

Working with (Post)Theories to Explore Embodied and (Un)Recognized Emotional Labor in English Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

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Abstract

Technocratic accountability, which is impacting ECEC practices in England, is where the government favors evidence-based knowledge to work with children. As a result, the emotional aspect of ECEC work and emotional labor have become increasingly complex and are sometimes unrecognized. In this paper we highlight the importance of more relational, connected, and embodied ways to work with young children. Analyzing qualitative semi-structured interview data from two projects, we focus on emotional labor using poststructuralist and posthuman affect theory. We use data from the first project to analyze narratives from ECEC practitioners, highlighting the relationship between government policies and dominant discourses. The second project notes entanglements with human and other-than-human bodies enacted with affect theory, which reveals embodied other-than-human productions of emotional labor generating alternative ways to explore ECEC work. By engaging with these two theoretical and conceptual positions, we offer a different perspective to consider ECEC professional knowledge(s) and reveal the ways these can shed an alternative light on professional practice. The resultant analysis allows us to reconsider knowledge-making practices in ECEC and challenge existing Cartesian dualistic thinking which separates “care” and “education.”

Keywords

ECEC; Emotional labor; Poststructuralism; Posthuman affect; Relationality; Knowledge-production

Introduction

In England, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is predominantly part of a neoliberal market model where provision for children between the ages of birth to five (foundation stage) has been driven by a statutory curricular framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and micromanaged by the government regulator (Department of Education [DfE], 2017; Ofsted, 2014). The diversity of the sector is replicated in the different types of non-statutory provision; including private day nurseries, children’s centers, nurseries attached to schools (or long daycare/preschools), and childminders (or

family daycare). Provision can be sessional or full time for up to 51 weeks of the year as selected by parents. The required qualification to work in these types of settings is a vocational accreditation, which is equivalent to exit-level high school certificates, although academic qualifications have developed to postgraduate level in recent years (DfE, 2017). In England, from the age of five, education is compulsory once the child passes the September after their fourth birthday; they enter schooling for the Reception Year, which is generally led by qualified teachers who hold either an undergraduate or a postgraduate teaching qualification. Pedagogy is traditionally play-

based, where ECEC practitioners blend child-directed and adult-led learning both inside and outside the classroom (Wood, 2013). However, pedagogy becomes more adult-led as children are prepared to transition to more formal compulsory stages of education.

During the 1990s, ECEC was subject to market-led models of education that resulted in the expansion of the sector, increased government investment, and introduction of an ECEC curriculum (Lloyd & Penn, 2013). The influx of public money saw the need to **demonstrate “quality improvements” and “value for money” (Fairchild, 2017). From 2010,** successive government reforms have resulted in a curriculum-focused approach where children are regularly assessed against measurable milestones (DfE, 2017). Assessment strategies follow children into compulsory education where the Standard & Testing Agency (STA, 2019) of the Department for Education produced an assessment framework to provide an on-entry baseline assessment of attainment to measure what it details are **the key features of a child’s “school readiness.” The proposed baseline framework has generated heated debates amongst professionals, academics, and researchers concerned over its suitability and efficacy (see Moss, 2019). These concerns include the worry that the play element of learning has been side-lined in policy, despite arguments that “learning not only can, but clearly does occur during play” (Nitecki & Wasmuth, 2017, p. 2).**

The focus on getting children “school ready” has become a key government priority (DfE, 2017). The conceptualization of “school readiness” was framed by ideas that young children must be ready to conform to the specific demands of a defined school routine and curriculum, rather than as a process of co-creating learning spaces and activities, and building relationships (Ofsted, 2014). At the

same time, ECEC provision and the workforce have been judged against the government **regulator’s measures of “quality” (Ofsted, 2014),** which has been determined by the narrow **definition of “school readiness” and specific measures of child outcomes at developmental stages (Moss, 2017).**

It has been argued that ECEC **practitioners’ emotional investment in day-to-day practices has been taken for granted due to the highly feminized nature of the industry (Osgood, 2012). The Cartesian dualistic split between the “body” and “mind,” coupled with the view that young children have simple development needs (Moss, 2017), have contributed to the perception that ECEC work is gendered, low skilled, and low paid (Osgood, 2012). For these reasons, the continuity of the conceptual division between “care” and “education” for 0-3 and 3- to 5-year-old children remains high on the policy agenda (Moss, 2017, 2019). This division has been reinforced with statutory assessment points at age 2 and the end of the foundation stage (DfE, 2017) which further separates the “care” aspect of ECEC practice.**

In this paper, we argue that in achieving the government goal of school readiness and **accountability for a child’s progress against the EYFS development goals, there is a possibility that the emotional aspects of ECEC practice, such as emotional labor, can become unrecognized (see Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018). Employing data from two qualitative projects, interpreted through poststructuralism and posthuman affect theory, we seek to explore and understand how the emotional aspects of ECEC practice can reveal relational, connected, and embodied ways to understand what it means to work with young children. We aim to contribute to the argument of wider definitions of “knowledges,” where Campbell-Barr (2019) argues for the “plurality of specialized**

professional knowledge for ECEC” (p.134) that not only opens up multiple ways of knowing, but also a consideration of the different ways of knowing and how these might be articulated (Campbell-Barr, 2017).

Review of the Literature

Technocratic accountability is based on the application of evidence-based knowledge to work with children (Georgeson & Campbell-Barr, 2015), which may result in the reproduction of school readiness, measurable outcomes, and quality improvements via more adult-led teaching practices (Moss, 2017; 2019). In this sense, the emotional aspect of ECEC work is not—and cannot—be captured. Boler (1999) questioned why professional and scholarly disciplines “erase, denigrate, and devalue emotions” (p. xviii), as this can impact wider perceptions of caring work and reinforce dualistic splits. Hochschild’s (1983) influential work, *The Managed Heart, Commercialization of Human Feeling*, was the first to address the idea that work is not solely divided between dualisms of mind and body, but may also incorporate significant emotional entanglement. **Such work entails learning to manage one’s own feelings in order to evoke particular feelings in other people.** She argued that, in human life, emotionality is an important function that contributes to successful relationships in which **emotional labor is “sold” and taken for granted** within the labor market (Hochschild, 1983).

Hochschild’s (1983) ideas have generated debates about emotional labor, especially in work related to care. Existing discussions in ECEC surrounding emotional labor have focused on the management and expression of emotions (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Van Laere et al., 2014) and caring work (Bolton, 2004; Page, 2018; Taggart, 2011). For example, Elfer (2008) discussed emotional labor in the context of the ECEC, stating the following:

Nursery staff spoke of minimising possible feelings of exclusion, guilt or envy in parents by careful control of information given to **them about their child’s day. Staff were** required to smile and look cheerful when parents were being showed around. There was also the labor managing emotions evoked by parents, sometimes nursery staff **being idealised as “loving children and having endless patience” when this is far** from the subjective reality (p. 365).

There have also been links to practitioner **training where Colley’s (2006) study showed** that emotional labor was taught in terms of how to evoke calmness and happiness, and suppress negative emotions in order to provide quality care for children in the nursery. She argued that emotional labor carried costs for the ECEC **practitioner as it is “controlled and exploited for profit by employers” (p. 15).** Vincent and Braun (2013) argued that expectations for emotional engagement, regulation, and containment should form part of the training for current and future ECEC practitioners. Official recognition of emotional labor has currently been subsumed **into English curricular policy as the “key person” approach, where a practitioner’s role is to** promote an attachment with the children in their care (DfE, 2017). Furthermore, in literature the emotional aspects of practice have been reflected in the expectations for practitioners to build caring—even loving—relationships with young children (Davis & Degotardi, 2015; Elfer, 2012; Langford et al., 2017; Taggart, 2011). Emotional labor has been explored as a way to understand and question the lived nature of emotional work. Indeed, the concept of professional love has been developed to legitimize the ways in which ECEC practitioners **“love” as part of their role (Andrew, 2015;** Aslanian, 2015; Page, 2018) which emphasizes the possible effect that emotional labor may have on ECEC practitioners.

However, Dahlberg et al. (2007) stated that portraying nurseries as a place of emotional closeness where emotional labor is seen as an **“intimacy” is faux, and this portrayal can** misleadingly combine the public and private spheres of life. They further argued that the **nursery should not be seen as “home-from-home” nor should the ECEC practitioner be seen and regarded as “substitute mother.”** They strongly argued that the benefit of attending a **nursery is that it offers “something different but quite complementary, so the child gets the best of two (home and nursery) environments”** (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 45). They also emphasized the independence of the child by **stating that the “young child is born equipped to learn and does not ask for permission to start learning.** In fact, the young child risks impoverishment at the hands of adults, and **rather than “development, the loss of capabilities over time.”** (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 48). Here Dahlberg et al. (2007) see the agentic child as a co-constructor of knowledge, identity, and culture, competent and rich in potential, and the **ECEC practitioner’s role is to complement the child’s experiences. However,** the ways in which the ECEC practitioner follows and invests their own knowledge, experience, **and skills to address a less “competent” child can** be seen as a source of challenge. This is because some children do not meet the demands imposed by adults, therefore it can be argued that emotional labor is taken for granted to **address the “challenges” that might arise where** a diverse range of children attend ECEC provision (Moss, 2017).

There have been wider debates that indicate emotional labor is not openly discussed in the field of education more generally. For example, it was argued that in teaching and **learning practices, teachers’ emotional** investment to their professional work was overlooked (Mikuska & Lyndon, 2018). In ECEC,

acknowledging emotional labor can be just as difficult as it may undermine the process of the professionalization of the workforce (Tan, 2014), which, despite government investment in a range of qualifications, is still perceived as a deficit (Osgood, 2012). Canella (1997) stated that ECEC work is linked to emotional labor in the **context of the skills mothers “naturally” have,** therefore, professionals needed emotional awareness of both themselves and others to be able to effectively engage work related to care (Ruch, 2012). The potential expectation for emotional labor as part of the ECEC **practitioner’s role can conflict with other** internalized moral and social expectations of gendered caring work (Syed, 2008), and can impact the ways in which the practitioners view themselves and their practice (Payne, 2009). The challenge for ECEC practitioners remains to find ways of moving beyond deficit perceptions **of ECEC as emotionally gendered and “natural” for women (O’Brien, 2007, 2008).** Taggart (2011) argued that **“...taking control of the** professionalisation agenda therefore requires practitioners to demonstrate a critical understanding of their practice as emotional **work” (p. 85).**

Hochschild (1983) warned that social status, class, and gender differently distribute the way in which emotional labor is managed, where women in particular are required to do more of the emotional labor type of work than men. Furthermore, Bolton (2004) debated that the commodification of emotional labor made it a challenge to resist or subvert the need for emotional labor that is often unrecognized. Wider dichotomies of care/education, skills/emotions and gendered work have been problematized by Lenz Taguchi (2007), who argued that power relations promote academic knowledge (predominantly theoretical and masculine) as more highly valued than (motherly feminine) nursery practices. This

gendered dualism forms the basis of the skills debate in service and care work where men are generally employed in more managerial or technical roles than women (Nixon, 2009).

Therefore, it can be argued that debates on emotional labor in ECEC are nuanced and complex due to the additional development of the organizational requirements of work in settings where both care and education are key components. However, policies that measure **children's outcomes devalue "the labor of love, care, and solidarity" (Apple, 2013, p. 16) that underpins the ECEC practitioner's role. The conceptual division between "education" and "care" remains a concern as it drives the ECEC practitioner in a particular direction, one that needs to ensure that "no aspect of the child must be left uneducated: education touches spirit, soul, motivation, wishes, desires, dispositions and attitudes" (Fendler, 2001, p. 121). This can result in ECEC practitioners' well-being and their emotional investment being disregarded due to government visions for accountability and a future society that creates the child as a self-governing subject (Dahlberg et al., 2007).**

Methodological Approach

To investigate the notion of emotional labor and the emotional investment of ECEC practitioners, we draw on qualitative data from two projects. Both projects investigated the professional practice of ECEC practitioners in England and aimed to recognize the wide range of skills and knowledge(s) that their job may require. The first project involved 42 semi-structured interviews with ECEC practitioners including childminders. Analysis of this project provided the foundation to the second, whereby **the first project sets the scene on "dominant narratives" of ECEC practitioners with the particular focus on the emotional aspects of their role.**

The second set of data was based on 10 semi-structured interviews with a similar range of ECEC practitioners. Working with posthumanist theorizations reveal a different view of human emotions within the social and material world and engages with the material (other-than-human) to reveal more-than-human relations (Coole & Frost, 2010). This offers a way to move beyond purely discursive articulations of **"dominant narratives" where "different conditions in which subjectivity can be revealed"** (Benozzo & Gherardi, 2019, p. 4).

From a Poststructural Approach to Posthuman Affect

Poststructural Approach to Data Collection and Analysis

A poststructural approach does not have one fixed meaning, but explores the complex relationship between existing knowledge, **"truth," and power, and the effects of these relationships on the individuals (MacNaughton, 2005). It helps to "bring assumptions and things taken for granted again into question, to shake habits, ways of acting and thinking, to dispel the familiarity of the accepted, to take the measure of rules and institutions" (Gordon, 2000, p. xxxiv).** It also troubles the binary categories such as male/female, adult/child, rational/irrational, making visible the constructive force of linguistic practices and dismantling their apparent certainty (Davies & Gannon, 2011). This approach claims that personal and political knowledge is guided and based upon individual **experiences. Weedon's (1997) work offered a contextualization of exploring experiences using poststructural theory; he stated the following:**

Experience has no inherent essential meaning. It may be given meaning in language through a range of discursive systems of meaning which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality, which in turn serve conflicting interests (p. 33).

Social reality is thus formed through individuals' experiences, and locations, in discursive structures which make it impossible to produce **one consistent and absolute "truth"** (Foucault, 1980). Since this paper reports on the experiences of ECEC practitioners that are formulated through their gendered and caring experiences, and on the ways these ECEC practitioners understand their practice, there is **no absolute objective "truth"**. Instead, **"truths"** are discourses accepted by society as meaningful. Our positioning in this paper is not **concerned with identifying an authentic "truth"** but to highlight, through lived experiences, the complexities of ECEC practices.

Posthuman Affect

Building on poststructural philosophies, a posthuman oeuvre questions the taken-for-granted primacy of the human and their relationship in the world. Taylor and Gannon (2018) note that this approach requires the human to be decentered and given the same status as other-than-humans. This produces a shift from discrete subjects/objects to reveal co-relational constellations of assemblages where connections between bodies produce the flows, **forces, and intensities through which "life" is materialized** (Fairchild, 2019). One of the concepts central to posthuman thinking is that of affect. However, defining affect can be problematic as there are multiple theoretical perspectives and positions (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019). In this paper we employ affect to explore how bodies become modified as they come into contact with, and connect to, each other (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2015).

Affect has been conceptualized as intersubjective and pre-personal (Massumi, 2015) and can **"influence how we live, interact and work"** (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 109). However, affect and emotion are co-constitutive, in as much as emotions can be produced as part of the

modification of connecting bodies; emotions are **episodic "realisations of affect"** (Von Scheve & Slaby, 2019, p. 46). Although employing terms such as **emotion may appear "too reliant on unspecified social and cultural assumptions about what specific terms mean and do"** (Anderson, 2014, p. 11) emotions can be an expression of the capture of affect (Massumi, 2002). By acknowledging fluidity, affect becomes political as bodily transformations unfold where the politics of collective transformation are more than individual human identity politics; they are politics of bodily transformations (Massumi, 2015).

Poststructural Approach - First Set of Data Findings

This section reports on the "dominant narratives" of ECEC practitioners that emerged from the 42 semi-structured interviews. The individual stories were thematically grouped for analysis to determine which stories were constructed by which participants and to **consider the question "[W]hy this story here and now?"** (Bamberg, 2016, p. 1294). **The investment of the emotional human capital to produce a high-quality professional service was referred to by all participants. The emotional element appeared as part of the "soft skills" (care, love) in feminized work, along with passion for the job ECEC practitioners do. It is therefore vital to recognize emotional labor when professionalization in ECEC is debated.**

Two dominant themes emerged from data, both **addressing practitioners' emotional investments**: One, the emotional cost of leaving a child in the care of others, resulting in ECEC practitioners dealing with parents (mainly mothers) emotionality; and two, the connection with some aspects of the **ECEC practitioners' (emotional) job, which often goes unrecognized.**

*Emotional Cost of Leaving a Child in the
Care of Others*

*...sometimes we need to support the parents
during settling in period not the child (Hannah)*

*The child is fine, settled well, but her mum is
just so anxious. I know, it is natural for a mum
to worry, but sometimes it is just too much
(Lottie)*

*I know that those mums who had to go to work
and who leave their children for the first time
on Tuesday afternoon are quietly suffering, I
can really relate to their feelings, feelings of
pain and guilt...(Charlotte)*

These examples were just a few that demonstrated the emotional cost of parents leaving their child(ren) in the nursery. The support ECEC practitioners offered parents was considered an important part of their role as parents needed to be reassured that their **child(ren) were in “good” quality care. These** examples show that emotionally engaged work requires emotional labor as part of the recognition of skilled work (Payne, 2009), as ECEC practitioners perform complex roles that **involved balancing parents’ anxiety with** providing high-quality care for their children. For example, Hannah, a deputy manager spoke about the emotional service she provided for some working mothers. She spoke at length about her personal experience as a working mother, describing how she felt leaving her own children in the care of others. She described her **feelings “like a kind of a grief when you hand over your child to someone else to look after her... it was the biggest hurdle I had to overcome.” This example shows the emotional** cost mothers need to pay when leaving their own children in the nursery. Drawing on her own experience as a mother, her focus was on the support of other mothers in the nursery she

runs, who were in the same/similar situation as she was. This action emphasized a dominant discourse of the maternal embodiment in care work (Bolton, 2004) and reinforced the widely accepted binary of domestic roles between mothers/fathers or females/males. Mothers who are returning to work were engaged more than **their children’s father in organizing, planning,** and finding appropriate care for their children (O’Brien, 2007, 2008).

*(Un)Recognized Emotional Labor
You are attached to them personally and
professionally. You do feel for them even when
you go home especially when some of those
children are on the child protection register and
stuff. I do feel for them, when I go home, I do
worry about them in my head (Trudie)*

*When I finished my degree, I was so passionate
to change things in the nursery. But my
manager didn’t like that, so I had no choice but
to leave (Barbara)*

*I am still teased by my male friends. They don’t
really understand why I chose to work in the
nursery. For example, when we go to the pub,
they would buy me a half pint or say things like
you cannot drink more than a pint. They just
think that I play with babies all day... (Rocky)*

All these accounts show that ECEC work is not solely divided between dualisms of the mind and body, but also incorporates a significant amount of unrecognized emotional work. Hochschild (1983), Bolton (2004), and Taggart (2011) all argued for emotionality to be recognized, as emotional labor is an important part of care work contributing to high-quality services. Like Trudie, the feel of worry, care, and attachment does not end at work, it continues in a domestic sphere which goes unrecognized.

Barbara confirms what Tan (2014) states, that qualifications increase human capital through knowledge and skills. With an aspiration to hold a higher professional qualification, a positive impact on the ECEC staff and services can be produced. This is part of the ECEC professionalization process that reverberates with what many interviewees argued, that professionalism has always been **linked to developing knowledge. Barbara's self-reflection** indicates that the reason for studying was to implement changes in her setting to ensure better outcomes for children. However, this was stopped by her manager, which resulted in her changing her job. Feeling undervalued or not recognized, despite finishing a degree, is another form of unrecognized emotional labor that ECEC practitioners face, which can result in changing jobs.

Rocky's story showed the gender division of labor in the nursery. The normative conceptions of appropriate behavior for males and females, in this case, can be seen as a deviation from the expected behavior for males, because he was doing ECEC work that had been **described as "play[ing] with babies all day."** In Western society, those individuals who do not act according to the dominant requirements of gender, or do not perform within the socially accepted domain of masculinity or femininity, may risk marginalization (Canella, 1997). For Rocky, this marginalization takes place through his friends, who are questioning his masculinity; but Rocky was also a father, a husband, a friend, and a deputy manager. Therefore, he was constituted from multiple, and probably simultaneous identities according to his specific contexts driven by a certain time and place.

Unsettling the dominant discourse of **masculinity, where Rocky was expected to "drink as a man" and to "do a man's job" can be** achieved by moving away from the binary system of male/female but also by rejecting the

idea of the unitary identity. For example, Weedon, (1997) argues that this view permits a different understanding of gender, where examining the construction of gender takes place through cultural discourses in which gender is made. This also suggests that by teasing Rocky **for not doing a "man's job," ECEC work was seen** by his friends for females only. While such relations are (re)constructed, renegotiated, or resisted for Rocky, for female ECEC practitioners the negotiation sits within **"juggling work/home commitment" where 13 of** the 42 participants mentioned this as an issue. For Rocky, in order to feel valued and confident in what he does for living, considerable amount of self-regulation and emotional labor needed to be invested; this kind of emotional labor goes unrecognized.

Affective Data Materializations – Second Set of Data Findings

The data explored in this section of the paper was generated as part of a Sociological Review Kickstart Grant funded project **"Unsettling Early Childhood Education and Care** (ECEC) classrooms: Ecological relations, professionals, and more-than-human subjectivities." **Data was collected using a range** of methods including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and image elicitation. In this section, we focus on seemingly mundane data fragments which emerged during the 10 semi-structured interviews. The aim was to move beyond discursive constructions of dominant narratives to consider how affective bodies and emotions were entangled in material moments from the interviews. The interview transcripts were subject to close reading whereby we were drawn to data that we felt articulated affective moments of emotional labor. Whilst we could have considered an inductive or thematic analysis of this account, we were conscious of some of the

materialist critiques of representation that can arrest debate and thinking as it “claims to represent truth or morality” (MacLure, 2015, p. 102). We turn to Taylor (2013) who encourages researchers to focus on the small and mundane happenings to “pay attention to what we don’t normally see, to what is excluded” (p. 629).

“Thank you” Card

This first excerpt is from Jane, who works in a medium sized private nursery that could cater for up to 50 children per day ranging between the ages of birth to five. She discussed a “thank you” card she received from parents of children she had looked after in her setting:

This [the card]...was from a family that I’ve had all three of their boys, and they love it. Do you know what? Parents love it. They all come because of our garden, and they all tell us, “We’ve come here because of the garden.” Families like that, they love coming back and going “You’re still here!” and as much as that’s lovely, so they like to be able to see the staff...If you strengthen all of that up, the rest naturally follows. And that is our core ethos I guess, and it’s natural, and it’s home from home and it’s comfortable and everyone is, it sounds like we’re all happy and have big cuddles all the time but generally the staff love the children and it’s all professional love and we’re not ones that, our children do get kissed and they do get cuddled and it’s very affectionate because we have a lot of full-timers, they’re in 45 hours a week... I don’t know, I just, when I look at our children...they always develop to their standards, it’s all about potential for them and how we can develop them, and we are very “school readiness” but it’s not, we stick with the primary areas, we try and, yes they do learn maths, yes they do learn English, they do all of that but we make happy, confident children that will talk to anybody and they’re not afraid of

people and they’re very sociable children, we’re very much concentrated on the primary areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance.

The “thank you” card materializes emotions from a range of different perspectives—those of the parents— their love for the setting, the resources, and the way the environment is set up, and the perspectives of the ECEC practitioners. A “key person” was incorporated into the EYFS as both a figure for children’s transitions and attachments and for supporting learning and development (DfE, 2017). This dual focus acknowledged the influence of the education/care binary; however, the above excerpt is primarily focused on love and the potential for emotional labor, where ECEC practitioners support parents. In this instance emotions are not erased but the “thank you” card becomes a conduit to make visible some of the unrecognized aspects of emotional labor. This raises an important issue for the perception of the importance of emotions and the management of these alongside being a professional practitioner (Elfer, 2008; Osgood, 2012; Taggart, 2011; Van Laere et al., 2014).

However, the debates concerning commodification and academic knowledge (Lenz Taguchi, 2007) are part of the discussions. Jane specifically mentions “professional love” (Page, 2018), which reveals the manifestations of the education/care/love debates (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Langford, 2019) and replicating the split between professional/personal and mind/body. This is also exemplified as the discursive nature of school readiness in the EYFS (DfE, 2017). Tensions between education and care (Apple, 2013; Fendler, 2001) are highlighted further when Jane considered how the social development of the children is just as important as their cognitive development.

In this excerpt, affect flows through the “thank you” card and connects to ECEC

practitioners, parents, children, and the EYFS curricular outcomes. These flows are produced **as the private and professional aspects of Jane's** work life are revealed (Pullen et al., 2017) where the card was addressed to her personally but made links to her role as an ECEC practitioner. This then influenced how she spoke about her **and her colleagues' roles and the ways in which** (professional) love is an emotional outcome of the affective relationships (Von Scheve & Slaby, 2019). In this excerpt, Jane does not recognize that the emotions felt are erased in her connections with parents, children, and policy; if anything, they are magnified. However, she does start to acknowledge that they may be unrecognized in policy when she links to school readiness. There is also a sense these emotions are reclaimed throughout the excerpt as affective connections that modify the way she perceives the need for education and care to be intrinsically linked (Massumi, 2002, 2015).

Stones and Circle Time

This second excerpt is from Christine who was based in a farm setting which took children between 2 years and 5 years old. The children spent most of their time outdoors and could access the whole farm, along with specific areas for them to play and learn with the ECEC practitioners. Below is a discussion on a stone and how it helped to facilitate a circle time engagement:

*We had a child with additional needs so the little boy was adopted with his siblings and had quite a traumatic upbringing and boundaries were **not in place and actually...his** emotional state could leave him very frustrated, so circle time then was an opportunity to be able to talk about keeping ourselves safe on the **farm and building up a trusted relationship...so it had its place...I had a stone, so just a stone, that was found outside and it was painted red***

and it had a few dots on it...and it was my magic stone and it was always kept in my pocket...it was a magic stone and when we held it we were allowed to talk and everybody else would listen to us because what we have to say was really important, but to be able to listen to the other person we needed to have our stone and have our space first so the stone, had a purpose and the activity had a purpose and we would have to do that before we moved onto a different space on the farm...

Rautio (2013) considers the power and affective nature of stones for young children. She argues autotelic practices, where the stone is placed in a pocket for no other reason than it produces a feeling, highlights that with the **“fleetingness and aimlessness of autotelic practices, we would have to let go of our insistence on long-term accountability, evaluation and controlling of learning outcomes”** (Rautio, 2013, p. 403). The bodily connections between the emotions of the boy and the need to self-regulate, which are part of the prime areas of learning in the EYFS (DfE, 2017), are palpable. Christine maintained a very child-led, play-based pedagogy (Wood, 2013) in the farm setting and her professional identity was dependant on the way she resisted aspects of the school readiness agenda (Osgood, 2012). In this excerpt, the stone becomes a vibrant affective intensity which modified practice, emotions, and social expectations in the setting.

Christine has a strong sense of emotional awareness for the needs of the boy and the other children in the setting (Ruch, 2012). This shows in the way she employs her own emotional management to connect with the boy and to ensure his peers also made that connection (Davis & Degotardi, 2015; Langford et al., 2017; Taggart, 2011). The stone and its autotelic nature make further connections to the school readiness agenda in the EYFS (DfE,

2017), which asks for activities to become more adult directed so that children are ready to transition to compulsory education. However, the affective nature of the stone transforms the circle time from a school readiness activity to a means to connect with magic, emotions, and the farm environment supporting both the staff and children.

In this excerpt, **Christine's** emotional labor becomes visible and is materialized by the stone that drives the activity she had planned. The EYFS, as a curricular body, becomes stretched and deformed as school readiness becomes re-centered on the way emotions are produced in everyday occurrences (Von Scheve & Slaby, 2019). It may be that the ethos of the farm setting was affective in the ways that child-led learning was of paramount importance. **The stone and Christine's body embraced the** emotionality and emotional labor of the circle-time activity and of the children who participated. This re-claiming of emotions and school readiness affects a movement of emotional labor beyond the deficit discourses of low professional status and value of practitioners, to a generative and expansive view of emotions and emotional labor as an intrinsic and recognizable part of practice expectations (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Elfer, 2012; Page, 2018; Taggart, 2011; Van Laere et al., 2014).

Conclusions

In this paper, we explored how emotional labor can be unrecognized in English government policy (DfE, 2017) which has been focussed on technocratic models of school readiness to frame professional practice. Research has noted the importance of acknowledging emotional labor as part of skilled professional work (see for example Elfer, 2012; Page, 2018; Taggart, 2011). However, the policy focus of school readiness reveals how **practitioners' desires to "care" are in tension**

with accountability requirements (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018; Moss, 2017, 2019). The call for papers asked authors to challenge the mind/ body split which favors a particular type of ECEC practice. We have drawn on poststructuralism and posthuman affect theory to instantiate (1) how emotional labor becomes co-constituted and reinforced via dominant discourses, and (2) how paying attention to other-than-human bodies can reveal the affective nature of how emotional labor is materialized.

Our contribution in this paper allows us to reveal and recognize the multiple and plural ways of knowledge making practice in ECEC (Campbell-Barr, 2017, 2019) which take a more relational, connected, and embodied form. In the literature we explored the complexity and nuances of emotionality and emotional labor in ECEC practice, which is in tension with **accountability practices which split "education" and "care."** **The first set of data sets up some of** the dominant discourses of emotional entanglement and employed a poststructural approach. The analysis revealed that in many cases emotional labor is unrecognized in some of the debates that surround the person/private sphere of the ECEC practitioner. The second set of data considered the materialization of emotions which included connections to other-than-human bodies articulating emotions as an affective intensity of emotional labor. These affective connections between human and other-than-human bodies reveal the more-than-human aspect of emotional labor, which acts as a counterpoint for technocratic accountability.

We argue that new modes of thinking are needed to consider the multiple discursive and posthuman aspects of ECEC practice. Our paper offers one way to conceptualize ECEC work that moves beyond technocratic accountability practices that we hope will provide an alternative and different perception

on the realities of ECEC practice. Building on the current scholarship that surrounds emotionality and emotional labor, and working with the **“post” theories is the way in which we articulate** a call for attention to be paid to the emotional nature of practice. We hope the critical theorizations we offer in this paper will engage with wider dialogues and resonate with both ECEC practitioners and scholars alike.

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