**Embodied professional Early Childhood Education and Care teaching practices**

**Abstract**

This chapter discusses the doctoral research process that informed our teaching and learning practices. In recent years, social research has turned its attention to ‘the body’ (Waskul and Vannini, 2016). We consider the implications of such a turn on the ways in which we (re)position ourselves as teachers by reflecting on our experiences of teaching future early years practitioners and teachers. In the first part of the chapter Eva argues that teaching requires a considerable amount of emotional labour that is embodied in her professional practice. She focuses on how her emotions became ‘embodied’ and the ways in which her professional practice/performance has been influenced by her emotions. To demonstrate her subjectification, she used her reflective diary and fieldnotes written over a period of one year which recorded her experiences as a teacher and novice researcher. In the second part of the chapter Sandra reflects on her doctoral study relating to child poverty and how Foucault has informed her ideas of embodiment in relation to her analysis of interviews with early years practitioners and her teaching of child poverty to future early years practitioners and teachers. She draws on examples from both her data analysis and reflective notes on her teaching.

**Context**

As part of our roles as senior lecturers in one of the post 92 higher education institutions, we were asked by the university if we were interested to enrol on the Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme. Since this programme is a high-quality form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that enhances the professional practice and expertise of the students who are our future and current early years practitioners/professionals and teachers, we both felt that this was an opportunity to pursue areas of research which are of direct relevance to our practice interests. We are both at the final stage of our doctoral journey and this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which we, as lecturers, shaped our professional practice through our recent experiences.

**Eva’s reflection**

*Why is it important to acknowledge teachers’ emotion?*

One might rightly ask the question why educators should interest themselves in researching and analysing emotion which has previously been extensively defined and researched by psychologists and sociologists (Harré and Parrott, 1996; Williams, 2001). One of the foremost reasons for doing so is that emotions are involved in many aspects of the teaching and learning process. Dewey (1987:61) states, ‘it is not possible to divide in a vital experience to practical, emotional and intellectual from one another and to set properties of one over against the characteristics of the others.’ Yet, there is little written about the ways in which emotion is embodied in our teaching especially if we take a position that emotions play a central role in the construction of the teacher subjectivity (Zembylas, 2005). Based on the understanding that there is a link between subjectivity and emotion where emotion is acting as discursive practices which are relational to power, then it is possible to demonstrate that emotion is embodied into our teaching practices.

To demonstrate the ways in which emotion is embodied in my teaching, I will draw on my reflective diary and field notes about my experiences as a teacher and novice researcher which were written over a period of one year. Initially, these notes were written to inform my doctoral research in terms of data analysis and ‘meaning making’ (Davies and Gannon, 2011; Osgood, 2012; Stanley, 2013), to find a way of capturing and presenting my participants’ voice in my research. After re-reading my notes, it become apparent that they were an extremely useful collection of information that informed my teaching, as well as the research and analysis process.

*The ‘Notes’*

To demonstrate that emotions are embodied in our teaching, I will analyse two quotes I have written in my reflective diary. The notes that reflect on my teaching, can be grouped into two collections, which are based on my personal experiences and on professional practice. The first quote reflects my ever-changing and sometimes contradictory thoughts of the social world that intersects with my personal experiences and teaching practices. The second quote is written about my teaching experiences. Not only did I record my emotional engagement with the delivery of the topics, but I also added some emotional reactions of a group of students (positive and negative) on certain activities I have designed.

*The intersection of my personal experiences and teaching practices*

About 15% of students I teach have children. I recognised from my own experience as a student mother in the late 1990s, what a difficult and emotionally engaging journey being a mother/parent whilst studying can be. I wrote:

*“Interviewing early years practitioners who are mothers and also students, made me review my own experience as a student mother. I remember that I was in constant race with time and struggled to find childcare. The feeling of guilt evoked with the feeling of having done my own mothering inadequately by leaving my children in the care of my neighbours and extended family. Unconsciously, I have developed a deep empathy towards student mothers which manifested in me being more lenient with their attendance and submission deadlines.” (Diary, 2016)*

This quote indicates that my own experience as a mature student mother, has an impact on the ways in which I have adapted my teaching to a certain group of students. While this approach initially was unconscious, it became more explicit through my reflective diary which made me think about it in more depth. The personalised teaching approach is not new, but by doing the doctoral research, the ways in which I see teachers professional work has been significantly affected. Through my understanding of the discursive ‘self’, the importance of making the teacher’s positionality explicit in their work, rather than pretending to be neutral and objective is essential in the process of subjectification. The recognition that my past experiences are deeply embodied into my professional practices gave me new ways of understanding of my profession.

*Reflection on a case that influenced my teaching practice*

Firstly, it is important to be explicit about who I am and where I am located in relation to my teaching in order to fully understand the next reflection*.* I am White but I am not White British as were the large majority of my students. I was born and raised in Yugoslavia by Hungarian parents, therefore I grow up in a multicultural context. At the beginning of the Yugoslavian war in 1992, I came to live and work in the UK. I have been involved teaching in Higher Education for over a decade mainly teaching on Early Childhood Education and Care programmes.

After a teaching session involving an undergraduate group of fifty female students, studying on an Early Childhood programme, I reflected on the ways in which I positioned myself as a teacher. In this particular instance, I struggled to capture the attention of the whole group. Some individuals refused to participate in the activity I have designed, and when challenged, I received some feedback which made an impact on the process of my subjectification/ identity shaping.

I recorded my feelings about a comment I received as they were about my accent and grammar. After more than ten years in the teaching profession, this particular experience has inevitably impacted my teaching practices. I have analysed the ways in which my emotions are embedded while I teach but also the ways in which the tacit becomes explicit. I wrote:

*I see myself as sensitive and responsive to the needs of students, as well as professional, reasonable and equitable. Yet, in my classroom practice I fall into an old power trap where – for diverse reasons - I tend to interact more with those who have ‘sparks’ in their eyes, and also with the ones who are willing to be active/participative. Although I have the power to select student(s) to participate in discussion, my authority is tenuous and depends on the willing subjection of students, to the classroom dynamics and to the disciplinary regimes of the university. Yet four students refuses the subjection of the university, and adopt authority in the class by ‘invading’ my space, the very space they are not authorized to be I initially felt* *(Diary, 2016)*

How can this reflective piece be understood? These students felt the need to comment on my accent and grammar. Further comment was made about the high tuition fee, as they felt a different native English-speaking teacher would afford them a better education experience.

Generally, the individual, in this case the teacher, should be rational and free from emotional experiences. Despite evidence that emotions have a direct impact on the teaching and learning process (Carlson, 2010; Lawson, 2011), there is considerable evidence in the literature that in higher education emotion has never been fully acknowledged (Perkun et al., 2009; Perkun and Stephens, 2010). Perhaps because emotion is very fluid ‘quick to occur and quick to change’ (Schultz and DeCuir, 2002:125). Within higher education the focus is mainly on student academic achievement with little attention paid to issues of emotion, especially on teachers’ emotion. This is called the ‘affective equality deficit’ (Lynch et al., 2009, p.12) where emotions in education are treated as private matters not sufficient for political debate or empirical survey. Therefore, the teacher (me) should be called a professional who follows a collective dualism, that is to accept and to become indoctrinated into a Higher Education current trend, or rebel against the sometimes-unwritten rules and to deviate from it.

An important point of this quote from my reflections is that it is written by the competent agentic adult (me) after an event occurred. The question is, how to reflect on the situation in which I am the main actor, who is captured by my own discursive self - my subjectivity. This case highlighted that subjectivity and subjectification is an ongoing, never ending process, that is influenced and shaped by external human interaction. However, this can also take a form of more than ‘human’ engagement with the non-human material world such as a classroom climate where the emotional affects become enacted (Fairchild, 2017).

The way in which I am positioning myself by reflecting on this particular event, means that my subjectivity is also contradictory. For example, the ‘choices’ that I make to deal with the situation are based on my rational analysis, but my desire may subvert rationality. Desires are integral to the various discourses through which I am constituted that are not necessarily amenable to change through rational analysis. But my subject positions (where the subject is me as a professional HE teacher), which I take up are made available through a variety of discourses. For example, my initial reaction to the event was based on the *migrant* rather than the *academic.* This meansthat I embodied the migrant teacher positioning which is perceived as more vulnerable in the current and changing post Brexit political climate. My emotional reaction was not planned nor rationally inspired, but deeply embodied in my migrant subject positioning that is culturally and socially constructed.

I argue that one subject position is more often made available to ‘white middle class’ than ‘others’, and in this case it was the migrant teacher. The question is how to act upon this concept, as the choices I make and the authority I exercise has been influenced by the comment about native English speaking teacher would afford a particular group of students a better education experience.

However, the relationship between me, as a teacher and the collective is not to be understood as dualism, but where ‘I’ is to be understood as a discursive construction where the embodied emotions are present, sometimes even visible. Going back to my original question of ‘Why is it important to acknowledge teachers’ emotion?’ is about recognition of the need to address the complex and fluid issue of emotionality and its embodiment. Currently there is little evidence that supports this growing need as HE’s been seen as emotional-free zone (Leathwood and Read, 2009). Yet some aspects of positive student experiences are based on the passion, enthusiasm and emotional wellbeing of their teachers (Mikuska, 2014). By recognising the place and importance of emotions in HE is a first step to address complex and discursive issues, such as: What can we do to recognise and make space for teachers’ emotions? How can teachers do this for themselves? Is there space within institutions to do this? In what ways does this improve the learning experience for students?

**Sandra’s reflection**

My aim in the second half of this chapter is to explore how Foucault ([1975]1996) has informed my ideas of embodiment and how this has shaped both my doctoral research and teaching of early childhood undergraduates. In this section I draw on Wehrle’s (2016) re-reading of Foucault’s concept of embodiment together with Foucault’s notion of regimes of truth as an approach to gain new understandings of child poverty. I reflect on how embodied understandings of child poverty are played out in three examples: my interviews with early years practitioners talking about child poverty; a workshop about child poverty with early childhood undergraduates; and my reflexivity on social mobility.

My doctoral research relates to early years practitioners’ narratives of child poverty in the UK. Between November 2015 and May 2016, as part of my research, I interviewed sixteen early years practitioners who were working in early year education and care settings in the south of England about their understandings of child poverty. Alongside my doctoral research I was working full time as a senior lecturer and teaching on early childhood undergraduate programmes. As a researcher, I became increasingly interested in how I could use Foucault’s ideas to help theorise some of the illuminations from my analysis of early year practitioners’ narratives. Part of my study related to identity and understandings of child poverty. Foucault’s concepts of embodiment and regimes of truth provided a useful lens to start looking at these concepts.

Wehrle’s (2016) re-reading of Foucault’s understanding of embodiment analyses how his ideas developed from viewing the body [or subject] as passively embodying the social norms of society to one which is reflective, critical and self-determining. In Foucault’s earlier work, ‘Discipline and Punish’ (1975[1995]) he presents the body as ‘docile’, one which is subjugated (disciplined) and controlled by institutions, for example, hospitals and schools. The body is subjected to a process of normalization (enforcing of behaviour) within which the practices of society become habituated (part of everyday life). In contrast, Wehrle (2016) argues in Foucault’s later works, such as, his lectures on ‘Hermeneutics of the Subject’ (Foucault, 1982) he sees the body in a different way, as critical and reflective. Reflection is exercised through ‘practices of the self’, being aware and reflecting on our actions and how these are influenced both externally and internally. Rather than seeing Foucault’s two understandings of embodiment in conflict, Wehrle (2016) argues that they are part of a process, firstly, recognising how we have embodied the social norms of society leads secondly, to being open to critical reflection and other ways of seeing and being.

Foucault’s concept of regimes of truth adds a further layer of understanding to how social norms come to be embodied. According to Foucault (1976, p. 112) ‘each society has its regime of truth’ which produces and sustains power. As MacNaughton (2005, p.35) explains, these are institutionalised ways of understanding which are embodied in how ‘we should think, act and feel towards ourselves and others’ producing inequalities within society. Foucault’s ideas of embodiment and regimes of truth provided me a way of theorising the following: how early year practitioners understand child poverty; how this has influenced my teaching; and how this has helped me to reflect on myself. These are illustrated within the three examples which follow.

When analysing the narratives of early years practitioners for my doctoral research I was struck with how understandings of child poverty were presented in different ways. Sometimes these were presented as Foucault’s regimes of truth, reflecting dominant discourses of neoliberalism within the UK. Jones (2014) comments on how neoliberal ideology has become so embedded in UK society, rendering it invisible with no possible alternative. Adopted by Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister, in the mid 1970s neoliberal policy promoted the free market. Owen (2015, p.xix and p.184) argues that neoliberalism has privileged the rich at the expense of the poor, ‘slashing taxes on the rich and big business, privatizing and cutting public services, rolling back the welfare state, curtailing workers’ rights, and so on’ and individualised those in poverty by ‘demonizing benefit claimants as scroungers by the British press’. Sometimes the narratives early year practitioners told me appeared to embody this view, for example, one practitioner talked about how some parents within the setting were, ‘claiming their benefits and they don’t work typically haven’t ever worked and have no intention of doing so’.

However, alternative truths were also presented, for example, an early year practitioner, who had experienced homelessness and poverty herself, reflected on how the benefits system presented barriers for parents wanting to get a job. She talked about how parents felt vulnerable about getting a job and coming off benefits, ‘you can totally understand that actually, if I [the parent] go back to work, you know, and have to sign-off the benefits, if it doesn’t work out, I can’t feed my kids.’ This second example opens up possibilities for new understandings and a different truth (Ball, 2015). The parent in this example, rather than being seen as someone who is living off the state and does not want to work, is constructed as a parent who is disadvantaged by the system and desperate to make sure she is providing for her children.

At the same time as I was immersed in my analysis of the interviews, I was also teaching early childhood undergraduates about child poverty. I was keen to apply Foucault’s ideas to my teaching in order to illuminate regimes of truth and create new ways of understanding and seeing about child poverty. On one occasion I used Foucault’s ideas to provide provocations within a teaching session about child poverty with final year students. I started with a brief discussion about Foucault and his ideas about how regimes of truth can affect how we think, feel and act towards others and perpetuate inequalities within society. I told the students the aim of my session was to contest and disrupt some of the regimes of truth surrounding child poverty. At the end of the session I asked students to personally reflect on how they had been challenged and how they might have encountered new ways of understanding about child poverty. Afterwards I reflected on the session and more generally on my teaching. Part of my reflection included the student’s discussion of different definitions of poverty. One of the definitions they were given was ‘relative low income’, defined as 60 percent of the current median income and most commonly used when reporting on child poverty levels in both the UK and the European Union (Lansley and Mack, 2015). We had a discussion about the current median income and what would constitute sixty percent of this. On working out an approximate figure, some students declared with surprise that they were either below or very near this income level. Most were very quick to resist the label ‘poverty’, declaring that they did not see themselves as poor. An intense discussion ensued debating what it meant to be poor with students drawing on their personal and professional experiences of working with young children. I was interested in the students initial ‘denial’ of personal poverty and pondered on whether this was a docile acceptance of structural inequalities within society thus rending poverty invisible. However, I concluded that this initial rejection of an income measure of poverty was instead the catalyst for an interesting and rich discussion on what poverty was and how it should be or should not be measured. This was something students were able to reflect on and use to start to question some of the assumptions about child poverty and how it is portrayed.

Finally, as a teacher, I am becoming more aware of my own embodiment of regimes of truth and how this sits in tension with both my teaching of child poverty and my doctoral research. As a researcher and lecturer I have both discussed and reflected on social mobility. During workshops I’ve discussed how neoliberalism suggests that society is a level playing field and anyone can be successful if they work hard. However, statistics suggest the opposite and social mobility is the exception rather than the rule (Social Mobility Commission, 2016). Nevertheless, I am aware that standing in front of the class, I am the embodiment of social mobility, the daughter of working class parents and the first one of my family to ever go to university and become a senior lecturer. I am not explicit about this with my students and did not make reference to it during my session on child poverty. Although, I am aware that my physical presence silently contributes to the regime of truth, suggesting that ‘if I can do it then so can you’. At this point the tensions within my own body and roles of lecturer and researcher are painfully illuminated for myself, although the students seem unaware. I take courage from Foucault and remember that by becoming aware and reflecting on my own embodiment of regimes of truth creates possibilities for new ways of seeing and change. I will challenge myself to be more open with the students in future sessions about my own ‘practices of the self’, and how this connects with my ways of seeing and being. Through creating spaces for further critical reflection within the course I hope that opportunities for students to form new ways of being and understanding will be achieved.

**Concluding comments**

While all the discussions and findings about embodiment offer important insights questions still remain. For Eva, the question about emotion and how that is embodied in higher education is still open because of its complexity. For Sandra a question is raised about how she and the practitioners she encountered appear to both simultaneously embody an acceptance and resistance to neoliberal ideology. For both Sandra and Eva the importance of reflection and awareness of their own embodiment is crucial to understanding the complex relationship of how both emotional labour and regimes of truth influence the multiplicity of their personal, professional and research roles. Returning to Wehrle (2016) it is through this process of reflection that new ways of being and understanding of how research can inform teaching emerges.

**Bibliography**

Ball, S. (2015) Subjectivity as a site of struggle: refusing neoliberalism. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 37 (8) pp. 1129-1146.

Carlson, N.R. (2010) *Foundations of behavioural neuroscience.* 8th ed. New York: Pearson Education.

Davies B. and Gannon, S. (2011) Feminism/Post-Structuralism in Stomekh, B. and Lewin, C. *Theory and Methods in Social Research*, 2nd Edition. London: Sage pp. 312-320.

Dewey, J. (1987) *The Later Works of John Dewey: Art as Experience.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Fairchild, N. (2017) Segments and stutters: Early Years Teachers and Becoming-professional. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood.* 18 (3) (forthcoming)

Foucault, M. (1975[1995]) *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books. [Paris: Gallimard, 1975]

Foucault, M. (1976) "La fonction politique de l'intellectuel", in *Dits et écrits II*, 1976-1988, ed. D. Defert and F. Ewald, Paris, Gallimard, 2001, pp. 109-114; trans. C. Gordon, "The political function of the intellectual", in *Radical Philosophy*, no. 17 (Summer 1977), pp. 12-14.

Foucault, M. (1982) “*L'Herméneutique du sujet*”, 1981-1982, ed. F. Gros, F. Ewald and A. Fontana, Paris, 2001, pp. 1-566; trans. G. Burchell, “The Hermeneutics of the Subject” Lectures at the College of France, 1981-1982, 2005, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Harré, R. and Parrott, G. [ED] (1996) *The Emotions. Social, Cultural and Biological Dimension.* London: Sage.

Jones, O. (2014) *The Establishment and how they get away with it.* London: Penguin Books

Lawson, C. (2011) *The connection between emotions and learning*. London: Sage.

Lansley, S. and Mack, J. (2015) *Breadline Britain*. London: One world Publications

Leathwood, C. and Hey, V. (2009) Gender/ed discourses and emotional sub-texts: theorising emotion in UK higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14 (4), pp. 429-440.

Leathwood, C. and Read, B. (2009) *Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Lynch, K., Baker, J. and Lyons, M. (2009*) Affective Equality. Love, Care and Injustice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan.

MacNaughton, G. (2005) *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies: Applying poststructural ideas*. Abingdon: Routledge

Mikuska, E, (2014) The relationship between higher education, emotion and gender: A qualitative study using text and interviews. *SAGE Research Methods Cases.* Available online <http://methods.sagepub.com/case/relationship-higher-education-emotion-gender-qualitative-text-interviews> (accessed 26th June 2017)

Osgood, J. (2012) *Narratives from the Nursery. Negotiating Professional Identities in Early Childhood*. Oxon: Routledge.

Owen, J. (2015) *The Establishment And how they get away with it*. London: Penguin Books

Perkun, R., Elliot, A.J. and Maier, M.A. (2009) Achievement goals and achievement emotions: testing a model of their joint relations with academic performance. *Journal of Educational Performance.* 101, pp. 115-135.

Perkun, R. and Stephens, E. J. (2010) Achievement Emotions in Higher Education, Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research. 25, pp. 257-306

Schultz, A. P. and DeCuir, T. J. (2002). Inquiry on emotion in education. *Educational Psychologist*. 37, pp. 125-134.

Social Mobility Commission (2016) *State of the Nation 2016: Social Mobility in Great Britain* [Available on line] <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/569410/Social_Mobility_Commission_2016_REPORT_WEB__1__.pdf> (accessed 23rd April 2017)

Stanley, L. [Ed] (2013) *Feminist Praxis. Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology.* Oxon: Routledge.

Waskul, D. and Vannini, P. (2016) *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body.* Oxon: Routledge.

Wehrle, M. (2016) Normative Embodiment. The Role of the Body in Foucault’s Genealogy. A Phenomenological Re-Reading. Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 47(1), 56-71

Williams, S. (2001) *Emotion and Social Theory*. London: Sage.

Zembylas, M. (2005) *Teaching with Emotions. A Postmodern Enactment*. Connecticut: Age Publishing