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A critique of the discursive landscape: Challenging the invisibility of early childhood educators' well-being.

Introduction

Discourses of children's well-being abound in early childhood education and care [ECEC]¹. Understood as: "feelings of security, confidence and optimism" and capacity for exploration, persistence and resilience (Emmett, 2013, p.27), children's well-being has received extensive research attention and has a central role in early childhood policy and curricular guidelines. This role is evident in numerous national curriculum documents, for example Australia's *Early Years Learning Framework* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009); England's *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (Department for Education, 2017); Scotland's *Getting It Right for Every Child* (Scottish Government, 2014); Ireland's *Aistear* framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) and Aotearoa/New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* curriculum (Ministry for Education, 2017). In contrast to this multi-faceted and well-evidenced attention to children's well-being, the well-being of early childhood educators has received fragmentary research attention (Authors; Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay & Marshall, 2014). Indeed, with the exception of the *International Labour Organization Guidelines for the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel* (2014), and parts of Australia's *National Quality Standard* (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2018) there appears to be no explicit attention to educators' well-being in policy documents or curricular guides – including those mentioned above - across national contexts.

There are also very few definitions of well-being in the research literature concerning early childhood educators. Following an extensive review of this literature, and drawing on sources from philosophy, psychology and physiology, we recently proposed this definition:

A dynamic state, involving the interaction of individual, relational, work-environmental, and socio-cultural-political aspects and contexts. Educators' well-being is the responsibility of the individual AND the agents of these contexts, requiring ongoing, direct and indirect supports, across psychological and physiological dimensions (Authors).

Links between educators' and children's well-being seem self-evident. If educators' well-being is compromised they are unlikely to be able to offer high quality education and care, which is the key to high quality experiences and outcomes for children (Tayler, Thorpe, Nguyen, Adams & Ishimine, 2016). This rationale is supported by research evidence showing both the positive effects for children of educators' well-being (Ylitapio-Mäntylä, Uusianutti, & Määttä, 2012; Nislin, Sajaniemi, Sims, Suhonen, Maldonado Montero,

¹ In this paper, 'early childhood education' refers to formal, centre-based services for children from birth-before school-age.

Hirvonen & Hyttinen, 2016), and the negative effects when educators' well-being is compromised (Ota, Baumgartner, & Berghout Austin, 2013; Cassidy, King, Wang, Lower & Kintner-Duffy, 2016)². Further, compromised educator well-being can be financially costly for early childhood services (Kusma, Groneberg, Nienhaus, & Mache, 2012), families, and educators themselves (Løvgren, 2016). Why then, is educators' well-being invisible within the discursive landscapes of early childhood education and care?

In this paper, our purpose is to offer explanations for this invisibility, then, begin the work of challenging it. We start by identifying and critiquing five dominant discourses within which early childhood education and care has been, and continues to be constructed. We argue that this discursive landscape enables *dividing practices* (Foucault, 1982) that marginalise educator well-being by creating divisions between and within individuals, and by obscuring collective issues. To challenge this landscape, we use theoretical resources from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Tronto (2013, 2015, 2017) to argue for a reformed discursive landscape in early childhood education and care with space for consideration of and attention to children's *and* educators' well-being.

Dividing practices

Dividing practices are concerned with the objectivisation of the subject – that is, how individuals see and understand themselves. From a Foucauldian perspective the subject is “either divided inside himself [sic] or divided from others. This process objectivises him [sic]” (Foucault, 1982, p. 208). The processes of ‘division’ operate through dominant discourses, creating binary regimes of truth by which there appear to only be oppositional ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to do, think or be. The apparent ‘truth’ of the ‘right’ side of binaries directs attention towards individuals and topics that are the subject of the most dominant discourses, whilst also deflecting attention away from social issues and diverse alternatives that bring into question the rightness of ‘truths’.

In relation to early childhood education and care, an example of dividing practices could be ways that early childhood educators are positioned – and hence ‘divided’ - through work arrangements and conditions. Historical and socio-political discourses positioning preschool as ‘educative’, and long day care as ‘caring’ can divide educators by association - as described by Grieshaber and Graham (2013), and Gibson (2013) for example. At a policy level, discourses shaping ECE as care **or** education can influence which government department has responsibility for the early childhood sector. For instance, in the Australian policy context in the 1970s, inter-departmental debates about responsibility for early childhood education and care led to disputes as to whether this responsibility was best located within the social welfare department or the education department (Authors). These disputes had long lasting implications for services and educators because the administration of child care funding remained with the Commonwealth government whereas preschool

² For a full review of this literature, see Authors, 2019.

funding moved to State governments³. Hence, educators became ‘divided’ according to the type of service provision in which they were employed and the funding arrangements applicable to their early childhood service. Relocating responsibility into government departments for education has only partly remedied the legacy of these divisions within educators’ and the public’s consciousness.

The divisions in these examples show how attention can be obscured from larger issues such as problematic workplace cultures for all, or, what quality teaching preparation might look like. In the examples above, the means of the practices becoming ‘divisive’ are through the operation of dominant discourses that create regimes of truth (Foucault, 1982). Regimes of truths are operationalised through the creation of binaries, such as the very thought that there **IS** a better qualification, or that education **OR** care is more important than the other. In terms of this paper, we contend that attention to children’s well-being has become discursively constructed as the only ‘right way’ to orient practice by rendering educators’ well-being invisible. Further, that dividing practices have created a regime of truth whereby educators overlook their responsibility to the well-being of themselves and their colleagues in the interests of children alone.

Discursive regimes contributing to the invisibility of educators’ well-being

Since its inception, ECEC has been consistently shaped by liberal / progressive, scientific, gender, nationalist, and economic discourses (Authors). Although multiple discourses exist, and discourses are themselves fluid and constantly shifting, they form a discursive landscape wherein multiple constructs of ECEC can emerge (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Jørgensen & Phillips, 1985). This landscape has given rise to various ways of viewing education, children and women that we argue, have contributed to a lack of attention to educators’ well-being.

Liberal / Progressive Discourses

Liberal / progressive discourses that focus on individual freedom, choice and creative self-expression have been highly significant for the construction of ECEC. For example, it was liberal / progressive discourses of the late nineteenth century that gave rise to an increased interest in children and calls for educational reform. These discourses created a space within which Free Kindergartens could emerge as models of new ‘progressive’ pedagogy. Liberal / progressive discourses, still pervade contemporary Western ideology (Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004; Stirrup, Evans & Davies, 2017). These discourses continue to uphold child-centred, play-based and individualistic aspects of ECEC, which are not only considered by many ECEC advocates to be central to current ECEC pedagogy, but are also evident in the curriculum and documents governing ECEC in many national contexts (including those mentioned in the introduction) (Wood & Hedges, 2016). However, the child-centred focus of ECEC, albeit

³ Similar jurisdictional divisions are reported by Penn (2013) in relation to some European Union contexts, and by Kagan (2018) in relation to South Korea.

important, has potentially diverted attention away from those who care for and educate children.

Liberal / progressive discourses also underpin the focus on social justice in ECEC (Olssen et al., 2004). In the past, these discourses not only gave rise to new ways of viewing poverty, but constructed children as vulnerable and innocent. ECEC thus emerged as a way of both 'rescuing' and 'forming' children, and also 'reforming society' (Authors). Similarly, contemporary liberal / progressive discourses that have a social justice ethic and call for fairness and equity, create spaces for constructs of ECEC to emerge as socially just education that aims to ameliorate the effects of disadvantage and to change inequitable practices – *for children, their families and society*. However, rarely do the rights and interests of educators figure within these social justice discussions. Educators' well-being is not only prioritised below that of the children in their care, but is most often invisible as an issue for attention.

Scientific Discourses

Early childhood education and care, perhaps more than education at any other time in a child's life, is also highly shaped by scientific discourses, especially those concerning child development (Wood & Hedges, 2016). However, the invisibility of educators' well-being as a key aspect of improving children's development and well-being, has meant that there is little scientific evidence with which to inform policy and practice concerning this important issue. With the rise of scientific enquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, came increasing recognition of children's development, and the importance of the environment as an influencing factor upon it. Scientific discourses have continued to inform ECEC, as our understandings about how children grow and learn are informed by empirical research (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005), and, most recently, drawing on emerging and compelling evidence from neuroscience (Edwards, Gillies, & Horsley, 2015). Moreover, there is sustained interest in the role that ECEC has in either enhancing, or jeopardising children's development and well-being. Scientific discourses, therefore, continue to uphold the construction of ECEC as education based on scientific knowledge, with the aim of improving children's development in an objectively 'measurable' way.

The quality of educators' practice is an acknowledged part of facilitating children's well-being - an aspect of their development. Providing sensitive responsive relationships, based on the principles of attachment theory, is often presented as a key practice in facilitating the development of children's well-being. Citing Rolfe (2004, p. 225), Emmett (2013) recognises: "the need for caregivers to have the necessary time, resources and emotional energy to provide that critical caregiving ingredient of sensitive responsiveness". However, this view fails to recognise that having "the necessary time, resources and emotional energy" are not always within educators' control, due to lack of regulatory or organisational supports, or compromised well-being. The invisibility of discourses of educators' well-being means that the need for the provision of appropriate conditions for supporting their well-being go

unspoken. With the ongoing influence of gender and maternalistic discourses still operating (as discussed below), the discursive effect of guidance on practice such as that above, is to place responsibility on to educators to make the time, resources and energy themselves, to ensure children's well-being is maximised.

Gender, Maternalist and Professionalism Discourses

ECEC has long been shaped by discourses of gender and maternalism (Ailwood, 2008; Aslanian, 2015; Lundkvist, Nyby, Autto & Nygård, 2017). In the late nineteenth century, when ECEC emerged in many national contexts, 'new woman' discourses were on the rise as women took on increasingly active public roles in politics, employment and education. However, the most powerful gender discourses constructed women as essentially different from men, and with a natural maternalistic tendency to care for young children. This discursive space enabled ECEC to emerge as legitimate employment and education for women, but at the same time, served to reinforce the notion that ECEC was both work done *by* women, and work done *for* women (Author).

In the twenty-first century, despite significant shifts in gender discourses, the feminisation of care and education of young children has been resistant to change and continues to construct the care of children as primarily women's concern, and as requiring little professional preparation (Ailwood, 2008; Aslanian, 2015). Much as they did over a century ago, gender and especially maternalistic discourses continue to uphold the construct of ECEC as women's work, that is, as work 'naturally' conducted by women but also done for the benefit of women. For example, Bown, Sumsion and Press (2011) identified far-reaching influences of maternalistic discourses for the development of ECEC policy. Their study found that politicians' perceptions and understandings of ECEC were driven by maternalistic discourses, even though this effect was not publicly acknowledged. Hence the enduring nature of maternalistic discourses of the perpetually strong and reliable educator whose first concern must be to altruistically give all to children (Bown & Sumsion, 2007; Authors).

These associations between the (contestable) natural instincts of women as carers of young children, or 'substitute mother' (Moss, 2006) continue to serve to: (i) undervalue the educative function of ECEC, especially for the very youngest children; (ii) devalue the professional status of educators and the need for qualifications for the work; and (iii) minimise the psychological and relational aspects of care work. As Halfon and Langford (2015, p.137) state:

These assumptions allow for ambivalence towards the child care workforce and adequate compensation for their work, reinforced by the devaluation of the skills and emotional labour necessary to care for other people's children and an emphasis on the intrinsic satisfaction of caregiving as a just reward for the work. Like mothering, it is assumed that all women can call upon their natural abilities to do this work.

Discourses of professionalism can similarly act as dividing practices in ECEC. Basing claims of professionalism upon the educative aspects of ECEC and their grounding in scientific evidence can result in a binary opposing education (as professional) to caring as (unprofessional) (Halfon & Langford, 2015). This binary can be exacerbated by the differentiation of educators by qualifications and the relatedly “differential systems of training, payment and employment conditions” (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 9). Halfon and Langford (2015, p. 134) argue that these conditions: “work against developing and supporting the child care workforce, diminishing their collective and professional identity, voice and power”. Low rates of unionisation in many contexts, and a tendency to see advocacy for educators’ rights as somehow shameful (Halfon & Langford, 2015; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2018), are evidence of the extent to which dividing practices – acting through gender, maternalistic and professionalism discourses – continue to fragment the field, and keep the issue of educators’ well-being invisible. Regimes of truth concerning the ‘naturalness’ of educators’ work then distracts attention away from the rights of educators to have their well-being considered, as well as to having multiple forms of professionalism recognised.

Nationalist Discourses

Historically, nationalist discourses which propagate and uphold particular ideas about what is appropriate and in the best interests of nation states (Wodak, 2017), have been highly influential in constructing ECEC (Lundkvist et al., 2017; Wood & Hedges, 2016). For example, when Australians felt threatened by a possible ‘invasion’ from the ‘north’ in the early twentieth century, those operating within nationalist discourses argued for the importance of a strong economy to ensure national stability. Children were seen as valuable assets and there was increased concern with their welfare - but they were also viewed as potentially dangerous and requiring strict supervision. This discursive space constructed ECEC as ‘national work’ - an important way of saving children by providing safe and healthy work-related child care, and as a means of producing productive future citizens, and reducing the costs associated with crime and punishment (Author).

In a similar way, in contemporary society, the uncertainties of a globalised economy have increased nationalist discourses and once again the “dialectic of the global and the local” asserts the need for a strong workforce who are able to compete in an increasingly competitive market (Rose, 1999, p. 144). Neo-liberal discourses uphold these nationalist discourses by asserting the role of the state in producing “enterprising and competitive entrepreneur[s]” (Olssen et al., 2004, p.136) who will contribute to the national wealth. And so, just as it was over a hundred years ago, nationalist discourses create a space where ECEC is constructed as contributing to national wealth by providing work-related care, an investment in the future potential of children, and a way of reducing the cost associated with anti-social behavior (Lundkvist et al., 2017; Wood & Hedges, 2016). Within such discourses

and their focus on ways ECEC can contribute to the nation, attention to what might be beneficial for educators tends to be overlooked. Educators are by and large, absent from policy, and expenditure on educator well-being is only considered appropriate in-so-far as it contributes to nationalist agendas.

Neo-liberalism, Economic & Market Discourses

The provision of ECEC has also been shaped intimately by economic and market discourses, that have also contributed to a discursive landscape in which attention to educators' well-being cannot find traction. Neo-liberal economic discourses, with their emphasis on individual consumption and private enterprise, have created a space where ECEC has been constructed as a commercial venture, in response to private demand (Authors, 2018; Penn, 2019). Privatised, for-profit provision of early childhood education and care are now the main form of service ownership in Australia, the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Ireland (Penn, 2013) and South Korea (Kagan, 2018).

Research from organisational sciences disciplines (such as human resource and change management) has demonstrated the benefits for productivity and in some cases, profitability, of employee well-being (Grawitch, Gottschalk & Munn, 2006). Based on recent research by Authors, organisations who employ staff to manage educators' well-being understand its importance to the organisation, and to children. However, organisational initiatives are mostly reactive rather than proactive – so, they become available when something has gone wrong, rather than working to prevent challenges by embedding the concept of well-being in policy and practice. In this regime, educators are positioned as resources as part of the organisational complex, divided from positive discourses of well-being by an emphasis on fixing rather than preventing. Accordingly, the issue of their own well-being may be invisible to educators until something is wrong, or the impacts of a difficult situation can no longer be tolerated. In addition, implicit deficit discourses of well-being can also divide through an emphasis on the individual. Here, educators may see challenges to their well-being as their responsibility to fix, or potentially as the result of an individual deficit (Corr, Cook, LaMontagne & Davis, 2015). In this case, educators may be divided from each other by focusing on and attending to individual problems, rather than recognising systemic failings.

Where ECEC services are also predominantly owned by small businesses (such as in Australia and the UK), and services are owned by those from outside the ECEC sector, there is likely to be a lack of attunement and attention to the well-being needs of educators. Research concerning small business ownership in general suggests lower spending on health promotion and injury prevention, and little knowledge of workplace health and safety issues relevant to their sector (Cunningham, Sinclair & Schulte, 2014). These tendencies may be exacerbated by the lack of legislative pressure requiring early childhood education service providers to explicitly attend to supporting educators' well-being.

The predominance of for-profit early childhood education and care services may further marginalise the well-being needs of educators if costs associated with attending to educator well-being are seen as antithetical to profit-making, as well as to the cost-effective provision of services for families. In relation to labour costs for example, Penn (2005, cited in Halfon & Langford, 2015, p.133) contends that:

Caring cannot be made more productive; the caring capacities of members of staff can be improved but cannot usually be extended to cover more children...The only way in which labour costs can be reduced is by paying staff less, at or below a minimum wage; employing the least qualified workers who can be paid less; covering ratio requirements with temporary or untrained staff or students on placement; minimizing benefits concerning sick leave, in-service training, holidays and pensions; and adopting anti-union policies to minimise resistance to such conditions.

Ultimately, as Halfon and Langford (2015, p.133) argue:

...child care delivered through a market essentially works against supporting trained and skilled professionals. The true cost of a professional workforce is too much for the market to bear, or parents to pay, resulting in a downward pressure on training, wages and supports.

More recently, Tronto (2017) has argued that the provision of a market-driven system of care is unable to discern the best ways of caring compared to a democratically driven system of care. Here, Tronto's (2017) understandings of care are closely connected to support for individuals' well-being in a democratic society. These understandings are broadly described as "everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto, 2017, p. 31). Nevertheless, Tronto (2017) raises concerns about the ability of market-driven systems of care to adequately deliver care for their employees if they cannot reasonably continue to maintain profit for the organisation. These concerns resonate with an ongoing uneasiness about the ability to supply and retain a well-qualified workforce in the ECEC sector. Indeed, a market-driven approach to ECEC provision may be less conducive to supporting educators' well-being unless steps are taken to proactively address this concern.

The dominance of neo-liberal discourses and market solutions produces a binary whereby the problem of inequitable pay and conditions for educators comes to be seen as only solvable by employers paying educators more – recovered by charging families more. This discourse can become further entrenched as the only solution because the highly feminised EC workforce may see the pursuit of decent pay and conditions for themselves as mutually incompatible with meeting the needs of children and families (Authors; Woodrow, 2007).

Other solutions – such as the provision of public funding to services for their provision of a public good (Halfon & Langford, 2015) – come to be obscured by the regimes of truth elicited by dominant neo-liberal discourses.

In the early childhood sector, the dominance of neo-liberal discursive regimes can focus attention on the two main protagonists in the market-driven model: service providers and consumers of these services. In this market binary, educators are invisible actors - implied in the service offering, yet despite actually being ‘the providers’ of the service to families and children, not accruing the benefits that the sale of their services generate. As well as being an invisible part of this ‘market’, research shows that educators’ willingness to undertake their important and complex work often comes at a personal cost. Educators’ pay is frequently incommensurate with their effort, skills and experience, their health can suffer from the physical and emotional demands of their work, and their status as professionals is not well recognised by society in general (Authors; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014). Educators can therefore be disadvantaged by choosing work that supports others to thrive.

Challenging dividing practices

In the previous sections we outlined the discursive landscape within which ECEC is constructed, and that renders educators’ well-being invisible as a collective issue. Within this landscape, binaries have become the established way to understand the purposes, structures and priorities of early childhood education. Educators and their interests have become positioned in ways that divide them from each other, as well as from families, from society, and within themselves. It has become very difficult to take action on educators’ well-being, as this issue is essentially cast on the ‘wrong’ side of binaries concerning accepted ways of doing, being and thinking in early childhood education.

How might the dominance of these discursive regimes be challenged? One option could be – to paraphrase MacNaughton (2005) – to ‘do Foucault’. This option could involve identifying binaries such as those outlined above, noticing how they limit possibilities and divide and distract from the visibility of educators’ well-being as a collective issue. Pre-service and ongoing professional education could, for example, include an appreciation of systemic issues and how educators can advocate for change at this level (as advocated by Macdonald, Richardson & Langford, 2015). An example of this possibility is provided by Woodrow and Busch (2008), who outline ways of challenging dominant discourses such as the managerial professional with that of the ‘activist professional’ during pre-service education. In addition, practices such as described by Authors, and Fenech, Sumsion and Goodfellow (2008) also provide examples of ways that educators can work collectively to reconstitute the effects of dominant discourses in their practice.

To these examples we would add that educators’ advocacy needs to include a focus on their own well-being, as well as that of children and families. While calls for public recognition of

the value of educators' practice are routinely made, there has been less attention to the need for educators to value their own practice and well-being. Valuing educators' well-being would require a reimagining of educators (by themselves, as well as others) into what a "socially purposeful 'we', a group of people joined together in a common cause and supported by a culture and sometimes a place" (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2018, p. 144). In addition, early childhood education and care peak organisations, and other leaders in the sector, need to champion issues on behalf of educators who may not have the contacts, confidence or time to do so individually (Macdonald, Richardson & Langford, 2015). This in turn, would require leadership of the type described by Lim and Lloyd (2019), as a: "moral and value-laden dimension of the act of leading others within professional relationships".

Similarly, Tronto (2015) proposes we consider care as the basis of becoming 'good citizens' by deepening our understandings of care practices that involve 'moral and value' commitments (Tronto, 2015, p. 7). In doing so, we become more attuned to certain practices that promote and support the well-being of those in our work contexts. Hence, educators who work closely with teams of other educators may become more attentive to the well-being of their colleagues (as evidenced in a study reported by Nislin, Sajaniemi, Sims, Suhonen, Maldonado Montero, Hirvonen & Hyttinen, 2016). They are likely to become more aware of when, and if so how, responsibilities for educator well-being are either supported or overlooked. Challenging the invisibility of educators' well-being therefore requires leaders' validation of attention to this issue, as well as educators' acceptance of the importance of their own collective and individual well-being.

Additional theoretical resources could assist these processes for challenging the discursive landscape, and the ways educators' well-being has been made invisible within it. One source for rethinking the dominance of the discursive regimes outlined above come from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Many post-structural thinkers work with the idea that everything is in relation to and with - that is, there is no isolated self or thing. Binaries divisions and oppositions of phenomena, individuals, ideas and matter are therefore artificial. By seeing these divisions as artificial, they can be de- and re-constructed to produce something new. A discursive move is then required to think about combinations rather than discrete things – how things work in combination, and what these combinations might produce. These are some of the ideas that Deleuze and Guattari write about in describing the logic of 'and'. This deceptively simple thinking could produce very different questions to those made possible by current discursive regimes. For example, questions implied by current binary discursive regimes might include: 'if we acknowledge educators' well-being are we ignoring children's well-being?' 'Is it right to put educators' well-being first?' 'Is it right to put children's well-being ahead of educators'?' In these questions, binaries, assumptions, discourses of costs, rights and purposes are all at work to position educators and children as essentially in opposition – educators' and children's well-being are constructed as divided. By using the logic of 'and', what would be produced by

considering the interrelation of educators' AND children's well-being? Andrew's (2015) work for example, directs attention to a similar idea – that rather than focusing on whether there is greater value in educators having formal knowledge **OR** experience as the basis for claims of professionalism, acknowledging their combination in educators' 'practical wisdom' could provide a more unifying discourse of professionalism.

Additional resources that could prove useful in reconstructing the discursive landscape in these ways come from political philosophers, such as Joan Tronto (2013; 2015; 2017). Tronto advocates shifting dominant neo-liberal discourses about care from one associated with welfare services to one that values care in policy and practice. According to Tronto (2015), care is fundamental to the human condition. It is an activity where **all** people should expect to be able to live with dignity and respect as well as possible. Hence, prioritising care as foundational in ECEC policy can provide a platform for re-imagining care as a highly valued practice. It would mean the well-being of educators, as part of nurturing caring relationships, would be a central aspect of ECEC services. Valuing care as central to educators and their pedagogical work would be based on "a commitment to the values of relationality, contextual sensitivity, interdependency, respect and trust" (Langford et al., 2020, p. 113). In practice, this may lead to early childhood educators, parents, children and community members working together to determine what care supports are needed for ECEC services in local communities.

What could be changed for educators' well-being by thinking with Tronto, along with Deleuze and Guattari's logic of 'and'? Examples include: not only offering educators' professional development in emotional coping strategies, but management demonstrating an ethic of care by attending to the reasons there are situations with which they must cope. Is there a culture of bullying? Are ratios of educators to children appropriate to productively work with the needs of the children attending that service? Does management support educators in relation to working with families and children with complex needs? In short, seeing educators' well-being as the focus of an ethic of care – alongside that of children's well-being - means attending to systemic problems rather than only responding to the visible cases of compromised individual well-being. In combination with a logic of 'and', new questions become possible and indeed necessary. What would it look like for educators' well-being to be acknowledged in policy? What evidence is needed to begin to effectively advocate for these changes? How are educators' and children's well-being related? What does human dignity look like for all in early childhood education and care?

By extension - in the case of organisations - care could be considered as a set of moral principles which guide employers to provide employees with sustainable work environments - because not doing so demonstrates disrespect for their human condition, and fails to provide the conditions for thriving (Langford et al., 2020). This ethically-grounded approach supports research demonstrating the efficacy for organisational

effectiveness of attending to employee well-being (such as by Grawitch, Gottschalk & Munn, 2006). Accordingly, failing to enable conditions for thriving will ultimately damage organisational effectiveness.

Gender discourses also play a role in these logics. Part of Tronto's (2015) arguments favour equality through a democratic approach to care. This approach challenges unequal gendered attitudes to care that claim women are naturally better at caring roles. Tronto's "caring-with alternative" (2015, p. 31) provides a revolutionary approach that requires re-thinking our use of time, regardless of gender, to spend more time each day caring with, for and about others. This approach means re-thinking the role that care work plays in our lives and the compensation we receive for it. Could it be that a lower value of women's care work in society has acted as another dividing practice that has contributed to the invisibility of the well-being of the highly feminised EC workforce?

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that a range of dominant discourses have created a landscape within which the well-being of early childhood educators is invisible. Moreover, that these discourses have acted as 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982) – that reinforce dominant discourses and binaries that make the pursuit of educators' well-being seem essentially 'wrong'. The regimes of truth generated through these dominant discourses can force educators to perceive that they must choose from an either/or binary, even when they are themselves disadvantaged by making the 'right' choice. In this way, educators are apparently bound by the discursive dominance of the binary form itself, as well as by the limited choices it offers.

Imagining differently – beyond the discursive landscape of binaries and dividing practices – requires not only courage, but the resources and conditions in which courage and agency can find ground. Acknowledging the importance of educators' well-being then, requires a shift towards seeing the value and ethics of attention, and openness to learning how the needs and rights of educators in relation to well-being can be met alongside those of children. These moves require engagement with systemic problems, as well as historical biases and assumptions shaping the early childhood education field and the invisibility of educators' well-being in this landscape. In societies where neo-liberal socio-political forces shape the apparent possibilities for rethinking the discursive landscape, the inevitable question of 'who pays?' needs not to continue to be divested onto 'the market', service providers and families to solve. A different ethic – of care for educators' well-being along with that for children's well-being - is required. Other alliances and new questions and approaches need to be mobilised – beginning with making visible the importance of educators' well-being in the landscape of early childhood education and care.

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