and U Penn Library catalogues provided two additional texts. Searching the Amazon website produced no additional texts. Thus, at the end of our database search, we had identified 115 texts to analyse.

We also used bibliographic branching, examining the reference list of each text in our database to locate additional resources that emphasized leadership conceptualizations and social justice and equity issues in relationship to leadership in early childhood settings. This analysis resulted in an additional seven texts to analyse. Based on this additional search, we compiled the final list of comprehensive, edited volumes, book chapters, peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles, reports published by research organizations and government reports, and unpublished dissertation and graduate thesis papers. We did not review conference papers. The search was conducted twice, once at the beginning of the study in June 2013 and then again toward the end of our study in July 2015. We completed analysis templates for six of these new texts; however, one dissertation completed in the U.S.A. could not be located for review.

Our final analysis included 81 texts primarily from Western countries: U.S.A. ($n = 27$), U.K. ($n = 20$), Australia ($n = 15$), New Zealand ($n = 11$), Finland ($n = 3$), Greece ($n = 1$), Hong Kong ($n = 2$), Iceland ($n = 1$) and Pakistan ($n = 1$). We were unable to locate 40 texts in our database for several reasons: (a) they were not available in the three libraries we searched and bids to secure them through interlibrary loan were unsuccessful, (b) we did not have adequate funding to purchase them online, and (c) requests to authors for copies of their manuscripts either went unanswered or in a few cases, authors wrote to tell us that the texts were so old they no longer had copies of them. These 40 texts represented authors from the countries listed above, however, it must be noted that a higher percentage

of these missing texts were from the U.K., Australia and New Zealand than the U.S.A.; a distinct limitation of the current review. We also removed 10 texts after reading them and determining the quality to be too poor to include (e.g. no methodology section in a research article) or discovering that the content did not address leadership even if the title suggested it would.

Based on the range of databases we searched and the triangulated sources included in our analysis process, we believe the texts included in this paper are a *representative* review of the literature on leadership in early childhood. However, due to the substantive number of texts we were unable to locate, we do not claim our work to be an *exhaustive* review of the extant literature. Ultimately, the analysis in this review includes 81 resources: 50 peer-reviewed articles, 6 non-peer-reviewed articles, 19 books/book chapters, and 6 unpublished dissertation and graduate thesis papers.

Analytic review template

After the texts were selected, we created an analytic review template as a guide to analyse the texts both qualitatively and quantitatively (see Appendix). The dimensions of our analysis included: (a) the type of resource (book/book chapter; peer-reviewed article; non-peer-reviewed article; thesis or dissertation; report), (b) the type of research (literature review; empirical study; theoretical/position paper; practical perspective; etc.), (c) the definition of leadership, (d) individuals positioned as leaders within the text (e.g. directors, teachers, parents), (e) the methodology used (e.g. qualitative; quantitative; case study; ethnography; discourse analysis, other), (f) the theoretical/conceptual frameworks framing the text (e.g. traditional/hierarchical and/or trait leadership, distributed leadership, transformational leadership), (g) social justice and equity issues addressed and how central they were to the text and to conceptions of leadership, (h) whether, and to what extent, macrocontextual factors were addressed, (i) epistemological assumptions, (j) most cited authors and (k) discourse/key terms used (e.g. to describe children, families, the workforce, the field of ECE).

Our research questions guided our template analysis: (a) Who is included in the definition of leadership? (b) What are the epistemological foundations assumed in the literature? (c) How are leaders positioned and represented through discourse? and (d) How are the purposes of leadership aligned with improving equity/social justice for children, families and the early childhood workforce? Analysing our answers to these questions, we looked at the theoretical/conceptual frameworks privileged in the text and discourse used to signify constructs and individuals. There were several occasions where we observed authors using concepts in their introductions and literature review sections incongruent with the methodology of their studies (e.g. statements made about everyone in the field of early childhood being included in definitions of leadership in the introduction and then statements defining leadership as limited to directors throughout the study). In such cases, the methodology of the study was the primary determinant for analysis instead of the literature review.

We used the template to categorize the texts according to their epistemological assumption(s). Our analysis of epistemology does not intend to privilege either modernist or postmodernist perspectives in conceptualizations of leadership. Our goal is to highlight epistemological assumptions implicit within the texts and therefore, our scholarship to date. In this review, we classify texts as primarily modernist, primarily postmodernist or a mix of modernist and postmodernist dimensions in conceptions of leadership. We do so with clear recognition that studies do not neatly fit into three epistemological boxes (a practice readers will see throughout this manuscript is antithetical to our beliefs). Instead, organizing the studies as we did is a theoretic exercise to identify exemplars of modernist and postmodernist dimensions of leadership thinking over the last twenty years. This, we believe, makes visible the strengths and limitations afforded by scholarship falling across the continuum of epistemological viewpoints. We recognize the contributions of modernist approaches for informing our field's thinking about leadership. However, we also believe that postmodern perspectives are essential for introducing more contemporary counternarratives that foreground diversity and contextual variation in discussions of identity and leadership enactment.

Finally, we also examined what issues, if any, related to social justice and equity were addressed in the text including: (a) naming marginalizing conditions and mechanisms of oppression (e.g. racism,

sexism, classism, etc.); (b) addressing the outcomes associated with these oppressions (e.g. children's rights to safety, developmentally appropriate learning contexts, children's economic and overall well-being); (c) developing resistance and personal resiliency skills to sustain work on equity issues; (d) chasms between the ECE workforce demographics versus those in positions of power influencing the field; (e) moral dialogue aimed at learning to work with diversity and address oppression; (f) reframing discourse (changing language to address oppressions); (g) transformative self-learning; and (h) other (any other issues related to equity and/or social justice). First, we analysed whether equity was discussed in the text and how centrally these topics were for the manuscript. Second, we analysed whether definitions or purposes of leadership were explicitly connected to addressing issues of equity and/or whether they were not connected in any intentional fashion (e.g. leaders have 'visions' but no mention of the responsibility of leaders to address equity in working towards their vision).

Development of quantitative codes

The information collected with the analytic review template was used to create a database where the results of our analyses were stored and coded. This allowed us to identify patterns (e.g. changes over time, continuities and distinctions within/between different international contexts) in conceptualizations of leadership, epistemological assumptions, and social justice and equity issues addressed. We also documented unique characteristics, features and/or methodological approaches in certain texts that distinguished them from others (e.g. the first time a particular term emerged in the literature). Whenever possible, the information from the template was coded and transferred into the database. For example, theoretical frameworks for leadership conceptualization were coded in the following way: 1 = hierarchical/traditional, 2 = distributive/relationship-based; 3 = transformational, 4 = community based/activism, etc. We used these codes to count and compare our results across the various categories in the template analysis.

Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability testing throughout the course of our analysis was comprehensive. Our first step early on in the study was to have all four authors complete analytic templates for five manuscripts, intentionally selected to represent a range of texts in our database (e.g. format, method used, theoretical perspectives, length, etc.), and compare results. Disagreement/inconsistency arose in two texts related to two areas of analysis on the template: the specific *topics* of social justice and equity issues addressed in the text and the *extent* to which these dimensions of social justice and equity were emphasized. We resolved these inconsistencies through conversation as a group. As the analytic template requires fine-grained subjective qualitative analysis of a text, we realized the importance of continuing to refine our understandings of each category on the template through group dialogue. We split up the remainder of the articles in our database assigning each researcher to analyse approximately one-quarter of the articles independently ($n = 20$). We checked reliability on a consistent basis by having the larger group complete an inter-rater reliability check on three to five articles from each individual researcher's assigned group of articles. This allowed for continual discussion of any inconsistencies that emerged until all four researchers had 100% agreement. Areas requiring the most consistent checking and conversation included analyses requiring higher levels of inference (e.g. inconsistencies between what a study claimed to be examining and what their methodology actually led them to study; determining the assumptions about leadership embedded within articles that did not clearly articulate a theoretical framework; determining whether and how to code topics of social justice and/or equity that were only briefly mentioned and not central to the paper; distinguishing analytic categories for articles that included both modernist and postmodernist characteristics).

After all of the review templates were complete, the first and second author completed another round of inter-rater reliability checking. We began by re-reading all of the articles in the database, reviewing the corresponding analytic templates, and discussing together whether we had any

questions or concerns with the analysis results represented on the templates. With four researchers, the number of articles reviewed, and the length of time over which the analysis took place (18 months), we determined this additional step to be essential. During this check, we had agreement with the completed analyses with the exception of ratings for four studies initially categorized as primarily 'postmodernist.' We determined them to be more reflective of our analytic category titled, 'both' (modernist and post-modernist dimensions) and therefore, we changed their ratings on the template. Two researchers independently analysed the seven texts added at the end of the study and compared results which reflected 98% agreement. One rating for epistemology was discussed until mutual agreement was reached.

Findings

In this section, we describe the results of three distinct analyses we completed with the total data corpus: (a) conceptions of who is included in definitions of leadership; (b) the epistemological foundations assumed in discourse and theorizing on leadership; and (c) alignment of purposes of leadership with improving social justice and equity for children, families and the early childhood workforce. We describe our findings for each analysis separately below. Within each analysis, we discuss the number and percentages of studies that reflect each respective analytic category and changes in number and percentages over time. This is followed by examples from the extant literature that reflect the different definitions, epistemological positions and considerations of social justice reflected in current scholarship. Lastly, in the summary of each analysis, we detail the ways in which certain groups are privileged and/or marginalized by this particular conceptualization.

Conceptions of leadership

In this section, we examine how leadership has been defined within the early childhood field and the associated assumptions about who is included and/or excluded from the construct based on these explicit or implied definitions. Many scholars have noted the lack of congruence across the field in defining the construct of leadership (Muijs et al., 2004; Thornton, 2006).

Although definitions of leadership were quite varied, we found three main themes represented across the literature. Many studies described leadership using *traditional hierarchical and trait-based* discourse. A second group of texts, often critiquing the corporate structures reflected in such traditional discussions of leadership, conceived of leadership as more *inclusive of a wider range of professionals* working in the field of early childhood. For these scholars, leadership was, to differing degrees, untethered from formal position and/or level of institutional authority. A third cluster of writing emphasizes *the dynamic process* of leadership describing it as a *situated, culturally influenced, interpretive phenomenon*. These distinctions are reflective of important epistemological differences in how scholars conceptualize the construct of leadership, its embodiment and how ephemeral and socially constituted or internalized and personal it is believed to be.

Table 1 shows the results across all of the studies reviewed. Although many studies conceptualize leadership using a traditional orientation ($n = 30$), a slightly larger number of studies expanded definitions of leadership to be a more inclusive construct ($n = 31$). In most texts, this meant including teachers in definitions of leadership ($n = 18$), however, this was primarily head teachers or teachers who engaged in activities above and beyond the daily responsibilities of their direct service to children and families (e.g. engagement in community advocacy or policy). Other articles in this group included parents ($n = 3$), early interventionists ($n = 1$), special education curriculum specialists ($n = 1$), infrastructure staff ($n = 1$) or all ECE professionals in definitions of leadership ($n = 6$). A third group of scholars describe leadership as a socially constructed, situated, culturally informed and dynamic process ($n = 20$). For this final group, some scholars described leadership as inclusive of all early childhood professionals whereas others were more restrictive and focused on a subset of roles (e.g. directors or head teachers). Texts from Australia, New Zealand and the U.K. were represented across all

Table 1. Definitions of leadership.

	Traditional/hierarchical ($n = 30$)	Inclusive of diverse range of ECE professionals ($n = 31$)	Socially constructed, situated, interpretive, culturally influenced ($n = 20$)[a]
Australia	7 (23%)	4 (13%)	6 (30%)
Finland	–	–	3 (15%)
Greece	1 (3%)	–	–
Hong Kong	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	–
Iceland	–	1 (3%)	–
New Zealand	3 (10%)	4 (13%)	3 (15%)
Pakistan	–	1 (3%)	–
U.K./England	5 (17%)	9 (29%)	**6 (30%)**
U.S.A.	**13 (43%)**	**11 (35%)**	3 (15%)

[a]Note: One article had both Australian and New Zealand authors. We counted this as one for Australia and one for NZ above.

three categories (traditional, inclusive, socially constructed) whereas research completed in the U.S.A. was more reflective of traditional or inclusive definitions than definitions emphasizing leadership as a socially constructed process.

Table 2 organizes the three main themes in the definition of leadership by time periods to illustrate changes in definitions of leadership over time. Traditional perspectives were the most common in the literature through 2005 and continue to be heavily represented in the literature today. However, over the last decade between 2006 and 2015, inclusive perspectives have expanded within the U.S.A. and internationally. The last five years (2011–2015) have also seen a gradual increase in the number of studies using a socially constructed, culturally situated conception of leadership, although these studies were primarily completed by international authors.

Traditional/hierarchical

Reflecting traditional perspectives, many of the texts we examined positioned leadership as residing within an individual and equated with specific roles that also carry the highest levels of authority within an organization (Argyropoulou, 2013; Aubrey, 2011; Boardman, 2003a, 2003b; Brownlee, Nailon, & Tickle, 2010; Cristman, 2010; Fenech, 2013; Ho, 2011; Muijs et al., 2004; Nupponen, 2005; Schomburg, 1999; Smith, 2005; Watson & Williams, 2011; Wise & Wright, 2012). An example of traditional conceptions of leadership that intend to emulate business environments is seen with Fleming and Love (2003), who proposed a systemic change model for leadership within child care organizations. The change agent responsible for driving reform in this model is the programme director, compared by the authors to a company CEO. Furthermore, quality is believed to improve in early care organizations if they align more closely with corporate practices:

> The director is the leader of the child care organization. His or her leadership creates the change process within the organization … The concept of support and relationship development is a similar concept experienced in corporations where the chief executive officer (CEO) fosters relationships and support within the organization … by focusing on a business lens, change concepts and director leadership qualities can be improved in the child care organization. Focusing a business lens in child care helps to improve the organization. (p. 52)

Table 2. Changes in definitions of leadership over time.

Year	Traditional/hierarchical ($n = 30$)	Inclusive of diverse range of ECE professionals ($n = 31$)	Socially constructed, situated, interpretive, culturally influenced ($n = 20$)
1995–2000	4 (13%)	1 (3%)	–
2001–2005	8 (27%)	3 (9%)	4 (20%)
2006–2010	3 (10%)	13 (45%)	7 (35%)
2011–2015	15 (50%)	14 (48%)	9 (45%)

Traditional views of leadership in these texts are also quite frequently associated with trait theories (Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986) – suggesting that 'certain individuals have special innate or inborn characteristics or qualities that make them leaders, and that it is these qualities that differentiate them from nonleaders … [including] unique physical factors (e.g. height), personality features (e.g. extraversion) and other characteristics' (e.g. vision, strong communication skills, intelligence, self-confidence, determination) (Northouse, 2015). Other texts hold assumptions based in a skills approach to leader-centred leadership (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000; Yammarino, 2000). Texts drawing from traditional approaches often include a substantive listing of specific skills that require competency for individuals enacting leadership in early childhood (Bloom, 2000; Boardman, 2003b; Rodd, 2006; Taba et al., 1999). Valued skills exemplifying leadership are frequently defined in bullet form as exemplified with Taba et al.'s (1999) description of the characteristics individuals need to engage in 'advocacy leadership' – e.g. risk takers who visualize and plan for the long term, survey the environment, hang tough and relentlessly and continuously develop new approaches to highlight issues. Along these lines, Boardman's (2003b) study ranks important attributes for successful early childhood leadership including individuals who can 'demonstrate trust and support for teachers,' 'lead with energy and by example,' and 'possess conflict and negotiation skills.'

Inclusive of a wider range of ECE professionals

A large number of scholars, working to address some of the limitations of traditional conceptions of leadership, redefined the construct to be more inclusive of a wide variety of early childhood professionals and their work (Dunlop, 2008; Fichtman & Yendol-Hoppey, 2005; Hallet, 2013; Ho, 2012; Leeson, 2010; Lunn & Bishop, 2002; Mistry & Sood, 2012; Maxfield, Ricks-Doneen, Klocko, & Sturges, 2011; McDowall Clark & Baylis, 2010; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Rodd, 2013; Safdar, 2005; Thornton, 2006, 2010; Whitebook, Kipnis, Sakai, & Austin, 2012; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). These approaches identify leadership within a diverse group of stakeholders such as teachers, infrastructure staff, special education professionals, parents, children and the community.

Teachers, conceptualized as both community activists and pedagogical leaders, 'hold promise for enticing early childhood professionals into locating themselves as leaders' (Woodrow & Busch, 2008, p. 90). Pedagogical leadership encompasses the contextual influences, challenges, skills and strategies that illustrate the complexities involved in 'leading, developing and implementing curriculum' (O'Gorman & Hard, 2013, p. 77).

Whitebook et al. (2012) suggest that staff in infrastructure organizations should also be included in definitions of leadership. Child care resource and referral programmes, for example, directly support children, their families, and the workforce, are involved in shaping policy, help millions of families find and pay for child care, develop child care spaces and train 500,000 ECE providers annually, and report publicly on child care supply and demand in their communities

Others have expanded leadership to include early childhood special education curriculum specialists (Arora, 2013) and early interventionists (LaRocco & Bruns, 2013). Several authors include parents (Jones & Pound, 2008; Thornton, 2006; Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, & Tamati, 2009) and a few include children (Aubrey et al., 2013; Te Kopae Piripono, 2006). This inclusiveness reflects the notion that 'leadership has emerged as an important issue for *all* early childhood professionals' not just those in positions of management (Leeson, 2010, p. 112, italics added). As Rodd (2013) explains:

> Every early childhood educator can choose to become a leader by demonstrating increasing competence in their work; by becoming a critical friend to colleagues; by supporting the development of others; including children, families and colleagues; and by acting as an ambassador for their profession. Leadership is everyone's business and everyone can and should share the leadership process every day. (p. 13)

Positioning every community member as fundamentally engaged in leadership is central to the New Zealand Ministry of Education's discussion of Te Kōpae Piripono, a Māori early childhood centre's conception of leadership as related to four central components of responsibility: (a) *being responsible*:

assuming designated roles and positions of responsibility; (b) *having responsibility*: being professional, acting ethically and appropriately, being honest, positive and open to others and different perspectives; (c) *taking responsibility*: having courage, taking risks, having a go, taking up a challenge and trying new things; and (d) *sharing responsibility*: sharing power, roles and positions and attending to relationships (Te Kōpae Piripono, 2006). They believe that every individual has a right, responsibility and ability to lead, and therefore, every person, adult and child, is a leader.

Socially constructed and situated

A third body of research goes beyond the description of leadership as including more of the early childhood professional workforce, families and children, to reconceptualize leadership away from individual bodies and to focus on *leadership as a dynamically constituted and complex process* that is defined and influenced within different contexts (Aubrey et al., 2013; Hard & O'Gorman, 2007; Kameniar, Imotoual, & Bradley, 2010; McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012; Ord et al., 2013; Robson, 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012; Turner, 2006). This perspective is evidenced with Kameniar et al. (2010) who examined how 'wicked problems – i.e. problems that are intractable, novel, without right or wrong answers, and have no stopping point' (p. 14) – were most effectively addressed through a model of contextually based and situated leadership. The complexity fundamental to a field where people and their relationships are at the centre requires a conception of leadership as an interpretive and situated phenomenon and responsive to context (Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013).

Drawing on Grint's (2005) theorizing, Kameniar et al. (2010) suggest that leadership is a fluid and negotiable ontology and a fluid and negotiable practice inherently tied to social contexts that legitimize 'particular forms of action' while 'constituting the world' during the process. Because people are 'not fixed in space and time or to particular contexts or events,' leadership, they suggest, should not be imagined this way (p. 12). Leadership, instead, must be understood as inherently situated and contextual. This view is supported by McDowall Clark and Murray's (2012) work on leadership that conceptualizes it as a process shaped by multiple factors, situations and contexts. They explain that leadership 'has no fixed identity because it is in a constant state of deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction. The absence of an agreed definition of leadership frees up possibilities for revisioning within any specific set of circumstances and influences' (p. 5).

Summary

Although many authors continue to write about leadership in early childhood using a traditional hierarchical conception of leadership, this has been substantively changing over the last 10 years with more authors electing to define leadership as a more inclusive construct and many moving away from positions all together to focus on the socially constructed process of leadership. Commensurate with these trends has been a conceptual shift in emphasizing leadership as a distributed, shared and relational construct (Dunlop, 2008; Heffron & Murch, 2010; LaRocco & Bruns, 2013; Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Te Kōpae Piripono, 2006; Thornton, 2006; Waniganayake, 2003; Weatherston, Weigand, & Weigand, 2010).

This shift represents a noteworthy change from traditional hierarchies and assumptions of leadership's association with singular minds and bodies or specific professional roles and levels of authority. However, actualizing these theoretical shifts in beliefs about leadership into practice is rife with tensions as reflected in Ho's (2012) research. She describes a 'paradox of power' that exists in Hong Kong early childhood programmes between policymakers who are encouraging new forms of distributed governance where teachers have a greater role in decision-making at school sites and principals resisting such reforms instead maintaining centralized traditional hierarchical cultures at their school sites. Such research highlights the gaps that can, and often do, exist between ostensive policy and systems reform goals – including shifting early childhood leadership away from traditional models – and the performative realities of policy implementation and practices in context that may reflect that little substantive change has actually occurred (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).

Modernist and postmodernist dimensions of leadership in early childhood

A second focus of our analysis was examining modernist and postmodernist characteristics reflected within definitions, discourse and scholarly writing about leadership in the early childhood field. Results of the epistemological analysis across studies are presented in Table 3. The largest number of studies reflected primarily modernist assumptions in conceptualizations of leadership ($n = 40$), followed by studies that were dually reflective of modernist and postmodernist characteristics ($n = 26$). Discussions of leadership that were using primarily postmodern epistemological perspectives were least common ($n = 14$). Texts that were primarily modernist or both modernist/postmodernist were frequently written by authors from the U.K. and the U.S. Postmodern characteristics in discussions of leadership were most commonly found in texts written by Australian scholars.

Table 4 displays epistemological dimensions of leadership represented in the literature over time. Modernism is strongly represented in all time periods we examined. Beginning in 2006, within the U.S.A. and internationally, postmodern discourse emerged as more visible in discussions of leadership. Literature in the last five years (2011–2015) reflects an emerging trend for articles to emphasize postmodern characteristics in discussions of leadership.

Modernist perspectives

Many studies positioned leadership development as a linear, sequential process, where individuals progressed 'up' an existing hierarchical system with sequenced roles and increasing levels of formal authority (Aubrey, 2011; Boardman, 2003a, 2003b; Catron & Groves, 1999; Ho, 2012; Jones & Pound, 2008; Leeson, 2010; Lunn & Bishop, 2002; Rodd, 2006; Schomburg, 1999; Sciarra & Dorsey, 2002; Whitebook et al., 2012). In this epistemological perspective, identities and conceptions of leadership were often associated with: (a) a stable coherent self and a set of specific traits (leaders are visionary and confident); (b) fixed, discrete binaries independent of culture and/or context (i.e. directors are leaders, teachers are followers); and (c) a perspective that problems and uncertainty were obstacles that experience and rationality were assumed to overcome.

Stage theories of leadership

Stage theories that describe stable developmental and hierarchical progressions – including the teacher to director stages outlined in Catron and Groves (1999) or the director career cycle described by Jorde-Bloom (1997) – envision a predictable and progressive journey in leadership, for example, from teacher (lowest) to director (highest). Catron and Groves (1999) refer to this as a process of 'changing shells … the shedding of one shell to find a better mode of being, contributing, and living' (p. 184). During Stage 1, directors are 'enthusiastic and energized but also easily overwhelmed' and working on a 'new and revised' self-image.' By Stage 4, directors are 'professionally mature … secure in most aspects of the administrative role,' focused on 'mentoring others … serving as an

Table 3. Modernist and postmodernist characteristics in conceptions of leadership.

	Primarily modernist ($n = 40$)	Modernist and postmodernist ($n = 26$)	Primarily postmodernist ($n = 14$)[a]
Australia	5 (12.5%)	5 (19%)	**6 (43%)**
Finland	1 (2.5%)	1 (4%)	1 (7%)
Greece	1 (2.5%)	–	–
Hong Kong	2 (5%)	–	–
Iceland	1 (2.5%)	–	–
New Zealand	4 (10%)	5 (19%)	2 (14%)
Pakistan	1 (2.5%)	–	–
U.K./England	9 (22%)	**7 (27%)**	4 (28%)
U.S.A.	**16 (40%)**	**8 (31%)**	2 (14%)

[a]One article had both Australian and New Zealand authors. We counted this as one for Australia and one for NZ above. One article, Cristman (2010), was not coded for this analysis as it was a description of a higher education programme that did not lend itself to examining epistemological characteristics of leadership.

Table 4. Changes in modernist and postmodernist characteristics in conceptions of leadership over time.

Year	Primarily modernist ($n = 40$)	Modernist and postmodernist ($n = 26$)	Primarily postmodernist ($n = 14$)
1995–2000	5 (12%)	–	–
2001–2005	11 (27%)	3 (12%)	1 (7%)
2006–2010	7 (17%)	12 (46%)	3 (21%)
2011–2015	17 (42%)	11 (43%)	10 (71%)

advocate for the field' and 'at increased risk for burnout' (Compton-Lilly et al., 2012, p. 185). Such discourse reflects stable, coherent identities for directors that are universal and progressively mature towards mastery where uncertainties and problems are mediated by experience.

Universal definition of leadership

Establishing one clear and universal definition of leadership is another assumed value of modernist scholarship. This is seen when experiences of leadership are essentialized without critique, as in Wise and Wright's (2012) universalizing of women in leadership. They state for example, 'unlike men, who tend to use power as a method of control, women use power for collaboration and organization' (Wise & Wright, 2012, p. 2). Reporting on early childhood lead teachers in Greece, Argyropoulou (2013) also draws on modernist perspectives to describe a binary between leadership and management when she states that 'ECE effective Headteachers cannot perform dual duties, teach and lead, at the same time' (p. 676).

Universal categorizations of leaders and leadership

Modernist perspectives are highlighted in leadership research that associates an individual with a particular type of leadership in a manner that either explicitly or implicitly universalizes the totality of their experiences. Taba et al. (1999) divide early childhood professionals into one of five types of leaders (i.e. advocacy leaders *or* administrative leaders). Safdar's (2005) study of effective early years head teachers in Pakistan also categorizes teachers into fixed leadership categories, concluding that one teacher practices moral leadership based on her commitment to Islamic values and principles while another, a secular individual who nurtures 'critical consciousness, intellectual competence and high moral values' (p. 52) is described as practicing transformational leadership.

Mixed modernist/postmodernist perspectives

A number of studies reflect both modernist and postmodernist characteristics in discussions of leadership (Curtis & Burton, 2009; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Goffin, 2013; Hallet, 2013; Hard, 2006; Hard & O'Gorman, 2007; LaRocco & Bruns, 2013; Miller, Cable, & Goodliff, 2012; Nivala & Hujala, 2002; Thornton, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009; Te Kopae Piripono, 2006; Tomlin, Weatherston, & Pavkov, 2014; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Sullivan (2010) exemplifies this blend describing leadership through postmodern discourse as exemplified in the following statements: 'leadership is complex, dynamic, interactive, and situational, no best way exists to develop or strengthen the many skills, abilities and competencies needed' (p. 21); and 'becoming an effective leader means understanding how the world makes sense to others as well as understanding how the world makes sense to you' (p. 51). However, modernist assumptions persist as the author includes universal developmental stages that all ECE professionals will go through when making progress in a leadership journey.

In a second example of mixed perspectives, Hallet's (2013) '10 categories of effective leadership' reflect universal truths and distinct categories that represent effective leadership for all early childhood professionals. However, other statements in the article suggesting that individuals need to be able to articulate their voices in different ways imply a valued consideration for diverse and multiple viewpoints, a postmodern epistemological stance.

Postmodernist perspectives

A growing body of research places a primary emphasis on postmodern perspectives in discussions of leadership (Cartmel, Macfarlane, & Nolan, 2013; Fasoli, Scrivens, & Woodrow, 2007; Kameniar et al., 2010; Karila, 2002; McDowall Clark, 2012; Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013; Nicholson, 2014; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Ord et al., 2013; Robson, 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012; Turner, 2006). These studies recognize leadership as socially constructed, associated with ambiguity and tensions, and continually negotiated in situated contexts. Strict binaries between leaders and followers or universal traits, skills or leadership styles that characterize individuals independent of context were not assumed. A few of the studies also positioned identities using postmodern discourse; however, this was less common than using postmodern thinking to discuss the process of leadership.

Feminist postcolonial perspective

A good example of literature emphasizing postmodern perspectives in discussions of leadership includes a recent article by three Australian scholars, Davis et al. (2015), who use feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theories to argue for alternative discourses of leadership that can address the inherently complex and shifting nature of work in early childhood education. They encourage the field to 'produce and reproduce fluid, non-essentialized images' (p. 138) for leadership that are both responsive to historical, political and social contexts and not reductive in describing women's leadership in normative fashion. They state:

> We must be mindful that the positioning of the work of women in the early childhood field is complex. Women are not merely passive in the highly gendered constructions of their educative identities. Women simultaneously resist and participate within and through the structures of the field that work to constrain and enable the work and positioning of women within it. Early childhood professionals invest in dominant identity constructions while they simultaneously resist the othering and marginalization of their work as educators that results. (p. 133)

Stamopoulos (2012) writes about identity from a similarly postmodernist stance unpacking what is often left untouched or unaddressed by many modernist scholars.

McDowall Clark (2012) examines EYPs in England charged with pedagogical leadership, that is, the responsibility to be leaders of practice, bridging research with practice in the early childhood workplace and inspiring 'other practitioners around them' to participate in quality improvement (p. 393). Writing from a primarily postmodernist discourse, McDowall Clark (2012) captures stories from EYPs about their perspectives and experiences and explicitly links them to 'leadership of practice' discourse, helping them to 'unravel' leadership discourse from associations with formal authority and position while also raising their awareness to view their daily practice as equated with the process of leadership enactment. In this way, she reinforces how leadership is a social construct that must remain 'open to reconstruction and reconfiguration' in order to 'open up and develop new ways of understanding' so, for example, 'EYPs can recognise themselves and their own experiences' within its boundaries (pp. 397–398).

Finally, Ord et al. (2013) provide a strong example of postmodern discourse and perspectives in a project designed to teach a methodology for leading pedagogy in a diverse range of early childhood settings in New Zealand. They explain that when groups come together, including early childhood educators, they inevitably face dilemmas and it is through the process of surfacing, recognizing and addressing the tensions reflected in these dilemmas that afford opportunities for transformative learning to take place. They provide two examples of expansive cycles of transformation: the development of kaupapa Māori methodology within the research field to destabilize the hegemony of Western world views as a dominant paradigm for research and the continuing critique of developmentalism in early childhood education by among sociocultural and critical theorists (Cannella, 1997; Edwards, 2007). Prior to the project, many of the leaders conceived of pedagogical leadership as 'working with or on individuals,' whereas afterwards they had shifted towards a more collectivist stance in perceiving 'where most problems of practice lay and where solutions are to be found' (p. xi).

Summary

The literature reflects both modernist and postmodernist perspectives in conceptions and discourse; however, the last five years has seen an increase in the number of scholars whose writing is emphasizing postmodern epistemology. These articles are positioning leadership, and especially decision-making, as dynamic, situated, culturally influenced and contextually variable. There is less explicit discussion of postmodern *identities* in leadership as many articles continue to conceive of leadership as associated with static traits of particular individuals and becoming a leader as a hierarchical progression up a fixed career ladder. To date, there is little discussion of intersectional identities of individuals engaged in leadership where they have agency to amplify different aspects of themselves (e.g. female, African-American, child care advocate, grass roots organizer, effective negotiator) fluidly across contexts and/or interactions. While inserting conversations of intersectionality into the discourse on leadership does not guarantee an immediate dismantling of systems of oppression, postmodern epistemological assumptions highlight key identities of privilege and marginalization that remain unaddressed in traditional modernist scholarship.

Considerations of social justice

The third focus of our analysis was examining considerations of social justice within the definitions, discourse and scholarly writing about leadership in the early childhood field. Specifically, we analysed the literature to see whether scholars discussed social justice issues within their manuscripts and if they did, we documented the topics of discussion and the extent to which they were emphasized within the texts. Further, we evaluated whether any discussion of social justice was explicitly tied to theorizing on leadership. That is, whether scholars brought specific attention to the purposes of leadership and connections between such purposes and reduction of oppressions experienced by children, families and the early childhood workforce.

Results of the social justice analysis across studies are presented in Table 5. A large number of studies we analysed did not include any discussion of social justice or did so in a nominal manner – mentioned once in the introduction in a sentence or two with no further emphasis ($n = 33$). The largest group of studies was characterized as discussing issues of social justice (e.g. gendered nature of the field, low compensation and status given to early childhood professionals) but not linking these issues in any explicit way to leadership ($n = 36$). Discussions of leadership that explicitly associated the purposes of leadership with social justice were least common ($n = 10$) and even when they did, only a few texts went into any detail about these relationships. Texts that did not include any emphasis on social justice were most prevalent among American authors. Those that included social justice but did not link these issues with leadership were reflected in scholars from England, U.S.A. and Australia. The small number of studies that did conceptualize leadership as inherently linked with social justice concerns were written in Australia, New Zealand and the U.S.A.

Table 5. Considerations of social justice.

	Social justice not addressed ($n = 33$)	Social justice issues raised but not tied explicitly to leadership ($n = 37$)	Social justice as a component of definition or purpose of leadership ($n = 11$)[a]
Australia	6 (18%)	6 (16%)	**5 (45%)**
Finland	–	3 (8%)	–
Greece	1 (3%)	–	–
Hong Kong	–	2 (5%)	–
Iceland	–	1 (2%)	–
New Zealand	4 (12%)	4 (11%)	2 (18%)
Pakistan	1 (3%)	–	–
U.K./England	4 (12%)	**15 (40%)**	1 (9%)
U.S.A.	**17 (52%)**	6 (16%)	4 (36%)

[a]One article had both Australian and New Zealand authors. We counted this as one for Australia and one for NZ in this column.

Table 6. Changes in considerations of social justice over time.

Year	Social justice not addressed ($n = 33$)	Social justice issues raised but not tied explicitly to leadership ($n = 37$)	Social justice as a component of definition or purpose of leadership ($n = 11$)
1995–2000	3 (9%)	2 (5%)	–
2001–2005	9 (27%)	5 (14%)	1 (9%)
2006–2010	7 (21%)	11 (30%)	5 (45%)
2011–2015	14 (42%)	19 (51%)	5 (45%)

Table 6 displays how social justice has been represented in the leadership literature over time. Throughout the time period of our review, there has been a consistent body of literature that does not include discussion of social justice. However, beginning in 2001 and continuing through to 2015, there has been a steady increase in the number of scholars who discuss issues of social justice in their texts but do not explicitly link these issues with their conceptions of leadership. Literature within the last five years (2011–2015) reflects a shift among a small group of scholars who are beginning to intentionally link leadership with social justice (see Table 6).

Issues of social justice not addressed in discussion of leadership

A large number of studies do not include any substantive discussion of social justice in writing about the definitions and/or purposes of leadership in early childhood (Aubrey, 2011; Boardman, 2003a, 2003b; Brownlee et al., 2010; Carr, Johnson, & Corkwell, 2009; Couse & Russo, 2006; Fenech, 2013; Fleming & Love, 2003; Maxfield et al., 2011; Muijs et al., 2004; Reynolds, 2011; Robins & Callan, 2009; Safdar, 2005; Schomburg, 1999; Snyder, Crowe, & Crow, 2012; Sullivan, 2010; Watson & Williams, 2011; Tomlin et al., 2014). An example of this literature is seen with Muijs et al. (2004) who wrote a review of literature in leadership for early childhood. Outside of a brief mention of the association between quality provision in early childhood and child outcomes and Kagan and Hallmark's (2001) claim about the strong political role for leaders in the early childhood sector, there is no explicit discussion of social justice in the article. Instead, the review summarizes extant research in relation to the roles of early childhood leaders, characteristic traits of effective leaders (e.g. being patient, warm and kind, using planning, assertiveness, vision, and confidence), and the lack of professional development and training in leadership for the early childhood education field. Although there is a concern that 'the leadership practices of those working in the field are not taken seriously,' these professionals are cast through deficit discourse throughout this review and the authors' solutions for these deficits reside in the collective wisdom of scholars *outside* of the field, stating that 'clearly, recent theorizing in educational leadership per se has a lot to offer the field of early childhood education' (p. 167). This article exemplifies writing that either does not discuss social justice in any manner or perpetuates historical injustices signifying the early childhood field and its workforce through marginalizing and deficit discourse that camouflages their funds of knowledge and strengths through comparisons with other fields (e.g. public school administrators and business executives).

Issues of social justice raised but not tied explicitly to leadership

A large and growing number of authors are including substantive discussions of social justice in their research without making explicit ties to definitions and/or purposes of leadership (Curtis & Burton, 2009; Fichtman & Yendol-Hoppey, 2005; Goffin, 2013; Hard & O'Gorman, 2007; Ho, 2011; Jones & Pound, 2008; Karila, 2002; Leeson, 2010; Mistry & Sood, 2012; McDowall Clark, 2012; Nivala & Hujala, 2002; Stamopoulos, 2012; Te Kopae, 2006; Thornton, 2009). For example, authors may discuss issues of equity in the introduction of their manuscript or within a section of the literature reviewed. However, they do not connect these inequities in any explicit manner with theorizing

about leadership. The injustices most often discussed in these articles were the *marginalizing conditions in the field* (e.g. compensation, lack of training and career ladders), the *chasm in demographics* (e.g. race, income, education level) between early childhood professionals and the individuals and organizations with positional power to influence the field, and the *marginalizing discourse* used to signify the early childhood field and its workforce.

A good example of this category is seen with Miller et al. (2012), who hired a professional film crew to videotape a professional working day for Julie, a manager working in a day nursery in England. The conclusion of the article states,

> the case study illustrates the challenges faced by practitioners such as Julie, who take on demanding roles in early years settings, requiring high levels of responsibility and professionalism, without corresponding recognition in the form of qualifications, status or commensurate pay. (p. 52)

While the authors raise the issue of equity, describing the discrepancy between work and compensation, they do not return to the issue of *leadership* as it relates to these inequities. Although Julie is described as a manager whose job requires leadership in many forms, there is no explicit association theorized between the injustices briefly mentioned related to her professional conditions and the purpose of leadership for Julie and other EYPs.

Cartmel et al. (2013) name several topics with equity and social justice implications. First, they describe the policy reforms occurring in Australia that they believe are leading to the marginalization of the early childhood education knowledge base. They explain, it is 'demoralising for (early childhood) practitioners and professionals who may be unable to encourage the inclusion of contemporary (early childhood) knowledge and practices [when] dominant knowledge bases, such as those underpinning allied health, medicine or education disciplines' are privileged. They argue for an 'acceptance that there are multiple ways of understanding [a]s necessary in order for professionals and practitioners to successfully advocate for their knowledge base alongside other disciplines' (p. 399). They also discuss the need to critically examine the discourse used to signify early childhood professionals to reduce traditionally marginalizing language that minimizes their association with professionalism. They explain, 'Australian early childhood reforms and related policy development are hampered by the siloed understandings that define the knowledge necessary to produce an early childhood professional as either a teacher or a carer, rather than a *transdisciplinary professional*' (p. 405, italics added).

Cartmel et al. (2013) get closer than most in establishing clear links between leadership and addressing such issues of social justice, but they stop short of making these relationships inherently intertwined. The authors suggest that requisite for transdisciplinary professionals is the use of critical thinking and reflection because such practices allow them to 'move beyond the boundaries of their own disciplines and take their knowledge base to new spaces and engage in discussions and debate with professionals from other disciplines' (p. 409). Critical self-reflection suggests the introduction of considerations of power in looking back at one's thinking and decision-making. What is missing, however, is explicit mention of how early childhood education leaders use reflective practice to engage in the type of critical questioning of leadership practice that MacNaughton (2005) encourages. This involves doing more than reflecting on actions but instead asking such questions as: 'Who benefits from what I do and know?' 'How and why do they benefit?' 'Do I want this to continue?' 'What do I take this particular action or use this particular knowledge?' 'Whose interests does this knowledge or action support?' As she explains, it is through conducting such a self-audit that we can 'expand our choices about how to think and to act against knowledge and actions that oppress or discriminate' (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 11).

Explicit associations made between social justice and the purposes of leadership

A small number of studies theorize leadership and social justice as centrally related, although some are more comprehensive in describing these connections than others (Austin, 2014; Cristman, 2010; Fasoli et al., 2007; Kameniar et al., 2010; Nicholson, 2014; Ord et al., 2013; Robson, 2013; Turner, 2006;

Woodrow & Busch, 2008). From this perspective, enacting leadership in early childhood is inherently connected to a fight for social justice in society (Nicholson, 2014).

Fasoli et al. (2007) connect leadership with social justice by critiquing the inequities associated with leadership theorizing explaining that it has rendered early childhood professionals' work invisible, a consequence they state demands change. They explain:

> One of the ways women experience leadership is through emotional labour – the work of caring for and about others in nurturing and healing relationships … These aspects of leadership find no place or expression in many constructions or theories of leadership. Clearly such labour is an important dimension of early childhood work and emotional labour is an important aspect of leadership that needs to be named and accounted for. Those of us who work in early childhood would have a robust understanding of the fundamental importance of the emotional labour inherent in building and maintaining relationships with staff, with parents, with children and the wider community. (p. 239)

They also name how the legacy of inequitable theorizing about leadership has been more consequential for early childhood professionals from non-dominant racial, ethnic and income groups. Instead of just naming this inequity as so many scholars do in their discussions of social justice topics in the literature we reviewed, these authors clearly articulate that working to ameliorate these inequities is a 'leadership challenge' that requires reflection and action. Describing leadership as 'ethical entrepreneurship,' they explain that leadership theorizing at the foundation must begin with a 'belief in social justice, making a difference and taking some action that contributes in a strategic way to the wellbeing of children, families, community and colleagues' (Fasoli et al., 2007, p. 244). The word entrepreneurship is used to reframe the purposes of leadership to be directed away from self-interest and towards a goal of 'creating, sharing, promoting (indeed selling) ideas that can be used in the best interests' of the individuals served (or impacted by leadership actions) instead of benefitting 'ourselves in a solely self-interested way' (p. 244).

Woodrow and Busch (2008) also critique traditional conceptualizations of leadership as problematic for the field of early childhood; however, instead of positioning the early workforce through deficit (e.g. uncomfortable with leadership), they critique the construct that signifies early childhood education professionals as limited to consummate carers and nurturers, powerless and lacking in agency to influence change, naming these as 'Mary Poppins images' that are outdated yet 'still perpetuated in the profession's discourses' (p. 89). They call for a more comprehensive examination of the inequities preserved in such images and a 'deeper analysis of the social, political and gendered context in which early childhood work is carried out' in order to advance more equitable and just constructions of leadership for the field (p. 86). This, they suggest, should begin with theorizing that is decoupled from business oriented values of 'neutrality, objectivity, generalizability and predictability' in order to realign conceptions of leadership with beliefs more in congruence with early childhood, including 'emotionality, partiality and specificity' (p. 86).

Robson (2013), drawing from the work of hermeneutic philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, uses narrative data on professional identity to construct alternative sites for constituting leadership that offer a political critique to gendered leadership practices privileged in traditional management literature. Shifting leadership away from title, position, tasks and competencies, she conceives of leadership as representing social and relational processes that influence the 'constitution and trajectories of individuals and institutions' (p. 3). She uses the term 'leadership as practice' to emphasize 'more about *where*, *how* and *why* leadership work is being organized and accomplished than is about who is offering visions for others to do the work' (p. 4). From this perspective, leadership is inherently complex and intersubjective, involving such processes as sense making, boundary spanning, collaboration and 'relational agency' understood to be purposeful action with others. Here, narrative practice emancipates meaning-making, allowing for 're-storying' or 'retelling' to make visible once silenced discourse, imagery and theorizing that marginalizes early childhood professionals.

Summary

A large percentage of literature does not include explicit discussion of social justice in theorizing about leadership. A growing number of studies discuss equity issues within the body of the manuscript including the gendered nature of the field or low compensation rates. However, there is a lack of connection between these inequities and the definitions or purposes of leadership for the field. A small number of scholars have recently begun to intentionally associate the purposes of leadership with responsibilities to address issues of social justice in the field. More so than conceptualizations of leadership and epistemological stances, social justice oriented leadership is explicitly tied to issues of privilege and marginalization for both scholarship and practice.

Discussion

This review of the literature on leadership in early childhood has revealed important information about the definitions and assumptions, epistemological perspectives and expressed purposes and goals embedded in current theorizing and scholarship. First, we documented how a variety of definitions of leadership are represented in the literature. Definitions have been changing over the past 10 years to include more consideration of the influence of context, the importance of relationships and distributed versus hierarchical organizational structures. Second, our analysis of epistemological characteristics reveals that many scholars discuss leadership in a manner that includes both modernist and postmodernist characteristics. However, there is an increasing emphasis on postmodern discourse emerging as leadership is conceptualized as a complex situated process highly influenced by context. Less developed, we found, are scholars using postmodern thinking to conceptualize identities for the individuals engaged in leadership. Third, our review makes visible how very few scholars explicitly emphasize social justice and equity in writing and thinking about leadership for the field of early childhood.

These findings are useful for inspiring a reflection on where collective theorizing currently stands. Furthermore, they are useful for providing direction to practitioners actively engaged in the work of leadership. Given the expanding calls within the field to focus on building leadership capacity in early childhood, our analyses can inform a process of interrogation about who benefits and who is marginalized by the various conceptions and discourses surrounding leadership scholarship. Such candid dialogue can inspire a productive struggle in thinking together about the types leadership we want to collectively build, promising methods for strengthening leadership capacities we value, and the consequences that result from emphasizing different conceptions of leadership. A major contribution our analysis makes to the field is to outline how the assumptions embedded in current scholarship represent both areas of confluence and alignment (e.g. the shift towards distributed and relational leadership) along with multiple arenas of contradiction and tension (e.g. constraining leadership to certain positions versus emancipating it from positional criteria). Such variability is expected given the continuum of epistemological positionings (Crotty, 1998) in the literature and reflects the tapestry of approaches and possibilities for thinking and action represented in current leadership theorizing. Such variety may be necessary given the complexities of our early childhood systems. Scholarship that teases apart these complexities can lay the groundwork for meaningful and concrete change in the spaces where early learning takes place.

Neither universal conceptions of linear hierarchical leadership development nor reconceptualization that emphasizes contextual variation and power sharing in leadership alone characterize what currently exists across all programmes in the early childhood field. No single definition of leadership will accurately capture the complexities inherent to work with diverse children, families, communities and the ECE workforce that serves them. As a result, we need to actively work to expand and diversify our conceptual frameworks, analytic tools, and tactical approaches. Although there is utility in working towards collective understanding by defining terms (e.g. leadership) and identifying best practices that are associated with strengthening quality and outcomes for children, such modernist thinking must be complemented with postmodern ideas if we want to remain innovative and

responsive to diversity and the dynamic conditions of working with children and families. As McMurtry (2015) explains,

> From a relational perspective, subjects and disciplines are neither objective truths nor idiosyncratic, subjective inventions. Instead, they are valuable, constantly evolving cultural tools and practices that help us to interact with the world in (hopefully) ever more effective, nuanced, and ethical ways. (p. 2, para. 10)

We need to conceptualize knowledge construction – and in this case knowledge about leadership and its expression – as having 'no pre-ordained endpoint, but rather grow[ing] ever outward and more complex' and changing in response to 'diverse bodies, personal experiences, social relationships, and cultural contexts … evolving [like the] unfinished nature of knowledge itself' (McMurtry, 2015, p. 3, paragraphs 1 and 3).

Embracing multiplicity and responsivity to context does not mean, however, early childhood should not construct principles that are shared foundations for theorizing about leadership for the profession. We do need to consider the purposes driving leadership as Amanda Sinclair (2007) reminds us, 'Our task is not just to learn how to be a leader. It is to grapple with the complex conceptual structural and political roots of leadership aspiration and to ask ourselves what leadership is for' (p. 33). Our findings suggest that leadership scholarship to date has given too little consideration of this question. A dearth of thinking exists that couples working for social justice and equity as explicit and visible values propelling the purpose and goals for leadership in early childhood. As Davis et al. (2015) state, emphasizing diversity and social justice can be foundational principles in theorizing:

> We would like to offer alternative discourses of early childhood educational leadership. These alternatives see that leaders work with people to create spaces for leadership that lead to the creation of communities where knowledge and inequitable positioning is critiqued and reconstructed. Within this leadership image, a leader can: be inclusive; learns alongside others; doesn't always have the answers and solutions; listens to and with others; and places ethics at the core of their work … (p. 144)

Raising awareness about the modernist and postmodernist epistemological perspectives represented in discourse on leadership allows scholars to grapple with the limitations and advantages of different perspectives. Whereas postmodern thinking recognizes the complexity of social interaction and human relationships and the intersectional realities that render identities as multi-dimensional, dynamic and constrained by the inequitable distribution of power in society, modernism is valuable for naming current organizations, programmes and schools as they exist where individuals are still frequently signified through social address boxes, static traits, ranks in a hierarchy and progressions up a career ladder. The process of intellectually grappling with these tensions – naming the world as it exists while working towards and imagining new, more equitable possibilities – must be central to the work of leadership scholars. Inclusion of these tensions in academic work must find a home in all research, analysis and evaluation of leadership in the field as a means to reduce the systemic oppression that often stems from the very institutions that are attempting to address inequity. The centrality of this work must also extent to practitioners, where the implications of hierarchy are immediate and concrete. For the entire workforce and leadership of ECE to grapple with these tensions suggests a real opportunity for a multiplicity of perspectives to participate in the daily and long-term practice of early learning.

Early childhood can learn from (not replicate) the body of work in social justice leadership where striving towards equity is a central objective and as Lyman, Strachan, and Lazaridou (2012) explain, the work 'always leads on because the work is by definition unfinished. There will be twists in the road as new issues arise and claim our attention. Neither the paths nor the outcomes of social justice leadership are predictable, only the need' (p. 197). For example, early childhood educators must expand beyond discourse that associates leadership with change agency and activism to include explicit commitments to build knowledge about how oppression and marginalization operate in society and the role of resistance, dissension, rebellion and subversion in leadership work to reimagine and transform oppressive and marginalizing experiences for children, families and the early childhood profession. We can ask how social

justice leadership theorizing can inform our thinking for early childhood and specifically, if and how the tenets of this body of literature are relevant to our field. These include maintaining persistence, building inclusive and participatory processes, widening the voices contributing to decision-making, engaging in ongoing critical self-reflection and personal work and expanding and challenging one's perspectives, developing strategies to work with resistance, and using data – narrative/interpretive and quantitative – to determine where inequities exist that require immediate and responsive intervention. We can ask what would happen if we united an equity agenda with beliefs about leadership and its ambitions. What consequences would result if leadership was conceptualized as praxis in early childhood? That is, considering leadership as a continual, dynamic interaction among knowledge acquisition, deep reflection and action at an intrapersonal and extrapersonal level with the purpose of transformation and liberation? What pathologizing silences (Shields, 2004) could we overcome by inviting people to give voice to their own realities, sharing how they 'make sense of things' in conversations in order to promote deeper understanding, strengthened relationships and an increased commitment to address social injustices made visible in these contexts of relational dialogue? How would this change our dialogue about children's civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights validated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989; UNCRC, 2009), the welfare and well-being of children living in poverty and/or toxic stress, children with disabilities or the low compensation rates oppressing the early childhood workforce? Early childhood, as a profession, must go beyond shifting definitions of leadership to be more inclusive of a wider spectrum of early childhood professionals. Instead, we must critically examine the epistemological assumptions represented in our leadership discourse and the conceptions of identity implied in the literature to better understand the benefits, limitations and consequences of our current theorizing. Most importantly, as early childhood enjoys a rise in national attention and more scrutiny is given to the need for strong leadership to guide systems reform efforts, we must query the intended purposes motivating leadership in early childhood so change is directed at improving equity in society instead of representing a quixotic crusade.

Conclusion

> One is rarely encouraged to ask: leading to what end and for whom – for the national interest, for individual students, for social justice in a democratic society? (Blackmore, 1999, p. 5)

This is the first comprehensive literature review analysing the assumptions underlying the scholarship discussing leadership within the early childhood profession. Given our research findings – the shift toward more inclusive and contextualized conceptualizations of leadership reflecting modern *and* postmodern epistemologies and emerging scholarship linking leadership with social justice and equity – this study makes a significant contribution to the profession. We suggest that the theoretical framework of intersectionality discussed by Núñez (2014) and comprehensive discussions of social justice leadership in Bogotch and Shields (2014) could inspire thinking about a more equity informed theorizing about leadership for early childhood. We invite scholars to utilize our findings to hold up our current scholarship and conceptions of leaders and leadership for 'reinvention and critique.' As Davis et al. (2015) suggest, our theories of leadership require exploration of power, knowledge, identities and agency. They should be based in early childhood knowledge and be responsive to the diverse individuals that interact together in early childhood contexts. For these scholars of leadership in early learning, meaningful 'reinvention and critique' can come in the form of concrete acknowledgement of identity and epistemology in scholarly work, with specific attention paid to the methodological details of study design, data collection and analysis, from considering leadership beyond directorships in participant selection to including the full spectrum of early learning (family child care providers, public and private providers, etc.), scholarship can be an active contributor to the breakdown of the dichotomies that negatively impact the field.

Theorizing about leadership in early childhood is continuously evolving. We align with Davis et al. (2015) in suggesting that we have a responsibility to conceptualize leadership in a manner that holds us collectively responsible for creating opportunities for more 'collaborative, ethical, inclusive and socially just communities' (p. 145). We believe that the field of early childhood needs more leadership theorizing that intentionally describes the purposes of working for change including goals of reducing oppressions and bringing about greater equity for children, families, communities and the early childhood workforce.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix. Analytic review template

Item number: _____

Type of resource:

___ Book/book chapter
___ Peer-reviewed article
___ Non-peer-reviewed article
___ Thesis or dissertation
___ Report

Institutional Affiliation(s)/location(s) of author(s)/Department(s)/division(s) and college(s) of author(s):

Summary of the chapter/article/book: (add abstract if there is one)

Keyword(s) listed (Please note when keywords were listed on article and/or in search terms**):**

What type of research is it? (check one or more)

___ Literature Review
___ Empirical study
___ Theoretical/position paper
___ Practical perspective (literature written for teachers, child care providers or general audience)
Other:

Definition of leadership (copy/paste exact quotes)

Who holds leadership?

___ Director
___ Manager
___ Other administrative staff
___ Teachers
___ Parents
___ Other:

What methodologies are used? (check one or more)

___ Qualitative (underline/highlight one of these)
___ Quantitative (underline/highlight one of these)
___ Case study
___ Ethnography
___ Discourse Analysis
___ Not Applicable/Other

What theoretical frameworks are privileged in this review? (e.g. traditional hierarchical and/or trait theories, distributed leadership, transformational versus transformative leadership)

Social Justice and Equity Issues Addressed in this Article

___ None
___ Naming Marginalizing Conditions and Mechanisms of Oppression (Racism, sexism, classism etc)
___ Addressing the Outcomes associated with these Oppressions including Child Welfare, Children's Rights to Safety, Developmentally Appropriate Learning Contexts, Children's Economic and overall Well-being
___ Developing resistance and personal resiliency skills to sustain an equity agenda
___
___ Chasm in demographics of Field versus those in positions of power influencing the field
___ Moral Dialogue to Learn to See and Honor Difference and address oppressions
___ Discourse (changing language to address oppressions)
___ Transformative self-learning
___ Other (describe)
Examples of the above:

To what extent are these dimensions of social justice and equity addressed? Assign a rating between 1 and 4.

__ Social justice and equity issues are not discussed
__ Social justice and equity issues are alluded to but only in general terms
__ Social justice and equity issues are treated as methodological variables
__ Social justice and equity issues are treated as central to the text/analysis
Additional Comments:

How, when, and to what extent are larger, macrocontextual issues/factors addressed (e.g. systems perspectives, political/policy contexts, historical contexts)?

___ Not at all
___ In general terms
___ Discussed in depth
Additional Comments:

What does the author cite as future directions?

Epistemological Assumptions (provide descriptions if possible)

____ Modernist
____ Post-modernist
____ Both

Critical Discourse Analysis--Keyword Analysis: Recognition of discourses as involving power relations, ideologies, and histories.

Language/Key Terms to describe leadership
Language/Key Terms to describe the field of early childhood
Language/Key Terms to describe early childhood professionals
Language/Key Terms to describe children and families
Changes in terminology (e.g. first time certain words appear)
Other: