Empirical Research

'I felt uncomfortable because I know what it can be': The emotional geographies and implicit activisms of reflexive practices for early childhood teachers

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Abstract

Reflexivity is recognized as an important constituent in how teachers build their professional knowledge and develop their pedagogical practice. However, less is known about the function that emotions play in the reflexive process and how these emotions can act as a catalyst to mobilize action that can create spaces for small activisms. Implicit activisms are here understood to involve small-scale gestures, such as speaking against discrimination, that can support notions of social justice. In this article, a reading of emotions is undertaken to explore how emotions such as discomfort can influence the speed and type of reaction for an early childhood specialist teacher during peer-to-peer mentoring. The concept of emotional geography is used to understand the way emotions relate to the distancing of others in one teacher's professional life and mobilize small-scale activism that can be interpreted as politically motivated.

Keywords

Emotional geography, implicit activism, peer-mentoring, reflexivity

Introduction

The need for reflexivity, understood as reflective thinking that leads to transformative action (Archer, 2012), is recognized as essential for early childhood education (ECE) teachers and practitioners in a policy landscape of 'anxious, restless change' (Moss, 2014: 8). Practice reflection is practically unattainable according to Bolton and Delderfield (2018), as the distancing from values and belief systems involved can trouble relationships.

Within ECE, reflexivity is conducted through complex webs of stakeholder relationships involving parents, children and colleagues (Warren, 2014), and Hargreaves (2001, 2005) posits

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that teachers operationalize their relationships within an emotional geography (Kenway and Youdell, 2011; Liu, 2016). What is rarely acknowledged in these professional relationships is the role emotions play (Osgood, 2010) and what emotions *do* require further conceptualization (Ahmed, 2004; Madrid et al., 2013). More recently, the role of emotions within reflexive processes has been associated with notions of activism (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Millei and Kallio, 2018; Zembylas, 2013). However, what is arguably overlooked is how activism can be small in scale (Horton and Kraftl, 2009), and also how emotions and reflexivity initiate activism (Zembylas, 2013). Therefore, this article makes a contribution to this debate by shifting the study of the interplay between emotions, relationships and activism within reflexive processes into the arena of ECE, where staff supervisions are statutory and must address influences on well-being (Department for Education, 2017). This is pertinent as teachers navigate practice changes through their relationships often in a high-stakes policy climate (Moss, 2014).

This article narrates an English ECE teacher's experience of transforming her practice in regard to parental involvement as part of a peer-mentoring project (Albin-Clark et al., 2016). The aim was to understand how reflexivity is related to activism within modest everyday actions (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Millei and Kallio, 2018) and the role emotions play in shifting the geography of parent and colleague relationships (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005). A timeline of events involved in the reflexive process is outlined to illuminate the role emotions play in relationship shifts and how those differing movements can trigger small-scale activisms (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Zembylas, 2015). The article interweaves theories of emotional reflexivity (Zembylas, 2014), implicit activism (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) and emotional geography (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005), and considers their application to a study of how parental involvement is transformed in the field of ECE. Next, the article examines the shifts in the emotional landscape of stakeholder relationships and identifies the role emotions play as triggers for different forms and speeds of action. Moreover, this article argues that emotions can be a powerful catalyst for small-scale activism, and asserts that everyday actions within stakeholder relationships are highly valued, what is small in scale can nonetheless be framed as social justice (Zembylas, 2013), and this is a potentially empowering notion to ECE teachers.

Emotions, care and relationships within the social space of ECE

Fostering relationships within a 'triangle of care' between teacher, child and parent can create trust but has inherent tensions (Hohmann, 2007). Caring relationships involve ethical sensitivity (Gilligan, 2003) and therefore encompass both empathy and reciprocity (Noddings, 2013), and more recently have been conceptualized as forms of professional love (Page, 2017). Brooker (2010) draws attention to possible tensions in relationship roles in her study of the interplay between power and professionalism, and advocates the role of listening in alleviating such tensions. Power structures within relationships influence emotional states, and professional life can involve forceful, stressful and guilt-laden feelings that can be conceptualized as a form of labour (Colley, 2006; Madrid and Dunn-Kenney, 2010). Emotional labour, according to Hochschild (2012), involves professionals, often females in caring professions, whose emotions are in effect commercialized as part of their daily work. The labour and regulation involved in managing emotions operate at differing levels according to Hochschild (2012), and can induce stress, particularly when there is a dissonance between what is felt and what is expressed. The relationship between emotion and resistance can create spaces for change that can positively influence teacher identity because it engenders an impetus to mobilize agency (Zembylas, 2003). As Osgood (2006) suggests, agency, rather than passivity, can support professional identities that, in turn, relate to discourses of authority and maternal identity, pertinent in a predominantly female workforce (Warren,

2014). This suggests that ECE teachers develop gendered professional relationships, and Osgood (2006) contends that this play outs within a social space that occupies a hegemonic professional discourse. Emotions move and act between people and shape their relationships, involve conscious or subconscious judgments of others through exchanges of power, and represent social and cultural practices that can shape collective working identities and discourses of the professional self (Ahmed, 2004, 2014; Schutz and Pekrun, 2007).

Emotional geography has emerged from the field of geographical research and studies emotion within the social sphere (Davidson et al., 2005). Emotions acting as a closing and distancing mechanism between the social groups that teachers interrelate with are theorized in Hargreaves' (2001, 2005) research of emotional geographies. This notion draws attention to how emotion mediates the boundaries that teachers create, delineating five emotional geography typologies. The first type is termed a sociocultural emotional geography and describes teachers who navigate cultures different from their own in schools. Secondly, emotional geography can have a moral dimension, and this is related to mismatches in purposes and choices. Thirdly, teachers use a professional emotional geography to create forms of detachment. Fourthly, and aptly for ECE teachers in terms of relationships with very young children, is a physical emotional geography as young children often seek proximity. Emotional geography can lastly be political, and this relates to how power is distributed. The application of such concepts can facilitate understanding of how policy change impacts on teachers (Hargreaves, 2001: 1062–1072).

Emotions, teacher reflexivity and activism

Riojas-Cortez et al. (2013) found that the relationship between reflexive action, ideological shifts and educational outcomes does not necessarily result from teacher professional development. Critical reflection on practice can enable a 'making and remaking of knowledge' (Fook and Gardner, 2007: 10), and reflexive not reflective action suggests reactions and responses as a result of professional learning. Zembylas notes:

> Particularly, the notion of 'critical emotional reflexivity' is theorized as a concept and praxis that not only acknowledges how reflexive processes are deeply emotional, but also interrogates how emotions are entangled with power relations and reflexive processes to legitimize or delegitimize certain teaching practices. (Zembylas, 2014: 210)

Thus, emotions are instrumental to reflexive actions and have the potential for acts of social justice by creating space for small 'implicit activisms', such as speaking up for discriminated groups, and can be a way that schools enact social activism and disrupt hierarchies (Zembylas, 2013: 84). Horton and Kraftl's (2009: 14) definition of activism includes actions that are characterized by 'small acts, kind words and "not too much fuss"'. Activisms within this construct are small scale and situated rather than grand in gesture (14). Millei and Kallio (2018: 31) use a similar term of 'mundane politics'. Osgood (2010: 119), in her theorization of the 'critically reflective emotional professional', notes that this is a way in which professional identities develop. Both Zembylas (2014) and Osgood (2010) draw attention to the close connection between reflexive practice, ethics and power. Zembylas urges further empirical research in this area and considers that some particular emotions associated with discomfort can be significant, adopting the term 'pedagogy of discomfort' (Boler, 2004; Boler and Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas and Boler, 2002). Identifying emotion within narrative research processes is significant because it draws attention to the issues that are faced within professional life (Woolhouse, 2017).

Methods and methodology

Studying reflexivity requires consideration of actions, relationships and associated meanings, so a qualitative and narrative approach was best suited to this endeavour (Andrews et al., 2013; Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). In order to overcome the limitations of privileging partisan perspectives that can result in a lack of critique (Hargreaves, 1996), I put to work procedures that sought authenticity by remaining close to participant responses, as Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) suggests that this way will ultimately benefit children.

This study draws on the data from one participant selected from a larger review for in-depth study into the role of emotions in her recall of the larger mentoring project. The research participant, Anna (pseudonym), an ECE teacher with 17 years of teaching experience, holds a Master's qualification and leads a team of seven teachers and teaching assistants working with children aged five years and under in a primary school in north-west England. Within the initial peer-mentoring project, she identified parent engagement as an area for development and developed her changes over one year with her team. I identify significant points in Anna's evolving reflexive practice and specifically examine her emotional experience in terms of how she navigates the proximities between stakeholders to enact space for small-scale activism.

The hour-long semi-structured interview, undertaken by a research assistant, took place at Anna's school. Ethical guidelines were adhered to (British Educational Research Association, 2011) and permission was gained for the interview to be used for the initial evaluation and this study. The transcription was validated by the participant to ensure accuracy and member-checked to enable analysis. In addition, I was mindful of my duty as a narrative researcher in creating a relationship that safeguarded the participant's dignity in the quest for scholarly knowledge (Josselson, 2007). This meant that I sought Anna's view on the final draft of the article, as I was aware of the sensitivities in writing a close account of her emotions.

Data analysis

The project took place over one year and, for the purposes of this study, was delineated into four significant phases. Each phase was analysed at a micro level to consider how Anna contextualized her relationships and the function emotions played. The analysis involved a series of readings to enable a nuanced understanding of the data. Framework analysis principles were applied and enabled a selected range of actions to be considered (Byrne, 2016). Firstly, words that were associated with emotions and phrases that indicated distances within relationships were identified. Secondly, the context of the language used was considered in relation to the phase of the project.

The findings are presented in a narrative order and focus on the purposes and functions of the language used (Reissman, 2008). The narrative identifies four phases that capture how Anna conceptualizes her changing emotions and relationships with colleagues and parents (see Table 1).

Phase 1. Close emotional geography

The first phase focuses on Anna's professional experiences in her previous school and paints a picture of close, harmonious teacher–parent relationships. Her descriptions reveal an established relationship underpinned with an assumption that parents were engaged with their children's learning:

> Well, I came from a school which was very middle class and I was used to having really strong relationships with parents. And I was used to parents that were really involved in their child's education at home and all that was just a kind of given, and I saw what the benefits of that were.

Table 1. Phases of the mentoring project with examples of words that express emotion.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Previous school	New school, new area Low socio-economic area,	Mentoring project begins Changes to parent	Project evaluation
High socio-economic area, white-British staff and families	white-British families Differing sociocultural backgrounds of teacher and parents	partnership implemented	
Similar sociocultural backgrounds of teacher and parents			
No explicit emotion words	Shocked, sad, uncomfortable, resent, negativity	Laugh, fears and projections, worry, fear, fears and worries	Lovely, comfortable, loved, churning away, trust, pleased

This suggests a clarity and resonance between children, parents and the school, revealing a similarity of expectations and a close sociocultural and political emotional geography (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005). There are no explicit emotional words used in this extract. Nevertheless, there are indications of a positive three-way relationship as 'just a kind of given', implying an unstated sense of comfort. This indicates an amicable status quo, reflecting the investment made by stakeholders to establish this relationship (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Power in this relationship is an 'authority discourse', where a teacher's knowledge and qualifications validate the claim of authority (Warren, 2014: 262), which secures Anna's professional identity. This established professional identity and relationship sets the scene at the beginning of the narrative. The closeness is viscerally disrupted within the second phase of the narrative as Anna moves to a different locality and school with a very different climate.

Phase 2. Distanced emotional geography

The second phase charts how Anna catalyses her emotions to prompt practice change and charts her heightened emotional reactions. On arrival at the new school, Anna found that parental involvement did not resemble her previous experiences, and encountered new colleagues with differing attitudes to parental relationships: 'there's real … negativity towards the parents within the culture of the school. There's a lot of criticism of parents rather than understanding'. The emotional geography of her relationships with colleagues involved distances that can be described as moral (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005), as they involve dissonance and incomprehension of viewpoints, but demonstrate some conflict with Hargreaves' definition, as Anna was clearly able to understand collegial standpoints.

Anna's perception of the distance between herself and the parents was evoked by physical and sociocultural factors (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005), manifested in emotionally charged exchanges. This realization resulted in powerfully felt emotive recounts:

> So, when I first came here, I was really shocked because it was a very, very different climate. Since I've been here, I've had parents screaming at me, shouting at me, parents making what I considered to be unreasonable demands on me … they don't, kind of, just accept what I say; there's a lot of negativity and … I was feeling … I felt sad about it really and I felt … uncomfortable because I know what it can be. And this was such a long way from that, but I haven't really known what to do about it.

Anna's description of screaming and shouting and her omission of the meaning or context demonstrates the visceral nature of those exchanges. If these actions are often repeated, Ahmed (2004) describes experiences like these as leaving marks, akin to injury, on the surface of the body that can influence positions towards others.

The lack of acceptance from the parents – 'they don't, kind of, just accept what I say' – suggests that Anna's identity as an experienced teacher is challenged, as is its attendant power (Zembylas, 2014), which disrupts the unquestioned authority discourse associated with her previous parental relationships (Warren, 2014). The powerful words with negative emotional connotations (e.g. 'shocked', 'sad', 'uncomfortable') used to recall incidents denote the emotional labour in managing emotional states (Colley, 2006; Hothschild, 2012).

As the physical emotional geography (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005) is breached, it results in emotions of sadness and discomfort. These emotions may have been caused by a dissonance between Anna's expectations of parents accepting her professional expertise and status and their actual responses, which questioned and perhaps shook her professional identity and being, which would have assumed authority and position. The physical, social and emotional distance between her old and new situations seems to be compounded with Anna's use of the adverbs 'really', 'very' and 'long' in phrases such as 'I was really shocked', 'it was a very, very different climate' and 'such a long way from that'. This gives a sense of the distance, difference and dissonance she must have felt when recalling her reaction, and also uses language associated with geography and space. These emotions are causing a discomfort and have the potential to act as a prompt for action. Emotions in this context can be interpreted in terms of not just what they mean, but also what they do (Boler, 2004; Zembylas, 2015).

This emotionally saturated context provides a prompt for reflection and can be conceptualized as costly to Anna by the strength of the reaction. It can also be conceptualized as a form of capital that is compelling and dynamic in Anna's aspiration for practice change to improve the transition processes for children and their parents (Osgood, 2010). Anna's reflection reveals her reaction to parents challenging and undermining boundaries and expectations as she attempts to establish her new position. Her reflection may also reveal Anna reappraising an authority that she has assumed would be accorded to her role. This is the point in the narrative where Anna's reflexive processes begin to gain traction. The reaction to such powerful emotions of 'shock', 'sadness' and, significantly, 'discomfort' shifts the power relations (Brooker, 2010) and catalysed a crucial turning point that acts as a kind of pedagogical tool for transformation (Zembylas, 2014: 210). This emotional narrative sparks a kind of 'critical emotional reflexivity', which Zembylas (2014: 214) considers requires both reflection on emotions and assumptions. However, Anna's experience challenges this definition as the omission of her own assumptions in the narrative does not deter her reflexive actions. This phase of the narrative leads into an account of the practice changes that Anna makes in response.

Phase 3. Distance and closeness in emotional geographies

The third phase charts two significant shifts in practice that occur using ideas inspired by the mentoring school: firstly, replanning her parents' meetings and, secondly, reviewing her induction of new children to actively bring parents into the classroom:

> the main thing that I got from them [the mentors] was that you can form much stronger relationships with parents if it's informal, much less formal, and also if, rather than have them follow PowerPoints, you're actually able to talk to them and explain it in a small group. So you're talking rather than … lecturing.

Anna here begins to consider her relationships in a much more personal way, and seeks to introduce greater informality. This is done through controlling the size of the meetings, use of visual prompts with sharing school lunch menus and uniform samples, limiting staff numbers and redacting shared information. This suggests a shift in attitude that reflexively reviews habitual practices (Bolton and Delderfield, 2018) by understanding the physical, sociocultural and moral emotional geographies between the school and parents (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005).

The phrase 'talking rather than … lecturing' is pertinent and suggests an emotional empathy. Empathy involves imagination (Yarrow, 2015) and is also a constituent of care ethics in action (Noddings, 2013). Here, Anna is using this capacity to garner insight into the lives of the families and putting to work the deeper acting level of emotional labour in considering the necessity to talk rather than lecture (Hochschild, 2012). This mobilization of empathy can also be read as a form of modest 'implicit activism' (Zembylas, 2013) by altering practice to enable and give permission to parents to enter into the school realm. This gesture could also be interpreted as creating affective bonds with her parent group, which is associated with activist endeavour (Zembylas, 2013). The shifts in language suggest Anna's recasting and repositioning of her authority to a caring identity within the teacher–parent relationship (Brooker, 2010), and perhaps constitute a 'scramble of the power relations' characteristic of implicit activisms (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 22), initiating a shift in the social hierarchy (Zembylas, 2013). This seems to be a gateway for practice change to take hold and is possibly the moment her emotional geographies begin to shift and close distance.

Anna's second specific practice change involved devising new approaches to induction:

So, I put in this extra session … instead of the parents just coming and dropping their children off and disappearing, the parents stayed as well. And so I had an hour for 15 children and an hour for the other 15, and the parents stayed, and that was just lovely because … they were here with their parents and the parents have sat in my classroom for an hour, which the current cohort had never done, ever. So, they've already seen what it's like and I was able to get round and chat … they've all got personal little things that they want to tell you.

And they played with the children and the year's worth of books were out and they could look through them. The children loved it.

The language demonstrates Anna's concerted attempts to invest and find benefit in her relationships (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Anna seems particularly to gain emotional satisfaction in the physical closeness between the parents and children ('that was just lovely', 'The children loved it'). This may also indicate a sense of satisfaction with her actions that shifted her orientation towards the parents, suggesting that Anna is appreciating the expertise of parents in her professional role (Brooker, 2010) and also a recognition of the significance of care and love in the fostering of relationships (Gilligan, 2003; Page, 2017). Anna gives value to the information that parents share, and her acknowledgement of this action suggests a reinvigoration of her professional identity, illuminating 'relational professionals who engaged in warm, trusting and positive relationships' (Warren, 2014: 262). Anna demonstrates her understanding of the significance of moving around the parent group and enabling informal talk: 'they've all got personal little things that they want to tell you'. This can be interpreted as a kind of 'small act' that is personalized and meaningful to parents, and can be read as a kind of implicit activism (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The opportunity to be listened to in sharing those meaningful details may also initiate affective and caring bonds that cement the triangular relationship of care (Brooker, 2010; Hohmann, 2007); Zembylas (2013) argues that affective bonds play a significant role in the early stages of activism.

At this point in the narrative, Anna reflects on what parents' meetings would be like without her intervention, and discusses her senior colleague's response:

> When we had the induction meeting, she kept saying, 'Right. We'll tell them that we have to be locked up by 7, so that they all leave by 7'. The meeting only started at 6! People … what I noticed is that everybody has got fears or projections about changes; everybody's got them, it's natural. So, for example, my assistant head's worry was, 'My gosh, if we're going to spend all this time standing round talking to parents, they're never going to go! We're going to have to have a limit on this'.

Again, the language of distance pervades ('locked up', 'leave by 7', 'they're never going to go', 'have a limit on this') in the descriptors that Anna ascribes to her senior colleague, illuminating Anna's attempts to control the physical emotional geography (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005). Anna rationalizes this reaction as 'fears', demonstrating an appreciation of the risks inherent in practice transformations. Emotion here is acting as a means whereby Anna delegitimizes the previous pedagogical practices at this stage in her reflexive process (Zembylas, 2014). The 'critically reflective emotional professional' (Osgood, 2010: 119) is apparent as Anna negotiates shifting the existing school culture through her active closing of the sociocultural and physical emotional geographies with her parent constituency, although the frequency of Anna's meetings with parents is at odds with Hargreaves' (2001) view that physical factors are aggravated by the episodic nature of teacher–parent meetings. However, the distance between herself and her senior colleague still reveals a dissonant and distanced physical and professional emotional geography (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005).

Phase 4. Distance and closeness in emotional geography

The fourth phase is where Anna considers the impact of the mentoring project on herself. In her relationships with parents, she has established a closer physical and moral emotional geography in that she has shared educational purpose with the parents by opening up her classroom. However, in her reflection, she perceives a knowledge gap that is compounded by a difference of social class between herself and the parents, and this has an undercurrent of political, sociocultural and professional distance (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005): 'Well, I think it just has made me take seriously the need to … model for parents things that they just simply don't know for one reason or another'. Anna seems to consider that the knowledge that parents need in order to become involved in their children's education can only come from teacher modelling: 'it isn't natural for them'. This suggests a classed judgement and a distancing of the moral emotional geography of the relationship, as Anna indicates differing purposes and choices made by parents and herself as a teacher (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005). The identification of a difference between what is natural to her current parents and what was natural to her previous experiences seems to rely on the perceived assignation of sociocultural class and gives a sense of the sociocultural class Anna ascribes to herself. There is a sense here of a dissonance between the knowledge capital that the teacher holds and the perceived lack of parental knowledge from Anna's interpretation. This can be identified as a commentary on the complex relationship between the family, class and schooling, exemplified by Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural capital. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a limiting and stereotypical view of parents in the assumption that parents should, and are willing to, engage in parent partnerships that align with schools' expectations. On the other hand, it can also be perceived as a way in which Anna finds purpose and identity as a moral gatekeeper of children's interests, and indicative of the ethical decision-making at play in evolving caring relationships (Gilligan, 2003). However, the solitary manner of Anna's decision-making demonstrates a limitation of Hargreaves' (2001)

definition of moral emotional geography as being buoyed along by collective endeavour. This may also signal how Anna frames her teacher knowledge within an authority discourse (Warren, 2014), therefore reclaiming a familiar and preferred professional identity:

> And for one reason or another, whatever has happened to them in their lives, they don't know and they're never going to know unless we go to them and show them and work with them. And that's beneficial for the child.

In this final phase of the narrative, Anna also reflects on the relationship she has with senior colleagues and their lack of knowledge about her practice changes. This demonstrates a continuing distance in her professional, moral, political and physical emotional geographies (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005) but conflicts with Hargreaves' view that sociocultural emotional geographies involve a lack of comprehension, as this next comment illustrates that Anna clearly understands her situation:

> I'm assuming that she's [the assistant head teacher] communicated it to the head and deputy but, in actual fact, I don't know and I think schools are way too busy and things get … skimmed over and nobody's looking at anything in depth. So, I guess from my side that I'm … what's churning away at the moment is that I'm thinking, 'You know, my head and deputy really need to know that this is what's changing down here'.

The isolation and emotional labour that the reflexive process has brought (Colley, 2006), and the resilience required in resisting the school culture of keeping a distance, are encapsulated in Anna's comment 'what's churning away'. This reveals that the reflexive process is nuanced, complex and ambiguous when managing relationships that navigate between children, parents and senior colleagues, and has a sophisticated emotional labour (Elfer et al., 2012). Here, Anna personifies an attuned, reflective emotional professional whose disruptions to hegemonic discourses leak compelling emotional consequences (Osgood, 2006, 2010).

Discussion

The reflexive process of developing parental engagement brought reactions, disruptions and shifts in Anna's emotional geographies. Anna's emotional reactions to the two significant stakeholder groups result in contrasting actions and appear to act at differing speeds, providing a significant discussion point. Anna moves quickly in her attempts to close the emotional geography with her parent group whilst moving much more slowly in her attempts to react to the distanced relationships with her senior colleagues. This implies that different emotional reactions can contribute to the speed of reflexive action, suggesting that emotions have a performative nature which can create spaces for transformative practices that mobilize implicit activisms (Boler, 2004; Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Zembylas, 2013). The role of emotions in constructing geographies and initiating activisms, and how they manifested at different speeds for social groups, will now be considered.

When Anna describes her emotions towards her senior colleagues' lack of awareness of her practice changes, she uses the term 'what's churning away', indicating deep-level emotions being slowly processed and not examined, identified or resolved. This is implied in the word 'churning', a turning over, subconscious consideration of her colleagues' actions. This may further indicate a perceived gap between her senior colleagues and herself, fuelled from taking responsibility for her attitudes and values towards parents bound to her reflexive actions (Bolton and Delderfield, 2018).

The delayed reaction to this emotion may have the advantage of creating a natural space for an experienced and trusted teacher to experiment in the reflexive process without the permission or sanction of senior colleagues. The practice changes are entwined with establishing a triangle of care in the relationship between child, parent and teacher (Hohmann, 2007), and evolving those caring and trusting dispositions can foster affective bonds that initiate kinds of implicit activism (Horton and Kraftl, 2009). This may indicate that emotions, even when they are not processed, can still socially construct beliefs (Schutz and Pekrun, 2007). However, this has the disadvantage of creating a cost in the form of a lonely burden, and, for Anna, there may well be a longer-term emotional labour in terms of creating an isolated professional identity (Colley, 2006). This isolation creates a distanced emotional geography between Anna and her senior colleagues, lingering at the close of the narrative. The expression of deeply rooted, unresolved, complicated emotions illuminates the complexity of what emotions can do in educational practice (Madrid et al., 2013). The distance between Anna and her senior colleagues in terms of an emotional geography remains static throughout her reflexive process, and this could be an implication of emotions that remain contained. Moreover, her change in practice would eventually be evident to her colleagues as they saw the imagined benefits to children, so this suggests that unexamined and resisted emotions can indicate a slower game at play in terms of making decisions about how and when she shares her practice changes with senior colleagues. This contained emotion creates a space for change that has positively influenced Anna's teacher identity (Zembylas, 2003). Anna may well be aware that constructing caring relationships between families and the school (Hohmann, 2007) at the start of their school career marks a mutual investment between stakeholders that benefits children in the longer term (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005).

However, there is a marked difference in the faster speed with which Anna responds to the emotions from her interactions with her parent group, revealing a quickly moving course of events, and this may correlate to the intensity of the emotions experienced. The emotions of 'shock' 'sadness' and 'discomfort' act as a positive provocation and catalyst for reflexive action. Emotions act as a capital that gives energy for practice changes – the emotion, in effect, becomes embodied in action (Yarrow, 2015). The vibrant and reactive lived emotions shape social practices (Ahmed, 2004), which, in turn, create a climate for modest 'implicit activisms' (Zembylas, 2013). Horton and Kraftl (2009) consider that 'implicit activisms' emerge from emotional states, and this heightened emotional reaction can be understood to create conditions where Anna feels compelled to listen and act. The affective bonds that Anna has created have resulted in a more caring teacher–parent relationship, reciprocated in 'small acts, words and gestures' characterizing modest forms of activism (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 14). There is also a sense that emotions relate to how power is felt and understood, and are thus both social and political, drawing attention to the potentials of power being displaced in home–school relationship roles (Brooker, 2010; Madrid et al., 2013). This political distance may indicate a power hierarchy that Anna seeks to retain in an authoritarian identity (Warren, 2014) in order to safeguard the children's best interests and her own position. There is an air of finality in Anna's observation about the parent group – 'they don't know and they're never going to know' – suggesting a resolution and fixing of identity (Brooker, 2010). This implies that emotional geographies may be intensely influenced by visceral emotional experiences, and this results in greater and faster shifts in terms of the positions teachers will take towards social groups (Ahmed, 2004).

The analysis indicates that different intensities of emotion provoke different speeds of action and shifts in emotional geography that contribute towards notions of activism occurring through reflexive processes. Viscerally felt emotions were more intensely felt and provoked faster practice changes, and also acted as a means of closing distances in emotional geographies. Unexamined and internalized emotions seem to be the pay-off for this practice action, but Anna's awareness of them

supports the notion of emotion having a sort of capital in future reflexive actions (Yarrow, 2015). This suggests that emotions are acting in different ways and have a role in the professional landscape that describes an emotional professional at work (Osgood, 2010). Emotions are, in effect, mobilizing caring acts and gestures that demonstrate implicit activisms by creating spaces for reflexivity that subsequently create affective bonds between stakeholder groups (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Zembylas, 2013).

Conclusions

This research concurs with the view that reflexive processes are entangled within emotional responses and reactions (Osgood, 2010; Zembylas, 2014). Applying the theory of emotional geographies (Hargreaves, 2001, 2005) has also been a fruitful approach, even within the limitations of a singular case study. Emotional geography has emerged from the field of geography and has been applied to education, but it has not previously been explored in the field of ECE research. The current study diverges from previous research on emotions and reflexivity by offering original insights into the field in terms of how the nature of emotion can also influence the speed of action in practice change and the interpretation of those actions and gestures as forms of activism. Further lines of enquiry are recommended using the conceptual frame of emotional geographies in the ECE research field, as this research has illuminated some limitations in Hargreaves' (2001, 2005) definitions within the context of ECE reflexivity, particularly in terms of the nature of emotion types and how this influences the longer-term impact of practice changes.

The role of emotions for ECE teachers in reflexive processes demonstrates that 'the everyday emotional lives of teachers are messy, complex, and intertwined with power and ideology' (Madrid and Dunn-Kenney, 2010: 398). Alongside the dynamics and politics of the emotional professional there also lies the potential of 'implicit activisms' that correlate with reflexive practices (Zembylas, 2013: 84). The capacity of ECE teachers such as Anna to interpret their everyday reflexive actions as a sort of activism – in this case, enabling parents to engage with their children's learning – gives a value to those emotional responses that correspond in a complex set of events, ultimately benefiting the 'triangle of care' in relationships (Hohmann, 2007) and resulting engagement between stakeholders. Emotions have the potential to provide a kind of provocation for change through ethical decision-making (Gilligan, 2003) – in this case, enabling parents to enter the domain of engagement in their children's lives in the classroom. Horton and Kraftl (2009) consider that reviewing everyday acts sits within a broader debate about the definitions and possibilities of activism. If a single teacher's mobilization of emotion can make a difference to one class of children and their parents, a whole-school approach can have more far-reaching effects. This is an exciting proposition in the field of ECE, where teachers' emotional reactions could enable small acts of social justice, leading to the prospect of larger acts of social justice to come.

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