Learning to Labour with Feeling: class, gender and emotion in childcare education and training

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ABSTRACT There is debate among early years experts about the appropriate degree of emotional engagement between nursery nurses and the children in their care. Through research into the learning cultures of further education (in the Economic and Social Research Council's Teaching and Learning Research Programme), the author considers how prospective nursery nurses first learn to deploy emotion in their work. Few researchers have investigated the learning of feelings for caring occupations, and this article presents a detailed case study, based on both quantitative and qualitative data, of a group of childcare students throughout their two-year course. In analysing its official, unwritten, and hidden curricula, and the social practices of learning it entails, the author draws on feminist readings of Marx and Bourdieu to reveal how gendered and class-fractional positionings combine with vocational education and training to construct imperatives about 'correct' emotions in childcare. The author compares theorisations of emotional capital and emotional labour, and suggests we need social rather than individualised understandings of how feelings are put to work. The author concludes that emotional labour carries costs for the nursery nurse, not because children consume her emotional resources, but because her emotional labour power is controlled and exploited for profit by employers.

Introduction

> Fledglings: offering care, love and education. (Advertising flyer)

The words above arrived through my letterbox one day, blazoned across a leaflet for a private nursery nearby. While the purchase of education and care has come to seem commonplace in a world of privatised services, this offer promises something more deeply significant. Here, love itself – one of the most powerful and intimate of human emotions – is one of the products for sale, a distinctive part of the total childcare package.

Simple marketing ploy though this may have been, it reflects a serious debate in early years research and practice: to what extent should the nursery represent a home-like environment and the nursery nurse play a quasi-maternal role? Opposing views on the answer to this question have been expressed by early years experts. On the one hand, Dahlberg et al (1999) argue that the nursery cannot and should not be seen as a home-from-home, nor should the nursery nurse be regarded as a substitute parent. To portray the nursery as a place of emotional closeness and intimacy, which are inevitably *faux*, is to conflate misleadingly a public with a private sphere. On the other hand, Elfer et al (2003) contend that such objections overstate problems that can and must be overcome in developing high-quality childcare. From their perspective, only a special relationship with a 'key person' who does offer love in the nursery can provide the intimacy and closeness that they claim children both need and want.

I avow here that I am not an expert in childcare or early years education, and would therefore be ill qualified to engage in this particular debate about 'what works'. My own research interests focus on post-compulsory education, but for the last four years, as part of my work in the project *Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education* (TLC) in the Economic and Social Research Council's Teaching and Learning Research Programme, I have been studying a further education (FE) college course that prepares school-leavers for employment as nursery nurses. As an interested 'intruder' in the field of early childhood, then, I propose to draw on data from that FE research to address a different set of questions posed by the Fledglings leaflet. These are not about 'what works' in terms of nursery nurses' emotional engagement with infants and small children, but

rather, 'how it works' in the social practices of learning to do the job. What do prospective nursery nurses learn from vocational education and training about emotion in childcare work? How do they learn it? And what factors interact to determine their success (or otherwise) in this learning? I begin by reviewing some of the key academic contributions to understanding the learning of emotion for personal service and caring work.

Learning to Labour with Feeling

Hochschild's (1983) seminal work, *The Managed Heart: the commercialization of feeling*, was the first to address centrally the idea that labour is not divided between the simple dualism of the manual and the mental, but may incorporate important emotional work too. Such work entails learning to manage one's own feelings in order to evoke particular feelings in other people. She argues that, in social and family life, this is an important function that contributes to civilised relationships. But in what she terms 'emotional labour', such feeling-management is sold within the labour market. The emotional style of providing a service – be it customer care, education, or health care – becomes part of the service itself, since 'in processing people the product is a state of mind ... [It] requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 1983, pp. 6-7). As such, however, it is subject to prescription and control by dominant groups who seek to profit from it. Consequently, emotional work is transformed into its opposite – not a source of human bonding and satisfaction, but of alienation and eventual emotional burn-out. Women, she argues, face much higher costs in this work than men: partly because the display of emotion is an integral expectation of gender-stereotyped 'women's work' in caring and personal service occupations, partly because of women's difficulty in escaping the socially constructed gendered role of nurturing others established early on in family life, and partly because women have to rely more on their emotional resources, lacking equity with men in economic, cultural and social capital.

Hochschild's is a Marxist-feminist analysis, which departs from the psychological accounts of emotion which have predominated, to place it in a sociological framework concerned with the influence of social structures on individual identities, roles and actions under patriarchal capitalism. Little headway has since been made in analysing the role of education in facilitating emotional labour, while the literature on caring work and the ethics of care largely perpetuates assumptions that it relies on inherent capacities of women, undifferentiated by class or 'race' (Thompson, 1998). Although there has been a recent revival of sociological interest in emotional labour, this has tended to be limited to descriptive accounts in different settings, from barristers (Harris, 2002) to beauty therapists (Sharma & Black, 2001).

Given the lack of sustained research and theoretical development about learning to labour with feeling, it is interesting that Hochschild's work has recently come under attack for its focus on the exploitative aspects of such work. Price (2001) objects that the commercialisation of feelings is a question of individual workers' agency rather than a product of social relations in the workplace:

> the commercialisation and marketisation of emotional relations provides a relatively new and
> particularly pernicious 'fit' with individuals' prior tendencies to adopt an instrumental stance
> towards the other or indeed towards aspects of the self. I do not think it is adequate to explain
> such instrumentalisation with reference to 'capitalism' alone; and it needs explaining. I also think
> that Arlie Hochschild has little to say about aspects of paid work that are rewarding – not in
> monetary terms, but *intrinsically* so. How and why do *individuals* exploit or enrich each other in
> their emotional relating, as a matter of course and also of choice? (p. 165, original emphasis)

Using examples of teachers working with small children, and a psychoanalytical framework that homogenises a series of particular experiences, Price argues that emotional labour is undertaken with pleasure by children as well as teachers in the classroom, and is in fact a matter of:

> very ordinary, universal capacities for relating to others as deserving of recognition, empathy and
> respect ... Such emotional sensitivity is not a specialist skill or 'intelligence' that can be factored
> off or straightforwardly taught. This emotional labour gives a moral dimension to 'human
> services' work. (p. 179)

These comments appear to dismiss the concept of emotional intelligence, which is the discourse that has come to dominate current discussions of feelings in the workplace. It is epitomised in the work of Goleman (1996), who argues that emotional skills and competencies need to be recognised alongside, and connected to, other areas of competence in order to maximise productivity. It is impossible to engage in a full analysis and critique of such business management theories within the remit of this article (see Cameron, 2000; Martin et al, 2000; and Hughes, 2005). However, we can note that this discourse also constitutes a celebration of emotional labour that resists acknowledging its costs to the employee.

Notable exceptions to the turn away from critical analyses of emotion – those which focus in particular on structures of class and gender – in learning and work can be found in the work of Inge Bates (1990, 1991, 1994) and Bev Skeggs (1997). Both present evidence which substantiates Hochschild's view that the use of emotion at work is both pre-formed by social conditioning in the family, and re-formed through education and training for particular occupational roles. In particular, they refute the notion that emotional labour is a universal or intrinsically human response to others.

Bates's (1990, 1991, 1994) study is of a youth training scheme (YTS) in care of the elderly. The 'care girls' involved were working-class girls who had left school with few qualifications and been rejected from their preferred career options, such as childcare. They had to get used to a number of tasks they initially found very unpleasant and distressing, and much of their learning centred on coping with incontinence, violence and death. To do this, they had to learn above all to control and manage their own feelings of disgust, anger, sorrow and fear, and reconstruct them differently. They also had to control, manage and reconstruct the feelings of their patients.

Bates argues that vocational and educational training (VET) contributed two significant social and cultural processes to learning the labour of elderly care. Firstly, it exercised a 'screening' effect, recruiting and then further sifting those girls who had suitable dispositions. Secondly, it also operated in a disciplinary way to socialise suitable girls into the work, and exclude those who were unable to adapt to the prevailing vocational culture. Although their off-the-job tutors and the assessment criteria for their National Vocational Qualification conveyed an idealised and sensitive version of caring *for* people as also caring *about* them, the culture of the workplace demanded a more realistic 'toughness', detachment and resilience. Those who were 'mardy' (i.e. too sensitive) were characterised by other trainees as 'bleeding, whining Minnies', and tended to drop out. Girls who were too 'tough' and, for example, reacted violently when provoked by patients, were also filtered out of the programme.

Those most likely to settle in to the job were from families in the most disadvantaged fractions of the working class: girls who had already had to care for elders or siblings, and had learned in particular to engage in self-denial rather than resistance to fulfil this role. A certain classed and gendered predisposition appeared necessary, then, *but not sufficient*, for success in training for elder care. Processes of habituation to the vocational culture through VET both on and off the job were required for them to adjust their disposition further, become the 'right person for the job', and feel that the job was 'right for them'.

Skeggs (1997) studied a group of young women who had entered general caring courses at a further education college as a 'choice' by default, having similarly been confronted by schooling that failed them, a collapsed youth labour market that offered only unemployment as an alternative, and college 'options' that were determined by professionals' perceptions of their abilities, aptitudes and prior experiences of caring. Like the 'care girls', many of their experiences on work placements were traumatic, and to these emotional demands they brought classed and gendered predispositions. Here too, their courses framed, constrained, and produced particular selves re-formed from those dispositions.

Skeggs argues that, in a historical context where the cause of inequalities faced by working-class people is constantly represented as their own moral deviancy, dominant discourses construct working-class women either as posing a threat of further moral pollution, or as a civilising social force – depending on the degree to which they take responsibility for the moral welfare of others. The college courses these young women follow also forge an indissoluble association between caring for and caring about others. Being the 'right kind of person' is at least as important as doing

the right things: 'the practices of caring become inseparable from personal dispositions' (Skeggs, 1997, p. 56).

The requisite dispositions are well learned, and as in the 'care girls' study, they are dominated by notions of altruism and selflessness, and of intimate social relations with those cared for and about. Emotional dispositions such as being kind and loving, warm and friendly, gentle and affectionate are universally cited by the students as qualities of a caring person. Despite the fact that here, as in the YTS, they constitute an impossible ideal, these dispositions and emotions are constructed as 'natural' and 'intuitive', even as much of the curriculum is devoted to teaching them:

> The caring self is produced through care for others. It is generated through both self-production and self-denial. The selflessness required to be a caring self is a gendered disposition ... [C]are of the self ... is the prerogative of someone who does not have to care for others to be seen as worthy of respect. [These] women ... have to continually prove themselves as respectable through their caring performances. (Skeggs, 1997, p. 64)

With this emphasis on respectability, Skeggs adds a further layering to the understanding of education for the deployment of emotion at work by focusing on the bourgeois moral imperatives that underpin it. She shows how frequent and detailed teacher–student discussions about 'good' and 'bad' ways to care constantly reinforce pressure on the girls to demonstrate their suitability in terms of moral propriety: 'The curriculum is organized in such a way that certain dispositions are invalidated and denied, while others are valorized, advised and legitimated' to produce a *respectable* self (Skeggs, 1997, p. 68).

This is key for Skeggs's analysis – and an important challenge to Price's (2001) unproblematised 'moral dimension' of caring work – since aspiration to respectability historically acts as a marker of those (working-class people) who are suspected (by the middle classes) of not having it. One issue for middle-class women, of course, is that many of them rely on working-class women to provide care for their children (see, for example, Vincent & Warren, 2000). We could argue here that, as a consequence, nursery nurses face a particularly strong imperative to be – and to appear to be – 'nice girls'. Skeggs highlights the importance of correctly coded dress and demeanour as signifiers of 'proper' moral dispositions, and although she only discusses these in terms of young women's social lives, we shall see later how crucial they were to the performance of childcare for the nursery nurses in our study.

This analysis also provides a further explanation of agency as well as social structure in the process of learning emotional labour, going beyond notions of individual occupational adjustment to reveal historical and collective processes at work. The care students embrace the disciplinary regulation of their courses, precisely because being seen to care properly for others in the public setting of the workplace allows them to gain respectability, and to rescue themselves *and others* from the mass of the non-respectable. The initial disappointments, the low status, low pay and poor conditions, and the ongoing emotional demands of their work can therefore be experienced positively, offering pleasurable satisfaction, a sense of worth, even superiority, and Skeggs takes full account of the fact that these positive aspects dominated the students' accounts of their experiences.

Without denying that such pleasures are genuinely felt, this interpretation confronts the frequent objection to critical analyses, that women do take pleasure in caring for others, especially for small children, and appreciate the rewards that loving relationships in such contexts can bring. Walkerdine & Lucey (1989) also address this point in the context of mothering. They express the reality of both sides of the emotional work that it entails, and argue that socially constructed imperatives are the facets of care that are misrecognised and therefore neglected:

> it might be argued that mothering is a very pleasurable activity and we are making it sound totally oppressive. We certainly agree that such pleasure is crucial and yet we would also argue ... that such pleasure is also produced and regulated – correct and incorrect, normal and abnormal – and cannot be seen as given. (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989, pp. 30-31)

Learning to Labour in the Nursery

This returns us to the early years debate highlighted in the introduction to this article. In the context of the literature reviewed above, my purpose here is to investigate how the education and training of nursery nurses functions to prepare them for this work. How does it mediate their previous experiences and predispositions? What does it teach them about the 'right kind of person' they have to become? I continue by discussing the learning of a group of trainee nursery nurses, almost all of them teenage girls, throughout their two-year course. In analysing and interpreting their experiences, I draw on sociological theories of the relationship between structure and agency, including Marxist-feminist analyses, as well as the theories of Bourdieu and feminist readings of his work. Diane Reay's (2000) work on emotional capital is of special interest here, as a major contribution to new sociological theorisations of feeling.

The data presented are drawn from a case study of one of 17 learning sites participating in the TLC project. The methodological approach of the project is founded on partnership between researchers based both in universities and FE colleges, and includes the active participation of the site tutors (see Hodkinson & James, 2003). Some of the data are qualitative: repeated semi-structured interviews with the tutor and a sample of six students in the first and last term of each year, and two interviews with the tutor's line manager; researcher observations of the college course and work placements three times a term; and the tutor's own ongoing reflective journal. Other data are quantitative: a questionnaire survey of all students in the site at the start, midpoint and end of their course, and college and national statistical data. All of the students identified themselves as white British, except one who identified herself as mixed race, and one student was male. The analysis is based on synthesising categories emerging across the data with narratives constructed by immersion in individual students' accounts, and discussions of the interpretation with the site tutor. All personal names have been changed here, and the college is anonymised to protect confidentiality. Let us turn now to the learning site itself.

The CACHE Diploma Learning Site

Joanne Lowe is the tutor for this learning site, one of two groups who started the Level Three CACHE Diploma [1] in September 2001. This is a full-time, two-year course, half of which is taught in college, and half of which comprises work placements in nurseries and primary schools. It is an overwhelmingly female group, and only one of the 20 students who originally joined Joanne's group this year is male. The course is located in the Department for Health and Social Care, and recruits mainly school-leavers. Most students originally had higher career aspirations to become professional teachers or nurses, but performed poorly in their school examinations, and became obliged to lower their ambitions. The large majority of students go on to work in private nurseries, looking after middle-class children, although most of their work placements are in the public sector, working with children from more disadvantaged families. A recent Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspection rated teaching on the course as excellent, and it is held in high regard by the CACHE national examination board and by local employers.

Joanne and two of her three colleagues in the CACHE teaching team are former nursery nurses themselves, and they offer valued 'insider' expertise. Joanne dedicates a great deal of time to intensive academic support for individual students, some of whom entered this advanced level course with only two passes in the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations at 16 plus (the usual minimum requirement for a Level Three course is four passes), and most of whom struggle with the written work required. She also helps organise a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, and provides a great deal of pastoral support for students and their parents. She is perceived as a very caring tutor, in whom students can confide. The promotion of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice is central to her teaching role and to the team's ethos.

The Vocational Culture of Childcare

The site reflects the fact that childcare in the United Kingdom is a heavily gender-stereotyped occupation: 99% of nursery nurses are female. Within the broader field of early years education, it is low-status work, and nursery nurses are often subordinate to qualified teachers or health

workers. They are also poorly paid, earning little more- sometimes even less than – the minimum wage in the private sector (Low Pay Commission, 2005), which has come to dominate provision and transform into an 'edubusiness' (Ball & Vincent, 2000) in recent years. Nevertheless, nursery nursing is an attractive occupation to many working-class girls. This may be partly because it is seen as a kind of 'labour aristocracy': work that is still highly preferable to more mundane work in worse conditions for those who are underqualified (O'Connor & Goodwin, 2002). This in turn resonates with powerful images of a more glamorous niche in childcare, in which young women from bourgeois families train at élite private colleges and travel the world as nannies to the wealthy, as Princess Diana did before her marriage to Prince Charles.

The CACHE tutors place great emphasis on their view that nursery nursing is a *profession*, and many of their efforts are devoted to raising its perceived status. All had worked previously in the public rather than the private sector, and Joanne in particular has a passionate commitment to the provision of high-quality childcare as a means of combating social exclusion in disadvantaged inner-city communities. In fact, she first became an FE tutor when she had moved to London and refused to apply for jobs in private nurseries. To a certain extent, as in health care occupations and professions such as nursing, acceptance of low pay is taken as a sign of genuine commitment to caring for others (Frykholm & Nitzler, 1993). Although tutors recognise that nursery nurses are treated as 'second-class citizens', they also argue that this means they care *about* the children they care *for*:

> *Joanne*: I mean, if you've worked as a nursery nurse, the money's rubbish. You don't do it, you
> know, for any other reason than you love working with children and families. ... Our students
> are really dedicated to the work.

Just as in other areas of caring work, a feminised, nurturing ideal dominates official discourses about childcare:

> There is an extraordinary international consensus among child-care researchers and practitioners
> about what quality child-care is: it is warm, supportive interactions with adults in a safe, healthy,
> and stimulating environment, where early education and trusting relationships combine to
> support individual children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. (Scarr,
> 1998, p. 102)

This ideal is enshrined in measures of quality that are widely used in childcare. Apart from various structural factors, the education of nursery nurses themselves is held to be a major determinant of quality (Blau, 1999). Consequently, one set of measures used internationally, the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS), focuses on the personal attributes that should be developed in the nursery nurse herself. She should display sensitivity, gentleness, enthusiasm, effort, and enjoy contact with children. Harshness and detachment are taken as contra-indications of quality (cf. Tietze et al, 1996). This establishes a norm for the kind of person that one has to be – or to become – to succeed in childcare. The emphasis on 'warmth', 'supportive and trusting relationships' and on the emotional development of the child, alongside these personal attributes, suggests that the deployment of emotion by the worker herself is a key part of the job. In the context of the public sector childcare where students undertake their placements, this emotional dedication is often discussed in the college classroom as a remedy for the moral deficits of working-class parents, a discourse that is quickly absorbed and reproduced by the students.

The CACHE tutors focus a great deal on this 'unwritten' curriculum of developing such personal attributes in their students, especially at the start of the course. They discuss how each group is 'gelling', and try to foster students' ability to 'bond' emotionally with each other and with their tutors. Joanne's team leader explained the importance of this process:

> It's the nature of the job. If you're working as an early years worker, you're always going to
> work as part of a team, and you have to get on with people. You have to get on with other
> adults, not just children ... I think the sort of hidden curriculum of an early years course is getting
> to know people and working as a team.

Joanne describes the successful 'gel' exemplified by her second year group, at the same time giving a sense of how important close personal relationships with other women are for her:

> My second years, I love every minute teaching with them, and we've got some right characters
> in there. We get on really well, we do the work, you know, I kept every single one of them that I
> started with. We've got really good relationships, and it's not difficult to go in and teach them.
> You know, they're respectful, but we have a laugh as well … I've got a feeling this lot [*the first-
> years*] are going to be the same. They've gelled, people that are teaching them have come in and
> said, like Maddie teaches both groups, 'Your group have really gelled already', you know, they're
> chatty but they're doing the work.

However, a number of students within the group actively resisted these processes. They were
mainly girls with different career aspirations, such as nursing, whose low levels of achievement in
their previous school or college courses had prevented them from gaining places on other Level 3
academic or health and social care courses, which all had higher entry requirements than the
CACHE Diploma. Although, in theory at least, the CACHE Diploma could enable them to
progress onto nurse education and training, the strong focus on nursery nursing, and the
substantial work-based element of the course, did not fit their occupational intentions, nor their
sense of a worthwhile occupation, and – understandably – they made little effort to 'fit in'. As the
first-year group completed their first term, Joanne became particularly frustrated with two
students, Sonya and Gaby. They led a small group who were persistently disruptive or absent, and
who bullied other students, despite lengthy efforts on Joanne's part to get them to integrate
better.[2] Eventually, she felt she had to set the college disciplinary procedures in motion:

> With Gaby, I just tried and tried, and it's just not worked. It's just a real clash … If they do go, I'm
> so looking forward to next year, because I think that I'll really bond with the group now, and
> Gaby and Sonya, they've stopped me from doing that, and they've stopped the rest … I think the
> group will be nicer … It'll definitely be more cohesive if they go.

Developing close emotional bonds among the group is therefore seen by tutors as an essential
foundation for the work that students have to learn to perform in the nursery. There is much here
that resonates with mothering on the part of Joanne herself (see again Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989),
in the mixture of pride and stress that accompanies a sense of total responsibility for her students,
and its accents of regulatory socialisation (discussed more fully in Colley, 2002). What, then, were
students' own accounts of their learning during the first year of the course?

Learning the Management of Feelings

When students discussed the new skills and knowledge they had gained, they talked about practical
skills (such as preparing play materials, food, displays) and more cognitive learning (such as health
matters, child development theory, equal opportunities legislation) acquired at college. However,
alongside this prescribed curriculum, and the unwritten curriculum of emotional bonding, a further
'hidden' curriculum emerged as students talked about what they had learned as they participated in
their work placements. Their narratives centred on coping with the emotional demands of the job,
and revealed a vocational culture of detachment in the workplace which contrasts somewhat with
the nurturing ideal that is officially promoted.

In a group tutorial discussion soon after the start of the course, following the students' first
few days in placement, there were many expressions of delight at being with children. But the
session also revealed events they experienced as far from pleasant: taking little boys to the toilet;
finding oneself covered in children's 'puke' and 'wee'; and being hit by children. These responses
illustrate the domination of bourgeois sensibilities, in which bodily functions, illness and strong
emotions are experienced as unpleasant and distressing.[3] Joanne was at great pains to emphasise
the 'correct' behaviour students should display in these situations:

> *Joanne*: Don't forget, you've got to stay cool and say, [*nonchalant tone*] 'Oh, that's not a very nice
> thing to do, is it?', and keep your own feelings under control.

By the end of their first year, the management of feeling had become a central theme in all the
female students' narratives. They often talked about the difficulties and stress of dealing with
physical injuries, tears, tantrums, aggression, disobedience and provocations:

> The morning group [of children] are still tired and maungy, and in the afternoon, they're giddy and hyper ... I was so tired after a week working at nursery ... I don't know if I could do it again. (Female student, white, aged 16, Year 1 interview 2)

> I asked one girl to go and get a book because we were waiting for story time. Well, she kicked up: 'I'm not getting a book! I'm not getting a book, I'm staying here!' So I took her into the cloakroom and I sat down with her, and by this point she was really, really hysterical, crying because she couldn't stay outside. (Female student, white, aged 17, Year 1 interview 2)

This involves working on their own and the children's feelings to suppress extreme emotions and evoke calmer feelings. It requires conscious effort, repeated practice, and a degree of self-surveillance and self-denial on the part of the students:

> Sometimes I shout at the children, but that's just me ... 'Cause the nursery nurses don't always raise their voice as much as I do. I could probably just tone it down a little bit, still try and realise when I'm speaking loudly, try and quieten it down. (Female student, white, aged 32, Year 1 interview 2)

> Children can wind you up! You'd say something to them, and then they're really, really cheeky. They've learned how to answer you back, so they're gonna do it. And they *can* wind you up, and suppose you've got a short temper? But saying that, I've got a short temper, but I don't let them try it. (Female student, white, aged 17, Year 1 interview 2)

As part of this process, the students' affection for small children and enjoyment of play also had to be limited, in order to take on a consciously developmental role:

> Well, like, you're taught you can't be all lovey-dovey with the children. You've got to be quite stern if they've done something wrong. (Female student, white, aged 16, Year 1 interview 2)

> That's what I've kind of learned, now ... I teach, although I was playing with the children. If you went and just played with the kids and just not said owt [anything], like 'How many bricks are there?', they wouldn't really ever learn, would they? So you've just got to really think about it. Make 'em count the bricks, and say how many bricks there are, and also play at the same time. (Female student, white, aged 16, year 1 interview 2)

In these quotations, just as for Bates's (1990, 1991, 1994) and Skeggs's (1997) care trainees, there is a mismatch between the official, idealised version of the nursery nurse conveyed by the CIS – where harshness and detachment are deemed to be negative indicators – and the vocational culture expressed in the workplace, where some degree of harshness and detachment is essential to doing the job and coping with its emotional demands. Elfer et al (2003) acknowledge this dual orientation in their 'key person' approach:

> The emotional demands are great too. The key person is in a professional role but she must develop a very personal and intimate relationship with each of the babies and children with whom she is working. There are bound to be some painful feelings involved, as the work cannot be done in an emotionally anaesthetised way ... Maintaining an appropriate professional intimacy, which every child needs in order to feel special, while keeping an appropriate professional distance, requires emotional work of the highest calibre. (p. 27)

At the same time, students were constantly encouraged by their tutors to believe that nursery nursing was a deeply worthwhile job that improved the lives of the children in their care, especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. This notion of the moral worth of the enterprise is likely to have been conducive to students' commitment and their ability to come to terms with the emotional tensions they encountered in the workplace. The power of that official curriculum and students' acceptance of it is demonstrated in both qualitative and quantitative data. They show that students felt not only that the content of their course was firmly controlled by their tutors and the CACHE examination board, but also believed strongly that it should be so.

By the start of their second year, students still agreed that working on their own and the children's emotions was a central aspect of their work. But they declared it was 'easy' for them now, explaining that they simply became a 'different person' when they entered into the workplace, reacting differently to provocation or distress than they would at college or at home. At

the end of the course, those interviewed explained that the patience and self-control they had learned in the nursery was now part of their persona at college and at home. They felt they had become nursery nurses. Given the focus of the project on learning cultures in FE, we have been unable to follow these students into their longer-term employment in childcare. However, another study has noted that

> the nursery nurses' increased affection for the infants also made them more distressed about the inadequacy of parenting which some of the infants received. Two young nursery staff spoke of spending sleepless weekends worrying about the happiness and safety of 'their' babies. Commitment to these disadvantaged infants was achieved at considerable emotional cost.
> (Hopkins, 1998, p. 106, cited in Elfer et al, 2003, p. 55)

We also know from tutors' accounts of their own prior experience of working in the sector that illness due to stress and burnout are common among nursery nurses. While employers in the public sector may tolerate periods of sick leave for staff to recuperate, such tolerance is unlikely in the private nurseries where most of these students are going to work. Mentoring and supervision may help to mitigate the negative impact of emotional labour, but these require resources that private employers may also be reluctant to commit, and address the symptoms rather than the cause itself.

There is also a hint here that these working-class girls were identifying with those who oppressed both them and their charges' families, at the same time as blaming the victims of poverty and discrimination for poor parenting. We can note that, while the overwhelming majority of the trainees were white, the nurseries and schools they worked in often had significant proportions – even a majority, in some cases – of ethnic minority children, while the few ethnic minority workers observed in these settings were almost all unpaid parent-volunteers. The trainees distinguished themselves, as did Skeggs's (1997) young women, by characterising others from working-class backgrounds as unfit to care for their own children – an assumption which often seems to underpin rationales for early childhood education.

The Role of VET in Filtering Gendered Class Fractions

The subtle processes of screening and discipline identified by Bates (1990, 1991, 1994) and Skeggs (1997) also underpin learning to labour in the nursery. Gender is crucial, and had already filtered students well before they applied for the course, notwithstanding some small success in the CACHE team's campaign to attract boys to the course. Girls had often looked after younger siblings and done part-time work babysitting or in various crèche or after-school club facilities. Some had also had brief work experience in care of the elderly, which they described with revulsion: they would probably have been viewed as 'bleeding, whining Minnies' (Bates, 1990) among the YTS care girls.

Fractional locations within the working class play an important role in this regard, and (like the care girls and students above) they observed and judged one another in respect of subtle social differentiations. Nursery nurses, looking after other women's children, are supposed to be 'nice girls', and one group rapidly defined themselves as 'nice', while dismissing more disadvantaged students as 'rough'. 'Nice' students described themselves as living at home with both parents, usually in the leafier suburbs of the city. Their parents were in white-collar jobs, such as clerical staff or police officers. They felt well cared for, even spoiled, and they knew that their college tutors cared for them too. But their talk about some of their fellow students reveals a process of subtle class distinction (Bourdieu, 1986):

> I come from a totally different background to some of these, because I mean, I don't know what it's like to be without a mum or a dad, I live with both my parents. A lot of them are just one-parent families and it's like half of the places where they live, I've never ever heard of, or I don't even know where they are, but a lot of people say, 'Oh, it's really rough, it's really rough'.
> (Female student, white, aged 17, Year 1 interview 2)

> Some people come from different places and have different upbringings, and, you know … you just look at them and – look at them first and think, 'Ooh, you know [*laughs*], don't want to be friends with *them*' [*laughs*]. If I met them on the street I wouldn't talk to them. I don't know what

> to say without sounding-, I seem really awful, but I don't know, it's just the mannerisms, and the way they talk and the – like some of them … I don't like swearing and they swear. (Male student, white, aged 17, Year 1 interview 2)

Such differences of location within the working class were reflected in physical appearance, in clothing, make-up and jewellery, which are taken as signifiers of social status and moral respectability in our society (Bourdieu, 1986; Skeggs, 1997). These formed part of the surveillance and discipline that operated in both college and placements through constant discussions of the 'right' and 'wrong' way to appear. Students were allowed to wear what they pleased at college, and at first celebrated their release from school uniform. Joanne would comment on high-fashion items of clothing worn, sometimes admiringly, and then ask the group, 'But would you wear that in placement?' Gradually, students began to tone down their appearance, and noticed those who did not:

> I don't know if you've seen Chloë, she wears all the black make-up and the big baggy pants and stuff, but then to be professional you wouldn't walk into a nursery looking like that, you'd scare the kids to death! (Female student, white, aged 17, Year 1 interview 2)

On one placement visit, after giving lots of positive feedback to an otherwise excellent student, Joanne ticked her off for wearing a revealing cropped T-shirt:

> *Joanne*: Next time, though, I don't want to see you wearing that. Not very nice for parents coming in, seeing acres of belly every time you lean across the table.

By the end of the first year, observations in college showed that almost all the remaining students had adopted a modest 'uniform' of tracksuit bottoms, T-shirts and hooded fleece tops in sober or pastel colours. (In school settings, this uniform also contrasted with the smart, formal clothing invariably worn by qualified teachers in charge, marking out the subordinate role and economic disadvantage of the nursery nurse as well as her moral suitability.)

However, as the year progressed, a number of the girls Othered as 'rough' – including Gaby, Sonya and some of their more disaffected group – had resisted developing emotional bonds with the group or with Joanne, despite her considerable patience with them and her efforts to get them to integrate. By the end of the year several of them had either left, or been excluded through the disciplinary process. Those remaining were working hard to behave more collaboratively in class, but the one member who was part of our sample was reluctant to discuss what had happened, and continued to see nursery nursing as a 'job with no prospects'.

Meanwhile, two of the 'nice' group had also quit the course. One was the student who had complained that 'Children can wind you up!', and who was aware of her own short temper. She said that she had simply 'had enough' of working with small children, and had been unable to motivate herself to do the written work required. Another had got into a fight outside college, was cautioned by police as a result, and when this came to light at college, decided to withdraw from the course rather than face certain expulsion. In her final research interview, she explained her view of her exclusion:

> If I look at it from [the tutors'] point of view, it's, well it's right, because I wouldn't like my kids to be looked after by someone that goes round hitting people. (Female student, mixed race, aged 18, Year 1 interview 2)

Class fractions and gender may combine rather differently in the childcare site than in care work settings, but the combination appears to operate just as effectively to include some while excluding others.

Theorising Emotional Labour in Childcare

The experiences of the successful CACHE students match Hochschild's (1983) original definition of emotional labour well. They learned to evoke calmness or cheerfulness, and suppress anger or embarrassment within themselves, in order to project a countenance that would also calm, comfort or discipline the small children in their care. The physicality of the work combines with its emotionality, as they care for the 'undisciplined bodies' of children (and as might others care for the undisciplined bodies of elders) (Tronto, 1989). Even the most 'suitable' girls have to adapt their

dispositions further as they encounter the emotional challenges of the workplace. The pragmatic detachment required to cope with 'puke', 'pee' and punches is mitigated by the idealised image of the perfectly sensitive and gentle nursery nurse, and by the deeply caring culture created by college tutors.

Elsewhere, Colley et al (2003), in a cross-project analysis of a variety of vocational learning sites, adapted Bourdieu's term 'habitus' to develop the concept of 'vocational habitus' as a way of expressing a powerful aspect of the vocational culture: the combination of idealised and realised dispositions to which students must orient themselves in order to become 'the right person for the job'. At the same time, we argued that such a concept must also include aspects of sensibility – of feeling and emotion – as well as the practical sense of what it takes to do a particular kind of work. But how can we theorise the nature of this emotional labour itself more clearly?

Reay (2000) has also drawn on Bourdieu's sociology in order to analyse feelings in the context of studying the (unpaid) emotional work that mothers from different social classes do to engage with their children's education. She used Nowotny's (1981) extension of Bourdieu's forms of capital – economic, cultural and social – to include emotional capital. In this sense, emotions are regarded as resources, or a set of assets, which can be circulated, accumulated and exchanged for other forms of capital within a particular field that allows those resources to 'count'. As Hochschild (1983) also argued, women typically possess greater emotional resources than men, not least because they tend to have access to fewer of the other forms of capital. Therefore emotional capital has a 'looser link' with social class than Bourdieu's other forms of capital. In patriarchal capitalist society, the oppression of women makes it less likely that their resources can be fully deployed as capital, since women are generally positioned as subordinate players in all fields. This reminds us that, from a Marxist perspective at least, capital is *not* essentially an economistic metaphor, but expresses sets of *social relations* and inequalities of power.

This analysis could explain the role of VET here as allowing young women – those with particular emotional resources suited to childcare – to develop and refine these resources, but only to deploy them as *capital* within a very restricted and subordinate field. They may, for example, exchange them for economic 'capital', but only for very low wages; or for more cultural capital, but only for vocational courses and at institutions that have relatively low status.

The weakness of this concept of emotional capital, however, is that it locates the exploitation of women's resources in those to whom they devote their emotional work:

> The gendered processes which make up involvement in schooling are exemplified in the complex contradictions of 'a capital' which is all about investment in others rather than self – the one capital that *is used up* in interaction with others and is often for the benefit of those others. (Reay, 2000, p. 583, emphasis added)

This assumes that the problem of capitalism and its unequal social relations is a problem of *consumption*, and that emotions are *goods* that are generated by women, but tend to be consumed by others. Such an analysis would suggest that it is the children for whom nursery nurses care who consume their emotional work, a view which risks misplacing the root of the problem from a perspective of both class and gender. Rather than showing how structure and agency combine to produce and reproduce social inequalities, it tends to lead us back to Price's (2001) very different argument that the deployment of emotion in caring work is a matter of individual choice and morality on the part of both the carer and the cared for.

It may be more helpful to follow Heller's (1979) argument that emotions are *neither* natural/innate, *nor* undifferentiated resources to which different genders or social classes have differential access and affordances. However universal, inevitable and irresistible they appear to us, in fact quite different repertoires of feeling are available to different class fractions and genders within them. They are related to the mode of production in any given society, to multiple divisions of labour within it, and to different relationships to the means of production. In occupations like childcare and care of the elderly, the management of one's own and others' feelings is not a private adjunct to work, nor a sub-category of caring. It is a key feature of the workplace, a form of paid labour, or to be more accurate, of labour *power* – the capacity to labour, which can be ever more exploited by those who own the means of production for private profit (Marx, 1865, 1975). In Britain, while pay for nursery nurses is barely above the minimum wage, the profits for those who own nurseries are handsome: analysts Laing & Buisson (2005) estimated the childcare market in

2004 to be worth £2.7 billion, representing a fivefold increase over the last decade, and the most profitable in Europe. This suggests that the 'highest calibre' emotional work expected by Elfer et al (2003) is indeed exploited by those who sell love in the nursery.

Of course, children may benefit from the emotional labour of their carers, paid or unpaid. But this benefit is its private use-value. And as already been acknowledged, the carer may indeed find pleasure in that labour, at least until its more stressful aspects take their toll. It is only to be expected that deploying one's allocated repertoire of emotion must feel appropriate and deeply natural. It is the appropriation of emotional labour put to work for *exchange*-value – for profit – that turns it into a commodity, and a potential source of alienation. Although the limited nature of this study means that we do not have data about any eventual costs of producing themselves as 'nice girls' within narrow conventional notions of femininity for successful students, the data do show how some students resisted this and found themselves excluded as a result. There is also considerable evidence from research in other contexts to support Hochschild's (1983) contention that painful experiences of guilt and stress are frequent outcomes. Moreover, in caring occupations rather than service work, these outcomes can have serious deleterious effects for the child, patient or client (Mann, 2004).

But in childcare, as in other forms of caring work, the concept of emotional labour helps us to understand how this work is learned and performed. These trainee nursery nurses were not only working upon the emotions of the children in their care, nor were they simply 'handing over' emotional resources for consumption. The primary 'raw material' on which these girls learned to labour was *themselves*. Successful trainees possessed particular dispositions – enjoying the company of children, creativity, outgoing personalities. They also brought with them more collective or social predispositions, in particular classed and gendered expectations of a destiny caring for children (cf. Steedman, 1982).

Disposition and predisposition are twin aspects of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, and elsewhere Reay (1998) offers a definition of gendered habitus that helps to explain the deeply embodied nature of emotional labour:

> the concept of gendered habitus holds powerful structural influences within its frame. Gendered habitus includes a set of complex, diverse predispositions. It involves understandings of identity premised on familial legacy and early childhood socialization. As such it is primarily a dynamic concept, a rich interfacing of past and present, interiorized and permeating both body and psyche. (p. 141)

The habitus that students brought with them to their VET course was necessary, but not sufficient, to become a nursery nurse, and exemplifies this dynamic. They had to mobilise existing dispositions and predispositions, but also work further on their own feelings in order to learn to labour appropriately. This process is facilitated by the occupational or vocational culture (Bates, 1994): a 'guiding ideology' of practice (James, 1989) which organises the norms and expectations of a particular sphere of work. The 'international consensus' about quality childcare (Scarr, 1998) indicates one such vocational culture. Furthermore, it combines with broader cultural imperatives that construct emotional labour as one of the few ways for working-class women to work at proving their moral respectability and worth (Skeggs, 1997). In fact, this may be a prime example of the form of gender oppression that Bourdieu (2001) terms 'symbolic violence' – a form of violence which is not directly physical or visible, and may even become imperceptible to those who suffer it, but which assures their subordination nonetheless. It is likely to continue as long as capitalist edubusiness has an interest in making profits by offering motherly love for sale in the nursery.

Conclusion

The final conclusion I draw relates to the further education arenas in which nursery nursing is learned, and the responsibilities of those who manage that business and educate girls for it. For all the enthusiasm that surrounds many discussions of emotional work in childcare, when we think about how the capacity to labour on feelings is learned, we need to consider it in the context of historical changes that have taken place in VET in recent years. The solutions posed today by the Equal Opportunities Commission (Miller et al, 2005) focus on providing better information and guidance to encourage girls to enter non-traditional careers. Yet, as long as 20 years ago, Griffin

(1985) argued that, in the face of trajectories that were highly structured by class, gender and other inequalities, such responses were inadequate. Girls do not need directing towards male-dominated occupations that most will quite rationally resist because of the discrimination and harassment they may face. Instead, they need opportunities to understand why they desire the destinies they pursue; to ask critical questions about what those destinies both offer and demand; and to ask why their education contributes so often to the reproduction of social inequality.

However, the spaces for young women to explore such issues in VET have receded rather than expanded. As post-16 curricula have increasingly become dominated by narrow and often behaviourist approaches focused on skills, competencies and economic instrumentalism, social and political education has been virtually eradicated. There is little scope in 16-19 education for young people to engage with these critical questions in emancipatory ways. Instead, much of what they learn, as on the CACHE Diploma, reproduces docile subjectivities and uncomplaining caregiving. Most young women today find themselves caught up in a disempowering paradox. They believe equal opportunities exist, but still experience stereotyping and discrimination, and so they tend to believe that these are personal rather than collective or political issues. Like Griffin's (1985) 'typical girls', they too need

> opportunities to recognize and analyze their own gendered experiences and the vocational
> conditions of other women in terms of structural inequities, examining their personal experience
> and disposition as socially constructed and collectively shared through political and economic
> currents. (Fenwick, 2004, p. 181)

Those who, unlike myself, *are* experts and practitioners in the field of early childhood might also use this evidence to pursue other questions that it raises: whose responsibility is it to initiate change? What can policy-makers, employers, course tutors or the CACHE awarding body do to make visible, support and advocate better rewards for the emotional skills demanded of nursery nurses? Who else might have responsibility for initiating change? In respect of the debates reviewed at the start of this article, there are also more general questions to be answered: Why is attachment valued so highly in the care of children? Why is *vicarious* attachment valued so highly? Which factors interfere with attachment, and have these changed over time? Further research is also needed to explore how girls originally learn about attachment, *what* they have learned about it, and how their experiences influence their development as caregivers. It would also be useful to research other aspects of emotional labour in childcare, such as interactions with parents, which are central to the work of qualified nursery nurses, but in which these trainees were only marginally involved.

In a context where policy makers have now opened up vocational pathways from the age of 14 (Department for Education and Skills, 2005), there is an urgent need for those involved in occupations like childcare, and in education and training for them, to think more critically about learning to labour with feeling – and for more research to understand both the processes of such learning and its consequences in subsequent employment.

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Notes

[1] CACHE stands for Council for Awards in Childcare and Education. It used to be known as NNEB – the Nursery Nursing Education Board. The Diploma is one of the most commonly recognised qualifications for entry into nursery nursing, which is a registered occupation in the United Kingdom.

[2] The sample of students was selected at the cohort's entry to the course in discussion with Joanne Lowe. It is interesting that, as the group evolved, only one of our sample turned out to be in the less integrated group, and she was unwilling to discuss differences in the group.

[3] This is not to suggest that working-class people do not experience such reactions, but to argue, following Heller (1979), that such sensibilities are constructed and imposed by dominant social groupings and their cultural norms. These might also be seen as particularly strong in advanced capitalist countries – it is interesting to note that the Latin American artist Frieda Kahlo lampooned the hygienic obsessions of US society in a painting depicting a toilet on a pedestal.

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