



**Educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families: Implications for
early childhood educators' wellbeing**



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A thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis, entitled *'Educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families: Implications for early childhood educators' wellbeing'* is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. I acknowledge that no content produced by generative AI tools has been used in the preparation of this thesis. The research presented in this thesis was granted clearance by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee reference number 2022-750, on the 3rd of November 2022.

Melanie Kate Dickerson

Dedication

For my Dad.

The dream we always had, and the journey walked in spirit.

Thank you for believing in me and giving me wings.

This is for us.

Love, your Dr. Daughter

Thesis Abstract

Early childhood educators in Australia and internationally are required to partner with families in their day-to-day work. Understandings of how educators establish and sustain such partnerships, particularly the emotional labour inherent in this relational work, are, however, limited. Furthermore, how such relational work with families impacts educator wellbeing also remains unclear. Given unprecedented wellbeing, turnover, and attrition challenges in early childhood education and care (ECEC), understandings of educators' work and its related wellbeing are critical.

This study's longitudinal mixed-method investigation of educators' emotional labour while working with families and the associated wellbeing impact of such work sought to address these knowledge gaps. The investigation adopted a critical feminist framing of emotional labour theory to shift outdated perceptions around educators' emotional, relational work and, instead, reveal professional and wellbeing affordances associated with their emotional labour. In recognition of the complex and multifaceted relational contexts that educators work within, an ecological perspective to their emotional labour was also taken in this investigation.

Findings from a survey of 147 educators administered in New South Wales, and from 12-months of ongoing journaling by, and interviews with, nine educator participants, showed that emotional labour is prevalent in educators' work with families. Five interconnected ecological factors were found to influence how such emotional labour was exercised with families. Evidence revealed the skill, intentionality, and complexity involved in, and the reflective planning and professional judgement work before, during, and after educator-family interactions. Increased participant awareness of emotional labour was found to deepen professional understandings of this work, signalling that emotional labour can be learnt and

emotional labour skills developed. This collective evidence debunked entrenched maternalistic notions that such work is skill-less and effortless by explicitly revealing the skill, intent, and purpose of the work and reaffirming the ever-present ecological systems at play.

Findings also unveiled that ongoing emotional labour with many families was difficult, effortful work, but whether emotional labour was negative or positive for wellbeing hinged upon contextual factors. Resultingly, such evidence signals that specific multi-level strategies and structures to resource and sustain educators' emotional labour and thereby their wellbeing are needed. Moreover, evidence revealed that emotional labour could result in meaningful and rewarding experiences of working with families when it resulted in positive professional, child or partnership outcomes. Such positive outcomes were shown to benefit educators' relational work and reduce relational challenges which could sustain educators' wellbeing. It was also found that sustained wellbeing enabled educators to exercise emotional labour, meaning that emotional labour and wellbeing's relationship was found to be more complex than just positive and negative impacts.

Taken together, this study contributes new practice-based evidence and theoretical insights about educators' emotional labour and wellbeing while working with families in ECEC. The study, through its critical feminist framing and ecological perspective, situates emotional labour within a discourse of strength and empowerment, rather than as an additional component of educators' work that needs to be managed and mitigated. That emotional labour can be learnt and developed, signals the need for training initiatives to support such work. The findings suggest that emotional labour requires multi-level systemic and structural acknowledgement of and supports, resources and training initiatives for emotional labour and its wellbeing simultaneously. Acknowledgement, support and resources at training, workplace, regulatory, policy and socio-political levels are, therefore, critical. Lastly,

theoretical contributions and advancements of emotional labour emerged through the evidence of its skilled, intentional enactments and the nuanced and complex relationship between emotional labour and wellbeing and has significance for relational, professional work, in and beyond ECEC.

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Author Attribution Statement and Details of Original Publications and Presentations

This is a statement of my contribution to the three journal articles and one book chapter (listed below) prepared for and contained within this thesis, written by me as first author under the supervision of Professor Marianne Fenech and Dr. Tina Stratigos. In all cases, I had primary responsibility for all aspects of the reported study including the design, data collection and analysis, and manuscript conceptualisation, preparation, submission, revision and corresponding author accountabilities. As co-authors, both supervisors provided ongoing feedback on the study's conceptualisation, collection and analysis of data, and on the journal and book manuscripts.

1. Journal Article

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4. Journal Article

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Presentations

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Abbreviations

ACECQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECT	Early Childhood Teacher
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
LDC	Long Day Care
NESA	NSW Education Standards Authority
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Glossary of Key Terms

Australian Children’s Education and Care Authority (ACECQA) are the independent statutory authority for early childhood education and care in Australia and are responsible for supporting the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF). More information can be accessed via [ACECQA’s website](#).

Approved Provider is responsible for the operation and management of an early childhood education and care service (defined below) according to the national law and regulations as outlined in the National Quality Framework (defined below).

Centre Director (manager) is the individual who leads an early childhood service and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the service, such as staffing requirements, child ratio and policy implementation, as well as leading, managing and taking care of administrative tasks. They may or may not be the elected *nominated supervisor* (see below).

Deep Acting occurs when employees shift their internal feelings to match the required external emotional displays expected in their job (Hochschild, 1983/2012).

Dissonance or emotional dissonance is a mismatch between what is felt and what is expressed or displayed (Hochschild, 1983/2012). Ongoing tensions between felt and displayed expressions causes psychological strain and alienation from self (Hochschild, 1983/2012).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) refers to the provision of learning, development and care of young children in settings catering for birth through to school age (i.e. birth-to-five). In Australia the ECEC sector is large and complex with a range of ECEC service settings, such as long day care (LDC), preschool, and family day care (FDC), offered by a mix of non-profit and for-profit providers.

Early childhood service types can also be called early childhood centres and for the purpose of this study included Long Day Care and preschool services. LDC services operate for at least 10 hours each day, five days a week and for at least 48 weeks per year, while preschool services typically operate for six hours per day on school days during school terms (see below for definitions).

Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) is a university-qualified teacher for the birth-to-five or birth-to-eight age range. These qualifications are typically a three- or four-year bachelor trained teacher or graduate trained with a Masters in Teaching that is recognised by ACECQA.

Early childhood education and care centre; early childhood centre, or setting, or service are terms used for regulated early childhood centres. These terms are often used interchangeably within the Australian context.

Educator within Australia's ECEC contexts includes degree-qualified early childhood teachers (ECTs) and diploma and certificate III vocationally-qualified professionals who work with children to provide education and care in an early childhood setting. This research will refer to 'educators' unless otherwise specified.

Educational leader is the educator in an early childhood service responsible for leading and mentoring the service educators in their pedagogy, program and practice in line with ACECQA's National Quality Framework Quality Area One: *Educational Program*.

Emotional labour is the internal regulation of emotions and the management of outward emotional displays that are often required for one's professional role and based on organisational expectations (Hochschild, 1983/2012).

Family includes parents, legal guardians, and carers of the child, inclusive of grandparents, extended adult family members, or significant others. ‘Family’ includes diverse and different family types (e.g., LGBTI or non-biological parents, blended and extended families).

Genuine Expressions are the authentic expressions of unaltered feelings that employees display in their work (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Interactions refer to educator-family encounters, communication, and engagement necessary for establishing an educator-family relationship that enables a collaborative partnership (see below *‘partnership’*).

Long Day Care (LDC) is centre-based ECEC for children birth to school age that typically operates for extended hours, often between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., five days a week, with some operational for up to 52 weeks per year. LDC follow an ECEC framework, such as the *Early Years Learning Framework*, are regulated by ACECQA and must comply with the *National Quality Framework* (NQF).

National Quality Framework (NQF) comprises of various interrelated elements: the *Education and Care Services National Law*; the *Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011 SI 653)*; the *National Quality Standards (NQS)* and the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*. The national law and regulations provide details of rules to be adhered to. The NQF is Australia’s system for regulating ECEC. Within the NQF, the NQS is the rating system that sets a benchmark for quality within ECEC services. Each service in Australia is rated against seven National Quality Areas as set out in the NQF to receive a quality rating. The seven National Quality Areas, each comprising several National Quality Standards, include: Educational Program and Practice; Children’s Health & Safety; Physical Environment; Staffing Arrangements; Relationships with Children; Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities; and Governance and Leadership. The four

ratings are, Significant Improvement Required, Working Towards National Quality Standard, Meeting National Quality Standard, and Exceeding National Quality Standard. Services rated 'Exceeding the National Quality Standard' in all seven quality areas are eligible to apply for a fifth 'Excellent rating' which is the highest rating under the National Quality Framework. The EYLF is the national curriculum framework for providing quality and consistency in educational programs in all Australian early childhood settings, but there are also other frameworks used in different states and territories within Australia. Detailed information can be found [here](#).

Nominated supervisor is the person who has legal responsibility for the day-to-day operation of a service, typically appointed by the approved provider, by ensuring compliance with regulations, law and the National Quality Framework requirements. A service director / manager may hold this position.

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is the New South Wales (NSW) state government's statutory authority responsible for teacher accreditation in NSW. NESA report to and collaborate with the state government and department of education with regards to teacher and educational matters, inclusive of early childhood learning. More details located [here](#).

Partnerships are respectful and reciprocal educator-family relationships. The NQF articulates in Quality Area Six that '*Collaborative Partnerships*' focus "...on supportive, respectful relationships with families which are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children" (ACECQA, 2020, p. 252). Here 'supportive relationships with families' refers to supporting family engagement in the service (NQS 6.1.1), respecting family views and decisions (NQS 6.1.2) and supporting connections to community, services and resources that support parenting and family wellbeing (NQS 6.1.3).

Preschool is an ECEC setting for children three-to-five, operational for shorter hours (e.g., 8.30a.m. – 3.30p.m.) Monday-Friday, during school terms (approximately 40 weeks per year). Preschools are not defined in the National Law or Regulations. Preschools provide an early childhood education program that follow an ECEC framework, such as the EYLF, that is delivered by a qualified teacher. Preschools are regulated by the Department of Education and must comply with the National Quality Framework. Alternative terms used for preschool in some states and jurisdictions include kindergarten, pre-preparatory and reception.

Room leader (or group leader or team leader) is an educator who leads the classroom pedagogy, routines, educator team and, oversees and fulfills administration duties relevant to the classroom, service philosophy and policy, and NQF requirements.

Surface Acting occurs when an employee modifies their external emotional expressions and behaviours by masking or suppressing their internal feelings (Hochschild, 1983/2012).

Workforce Strategy is ACECQA's 10-year '*Shaping Our Future*' plan (2022-2031) to address the challenges pertaining to recruitment, retention, sustainability, and quality of the sector workforce. The plan acknowledges and extends on the workforce initiatives that governments across Australia have invested in to date. More information can be found [here](#).

Chapter One: Introduction

Educator Wellbeing in ECEC

High-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) requires early childhood teachers and educators (henceforth ‘educators’) to have strong wellbeing that enables them to undertake relational work with children and families (Cumming & Wong, 2019; Kwon et al., 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). Nuanced understandings of educators’ work-related wellbeing is critical given the ongoing workforce turnover and attrition crises that, in part, stem from wellbeing challenges impacting educators in Australian and international contexts (Cumming, Logan, et al., 2020; McMullen et al., 2020; OECD, 2022; OECD, 2024a; Thorpe et al., 2023). Stakeholder and government initiatives have sought to better understand, resource and support educators’ work and wellbeing (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2021; Department of Education Skills and Employment [DESE], 2022; Kulakiewicz et al., 2022; OECD, 2022; United States Department of Health and Human Services’ [DHHS] Administration for Children and Families, 2022). Initiatives to attract and retain educators, while aimed at meeting increasing demands for ECEC and supporting parental engagement in the workforce (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024), also aim to ensure families and children can access and benefit from high-quality ECEC (Fenech et al., 2021; Logan et al., 2020; McCormick et al., 2021; Schaack et al., 2022). Moreover, educators deserve to be well, professionally acknowledged, fairly compensated for, and experience enjoyment in all aspects of their work (Thorpe et al., 2023).

Family Partnerships in ECEC

Quality ECEC requires that educators engage in relationship-based practices with children, families, colleagues and communities to ensure positive learning, development and wellbeing outcomes for children (OECD, 2024b). Relationship-based practices are of a relational and emotional nature given that such work supports the wellbeing and education needs of another (Andrew, 2015; Solvason & Webb, 2022; Taggart, 2011) and requires educators to establish strong partnerships with families who have entrusted them with their child's learning, development and wellbeing (O'Connor et al., 2017; Rouse, 2020). Indeed, partnerships with families is, for this very reason, a regulatory requirement in Australia (ACECQA, 2020) and internationally (Canadian Government, 2017; Department for Education [DfE], 2023; Guo & Kilderry, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2017; Ministry of Education and Research, 2005; United States Department of Education, 2016), with such requirements acknowledging families as the child's first teacher.

These regulatory requirements outline complex, relational, and emotional expectations that educators must meet to develop and maintain collaborative partnerships with families that support child outcomes. Australia's National Quality Framework (NQF) (ACECQA, 2020, p. 253) sets out expectations in its National Quality Area Six for educators to support families' parenting and wellbeing needs and their engagement in ECEC settings to "enhance children's inclusion, learning and wellbeing" through ongoing respectful and collaborative partnerships. Furthermore, Australia's Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) states that in genuine partnerships educators must, for example, "value and respect each other's knowledge [and] contributions... act with empathy and sensitivity... [and] acknowledge the diversity of families and their aspirations for their children" (Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE], 2022, p. 15). Additionally, Early Childhood

Australia's Code of Ethics articulates partnerships where educators are active in "supporting... listening to... and developing respectful" family interactions (2015, p. 2). ECEC services in Australia are assessed and rated on their partnership practices according to the NQF's Quality Area Six (ACECQA, 2020), however the complexities of how such relational and emotional work is undertaken, and with what wellbeing impacts, remain relatively unclear (Cumming, Wong, et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2018).

Emotional Labour Theory

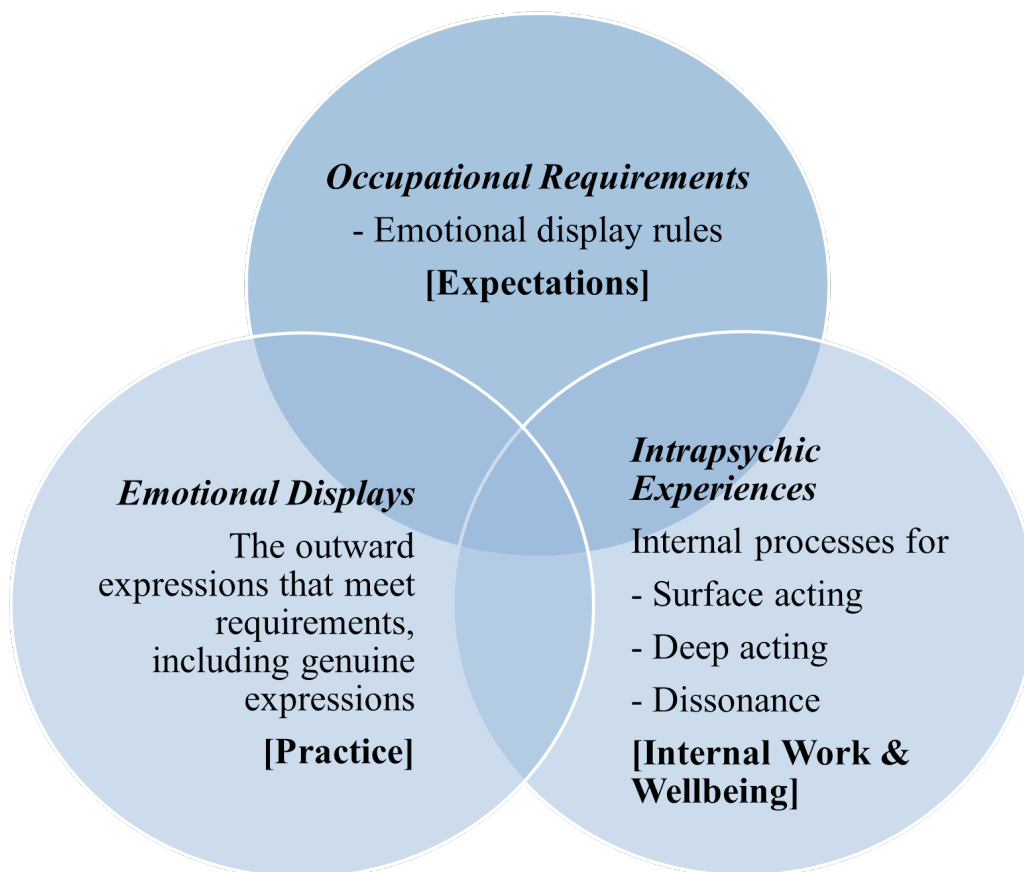
One way that educators undertake their relational work with families, indeed, their relational work with children and colleagues too, is through emotional labour. Emotional labour was originally conceptualised by Arlie Hochschild in her pivotal work *The Managed Heart* (1983/2012). Hochschild's (1983/2012, p. 29) research within the context of service work—specifically, airline hostesses and bill collectors—conceptualised emotional labour as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display...that is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value". Hochschild (1983/2012, p. 102) articulated three characteristics that jobs requiring emotional labour include: first, such jobs are "face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public"; second, they require the employee "to produce an emotional state" or state-of-mind in another person (i.e., a passenger feeling safe and comfortable); and third, the employer holds some "control over the emotional activities of the employee" through training and supervision. Hochschild, however, also acknowledged that not all jobs included all three characteristics or, indeed, in equal measure.

Since Hochschild's (1983/2012) conceptualisation of emotional labour, extensive research across professions has critiqued and expanded emotional labour theory. This doctoral study drew upon Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp's (2013) subsequent trifocal

framing of emotional labour theory which sought to make distinct the core concepts of emotional labour. Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp's three interconnected dimensions position emotional labour as *occupational requirements*, *emotional displays*, and *intrapsychic experiences*, seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Grandey Diefendorff and Rupp's (2013) Three Interconnected Dimensions of Emotional Labour Theory



Emotional labour as *occupational requirements* pertain to workplace expectations that define how employees should interact with others (Grandey et al., 2013). Grandey Diefendorff and Rupp (2013) consider the occupational requirements of emotional labour

jobs as comprising the three characteristics, or part thereof, that Hochschild (1983/2012) prescribed to emotional labour occupations (mentioned above). Occupational requirements dictate occupation norms, or the *emotional display rules* for how one should behave and interact with others to meet occupational and role expectations (Grandey et al., 2013). In this way, emotional labour benefits the organisation but is typically deleterious for the employee (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 1983/2012).

As noted in Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp (2013), Wharton and Erikson (1993, p. 463) identified three types of *display rules*:

1. *Integrative display rules*: the requirement to show positive emotions (e.g., empathy, liking, patience) that “bind groups together”
2. *Differentiating display rules*: the requirement to show negative emotions (e.g., hostility, contempt) to create differences between others; and
3. *Masking display rules*: the requirement to show neutral emotions (e.g., calm, neutral, or unreadable emotional displays, especially in stressful circumstances) to convey impartiality and authority.

The *emotional display rule* subscales in emotional labour measurement scales (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Diefendorff et al., 2005) typically describe and split displays as being either positive (*integrative*) because of the requirement to express positive emotions, or negative because of the requirement to suppress negative emotions (*masking*). Educators may, for example, exercise positive displays such as calm, warm, reassuring demeanours that support families and establish family confidence in the educator which later develops trusting educator-family relationships. Negative emotions such as stress, frustration, overwhelm, or exhaustion, may be suppressed in favour of such positive displays. Expressing sadness, concern, or perhaps even frustration, however, may also serve the relationship through relatability or establishing common ground between family and educator. For example,

shared sadness where a death in the family occurs or shared frustration where a child's disability support application is denied. Educators may use masking (or suppression) to avoid expressing feelings that may jeopardise the relationship or their professionalism. For example, while an educator may feel as stressed as a family over uncontrollable, unpredictable events (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic, natural disasters), the educator may mask their stress in favour of a firmer demeanour that does not diminish authority or jeopardises the family's trust in them during a time of crisis.

The second conceptual dimension is emotional labour as *emotional displays* which are dictated by the emotional display rules, or social norms, that direct employees' outward expressions appropriate for satisfying occupational requirements (Grandey et al., 2013). *Emotional displays* can be effortful or effortless and, post-Hochschild's (1983/2012) conceptualisation, include effortless *authentic displays*—genuine expression of felt emotion requiring no internal emotion regulation—which arise naturally and have both employee and organisational benefits (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey et al., 2013). This doctoral investigation uses *genuine expressions* to mean *authentic displays*. Emotional displays stem from employees' perceived understandings of occupational requirements to meet such requirements. For example, educators feeling joy at greeting families and children, genuinely express their joy through a smile.

Emotional labour as *intrapsychic experiences* is the third dimension and pertains to emotional labour's internal processes requiring “effort, planning and control” (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987) to “regulate feelings and expressions” (Grandey, 2000, p. 97). The internal processes according to both Hochschild (1983/2012) and Grandey et al.'s (2013) emotional labour conceptualisations include *surface acting*, *deep acting*, and *emotional dissonance*. Hochschild (1983/2012, pp. 38-40) described that for emotional labour, the employee may act in two ways:

In the first way, we try to change how we outwardly appear ... the action is in the body language, the put-on sneer, the posed shrug, the controlled sigh. This is surface acting.

...In surface acting, the expression on my face or the posture of my body feels “put on.” It is not “part of me.” ...To show through surface acting ... the body, not the soul, is the main tool of the trade.

The other way is deep acting. Here, display is a natural result of working on feeling; the actor does not try to *seem* happy or sad but rather expresses spontaneously...a real feeling that has been self-induced.

In both cases the actor has learned to intervene—either in creating the inner shape of a feeling or in shaping the outward appearance of one.

The *intrapyschic experiences* of surface and deep acting are, for the purposes of this doctoral study, defined as such:

1. *Surface acting* is the intentional suppression or exaggeration of an emotion to express the preferred or expected emotional display necessary for meeting occupational requirements (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 1983/2012). For example, in a busy, noisy environment, an educator may suppress stress and exaggerate calm, supportive demeanours through a smile to develop trust with and reassure families that they are leaving their child with a calm, happy educator. Thus, the educator has faked their calm confidence to meet a professional, workplace, role and/or family expectation.
2. *Deep acting* is the cognitive modification of feelings such that the dissonance between experienced and expressed emotions is resolved (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 1983/2012). Deep acting is therefore the expression of felt

emotion through reappraisal¹ and, consequently, may be authentic (Grandey et al., 2013). For example, an educator who feels frustrated that a family seem unconcerned about their child's behaviour, will internally manage thoughts and emotions to feel compassion and understanding. Here the educator displays expressions that benefit the educator-family partnership through securing the family's state-of-mind that they and their child are receiving supportive, compassionate education and care, thus meeting self, workplace, role and/or the family's expectations.

Emotional dissonance is the incongruence between feelings, displays, and requirements (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 1983/2012). Emotional dissonance can potentially be harmful to organisations if dissonance prevents employees from achieving expected outcomes or results such as through *emotional deviance*, where an employee's emotional displays do not match occupational requirements (Grandey et al., 2013). Conversely, *emotional harmony* is the congruence between feelings, displays and requirements and may potentially enable positive employee and organisational outcomes simultaneously (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Emotional dissonance is conceptualised as emerging in two ways. Occupational requirements may result in *emotion-rule dissonance*, where one feels differently to the expected emotional rules for the role and is typically experienced prior to internal emotion management (Hochschild, 1983/2012; Morris & Feldman, 1996). For example, an employee who feels stressed, frustrated, and undervalued at work is internally conflicted by the occupational rules that expect polite, joyful displays. The employee then manages their emotions and displays through surface or deep acting to show positive, joyful expressions

¹ A cognitive strategy where a situation or an event is reinterpreted such that its perceived emotional impact is shifted or repositioned.

and, thereby, experiences dissonance between felt and expressed emotion, known as *emotion-display dissonance* (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Dissonance causes employees to experience feelings of inauthenticity, estrangement or job dissatisfaction that negatively impacts their wellbeing (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 1983/2012). Hochschild (1983/2012, p. 39) described that:

In surface acting, the expression on my face or the posture of my body feels “put on.” It is not “part of me.” In deep acting, my conscious mental work...keeps the feeling that I conjure up from being part of “myself.” ... But whether the separation between “me” and my face or between “me” and my feeling counts as estrangement depends on something else—the outer context.

The outer context according to Hochschild (1983/2012, p. 39) is that of the workplace, where the “psychological costs of emotional labor are not acknowledged by the company.” Thus, for Hochschild (1983/2012, p. 68) emotional labour is always costly to the individual:

Maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning over the long run leads to strain. We try to reduce this strain by pulling the two closer together either by changing what we feel or by changing what we feign. When display is required by the job, it is usually feeling that has to change; and when conditions estrange us from our face, they sometimes estrange us from feeling as well.

Typically, surface acting’s suppression of felt emotion and exaggeration of unfelt emotion results in dissonance (Grandey et al., 2013). Conversely, deep acting yields inconsistent dissonance outcomes and wellbeing impacts given that it often causes positive professional outcomes that possibly mitigate the negative impact associated with effortful internal regulation (Grandey et al., 2013). Although genuine expressions can yield positive

employee and organisational outcomes (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), exercising genuine expressions at high frequency may be exhausting (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Overall, however, Hochschild (1983/2012) positioned emotional labour as work that is costly to the individual since emotion is commodified, and the organisation is the one who gains. Articulated this way, emotional labour theory undervalues the purpose and power of emotion within a professional context and positions the employee as merely a rule follower to meet occupational requirements and the needs of others through emotional displays that are at the expense of their own wellbeing.

Emotional Labour in ECEC

Although there has recently been an increase in emotional labour research in ECEC contexts (as discussed in Chapter Two), emotional labour in ECEC remains a novel concept given the relatively small number of investigations and their broad focus on this phenomenon to date overall. Of this small body of research, only four investigations have intentionally focussed on emotional labour exercised in educators' work with families prior to this doctoral study (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022). Specifically, two investigations articulated findings on educators' emotional labour across relationships with children, families and colleagues (Brown et al., 2022; Morris, 2018), while two focussed just on families at one point in time (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Quiñones et al., 2022). As such, understandings of how and why educators exercise emotional labour to establish and sustain partnerships with families in ECEC, and the wellbeing impacts of that labour, are limited.

While limited, scholarship on emotional labour in ECEC has provided important understandings of this labour and signal its inherent nature in educators' relational work. Some evidence suggests that educators perceive they are expected to exhibit positive, cheerful, and attentive dispositions with families, even in challenging, emotionally intense

interactions and contexts (Brown et al., 2022; Q. Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, despite feeling stressed or overwhelmed, educators manage their feelings to support families, such as when a parent is feeling anxious about leaving their young child with the educator (Mikuska & Fairchild, 2020). Consequently, the ECEC service and educator goals, as well as family expectations, are likely met through emotional labour practices that ensure families feel safe and trusting of both service and educators; indicating “that the management of emotions is central to effective conduct” in ECEC (Osgood, 2012, p. 134). Positioned this way, it appears that when emotional labour is practised successfully, strong, trusting educator-family relationships may be formed (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011).

When taking a wider view of the extant literature on emotional labour in ECEC, however, it was not always clear that emotional labour is a positive aspect of educators’ relational work. Instead, and as discussed in Dickerson et al. (2024a) in Chapter Two’s literature review, emotional labour tended to be described and positioned negatively, as a demand that burdened educators. Indeed, Hochschild’s (1983/2012) investigation of airline hostesses’ emotional labour with passengers, articulates that emotional labour typically has negative wellbeing impacts for the employee. Likewise, evidence from the small body of ECEC scholarship (discussed in Chapter Two) and other organisational scholarship on emotional labour (Gabriel et al., 2023; Ward & McMurray, 2015) reveals a tendency for investigations to expose emotional labour as deleterious to wellbeing. By contrast, educators’ relational work with families, that includes inherent emotional labour, has been found to be satisfying and meaningful work that contributes to educators’ wellbeing (Hadley & Rouse, 2021; McDonald et al., 2018; McKinlay et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2024). That little understanding of emotional labour and its wellbeing impacts in educators’ work with families exist while the workforce struggles with turnover challenges, signifies the importance of exploring such work and its wellbeing impacts

The tendency for emotional labour to be articulated as a burden with negative wellbeing impacts was, for me, problematic. Negative articulations of emotional labour are linked to beliefs that care, nurture, and emotionality are spontaneous, innate, and natural for women, which feminists argue positions such labour in female-dominated professions as a form of exploitation (Bolton, 2004; Colley, 2006; Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2012; Skeggs, 1997). The maternalistic positioning of emotional labour in socio-political discourses means that the effort, skill, and professionalism in emotional labour remains invisible, structurally disregarded, and poorly remunerated.

If emotional labour is an inherent, indeed necessary, component of educators' relationship-based work, then such a negative perspective obscures the professional purpose and benefits of this work, not just for children, families and services, but for the educator as well. As such, I wondered why emotional labour had not been explored – and exposed – for its potential affordances in ECEC. Last, I wondered about emotional labour theory itself being negatively positioned and articulating such work as a burden. A positive framing of emotional labour may build on and contribute to feminist calls for emotional labour to be recognised as a skilled, professional component of educators' work (Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2012) by potentially exposing and re-positioning such labour as not only burdensome.

The Hidden Labour Dilemma

There is limited understandings of educators' emotional work broadly, and the emotional labour involved in such work, and its impact on educator wellbeing remain unclear (Cumming & Wong, 2019; Jones et al., 2020). Indeed, regulatory requirements do not acknowledge emotional labour in educators' relational work or how such relational work might be undertaken. Resultingly, they also do not identify and articulate the impact on, or the resources and practices needed, for safeguarding educator wellbeing in such emotionally complex and intense labour. As such, emotional labour and its wellbeing impacts are

unacknowledged at professional levels and I wondered whether emotion in the workplace was seen as unprofessional and the internal emotional effort, not easily seen, was not perceived as work?

In wanting to illuminate the emotional labour in educators' work with families and simultaneously the wellbeing impacts of this work, it was important to me to understand the reason why such work has remained unacknowledged and to include educator voices for illuminating such work. The socio-political and historical framing of emotional, relational and care work in ECEC as predominantly women's work akin to 'mothering' (Ailwood, 2007) and traditionally not viewed as professional, has contributed to the invisibility of such work (Osgood, 2006; Taggart, 2011). Illuminating the invisible work, through educators' voices, was important to me for dismantling dominant discourses of maternalism that renders emotional labour as unskilled work and by default, the emotional labourer as unskilled. Undertaking such research was therefore not only about generating knowledge for others – society, stakeholders, policymakers, governments – but also sought to liberate the individual being researched from constrained, disempowering positions (Lather, 1992).

Personally, this research approach was important to me as an early childhood teacher who had experienced the hidden complexities of relational and emotional work with children and families. During my own teaching career there had not been any acknowledgement of the relational work that occurs both internally and externally in the early childhood settings I had worked in. Often, however, this was the work that remained with me long after and before my teaching day because it was the precursor to everything else I aimed to achieve with and for young children, but also, me as a professional. As my reading and thinking progressed during the design phase of this study, I recognised that contributions for practising educators

were as important as contributions for the wider research, regulatory and ECEC stakeholder communities.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to illuminate the skilled complexity of educators' emotional labour in their work with families, and the wellbeing impacts of such work. Illuminating such work and its associated wellbeing impacts sought to increase understandings of the supports and resources that enable educators to thrive in work that is often difficult but can also be rewarding. Additionally, the intention was to offer understandings that might inform and support initiatives addressing the ongoing ECEC wellbeing, turnover, and attrition challenges in Australia and internationally (Fenech et al., 2021; OECD, 2022, 2024a; Schaack et al., 2022; Thorpe et al., 2020). It was also hoped that findings would liberate educators from discourses that disempower the workforce and undervalue their skilled emotional labour.

The following research questions framed the study:

1. How do educators exercise emotional labour in their efforts to partner with families in early childhood education and care contexts?
2. What influences educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families?
3. What are the wellbeing impacts of educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families?

In the sections that follow, terminology used throughout the thesis is clarified and the ECEC context in which the research participants undertook their relational work outlined. Lastly, the thesis outline and a snapshot of the chapters to follow are presented.

Clarification of Terminology

Although the Glossary (p. xii in this thesis) provides details of terminology used within this thesis, the terms most often used in this study are highlighted here for clarification purposes. The term ‘early childhood education and care (ECEC)’ is used to mark the significance of both education and care as interconnected components necessary for young children’s learning, development, and wellbeing. The term ‘family’ includes parents, legal guardians, and carers of children inclusive of grandparents, extended adult family members, and significant others. ‘Family’ includes diverse and different family types (e.g., LGBTI or non-biological parents, blended and extended families). The term ‘educators’ within Australia’s ECEC contexts includes degree-qualified early childhood teachers (ECTs) and diploma and certificate III vocationally-qualified professionals.

The ECEC Context

The relational nature of ECEC pertains to educators’ ongoing relational work with children, families, colleagues, and communities within early childhood contexts that tend to be busy and often unpredictable and changeable in nature. The EYLF (AGDE, 2022) refers to relational pedagogies as underpinning everything that educators do to establish and sustain relationships with others in ECEC contexts that, fundamentally, supports children’s educational, developmental and wellbeing needs. In other words, educators’ ongoing relationships in ECEC settings are *for* the child, who is at the heart of an educator’s relational work (Rouse, 2020).

In Australia, ECEC contexts provide for the educational, developmental, and wellbeing needs of children and include long daycare settings for children aged birth-to-five (operational for extended hours between 7am-6pm, five days a week, between 48-52 weeks per year) and preschool settings for children aged three-to-five (operational typically between

8.30am-3.30pm, during school terms) (ACECQA, 2020). Within such settings, children are generally grouped according to the child's age (i.e. birth-to-one, one-to-two, two-to-three, three-to-four, four-to-five). Children usually remain within their grouping for 12-months, but in some instances even longer, particularly for developmental reasons or where groupings include children birth-to-two or three-to-five. Adult-child ratios in Australia require one adult for four children aged birth-to-two; one adult for five children aged two-to-three; and one adult to ten children aged three-to-five (ACECQA, 2020). Such adult-to-child ratios mean a group with twenty enrolled children per day has at least two to five educators who must establish and maintain ongoing relationships with each other, leadership, children, families and community (ACECQA, 2020). The number of enrolled children (and families) across the week is much greater given that children can be enrolled for between one-to-five days per week. Similarly, the number of educators in a service are also greater than just the minimum ratio requirement since educators may work shifts (i.e., 9a.m.-6p.m. in a service operating from 6a.m.-6p.m.) or part-time and require tea and lunch breaks. As such, many more educators are required throughout the day and across the week to cover the time educators are not working directly with children. Additionally, educators who change between groupings from one-year-to-the-next may remain with the child as they transition into older age groups or they may work with a sibling in subsequent years. As such, educators' connections with children and families are not short-lived, but often last many years.

That families are children's "first and most influential teacher" (AGDE, 2022, p. 15) who play a significant role in making decisions that impact their child's lifelong learning, development, and wellbeing outcomes, highlights the particular criticality of educator-family relationships (Rouse, 2020; Wilson, 2016). Educators' interactions with families are frequent depending on the child's enrolment of one-to-five days per week and may last for a year or more before they transition to school. Educators, therefore, have long-standing, ongoing,

intimate relationships with families and require knowledge of the family's life and values which inform and support their relational and pedagogical work (Dunst, 2002; Rouse, 2020). Complicating such work is the dynamic nature of families' lives and children's development over time. Time in educators' ongoing relational work with children and families includes time to come to know families and their child on deeply personal but professional levels, and ways the educator-family relationship might shift over time (O'Connor et al., 2018; Winship et al., 2021).

Getting to know families occurs through educator-family interactions at daily drop-off or pick-up periods, via educational apps, or potential ad hoc private interactions involving acute and sensitive attention to the child's holistic developmental, educational and wellbeing progression (Hryniewicz & Luff, 2020; Rouse, 2020; Wilson, 2016). When interactions occur during daily drop-off and pick-up periods, educators are usually simultaneously engaged with other children, families, and responsibilities while families might be rushing to get to work or home. As such, time for engaging meaningfully is short and pressured.

The child's developmental, educational, and wellbeing progression over days, weeks, months and years of attendance is continually changing the work educators do with them and their family. Children also have unique routine and social-emotional needs that can vary moment-to-moment and day-to-day, and this may be more pronounced where they have additional needs, or families face adversity which can change and challenge the daily dynamics within groupings (Berlin et al., 2020; Davis & Dunn, 2022). The sensitive, unpredictable nature of such work adds to the intensity of the educator-family relationship. This intensity might pertain, particularly, to children who are still non-verbal, require additional supports, encounter illness or injury, or for first-time users of ECEC (Rouse, 2020; Wilson, 2016).

Alongside the sensitive, changeable work with children and families, the nature of ECEC contexts can further complicate educators' relational work. In Australia ECEC contexts vary, for example, in size (i.e. the number of children in attendance), location (urban, rural, regional or city, coastal, outback), and demographics (cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, religious diversity of families, educators, society etc.). Educators' pedagogical practices and relational work is undertaken according to such factors, where how and why educators undertake their work varies from one-context-to-the-next. By considering such differences carefully, educators are able to respectfully collaborate with families to support and develop children's sense of being, becoming, and belonging (AGDE, 2022) to their ECEC contexts, communities and society as a whole. Such work can be further challenged and complicated where children face adversity, behavioural or developmental challenges or where families are culturally-and-linguistically diverse, disadvantaged or highly anxious (Davis & Dunn, 2018, 2022; Hodgkins, 2024; Hodgkins et al., 2023).

ECEC settings also involve the unpredictability associated with, for example, staff absenteeism; child illness or injury; changeable family and child moods or needs; socio-political factors (e.g., recent media scrutiny of safety concerns in ECEC, workforce shortages, universal ECEC provisioning) and educators who work variable days and on rotating shifts (Harper et al., 2024; Hjelt et al., 2023). Given such changeable factors, tasks to meet the needs of children, families and regulatory requirements can also be unpredictable, irregular, varied and co-occurring (Harper et al., 2024; Harrison et al., 2023). As such, educators experience time pressures for meeting the needs and demands of their relational and pedagogical work which often leads to multi-tasking (Cumming et al., 2024; Harrison et al., 2019).

Such understandings about the complex workplaces and relationships educators encounter in their professional lives reveals the complexity and nuance in their dynamic,

unpredictable contexts (Cumming et al., 2024) that requires and potentially benefits from emotional labour. This study sought evidence from educators working in different contexts where their work, relationships, and experiences are unfolding in different ways on different days. Understanding the complexity of, and between, ECEC contexts and the individuals who attend and belong to such contexts is important for thinking about educators' relational work and the requirements for and experiences of such work. Such understandings are important for knowing how to support educators in their work; for knowing how to train educators at pre-service and ongoing professional development levels; for knowing what kinds of resources educators need to undertake such work – across varied contexts – that ensures strong outcomes for children; but, also for knowing how educators can be supported to enjoy their work and be sustained throughout their careers.

Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises eight chapters with four peer-reviewed publications. The first publication is a conceptual literature review, and the subsequent three publications pertain to findings. Table 1 provides a list of the publications, where in the thesis they are located, and which research questions they address. Three chapters do not include publications. Chapter Three is the methodology chapter; Chapter Seven provides conceptual contributions for emotional labour theory based on this doctoral study's findings; and, Chapter Eight is the conclusion chapter. Details of each chapter appear after Table 1.

Table 1

List of Publications, their Location within this Thesis, and the Research Questions they Address

	Publications	Location in Thesis	Research Question(s)
1	Dickerson, M. K., Fenech, M., & Stratigos, T. (2024a). Emotional labour while working with families: Potential affordances for supporting early childhood educators' wellbeing. <i>Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood</i> . https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491241252753	Chapter Two	1, 2 & 3
2	Dickerson, M. K., Fenech, M., & Stratigos, T. (2024b). Working with families: An investigation of early childhood educators' emotional labour and wellbeing. <i>Early Years</i> . https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2024.2393143	Chapter Four	1, 2 & 3
3	Dickerson, M. K., Fenech, M., & Stratigos, T. (under review-a). Illuminating the professionalism of early childhood educators' emotional labour in their work with families. In T. Cumming & M. Saha (Eds.), <i>Emotional Labor in the Work of Early Childhood Educators: International Research Perspectives</i> . Routledge with expected publication date March-April 2026). Submitted 8 November 2024.	Chapter Five	1 & 2
4	Dickerson, M. K., Fenech, M., & Stratigos, T. (under review-b). "My emotions do matter": Illuminating the wellbeing impact of early childhood educators' emotional labour with families. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> . Submitted 25 March 2025.	Chapter Six	3

In Chapter Two I review the emotional labour literature from ECEC. I first detail the emotional labour literature from ECEC broadly, including the wellbeing evidence from these investigations. Dickerson et al. (2024a) reviews, through a critical feminist lens, the existing emotional labour investigations that explore educators' labour in their work with families.

The publication details limited, but important, findings of emotional labour in educators work with families and highlights limited attention to the wellbeing impacts of and barriers within educators' partnership work with families. Then Dickerson et al. (2024a) argues for theoretical and methodological approaches to address the gaps in the literature on this focussed area of educators' work and wellbeing and provides an argument for emotional labour's potential professional and wellbeing affordances. In doing so Dickerson et al. (2024a) argue for research practices that may enable elicitation of possible affordances of emotional labour, questioning whether emotional labour can in any way support or sustain educators' wellbeing. A postscript at the end of the chapter provides a broad overview and discussion of the ECEC emotional labour literature published since Dickerson et al. (2024a) was authored.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical and methodological approaches employed within this doctoral study. I begin by articulating my own positioning as researcher. I then discuss the theoretical components of emotional labour theory and the critical feminist lens I apply to emotional labour theory and argue for a mixed-method approach to address methodological gaps identified in Chapter Two's literature review. I detail the quantitative method (self-adapted emotional labour survey) used to gather broadbrush data on educators' emotional labour and wellbeing in their work with families in the state of New South Wales, Australia. Thereafter I outline the qualitative methods (longitudinal interviewing and journaling over 12-months) to gather in-depth and rich accounts of educators' emotional labour and wellbeing experiences in their work with families. There is no postscript to this chapter.

Chapter Four opens with a short discussion on the adjustment made to emotional labour theory before the second publication on survey results is presented. Survey results unpacked in Dickerson et al. (2024b) reveal, for the first time in the Australian context,

educators' frequent, effortful, and skilful exercising of emotional labour in their work with families, with predominantly negative wellbeing implications. Some data revealed positive and mixed positive-negative wellbeing impacts which raised questions about what influences educators' wellbeing in their work with families and if emotional labour in such work is, in fact, always negative. The results drew attention to Bronfenbrenner's (1996) bioecological levels of influence on educators' emotional labour. While the survey results confirmed existing evidence for educators' emotional labour, it also offered a unique lens to consider how future investigations might explore in-depth and nuanced aspects of emotional labour and its wellbeing impacts in ECEC contexts. A postscript at the end of the chapter briefly details how the bioecological levels of influence were included in the qualitative component of this doctoral investigation.

In Chapter Five I sought to reaffirm and extend on the evidence presented in Chapter Four through analysis of qualitative data on educator-participants' emotional labour and wellbeing in their work with families. Chapter Five includes a book chapter publication (Dickerson et al., in press) that unveils emotional labour in educators' work with families as skilled and effortful work, that is influenced by time, undertaken intentionally and according to educators deep professional understandings of their work with children and families in ECEC contexts. Emotional labour was also found to include the work of reflective planning and professional judgement. Additionally, once aware of emotional labour –after nearly 12-months of research participation– educator-participants revealed greater control and intentionality in their emotional labour enactments that also safeguarded their wellbeing. I argue in this chapter that such evidence debunks maternalistic discourses that such work is natural and intuitive work undertaken only for the benefit of organisations and others. Instead, I advocate that skilled emotional labour and its purposeful outcomes ought to be

acknowledged at educator, employer, pre-service training, and socio-political levels as deeply professional work that can be learned. There is no postscript to this chapter.

In Chapter Six I extend on Chapter Five's skilled, intentional emotional labour to reveal how such labour impacts educators' wellbeing in Dickerson et al., (under review) and argue that the emotional labour and wellbeing literature in ECEC do not take an ecological approach to understanding educators' wellbeing in their work with families. Dickerson et al., (under review) reveals evidence that emotional labour is effortful and demanding work that can also be rewarding and fulfilling and, therefore, has negative and positive wellbeing impacts. Additionally, evidence highlights that wellbeing can also impact emotional labour. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory, emotional labour as negative or positive for wellbeing was illuminated as being dependent on educators-participants' awareness of such labour and multi-level contextual factors, that can position emotional labour as a resource or a demand for educators. Additionally, evidence reveals that educator-participants exercised emotional labour in sustaining ways and for purposeful outcomes. Lastly, findings in Dickerson et al., (under review) show that emotional labour and wellbeing share a mutually supportive relationship and that such labour has professional and wellbeing affordances. There is no postscript for this chapter.

Drawing the quantitative and qualitative findings together, Chapter Seven contributes theoretical understandings and advancements to emotional labour theory for ECEC contexts and potentially also for other relationship-based professions. In this Chapter I argue that the original work of emotional labour theory is restrictive for relationship-based professions given it was originally conceptualised in the context of service work. I unpack the theoretical advancements offered by other relationship-based professions and reveal how this doctoral study's findings reaffirm, but also expand on, these existing advancements. I suggest that emotional labour theory requires a critical stance to avoid reinforcing some of the negative

and maternalistic positionings of the theory and instead illuminate the skill and the professional and wellbeing affordances of such labour. I also suggest that an ecological perspective which illuminates the multi-level influences on emotional labour, further reinforces the complex, skilled nature of this work and challenges simplistic notions that emotional labour is just a performance of emotion to satisfy occupational rules at the expense of the individual's wellbeing. Emotional labour is revealed to include additional processes not currently included within its conceptualisation and as sharing a mutually supportive relationship with wellbeing. Such contributions emerged through the application of emotional labour theory framed in a critical feminist paradigm and through an ecological lens that challenged deficit framings of emotional labour. A critical and strength-based framing through a critical feminist framing and ecological approach can illuminate empowered enactments of this labour that identify professional and wellbeing affordances and supportive structures and resources needed to undertake relational work in, but also beyond, ECEC. There is no postscript for this chapter.

Lastly, in Chapter Eight I draw together the approaches, and key findings and contributions of this investigation. I then discuss implications for educators, employers, training providers, policy makers and regulatory authorities, and governments. Thereafter, I acknowledge the limitations of the study and provide possible directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The first publication in this thesis is a literature review which analyses a small body ($n=4$) of empirical investigations of emotional labour in educators' work with families in ECEC through a critical feminist lens. The review sought to identify current understandings of emotional labour in educators' work with families, and the theoretical framings and methods applied in these investigations. Reviewing the literature through a critical feminist lens exposed theoretical and methodological limitations and gaps, and provided a vision for this study's design and critical feminist framing (Somekh & Lewin, 2011; Van der Walldt, 2020). The review also sought to identify how educator wellbeing was associated with educators' exercising of EL in their work with families in the existing literature.

To contextualise the published paper, in the sections below I provide an overview of the extant ECEC research on emotional labour and the wellbeing impacts identified in this body of research. I looked specifically at investigations that purposefully aimed to explore emotional labour in ECEC contexts from the outset, choosing not to include investigations that unpacked emotional labour as a finding only. The publication paper that follows focuses only on studies that investigated educators' emotional labour in the context of their work with families. The section that appears after the publication provides a broad overview of what the rise in investigations in ECEC are highlighting in relation to emotional labour.

Emotional Labour in ECEC

At the time of undertaking the review of literature on emotional labour in ECEC between April 2022 and January 2023, it became clear that emotional labour remained a relatively novel and under-explored phenomenon that was typically identified as having negative wellbeing impacts for educators. Using the search strategy outlined in Dickerson et al. (2024a, pp. 5-6) only 32 published articles were located and reported in the appendix

attached to Dickerson et al. (2024a). Of these, two were conceptual papers (Lam et al., 2016; Purper et al., 2022) that drew attention to the limited ECEC research on emotional labour and burnout. Lam et al. (2016) suggested that emotional labour may potentially support kindergarten teachers' career adaptability and satisfaction which might mitigate burnout for teachers in their Hong Kong contexts. Purper et al. (2022) reviewed the burnout challenge of emotional labour for ECTs in the United States and the potential for individual strategies, like mindfulness, to mitigate such effects. While both papers identified that educators' emotional labour is unavoidable and causes burnout, they do not address, within the context of relationships and ECEC's diverse, complex settings, if positive educator wellbeing, relational, and role outcomes ensue through exercising emotional labour. Additionally, both papers focus on individual wellbeing management strategies (i.e., emotional intelligence and mindfulness practices) to mitigate the negative impacts of emotional labour, thus lacking attention to broader relational and contextual factors that might influence emotional labour and its wellbeing outcomes.

The analysis of the remaining 30 empirical studies' approaches and contexts revealed some interesting trends. All studies were undertaken at one point in time or over short periods of time (e.g., two weeks) using cross-sectional research designs. Twelve used quantitative survey designs; fourteen employed one or more qualitative methods including interviews, observations, focus groups, individual narratives, and/or document analysis; and four were mixed-method studies. A marked increase in ECEC emotional labour investigations occurred from (and inclusive of) 2020 with more than half ($n=17$) of the 30 studies published since then. Such increased attention to emotional labour may have been attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic's strains and stressors and ensuing educator wellbeing, turnover, and attrition challenges (Berger et al., 2022; Bigras et al., 2021; Eadie et al., 2021).

Of the 30 empirical publications, 10 (33.3%) were from Chinese contexts, with five (16.7%) from America and six (20%) from England with only one cross-cultural, qualitative investigation conducted between China and Norway (Hong & Zhang, 2019). The remaining eight investigations came from Ghana, Taiwan, Sweden, Australia, Denmark, Canada and New Zealand ($n=2$). Notably, 14 (46.7%) of the 30 publications' participants were all qualified ECTs, while 13 (43.3%) included participants with mixed-level qualifications, many with a high representation of teacher-qualified participants. Only four of the 30 studies purposefully investigated educators' emotional labour with families (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022), the remainder focussed on educators' work with children or more generally in their work and on the wellbeing impacts of this labour.

Studies identified that emotional labour is effortful and demanding work and not always undertaken according to specific rules because ECEC contexts are changeable spaces (Malhotra, 2022; Mikuska & Fairchild, 2020; Monrad, 2017; Morris, 2021). Reviewing the studies identified that educators' exercising emotional labour was attributed broadly to three main influences: individual; relational; and socio-political. In discussing these influences below, the individual or professional outcomes yielded are also discussed.

Influences on Educators' Exercising of Emotional Labour

Individual Influences. Individual influences on educators' exercising of emotional labour pertain to, for example, the educator's understanding of their professional identity; perception of workplace culture and rules; training for and experience in ECEC; emotional and cognitive resources for relational work; and their role and age. Evidence shows that emotional display rules were perceived according to ECTs' understandings of their workplace expectations and culture, and their own personal and professional identities (Brown et al.,

2022; Monrad, 2017). For example, the only cross-cultural study found that Norwegian ECTs who held higher levels of intrinsic professional identity than their Chinese counterparts tended to view emotional labour as an extension of their professional selves (Hong & Zhang, 2019). As a result, the Norwegian teachers exercised emotional labour through more frequent deep acting or genuine expressions, positively supporting their role and work with others.

An individual's psychological resources – emotional and cognitive capacities – were found to also play a role in how and why they may exercise emotional labour in their relational work, particularly whether they have such resources or not. Educators with high levels of psychological capital (e.g., self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism) were found to have sufficient psychological resources for exercising emotional labour that best suited the interaction and for reducing the effort involved in such work (Fu, 2015; Hong et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2019). Educators with such personal resources may therefore avoid ineffectively exercising emotional labour that likely yields unsuccessful role outcomes or negative wellbeing impacts. Psychological capital appears to mitigate burnout which, in turn, leaves educators with sufficient cognitive and emotional resources for ongoing emotional labour (Fu, 2015; Hong et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2019).

Educators' years of experience may also influence their emotional labour, however findings in international research are contradictory. Where experienced preschool teachers in the United States tended to deep act more frequently (Brown et al., 2022), experienced Canadian educators tended to exercise more surface acting in their work with families (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011). Furthermore, Yin et al. (2022) identified that experienced Hong Kong preschool teachers tended to utilise genuine expressions most frequently. Such evidence raises the question about the role of an individual's context, culture, and the cultural context in which they are exercising emotional labour and with whom they are working (i.e. children or families) as influencing their emotional labour styles. Such evidence signals that emotional

labour requires in-depth study to identify the role of context and culture for emotional labour in ECEC.

Gender is another potential influence that remains unclear given the limited explorations of gender and emotional labour in ECEC, likely compounded by a female-dominated workforce. A survey of 240 ECTs' emotional labour in the Chinese context identified male teachers as exercising more surface and deep acting compared with their female counterparts (Xie, Liang, et al., 2022). The authors suggested that this may be due "to the potential extra pressure they [males] face in their daily educational practice" (Xie, Liang, et al., 2022, p. 11) working in a feminised workforce. The authors stated that qualitative methods are necessary for deep insights into gender differences. Understandings of gender may better reveal too that emotional labour is not merely intuitive, natural work for women (Ailwood, 2007) and shift the discourses that diminish the value of such work.

While the individual factors presented here are important, emotional labour is likely specific to the relational nature of educators' work with others and potentially also context-specific for ECEC. Therefore, considering the interplay of emotional labour's influencing factors upon each other (Brown et al., 2022) seems critical and unavoidable.

Relational Influences. Emotional labour is relational work so the choice of strategy may be influenced by educators' unique and individualised interactions and relationships with others. Most of the literature reviewed focuses on educator-child interactions. There is evidence that genuine expressions and deep acting occur more with children than with families and colleagues (Brown et al., 2022; Hedlin et al., 2019; Q. Zhang et al., 2020). Limited relationship-specific investigations of emotional labour in educators' work with families and colleagues exist for such claims to be deeply understood or for the differences between genuine expressions with families and genuine expressions with children to be recognised. Moreover, the strategy utilised seems to be dependent on the strength, familiarity,

and needs of the specific relationship (Brown et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2022). Where relational challenges occur, particularly in new and difficult relationships, or when educators do not want families or colleagues to know about role-related difficulties, strategies may be exercised to protect and sustain the relationship or as a form of self-preservation (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Malhotra, 2022; Mikuska & Fairchild, 2020; Morris, 2018; Vincent & Braun, 2013; L. Zhang et al., 2020). What seems unclear, however, is whether the emotional labourer is aware they are using emotional labour this way.

Evidence highlights that educators exercise different emotional labour strategies with different individuals in ECEC settings. For example, how an educator navigates the complex social-emotional learning with one child, may be very different to how they support another child's unique needs (Brown et al., 2022; Colley, 2006; Hedlin et al., 2019; Vincent & Braun, 2013; Xie, Wu, et al., 2022). Preschool teachers, for instance, exercise surface acting to promote emotional support for children's social learning within the classroom (Brown et al., 2018), but how this occurs at whole classroom levels versus with individual children might vary. Educators' emotional labour with colleagues and leadership also varies and occurs according to the relationship's strength, hierarchy, and situational context (Brown et al., 2022; Morris, 2018; Zheng et al., 2022).

Such broad findings highlight that when educators exercise relationship-specific emotional labour to meet the needs of another, then successful relational and role-related outcomes may occur which can be rewarding. Conversely, and as discussed in the next section, this body of scholarship also reveals that emotional labour can be challenging and may not always be experienced positively. Such evidence illuminates the need for investigations to extract deep understandings of relationship-specific emotional labour in ECEC. Additionally, understanding the wellbeing implications of exercising emotional labour

across multiple relationships according to individual, but also relational, contextual, and socio-political factors seem critical, given the evidence that such work can be draining.

Investigations generally do not make explicit whether their participants understood the intentions behind their emotional labour enactments and if, or how, the outcomes from their practices balanced the rewarding and draining experiences in their work. Crucially, the individualistic enactment of emotional labour according to the relationship the educator shares with others, indicated that the impact of emotional labour on wellbeing potentially varies from one educator-to-another. What impact the context has on the individual, their relationships and their wellbeing while they exercise emotional labour is, thus, also important.

Socio-political Influences. The socio-political context in which educators work includes the dominant cultures of educators, families, and the community the service is situated in; and the societal and political beliefs and expectations around ECEC. For example, in the United Kingdom, Colley (2006, p. 21) revealed a “vocational culture in the workplace” as influencing how, when, and why emotional labour is to be exercised. Additionally, Colley reveals that much of what is learned both through training and in the work place “reproduces docile subjectivities and uncomplaining caregiving” (2006, p. 27). Colley, as well as Vincent and Braun’s (2013) explorations of emotional labour, drew attention to British societies’ long-held view of ECEC as care work that requires mothering, rendering the emotions involved in such work as innate and skill-less.

In an investigation on nursery workers’ professionalism in England, Osgood (2012) found, however, that workers negotiated their professional identities through emotional labour. Nursery workers exercised emotional labour in their relational and ethical work in ways that resisted socio-political discourses of professionalism as based on performance and standardised, measurable outcomes. Instead, nursery workers placed value on experiential

and relational knowledge and practices that Osgood described as undertaken with skill, agency, and reflexivity. While emotional labour was a central aspect of nursery workers' professionalism, the naturalised discourses associated with emotional labour meant that such labour both valued and undervalued their professional identities. Extending on this, Monrad (2017) shows that because educators in the Danish context identify as caring and nurturing, they attempt to justify their professionalism by undertaking emotional labour to provide high-quality care despite a lack of resources or support. Monrad argues that in doing so, these educators reinforce systems that exploit them in commodified care contexts by undervaluing their skilled labour.

Boyer et al., (2013), like Colley (2006), Osgood (2012), and Monrad (2017), contest and debate long held socio-political discourses of emotional labour in ECEC as commodified care. Recently, Morris (2021) identified that educators in England do not always follow expected rules, but exercise emotional labour flexibly to balance ethical boundaries and care responsively to children, revealing instead the professional, skilled work of emotional labour that is certainly not commodified care. The flexible utilisation of emotional labour is, for example, seen in Hedlin et al.'s (2019, p. 498) study of Swedish preschool teachers who balanced what was expected of them through emotional labour "for the purpose of obtaining a specific educational goal." Hedlin reveals, for example, that teachers adapted to their workplace context, culture, and preschool classrooms' emotional display rules initially through surface acting. Such evidence reaffirm arguments that emotional labour is a professional component of educators' work (Osgood, 2010, 2012).

In Chinese contexts the hierarchical power relationship between teacher and student allows Chinese teachers to show more naturally felt emotions – positive and negative – and still be respected by children, families and colleagues (Zheng et al., 2022). Multiple studies have found that Chinese ECTs utilise more deep acting and genuine expressions with children

(Peng et al., 2019; Q. Zhang et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2022). From their survey of 1,264 Chinese ECTs, Q. Zhang et al., (2020) noted that experienced teachers surface acted more frequently than inexperienced teachers, however, deep acting remains prevalent overall. Contrastingly, in a cross-cultural study, Norwegian ECTs exercised more deep acting in their work compared with their Chinese counterparts (Hong & Zhang, 2019). The authors identified that ‘respectability’ was an important Chinese cultural trait. Resultingly, surface acting potentially supports Chinese teachers “to look as respectable as possible” within the socio-cultural setting they work in (Hong & Zhang, 2019, p. 485) and was similarly highlighted in results from a survey of 124 Chinese ECTs who utilised more surface acting to potentially experience higher levels of teaching efficacy (Xie, Wu, et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Brown et al. (2022) identified that teachers in the United States utilised surface acting to protect themselves, maintain relationships across the school setting and their professional image with children, families, colleagues, and school leaders.

Such evidence raises the question – once again – as to whether the use of surface acting, and emotional labour generally, is culturally, socially and contextually unique, shaped by the socio-political discourses of ECEC within different contexts, and if so, then why. The consideration for cultural and contextual influences extends beyond the individual educator to include children, families and colleagues’ cultures and perspectives and the context the ECEC setting is situated within. As such, the wellbeing impacts of educators’ emotional labour are, potentially, subject to the same influences, but this requires explicit exploration.

Emotional Labour’s Wellbeing Impacts

Empirical investigations of emotional labour and its wellbeing impact typically stem from emotional labour theorising that such work is deleterious for employees’ wellbeing. Some scholars have looked at aspects of emotional labour that are positive and negative for wellbeing (e.g., Hong et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2019). Overall, however,

understandings of how or why wellbeing is positive or negative in relation to educators' emotional labour practices in their relational work with families has remained limited, as discussed further in Chapter Six's publication on the study's wellbeing findings.

Colley (2006, p. 24) undertook some of the earliest ECEC emotional labour research and identified that ECEC training programs transformed educators into calm, cheerful, supportive, and nice educators who had learned to work on their own feelings "to labour appropriately." Colley cautioned that the commodification of such feeling work in ECEC can result in alienation and burnout and called for greater critical thinking about the social and individual processes involved in learning to labour with feeling and its consequences within ECEC. Colley's work builds on Skeggs' (1997) earlier explorations of female participants enrolled in caring-vocational courses including childcare by showing that institutional training in ECEC—which produces the 'appropriate' way to be—can often limit how women are professionally recognised. According to Skeggs, beliefs that women have natural tendencies for such work economically devalues such labour and is often tied to the social and political perceptions that position 'professional' as typified by masculine traits rather than feminised traits of care and emotion. The wellbeing impact for these student-educators, where their critical emotional work was professionally devalued and invisible, was demoralisation, stress, and burnout (Colley, 2006; Skeggs, 1997).

Boyer et al., (2013) identified that the value of emotional labour arose when such labour in educators' work with children and families, despite being difficult and exhausting, had the potential to be experienced as rewarding and gratifying. Which parts of educators' relational work with children, families and colleagues was rewarding or gratifying, and why, was not explicit, however. Others have argued against dualistic approaches to the individual impacts of emotional labour as it masks the contextual nuances of ECEC work (Osgood, 2012; Vincent & Braun, 2013). Scholars have highlighted that emotional labour, and its

impacts are beyond the subjectivity of the individual (Fairchild & Mikuska, 2021) where wellbeing impacts, such as exhaustion and stress, can arise from socio-political agendas, for example, that keep emotional labour unrecognised, undervalued and underpaid (Osgood, 2012). As such, emotional labour and its impacts include relational, contextual and socio-political level nuances that are important to consider. Such insights were critical contributions for educators' work and understanding emotional labour's socio-political positioning, but the emotional labour and wellbeing affordances and complexities of such work have remained unclear.

A keen focus on educator wellbeing in the context of workforce challenges has led to a tendency to explore the negative impacts (Annor et al., 2023; Fu, 2015; Jena-Crottet, 2017; Ntim et al., 2023a; Purper et al., 2022) or reinforce positive-negative binaries that surface acting is negative for wellbeing; deep acting yields mixed impacts; and genuine expressions tend to be more positive (Hong et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2022). Furthermore, investigations have also sought to identify if individual factors can mitigate this negative impact (Hong et al., 2022; Yin, 2015; Yin et al., 2022), limiting understandings on whether relational, contextual, and broader socio-political factors might also play a role in impacting wellbeing. Consequently, nuanced understandings of skilled emotional labour within the systems and processes of ECEC contexts and whether such labour can support wellbeing, remain limited.

Concluding Thoughts

While the findings from the investigations of emotional labour in ECEC are important and insightful, I questioned, at a time where wellbeing was a heightened concern within ECEC, why emotional labour was not purposefully explored in the context of educators' work with families. I also wondered why emotional labour research did not seek to understand what it may offer educators, particularly their wellbeing in the context of their

relational work. Furthermore, in writing Dickerson et al., (2024a) I was aware of the multiple ways scholars referred to genuine expressions, such as, expression of authenticity, authentic displays, authentic expressions, natural acting, expression of genuine emotion, performance of naturally felt emotions, and genuine expressions. While writing Dickerson et al. (2024a), I chose to use genuine expressions consistently within this doctoral study and was particularly determined to avoid the use of ‘performance,’ ‘acting’ or ‘display’ to describe this concept. This decision was due to my understanding of the word expression being associated with a genuine revealing of one’s emotions outwardly either verbally or physically or both.

The publication that follows extends this review of emotional labour in ECEC to focus specifically on emotional labour in educators’ work with families. In particular, the article positions emotional labour theory in a critical feminist lens as that offers a useful framing for expanding this body of research and challenging the deficit discourses associated with this work. Indeed, the article suggests that emotional labour may offer potential professional and wellbeing affordances.

Publication 1: Emotional Labour While Working with Families: Potential Affordances for Supporting Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing

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Abstract

Partnering with families is an explicit regulatory and role requirement for early childhood educators, yet the emotional labour involved is implicit and relatively unacknowledged. While research has found that complex work demands jeopardise educator wellbeing – resulting in unprecedented turnover and attrition in Australia and internationally – little research has investigated emotional labour and associated educator wellbeing in relation to partnering with families. This article argues that the limited research on educators' emotional labour with families and its ensuing invisibility may pertain to both its positioning within social constructivist and interpretivist paradigms that render such work as naturally inherent and to conceptualisations of emotional labour theory that entrench this work in maternalistic discourses. The article positions emotional labour theory within a critical feminist lens and as a worthwhile line of inquiry to extend this body of research and disrupt maternalistic discourses that diminish educators' skilful labour. The potential affordances pertaining to the illumination of this work as skilful for early childhood workforce policy are considered.

Keywords

early childhood educators, emotional labour, educator wellbeing, family partnerships, early childhood education and care

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Introduction

Australia and many countries around the world are experiencing an early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce crisis, evident in the unprecedentedly high turnover and attrition levels of educators (i.e., degree-qualified teachers and vocationally trained practitioners who work with children birth-to-five years) (Cumming et al., 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020; Schaack et al., 2022). This crisis is attributed to structural and workplace challenges, notably low pay, poor professional recognition and workload burden (McKinlay et al., 2018; McMullen et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic amplified these stressors (Berger et al., 2022), resulting in increased rates of educator burnout (Saracho, 2022) and contributing further to the challenge of sustaining a high-quality workforce (Fenech et al., 2021). Such turnover can deleteriously impact the quality of ECEC services through the disruption of relationships between educators, children and their families, and the loss of knowledgeable and experienced educators (OECD, 2022).

Australian and international governments and regulatory authorities are initiating recovery and support plans, calling for evidence-based research to address the wellbeing, turnover and attrition issues that jeopardise quality ECEC (Kulakiewicz et al., 2022; Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2021; United States Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, 2022). Australia's Early Childhood Workforce Strategy (ACECQA, 2021), for example, aims to investigate and resource educator wellbeing and practice-based initiatives for a sustainable, quality workforce where educators have supportive working conditions, wellbeing provisions, career progression, competitive remuneration and professional status. Such initiatives signify the critical need to investigate educators' work-related wellbeing, understood in this article as encompassing psychological and physiological wellness, influenced by 'the interaction of individual, relational, work-environmental, and socio-cultural-political' dimensions (Cumming and Wong, 2019: 276).

One area of educators' work-related wellbeing that warrants investigation is partnering with families. Policies set expectations for educators to collaborate with and support families in Australia (ACECQA, 2020) and internationally, including in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2017), the United States (United States Department of Health and Human Services & United States Department of Education, 2016), the United Kingdom (Department for Education, 2021), China (Guo and Kilderry, 2018), Canada (Canadian Government, 2017) and Norway (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). These regulatory expectations are evidence-based, recognising that when educators and families collaborate, families' strengths, cultures and values are supported and included within educational programmes (Trute and Hiebert-Murphy, 2018). Family involvement and shared decision-making promote the child's inclusion and continuity of learning, thereby provisioning lifelong benefits for the child (ACECQA, 2020; Department for Education, 2021), particularly for families experiencing disadvantage (Fenech and Skattebol, 2021; Hadley and Rouse, 2021; Tobin, 2020).

While research has identified that partnering with families is emotional work for educators (Andrew, 2015; Davis and Dunn, 2018; Elfer, 2015; Osgood, 2010), this article will show that empirical evidence regarding the emotions educators utilise in their work with families and the ensuing impact on educator wellbeing is limited. This silence in ECEC may in part be attributable to maternalism discourses that ascribe 'natural' mothering instincts to ECEC educators (Ailwood, 2007). Predominantly female, educators are viewed as innately caring and emotional in their work (Ailwood, 2007), and more capable of managing emotions and expressions, doing so more frequently than men (Hochschild, 2012). One implication of this discourse is the positioning of educators' emotional work as innate and therefore unskilled (Malhotra, 2022). Such positioning

devalues educators' skills and professionalism (Ailwood, 2007), rendering such work invisible (Taggart, 2011) and potentially unworthy of investigation.

Bringing a critical lens to educators' emotional labour with families has scope to disrupt maternalistic views by illuminating both this undervalued and unrecognised work and its potential impact on educator wellbeing. Drawing on the work of Hochschild (2012), 'emotional labour' is an employee's regulation of emotions and expressions that meet professional expectations or norms. The article explores the potential of emotional labour theory to provision understandings about, and make more visible, the complex emotional work and wellbeing implications of educators' work with families. In doing so, the article addresses the question of whether a focus on educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families can help disrupt entrenched views that ECEC work is maternalistic and therefore natural and unskilled.

The article begins by outlining emotional labour theory and in so doing, maintains that the social constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, within which emotional labour theory predominantly sits, may reinforce maternal views of educators' work. A literature review of educators' emotional labour with families follows. Using a critical feminist lens to review the four studies that have to date explored educators' emotional labour with families, the article argues that without a critical stance, educators' emotional labour remains entrenched within deficit, maternalist discourses. A discussion of the limitations of this body of research follows, before the potential affordances of future explorations of ECEC educators' emotional labour with families, through a critical feminist paradigm, are highlighted.

Emotional labour theory

Emotional labour theory offers a framework from which to investigate and expose the complex, nuanced emotion skills and strategies necessary for working in ECEC and in particular, with families. Emotional labour requires an employee to regulate or manage their feelings to display an outward expression or behaviour that induces feelings or a state-of-mind in others to achieve work-related goals and expectations (Hochschild, 2012). Grandey et al.'s (2013) three-dimensional conceptualisation of emotional labour, encompassing *occupational requirements*, *emotional displays* and *intrapsychic experiences*, provides an additional lens through which educators' work with families may be explored.

Emotional labour's three-dimensional framework

Occupational requirements refer to occupations in which employees have frequent interactions with others, and where *emotional display rules* dictate the emotions deemed necessary for inducing feelings or states-of-mind in others to meet role expectations (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012). *Emotional display rules* are the social norms that define how employees should interact with others to meet occupational requirements (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012). The workplace or role's emotional display rules dictate the second dimension of the framework, *emotional displays*, which are the outward expressions and behaviours of employees that are intended to induce feelings or states-of-mind in others (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012).

Emotional displays include three display strategies. First, *surface acting* involves deliberate suppression or exaggeration of emotion to outwardly display the expression necessary for occupational requirements (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 2012). For example, an educator may suppress feelings of stress, exaggerate a smile and express a calm demeanour to reassure families that they are leaving their child with a capable, happy educator. The second strategy, *deep acting*, involves cognitive modification of feelings such that the dissonance between experienced

and expressed emotions is resolved (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 2012), and therefore may be authentic (Grandey et al., 2013). For example, an educator frustrated that a family seems unconcerned about their child's behaviour will internally manage thoughts and emotions to feel and express genuine compassion and understanding, securing the family's state-of-mind that they are well supported. *Natural/genuine expressions* are the third strategy in which the individual does not need to modify, suppress or artificially display expressions different from their feelings (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993), such as when an educator's genuine smile and cheerfulness reflects their enjoyment and passion for their work.

The third and final dimension, *intrapsychic experiences*, refers to the internal processes requiring 'effort, planning and control' (Morris and Feldman, 1996: 987) to 'regulate feelings and expressions' (Grandey, 2000: 97). Generally, the greater the effort of these internal processes the greater the negative wellbeing impact (Grandey et al., 2013). Surface acting has tended to correlate positively with exhaustion and burnout, whereas deep acting and genuine expressions have tended to elicit mixed results (Delgado et al., 2017; Hülshleger and Schewe, 2011; Kariou et al., 2021; Lee and Madera, 2019; Yang and Chen, 2020).

Emotional labour's social constructivist positioning

Given that educators exercise emotional labour through emotional displays influenced by their occupational context, emotional labour theory can be seen to be positioned in a social constructivist framing that is limiting. Social constructivism pertains to the unique ways of meaning-making and knowing through individual lived experiences (Crotty, 2020). The limitation of socially constructed meanings is that they resist a 'critical spirit' (Crotty, 2020: 58). Therefore, while each educator may exercise and experience emotional labour according to their unique occupational and contextual factors, when investigated without an additional critical lens, limitations to how emotional labour is portrayed exist.

Firstly, emotional labour becomes relegated to descriptions and interpretations of how and why it is exercised according to constructivist and interpretivist constructs. Therefore, instead of articulating the professional and skilful effort required to manage one's emotions in ever-changing and complex contexts to meet workplace, family or educator expectations (Taggart, 2011), educators' emotional labour may appear implicitly natural and therefore 'socially constructed as a non-skill' (Bolton, 2004: p.3). Secondly, discursive display rules tend to be implicitly inherent in ECEC, thus taken for granted and exploitative (Malhotra, 2022) rather than explicitly acknowledged and questioned. Thirdly, without a lens that critiques emotional display rules, illuminates skills and efforts involved in exercising emotional labour, and makes educators' wellbeing visible, the development of educator supports for effectively exercising emotional labour and sustaining educator wellbeing may be inhibited. In turn, research framed by social constructivist or interpretivist paradigms that keep educators' professional and skilful emotion work invisible ensure that related wellbeing implications remain relatively unacknowledged in workplaces, policy, curriculum and training programmes (Cumming et al., 2020; Purper et al., 2023).

Notably, emotional labour has been described in other female-dominated professions such as nursing, aged care, social work and primary teaching as skilled work, with wellbeing implications (Nixon, 2009; Winter et al., 2019; Bolton, 2004; Howard and Timmons, 2012; Payne, 2009). The research on social workers and nurses' emotional labour with families makes visible the technical and complex emotional skills used in practice, with safeguarding techniques for wellbeing also identified (Howard and Timmons, 2012; Lavee and Strier, 2018; Winter et al., 2019). For example, knowing 'when to push the discussion further or back away, knowing what feelings to suppress to avoid igniting the situation and knowing when and where to leave to maintain personal

safety' (Winter et al., 2019: p.228). The skilful management of emotions for self-preservation purposes (Lavee and Strier, 2018) without compromising emotional attachments to children and families (Howard and Timmons, 2012; Winter et al., 2019) is also highlighted in this literature.

Included in this body of work are ideas that effectively challenge a social constructivist positioning of the work of health and welfare professionals, and which are relevant to educators. First is a critique of the notion that the shaping of men's and women's emotion behaviours and the stigma around work skills that are typically viewed as feminised or masculinised are due to gender socialisation (Nixon, 2009; Bolton, 2004). Second is the argument that identifying specific skills relevant to a profession's emotional labour demands requires differentiating between socially expected emotions such as politeness, from the technical application of emotion for specific labour purposes (Payne, 2009). These ideas suggest that a more critical framing of emotional labour such as that offered by critical feminism may enable space for the skills and wellbeing implications of emotional labour to be made visible.

Emotional labour through a critical feminist lens

Critical feminist approaches invoke change, empower, emancipate, challenge and disrupt outdated and patriarchal ideologies about women's work, particularly emotion work in ECEC (Boler and Zembylas, 2016; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The educator role requires frequent, sustained interactions with families to support child learning and development and individual family needs, and to secure families' satisfaction, trust and ongoing enrolment, most often through positive emotion displays such as cheerfulness, calmness and confidence (Malhotra, 2022). The expectation for positive displays to meet the occupational requirements for working with families implicitly marks the educator as nurturer, pleaser and comforter to meet the needs of others. Moreover, conceptualisations of emotional labour theory have potential to entrench notions of 'mothering' whereby educator emotions are constructed as an innate and inherent response to the support, care and emotional needs of families that are necessary for meeting educator-family partnership requirements. The idea that ECEC is women's work, consisting of women's skills will then continue to manifest societal thinking, reinforcing the view that certain professions require skills and dispositions that are typically feminised. To ascertain whether the existing research on educators' emotional labour with families entrenches or disrupts notions that educators' work is maternalistic, a review of these empirical studies through a critical feminist lens was necessary.

Empirical investigations of emotional labour with families

To ascertain what ECEC research on educators' emotional labour with families exists, and through which paradigm this research has been undertaken, a literature search was conducted using the terms *early childhood teachers/educators/preschool teachers/kindergarten teachers/early years/day care* AND *emotional labour/emotional labor* in the EBSCOHOST (Education), Taylor & Francis, ProQuest, Wiley Online, SpringerLink and SAGE databases. Date-range limitations were not applied. This search strategy generated 36 peer-reviewed publications. Four publications made only general reference to emotional labour in relation to educators' care ethics and emotion work (Elfer, 2015; Osgood, 2010; Taggart, 2011, 2015), and so were excluded. The 32 peer-reviewed publications comprised two conceptual papers and 30 empirical studies (Appendix 1). Surprisingly, only four publications focused on educators' emotional labour while working with families (Brown et al., 2022; Lee and Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022).

Critical analysis of the four studies was grounded in both inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Inductively, analysis of research methods and theoretical

underpinnings of the following was undertaken: who the investigation included (i.e., vocationally trained or teacher-qualified educators, children, families and/or colleagues); what setting the investigation occurred in; and the justification for research decisions. Questions that guided subsequent analysis emerged as the literature was reviewed, including how educators exercise emotional labour in ECEC, particularly in their efforts to partner with families; what influences educators' exercising of emotional labour, particularly with families; what educators' perceptions of the impact of emotional labour on their wellbeing are; and whether any factors for safeguarding educator wellbeing had been identified. A deductive analysis considered whether the literature positioned emotional labour in deficit maternalist discourses, and reinforced or disrupted maternalistic positionings of educators and the work they do with families.

What follows is a critical review of educators' emotional labour while working with families, and the wellbeing implications of this work, as reported in Brown et al. (2022); Lee and Brotheridge (2011); Morris (2018); and Quiñones et al. (2022). The review first presents the key findings of the four studies, before considering if and how these investigations reinforce or disrupt maternalistic positionings of educators' emotional labour.

Educators' emotional labour with families

A key finding of this literature review was that only four studies have to date specifically explored educators' emotional labour with families (Brown et al., 2022; Lee and Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022). Lee and Brotheridge (2011) used an interpretivist approach to their cross-sectional survey (n = 198) of Canadian educators' experiences of emotional labour with parents. Morris's (2018) phenomenologically framed doctoral study explored United Kingdom university-qualified early childhood teachers' (n = 18) emotional labour – with children, families, colleagues and leaders – through five focus groups, followed by individual interviews. Brown et al. (2022) investigated preschool teachers' (n = 27) emotional labour across all school-based relationships in the United States through individual interviews, providing descriptive and interpretivist accounts of participant experiences. In the only Australian study, Quiñones et al. (2022) explored, through interviews, educators' (n = 30) increased emotional labour with families and ensuing burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Brown et al. (2022) and Quiñones et al. (2022) utilised interpretative paradigms to articulate educators' experiences of emotional labour, whilst also adopting social constructivist positioning of emotional labour as influenced by others (i.e., the relationship) and events (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic).

While there is a lack of in-depth understanding of educators' emotional labour and wellbeing implications while working with families, the limited extant research nonetheless offers some insights. The four studies identified three key influences on how educators exercise and experience emotional labour: firstly, based on the nature of their individual relationships with families; secondly, to benefit the educator–family partnership; and thirdly, with variable professional and wellbeing implications. As the discussion that follows will show, reviewing these four studies through a critical feminist lens highlights that interpretivist and constructivist framings of some findings entrenches educators' emotional labour within existing maternalistic positionings while only a few findings, when critically reframed, offer the potential to contradict and disrupt such notions.

Influence of individual relationships on emotional labour

The literature suggests educators' exercising and experiences of emotional labour are influenced by the individual relationships they have with families. As such, the purpose, practice and meaning of educators' emotional labour is constructed in accordance with the demands of each families' needs.

For example, Brown et al., depict preschool teachers' emotional labour as based upon understandings of parents' needs, how well they knew families, and the trust, 'strength and intimacy of their relationships' (2022: 8). Emotional displays provide each family with support to meet their needs or as a self-preservation strategy to hide educator uncertainty, thereby meeting family expectations through securing families' confidence in the educator (Brown et al., 2022; Lee and Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022).

Educators' emotional labour positioned as providing for the individual needs of families resonates with depictions of women having intuitive capacities for the physical and psychological needs of others based on their 'mothering' predispositions (Hochschild, 2012). Both Morris's (2018) interpretation of participant experiences of surface acting as a 'moral technique for helping those who are more vulnerable' (2018: 182), and Lee and Brotheridge's (2011) interpretation of the socially constructed 'nurture and care' nature of ECEC and educators socialisation to behave as such, detracts from ideas that such work is skilled, professional labour. Further implying the innate capacity for emotion work, Lee and Brotheridge described educators' emotional labour with families as 'spontaneous and emergent' rather than skilled practices of emotional labour.

Educators may also exercise and experience emotional labour with families in a professional and skilful way that not only supports families' needs, but also ensures collaborations and partnerships. Emotional labour strategies were generally found to be chosen based on the 'emotionally complex interactions in the moment' (Brown et al., 2022: 8), as seen in Quiñones et al., where 'the nature of communication between families and educators changed in light of the pandemic' (2022: 98). Morris (2018) also points out that educators need the skill to balance nurture-and-care with professional detachment while collaborating with families who may not view educators' professional skills as highly as their own parenting capacities. There is opportunity to explicitly reveal, through a critical feminist lens, how educators flexibly and skilfully navigate individual family needs in constantly changing circumstances, while also managing professional boundaries to support families.

Benefits of educators' emotional labour with families

How educators exercise emotional labour has educator-family relationship benefits. Lee and Brotheridge (2011) identified that the requirement for positive displays with parents (i.e., cheerful, welcoming, calm) through surface acting, over time led to deep acting with parents, with beneficial relationship outcomes. They also acknowledged that surface acting's 'faking' display was utilised least, potentially due to its ability 'to undermine their credibility in the parents' eyes' (2011: 414). Similar findings of surface acting's relational benefits through protecting the teacher-family relationship when genuine emotions would not, were found in Brown et al. (2022). Educators were also described as concealing and regulating their emotion displays to mitigate family concerns over the care of their child, such as masking their stress to protect themselves, appear competent and engage professionally with families (Morris, 2018). Educators working with families whose children have additional needs, for example, may utilise genuine expressions of empathy, but may surface act to benefit the relationship by saying 'the things parents want to hear because you don't want to hurt their feelings' (Morris, 2018: 122).

The descriptions and interpretations above construct the purpose of educators' emotional labour as being naturally accommodating, caring, and a provider for others' needs for relational benefits (Smith et al., 2017), thus entrenching this labour within existing maternalistic positionings. Brown et al. consistently extracted evidence such as 'ensuring families felt heard' (2022: 6) to make this point, rather than offer evidence that details the skill and professional practice teachers exercised through emotional labour to 'ensure families were heard'. The provision for families'

needs at the expense of their own occurs in Quiñones et al. (2022) and is evident in Morris's (2018) participants who exercise strategies that 'concealed', 'regulated' and 'masked' feelings. Quiñones et al. (2022) articulated that by providing additional emotional support and communication to families during the pandemic, educator–family relationships were improved and sustained. Such a finding indicates that educators acted in a way that served the requirements of the occupation.

Educators' skilful exercising of emotional labour practices to benefit educator–family relationships, tend to be only implicitly discussed. For example, Brown et al.'s identifying of preschool teachers as occasionally masking emotions to 'create space in the moment to sustain and bridge challenging relationships' (2022: 9) implies a level of skilful emotion regulation for strategic relational purposes. The skilful and effective use of 'hiding' correlates with Lee and Brotheridge's (2011) findings that 'hiding' tended to be exercised by more experienced and older educators. Through a critical lens, these descriptions implicitly refute naturalist notions of educators' work by inferring that educators employ nuanced skills to regulate their own emotions to mitigate conflict and manage complex relationships with families. Thus, through varied emotional labour strategies with different families and in different situations, educators can skilfully and professionally exercise emotional labour in their work with families.

Wellbeing implications of educators' emotional labour

Emotional labour may have positive wellbeing implications for educators that are implicitly evidenced as well as explicitly stated within the family investigations. Brown et al. (2022) cautioned against the idea that surface acting has only negative outcomes for educators as it supported the development of relationships or acted as a buffer for when educators did not yet know families or their child very well (Lee and Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018). Deep acting also facilitated educator interactions with families, despite requiring some effort that may in turn have wellbeing implications. The 'common ground, mutual understanding, and practical, situated interests with the parents' (Lee and Brotheridge, 2011: 415) through deep acting supported educators' work with families.

Potentially, surface and deep acting may offer short-term strategies to share information and build relationships that may eventually lead to more genuine emotional displays with families. As such, there may be short-term negative wellbeing implications, such as exhaustion and anxiety, due to the effort in exercising emotional labour in, and concern for, new or difficult relationships and contexts. However, these strategies may lead to better relational and professional outcomes over time that positively influence educator wellbeing in the long-term. For example, the professionally rewarding aspect of supporting families, their home-life challenges, parenting needs and collaborating on child development and learning (Morris, 2018) indicates the potential for professional satisfaction to positively influence educators' wellbeing. Positive wellbeing outcomes for educators may occur when emotional labour is thoughtfully and skilfully exercised to sustain quality educator–family interactions. Detailed evidence of the positive outcomes and skills used, as outlined in the preceding discussions, potentially offers a professional and skilful framing of educators' emotional labour, rejecting notions that this labour is inherent to educators' work.

However, emotional labour while working with families may also have deleterious wellbeing implications for educators, which may further contribute to the 'mothering' nature of giving to others' needs at the expense of oneself, adding to maternal positionings of educators' work. Educators who exercise emotional labour with families may experience emotional exhaustion and burnout in relation to this work (Lee and Brotheridge, 2011). Australian educators' emotional labour during the COVID-19 pandemic may have ensured they supported

families and achieved role-related responsibilities. However, educators experienced emotional distress and job burnout as a result (Quiñones et al., 2022). The extent to which exercising emotional labour with families influences educator wellbeing remains unknown. For example, it is unclear what wellbeing implications exist when emotional labour is exercised to support families during times of crisis, as seen in Quiñones et al., compared with emotional labour being exercised to collaborate with families.

Limitations of the educator-family emotional labour research

Emotional labour investigations lack a critical lens

Notwithstanding the value of the existing findings, limitations exist, particularly when investigations adopt interpretivist and/or social constructivist paradigms that reinforce naturalist framings of educators' emotional labour, keeping their effort and expertise hidden. Emotional labour investigations must extend beyond interpretivist and constructivist-only paradigms that may unintentionally contribute to the low social and political status of ECEC by not illuminating the professionalism within educators' emotional labour. Incorporating critical framings may identify not only educators' emotional labour, but also the constructs which keep such labour unacknowledged and entrenched in deficit positionings. Evidence suggests that the feminised stigma to emotional labour and ECEC as women's work inhibits men from entering the workforce (Nixon, 2009) at a time when workforce shortages could benefit from increased numbers of male employees. A critical feminist paradigm offers the potential to frame research findings in powerful ways that may challenge the deficit discourses of naturalism and gender pertaining to ECEC and emotional labour, thereby emancipating educators' emotional labour from its skill-less branding and engendered social stigma (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Emotional labour with families is under-researched

There is much scope to better understand emotional labour and ensuing wellbeing implications in the context of working with families in ECEC, as evidenced in the social work and nursing investigations (Delgado et al., 2017; Howard and Timmons, 2012; Lavee and Strier, 2018; Winter et al., 2019). There exists a paucity of research in this area, and the four explorations of educators' emotional labour with families are limited in scope. First, none of the four studies addressed, in depth, the individual and/or contextual influences on how, or why, emotional labour was exercised with families. Second, two studies (Brown et al. (2022) and Morris (2018)) investigated emotional labour with children, families and colleagues rather than specifically with families. Third, Quiñones et al.'s study (2022) explored educators' emotional labour within the context of a global pandemic, rather than the day-to-day of educators' emotional labour with families. Fourth, since the four studies generally focused on educators' exercising of emotional labour to support families, what wellbeing implications exist when emotional labour is exercised to collaborate with families remains unclear. There is scope for researchers to critically explore individual and contextual factors relative to the relationships with families in which emotional labour is being exercised within ECEC.

Inattention to educator–family barriers

The perception that emotion work with families is innate and is not labour requiring support means that little attention has been paid to three key structural and workplace barriers of such work. These

barriers limit emotionally safe spaces for educators to prepare for and engage in complex and sensitive conversations and collaborations with families (Almendingen et al., 2022; Harrison et al., 2019). First, time constraints and busy, noisy environments in which educators multitask heavy workloads pressure educators to engage in important, confidential discussions quickly, in disruptive environments. Such conditions may require surface acting to conceal stress, display positive expressions, mitigate conflict or reflect professionalism.

Second, limited access to and support from service leaders and colleagues impedes educator capacity to navigate complex family partnerships (Kambouri et al., 2022; Murphy et al., 2021). While evidence indicates that collaboration with leaders and colleagues supports educators' emotional labour (Brown et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2022), such opportunities remain scarce (Malhotra, 2022; Monrad, 2017). Staffing inconsistencies due to high turnover, rotating-rosters, part-time educators and/or absenteeism also inhibit the development, over time, of collaborative collegial relationships and strong, trusting educator–family partnerships (Kambouri et al., 2022; Murphy et al., 2021).

Third, insufficient or inaccessible pre-service training and ongoing professional development inhibit educators from acquiring requisite interpersonal, communication, and emotional skills necessary for on-the-job demands of educator–family partnerships (Boyd et al., 2020; Fenech and Ribarovski, 2020; Winship et al., 2021). Yet, families often need emotional support and reassurance that is highly skilled, challenging and sensitive work (Mikuska and Fairchild, 2020). Limited training may exist due to perceptions that women are natural 'carers', diminishing the need for skills and training critical for ECEC work (OECD, 2019). Many Australian and international educators articulate low confidence and feeling unprepared for these intense, on-the-job partnership demands (Kambouri et al., 2022; Murphy et al., 2021) and this may correlate with the limited representation of emotional labour in pre-service training programmes, policy and workplaces (Malhotra, 2022). Limited preparedness coupled with language barriers and difficulties relating to and supporting multiple perspectives and diverse families hinder educator understandings of family culture, socio-economic status, religion, values, beliefs, expectations and abilities (Hadley and Rouse, 2021; Wilson, 2016).

Wellbeing implications remain unknown

Since research on educators' emotional labour with families is limited, and at times may reinforce deficit maternalistic ideas, educator wellbeing implications remain unclear and require investigation. While educator–family relationship benefits of emotional labour exist (Lee and Brotheridge, 2011; Brown et al., 2022; Morris, 2018), whether these benefits have positive wellbeing implications for educators remains unclear. Quiñones et al. (2022) focused only on the negative wellbeing implications of emotional labour, and in the context of a global pandemic. The link between emotional labour and mental and physical health remains, overall, relatively unclear within the emotional labour scholarship (Gabriel et al., 2023). Further explorations of which strategies and whether emotional labour itself can mitigate or manage how this labour with families is experienced, as suggested in the social work and nursing investigations (Delgado et al., 2017; Howard and Timmons, 2012; Lavee and Strier, 2018; Winter et al., 2019), may help support educator wellbeing and retention.

Methodological limitations

The four family studies collected data either at one point in time (Lee and Brotheridge, 2011) or within a short period of time (Brown et al., 2022; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022). Thus, it

is impossible to consider the ‘transient nature of emotions’ and comprehend ‘why and when emotional labour is harmful or beneficial’ (Grandey et al., 2020: 154), both for professional and well-being purposes. Research exploring educators’ day-to-day emotional labour and how these may change or develop over the period of time in which educators and families usually interact (typically a 12-month duration of the child’s age-group attendance) requires methods that collect rich data at various time points across the period of the educator–family relationship. Critical analyses of such data may identify the skilful exercising of emotions in the relational context over the duration of the relationship.

Future longitudinal investigations of emotional labour, adopting a critical paradigm to challenge the maternalistic discourses that undermine such work as innately ‘women’s work’, could explore unfolding dynamics within and between relationships, interactions or events, and educators’ well-being, performance and job satisfaction changes over time. Moreover, they could have the added benefit of understanding these changes in context (Diefendorff et al., 2020). In-depth knowledge of educator–family relationship dynamics, the changes over the duration of the relationship and how frequency and variability of emotional labour impacts educator wellbeing and relational work, may enhance understandings about educator practices with families, and associated well-being implications.

Potential affordances of future critical investigations of emotional labour in educator–family partnerships

The limited ECEC investigations of emotional labour, especially in relation to educators’ working with families, and their inadvertent contributions to existing maternalistic positionings of educators’ work, keep emotional labour and its wellbeing implications relatively hidden and unacknowledged in policy, research, pre-service training programmes, and workplaces (Boyer et al., 2013; Colley, 2006; Fairchild and Mikuska, 2021; Malhotra, 2022; Monrad, 2017; Morris, 2018; Purper et al., 2023; Vincent and Braun, 2013; Zhang et al., 2020b). The long-held positioning of the work of ECEC professionals as predominantly women’s work (Colley, 2006; Fairchild and Mikuska, 2021; Malhotra, 2022; Monrad, 2017) maintains the idea that ‘mothering’ innately includes care, thereby rendering the highly professional skills necessary for emotional labour in ECEC invisible and exploitative (Malhotra, 2022; Mikuska and Fairchild, 2020; Monrad, 2017). Additionally, such notions entrench gender inequalities and social stigmas pertaining to ECEC work that position men as unsuitable workforce employees due to a lack of innate emotional capacities (Nixon, 2009; Payne, 2009). A critical component in identifying the specific skills within ECEC’s relational work is to separate skills from engendered notions that emotional labour within ECEC is innate for women.

While the review of existing emotional labour research in educator–family relationships made some reference to the skills necessary for such work, most often the reference to professional and skilled aspects of emotional labour were implicit, keeping the professional work of emotional labour invisible. Transparent evidence of the emotional labour skills educators utilise to meet requirements for partnering with families, through a critical feminist lens, may: (i) identify that this necessary labour is difficult, skilled work that warrants appropriate remuneration; (ii) illuminate wellbeing implications; (iii) identify and clarify that emotional labour is not merely innate but can be acquired and successfully utilised through training and support; and (iv) inform the planning and delivery of relevant pre-service and ongoing professional training (Malhotra, 2022; Vincent and Braun, 2013). Lines of enquiry that acknowledge educators’ skilled work can shift the rhetoric that ECEC work is natural and thus unskilled.

Pre-service training for social workers and nurses based on evidence of emotional labour practices, particularly with families in extenuating circumstances, has been shown to support workers' capacity to balance the emotions they moderate with the emotions they need for their work (Howard and Timmons, 2012; Lavee and Strier, 2018; Winter et al., 2019). Additionally, ongoing support for these professionals' reflections on their everyday emotions while working with families, at an individual, collegial and organisational level, has been highlighted as critical (Howard and Timmons, 2012; Lavee and Strier, 2018; Winter et al., 2019). These investigations are instructive for how educators might be better prepared and subsequently supported in the workplace. Acknowledging educators' emotional labour in their work with families as skilled labour could help address current workforce challenges. The development of government and provider workforce policies that identify and stipulate necessary supports for effective practices and partnerships with families may have positive wellbeing implications and mitigate educator turnover (Molyneux, 2021).

There is also scope to advance emotional labour theoretical conceptualisations and methodology, through a critical feminist lens that critiques, challenges and transforms current maternalistic discourses keeping emotional labour in ECEC invisible and devalued. Advancing emotional labour theory calls for longitudinal studies exploring emotion regulation as it develops within different relationships over time (Kariou et al., 2021; Diefendorff et al., 2020; Grandey et al., 2020). As such, research design recommendations include investigating employee experiences of emotional labour in and between events or interactions in their work over time through mixed-methods that include, for example, interviewing at multiple points-in-time, diary-based procedures, unobtrusive observations or experience-sampling (Diefendorff et al., 2020). Analysing experiences of emotional labour through a critical feminist lens may support understandings of how participants frame their emotional labour with families and whether accounts of experiences have gendered underpinnings.

Theoretical advancement requires methods that consider the contextual, relational, workplace and individual influences and their inter-relatedness on this labour (Grandey and Melloy, 2017). Furthermore, the advancement of emotional labour theoretically and methodologically requires researchers to compare, contrast and critically analyse emotional labour within various theoretical paradigms to 'not only test the framework, but compare theoretical ideas' (Grandey and Melloy, 2017: 417). Critical theories may challenge the status quo (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), such as a critical feminist theory that disrupts notions of maternalism keeping emotional labour invisible and undervalued.

In ECEC, where emotions may be more momentary, frequent and interchangeable, dependent on the social-cultural-organisational context and the relationship-based nature of the profession, new ways of conceptualising emotional labour may emerge. Hochschild (2012) acknowledged that the work involved in some professions, such as that of an educator, may not align with the dimensions of emotional labour as she conceptualised it. Thus, investigating emotional labour may lead to new conceptualisations according to the unique relationships and requirements of the profession. There is scope to re-conceptualise emotional labour for the ECEC context through multiple theoretical lenses that may acknowledge the professional, skilled work educators do with families, disrupt discourses that undervalue this work and support workforce wellbeing challenges. As such, social perceptions of educators' work and skills may improve, reinforcing the importance of pre-service and ongoing training and bridging the gender gap within the workforce (OECD, 2019).

Conclusion

This article draws attention to both the limited evidence on educators' emotional labour while working with families, which remains implicit, and the critical perspective needed for future research to disrupt the gendered and maternal discourses devaluing educators' emotion practices.

Associated implications for educators' wellbeing thus remain unclear. The limited and often-times implicit interpretations of educators' emotion skills necessary for working with families fails to identify emotional labour as a core professional component in ECEC's relational demands, rendering the necessary skills invisible. Explicitly illuminating the complex skills and supports required to navigate complex relational engagements in flexible and nuanced ways may shift maternalistic rhetoric and unveil educator wellbeing implications.

Acknowledging the use of emotions and the exercising of emotional labour should not diminish educators' professionalism, but rather advocate for the skilled complexity of the work educators do with families and shift outdated maternalistic discourses dominating ECEC. While these views on educators' work remain socially entrenched in Australia and elsewhere, 'the naturalisation of their work undermines their struggle for professional status' (Ailwood, 2007: 162), keeping remuneration low (Fairchild and Mikuska, 2021; Malhotra, 2022) and contributing to ongoing workforce turnover and attrition challenges. Research-based evidence that acknowledges educators' emotional labour when working with families, particularly through a theoretically critical feminist lens, may inform initiatives intended to address the current international workforce crisis. Doing so requires providing transparency of why and how educators' work and wellbeing are intertwined, how maternalistic discourses socially and politically diminish educators' work and wellbeing, and where support is needed. Initiatives based on a multi-theoretical, critical inquiry of educators' practice-based experiences will be better positioned for successfully shifting antiquated notions around the work of educators, understanding family partnerships work through the lens of emotional labour and sustaining high-quality ECEC (Cumming et al., 2020).

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Author biography

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Dr Tina Stratigos is a lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the University of Sydney. She is an early childhood teacher with experience in early childhood settings, the early years of primary school, and out of school hours services. Tina is interested in the learning and development of infants and toddlers in early childhood settings, and the preparation of early childhood teachers to work with this age group.

Appendix I: Summary table of ECEC emotional labour literature review articles

Authors	Title	Study Participants	Country
Quantitative studies: 12			
1. Hong et al. (2022)	Relationship between emotional labor and mental health in preschool teachers: Mediation of psychological capital	ECTs	China
2. *Lee and Brotheridge (2011)	Words from the heart speak to the heart: A study of deep acting, faking and hiding among child care workers	Mixed level (NS)	Canada
3. Ma et al. (2020)	Kindergarten teachers' mindfulness in teaching and burnout: The mediating role of emotional labor	Mixed-level college degree or below (27.4%) Bachelors (67.1%) Master's (5.5%)	China
4. Peng et al. (2019)	Emotional labor strategies and job burnout in preschool teachers: Psychological capital as a mediator and moderator	ECTs	China
5. Xie et al. (2022b)	The relationship between Chinese teachers' emotional labor, teaching efficacy, and young children's social-emotional development and learning	Mixed-level ECE degree: Yes (79.8%) No (20.2%)	China
6. Xie et al. (2022a)	Emotional labor and professional identity in Chinese early childhood teachers: The gendered moderation models	Mixed-level ECE degree: Yes (Female = 80.1%) (Male = 66.3%) No (Female = 19.9%) (Male = 33.7%)	China
7. Yin et al. (2022)	Emotional Labour Matters For Kindergarten Teachers: An examination of the antecedents and consequences	ECTs	Hong Kong
8. Zhang et al. (2020b)	Emotional labor among early	Mixed-level diploma (38.1%),	China

(continued)

Appendix 1. Continued.

Authors	Title	Study Participants	Country
9. Fu (2015)	childhood teachers: Frequency, antecedents, and consequences The effect of emotional labor on job involvement in preschool teachers: Verifying the mediating effect of psychological capital	degree (40.8%), secondary school qualification (17.4%) ECTs	Taiwan
10. Zheng et al. (2022)	Do servant leadership and emotional labor matter for kindergarten teachers' organizational commitment and intention to leave?	ECTs	China
11. Gu and Wang (2023)	Why and when surface acting interferes with family functioning: The role of psychological detachment and family-supportive supervisor behaviors	ECTs	China
12. Ntim et al. (2023)	Early childhood educators' emotional labor and burnout in an emerging economy: The mediating roles of affective states	Mixed level (diploma and higher NS)	Ghana
Qualitative studies: 14			
1. Boyer et al. (2013)	The nursery workspace, emotional labour and contested understandings of commoditised childcare in the contemporary UK	NS	England
2. Cooper (2017)	Reframing assessment: Reconceptualising relationships and acknowledging emotional labour	ECTs	New Zealand
3. Fairchild and Mikuska (2021)	Emotional labor, ordinary affects, and the early childhood education and care worker	Mixed level (NS)	England
4. Hedlin et al. (2019)	Too much, too little: Preschool teachers' perceptions of the boundaries of adequate touching	ECTs	Sweden
5. Hong and Zhang (2019)	Early childhood teachers' emotional labor: A cross-cultural qualitative study in China and Norway	ECTs	China and Norway
6. Jena-Crottet (2017)	Early childhood teachers' emotional labour	ECTs	New Zealand

(continued)

Appendix I. Continued.

Authors	Title	Study Participants	Country
7. Larkin (2021) (Master's thesis)	Emotional labor: Teachers' understandings of their emotional lives in preschool classrooms	ECTs	USA
8. Malhotra (2022)	'Not everyone can do this': Childcare context and the practice of skill in emotional labor	Mixed level (NS)	USA
9. Mikuska and Fairchild (2020)	Working with theories to explore embodied and recognized emotional labor in English early childhood education and care	Mixed level (NS)	England
10. Monrad (2017)	Emotional labour and governmentality: Productive power in childcare	Mixed level (15 of 17 were pedagogue-qualified with 3–3.5 years professional education in Denmark; 2 were unskilled)	Denmark
11. Morris (2021)	Love as an act of resistance: Ethical subversion in early childhood professional practice in England	ECTs	England
12. *Morris (2018)	'We don't leave our emotions at the nursery door': Lived experiences of emotional labour in early years professional practice	ECTs	England
13. Vincent and Braun (2013)	Being 'fun' at work: Emotional labour, class, gender and childcare	Students (UK level 2 and 3 courses)	England
14. Zhang et al. (2020a)	Chinese preschool teachers' emotional labor and regulation strategies	ECTs	China
Mixed-method studies: 4 (5 papers)			
focus: Children only = 2 family and children = 2 **=K-12 teachers inclusive			
1. **Brown et al. (2014)	United States teachers' emotional labor and professional identities	K-12 teachers inclusive/ECTs	USA
2a. Brown et al. (2018) 2b. *Brown et al. (2022)	Emotions matter: The moderating role of emotional labour on preschool teacher and children interactions Preschool teachers' emotional acting and school-based interactions	Refers to educators and teachers, inclusive of assistant teachers 35% four-year degree; 29% two-year degree; 22% high school; 27 lead and assistant teachers: high school = 3; 2-year college = 8; 4-year college = 9; Masters degree = 6	USA USA
3. Colley (2006)	Learning to labour with feeling: Class, gender and emotion in childcare education and training Australian early childhood	Employed students (diploma-enrolled) Mixed level (NS)	England Australia

(continued)

Appendix 1. Continued.

Authors	Title	Study Participants	Country
4. *Quiñones et al. (2022)*	educators' emotional support to families and children during COVID-19 pandemic. In: Saracho ON (ed.) <i>Contemporary Perspectives on Research on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Early Childhood Education</i>		
Conceptual Papers: 2			
1. Purper et al. (2023)	Exploring the challenge of teachers' emotional labor in early childhood settings	Mixed level	USA
2. Lam et al. (2016)	Early childhood teachers coping with change: The roles of emotional intelligence, emotional labour and career adaptability. In: Martin TV (ed.) <i>Career Development: Theories, Practices and Challenges</i>	ECTs	Hong Kong

Note: * = Studies with families; Papers with** = studies of K-12 teachers inclusive; NS = not specified; ECT = early childhood teacher (includes preschool and kindergarten); Mixed level = ECTs, Diploma and Certificate III; 32 papers in total = 30 empirical studies + 2 conceptual papers.

Postscript

Most Recent Emotional Labour Investigations in ECEC

Since publishing Dickerson et al., (2024a) 30 additional publications emerged in my continued reviewing of the literature seen in the table in Appendix A. As found in Dickerson et al., (2024a), most recent investigations tend to be quantitative ($n=24$) with half of these emerging from the Chinese context ($n=12$) (includes one from Hong Kong). The remaining quantitative studies ($n=12$) emerged from Ghana ($n=2$); Australia ($n=1$); Thailand ($n=1$); New Zealand ($n=1$); United Arab Emirates ($n=2$); and South Korea ($n=5$). One paper was a qualitative investigation from the United Kingdom, and one was the qualitative paper from a mixed method investigation from the United States. Three papers were conceptual publications from England, China and Hong Kong respectively. One unpublished Masters-level thesis exploring ECTs' emotional labour with colleagues in Australian contexts was also located. Furthermore, while some studies included limited emotional labour results pertaining to educators' work with families (Annor et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2022; Zheng, Luo, et al., 2024), with one study addressing emotional labour in K-12 teachers' work with children, colleagues and families (Brown et al., 2023), none focus on emotional labour in educators' work with families in birth-to-five contexts exclusively. What follows is a broad overview of what the rise in investigations in ECEC are highlighting in relation to emotional labour.

The spike in investigations exploring emotional labour reflects a welcome, increased interest in the complex relational work early childhood educators undertake in their contexts and the wellbeing impact of such work. Increased attention to emotional labour has potentially emerged due to the post-Covid-19 pandemic landscape wherein educators felt the impact of the heightened pressures and stressors they faced as essential workers during the pandemic years (Berger et al., 2022; Eadie et al., 2022; Keary et al., 2022; McFarland et al., 2022; Saracho, 2022; Swigonski et al., 2021). Moreover, the increase likely pertains to

longstanding wellbeing challenges within the profession causing turnover (Farewell et al., 2023; Fenech et al., 2021; McMullen et al., 2020; Thorpe et al., 2020). Thus, as highlighted in Dickerson et al., (2024a) attention to emotional labour tends, still, to be predominantly focussed on emotional labour's negative wellbeing impact for educators. This negative focus is evident in the statistical measures of emotional labour's exhaustion (Annor et al., 2023; Ntim et al., 2023b; Zheng, Fu, et al., 2024; Zheng, Luo, et al., 2024) and burnout (Hwang, 2010; Kim et al., 2021; Ntim et al., 2023b; Oh & Kim, 2020; Ren & Li, 2023; Yin et al., 2019). Investigations are, however, also increasingly interested in considering the positive effects of emotional labour and its surface and deep acting and genuine expression components in relation to Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) Job Demands-Resources model (Huang & Zhou, 2024; Ntim et al., 2023b; Zheng, Fu, et al., 2024) and Hobfoll's (1989) Theory of Conservation of Resources (Ntim et al., 2024; Qi et al., 2017; Ren & Li, 2023).

Moving Beyond the Individual

Dickerson et al., (2024a) highlighted a need for investigations of emotional labour in ECEC to focus beyond the individual factors. Some recent investigations have explored contextual demands and resources, and individual resources such as psychological capital as potential factors involved in emotional labour's wellbeing impacts (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Huang & Zhou, 2024; Ming & Pek, 2024; Oh & Kim, 2020; S. Sun et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Findings reveal, for example, that long work hours may impact educators' wellbeing negatively by causing exhaustion which is then further compounded by effortful emotional labour (Carey & Sutton, 2024). Others have identified that emotional demands potentially appear as professional challenges that educators feel motivated to resolve through emotional labour which possibly results in job satisfaction (Zheng, Fu, et al., 2024). It has also been suggested that emotions might be a resource for educators to employ through emotional labour to support children's social-emotional development (Zheng, Luo, et al., 2024). The

evidence presented here highlights emotional labour's negative and positive impacts on educator wellbeing are more complex than simply emotional labour is negative (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Hodgkins et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

Towards Affordances of Emotional Labour

Recent investigations are beginning to reveal emotional labour's professional and wellbeing affordances (Dickerson et al., 2024a). These investigations are actively exploring and measuring what emotional labour means for educators and their work and although not explicitly argued, their findings show that such labour is potentially positive and useful in educators' work (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). For example, deep acting has been found to be linked to strong teacher identity and results in a sense of accomplishment and personal growth (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Ntim et al., 2023a; Ntim et al., 2023b). Evidence shows emotional labour to be a mediator of burnout if mindfulness is used to support and sustain deep acting and genuine expressions (Ma et al., 2020). Furthermore, deep acting improves educators' work engagement (Huang & Zhou, 2024; Zeng et al., 2025) while genuine expressions enhance teaching efficacy and job dedication (Zhang et al., 2024). Such positive outcomes for educators potentially improve their wellbeing, but also their pedagogical practices and are important findings given that emotional labour is a critical, unavoidable component of educators' relational work. Despite these positive findings, however, this body of research still tends to position surface acting as effortful, draining and thus only negative for wellbeing. Distinguishing between *when* and *why* emotional labour's strategies are a demand or a resource is therefore significant for understanding the utilisation of each strategy and its professional and wellbeing impacts, particularly beyond individual levels (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Huang & Zhou, 2024).

Limitations in Investigations Remain

The potential professional and wellbeing affordances of emotional labour in educators' relational work are, however, still not yet consistently sought out. Dickerson et al. (2024a) revealed that consistent and explicit evidence that dismantles negative positionings of emotional labour and seeks the affordances of such labour are critical. As such, investigations still face similar limitations as detailed in Dickerson et al. (2024a). Research tends to explore emotional labour broadly across relationships so that nuanced understandings of emotional labour and its wellbeing impact in relation to educators' work with families are limited. Many of the 30 recent investigations within Appendix A also only capture data on preschool or kindergarten teachers who work with children 3-years-or-older rather than with children birth-to-five-years, and tend to draw on the school teaching literature, which while relevant, is a very different context than that of birth-to-five ECEC. Furthermore, understanding the emotional labour-wellbeing relationship through a bioecological lens that considers multi-level factors at play in early childhood contexts and according to Cumming and Wong's (2019, p. 277) ethical wellbeing dimension –that “responsibility [for wellbeing] is shared between educators... systems and structures”– are also absent. Moreover, investigations that focus on the detrimental impacts of a necessary and unavoidable component of educators' work position emotional labour as a problem to be fixed, reinforce negative perceptions of this work, and potentially miss a deeper understanding of such work and its outcomes.

Nuanced understandings of emotional labour in ECEC, however, would benefit from longitudinal, qualitative or mixed-method investigations (Gabriel et al., 2023), and as argued in Dickerson et al. (2024a) a critical stance with educator perspectives over time to consider contextual influences on emotional labour and wellbeing. Explorations that focus on educators' work in specific relationships (Diefendorff et al., 2020; Gabriel et al., 2023;

Grandey et al., 2020) rather than broadly across all relationships, are also needed. Such strategies are particularly important for two reasons. First, they can shift deficit perceptions of such work as unskilled and only negative for wellbeing by extracting the specific skills and purposes of such labour. Second, they are necessary to provide researchers, pre-service education providers, employers and policymakers with practice-based evidence for resourcing and supporting specific components of educators' relational work that might sustain them throughout their careers.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout this doctoral journey, empirical investigations on various emotion strategies pertaining to educators' work have emerged and indicate the complex, varied emotional skills these professionals utilise in their work. Explorations have looked at, for example, educators' skills in or use of empathy (Hodgkins, 2022, 2024; Hodgkins et al., 2023), joy (Sloan, 2025), mindful self-compassion (O'Hara-Gregan, 2024), positive emotions (Tatalović Vorkapić & Velan, 2023), laughter (Myrann, 2023), emotion capital (Andrew, 2015; Sloan, 2025), and emotional intelligence (Xie et al., 2024). Deep explorations and articulations of this emerging research were beyond the scope of this doctoral study but indicates increasing attention to this area of educators' work. It is reassuring that such a focus is rapidly emerging and educators' emotions – positive or otherwise – are being acknowledged as powerful enactments of professional practice with children and families.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In Chapter One I alluded to my experience as an early childhood teacher who has worked with children, families, and colleagues in ECEC contexts –in Australia and elsewhere. I noted that the internal relational components of my work were largely unacknowledged, including the wellbeing impact that work had on me. As such, in approaching this doctoral journey about emotional labour, I wondered: *how could I expose this work so that it might be acknowledged and understood by educators, employers, training providers, policymakers and at wider socio-political levels; and how can educators undertaking such work be seen, supported and sustained in their relational work?*

It was such thoughts, while simultaneously looking at the knowledge, theoretical and methodological gaps and the positioning of emotional labour theory in the literature, as discussed in Dickerson et al. (2024a), that informed the decision to undertake a mixed-method longitudinal study. In Dickerson et al. (2024a) I also argued that emotional labour may have potential professional and wellbeing affordances, and that how emotional labour theory is framed within investigations is critical for challenging deficit positionings and articulations of this inherent work, particularly in a female dominated profession such as ECEC.

This chapter details my position as a researcher, the theoretical framings I selected for this research project, the research purpose, questions, design and methodology, and lastly ethical approval and considerations. The methodology unfolds according to the two components of the research project: the quantitative component that formed the broad foundation upon which the second, qualitative component was based. Given that this study disseminated findings through publication there may be overlap or repetition of what is

written in this chapter across the publications despite best efforts to minimise such occurrences.

Researcher Position

I recognise that it is important to acknowledge and identify the role of the researcher within a research study, due to the experiences and beliefs the researcher may bring to the project, both intentionally and unintentionally. While a researcher may utilise reflexivity and collaboration with mentors, supervisors or research colleagues to limit bias and challenge thinking, the subjectivity of the researcher is not absent and often contributes to the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022b; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). As such, it is through my own subjective experiences that I approach and undertake this research. Feminist scholars argue that subjectivity can be an advantage but must be acknowledged and requires ongoing reflexivity that limits bias by perpetually questioning how subjectivity shapes and influences the research (Harding, 1991; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

I entered this project as I exited a 12-year teaching career consisting of teaching experience in Australian and Singaporean early childhood contexts, and in South Korean elementary school contexts. Adding to that global diversity, I was born and raised in South Africa, where I completed a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Psychology. I now call Australia home where many years ago I completed my Masters of Teaching in Early Childhood. I believe that the experiences we encounter in life shape us, but that we, also, shape experiences by bringing our knowledge of the life encounters we have had to the new spaces and situations we find ourselves in. It was in this way that I approached my teaching: respectful of the new experience and space, willing to learn and grow, and willing to shape

and re-shape my own teaching experience and teaching identity as positively as possible, for positive professional outcomes.

During my teaching career I became aware that a large component of my work included unseen and unacknowledged relational work, especially in the early childhood contexts. I became particularly interested in the work I did with families because this work was central to the work I did with children and was often more challenging and sensitive than working with children and colleagues. At the early stage of this research journey, I did not identify that this ‘other’ work with families was ‘emotional labour.’ Instead, I was thinking about the work I did with families –that all educators do with families– as ‘pastoral work’ or a type of counselling that was given and which involved intense and ongoing interactions with families, often of a sensitive, personal nature. It was these experiences and my work pertaining to such experiences, and the outcomes from this work, that I wanted to understand.

The motivation to explore this work came from experience-based understandings that such work was complex and sometimes difficult, because it related to families’ intense love and commitment to their child, how they raised their child, and myriad factors shaping their lives and my working context. Consequently, my experiences of working with families to ensure child-related outcomes included deep thought and preparation, often beyond my working day and were important to me. I recognised too that while I experienced this work as cognitively and emotionally intense –during my interactions with families but also before and after these interactions– it could also be rewarding. I discovered and learnt much of this work with families on the job, often without access to experienced colleagues or leaders and without specific training on this ‘other’ internal, emotional work.

I started to recognise that since this relational work was unseen, its impact on me, and often children and families, and the skill and effort involved were also unseen and therefore

incapable of being effectively supported. I came to consider that such invisibility likely contributed to the well-known and persistent feelings early childhood educators had of being undervalued (Jovanovic, 2013; Osgood, 2012), which in turn, likely contributed to the workforce wellbeing challenges. Early childhood educators are perceived as nurturing and caring, and often the expertise, skill, intentionality, and effort in their pedagogical and relational practices are overlooked, particularly at socio-political levels. I had long reflected that this might be because the relational, emotional components of the work are invisible and unarticulated, even for educators themselves. For me, this part of the work was fundamental to working with children and their families in ECEC because without relationships, positive child outcomes are very difficult to achieve. I suspected, however, that professional relationships that achieve positive child outcomes are difficult to establish and maintain if educators, who feel undervalued, have poor wellbeing and this thinking felt important to me.

As an ECEC teacher and leader, I wanted other leaders, teachers, and educators to know about and value this hidden work, to potentially be taught and supported in such work. These thoughts galvanised an energy within me to expose this work in professional language. I wanted to reveal its measurability and observability, I wanted to define it in black-and-white by identifying core components, influences, and outcomes of the work. I wanted to do so by not by adding further assessment-related burden on educators, nor by commodifying their emotional labour so that it can sold by ECEC business owners to paying parents. I wanted it to be accepted as real and seen. I wanted it to be marked as a valuable, professional component of educators' work.

A pragmatic stance to this investigation of an under-explored area of educators' work sought to make emotional labour and its associated wellbeing impacts visible so they can be resourced and supported and to acknowledge the skill and professional value of this work through the voice of the educator. Sandra Harding's (1991) assertions that approaching

research with a problem experienced by women leads to research that is *for* women, is pertinent here. Reflecting on Harding's perspectives, such research can, in turn, provide insights and policy solutions that are beneficial *for* women and drive social justice and change.

I wanted practical solutions through research practices that would deliver knowledge that empowers educators, shift their undeserving poor professional status, and identify ways to sustain their wellbeing in this relational work. I wanted practice-based evidence and understandings of educators' day-to-day relational work and of the resources and supports necessary for emotional labour in working with families. I believed that such evidence could contribute to workplace resourcing strategies; the development of training programs; and supporting regulatory authorities and governments to better understand this work and its associated wellbeing implications. Thinking about how I could deliver such evidence of educators' emotional labour and wellbeing experiences, and with guidance from my supervisors, decisions for this doctoral study's theoretical approaches and methods were made.

Theoretical Framings

This investigation adopted a critical feminist framing of emotional labour theory to challenge discourses of such labour as innate for women based on beliefs that care and emotion work are naturally feminised, rather than professional, traits. I drew from feminist arguments to support me to unveil knowledge and power pertaining to educators' emotional labour (Harding, 1991; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Additionally, such a lens offers the opportunity to investigate emotional labour through a more positive perspective that may potentially illuminate affordances of this labour. Furthermore, the investigation drew upon additional theoretical frameworks, discussed at various junctures within the publications of this thesis. For example, Bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) stems from

developmental psychology and guided understandings of emotional labour and its wellbeing implications at individual, family, service, sector and broader socio-cultural-economic levels across time. Dickerson et al. (2024b) in Chapter Four presents survey results that identified interconnected ecological factors influenced educators' emotional labour. Resultingly, the ecological perspective to emotional labour was intentionally carried through into the qualitative component and is therefore unpacked in the qualitative methods section in this chapter and again in Chapters Four, Six, Seven and Eight. A mixed theoretical approach is one of the contributions of this research project. The sections that follow unpack emotional labour theory and the critical feminist lens that framed emotional labour theory in this study.

A Critical Feminist Framing

A long-held view that ECEC work comes naturally to women is due to the belief that women have an innate ability to care, nurture, and mother children (Ailwood, 2007), with an intuitive capacity for emotions (Hochschild, 1983/2012; Malhotra, 2022). Consequently, emotional labour remains professionally disregarded and under compensated, and men marginalised from the workforce (Cooke et al., 2023; Taggart, 2011). Hochschild (1983/2012, p. 112) unveiled in her 1980s investigations of emotional labour that women “are thought to manage expression and feeling not only better but more often than men do” alluding to the internal, natural predispositions in women for emotion work. Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp's (2013) framing of emotional labour theory similarly illuminates the socially constructed nature of emotional labour, where emotional rules for men and women are different. Hochschild wrote that women bear the burden of having to offer service by being nice, while men are expected to master aggression, which positions women in a weaker, subordinate position, more easily exploited. Being nice has long been contested in ECEC with scholars (for example, Cooper et al., 2023; Davis & Dunn, 2018; Hodgkins,

2024; Langford, 2019) evidencing that educators are more than “nice ladies who love children” (Stonehouse, 1989, p. 61).

The historical perception of women in ECEC as nice ladies where the “rigour and sophistication...characteristic of the...work” remains absent from professional discourses, society, and political agendas (Stonehouse, 1989, p. 67) has left oppressive discourses unchallenged. A critical feminist lens, however, provides scope to re-position educators’ emotional labour away from deficit, naturalistic discourses by disrupting and shifting outdated ideologies that inadvertently keep such labour positioned as a “non-skill” (Bolton, 2004, p. 3) that is invisible and under-valued. A critical feminist framing enables the researcher to engage in research *with* women in such a way that the socio-political perceptions of women’s work can be questioned by evidence that generates new ways of perceiving emotional labour (Harding, 1991). Maternalistic discourses have perpetually entrenched professions that tend to be dominated by women—such as nursing, social work, teaching, ECEC, and aged and disability care work—in deficit positionings that often depict this labour and its ensuing expertise as unskilled (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Malhotra, 2022; Osgood, 2006).

Positionings such as this make it necessary to apply critical framings to challenge such discourses. Concurring that emotional labour is entrenched in maternalistic discourses, Osgood (2012) used feminist post-structuralism to expose how such labour is both expected and undervalued at regulatory levels. Osgood’s study on educator professionalism found that educators perceived emotional labour as being poorly valued and relegated as unskilled work yet was also central to their work. Resultingly, educators enacted emotional labour both in ways that reinforced and resisted deficit discourses of such labour revealing the complexities of such labour in ECEC. Osgood’s participant descriptions were, for example, “suggestive of emotional labour as scripted performance...” by women who were “channelled into caring

professions through...socialisation and societal expectations” (p. 135; p. 137). Osgood’s feminist post-structuralism, however, provided an alternative perspective of educators’ emotion in their professional context. As such, emotional labour was, contrastingly, also described in ways that revealed the ways in which “women manage and deploy that emotional capital in their professional lives...[by] exercising agency and a large degree of autonomy” (p. 137).

The contribution of a critical feminist lens in this doctoral investigation is its challenging to maternalistic positionings of educators’ emotional labour as women’s work and emotional labour theory’s deficit positioning that such work is only costly to wellbeing. Resultingly, such a framing seeks to draw out evidence that dismantles long-held perceptions of women as naturally more capable of such labour compared to men (Ailwood, 2007; Hochschild, 1983/2012) and to evidence educators’ emotional labour as skilled, professional work (Osgood, 2010). In doing so, it is hoped that emotional labour can instead, reveal potential professional and wellbeing affordances that may expand upon existing feminist calls for such labour to be accepted, and supported, at socio-political levels as fundamental for educators’ professional practices (Langford, 2019; Sevenhuijsen, 1998).

The critical feminist framing of emotional labour theory in this doctoral study draws from the feminist Patti Lather (1992; 2017, p. 83) who argued that critical feminist research is research *with* women seeking to “empower, through empirical research designs... both researcher and researched... to become, in the words of feminist poet-singer, Cris Williamson, *‘the changer and the changed.’*” Such research practices have the potential to illuminate and challenge “the invisibility and distortion of women’s experiences” (Lather, 2017, p. 83) through the voices of educators themselves. As such, critical feminist research approaches may empower educators to recognise, value, and strengthen their emotional labour in their work with families, further contributing to the dismantling of deficit discourses

(Lather, 1992). Enabling research participants to share their experiences such that educators may be empowered, requires an ethic of care which “involves [the researcher] forming appropriate supportive relationships with research participants... and representing the accounts...of participants in ways that do not fuel existing stereotypes” (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, p. 72). In this way, educators may be liberated from antiquated perceptions about their skills. The skills and affordances associated with their professional exercising of emotional labour in their relational work in ECEC can, instead, be recognised in themselves but also at socio-political levels (Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2012; Sevenhuijsen, 1998).

Finally, a critical feminist lens sought to avoid the limitations associated with some emotional labour investigations in ECEC—as discussed in Dickerson et al. (2024a) in Chapter Two. The limitation of investigations that adopted only constructivist or interpretivist paradigms is that they tend towards resisting a “critical spirit” (Crotty, 2020, p. 58). In doing so, emotional labour is reinforced as undertaken according to occupational rules for others, with negative wellbeing impacts for the employee. Furthermore, emotional labour exercised as such positions the employee as someone lacking agency; merely a compliant rule follower acting out emotions to please others. Similarly, Cooke et al., (2023, p. 18) highlighted limitations of ECEC emotional labour studies that “do not provide the embodied and affective insights” necessary for exposing, for example, the energy in juggling increasing regulatory expectations and emotional labour, leaving educators feeling invisible and, thus, demoralised. To avoid such limitations a critical feminist approach to this doctoral investigation enabled researcher-participant co-construction of knowledge and meaning pertaining to educators’ emotional labour and wellbeing (Hesse-Biber, 2010). As Harding (1991) argued, approaching research from the position of women to explore women’s experiences—told by them—can bring forth new questions and insights that shift deficit socio-political beliefs which traditional frameworks may overlook. Such an approach seeks

out the professional, complex skills in that labour to challenge and disrupt outdated ideologies about women's work in ECEC (Boler & Zembylas, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Design

To address the invisibility of educators' emotional labour in their work, particularly with families, and debunk socio-political notions that such work is innate and skill-less, I selected a mixed-method longitudinal research design. This research design aimed to identify emotional labour in educators' work with families, and the wellbeing impacts of such labour. In particular, I sought to illuminate whether emotional labour in educators' work was skilled work, and if so, to illuminate how and why it is skilled work. Additionally, I sought to reveal how and why emotional labour was exercised and impacted wellbeing. As such, I hoped that through these methods, educators might be liberated from discourses that disempower the workforce and undervalues their skilled emotional labour would emerge. Furthermore, my research design sought to address some of the methodological and theoretical limitations within ECEC investigations of educators' emotional labour, specifically with families, that keeps such work invisible, as reported in Dickerson et al. (2024a). As such, my selected research design sought to respond to three research questions:

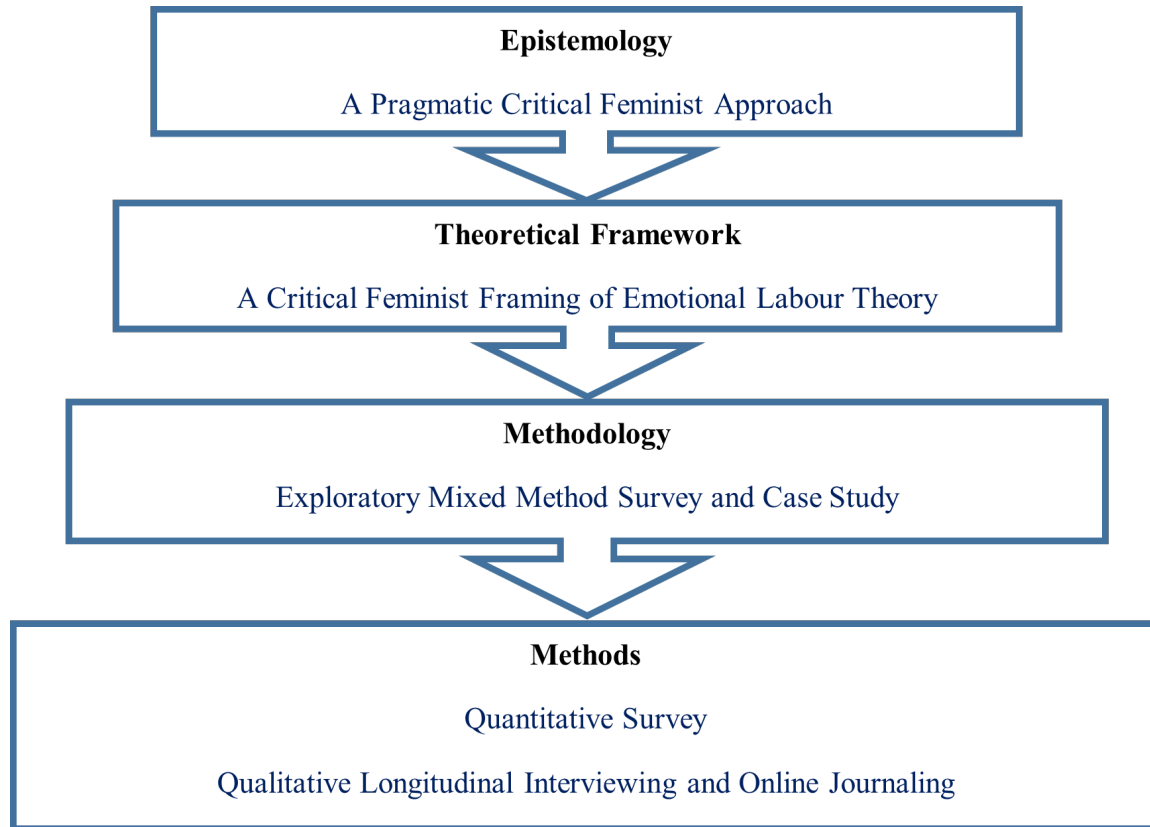
1. How do educators exercise emotional labour in their efforts to partner with families in early childhood education and care contexts?
2. What influences educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families?
3. What are educators' wellbeing experiences of exercising emotional labour in their work with families?

A mixed-method design allowed for an under-explored, complex topic to be investigated from multiple perspectives by bringing together the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Together, these approaches allowed for in-depth meaning-making and understandings (Hesse-Biber, 2010) that generated knowledge grounded in human experience (Nowell et al., 2017). Mixed-method approaches can capture nuanced insights within the data that produces rigorous findings (Creswell, 2015) and increases their credibility (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

Drawing on Crotty (2020), Figure 2 illustrates the four elements of the study's research design. The following sections unpack the two components of the mixed-method longitudinal study design undertaken in this doctoral investigation: a quantitative component comprising of the *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale* survey, followed by a qualitative component comprising synchronous in-depth interviewing and journaling over 12-months. While component one formed the groundwork upon which component two was developed, both components were complimentary and respectively provided the cross-sectional snapshot and in-depth case study findings of educators' emotional labour and wellbeing experiences while working with families.

Figure 2

The Four Elements in this Research Design, as Developed from Crotty (2020, p. 4)



Quantitative Method: The Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale Survey

Survey Rationale

There were five rationales for utilising a survey as the initial phase of data collection in this doctoral investigation. First, only one study (Quiñones et al., 2022) had explored emotional labour in educators' work with families in the Australian ECEC context, but during the Covid-19 pandemic and not through an emotional labour survey. Second, an existing tool used for exploring American K-12 teachers' emotional labour (Brown, 2011) could be modified for educators' work with families in Australian ECEC contexts to address this research study's questions. Third, survey findings could provide broadbrush understandings of Australian educators' emotional labour and associated wellbeing impacts in their work with families not yet identified. Fourth, a survey would enable the recruitment for the second, qualitative component of this doctoral study. Through the survey, respondents would provide individual and contextual information that supported the recruitment of a diverse range of case study participants. Last and fifth, survey responses pertaining to the qualitative participants would support in-depth qualitative data collection on the individual, relational, contextual, and workplace factors pertaining to participants' emotional labour and wellbeing in their work with families.

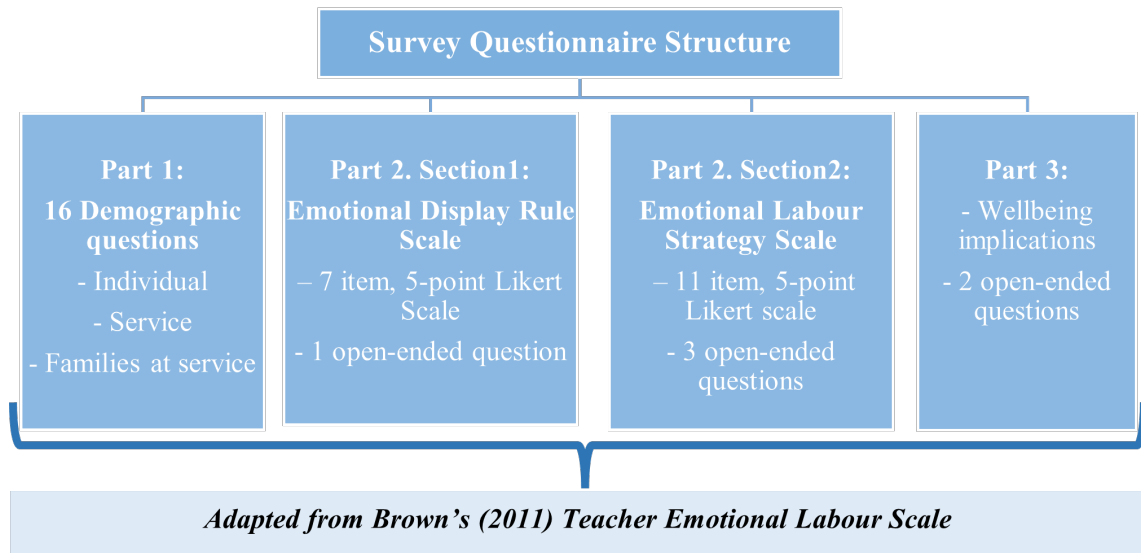
Adaptations and Development of the Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale Survey

The *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Survey Scale* used in the questionnaire (Appendix B) was adapted from Dr Elizabeth Brown's (2011) *The Emotional Labor of Teaching Scale* (TELTS). Permission (Appendix C) from Dr Brown was sought prior to adapting the TELTS. The TELTS is an 18-item, 5-point Likert scale comprising items from the original *Emotional Labor Scale* (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) and the *Emotional*

Labor Strategy Scale (Diefendorff et al., 2005), with three additional open-ended questions. Brown's (2011) scale was designed primarily for teachers working in K-12 school settings in the United States and later with 3-5 year old children (Brown et al., 2018). Although Çukur's (2009) earlier *Teacher Emotional Labour Scale* (TELS) for Turkish teachers had been developed, Brown (2011) established an English version due to translation challenges from Turkish to English that compromised the comprehension of the survey items. Yin's (2012) *Teacher Emotional Labour Strategy Scale* (TELSS) was adapted for primary and secondary teachers in the Chinese context and has been used in research with preschool and kindergarten teachers in China (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Xie, Wu, et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2022). Given the differences in the work of educators in ECEC, it seemed critical to align a scale specific for ECEC in Australia and for educators' work with families.

For this study, a scale suitable for the diverse birth-to-five service settings that Australia's early childhood teacher-qualified and vocationally-trained educators worked in was necessary. The content validity of the adaptations was discussed and agreed upon by me and both supervisors in this research project, collectively having substantial experience as early childhood teachers and as academics, researchers, and providers of teacher training. The adaptations and rationale for these changes are outlined in Appendix D. The adaptations were then assessed through the piloting of the survey (discussed below in the 'Pilot Survey' section) by educators who at the time were working in ECEC.

Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the adapted survey questionnaire layout while Appendix E provides explanations for the purpose of each of the three parts of the survey. These three parts are unpacked next.

Figure 3*Survey Questionnaire Layout*

Part One: Demographics. Brown's (2011) demographic section of her survey consisted of four questions on gender, teaching experience, teaching grade and teaching subject, however to reflect the diversity of Australia's ECEC sector, it was pertinent to ensure relevant and detailed demographic information was captured. It was also believed that since many developed countries have diverse ECEC workforce, child and family demographics (OECD, 2020), a thorough demographic section offered this research team and future researchers who might utilise this tool, the opportunity to compare and contrast various demographic factors with emotional display practices.

The first six demographic questions related to the personal details of the individual respondent and included: gender, age, birth country, cultural identity, qualification, and length of work experience within ECEC. Questions seven to fifteen related to the individual's employment context and included: current role; length of employment in current role; typical age of children with which they work; location, type and size of service; how many families

they interact with in a week; and ACECQA's overall National Quality Rating (2020) of their service and the rating given to their service's quality area six that pertains to partnering with families. These demographic questions were categorical. Lastly, question sixteen asked respondents to consider the families they worked with by asking respondents to rate statements, such as, *'have cultural backgrounds different from yours?'* as either *'none'*, *'a few'*, *'about half'*, *'most'*, or *'I don't know'*. Demographic and contextual details like these were important to capture since it was suggested in the organisational literature that emotional labour potentially pertains to individual, relational, contextual, cultural and workplace influences (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Detailed demographic data also aimed to support the selection of a diverse group of participants with varying individual, relational, contextual, workplace and cultural factors for the second phase of this study's data collection.

Part Two: The Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale. To ensure the survey was relevant for context and culture (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011) and occupational requirements relevant to ECEC (Mikuska & Fairchild, 2020), adaptations included the removal of the words 'school' and 'students'. Since this research was specifically looking at the emotional labour with families, the term 'families' was utilised within the Likert scale items instead of 'students', however the terms 'children', 'colleagues' and/or 'leaders' may be inserted here should future research aim to explore early childhood educators' emotional labour in other ECEC relationships. Additionally, the term 'school' was initially replaced by 'ECEC service' yielding the phrasing *"my ECEC service expects me to"* in the emotional display rules section of the scale. However, following reflection and discussions with this project's supervisory team, it was decided that *"I am expected to"* rather than *"my ECEC service expects me to"* was more appropriate as it did not assume that emotional display rules stem only from the service. It was decided that clarifying where the expectation for emotional labour comes from was best left for discussion within the interviews.

Part Two, Section One: Emotional Display Rules Likert Scale. Respondents' perceptions were recorded as either *I strongly disagree*, *I disagree*, *I neither agree nor disagree*, *I agree*, or *I strongly agree* across seven items. Three items formed part of the *Positive Display Rules* subscale, and three items formed part of the *Negative Display Rules* subscale, with the seventh item seeking clarification whether participants felt they knew the rules expected of them. The positive display rule items were:

- I am expected to express positive emotions with families as part of my job.
- Part of my job is to make families feel supported and trusting.
- I am expected to act happy and enthusiastic in my interactions with families.

The negative display rule items were:

- I am expected to suppress or hide my bad moods or negative reactions to families.
- If I am upset or distressed, I am expected to hide these emotions while working with families.
- If I am angry, I am expected to hide my anger while working with families.

The seventh item in this scale asked:

- I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to families.

Lastly, closing this section, respondents are asked to share in an open-ended question if there is “... *anything that you would like to share about the emotional display rules that are expected of you?*”

Part Two, Section Two: Emotional Labour Strategies Scale. The emotional labour strategies scale comprised three subscales: *Surface Acting*, *Deep Acting*, and *Genuine Expressions*. For this scale, responses were recorded as, *Never*, *Rarely*, *Sometimes*, *Often*, or *Always*.

The five items from the surface acting subscale included:

- To work with families, I need to act differently from how I feel.
- As an educator, I feel I must show or perform certain emotions to families.
- Even if I'm upset or angry, I make families think that I'm in a good mood.
- To interact with families, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display.
- I hide the emotions I feel to establish and maintain family partnerships.

The three items from the deep acting subscale included:

- I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display with families.
- I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me.
- I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show families.

The three items from the genuine expressions subscale included:

- The emotions I show to families match the emotions I feel.
- The emotions I show families come naturally.
- The emotions I express to families are genuine.

While Brown's (2011) scale included open-ended questions at the end of the emotional strategies scale, seeking input on suppressed feelings (hiding felt emotions) and faked emotions (showing unfeelt emotions), the adapted scale included these and an additional open-ended question on genuine emotions (requiring no change in emotions). In the definition and dimensions of emotional labour theory that are outlined in this study, genuine expressions are discussed as an emotional display utilised by employees (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Diefendorff et al., 2005; Glomb & Tews, 2004). It was decided early on that this is significant for early childhood educators who work in a relationship-based profession, where relationships may exist over a period of time and where research highlights genuine expressions in educator-family interactions (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011). Brown's (2011) Likert scale also included components for, what she termed, natural expressions. Therefore, a

third open-ended question seeking educators' experiences of expressing genuinely felt emotions while working with families was included.

Part Three: Reflection and Wrap-Up. The addition of the last two open-ended questions related, firstly, to this study's third research question on wellbeing and secondly, broadly to educators' exercising of emotional labour. The first open-ended question sought educators' perceptions of the impact of emotional labour on their wellbeing. A brief description of wellbeing and a link to Australia's Be You (2022) online [Educator Wellbeing](#) resources ensured participants understood the construct of wellbeing and could access wellbeing resources if they required. It was important that throughout this investigation no assumptions were made that wellbeing impacts from emotional labour would only be negative. Furthermore, some individuals may not experience either positive or negative wellbeing impacts. The second question in part three sought any additional comments on educators' exercising and experiences of emotional labour with families. The addition of the wellbeing open-ended question within the survey supported the recruitment process for the second qualitative component of this study by identifying individuals who may have positive, negative or no wellbeing implications from their emotional labour practices with families.

Survey Design

The Early Childhood Educator's Emotional Labour Scale survey was designed in Qualtrics in late 2022 (as per Appendix B). Qualtrics is an online survey platform provided through the University of Sydney. During the adaptation, development, and design phases, multiple versions emerged, particularly pertaining to the question format types, the wording of the demographic questions, and the descriptions of emotional labour's components in each scale section. Towards the end of the adaptation phase, a statistical consultant within the University of Sydney's Informatics Hub team reviewed the design for clarity and statistical functionality. Given the validity and reliability of Brown's (2011) scale, no issues following

these adaptations were identified within the Likert scales for emotional display rules and emotional labour strategies.

The first page of the survey detailed what emotional labour is; provision for anonymity; duration for completion; and scope to stop-and-return to the survey if completion in one sitting was not possible. Eligibility to respond to the survey required that educators were 18-years-or-older and “... *currently working in either a long day care service or preschool service in NSW*”. Those unable to meet the criteria were thanked for their time and taken to the end of the survey.

Potential respondents were prompted to download and read the participant information statement (seen in Appendix F) on the second page of the survey. Consent to participate was built into the survey on pages two-three (seen in Appendix B) which prompted respondents to either provide consent to continue or select ‘No’ to exit the survey. Pages three-four of the survey allowed participants to create a unique survey identifier code. This code enabled access to responses of respondents who had self-selected to participate further in the study and to delete any survey responses of those who requested to withdraw their participation after submission of the survey – no such request was made. Thereafter, each part and sub-section of the survey as detailed above was introduced with an explanation or definition of what was required.

At the end of the survey respondents were asked if they would like to participate further in the study. If they selected ‘yes’ they were taken to a separate survey where they could read the details about the study’s second phase of data collection. Respondents could then opt-in through an expression-of-interest by providing consent for their survey data to be de-identified and their unique survey ID code, full name, phone number and email address. The details of the expression-of-interest survey and consent can be seen in Appendix G.

Survey Piloting

Once ethics approval from the University of Sydney's Ethics Committee (#2022-750) was granted, the survey was distributed for piloting in early November 2022. Five educators, recruited for convenience (e.g., ECT and vocationally-qualified colleagues), currently working in ECEC (see Table 2) completed a pilot of the survey. At the end of each section in the pilot survey respondents were asked if any questions were unclear or challenging, and why. Respondents reported that it took them approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. Overall feedback from the respondents was extremely positive, with just one commenting that "*Question 4 –I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me– was a bit difficult to interpret, I thought it was a bit broad, and I could answer it differently depending on different contexts or interpretation.*" Since this question stems from Brown's (2011) original survey and was not found to be challenging for the other pilot survey respondents, it was decided it would remain unchanged within the Likert Scale.

Given that the survey's items were checked for content validity by sector-wide professionals—the supervisory team, the proposal review team from the University of Sydney's School of Education, as well as practicing educators—while also maintaining the constructed meaning and purpose as established in Brown's (2011) original scale items, the survey was then deemed fit for purpose.

Table 2

Survey Pilot Respondents and their Feedback

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5
Gender	F	F	F	F	F
Age	28	42	31	22	39
Birth Country	China	Spain	New Zealand	Australia	Philippines
Cultural Identity	Chinese	Spanish	New Zealand-South African	Australian	Filipino
Qualification	ECT	ECT	Diploma	Diploma/ Working towards ECT	Masters level ECT
Role(s)	Room Leader	Room Leader Educational Leader	Room Leader Director	Room Leader	Room Leader
Age Group	3-5	2-3 / 3-5	0-2	0-2	2-3 / 3-5
ECEC Experience	3 years	10 years	9 years	5 years	18 years
Feedback	<i>I found nothing challenging. Regarding "emotional rules" in Question no.7, it may be better to have some examples to elaborate? I really enjoyed it. I felt everything was well-explained while doing this survey. The Expression of Interest page is clear and easy to understand for me. The layout and presentation of the survey are very consistent and user-friendly.</i>	<i>Question 4 was a bit difficult to interpret, I thought it was a bit broad, and I could answer it differently depending on different contexts or interpretation. This is a very interesting topic of research that can enhance practitioners' ability to deal with uncomfortable situations and conversations. Thank you!</i>	<i>This was a really good survey. It was clear. And it will make an impact when the world knows about this work educators do.</i>	<i>It was all clear and easily presented.</i>	<i>Easy to follow and great presentation</i>

Recruitment

Recruitment for survey respondents occurred when the survey was administered online via peak early childhood platforms such as Early Childhood Australia (ECA), Community Early Learning Australia (CELA), The Sector (an ECEC sector news forum), larger ECEC umbrella organisations, and early childhood educator social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X). The survey promotion pamphlet shared online and via email is in Appendix H, while the distribution of the survey by The Sector and Early Childhood Australia's WebWatch is in Appendix I. The survey was anonymous and no personal identifying data from respondents were collected unless they continued to provide their details in the subsequent expression-of-interest survey.

Data Collection

Following the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee's (#2022-750) approval and survey piloting, the survey was administered November 2022 in the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. A state-wide rather than national survey was administered for several practical reasons. First, given the study's tight timeframe, confining the promotion and distribution of the survey to NSW was a strategic planning decision. Second, confining the survey to NSW limited the complexities of multiple jurisdictions with differing early childhood frameworks, terminology, and requirements. Third, NSW employs most of Australia's early childhood educators and teachers. A second promotion round was undertaken from January through to mid-February 2023. A final, smaller promotion of the survey occurred in mid-March. A total of 149 respondents completed the survey.

Respondents who had submitted expression-of-interest surveys and had been emailed in February with an invitation to participate in the qualitative component but had not yet responded, were sent a follow-up email in March. In this follow-up email, respondents were

thanked for their interest and offered once more the opportunity to participate further if they were still interested. The email also provided a survey link and a suggestion for these individuals to share the link with fellow educators they thought might be interested in participating in the survey and qualitative component. This email can be seen in Appendix J. An additional two expression-of-interest responses were received, bringing the total expressions of interest in Component Two to 75.

Respondents

The survey was completed by an older, more experienced demographic to that generally found in Australia's ECEC sector. The full demographic details of respondents from the survey can be seen in Appendix K, and are reported in Dickerson et al. (2024b) in Chapter 4. Unsurprisingly 98% of the survey respondents were female (n=144), similar to the 95.5% of the Australian ECEC sector (DESE, 2022). The average age of respondents was 39.59 years (SD=10.82; range 20-66 years) compared with sector data of 32 years for male workers and 37 years for female workers (DESE, 2022). Most survey responses (n=117; 79.6%) came from educators older than 31 years in age. In comparison, less than two thirds (60.8%) of the workforce are older than 31 years in age (DESE, 2022). Respondents (n=51) falling within the 30-39 age-bracket made up 34.7% of survey responses, whereas only 24.8% of the workforce are between 30-39 years old (DESE, 2022). Educator culture identified 74.1% as Australian (n=109) and included three (2.0%) Aboriginal respondents, while 25.9% (n=38) were other cultures (e.g., Brazilian, Canadian, Chinese, Italian, and South African). Considering that 29.1% of Australia's population were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), it is not surprising that a quarter of the survey respondents identified with other cultures.

Data Cleaning and Preparation

The survey data were exported from Qualtrics to Microsoft Excel for initial checking and cleaning to ensure accuracy and increased reliability (Cohen et al., 2011), before being imported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 for analysis. From Qualtrics a total of 263 recorded responses were available. However, 114 responses were not completed beyond the demographic or Part 1 sections, thus only 149 responses were counted as completed. A further two responses had insufficient responses due to questions being skipped and repeated selections of “I prefer not to say”, “I am not sure” or “I don’t know” yielding data that would not offer insight into respondents’ emotional labour. A total of 147 completed responses, including those where one or more open-ended questions were left blank, were retained in the dataset.

Appendix L provides details of the survey questions and corresponding response options, variable type, label and value. Appendix L served to make clear to me, and to my supervisors and the statistical consultants from the University of Sydney who were supporting my analysis, what variable adaptations of the original survey questions were made in preparation for running statistical analysis. Where response counts in a category were less than 5% (eight or fewer response counts) as detailed in Appendix K and Appendix M, the categories were logically combined. Adjustments were also made to reflect workforce data or meaningful ordering of ‘select-all’ questions. Respondents’ ages were bracketed into 10-year categories –20-29, 30-39, 40-49 and 50> years– reflective of the Workforce Census (DESE, 2022) that was used for comparison of such data for the ECEC sector in Australia. Cultural and ethnic identities were categorised according to ‘Cultural Regions’ of the world such as African, Asian, Australasian (inclusive of three Aboriginal, two Māori and all Australian and New Zealand respondents), European, North American, South American, and Southeast Asian. However, this variable was split further into two categories identifying ‘*Australian*’

(including all Australian and the three Aboriginal respondents) and ‘*Other Cultures*’ given that some of the ‘cultural regions’ had very low counts.

Respondents were asked to list all their ECEC qualifications and thus the variable was adjusted to represent their highest early childhood qualification only. As such, those who were early childhood teachers (ECTs) either from a bachelor or higher qualification were categorised as ‘*ECTs*’. Those whose highest qualification was ‘*diploma*’ and ‘*certificate III*’—inclusive of two trainees working towards their certificate III which correlates with workforce data (DESE, 2022)—were grouped as such. From this variable, an additional variable positioning degree-qualified ‘*ECTs*’ alongside vocationally-trained ‘*educators*’ (diploma, certificate III) was created so that comparisons between teachers and vocationally-trained educators could be undertaken.

Survey questions with ‘select-all-that-apply’ were also reduced into logical categories representative of the ECEC workforce and to correct for low response counts, thereby enabling effective statistical analysis. For example, an educator who held one or multiple roles could select multiple options from the following ECEC roles: assistant, educator, room leader, ECT, educational leader, centre director, nominated supervisor or ‘other’ roles such as trainee, administration, sustainability leader etc. Two variables, one for ‘ECTs with leadership positions’ and one for ‘educators with leadership positions’ were created to identify individuals who were with or without a leadership role (i.e., director/ nominated supervisor, educational leader, or room leader). Additionally, these two variables were collapsed into one variable, ‘*leadership role*’ that identified which of the respondents held a director/nominated supervisor or educational leader role. An additional variable identifying respondents who held a director or nominated supervisor role only was created. During reflections and discussions with the supervisory team it was acknowledged that while educational leaders were not typically expected to work with families this was dependent on

the service structure and culture. Nominated supervisors / directors, however, were often at the forefront of family interactions within an ECEC service setting.

The typical age group(s) with which educators' work across a week also allowed for 'select-all-that-apply'. Adjustments were made where, for example, a respondent selected both '*infants & toddlers (birth-2)*' and '*toddlers (2-3)*' they were categorised under '*birth-three*'. Those working with '*toddlers (2-3)*' and '*pre-schoolers (3-5)*' or those who selected working across the '*birth-5*' range were categorised together in '*birth-five*'. Those who selected '*three-five*' only were categorised as such. The last category in this variable was '*Not-directly-working -with-children*'. Two respondents selected that they do 'not-work-directly-with-children' while also selecting an age group. Both respondents indicated 'nominated supervisor' only under the ECEC roles question, and thus the decision was made to group their responses wholly within the '*Not-directly-working -with-children*' category. This decision was based on the understanding that nominated supervisors who are '*Not-directly-working-with-children*' are not typically rostered into a classroom, but that from time-to-time they are required for additional support or to meet ratio requirements and may then be working with children occasionally across the week. There were, however, respondents who had selected *nominated supervisor/ centre director* in the role question who did not select the '*Not-directly-working-with-children*' option, but selected an age group, indicating that while they held this leadership role, they are also counted in ratio across a typical week and responsible for an age-group.

Further collapsing of variables, particularly where workforce data (DESE, 2022) used specific categorisations, occurred in '*years worked in ECEC*' and '*years worked in current service*' included groupings in years as <1, 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10> respectively. To run statistical analyses, the categories for years of experience in ECEC and time at current service were collapsed to '*≤ 3 years*', '*4 – 9 years*', '*10 ≥ years*'. This ensured sufficient response

rates within each category suitable for statistical analysis. The '*National Quality Rating*' variable was reduced to four categories: '*excellent*', '*exceeding*', '*meeting*' and '*other*', where '*other*' captured responses for '*working towards*', '*significant improvement required*', '*my service has not yet been rated*' and '*not sure*'. The '*excellent*' category held seven responses (4.8%) only slightly less than the 5% logic applied to collapsing variables and was kept as such since '*excellent*' is a distinct and important rating. Similarly, the '*National Quality Standard 6*' variable was reduced to '*exceeding*', '*meeting*' and '*other*' (no '*excellent*' rating is given at the Standard level and '*other*' included the same responses as the '*National Quality Rating*' variable). The family demographic scale questions were combined to reduce categories where response counts were low (approximately 20% or less) and to attempt to evenly distribute category responses. Collapsing created categories, '*None-to-a-few*' (None and A few); '*About half*' or '*Half-or-more*' ('About Half' and 'Most'); or '*Most*' its own (where response counts were higher than 35%). '*I don't know*' remained as such but was excluded from inferential analysis due to having either zero or less than three responses overall and counted as 'missing data'.

Both the *Emotional Display Rule* and *Emotional Labour Strategies* Likert Scales were left as 5-point Likert-scale responses. The means for each item, subscale, and scale were calculated, and these statistical versions of the scales and subscales were used in inferential analyses. The wellbeing question was split into two variables. First a variable identifying whether respondents perceived their emotional labour with families as impacting their wellbeing was created with binary *yes-or-no* responses required. Secondly, for respondents who answered *yes*, a categorical variable identifying whether this impact was *positive*, *negative*, or *both* was created.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were run through SPSS V28. Cronbach's alpha, a measure of reliability of the survey scale, was run first. Thereafter exploratory descriptive analysis was run, followed by T-Tests and ANOVAs, once assumptions for these statistical tests had been checked.

Reliability Test. The Cronbach alpha scores of the subscales and scales were calculated to check for reliability. Generally, the higher the number between 0 and 1 across the items in each scale and subscale, the greater the reliability (Strunk & Mwavita, 2020). Testing the reliability of the adapted instrument occurred prior to running exploratory descriptive analyses and deeper correlations of the survey responses was important given that the scale had been adapted from an American scale designed for K-12 school teachers. Overall, the Cronbach alpha scores for the *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale* revealed the scale held good internal reliability, as can be seen in Table 3. Good internal reliability confirms that the items within the scale are consistently measuring the concept it is intended to measure (Strunk & Mwavita, 2020).

Cronbach alpha scores for the current study are presented in Table 3 below alongside Cronbach alpha scores from Brown (2011) from which this study's scale was adapted, and Diefendorff et al. (2005) and Brotheridge and Lee (2003) from which Brown's scale was adapted. Brotheridge and Lee (2003) did not use an *emotional display rule* scale, or items for *naturally felt emotions*, however their *surface acting* and *deep acting* subscales included three items each. Diefendorff et al. (2005) had seven *surface acting* items, four *deep acting* items and three *expression of naturally felt emotions* items and both *positive* and *negative emotional display rule* subscales with four and three items respectively. Brown's (2011) *Emotional Labor of Teachers Scale* adaptation included three *natural emotions* items, three

deep acting items and five *surface acting* items to make the 11-item *emotional labour strategy* scale, reflective of the measure used in the current study.

Table 3

Cronbach Alpha (α) Scores for Emotional Labour and Emotional Display Rule Scales and Subscales with Prior Studies

Scale or Subscale	Current Study (<i>n</i> =147)		Brown (2011) (<i>n</i> =468)		Diefendorff et al. (2005) (<i>n</i> =270)		Brotheridge and Lee (2003)			
							Study 1 (<i>n</i> =296)		Study 2 (<i>n</i> =238)	
	<i>Items</i>	α	<i>Items</i>	α	<i>Items</i>	α	<i>Items</i>	α	<i>Items</i>	α
Positive Display Rules subscale	3	.86	3	.81	4	.73			NA	NA
Negative Display Rules subscale	3	.89	3	.88	3	.75			NA	NA
Perceived Emotional Displays Expected	1	1.0	1	1.0	NA	NA			NA	NA
Emotional Display Rule Scale	7	.88	7	.86	7	NA			NA	NA
Genuine Emotion subscale	3	.80	3	.73	3	.75			NA	NA
Deep Acting subscale	3	.75	3	.70	4	.82	3	.82	3	.83
Surface Acting subscale	5	.83	5	.80	7	.91	3	.85	3	.79
Emotional Labour Strategy Scale	11	.60	11	.71	14	NA			NA	NA

Exploratory and Inferential Data Analysis. Following the reliability test, data analysis occurred in two phases. First, frequency descriptives were run to identify response rates for the demographic and scale items. Thereafter mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each item, subscale, and scale. Exploratory data analyses of the survey were run first to yield frequency tables such as those seen in Appendix K and M, as well as histograms, graphs, Q-Q plots, and boxplots of the survey questions to allow a visual of the distribution of the data and each scale item. Average scores of the *emotional display rule* scale and its subscales (positive display rules, negative display rules, and perceived knowledge of display rules) and the *emotional labour strategy* scale and its subscales (genuine emotions, deep and surface acting) were then calculated. The average scores of the scales and subscales created weighted mean scores and standard deviations for each item, subscale, and scale, and their numerical summary statistics were observed. Table 4 provides a numerical summary of the scales' and sub-scales' Mean (*M*), Standard Deviation (*SD*),

Standard Error Mean (*SE*), Range, Minimum and Maximum, and Percentile statistics. Again, this process enabled visuals of the distribution of the scales and subscales to be created and a descriptive table of these outcome variables to be compiled against the demographic variables of interest and decide which tests might be relevant.

Table 4

Numerical Summary Statistics of Scales and Subscales

Scales or Subscales										
								Percentiles		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	Range	Min	Max	25	50	75
Positive Display Rules Subscale	147	4.57	0.681	0.056	4	1	5	4.33	5.00	5.00
Negative Display Rules Subscale	147	4.39	0.684	0.056	3	2	5	4.00	4.67	5.00
Perceived Emotional Displays Expected	147	4.47	0.686	0.057	3	2	5	4.00	5.00	5.00
Emotional Display Rules Scale	147	4.48	0.578	0.048	3	2	5	4.14	4.71	5.00
Surface Acting Subscale	147	3.71	0.713	0.059	4	1	5	3.20	3.80	4.20
Deep Acting Subscale	147	3.60	0.767	0.063	4	1	5	3.00	3.67	4.00
Genuine Emotion Subscale	147	3.56	0.681	0.056	3	2	5	3.00	3.67	4.00
Emotional Labour Strategy Scale	147	3.64	0.401	0.033	3	2	5	3.36	3.64	3.91

Descriptive statistics identified the prevalence and frequency of educators' emotional labour in family interactions and perceptions of emotional display rules. Visual and frequency representations of the data allowed me to assess the relevant t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) assumptions. Assumptions of normality and constant variances for parametric T-Tests and ANOVA were checked. Visuals (boxplots, Q-Q plots and histograms) were used to check for outliers, normality and homogeneity. Assumptions for normality included reviewing the Shapiro Wilk test for significance and Levene's Test of significance,

while for homogeneity the standard deviation across the different categorical groupings were checked for any difference of < 2 indicating unequal variances.

Where assumptions were met, t-tests and ANOVA of the binary and multi-categorical explanatory variables were respectively run with the scales and subscales. T-Tests and ANOVAs also provided means, standard deviations, and confidence interval ranges. Where assumptions for equal variance were violated 'equal variances not assumed' in the t-test were checked or Welch's ANOVA was run through SPSS. Independent samples t-tests and ANOVAs, where p values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant, were conducted to explore associations between continuous outcomes and binary and multi-categorical explanatory variables, respectively. The explanatory variables are the demographic questions from the questionnaire, and the outcome variables are the *emotional display rule* scale and subscales (positive and negative emotional display rules) and the *emotional labour strategy* scale and subscales (surface and deep acting and genuine emotions). A sample of the group statistics of explanatory variables t-tests and ANOVA for the surface acting subscale can be seen in Appendix N.

Open-Ended Questions Analysis. The second phase of analysis included qualitative analysis of the six open-ended survey questions. The questions were given initial codes with clear definitions and response excerpts and then analysed further to support code refinement (see Appendix O). Thereafter, codes were grouped into potential themes through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) based on the overall responses from survey participants and with the research questions in mind (see Appendix P). During this process, it was decided that the wellbeing questions could be created into statistical variables. Exploratory data analysis of the two wellbeing outcome variables that were given statistical codes in SPSS were conducted. Appendix Q provides the descriptive statistics for the wellbeing variables.

Given the skewed response rates in both variables—that emotional labour with families impacts wellbeing and does so negatively—running inferential analysis was not possible.

Qualitative Methods: Longitudinal Interviewing and Journaling

Qualitative Case-study Purpose

Exploring the emotions and wellbeing of others goes beyond a measurement tool and requires in-depth accounts of how emotions and wellbeing are experienced according to the individual in context, over time, and in various situations and relationships. Qualitative methods sought to complement the quantitative component by offering a robust, in-depth understanding of emotional labour in educators' work with families and the educator wellbeing outcomes associated with such work. Interviewing and online journaling elicited descriptions of individual participants' context-dependent emotional labour and wellbeing experiences over a twelve-month period and were bounded within the participants' real life ECEC context and educator-family interactions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A critical feminist lens sought to understand whether educators' own experiences and descriptions extended maternalistic positionings or identified this work as skilful rather than innate, and whether their descriptions challenged original emotional labour theory. The qualitative component allowed me to reflexively and respectfully undertake a critical feminist researcher approach to illuminate deep understandings of emotional labour and wellbeing impacts from such labour in educators' work with families. I was also able to seek rich, nuanced descriptions of participants' contexts, the individual relationships they had with families, and the influence of context and wider socio-cultural-political discourses.

This section unpacks bioecological systems theory, the recruitment process, journal and interview data collection procedures, participant details, and data analysis. The chapter concludes by discussing this study's ethical requirements and considerations.

Bioecological Systems Theory

During the analysis of survey data, it emerged that interconnected ecological factors, as per Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological systems theory, influenced educators' emotional labour in their work with families. The five levels of influence are: (a) the individual educator, (b) microsystem (service context), (c) mesosystem (alignment between service and families), (d) exosystem-to-macrosystem (socio-cultural-political influences and discourses influencing emotional labour) and (e) chronosystem (the influence of time within and between the first four systems) (Dickerson et al., 2024b). Each level is nested within the other with the educator at the centre. The various levels can independently, but also collectively, influence emotional labour and emotional labour itself can influence the systems, revealing interchangeable interactions between emotional labour and the multi-level influencing factors over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). An ecological perspective to exploring and understanding educators' emotional labour and its associated wellbeing while working with families was adopted from the analysis and interpretation of the survey component of this study and included in the qualitative data collection, analysis and interpretation processes.

Recruitment

Once the survey was closed in February 2023 a six-week recruitment process for component two's case study participants began. Survey respondents interested in participating in component two of the study had completed an expression-of-interest survey where they consented to providing their contact details. To meet the aims of this study, potential participants were selected based on their survey responses (i.e., those who had varied experiences and wellbeing impacts of emotional labour), with a range of potential participants targeted based on a range of contextual (e.g., different workplaces, locations, family demographics) and individual (e.g., experience, age, roles, qualifications) factors.

Such a selection process aimed to identify individual and contextual factors that influenced emotional labour and wellbeing, responding in depth to this study's research questions. For data analysis to be manageable, a sample of 7-10 individual case study participants were to be selected. It was envisaged that 12 months' data collection that included five interviews and ongoing journaling would be sufficient for saturation to be achieved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A total of 75 expression-of-interest surveys were received. Potential participants were emailed, in batches of ten, a Zoom introductory session invitation. The 10-minute Zoom introductory session allowed potential participants to meet and establish a connection with the researcher (me), clarify and ask questions, and receive relevant information to support an informed decision regarding their participation (Creswell, 2015). Additionally, potential participants were given a brief navigation of the PebblePad journaling platform via screen-sharing to briefly view how journal entries could be created. Appendix R is the Zoom Introductory Session Agenda. If educators had not booked a Zoom session seven days after being emailed, they were sent one reminder and then another ten potential participants were emailed.

Educators who indicated their interest in participating in component two at the end of the Zoom session were emailed a Participant Information Statement (Appendix S) and Participant Consent Form (Appendix T). Those who did not indicate an immediate interest were advised that should they decide to participate after some reflection, to email me for a consent form. Educators were requested to return these forms within seven days if they were interested in participating, with one reminder email being sent on day seven. Additionally, educators were reminded that participation was voluntary, thus ensuring that they willingly committed to participating of their own free will, securing the integrity and validity of the data collected. Those who returned their consent forms were thanked for their commitment to

the study and asked what time and location (Zoom or in-person if viable) would suit them for their first interview. Interview one was undertaken as soon as possible.

Recruitment occurred between February and the end of March 2023. Many expression-of-interest survey respondents who were emailed did not respond, while three who were due to join a Zoom session did not connect to the session they had booked, despite a reminder 24-hours before their Zoom session. Some educators responded much later than their initial email due to emails going to their spam folders. In each round of emails sent for recruitment, I selected additional potential participants following the same rigorous contextual, individual, and survey response selection criteria process until this became unfeasible and all 75 individuals had been contacted.

Few vocationally-trained or younger-aged educators indicated interest in further participation. I wondered, but could not verify, whether this had something to do with vocationally-trained educators' confidence to engage in research; or whether they were less engaged in working with families and therefore the research did not appeal to them; or if emotional labour was an abstract component of ECEC work for some; or if the distribution of the survey did not reach enough of the vocationally trained and younger aged cohort of educators (perhaps due to not being passed on by gate-keepers). Further considerations were whether being involved in doctoral research (or research in general) was not considered important or whether educators faced challenges with juggling work-related and family commitments. In reviewing the start dates and times for the survey, almost all respondents accessed the survey during personal hours (evenings and weekends), which may also be the reason why many respondents did not return to complete the survey. The age, experience and qualification of those completing the survey and showing interest in further participation fell outside of my control.

After a lengthy recruitment period, seven participants (see Table 5 below) joined the qualitative component of this study with the first round of interviews and online journaling occurring throughout March 2023. Reflections with the supervisory team in mid-March 2023 on whether seven participants were sufficient resulted in two further recruitment strategies being considered. First was to provide existing participants who had mentioned in their interviews that they knew of individuals who were keen to participate in the qualitative component with the survey link in an email. They were requested to share the link with those individuals they knew who might be interested in the study. Recruitment would occur directly from the completed surveys that came through with an expression-of-interest to ensure survey completion and expression to participate further were voluntary. Second, one final wrap-up email was sent to all those who never responded to the first round of invitations to participate. This wrap-up email thanked the respondents for their initial expression-of-interest and mentioned that there was still space for further participation if they or anyone they knew was interested (as per Appendix J). The emails were sent with an embedded survey link so that the email could be forwarded to others and allow for anonymous completion of the survey and an expression-of-interest without coercion.

It was decided that any additional participants selected should preferably be those working directly with children rather than leaders not working directly with children, to ensure diversity of participants. By the end of March 2023 an eighth participant was confirmed and interviewed. The eighth participant was an ECT, working as an educational leader not directly working with children. Despite prior reflections on selecting further participants who worked with children and were perhaps not in leadership positions, it was acknowledged that they had taken the time to respond to the survey, submit an expression-of-interest and request to join the Zoom session. Two additional completed surveys and expression-of-interests were received in early April following the final recruitment strategy

efforts and each were invited for a Zoom introductory session. Only one of these educators – an ECT working as a room leader– joined a Zoom session and became the ninth participant to join the study, having their first interview in early May 2023. Details of the participants' research engagement are provided after the following data collection section.

Table 5

Participant Demographics

	Pseudonym (Identifies as)	Age	Years in ECEC	Position (Qualification)	Service Type (Rating)	Service Size	Location	Is a parent
1 [^]	Misty (Australian)	28	7	Lead 3-5 years Teacher Lead Birth-to-1 Teacher (ECT#)	Combined preschool and LDC (Exceeding)	53-place	Regional	N
2	Marisse (Greek- born# Australian)	36	10	Educational Leader NDWC [§] (ECT)	Private LDC (Meeting)	100- place	Urban	Y
3	Sal (Australian)	50	21	Director NDWC [§] (Certificate III)	Private LDC (Exceeding)	51-place	Urban	Y
4	Lisa* (Australian)	51	14	3-5 years Assistant (Diploma-working towards ECT)	Preschool (Exceeding)	40-place	Urban	Y
5	Jay (Australian)	42	20	Director NDWC (ECT)	Community preschool (Meeting)	40-place	Urban	Y
6	Kelly* (Australian)	45	22	Lead 3-5 years Teacher & Educational Leader (ECT)	Community preschool (Excellent)	80-place	Urban	Y
7	Joan* (Australian)	52	30	3-5 years Assistant Teacher (ECT)	Community LDC (Exceeding)	59-place	Urban	Y
8	Ally (Sri-Lankan)	49	27	Educational Leader NDWC (ECT)	Private LDC (Exceeding)	88-place	Urban	Y
9	Ana (Brazilian)	27	3	Birth-2 years Room Assistant (Diploma)	Private LDC (Exceeding)	96-place	Urban	Y
				3-5 years Assistant (Diploma)	Private LDC (Exceeding)	41- Place	Urban	

Notes. [^]Participants are not listed in order of recruitment.

#Born in Greece and relocated to Australia as a young adult.

*Withdrew

§NDWC – Not Directly with Children

Data Collection

PebblePad Online Journals. PebblePad is a secure and private online platform for that supports text, image, video and audio entries, often used by early childhood students at university, and adapted for this research to be a reflection space. A PebblePad journaling platform was designed to include pages with information about participation, what emotional labour is, and pages for fortnightly journal entries each month. Supportive resource pages provided wellbeing resources, reflective questions and prompts, guidance for selecting families, and guidance for structuring and entering written, photo or video journal entries. Interview dates, times and transcripts post-interview were added to PebblePad so participants could cross-check transcriptions if they wished to do so and use these as evidence of self-reflection and professional engagement practices. There was a 'Family Profiles' page where participants entered the details of the families they had selected to reflect on over the 12-month period. Lastly, there was a space where I could add optional comments to provide ongoing reassurance and support for participants' journaling. See Appendix U for a sample template of the PebblePad Journal.

Depending on the participants' service size, role, and number of working days, they were asked to select three to five families that they tended to work closely with. The 'Family Profile' page on PebblePad provided examples of the different types of families that participants might select and encouraged a selection of families distinct from each other. For example, participants might select families they knew well, were new to, had difficulty connecting with, connected easily with, whose culture was different from their own, or who were experiencing adversity. The objective was to have a selection of families that were different.

PebblePad offered participants the opportunity to reflect and document their emotional labour and wellbeing experiences while working with families. PebblePad allowed

me to address any participant questions and to clarify, contextualise or extend participants' journal accounts by asking follow-up questions to extract rich, descriptive data. I sought clarification where meaning was unclear by asking participants if the meaning I drew from their written pieces was correct. Interviews were most often used for such clarification. As such, I accessed the participants' PebblePad journals often for journal analysis to inform upcoming interviews or to engage with participants' journal entries where I sought clarity on their written reflections.

Participants' twelve-months of journaling sought to capture the unique, contextual experiences and changes in the participant's perspectives, practices, or feelings over time (e.g., the beginning or end of a shift/week; the beginning of a year with new families; year-end as transitions are occurring) as well as before, after and between educator-family engagements. Such approaches aligned with identified gaps on the methodological approaches to exploring emotional labour longitudinally, over periods of time and between events (Gabriel et al., 2023). Furthermore, my facilitation of participants' journaling sought educator experiences and feelings that addressed each research question.

While the use of PebblePad was strongly encouraged and facilitated, I had detailed at the beginning of the PebblePad set-up that should participants need support at any time, Zoom meetings were available. I had initially requested that participants attempt fortnightly journaling, however, as data collection progressed, two participants found it challenging to find time to journal, while others found the platform a novel, creative and necessary space for reflection and emotional expression. I made adaptations for those who found it difficult to find time to journal. Such adaptations are discussed in the section that follows on the participants' experiences in the 12-month data collection period. Table 6 outlines data collection for each participant.

Table 6

Participant Data Collection Type and Quantity

	Participant Pseudonym (Commencement/ withdrawal date)	Support Zoom	Data Collection Type
1.	Misty (May 2023)	3 x support sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x 1-hour interviews • 1 x 30-minute year end interview • 8 x 30-minute interviews in lieu of PebblePad journaling (bi-weekly) • Family Profiles on PebblePad
2.	Marisse (March 2023/ withdrew end of September 2023)	2 x support sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x 1-hour interviews • 5 x PebblePad journal entries • Family Profiles on PebblePad
3.	Sal (March 2023)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x 1-hour interviews • 1 x 30-minute year end interview • 12 x PebblePad journal entries • Family Profiles on PebblePad
4.	Lisa (March 2023; withdrew in June 2023)	3 x support session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x 1-hour interview • 2 x PebblePad journal entries • Family Profiles on PebblePad
5.	Jay (March 2023)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x 1-hour interviews • 1 x 30-minute year end interview • 5 x PebblePad journal entries • Family Profiles on PebblePad
6.	Kelly (March 2023; withdrew in April 2023)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x 1-hour interview
7.	Joan (March 2023; withdrew in June 2023)	1 x support session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x 1-hour interview
8.	Ally (March 2023)	1 x support session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x 1-hour interviews • 1 x 30-minute year end interview • 4 x 1-hour interviews in lieu of PebblePad journaling (monthly) • Family Profiles on PebblePad
9.	Ana (March 2023)	2 x support session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x 1-hour interviews • 1 x 30-minute year end interview • 2 x 1-hour interviews in lieu of PebblePad • 7 x PebblePad journal entries • Family Profiles on PebblePad

Interviews. Alongside the ongoing journaling, individual semi-structured interviews enabled exploration of educators' rich, complex experiences relative to their social, emotional

and interactive work contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Four, one-hour interviews and one, 30-minute interview with each participant was conducted over approximately twelve-months, accounting for relational and contextual changes at different points in time (e.g., early in the year as families settle-in and as the year progresses, educator-family relationships may strengthen or require different elements). First round interviews occurred in March 2023 with the ninth participant having her first interview in early May. Second round interviews occurred in July-August, and third round interviews occurred in October-November. At the third-round interviews two participants who interviewed in October were keen to meet briefly in early December before the December-January summer holiday period. I offered this option to all participants, and all were keen to meet before the holiday break. Remaining flexible to participant needs was key in this study and 30-minute year-end interviews were scheduled in December, making up the fourth-round of interviews. Fifth and final interviews occurred in February-March 2024.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom's online platform eliminating commute time, and privacy, health and safety concerns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Most participants had the option to meet in-person for their interviews; however, all participants selected the convenience of Zoom interviewing. Online platforms make research participation widely accessible, inclusive of regional, marginalised and/or isolated educators and enabled participants to select spaces that were emotionally safe and private (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). With participant permission, all interviews were video recorded via Zoom.

In interview one, open-ended questions expanded on the participant's survey responses as well as the overall findings from the survey by exploring in greater depth the *what, why and how* of emotional labour and educator wellbeing in family interactions (Morris, 2015). Clarity and contextualised understandings of each participant's survey responses and their general experiences of emotional labour with families in their workplaces

were sought in interview one (Appendix V). Data from participants' descriptions in interviews informed the research questions for this study. Data collected from interviews included descriptions of: (a) how participants exercised emotional labour in their work with families; (b) participants' perceptions of how emotional labour occurs and is influenced within their contexts; (c) what participant's wellbeing was like in relation to their emotional labour practices with families; (d) what participant's emotional labour capacities are; and, (e) what may safeguard their wellbeing and support their capacities for exercising emotional labour.

Since data collection and analysis were synchronous, gaps in the data could be identified from prior interviews and participants' journaling which supported my preparations for up-coming interviews. As such, subsequent interview guides were individualised and drew on participants' prior interviews and PebblePad journal entries. This enabled participants to detail or clarify their experiences with families at that point in time, over time or make comparisons of their emotional labour in a 'then-now' fashion (as seen in Appendix W that provides an example of a participant-specific guide for the second interview). Cross checking participants' journal reflections and interview descriptions during interviews allowed for clarity and nuanced understandings of the participants' emotional labour, wellbeing, and work with families in their context. Key to these data collection methods was to ensure that participants' knowledge and experiences of emotional labour were illuminated.

The final interview conducted at the end of February-early March 2024 was based on detailed data analysis, reflections, and discussions with the supervisory team. Specifically, the final interview asked participants to explain whether knowing explicitly about emotional labour through their research participation over the last few months had impacted their work with families. Additionally, explicit wellbeing questions were asked to gather participants' understandings of wellbeing pertaining to this work with families at the late stage of data

collection. Appendix X, attached to the wellbeing publication (Dickerson et al., under review) in Chapter Six, includes the final interview guide.

Each interview was flexible enough that participants could and did draw upon examples of experiences with other families not in their selection of families for this study to explain their work more deeply. This flexibility allowed the participant to describe the complex, ever-changing nature of their work with individual families; how some experiences impacted them or their emotional capacities for emotional labour; and their perspectives on working with families generally. This level of flexibility also ensured that if families encountered extenuating circumstances at any juncture which required participants to work closely with that family, such experiences could be shared by the participant. Additionally, this flexibility also catered for circumstances where families left the service and were no longer available for the participant to reflect on.

Interviews respectfully inquired and probed participants on their emotional labour with families and wellbeing experiences to gain clarity, explore their practices and unveil their in-depth knowledge (Morris, 2015). From my own experiences in ECEC, I was able to relate to the participants' experiences, understanding deeply the nature of their working context and their relational labour, at both the level of leader and teacher. While my experience potentially posed subjective bias on the research, it also enabled trusting relationships with the participants to form; supported my capacity to respectfully probe for nuanced, rich descriptions during interviews; and supported my role in supporting the participants' wellbeing and engagement throughout participation.

Reflexively and in collaborative reflection with the supervisory team, I ensured that the data collected, and its meaning, remained grounded in the participants' experiences and constructions, and not within the research demands, meaning data were not interpreted purely

to meet research objectives (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Somekh and Lewin (2011, p. 72) point out that

ideally, reflexivity focuses on positioning the researcher within relationships in a move towards more egalitarian research practices and towards creating knowledge that incorporates an understanding of the power relations that are constitutive of, and reproduced through, research... [and where] non-hierarchical relationships [are fostered] and ... research relationships ...are based on valuing the contributions of research participants.

As such, I often repeated what I *thought* I had heard the participant describe during interviews for clarification. Important for this research, framed in a critical feminist lens and through an ecological perspective, was ensuring that throughout interviewing and journaling participant voices—educator voices—were amplified and that participants felt trusted and their experiences valued. The interviewing techniques described above ensured that through mutual engagements and reflections between the participant and me throughout the research journey the co-construction of knowledge on emotional labour in educators' work with families according to participant experiences and perspectives emerged. Such practices are reflective of Ransom's (1993, p. 144 in Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 21) arguments that "feminism requires the development of a methodology which acknowledges the presence of the speaker in what is spoken". As such, the use of co-construction supported the elicitation of rich, contextual data (Clarke & Braun, 2019; Somekh & Lewin, 2011) that sought to avoid the reproduction of oppressive systems (Harding, 1991; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) and, instead, ensured participant experiences were at the forefront of this doctoral investigation. Such practices supported my own researcher reflexivity, essential for questioning how I analysed participants' data and identifying what influence my own ECT identity and experiences had on the data and analysis (Harding, 1991; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

Case Study Participants

This section provides some details of the case study participants' 12-month data collection journey and the individual supports provided during their participation. All participants identified as female, and were passionate, committed educators, most with many years of experience who had found ways to sustain themselves in their ECEC careers. Accordingly, these participants represented the workforce stayers. All participants were provided with a pseudonym. I compiled participant profiles following interview one and shared these with participants for feedback. Participants indicated that these were fair summaries of themselves, their context and general beliefs about working in ECEC and with families (see Appendix Y for example profiles for Sal and Misty).

The four participants who withdrew at various stages of data collection did so following personal and professional challenges that impacted their capacity to continue. Kelly withdrew following the passing of her sister, while Lisa described ongoing challenges with an unsupportive service director that jeopardised her ability to work with families, her wellbeing and her capacity to participate in this research. Joan withdrew after revealing a change in work shifts to support current personal challenges which then limited her interaction time with families. Marisse withdrew at the end of September following health challenges and a relocation due to her husband's change of employment. All four participants consented for their data to be used.

Three participants required flexible and adjusted approaches to data collection. Ally revealed in June that she preferred talking over writing. Consequently, Ally opted for monthly, one-hour interviewing in-lieu of PebblePad journaling which she felt were more supportive for her to unpack and reflect on her emotional labour and wellbeing impacts in her work with families. Ana sustained a back injury in May that had resulted in her temporarily working in the preschool classroom. Upon returning to the birth-to-two classroom in late

June, Ana's journal reflections described the difficulty of working in a physically intense, chaotic birth-to-two space (with approximately 30-under-two-year-olds and a large team) given her limited movement and persistent back pain. In a support Zoom interview Ana described disjointed communication with and a lack of understanding from her leadership team regarding her back injury. In mid-August Ana emailed to explain that she had resigned, following her employer's decision to fill an available preschool position with a new hire instead of her. In early-September Ana started working in a preschool classroom in a LDC service that was smaller than her previous workplace. Ana continued to participate until the end of data collection. Misty shared in a support Zoom interview in late June that writing reflections at home "felt like" carrying work stress into her personal life. I clarified whether Misty wanted to continue with participation given her stress levels (detailed further in Appendix Y) to which she responded that she did. Misty shared that she preferred talking and thus opted for bi-weekly, 30-minute interviews immediately after work.

Data Analysis

Qualitative journal and interview data was analysed within the coding software package, NVivo V14.23.4. Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 86) thematic analysis that has been shown to be reliable for the analyses of complex human phenomena through a deep, flexible and "recursive" six-stage process. This six-stage process included familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report or discussion on the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reflexively utilised these steps in a cyclical and iterative analysis process throughout the 12-month data collection and beyond, to address the research aims and questions in ways that aligned with feminist approaches to research (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

Thematic analysis allowed flexibility to adjust, re-frame, and re-structure coding and themes while the data collection and analysis progressed over time, supporting the creation or adaptation of themes. Flexibility allowed for “theoretical freedom” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78) and supported the critical feminist framing of emotional labour theory through an ecological systems approach within the concurrent data collection and analysis process. Such a theoretical lens sought to dismantle oppressive ways of thinking by illuminating educators’ professional and intentional experiences of emotional labour with families within their contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that is not “biological on the account of gender” (Taggart, 2011, p. 93). As such a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive processes typical of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) ensured a rigorous analysis method. Rigorous reflective meetings with this study’s supervisors, and member checking with participants (in interviews, via email correspondence), supported my ongoing reflexivity practices throughout data collection, analysis and dissemination. Such practices established the study’s credibility (Nowell et al., 2017) and are imperative in feminist approaches to research that seeks to identify exploitation and oppression (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). An analysis method that sought to advocate for such professional skill and unveil wellbeing impacts through multiple theoretical framings required considered and collaborative preparation of a coding frame.

Coding Frame. Through ongoing reflections and discussions with this study’s supervisors, I developed a coding frame that drew from emotional labour, critical feminist, and bioecological systems theories. In developing the frame, each code and any sub-codes were defined and were subject to rigorous discussion and reflection between myself and the supervisory team between May and July 2023 to ensure that any doubling-up, cross-over, and meaninglessness in codes was eliminated. Codes from emotional labour theory, for example, sought descriptions of participants’ exercising of emotional labour’s strategies and included

surface acting, deep acting and genuine expressions as well as *positive, negative and mixed* wellbeing outcomes. Further details and examples of how each theory contributed to the coding frame are provided in Chapter Six's publication (Dickerson et al., under review) and Appendix Z.

Once an initial coding frame was developed I and each of this study's supervisors coded one interview, to check for coding consistency, thereby establishing intercoder reliability (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Thereafter we collaboratively adapted the framework further through in-depth discussion, reorganisation and re-defining of codes and subcodes. Another iteration of the coding frame was established, and a PebblePad reflection was coded by me and my supervisors. Some minor, final adjustments to the framework occurred before I undertook coding of the data set while still conducting interviews and extracting journal data from participants over the 12 months.

The coding frame was, however, flexible, allowing for new codes and subcodes to be developed, adjusted, or dissolved through reflexive deductive and inductive analysis approaches "to better evoke and differentiate between the range of meanings in the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 55). Where existing codes required re-defining, dates were added so that the development and progression of the coding frame could be observed. In this way the coding frame was a live document throughout the data analysis process. Thoughts around coding were discussed extensively in meetings with the supervisory team, particularly between mid-2023 and early-2024.

NVivo Analysis. Prior to the second round of interviews (scheduled for June/July 2023), I began to input the coding frame, interview transcripts, journal extractions and researcher notes into NVivo (V.14). The first two steps in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis require familiarising with and coding the data. With each new interview

and journal extract I took time to read not only the new data, but the data that came before. Meaning, I first went through the second interview while transcribing and conducting a first round of coding, then I went back to the participants' first interview and read and coded through to the end of their second interview to grasp the whole picture. In this way, I worked to code the data from the beginning through to the end, which supported the adjustment of codes and my search for patterned meaning specific to participants and across the data overall. As I moved through this process, I consolidated, adapted or split initial codes as seen in Appendix AA.

First round coding occurred in NVivo as interviewing and journaling progressed. Coding of the first interview and PebblePad journal extracts supported planning for second-round interviews. A reflexive and flexible flow between semantic and latent coding, exploring both face-value meaning and deeper, conceptual meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022a), of participants' descriptions over multiple rounds of coding supported the capturing of ideas and meaning within the text.

I challenged my own subjective thinking throughout the collection and analysis processes by questioning why I saw the data in a certain way and whether, or how much of, my own assumptions and experiences influenced the way meaning and ideas were being created. Additionally, I often questioned *what is different here* or *what am I not seeing, what is their perspective* throughout the data collection and analyses processes. It was these questions I often took to the supervisory team. Part of the reflective process was to allow mine and the questions from supervisors to prompt deeper thinking or offer entirely new, fresh perspectives, insights or directions I had not yet thought about. Braun and Clarke (2022a) consider subjectivity to be a strength that fuels such processes and shapes the interpretation of data by what the researcher brings to it.

I remained aware of my own background, experiences and knowledge of ECEC, and reflected how subjectivity infiltrated the coding, meaning-making and theme-creation processes and sought supervisory discussion to challenge any emerging assumptions. Multiple rounds of coding and cross-checking sections of data at various points in time established coding consistency, achieving *intracoder reliability* (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020) which supported clustering of codes for theme formation. The ongoing coding, questioning and reflection supported all future data collection, the refinement of the coding frame over time, coding and analysis processes and eventually, the generating of themes.

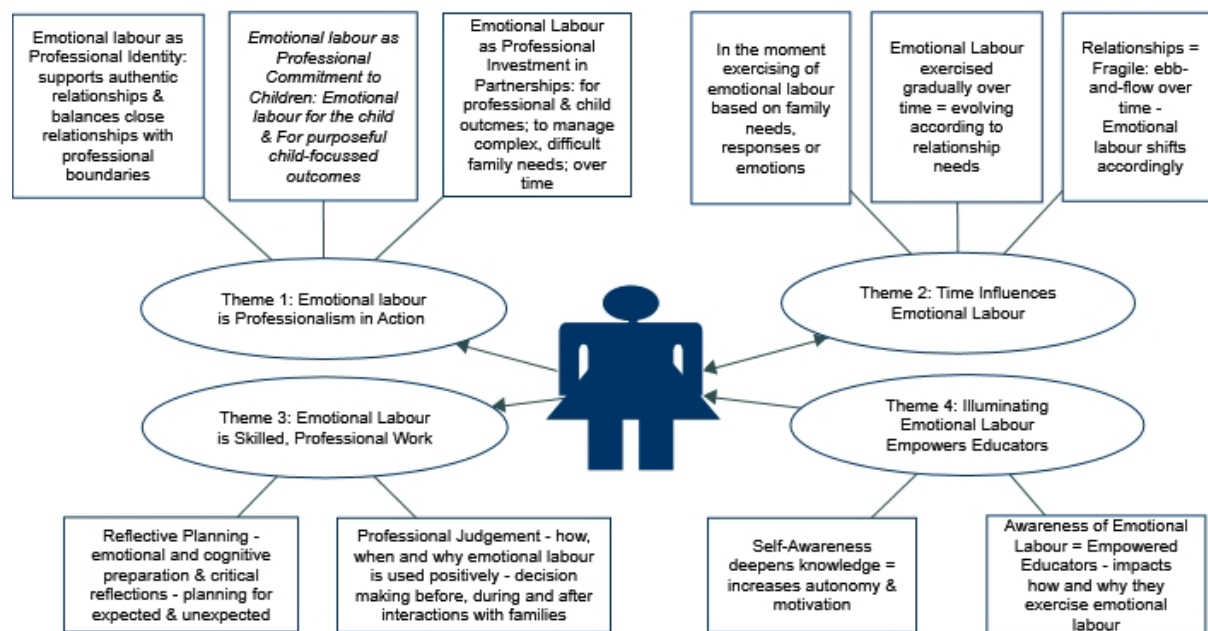
Development of Themes. In February 2024, prior to the final interviews with all participants, I met with the supervisory team to discuss, reflect and unpack the initial big ideas from the coded data. I considered whether these potential ideas could respond to the research questions meaningfully to reveal educators' emotional labour in their work with families and the wellbeing impacts of this work. I also considered whether the ideas could draw multiple codes together to provide deep, nuanced understandings of the participants' work and wellbeing. Questions arose, such as, *now that participants knew about emotional labour, how did that impact them, their work with families and, how does emotional labour occur within these ECEC relationships that might influence the conceptualisation of emotional labour theory relevant to ECEC?*

Being familiar with individual codes supported the process of brainstorming and collating codes and then rearranging and grouping codes, to deepen both data-driven and theoretically-driven understandings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Appendix BB is a sample of the code clustering and emerging ideas process that supported the development of themes. This process required active seeking and discovering of themes from the data but also through the critical feminist framing and an ecological perspective of emotional labour in educators' work with families (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Figure 4 offers a visual summary of four over-

arching themes that were interpreted in Dickerson et al. (in press) in Chapter Five that illuminated educators' hidden emotional labour as skilled and intentional work undertaken with families.

Figure 4

Concept Map of Educators' Emotional Labour as Skilled, Professional and Intentional Work



Trustworthiness

Triangulation, through the use of multiple methods (participant survey, interviews and journals); multiple sources of data collection (from different participants in different contexts at different points in time); multiple theoretical framings (emotional labour, critical feminist, bioecological and job demands-resources theories); ongoing member checking with supervisors and participants; and reflexive approaches, supported research credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research (Nowell et al., 2017). Engagement with statistical consultants through the University of Sydney and this study's lead supervisor for survey analysis supported robust analysis

processes and triangulation of analysis. Member checking with participants ensured that reliable descriptions of the data were being collected, confirmed and disseminated. Member checking throughout data collection and analysis was critical to capturing participant's rich, descriptive meaning and supported intercoder reliability and credibility (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). Additionally, thematic analysis' six-stage recursive process allowed for rigorous, robust and repeated reflexive and ongoing development of the coding frame and analysis and interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inter-rater reliability and coding agreement between myself and this study's two supervisors was also a crucial component to ensuring quality and reliability of the coding analysis and interpretation stages (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

Ethics

This research project received ethics approval from the University of Sydney's Human Ethics Committee (#2022-750) in November 2022. Ethics was an essential part of ensuring that this research was conducted honestly and with integrity (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Meticulously planned ethical practices and ongoing reflexivity ensured the reliability, value, and quality of this study in accordance with the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC, 2018) procedures and protocols. Frequent collaboration with supervisors supported the ethics, credibility, and integrity of the research, ensuring ethical protocols were understood and adhered to, stemming from their professional perspectives and extensive research experience (Cohen et al., 2011).

The ethical requirements for human research include anonymity, voluntary participation, and informed consent (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Participants voluntarily joined the study once participation and informed consent was explained through the participant information statements (Appendix F and S) and consent forms (Appendices G and T). The participation information statements detailed the research; possible risks and benefits; the

data collection processes; guarantees of anonymity and de-identification; the right to withdraw; assurance of anonymity and confidentiality in all research outputs; that employers will not have access to the information participants shared but employers may access the research publications; and secured storage of participant data only accessed by the researcher and her supervisors for this research study (Cohen et al., 2011). These details secured three important things: first, that participants maintained power and control throughout the research process; second, that participants felt safe and could establish a sense of genuine security and trust with the researcher (Somekh & Lewin, 2011); and third, that participants felt comfortable provisioning authentic data for a credible and quality research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participant wellbeing remained an essential ethical consideration throughout the duration of this study. Private, emotional accounts of real-life experiences are understood to have, at times, positive or distressing impacts on participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was aware that participants may at times disclose personal feelings and wellbeing experiences that might make them feel exposed or vulnerable. It was crucial that I remained perceptive to participants' wellbeing via their email, PebblePad, and interviewing engagements, ensuring that if participants indicated distress, support in a mindful, respectful and safe way for both participant and me was facilitated (as summarised in Appendix Y for Misty). Such support included reflective discussions with supervisors to ensure holistic approaches were utilised.

The wellbeing supports I provided included wellbeing and mental health services' details for participants both on PebblePad and in interviews if they needed support (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Beyond Blue, Headspace, Lifeline). I also made myself available to participants if they indicated that they were struggling with their participation in anyway or with their work in ECEC, particularly the emotional aspects of their relational work. Adaptations to data collection were essential for some participants to

support their wellbeing and engagement throughout this research. Furthermore, all participants indicated that either (or both) journaling and interviewing was a therapeutic way to relieve stress, reflect on themselves and their work, and support emotional processing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Chapter Conclusion

A mixed-methods longitudinal study with an application of emotional labour theory framed in a critical feminist lens and through an ecological approach enabled empirical understandings of emotional labour in educators' work with families within Australia's ECEC context to be exposed for the first time. Additionally, I had come to understand that if I wanted to advance emotional labour theoretically, then my research methods and practices needed to draw from various theoretical paradigms that challenge emotional labour theory (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). The critical feminist lens sought to challenge maternalistic views of educators' emotional labour in their work with families by disrupting discourses that keep emotional labour undervalued and invisible in ECEC and positioned only as negative to wellbeing. Meanwhile, drawing on ecological systems theory and later job demands-resources' theory, I sought to expose the multi-level factors involved in educators emotional labour and wellbeing to further highlight the skill in this work and what the relationship between emotional labour and wellbeing is in ECEC contexts. The remainder of this thesis addresses the findings pertaining to the methods discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Survey Results and Discussion

In Chapter Two I exposed knowledge gaps and methodological and interpretative limitations to investigations of emotional labour in educators' work with families that unintentionally reinforce deficit discourses about this labour (Dickerson et al., 2024a). Furthermore, I argued that a critical feminist framing of emotional labour in ECEC may illuminate the skill involved in this labour to shift maternalistic rhetoric, and in doing so, unveil wellbeing implications beyond negative-only understandings and inform theoretical advancements of emotional labour for ECEC (Dickerson et al., 2024a). I therefore also argued in Chapter Two that quantitative-only investigations of emotional labour in educators' work with families are insufficient for unveiling the depth and nuance of such work (Dickerson et al., 2024a). In Chapter Three I discussed a mixed-method approach as a worthwhile route to yielding data that reveals in-depth understandings of emotional labour in educators' work with families, the contextual influences on this work, and its wellbeing effects.

Building on Dickerson et al. (2024a), this chapter is the first of three that presents findings from my mixed-method study, framed in a critical feminist lens, on emotional labour in educators' work with families, and the wellbeing impacts of such work. The chapter includes the second publication in this thesis, which presents and unpacks the results from the quantitative component's *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale* survey. Since only one Australian investigation on emotional labour in educators' work with families had been conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic (Quiñones et al., 2022), the purpose of the survey was to generate—for the first time—broadbrush quantitative data on educators' emotional labour with families in Australian birth-to-five contexts. Additionally, the survey sought to identify if, what, and how emotional labour is exercised with families, and if and

what impact such work is perceived to have on educator wellbeing. As such, the survey component addressed all three research questions:

1. How do educators exercise emotional labour in their efforts to partner with families in early childhood education and care contexts?
2. What influences educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families?
3. What are the wellbeing impacts of educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families?

Between the publishing of Dickerson et al. (2024a) and the writing of the paper included in this chapter—Dickerson et al. (2024b)—I made adjustments to my articulation of emotional labour theory following deeper engagement with both Hochschild's (1983/2012) and Grandey et al.'s (2013) work. The next section discusses the adjustments I made to the theory following my deepened understandings and is the theory that appears in Dickerson et al. (2024b).

Adjusting Emotional Labour Theory

My initial understanding of emotional labour theory developed while reviewing the emotional labour literature in ECEC (Dickerson et al., 2024a) and some of the organisational, psychological, and sociological conceptualisations and applications of emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Diefendorff et al., 2005; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1979, 2012; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Wharton & Erickson, 1993). My initial understanding of the theory is articulated in Chapter Two's first publication (Dickerson et al., 2024a).

As detailed in Chapter Three, Grandey et al.'s (2013) tri-focal framing of emotional labour theory includes three interconnected lenses: occupational requirements, emotional

displays, and intrapsychic experiences. I initially took emotional displays to include surface acting, deep acting, and genuine expressions, and intrapsychic experiences to be the internal experiences of emotional labour that related to how such labour impacted the employee's wellbeing, such as causing dissonance (Hochschild, 1983/2012).

Given the doctoral journey requires reflexive researcher practices and constant reading of new and relevant literature, theoretical understandings of emotional labour theory progressed as I continually reflected on two important ideas: one being the external expressions that occurred in interactions with others; and two, the internal work necessary for exercising these external expressions at work. Gradually, while continually returning to Hochschild (1983/2012) and Grandey et al.'s (2013) work, I came to better understand Hochschild's surface and deep acting as internal work and recognised that while Grandey et al. discussed these with respect to emotional displays, they were, in fact, positioned as intrapsychic experiences.




I had come to understand that emotional labour as emotional displays were the external aspects—the expressions, behaviours and attitudes—enacted for meeting occupational requirements, while the intrapsychic experiences were the internal aspects of emotion regulation work that could include the wellbeing impacts of this work. I also came to understand that there was effort in the emotional and cognitive processes for suppressing or faking emotion (surface acting), changing emotion (deep acting), or showing genuine emotion (genuine expressions) in accordance with occupational requirements. This understanding was different to my initial articulation of emotional labour theory in Dickerson et al. (2024a). As such, I adjusted the theory to reflect more clearly Grandey et al.'s (2013) tri-focal conceptualisation of Hochschild's (1983/2012) original emotional labour theory. It is this perspective of the theory that is presented in this chapter's publication (Dickerson et al., 2024b).

My understanding of emotional labour's three strategies shifted from emotional displays into the intrapsychic experiences prior to Dickerson et al. (2024b) being published. The same theoretical iteration is provided in this thesis' third publication, Dickerson et al. (in press), in Chapter Five. Only when I undertook journal revisions for the publication of the wellbeing findings (Dickerson et al., under review), presented in Chapter Six, and while simultaneously writing on this investigation's theoretical contributions to emotional labour, presented in Chapter Seven, did I adjust my understanding of the theory once more. The final adjustment is discussed at the beginning of Chapter Six before Dickerson et al. (under review).

**Publication 2: Working with Families: An Investigation of Early Childhood Educators’
Emotional Labour and Wellbeing**

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Working with families: an investigation of early childhood educators' emotional labour and wellbeing

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ABSTRACT

Emotional labour is the process by which employees regulate emotions to manage their expressions in accordance with their professional role. Early childhood educators' emotional labour is relatively under-explored and unacknowledged, with understandings about the wellbeing implications of such work limited. This paper reports findings from a study aiming to unveil educators' emotional labour while working with families, and the educator wellbeing implications of this work. The study utilised a three-dimensional conceptualisation of emotional labour framed by a critical feminist lens seeking to illuminate the skilled and professional aspects in such work. The Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour survey provided broadbrush, quantitative data of early childhood teachers' and educators' emotional labour with families in Australia for the first time. Emotional labour was found to be prevalent in educators' work with families; influenced by individual and contextual factors; and negatively impacted respondents' wellbeing. Implications for providers, pre-service and ongoing professional development programs, early childhood workforce practice and policy, and future research are discussed.

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Early childhood education; wellbeing; emotional labour; educators; families

Introduction

Working with families in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is an expected and important component of educators' day-to-day work. Educators – vocationally (certificate III/diploma) and degree (early childhood teacher [ECT]) qualified professionals – are required by regulations and frameworks in Australia and internationally to establish and sustain partnerships with families (Canadian Government 2017; ACECQA (2020); Department for Education 2021; Guo and Kilderry 2018; Ministry of Education 2017; Ministry of Education and Research 2005; United States Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS] & Department of Education 2016). Such partnerships have life-long wellbeing, learning, and development benefits for children (Hryniewicz and Luff 2020), however, understandings of educators' emotional labour to establish and sustain

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partnerships with families, and the potential wellbeing implications, are limited (Dickerson, Fenech, and Stratigos 2024).

Emotional labour, essential for educators' relational work (Langford 2019; Taggart 2011), offers a lens to unpack educators' work with families and the related wellbeing implications. Emotional labour is the 'management of feeling' and expression for professionally required outward displays (Hochschild 2012, 7). Our recent review of educators' emotional labour (Dickerson, Fenech, and Stratigos 2024) identified thirty empirical investigations, but only four explored emotional labour with families (Brown et al. 2022; Lee and Brotheridge 2011; L. Morris 2018; Quiñones, Melissa, and Emily 2022). Moreover, while some studies highlighted emotional labour's negative wellbeing implications for educators (Hodgkins et al. 2023; Purper et al. 2022), limited understandings of the relationship between educators' emotional labour with families and their wellbeing remain.

A deeper understanding of educators' emotional labour with families and ensuing wellbeing implications is timely given global ECEC workforce turnover, attrition, and wellbeing crises (Fenech et al. 2021; OECD 2022). Evidence that articulates educators' work and its associated wellbeing may inform initiatives to address these crises (ACECQA (2021); Canadian Government 2021; Kulakiewicz et al. 2022; Productivity Commission 2023; United States DHHS 2022). This study, the first component of a longitudinal, mixed-methods investigation, addresses the evidence-gap of educators' emotional labour and associated wellbeing with families in birth-to-five contexts. What follows is an overview of emotional labour theory and the gaps in extant research that our study addresses.

Emotional labour

This study drew upon A. Grandey, Diefendorff, and Rupp's (2013) re-conceptualisation of Hochschild's (2012) emotional labour theory, which included the interconnected tri-focal lenses of *occupational requirements*, *emotional displays*, and *intrapsychic experiences*. *Occupational requirements* are the *emotional display rules* expected of employees and include positive (express positive emotions) or negative (suppress negative emotions) display rules (A. Grandey, Diefendorff, and Rupp 2013).

Emotional displays are employees' outward expressions displayed to meet *occupational requirements* and may have individual and/or organisational benefits when feelings, displays and requirements are congruent (A. Grandey, Diefendorff, and Rupp 2013). For example, if it is expected that educators are calm and positive, then educators who feel and display patience with a smile may secure families' trust. *Emotional displays* enacted through *surface acting*, *deep acting*, or *genuine expression* strategies either reflect *emotional harmony* (congruence between feelings, displays and requirements) or *emotional dissonance* (incongruence between feelings, displays and requirements), with potentially positive or negative individual and/or organisational outcomes (A. Grandey, Diefendorff, and Rupp 2013).

Intrapsychic experiences are the internal 'effort, planning and control' (A. J. Morris and Feldman 1996, 987) required to regulate 'feelings and expressions' (A. A. Grandey 2000, 97). *Surface acting* involves hiding feelings and/or expressing expected displays without internally feeling them, likely causing *dissonance* (Brotheridge and Lee 2003). For example, an educator may hide their tiredness to

express a cheerful demeanour. *Deep acting* involves managing emotions from what is felt, towards feeling and expressing what is expected (Brotheridge and Lee 2003). For example, an educator initially anxious about a family's indifference towards their child's behaviour, internally manages their anxiety to instead feel and express concerned empathy. *Genuine expressions* are authentic, likely achieving *emotional harmony* (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993) – such as authentic joy at celebrating a child's achievement with the family, but may be effortful at high frequency – such as grief when discussing their child's possible development delay (Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand 2005).

Educators' exercising of emotional labour while working with families, however, remains unclear. Research across other professions highlights mixed experiences of emotional labour and its efforts (Gabriel, Diefendorff, and Grandey 2023). What factors cause emotional labour to be effortful, and whether such understandings offer potential affordances for supporting educators' day-to-day work and wellbeing, is the focus of this paper.

Emotional labour with families in ECEC

To our knowledge only four studies have investigated educator-family emotional labour (Brown et al. 2022; Lee and Brotheridge 2011; L. Morris 2018; Quiñones, Melissa, and Emily 2022). Findings highlighted that educators exercised and experienced emotional labour '... based on the nature of their individual relationships with families ... to benefit educator-family partnerships ... and with some professional and wellbeing implications' (Dickerson, Fenech, and Stratigos 2024). Importantly, emotional labour is described as work that supports educators to know families, and manage relational, professional, and contextual challenges.

Notwithstanding the value of such findings, limitations persist. First, the studies inadvertently reinforce maternalistic positionings of educators' work by not making explicit the skills that exercising emotional labour requires (Dickerson, Fenech, and Stratigos 2024). Second, the studies examined emotional labour across multiple ECEC relationships, rather than specifically with families (Brown et al. 2022; L. Morris 2018); during a global pandemic (Quiñones, Melissa, and Emily 2022); and at one time point (Lee and Brotheridge 2011). Third, due to each study's limited wellbeing focus or tendency to highlight negative emotional labour experiences, the wellbeing implications of exercising emotional labour with families remain unclear. As such, the skills and strategies educators may use while working with families, and why, and the associated wellbeing of this work remain hidden.

Study aims

The study reported in this paper investigated educators' emotional labour and associated wellbeing while working with families. Specifically:

- (1) Do educators exercise emotional labour with families, and if so, how?
- (2) What influences this emotional labour with families?
- (3) What are educators' perceptions of the impact of emotional labour on their wellbeing?

Methodology

A critical feminist framing

Investigated using emotional labour theory within a critical feminist lens, this study sought to challenge deficit maternalistic discourses of educators' emotional labour by unveiling the skill of such work. Our approach was informed by the work of feminist Lather (1992, 91) who highlighted 'the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness, skills, and institutions'. Lather (2017, 83) argued that critical feminist research challenges 'the invisibility and distortion of women's experiences' through reflexive research that generates 'emancipatory knowledge' to empower and liberate the researched. A critical feminist lens challenges emotional labour's positioning as women's work, where women are perceived as naturally more capable of labour that is emotional, nurturing or caring compared to men (Ailwood 2007; Hochschild 2012). This positioning brands emotional labour as skill-less on account of gender and innate, biological attributes (Ailwood 2007; Osgood 2012), thus marginalising men from the workforce (Taggart 2011). In a female-dominated workforce, where emotional labour remains unacknowledged as skilled work, exploitation of such labour occurs and undermines educators' quest for professional recognition (Ailwood 2007; Taggart 2011). Consequentially, emotional labour's necessary, oft complex skills for working with young children and families are devalued and concealed, further entrenching such labour in maternalistic discourses (Osgood 2010; Taggart 2011).

Where emotional labour is recognised as multi-skilled work, the possibility of debunking maternalistic discourses arises. Osgood (2010, 128) identified that educators 'constantly negotiate and assess the role and interplay of emotions' signifying the effort in educators' emotional labour (Taggart 2011) and negating maternalistic positionings. Feminist scholars suggest that by 'reclaiming emotions as vital and credible in ECEC practice' (Osgood 2012, 146), emotional labour can contribute to educators' professionalism (Langford 2019). That such labour is innately women's work is further debunked by findings that male educators experience and engage skilfully with the emotional components in their ECEC relational work (L. Morris 2018; Thorpe et al. 2020). A critical feminist lens seeks to acknowledge the skill in educators' emotional labour with families and dismantle the exploitative and invisible positioning of such labour.

Data collection

To gather a broad understanding of educators' emotional labour with families and related wellbeing, data were collected through *The Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale* survey, administered in New South Wales, Australia. Following the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee's (#2022-750) approval, the anonymous survey was piloted and then administered online between November 2022 and February 2023. Respondents accessed the survey via peak ECEC platforms, social media, or through ECEC authorities and service leaders who promoted the survey. Respondents were 18-years-or-older working in preschool (three-to-five-year-old) or long day care (birth-to-five-year-old) settings.

The survey was adapted from Brown's (2011) *The Emotional Labor of Teaching Scale* (TELTS). TELTS is an 18-item, 5-point Likert scale developed from the original *Emotional Labor Scale* (Brotheridge and Lee 2003) and *Emotional Labor Strategy Scale* (Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand 2005). Adaptations for Australian birth-to-five contexts included additional demographic questions and replacing 'my school expects me to ...' with 'I am expected to ...' in the *Emotional Display Rule* scale, as it remains unknown from where expectations for emotional displays in ECEC arise. Additionally, replacing 'students' with 'families' and including open-ended questions for *genuine emotions* and educators' *perceptions of emotional labour's impact on their wellbeing* met this investigation's objectives. The survey was organised into three parts (see Appendix 1) and included two 5-point Likert Scales: the *Emotional Display Rule* scale ranging from '0=I strongly disagree' to '5=I strongly agree'; and the *Emotional Labour Strategy* scale ranging from '0=Never' to '5=Always'.

Respondents

Demographic data from 147 respondents, where 98% were female, are reported in Appendix 2. Overall, respondents represented an older (80% older than 31-years), more experienced (13-years mean sector experience) cohort compared to the Australian centre-based ECEC workforce (65% older than 31-years; seven-years mean sector experience; DESE 2022). Respondents' qualifications included 44.9% ECTs, compared to only 12% of the workforce having an ECT qualification (DESE 2022). Additionally, many respondents held leadership roles (42.2%) (director, nominated supervisor, or educational leader) and worked in 'exceeding'-rated services (47%) – rated as operating above minimum standards – as per Australia's national regulatory and quality assurance system (ACECQA 2020).

Data analysis

Data were imported to SPSS (V24) for reliability checks and statistical analyses. Cronbach's Alpha (α) revealed that this study's adapted survey scales had internal reliability, that is, consistency across the adapted scale items was observed. Mean and standard deviation ($M \pm SD$) for influences on emotional labour and emotional labour strategies are reported where statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) differences between demographic groups occur. The mean indicates the average distribution of the demographic group on the scale, while standard deviation indicates how much responses vary either side of the mean (Strunk and Mwavita 2020). Where demographic variables are not reported, no statistical significance between groups occurred.

Exploratory data analyses described the frequency of educators' demographics, perceptions of emotional display rules, and emotional labour strategies with families. Averages of the emotional display rule and emotional labour strategy scales were calculated to create weighted mean scores and standard deviations for each item, subscale, and scale. Where the *Emotional Display Rule Scale* data and wellbeing responses were heavily skewed, analyses were kept descriptive given that inferential analyses (i.e. predictions about the broader educator population) could not be made.

Inferential analyses examined associations between numerical summary outcomes of the scales and explanatory demographic variables through independent samples t-tests and analyses of variance (ANOVA). Models achieving p -values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant. Outliers were identified and assumptions of normality and constant variance for T-Tests (Levene's test) and ANOVA were checked prior to final interpretation. Where assumptions of variance were not met, Welch's non-parametric tests were conducted.

The open-ended wellbeing question was thematically coded with two emerging categorical variables. First, *whether respondents perceived that emotional labour while working with families impacted their wellbeing (yes/no)*, and second, *what this wellbeing impact was (positive/negative/both)*.

Results

Do educators exercise emotional labour while working with families, and if so, how?

Overall, respondents ($n = 147$) reported exercising emotional labour 'often' (Likert scale score of 3–4) when working with families (Table 1). Respondents also reported using all emotional labour strategies 'often', with surface acting being exercised more frequently, followed by deep acting and genuine emotion.

What influences educators' exercising of emotional labour with families?

Emotional labour

Respondents ($n = 147$) agreed emotional displays are expected in their work with families (Table 2). While both positive and negative displays were exercised frequently, positive displays (being happy, calm, enthusiastic or supportive) were perceived to be expected more than negative displays (suppressing negative emotions like anger, distress, sadness).

Inferential results (Table 3) revealed that emotional labour was, overall, influenced by culture, qualification, and some family factors. Where respondents identified as

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of emotional labour, and emotional labour strategies exercised by respondents ($n = 147$).

	α	M	SD
Emotional Labour	0.60	3.64	0.40
Surface Acting	0.83	3.71	0.71
Deep Acting	0.75	3.60	0.77
Genuine Emotion	0.80	3.56	0.68

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of respondents' ($n = 147$) knowledge and exercising of emotional display rule scale.

	α	M	SD
Perceived knowledge of emotional display rules	1.00	4.47	0.69
Positive Display Rules	0.86	4.57	0.68
Negative Display Rules	0.89	4.39	0.68

Table 3. Significance ($p < 0.05$) indicating emotional labour influences.

Influences	Emotional labour	Surface Acting	Deep Acting	Genuine Emotion
Perceived Emotional Display Rules	Descriptive			
Culture	$p = 0.013$			
Qualification	$p = 0.011$			
Role-type		$p = 0.013$		$p = 0.024$
ECEC experience (years)			$p = 0.014$	
Service size		$p = 0.027$		
Families keen-to-partner	$p = 0.046$		$p = 0.003$	$p = 0.006$
Families EAL	$p = 0.032$		$p = 0.016$	
Migrant Families			$p = 0.024$	
Families' culture is different			$p = 0.003$	

'Australian' (3.69 ± 0.40) emotional labour was exercised more often than respondents identifying as 'other culture' (3.50 ± 0.39). Similarly, vocationally-qualified educators (3.72 ± 0.37) exercised emotional labour more often than ECTs (3.55 ± 0.42). Emotional labour was exercised more often when 'most' families were perceived as keen-to-partner (3.70 ± 0.37) compared to the group 'a-few-to-about-half' of families (3.56 ± 0.44) and where 'none-to-a-few' families had English as an Additional Language (EAL) (3.70 ± 0.42) compared to 'half-or-more' EAL families (3.55 ± 0.35).

Surface acting

Role-type and service size influenced educators' exercising of surface acting. Educators 'working directly with children' (3.77 ± 0.71) surface acted more often than leaders 'not working directly with children' (service directors, nominated supervisors, educational leaders) (3.32 ± 0.62). More surface acting was exercised in services with ' ≤ 30 ' children per day (4.11 ± 0.62) compared to services with '31-50' (3.57 ± 0.51) and '51-100' (3.62 ± 0.76) children per day.

Deep acting

Years' sector experience and all family factors influenced deep acting. Respondents with '4-9 years' of experience (3.91 ± 0.73) exercised deep acting more often than those with ' ≤ 3 years' (3.61 ± 0.82) and ' ≥ 10 years' (3.67 ± 0.75) experience respectively. Deep acting was exercised more often where 'most' families were perceived as keen-to-partner (3.76 ± 0.74) compared to the group 'a-few-to-about-half' (3.39 ± 0.76); with 'none-to-a-few' EAL families (3.73 ± 0.78) compared to 'half-or-more' EAL families (3.41 ± 0.71); where 'about half' of families had a culture different to the respondents (3.93 ± 0.56) compared to where 'most' families (3.37 ± 0.76) had a different culture; and with 'none-to-a-few' migrant families (3.70 ± 0.83) compared to 'half-or-more' migrant families (3.42 ± 0.62).

Genuine emotions

Role-type and some family factors influenced educators' genuine emotions with families. More genuine emotions were expressed by those 'not working directly with children' (3.81 ± 0.45) compared to those who were (3.52 ± 0.70); and where 'most' families were perceived as keen-to-partner (3.69 ± 0.65) compared to the group 'a-few-to-about-half' of families (3.38 ± 0.69).

What are educators' perceptions of the impact of emotional labour on their wellbeing?

Ninety-four respondents answered questions on the wellbeing impact of emotional labour, with 99% ($n = 93$) perceiving that their exercising of emotional labour with families impacted their wellbeing. Of these ninety-three respondents, 74.4% ($n = 80$) indicated *whether this impact was negative, positive or, both*. Overwhelmingly, 90% ($n = 72$) indicated a negative impact. Additionally, seven respondents indicated both positive and negative impacts, and only one respondent indicated a positive impact. Descriptive analyses on the demographics of the seventy-two 'negative-responders' did not indicate any specific educator profile type different to that found in the 147 respondents overall.

'Negative' open-ended descriptions of participants' emotional labour included 'exhausting', 'stressful', 'frustrating', 'being underappreciated', and 'impacts my family life'. For example,

It is emotionally, mentally and physically exhausting to be 'on' all the time. To be positive, to make sure everything is done, all paperwork is done, children are happy, observations are done, experiences are set up, children are up when parents want them to be – to manage every family's expectations, when all families expectations are different.

Descriptions that included acknowledgement of the positive experiences and/or outcomes were, 'benefits my work', 'true emotions boosting my wellbeing', and 'supports me'. For example,

On occasion it works out well where if you positively engage first, regardless of how you're feeling, it opens up a door for positive interactions which can result in legitimate positive emotions. In this way I feel some emotional 'faking' can actually make my day and benefit my outlook on work. This can also build genuine relationships with families in which case you never have to fake around them.

Discussion

Implicit to explicit emotional labour

That an overwhelming majority of educators exercised emotional labour and all three emotional labour strategies often in their work with families shift this labour from implicit to explicit. This finding further suggests that the internal effort for exercising these strategies, especially surface acting, also occurs often. Findings indicate that educators may have flexibly and strategically exercised a strategy dependent upon factors such as time; individual experience, culture, and role; socio-cultural and workplace contexts; and/or the educator-family relationship (Gabriel, Diefendorff, and Grandey 2023).

Ecologically framing emotional labour in ECEC

A contribution of this study is its finding that interconnected ecological factors influence the exercising of emotional labour. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1996), five interconnected levels of influence emerged from this study:

- (1) the individual educator;
- (2) the microsystem: the service context;
- (3) the mesosystem: how aligned service and families' backgrounds and expectations are;
- (4) exosystem-to-macrosystem: regulatory requirements and discourses framing emotional display expectations; and
- (5) the chronosystem: the influence of time within and between the first four systems.

Individual level

Our findings showed that whether an educator works directly with children or not influences their emotional labour while working with families. Educators who worked directly with children exercised more surface acting with families compared with educators not working with children and overall, vocationally-qualified educators exercised more emotional labour with families than ECTs. In Australia, vocationally-qualified educators typically spend less time working with families and more time with children than ECTs (Gibson et al. 2023). Working intensively with children is physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausting (Cumming et al. 2024) and potentially influences the exercising of certain strategies with families. The educator-child relationship may influence educators' emotional labour with the family, particularly where child development or behaviour concerns exist (L. Morris 2018). Working with children may necessitate surface acting that suppresses tiredness, stress or even dislike of a child and warrants investigation.

Surface acting requires knowledge of children, families (Brown et al. 2022), and the benefits of positive dispositions that support children and secure families' confidence in the educators' capacity to nurture their child. Here, surface acting could support family engagement, while simultaneously managing child-related responsibilities that may have positive professional outcomes. Further dismantling notions of skill-lessness, such descriptions suggest that educators apply knowledge to make informed decisions to exercise emotional labour intentionally. That is, using one's emotions is not a threat to professionalism in ECEC, but is, rather, an act of professionalism (Langford 2019).

In contrast, educators 'not working directly with children', typically in senior leadership positions, exercised more genuine emotions. This finding may be due to the experience, authority, and agency that leadership roles afford educators, noting that most service leaders in Australia are ECT-qualified with ≥ 3 years of sector experience (Alchin, Arthur, and Woodrow 2019). Moreover, whether leaders not working directly with children potentially have more time and energy to establish and sustain relationships with families, requires exploration.

Results suggested that respondents' years of ECEC experience influenced the exercising of deep acting with families in two ways. First, that deep acting was exercised more often by educators with four-to-nine years of experience than those with ≤ 3 years and ≥ 10 years of experience, potentially signifies the knowledge and learned experiential skill acquired over time necessary for this strategy. This assertion is supported by Brown et al. (2022), 7) who noted that experienced preschool teachers who knew more about families' backgrounds had greater capacity to deep act, but doing so took 'years of practice'. Second, longevity in the sector has been associated with burnout (Thorpe et al. 2023), which may account for why this study's respondents with ≥ 10 years' experience in ECEC exercised less deep acting. Such a suggestion aligns with evidence that educators surface

act to protect themselves and manage emotions that may adversely impact educator-family relationships (Brown et al. 2022; L. Morris 2018).

Knowledge, experience, and confidence to partner with families may be necessary for exercising emotional labour with families, signifying that emotional labour's skills are potentially learned instead of a gender-based, intuitive capacity (Osgood 2010; Taggart 2015). Additionally, acquiring such capacities through knowledge and experience may signify differences between vocational- and teacher-qualified educators' practices of this work. Perhaps, over time, some educators achieve greater emotional harmony due to developing capacities that fit the emotional demands for working with families. Whether, and how, pre-service preparation, professional development, workplace structures and experience better prepare and support educators to develop and flexibly exercise emotional labour necessary for working with families warrants examination.

Microsystem

Our findings suggest that service contexts influence how, when, and why educators enact emotional labour with families. That educators in smaller services exercised surface acting often-to-always may be attributable to requirements for fewer ECTs on site (ACECQA 2020). Additionally, given that ECTs in small services may work directly with children while simultaneously holding leadership roles (Alchin, Arthur, and Woodrow 2019), more surface acting may occur, since working with children was found to be associated with surface acting. Smaller services are prone to lacking resources to support staff, enable professional development, and employ above-ratio-staffing (Harrison et al. 2023). Limited resources, leadership support and ECTs potentially curtail opportunities for sustainable workloads, collaborations on and knowledge-sharing of child and family needs that support deep acting or genuine expressions. Limited resources and support may also encourage the enactment of strategies that focus on concealing workplace stress, rather than unveiling emotional labour's skills, thereby enabling ongoing exploitation of emotional labour.

Mesosystem

The ease in working with families 'most keen-to-partner' appears to enable more deep acting. While more deep acting occurred with 'none-to-a-few' migrant and EAL families and less deep acting occurred where 'most' families' cultures were different to the educators' potentially signifies challenges working with these families. Deep acting seems to occur where educators can easily know or relate to families. Whether educators hold deficit attitudes towards migrant or EAL families, and what strategies educators utilise while working with them requires exploration.

Surface acting may be a preferred strategy where differences between educators and families exist. Surface acting is perhaps exercised 'to create space in the moment to sustain and bridge challenging relationships', or where educators 'lack the cognitive and emotional resources required to rapidly deep act in the moment' (Brown et al. 2022, 9). Additionally, if surface acting is a self-preservation strategy, then it may purposefully sustain relationships or educators' capacities for working with families where differences exist. Given that 26% of respondents identified as 'other culture', investigating potential

benefits of a migrant-EAL-culturally diverse workforce for families is critical (Gide et al. 2021), particularly for understanding emotional labour with diverse families.

Exosystem-macrosystem

Educators believed there were display rules requiring certain expressions with families, a finding consistent with other studies (Hodgkins et al. 2023; Lee and Brotheridge 2011; L. Morris 2018) and which signifies the relevance of socio-cultural expectations for emotional labour. However, understanding whether ‘Australian’ educators exercised more emotional labour due to better understanding of socio-cultural expectations within Australian contexts compared to educators from ‘other cultures’ needs clarification. Whether and how emotional labour may be culturally specific in ECEC requires examining.

Beliefs about what is expected may stem from regulatory requirements for supportive relationships with families (ACECQA 2020); social, government and family expectations that ECEC services be responsive to the needs of families (Productivity Commission 2023); employers who position families as customers and educators as service providers (Fenech 2019); socio-historical perspectives of educators as ‘nice ladies’ who provide for others’ needs (Stonehouse 1989); and pre-service preparation programs, workplace mentorship or societal norms that implicitly encourage practices to fulfill such expectations (Solvason and Webb 2022). While Hochschild (2012) highlighted organisational expectations and employer-managed display rules for emotional labour, the expectations for the relationship-based nature of ECEC may not only be organisationally derived.

Contrasting Hochschild’s (2012) shopkeepers, waiters or flight attendants who provide services and products to strangers, educator-family engagements are personal in nature and occur frequently. Educators’ careful consideration of their own needs and capacities, socio-cultural and work contexts, and family-based factors likely drive their choice of strategy from one-family-to-the-next, from one-day-to-the-next, and from one-situation-to-the-next, positioning this work as strategic and skilful. Yet, the skills and strategies educators utilise in their emotional labour for partnership work and its associated well-being, are absent from regulations, policies, and social expectations.

Chronosystem

Our findings suggest time may play a role in educators’ exercising of emotional labour in two ways. First, educators’ knowledge, experience, and confidence to partner with families are perhaps gained through qualifications but also time in the role. As such, individual educators’ emotional labour capacities may be honed over time. Second, educators work with families continuously over the period in which a child (or the family’s children) attends the service. Contrasting Hochschild’s (2012) professions where emotional labour with strangers is momentary or short term, educators engage with families continuously, for extended periods. How expectations for educator-family partnerships might change over the lifespan of the educator-family relationship and the child’s growth require examination.

Ecologically framing emotional labour’s wellbeing implications

Overwhelmingly, this study’s educators experienced negative wellbeing impacts from their emotional labour with families. Scholarship identifies exhaustion, burnout, and

emotional dissonance experienced from emotional labour, particularly surface acting (Gabriel, Diefendorff, and Grandey 2023). Similar evidence in ECEC research exists (Hodgkins et al. 2023; Purper et al. 2022). Exercising emotional labour at high frequency, intensity, and duration has negative wellbeing implications for educators (Brown et al. 2018; Zhang et al. 2020) and relates to this study's findings. Additionally, frequent and extended deep acting and genuine expressions may be effortful, leading to educator burnout (Zheng, Ailing, and Ying 2022).

Exercising emotional labour to prioritise the feelings of others over one's own or by being nice to appease families, fuels exploitation that 'reproduces repressive structures' in ECEC (Monrad 2017, 282) and negatively impacts wellbeing. Given that ecological factors influence educators' emotional labour with families, ecologically framing educators' wellbeing of this work may indicate multi-system support strategies (Cumming, Logan, and Wong 2020). Such a system may also identify emotional labour's skills and its wellbeing impact within and between system levels. Identifying the skilled exercising of emotional labour, that may have negative wellbeing implications, challenges notions that such work is easy or natural.

If working with families is and requires emotional labour, then it is counter-productive to view emotional labour as merely negative. Unpacking educators' positive emotional labour experiences may afford more nuanced understanding of the relationship between emotional labour and wellbeing. The previous description of a participant's positive and negative experiences highlights that emotional labour enables positive interactions with families and potentially establishes genuine partnerships with indirect, long-term positive wellbeing implications.

Investigating how emotional labour could be '... an ongoing coping strategy to deal with burnout rather than a cause or antecedent of burnout' (Kariou et al. 2021, 12), for example, may proffer practice-based evidence to inform workforce wellbeing strategies that support emotional labour practices. While the survey asked respondents if emotional labour had wellbeing implications, it remains unclear whether educators' wellbeing was already negatively impacted by workplace or workforce challenges; that is, whether educators' emotional labour practices were influenced by negative wellbeing experiences, rather than or in addition to the other way around. Despite their negative wellbeing experiences and the burnout factors driving sector turnover (Ng, Rogers, and McNamara 2023), the mature-aged, experienced respondents in this study represented the workforce 'stayers'.

Policy, preparation, and practice implications

Given that emotional labour is exercised often and has a negative effect on wellbeing, attention to such labour in ECEC workforce policy, pre-service and ongoing professional development programs, and by employers is essential. Through a critical feminist lens, the purposeful enactment of emotional labour based on the nuanced, individualised needs of families, identifies this labour as requiring skill that can be learned and supported. Such a lens shifts the focus from emotional labour's negative impact to its potential positive implications that promote educator professionalism and wellbeing. Evidence of and recognition for educators' skilful and purposeful emotional labour, in tandem with

broader sector and societal discourses framing ECEC policies, regulations, and pre-service and ongoing professional development programs, in which they work, is critical.

Identifying and articulating the impact on, and the resources and practices needed for safeguarding educators' wellbeing while working with families is necessary given current Australian and international sector burnout and attrition (Australian Government 2023; OECD 2022). Additionally, provisioning educators with evidence-based-knowledge and practice-based-skills for emotional labour may mitigate negative wellbeing effects. Understanding each strategy's benefits may avoid exploitative, expense-of-self and maternalistic enactments of this labour (Monrad 2017) and instead explicitly position emotional labour as a valuable, unavoidable professional component (Osgood 2010). It remains unknown what factors may balance the effort required for emotional labour that causes negative wellbeing experiences, but the stayers in this study signify such possibilities.

Limitations and future directions

Respondents in our study were older, more experienced, and included an over-representation of ECTs compared to Australia's ECEC workforce generally, signifying the sector stayers despite unprecedented workforce challenges (Australian Government 2023). Furthermore, this cohort predominantly worked in services rated as high quality. While such a cohort skewed some of our data, it highlights significant future directions. Future investigations should seek larger sample sizes, from a wider range of educators across various contexts and with consideration to adult-to-child ratios to draw inferences in relation to the workforce. Educators' surface acting, faking and suppression techniques, and emotion regulation for deep acting require exploration. The cultural dimensions of educators' emotional labour with a range of families remain unclear and could be examined. Future research could draw attention to educators' skilful exercising of emotional labour for professional purposes thereby diminishing deficit discourse.

Understandings about the relationship between wellbeing and emotional labour remain sparse in ECEC and warrant exploration. Such investigations will deepen understandings of emotional labour's skilful utilisation and implications for educator-family partnerships and educator wellbeing. Limited Australian research of educators' emotional labour and associated wellbeing exists for comparison of this study's findings. However, this is the first component of an empirical mixed-methods study seeking to detail and describe educators' exercising of and experiences with emotional labour in educator-family partnerships over time. It is hoped that this study sets the way for further emotional labour research within and beyond the Australian ECEC context.

Conclusion

Emotional labour in educator-family partnerships is skilled and complex work that negatively impacts educators' wellbeing. Explicit acknowledgement of this labour and its wellbeing implications may support workforce strategies and employers to facilitate measures that can support educators in this work and attract, retain, and sustain a high-quality workforce. However, the questions this study raises suggest further examination of

educators' emotional labour and associated wellbeing are necessary. A critical feminist lens shifts this labour from skill-less to skilful by debunking maternalistic notions. Brown et al. (2018) argued that it is not enough to be aware of the expectation to emotionally act, but also to know how to emotionally act. Knowledge of emotional labour's strategies relative to interconnected individual, service, and family factors at interplay across time may support educators' skilful enactment of this complex labour in birth-to-five contexts and potentially limit its associated negative wellbeing experiences. Ecologically framing emotional labour and its associated wellbeing in ECEC has implications for policy, providers, pre-service preparation programs, researchers, and educators by highlighting the purposes, benefits, and supportive dimensions necessary for this work.

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Postscript

The *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale* survey provides for the first time in Australian ECEC contexts, understandings of emotional labour in educators' work with families. A significant contribution from this part of my doctoral study's investigation was the finding that emotional labour is influenced by interconnected ecological factors as per Bronfenbrenner's (1996) bioecological systems theory. While emotional labour investigations within organisational disciplines had highlighted a need to consider multi-level contextual influences of such labour more holistically (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), this approach has not been consistently utilised in investigations, particularly in ECEC. In preparing for the second, qualitative component of this doctoral study's investigation, as detailed in Chapter Three's methods section, I applied Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory to both my data collection and analysis processes. Doing so enabled me to carefully seek out the nuanced, multi-level factors that influenced educators' emotional labour in their work with families. The next chapter will present the first set of findings pertaining to the qualitative interviewing and journaling I undertook with participants. These findings emerge through my deductive-inductive analysis utilising a coding framework that incorporated emotional labour, critical feminist, and bioecological theories.

Chapter Five: Part One of the Qualitative Findings and Discussion

Educators' Emotional Labour as Skilled, Professional and Purposeful Relational Work

In this chapter, the third thesis publication reports the first part of the qualitative findings extracted through concurrent interviewing and participant journaling, and extends Chapter Four's broadbrush survey findings to provide deeper understandings of emotional labour and wellbeing in educators' work with families. Key findings from the survey revealed that emotional labour was expected and exercised often with families; ecological factors influenced emotional labour in educators' work with families at individual, service, relational, regulatory, and socio-political levels over time; and, emotional labour had overwhelmingly negative but also some positive wellbeing impacts (Dickerson et al., 2024b).

The publication that follows offers deep understandings of how and why participant educators exercised emotional labour in their work with families; what skills are involved in such work; and what the wellbeing impacts of this work were. A critical feminist framing of emotional labour through an ecological perspective was applied to data collection and analyses in an effort to more clearly debunk notions of innate and skill-less emotional labour—as discussed in Chapter 2—and identify the influences of such labour in ECEC contexts. The critical feminist lens is central to this publication because it privileges educators' voices, which is key to feminist methodologies that aim to illuminate the lived experiences of women as told by them (Harding, 1991; Lather, 1992). Such approaches seek to shift existing narratives of emotional labour based on long-held perspectives and knowledge that stem from socio-political norms and agendas (Harding, 1991; Osgood, 2012; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Instead, new knowledge and narratives derived from the experiences of educators themselves can be generated. Additionally, that I embedded myself into the professional lives of participants for an entire year of data collection resonates strongly with

feminist research approaches (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Somekh & Lewin, 2011) as it enabled me to gain access to the contextual, relational, and emotional dimensions of educators' experiences of emotional labour in their work with families over time.

This first part of the qualitative findings addresses and provides deeper insight into research questions one and two:

1. How do educators exercise emotional labour in their efforts to partner with families in early childhood education and care contexts?
2. What influences educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families?

The publication (Dickerson et al., in press) that follows shows that the how and why of emotional labour in educators' work with families is intricately woven together because the relational work undertaken with families is complex and sensitive, and influenced by multiple factors across the duration of the educator-family relationship. Moreover, it is this complexity and nuance in educators' work with families that illuminates educators' hidden emotional labour as skilled, purposeful work—as revealed in the publication.

Publication 3: Illuminating the Professionalism of Early Childhood Educators'**Emotional Labour in their Work with Families.**

Dickerson, M. K., Fenech, M., & Stratigos, T. (in press). Illuminating the professionalism of early childhood educators' emotional labour in their work with families. (A book chapter in an edited book on *Emotional Labor in the Work of Early Childhood Educators: International Research Perspectives*, accepted for publication by Routledge with expected publication late 2026).

Illuminating the Professionalism of Early Childhood Educators' Emotional Labour in their Work with Families

Abstract

While working with families is critical to early childhood educators' practice, there is limited evidence on *how* and *why* emotional labour is exercised when undertaking this work. Furthermore, educators' emotional labour as skilled work remains largely unacknowledged. To challenge entrenched maternalistic discourses that undervalue educators' emotion work, this chapter reports findings from an Australian study that investigated the emotional labour involved in educators' work with families through a critical feminist lens and framed by Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp's (2013) conceptualisation of emotional labour. As the second component of a longitudinal mixed-methods study, qualitative case-study data from nine participants collected through multiple interviews and journaling over 12-months is reported. Findings illuminate emotional labour as skilful, professional work that is influenced by time and involves reflection, planning and professional judgement, which participants exercised strategically to sustain family partnerships for positive child outcomes. Findings have implications for practitioners, employers, training providers, and policymakers, and may inform strategies to address workforce challenges in Australia and internationally.

Keywords early childhood education, families, emotional labour, professionalism

Introduction

The work expected of early childhood educators (teacher and vocationally-qualified) to partner with families (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2020; Department for Education [DfE], 2023) is relational work. While there is some recognition that this work requires, and is benefited by, emotional labour (Elfer, 2012; Osgood, 2010; Solvason et al., 2021), such labour remains largely unacknowledged. Historically perceived as an innate, intuitive predisposition in women (Ailwood, 2007), educators' emotional and caring work, such as emotional labour, is positioned as effortless and skill-less (Ailwood, 2007; Hochschild, 2012), constituting the unseen workload of a female-dominated workforce. Such perceptions mask the professionalism in educators' work.

Greater understanding of educators' emotional labour in their work with families can acknowledge emotional labour in such work that enables better support for educators' work-related and wellbeing needs. Unprecedented retention challenges are plaguing the Australian and international early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce (ACECQA, 2021; OECD, 2021). Investigating educators' emotional labour and associated wellbeing while working with families may evidence educators' skills, practices, and experiences of such work, and inform efforts to address workforce challenges (ACECQA 2021; Canadian Government, 2021; Kulakiewicz et al., 2022; United States DHHS, 2022) by identifying how educators could be better prepared, sustained, and retained.

The purpose of this chapter is to report findings from an Australian study that investigated the skill and complexity associated with educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families. Emotional labour theory and the limited research that has investigated such labour with families in ECEC is first outlined, followed by an unpacking of the methodology of the study. Findings on how and why educators exercise emotional labour

with families are then reported. Emotional labour is shown to be skilled and professional work influenced by time and undertaken with intentionality for positive professional and relational outcomes. As such, the professionalism of emotional labour is illuminated, with implications for educators, employers, training providers and policymakers discussed.

Emotional Labour Theory

Emotional labour is the regulation of emotions and expressions necessary for one's professional role (Hochschild, 2012) and comprising *occupational requirements*, *emotional displays*, and *intrapsychic experiences* (Grandey et al., 2013). *Occupational requirements* are the *emotional display rules*, or social norms, expected within a profession (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012). *Emotional displays* are the outward expressions that meet the *occupational requirements* (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012) and include *genuine expressions* that are perceived to be effortless work not requiring internal regulation of feelings or management of external displays (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). In ECEC, for example, *occupational requirements* may expect educators to be positive and calm with families; the *emotional display* to meet this *requirement* is a smile with a calm demeanour. *Intrapsychic experiences* of emotional labour are the "effort, planning and control" (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987) necessary for the internal regulation of emotion and the management of external displays, and include *surface acting* and *deep acting* (Hochschild, 2012). An educator who feels stressed but displays a smile and calm demeanour with families, has suppressed their stress to express an outward display that reassures families, enacting *surface acting* (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 2012). Conversely, another educator may internally shift their stress to actually feel the expected calm demeanour with families, enacting *deep acting* (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 2012). Surface acting requires effort to suppress and exaggerate emotion and the individual may become estranged from

their true self over time; while deep acting, although effortful, can be experienced as more authentic and less effortful over time (Hochschild, 2012).

Emotional Labour with Families

A small body of research has identified that while working with families, educators exercise emotional labour frequently, through surface and deep acting, and genuine expressions (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022). These studies show that emotional labour with families is exercised according to individual educator-family relationships; to intentionally benefit these relationships; and with variable professional implications (Dickerson et al., 2024a). While such findings are informative, two key limitations restrained these investigations' illumination of the skilled complexity of educators' emotional labour with families (Dickerson et al., 2024a).

First is a conceptual limitation. Framed by social constructivist or interpretivist paradigms without a critical stance, these studies inadvertently reinforce maternalistic positionings of educators' emotional labour, concealing the skill involved (Dickerson et al., 2024a). The studies describe emotional labour as an emotional performance "to show nurturance and support... and respond to in-the-moment experiences" (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011, p. 415) according to organisational display rules (Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022), thereby reinforcing notions that such work is a natural 'mothering' response to others' needs over one's own professional needs. Second are methodological limitations, with the studies examining emotional labour across multiple relationships rather than specifically with families (Brown et al., 2022; Morris, 2018). Additionally, investigations were undertaken at one time point (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022), which limited in-depth understandings of educators' emotional labour in their work with families over time. To address these limitations, the study reported in this chapter

adopted a critical feminist lens to investigate educators' emotional labour with families longitudinally to identify the complex skill involved in such work.

A Critical Feminist Approach to Understanding Work with Families

We framed educators' emotional labour in a critical feminist lens to challenge discourses that undervalue emotion-based work. Critical feminist lenses disrupt "historical ...systems of oppression" (Lather, 1992; 2017, p. 98) such as the positioning of ECEC as unskilled, mothering work and instead shifts emotional labour from distorted and inaccurate perceptions. As such, a critical feminist lens supports research *with* women, not *of* women, to tell *their* experiences (Lather, 1992) and extend feminist scholarship that has drawn attention to skilled, professional aspects of educators' emotion-based work (Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2012).

Our mixed-methods critical feminist investigation has already contributed to the small body of existing research through its first component, a statewide survey ($n=147$) (Dickerson et al., 2024b). Results established educators' emotional labour with families as the frequent, purposeful application of surface acting, deep acting, and genuine expression (Dickerson et al., 2024b), according to five interconnected levels of influence: individual, contextual, family, socio-political, and time (Dickerson et al., 2024b). Respondents believed that emotional displays are expected in their work with families, and that this work can negatively impact their wellbeing, while also having positive professional and wellbeing implications for educators (Dickerson et al., 2024b). These broad-brush results, however, could not identify how or why educators exercised emotional labour with families over time.

This chapter addresses this limitation by reporting findings from the second component of our longitudinal study which qualitatively explored two questions:

1. How do educators exercise emotional labour with families?

2. What influences educators' exercising of emotional labour with families?

Methods***Recruitment and Participants***

Participants for the qualitative component of this investigation opted in through an expression-of-interest form in the survey. This recruitment strategy and the collection of data reported in the chapter were approved by the University of Sydney's Human Ethics Committee (#2022-750). Nine educators voluntarily consented to participate, with six engaging for the entire 12-months of data collection (Table 1). Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' anonymity.

Table 1***Participant Demographics***

	Pseudonym	Age	Years in ECEC	Position (Qualification)	Service type (Rating ⁺)
1	Misty	28	7	Lead 3-5 years Teacher (ECT#) Lead Birth-1 Teacher	Combined preschool^ and LDC% (Exceeding)
2	Marisse	36	10	Educational Leader@ NDWC ^s (ECT)	LDC (Meeting)
3	Sal	50	21	Director NDWC (Certificate III)	LDC (Exceeding)
4	Jay	42	20	Director NDWC (ECT)	Preschool (Meeting)
5	Ally	49	27	Educational Leader NDWC (ECT)	LDC (Exceeding)
6	Ana	27	3	Birth-2 years Room Assistant (Diploma) 3-5 years Assistant	LDC (Exceeding) LDC (Exceeding)

Notes. ⁺Services in Australia are rated against seven quality areas set out in the National

Quality Framework as either: Significant Improvement Required, Working Towards, Meeting, Exceeding, or Excellent.

#ECT: early childhood teacher

^Preschool: ECEC setting for children aged three-to-five years, operational for shorter hours (e.g., 9a.m.–3p.m.) during school terms.

%LDC: centre-based ECEC for children aged birth-to-five, operational for extended hours, between 7a.m.-6p.m., five days a week.

@Educational Leader: responsible for leading a service's pedagogical program and practice.

\$NDWC: Not directly working with children

Participants were predominantly experienced, mature-aged educators working in settings rated as high-quality. On average, participants had worked in ECEC for 14.7 years. Three participants were born in Australia (Misty, Sal and Jay), while three were born overseas (Marisse, Ally and Ana). Ana changed workplaces and age groups midway through data collection. Misty worked with families and children facing adversity and/or with experiences of trauma. While employed as the preschool teacher, midway through data collection her role included working two days per week with the birth-to-one age group.

Data Collection and Analysis

Five semi-structured, one-hour interviews per participant were conducted over 12-months. Emotional labour theory guided the collection of data on how and why emotional labour was exercised in educators' work with families. Interviews sought data on relational and contextual changes across time (e.g., as families settled-in; as relationships strengthen, change, etc.). Open-ended questions in interview one expanded on survey findings, while subsequent interviews expanded on individual interview and journal data by delving into the how and why of educators' emotional labour experiences.

Over the 12-month data collection period participants recorded reflections on their work with families using PebblePad, an online platform for documenting one's experiences, offering participants a private, purpose-designed space for journal reflection. Participants selected between three-to-five families (i.e., those they knew well, or not; those who faced extenuating circumstances etc.) with whom they had frequent interactions, to reflect on at least fortnightly. While most participants found PebblePad journaling a novel, useful reflection space, Ally preferred monthly one-hour interviews, while Misty opted for fortnightly 30-minute interviews.

Data collection and analysis were synchronous, ensuring that initial interview and journal data were explored in subsequent interviews to gain clarity on participants' knowledge, practices, and experiences over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ongoing interview data were co-constructed, supporting participants and the researcher to elicit together understandings of how and why emotional labour with families was enacted. Such practices sought to ensure findings reflected participants' perspectives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data was analysed in NVivo (V.14) using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which supports the analysis of complex human phenomena through a deep, flexible, and iterative process. Following the establishment of a coding frame, each author independently coded interview and journal samples. These samples were then compared and the initial coding frame adjusted. This process was repeated until agreement on the coded data samples and coding frame was reached. Dickerson undertook the remainder of the data analysis through multiple rounds of coding and cross-checking sections of data. These processes enabled coding consistency and intercoder reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and supported the clustering of codes into themes.

The critical feminist lens supported data collection and analysis to identify the skill and intent in participants' emotional labour. Interview questions included: 'what did you do/ practices used to navigate these critical interactions / incidents with the family?' and, 'what was the reason for you using such practices/ emotional labour strategies this way? What do they mean for future interactions?' Analysis involved a rigorous, recursive deductive-inductive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to illuminate educators' experiences of emotional labour with families and whether descriptions debunked or reinforced deficit discourses associated with this work. For example, deductive codes included 'notions of care' and 'emotional labour comes naturally', while inductive codes included 'intentionality' and 'preparedness'.

Findings and Discussion

Four key findings highlight the professionalism in how and why educators exercised emotional labour in their work with families: first, emotional labour was intentionally exercised for professional purposes; second, the exercising of emotional labour was influenced by time; third, emotional labour involved skilled, professional work that supported educators' ongoing enactment of such labour; and fourth, developing an awareness of how emotional labour empowered educators and deepened their strategic exercising of emotional labour.

Theme 1: Emotional Labour is Professionalism in Action

Data repeatedly showed that participants intentionally exercised emotional labour to achieve professional outcomes for themselves, children, families, and educator-family partnerships. Contrary to Hochschild's (2012) emotional labour theory, educators did not exercise emotional labour merely for external or organisational requirements. They were not,

therefore, “docile bodies” (Osgood, 2010, p. 128) simply performing emotion according to organisational rules (Hochschild, 2012).

Sub-theme 1: Emotional Labour as Professional Identity.

Participants’ reflections highlighted that their emotional labour was part of who they were as a professional, with professional affordances. As Ana explained, “it comes from a place in myself, and how I value myself as a professional.” Ally described wanting “authentic relationships [because] if you're not being, or trying to be, authentic...how do you get that relationship, that trust? Maybe it’s not always authentic to you, but you hope it can be.”

Participants exercised emotional labour to balance familial relationships with professional boundaries. As Sal explained, working with families “requires a close relationship [but] I’m not their friend...it’s a professional relationship.” Jay could “empathise with families... [and] be authentic...listen, share, understand emotions”, but at times managed her feelings and expressions when “I need you to know that...we're following policies and procedures.”

Sub-theme 2: Emotional Labour as Professional Commitment to Children.

Participants repeatedly expressed that their emotional labour was for children and that “whatever strategy I’m using ...it’s in the best interest of the child” (Misty). Misty believed:

If families are coming in [yelling, stressed, angry] ...I need to bring their emotions to a calmer place that's better for their children, but also the children who might have had a stressful event in their own home.

Whether Misty surface- or deep-acted or used genuine calm varied across families and whether she was stressed due to dynamic individual, family or workplace factors. Her strategy, however, was always based on the purposeful child-focused outcomes she sought to

achieve. As such, emotional labour stemmed from internal, professional understandings of working with children and families, and highlighted that why participants exercised emotional labour drove how they exercised it.

Participants shared many nuanced examples of exercising various emotional labour strategies in their relationship with families to achieve positive child outcomes. This strategic employment of emotional labour was, in part, reflective of the complexities and challenges inherent in ECEC's relational work. The flexible and varied exercising of emotional labour illuminated participants' work as "agentic and skilful" (Vincent & Braun, 2013, p. 755). Sal, for example, experienced initial frustration with a family who appeared unphased by their child's behaviour that seemed to Sal to require urgent allied health support. Being acutely aware that "it's not productive to give up on families, because that's not respecting the child" Sal's frustration shifted to respect and empathy for the family by purposefully "understanding culture... [recognising] it's difficult to be a parent, especially when you're [new to Australia]." Sal collaborated patiently with the family over time "to make sense of what is appropriate and available in Australia for the child," resulting in appropriate intervention.

Sub-theme 3: Emotional Labour as Professional Investment in Partnerships.

Participants believed partnerships were important and were committed to ensuring that families felt respected and had a sense of belonging. Participants understood that trust was the foundation for successful partnerships, with emotional labour "a type of trust building" (Ally) mechanism. For example, Marisse reflected on the complexity of exercising emotional labour to establish and sustain trust with a mother who was finding it difficult to recognise her child's additional needs:

I feel guilty that I cannot have a straightforward conversation with mum... but there's a lot of pressure in making sure she doesn't get offended and lose her trust in me for when she expects some support from me for her child.

Marisse surface-acted to mask guilt at not being able to say outright that the child required allied health intervention. Rather, echoing other participants, she understood that it took time for some families to receive or accept such information and, for the longer-term benefit of the child, strategically deep-acted to shift internal tensions and work empathically with mum.

Through emotional labour, participants managed difficult or negative family emotions that were counter-productive to partnership. Ally felt apprehension with “a nervous mum” who had high expectations, never “seemed 100% happy, and always saw the flaws.” Ally initially masked apprehension to be assertive, calm and positive, knowing that “you need to work the emotional space [to] settle [mum because that] mitigates potential challenges” later. Accounts like Marisse's and Ally's demonstrate the strategic exercising of emotional labour based on the best interests of the child and partnership rather than according to pre-determined organisational rules.

These findings align with assertions that surface acting can lead to deep acting, mitigating conflict and reflecting educators' professionalism (Brown et al., 2022). Using surface acting as a self-preservation strategy is similarly and successfully utilised by social workers (Winter et al., 2019) and psychologists (Van Der Merwe, 2019) to support and sustain them in their complex relational work over time. Where participants came to know families and their circumstances, they described deep acting more often, which is consistent with earlier investigations (Brown et al., 2022; Dickerson et al., 2024b).

Our findings highlighted emotional labour as exercised flexibly, according to complex and inter-connected professional, relational and contextual factors. As such, surface acting is not exercised merely to provision for family needs (Morris, 2018) or to manage new or challenging relationships or circumstances (Brown et al., 2022; Quiñones et al., 2022). Surface acting may safeguard educators, children, families, or partnerships, sometimes simultaneously, and enable the purposeful achievement of professional outcomes. Surface acting also appeared to lead to deep acting with families, however, if deemed strategically necessary, surface acting was also exercised interchangeably with deep acting for professional purposes. This finding contrasts deep acting as only exercised more often by young educators (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011), or conversely, by experienced educators in established educator-family relationships (Brown et al., 2022).

Theme one's findings extend on evidence that emotional labour is a tool for relationship building (Brown et al., 2022). Working with families is tied to educators' "strong, felt commitment to children" (Morris, 2018, p. 208) and enables connection with and responsiveness from families (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011). While previous studies have attempted to link strategies to specific factors, our data showed that emotional labour is exercised according to the complex interplay of various influencing factors over time (Dickerson et al., 2024b).

Theme 2: Time Influences Emotional Labour

Time was identified as a significant influence on how and why emotional labour was exercised with families according to in the moment needs; the ongoing nature of educator-family relationships; and, individual, child, relational and contextual changes that influenced relationships over time. Participants frequently described managing emotions in the moment to protect themselves and the relationship or deepen families' confidence. Ally, for example,

suppressed frustration at a parent's comment one morning, using surface acting to "avoid conflict". She explained "...next time when I'm [calmer] I'll say, 'can we just circle back to that'."

All participants identified that they strategically changed how and why they exercised emotional labour over time in response to the evolving needs of the relationship. For example, Sal surface- and deep-acted interchangeably while "[a family's] knowledge of parenting...developed over time...now, they're more understanding about expectations for children...[and] we can talk more openly." Similarly, Ally gradually shifted from initial surface acting that supported her work with an anxious mum to more deep acting and genuine expressions as she came to "understand where mum was coming from, what she wanted... [that enabled] collaboration on strategies to support her child". Such examples reinforce evidence that, over time, surface acting enables more frequent deep acting and genuine expressions (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011), and that how relationships change over time influences what and how strategies are exercised.

Participants also understood that relationships are fragile and over time, may ebb and flow between stable and unstable periods. Such shifts depended on what was happening for the educator, in the educator-family relationship, service, or with the child. Sal explained that "it's unknown what's going to happen in that family's time with you... something awful might happen...in their lives, with their child here?" Misty echoed similarly "if the parent withdraws [pulls back]...I've lost that relationship?" Strategies must, therefore, be exercised interchangeably over time to continually engage families and build trust. Participants strategically and flexibly decided, beforehand or in-the-moment, which emotional labour strategy, or combination of strategies, best suited their situation.

Theme 3: Emotional Labour is Skilled, Professional Work

Participants' descriptions highlighted that intentionally enacting emotional labour is work that is skilled, synergistic, iterative, and dependent on the interplay between individual educator, family, child and workplace factors. That is, participants' emotional labour is work beyond surface acting, deep acting and expressing genuine emotions. Two forms of skilled labour are next unpacked: reflective planning, and professional judgement.

Sub-theme 1: Reflective Planning. Participants' reflective planning included emotional and cognitive preparation that was multi-faceted labour, occurring before, during and after interactions with families and was necessary for supporting participants' regulation of emotions and expressions. Ongoing emotional and cognitive preparation included: acquiring knowledge of families, children, and contexts; critical reflection; collegial collaboration; and, planning how to engage with parents, including what information to share when and why. Educators' use of reflective planning to strategically and skilfully support their emotional labour with families in ways that benefitted families, children, but also themselves, further negates notions that such labour is innate, skill-less 'mothering' work (Ailwood, 2007).

Emotional preparation involved preparing for the expected and unexpected emotional demands of working with families. Educators described the purposeful emotional labour needed to think about their emotions and the emotions of families prior to, during, and after interactions to understand how best to respond to families. For example, Ana felt it was important to be 'authentic' and avoid having her negative emotions impact families, so she tried "to slow down at work [particularly] before busy periods, [to] see where my emotions are coming from." Ally, while in a family engagement that caused her "anger, shock, outrage", paused, "to think...objectively. 'What's just happened?' To work emotionally with families, I had [to be] prepared beforehand... [making] sure that ... 'oh gosh, if you're ambushed, be prepared' ...preparing for what they [might] be requesting." Ally's preparation

“beforehand” was based on reflections following previous interactions with this family, highlighting the complex ways emotional labour is enacted outside direct interactions.

Cognitive preparation, such as acquiring knowledge of families, children and contexts, informed how and why participants exercised emotional labour. Jay explained that knowing “what they [families] believed and wanted for their child” supported her in making decisions about how to collaborate with families. Similarly, in Sal’s work with the family whose child needed allied health intervention she understood that knowing “what is happening for the child is completely based around what is happening with the family” and that such knowledge enabled her to choose how she exercised emotional labour respectfully to support the family. As such, participants used knowledge of families and their possible reactions in their reflective planning to better understand how to exercise emotional labour with empathy, respect, and understanding with individual families. Ally, for example, gathered:

information [from colleagues] beforehand...to be clear with what I was going to say... [Reflecting] that ‘mum's probably going to be angry, but that’s understandable, her child has been bitten again.’ I had...spoken to the educators, so we had very clear strategies [to] share with mum.

Ana revealed, “always thinking about how I’m going to tell the parents, of their child who was bitten or biting...and how they will respond. So, then, how will I respond?” Reflections might occur before or after interactions, or often while educators were engaged with children. Participants, however, also reflected in-the-moment to make decisions based on parents’ responses.

The complexities of educators’ skilled emotional labour is illuminated through these examples of ongoing reflection and planning that enabled educators to respectfully learn

about families, allowing them to collaborate on sensitive child and relational aspects. Often such reflective work, as well as the emotional labour that extracts personal family information, is undertaken in spaces that are noisy, busy, and lack privacy. Earlier investigations depict the act of exercising emotional labour as effortful and difficult work (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Purper et al., 2022; Quiñones et al., 2022). Such effort and difficulty may extend, however, to emotional labour's ongoing reflective planning necessary for the nuanced, synergistic complexities of relational work in ECEC.

Sub-theme 2: Professional Judgement. Participants used professional judgement to make decisions about how and why they would exercise emotional labour, by considering whether the outcomes of their emotional labour might benefit children, demonstrate professionalism, or establish and sustain trusting partnerships. Exercising emotional labour through flexible, autonomous professional judgement was not, therefore, a performance of expected feeling and expressions (Hochschild, 2012). Participants reflected on and utilised what they knew about a family to make decisions, such as “whether or not it’s worth telling [parents] about their child’s behaviour” because sometimes that information can make the parent “feel like a failure... then take it out on the child” (Misty). Sal intentionally decided to involve the family in her work with their child by asking, “I’m not quite sure here. What should we do?”, which ensured families felt valued as decision-makers and “creates alignment or keeps us on the same page.”

Participants employed professional judgment in their exercising of emotional labour according to what worked for a family or what might be happening at that moment. Marisse, for example, decided to relate her personal experiences with allied health services with a mum who initially struggled to accept her own child’s needs, but was finally beginning an assessment and diagnosis process: “I’ve been open about... my child’s [diagnosis], but it’s not

a discussion for any parent... it's deciding whether this benefits the family, the child, my work with them.”

Nuanced complexities of working with families required flexible, agentic decisions, based on specialist knowledge about which emotional labour strategy suited the moment, the family and the outcomes educators sought. Such evidence illuminates the deeply professional, purposeful and skilful nature of educators' emotional labour practices with families and refutes maternalistic discourses that under-value such work by claiming it is innate women's work. Our findings extend existing scholarship by evidencing how and why emotional labour is a professional component of educators' work (Andrew, 2015; Elfer, 2015; Osgood, 2010), exercised through self-management, professional judgment, and self-reflection.

Theme 4: Illuminating Emotional Labour Empowers Educators

Reflections across participants' 12-month research involvement enabled self-awareness of their emotional labour that deepened their knowledge of this work, allowing participants increased autonomy and motivation for how and why they exercised emotional labour. Despite most participants initially feeling that “my emotions don't matter” (Sal), participation in the research enabled educators to understand that “my emotions do actually matter” (Sal) for how and why they exercised emotional labour. For example:

having awareness that, in a moment, I quickly assess what type of person this is; how I deliver a message; what my tone, facial expression, body language is. I'm not just [approaching] that parent and talking... Then depending on [the conversation] I may need to [reflect, plan] ...it's [more than] a conversation. I hadn't thought about all the things that are happening...until we've been exploring it. (Jay)

Subconsciously [knowing] about it...that you do all these extra thought processes to deliver whatever you need to deliver to parents... [I was] not appreciating how much of my role is emotional labour. Now I'm much more aware of it. (Misty)

Such awareness empowered participants to have greater control of and motivation for how and why they exercised emotional labour. Participants described that awareness ensured their emotional labour was, increasingly, not merely exercised “in the interests of the other” (Morris, 2018, p. 211), but also in the interests of themselves. Awareness and understandings of emotional labour enabled participants to be “less anxious” (Ally) and recognise “its impact” (Jay), thereby empowering participants to strategically exercise emotional labour with greater professional affordances. Jay explained that “...starting this year I have put boundaries in place” to balance the emotional load of what “families sometimes offload.”

For Ally, it became “easier to deal with parents now” because she had reflected on previously challenging family-partnership experiences by questioning, “How did we start? What was it like and was I really explicit?” Consequently, Ally was increasingly intentional about her emotional labour, being “more explicit and open with new families.” Ana, initially unaware of “how much emotional effort I put into the work,” later felt more able to understand “what happened throughout the day that made me feel how I am feeling now.” Such clarity empowered her to be better “prepared to deal with [her own and families’] emotions.”

Findings illuminate the benefits that opportunities for “talking with feeling and about feeling” (Elfer & Wilson, 2023, p. 181) have for deepening educators’ confidence and autonomy (also noted by Osgood, 2010). Awareness gained and opportunity for reflection with the researcher over 12 months enabled the purposeful, professional enactment of emotional labour with families and helped safeguard against the negative impacts of such

work. Participants demonstrated specialist skills, judgement, and intentionality in their nuanced exercising of emotional labour in complex relational work; components scholars have argued are key for professionalism (McDowall Clark, 2022; Osgood, 2012). Findings, therefore, contradict oppressive narratives that educators' emotion-based work is skill-less, instead illuminating that emotional labour's multi-layered, skilled work can be learnt over time and is not just 'women's work'. A shift towards seeing emotions as key to the professional practices of educators' relational work is paramount given that emotional labour is skilled, complex work resulting in significant professional outcomes.

Conclusion

As findings from the study emerged from highly-qualified, experienced, mature-aged workforce 'stayers', they cannot be generalised to the broader educator workforce in which turnover is prevalent. Nonetheless, they show that emotional labour is a professional component of educators' work with families. The critical feminist framing enabled educators' skilled, professional emotional labour—exercised strategically over time for professional benefits—to be illuminated. Acknowledgement in ECEC workforce policy and training programs, as well as by providers and society, is essential for liberating educators from maternalistic positionings that undervalue their work, and identifying and articulating the resources and practices needed for complex, skilled emotional labour work.

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Chapter Six: Part Two of the Qualitative Findings and Discussion

The Wellbeing Impact of Educators' Emotional Labour in Their Work with Families

This chapter includes the fourth publication —Dickerson et al. (under review)— of this doctoral investigation and illuminates the impact of emotional labour on educators' wellbeing associated with their work with families. The fourth publication responds to and provides deeper insight into the third research question framing this doctoral study: *what are the wellbeing impacts of educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families?*

Findings from Chapter Five revealed that educators skilfully and purposefully enacted emotional labour for professional, child, and partnership outcomes (Dickerson et al., in press). Additionally, emotional labour impacted, and was impacted by, educators' wellbeing; time influenced emotional labour; and awareness of emotional labour empowered educators (Dickerson et al., in press). As such, the evidence presented in Chapter Five debunked notions that emotional labour is unskilled, intuitive work and draws attention to professional affordances associated with intentional and purposeful emotional labour (Dickerson et al., in press).

In reflecting upon the impact of a critical feminist approach to the qualitative component of this doctoral investigation, these findings highlighted feminist methodologists' (Harding, 1991; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) arguments that feminist research is about uncovering knowledge and power not just truth and experience. The findings in Dickerson et al., (in press) illuminate knowledge that challenges discourses which have devalued women's skilled, professional emotional labour, thereby exploiting women's efforts and expertise in ECEC settings. Evidence in Dickerson et al., (in press) also showed that when educators have knowledge, they hold the power to better understand how to exercise emotional labour for

professional affordances. With such understandings in mind, two questions pertaining to wellbeing arose following the writing of Dickerson et al., (in press). First, I wondered what it meant for educator's wellbeing and their emotional labour that emotional labour was shown to impact their wellbeing *and* also be impacted by their wellbeing? Second, do emotional labour's positive professional outcomes have a positive impact on educator wellbeing, and if so, how and why?

The literature on emotional labour in ECEC discussed in Chapter Two and Dickerson et al. (2024a), and the survey findings presented in Dickerson et al. (2024b) in Chapter Four, revealed emotional labour as predominantly negative for wellbeing even though some positive impacts were identified. I have argued, however, that wellbeing impacts associated with emotional labour may differ when exercised to meet family needs versus to collaborate with families, or may be dependent on the barriers educators face for family partnerships, and such discrepancies should be teased out (Dickerson et al., 2024a). I have also argued that it is critical to distinguish whether educators experience negative wellbeing impacts from emotional labour, or from ongoing workplace and workforce challenges that then impact their emotional labour experiences. I postulated that nuanced understandings of the ecological systems at play in ECEC might enable such distinctions to be identified (Dickerson et al., 2024b). I recognise that feminist scholars (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) emphasise knowledge, experience, and reality as contextual, where in the context of this study, educators understand the hierarchical and power dynamics involved in ECEC systems and directly experience their impacts (Harding, 1991). In other words, a feminist approach enabled me to explore the ecological systems and how they interact with emotional labour in a way illuminates the structural and systemic influences on their labour and their wellbeing.

Final Reflection on and Adjustment of Emotional Labour Theory

In working through emotional labour theory throughout this doctoral study and once more for the wellbeing analysis and interpretation stages, I looked more deeply at what the theory and existing scholarship revealed about surface acting, deep acting, genuine expressions, dissonance and wellbeing overall. Hochschild (1983/2012), Grandey et al. (2013) and the scholarship I reviewed and discussed in Chapter Two and more broadly in organisational, sociological and psychological disciplines, articulated clearly the dissonance typically associated with surface and deep acting. Understandings of the wellbeing impacts associated with genuine expressions, however, were vague and limited. Genuine expressions in Grandey et al. were conceptualised as not requiring internal management (or regulation) of emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and were, I discovered, therefore generally considered not to be effortful. In Dickerson et al. (in press), however, educators were found to work hard to be genuine with families and I questioned what this meant for their wellbeing.

My continued reading of the theory and emotional labour scholarship (for example, Ashkanasy et al., 2002; Bolton, 2009; Brook, 2009; Brook et al., 2013; Erickson, 2018; Erickson & Stacey, 2013; Humphrey et al., 2015; James, 1989) identified that Grandey et al. (2013) discussed genuine expressions as only emotional displays, yet in my earlier adjustment of the theory, articulated in Chapter Four, I had positioned genuine expressions as intrapsychic experiences. The publication presented in this chapter includes my final theoretical adjustment that reflects Grandey et al.'s conceptualisation of genuine expressions as only display work. During this reflective writing process, the idea that emotional labour theory itself positions emotional labour as only deleterious for employee wellbeing, as per Hochschild's (1983/2012) work, was reinforced. As I have already suggested, if emotional labour is an unavoidable component of educators' relational work, then it is unproductive to view such labour as only negative for educator wellbeing (Dickerson et al., 2024b).

Although the increased challenges of educator burnout and workforce turnover in Australia and internationally (DESE, 2022; Fenech et al., 2021; Kulakiewicz et al., 2022; OECD, 2020; OECD, 2021; OECD, 2022; Schaack et al., 2022) have encouraged researchers, policymakers, and other ECEC stakeholders to seek understandings of educators' negative wellbeing experiences, I came to recognise the importance of moving beyond just focusing on the negative wellbeing associated with educators' work. I reflected that to achieve a positive and impactful contribution, focussing predominantly on the negative-only experiences of emotional labour for educators' wellbeing would be limiting. I also did not want to position emotional labour as a problem to be fixed. Instead, I sought affordances and understandings of the strengths and optimal enactment of educators' emotional labour. I was explicitly looking for the potential professional and wellbeing affordances of emotional labour and whether such labour enabled participants to flourish in their work with families, experience such work positively and in fulfilling ways that potentially sustained them in their work. In other words, I was considering what supports educators to thrive in their work (Thorpe et al., 2023).

While my aim was not to ignore the negative wellbeing experiences of emotional labour, a positive approach sought, instead, to value such work by seeking evidence that contributes to strengthening practices and provisioning safeguarding strategies for educators' emotional labour at individual and broader stakeholder and organisational levels. Additionally, a positive approach sought evidence that might inform structural, systemic, and stakeholder initiatives seeking to support and sustain educators' capacities to flourish in their relational work. Given the expectations for and amount of time educators interact and collaborate with families, as discussed in previous chapters of this thesis, the limited focus on this aspect of educators' work in relation to their wellbeing was concerning.

The qualitative wellbeing data I collected from participants through a critical feminist lens and an ecological approach sought to identify deep, rich, and nuanced negative and positive wellbeing impacts of emotional labour. The purpose of the publication below was to report negative and positive wellbeing impacts of emotional labour; influences on these wellbeing impacts; and if, and how, emotional labour has wellbeing affordances for educators. In other words, I challenged emotional labour theory's positioning that such work is predominantly negative for educator wellbeing. It is hoped that Dickerson et al. (under review) provides some insight into educators' wellbeing experiences of their work with families, particularly their emotional labour practices, that identifies ways emotional labour can be supported to potentially contribute to wellbeing, and perhaps vice versa.

Publication 4: “My Emotions Do Matter”: Illuminating the Wellbeing Impact of Early Childhood Educators’ Emotional Labour with Families.

Dickerson, M. K., Fenech, M., & Stratigos, T. (under review-b). “My emotions do matter”:

Illuminating the wellbeing impact of early childhood educators’ emotional labour with families. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. Submitted 25 March 2025.

“My emotions do matter”: Illuminating the wellbeing impact of early childhood educators’ emotional labour in their work with families

Abstract

Early childhood educators in Australia and internationally face unprecedented wellbeing challenges, contributing to and stemming from wider workforce attrition issues that adversely impact early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality. Addressing workforce challenges requires understanding educators’ day-to-day work demands and associated wellbeing implications. One area of practice where these understandings are unclear is emotional labour in educators’ work with families. To inform this gap, this paper reports findings from the qualitative component of a larger mixed-method longitudinal study that explored emotional labour in educators’ work with families. Findings show that this labour has negative and positive wellbeing impacts, and that emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship. Multi-level supports that can sustain educators’ emotional labour and wellbeing that warrant attention in ECEC preparation, professional development, and policy are highlighted.

Keywords: early childhood education and care, educators, wellbeing, emotional labour, families, workforce

Introduction

Increased attention to early childhood teachers' and educators' (hereafter collectively referred to as 'educators') wellbeing has enabled understandings of the positive association between wellbeing and outcomes for educators, children, families, and services (Murray et al., 2024; Rankin et al., 2022). Such attention has been driven by workforce shortages in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Australia and internationally (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024; OECD, 2022), where strained wellbeing has emerged as a contributor (Cumming, 2017; McMullen et al., 2020). Greater understandings of educators' wellbeing is critical for supporting child outcomes and parental workforce engagement (Thorpe et al., 2023), and for sustaining educators in their work (Fenech et al., 2021). One area of educator wellbeing that remains underexplored, however, is emotional labour in educators' work with families.

Emotional labour is an employee's management of feelings and emotional displays to meet organisational requirements (Hochschild, 2012). A flight attendant, for example, might suppress frustration with passengers and exaggerate a smile to meet airline expectations that passengers are satisfied with the service received (Hochschild, 2012). Such work is conceptualised as costly for employee wellbeing because it can lead to feelings of inauthenticity (Hochschild, 2012). Indeed, emotional labour has been linked extensively to exhaustion and burnout across many professions (Gabriel et al., 2023), including ECEC (Purper et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding negative wellbeing impacts, exploring potential wellbeing affordances of emotional labour in educators' work with families may provide useful insights for resourcing and supporting a sector in crisis. From a critical feminist paradigm, we challenge the original conceptualisation of emotional labour as only detrimental to wellbeing,

and propose that emotional labour may also support educators' wellbeing. As such, this paper responds to the question: *what are the wellbeing impacts of emotional labour in educators' work with families?* Findings show negative and positive wellbeing impacts associated with emotional labour and illuminate that emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship.

Educator Wellbeing

Educator wellbeing encompasses *psychological, physiological, and ethical* dimensions (Cumming & Wong, 2019). The psychological dimension includes positive cognitive and emotional functioning, such as purpose, growth, autonomy, and positive attitudes, moods and relationships. The physiological dimension comprises good overall health, physical movement, sleep, and mood. Psychological and physiological wellbeing are interconnected, associated with stress, depression, and burnout, and influenced by individual, environmental, relational, and socio-political factors shifting over time (Cumming & Wong, 2019). Accordingly, the ethical dimension positions educators, broader ECEC systems, and stakeholders as jointly responsible for wellbeing.

Three literature reviews highlight factors impacting educator wellbeing, including compensation, qualifications, satisfaction, and stress (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013); work environment, workplace relationships, and emotion work (Cumming, 2017); and child behaviours and interactions, work conditions, physical and psychological demands, and personal resources (i.e., psychological capital, emotional intelligence) (Demirci-Ünal & Olgan, 2025). Investigations within these reviews, however, exclude educators working with birth-three-year-olds; are mostly quantitative; and lack a holistic ecological systems approach that misses nuanced individual, relational, and contextual influences on, and multi-level supports for, wellbeing. Despite the requirement that educators partner with families (e.g.,

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2020; Department for Education, 2023; United States Department of Education, 2016), these reviews do not articulate wellbeing impacts of educators' work with families. Evidence shows that working with families can be difficult (Murphy et al., 2021; Thorpe et al., 2023), but also that strong, collaborative partnerships can be rewarding (McDonald et al., 2018), boost wellbeing, and sustain educators (Murray et al., 2024).. Despite emotional labour being necessary for educators' sensitive relationship-based work (Cumming & Wong, 2019; Demirci-Ünal & Olgan, 2025), understandings of this labour and its wellbeing impact on educators, specifically in their work with families, are scarce.

Emotional Labour

Emotional labour requires employees to manage feelings and expressions that are expected for their role (Hochschild, 2012). Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp's (2013) conceptualisation of emotional labour includes three theoretical dimensions. *Occupational requirements* are the emotional display rules a profession requires (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012). For example, an educator may feel they must display calm, happy demeanours to reassure families during morning drop-off. *Emotional displays* are the outward expressions that meet occupational requirements (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012), such as smiling educators patiently interacting with families at drop-off. Emotional displays include *genuine expressions*, like authentic happiness, that require no internal regulation of emotion (Grandey et al., 2013). *Intrapsychic experiences* are the internal processes that regulate emotions and manage external displays through two strategies (Morris & Feldman, 1996). *Surface acting* involves hiding emotion (e.g., stress/anxiety) to fake required expressions (e.g., calm happiness), while *deep acting* requires internally shifting felt emotion, like stress, to instead feel and display calm demeanours (Hochschild, 2012).

Educators' emotional labour in their work with families has wellbeing implications. Where, for example, educators are required to be positive and reassuring with families, but instead feel stressed or angry, they may experience *emotional dissonance* (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012). Such conflict between felt and expected emotions (*emotion-rule dissonance*) causes internal discord (Hochschild, 2012) and strains psychological wellbeing, particularly when ongoing (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Educators may also display required emotions by internally managing their felt emotions which may cause dissonance between felt and expressed emotion (*emotion-display dissonance*) (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Dissonance causes feelings of inauthenticity, estrangement or job dissatisfaction that further negatively impact psychological and physiological wellbeing (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012).

When educators utilise surface acting to suppress felt emotions and express inauthentic displays, dissonance is likely experienced (Grandey et al., 2013). Deep acting, however, has inconsistent associations with dissonance and wellbeing, possibly pertaining to positive relational outcomes that can neutralise negative wellbeing impacts of internally managing emotions (Grandey et al., 2013). When emotions, displays, and occupational requirements align, *emotional harmony* occurs which benefits wellbeing (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Emotional labour in ECEC

Limited investigations of educators' emotional labour highlight positive wellbeing impacts, with most generally reinforcing the perspective that emotional labour is deleterious for educators' wellbeing by causing exhaustion and burnout (Annor et al., 2023; Colley, 2006; Jena-Crottet, 2017; Purper et al., 2022; Vincent & Braun, 2013). Investigations reinforce surface acting as negative for wellbeing and deep acting as having negative,

positive, or no effect on wellbeing (Annor et al., 2023; Huang & Zhou, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024; Zheng, Fu, et al., 2024; Zheng, Luo, et al., 2024). Conversely, surface acting can support educators' relational practices and sustain wellbeing (Brown et al., 2022), while genuine expressions can support wellbeing (Zhang et al., 2024; Zheng, Luo, et al., 2024). Findings identify emotional labour as a demand for educators that has negative impacts, while suggesting emotional labour may also have positive implications (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Huang & Zhou, 2024; Ng et al., 2025).

Recent investigations have sought understandings of contextual and individual demands and resources that influence emotional labour's wellbeing impacts. Where educators have organisational support, for example, emotional labour contributes to personal growth and sense of achievement (Carey & Sutton, 2024), leading to job satisfaction (Ng et al., 2025) and motivation (Huang & Zhou, 2024). Such evidence indicates the organisation's ethical responsibility for supporting educator wellbeing (Cumming & Wong, 2019).

Despite this body of research, only five studies have specifically explored emotional labour in educators' work with families (Brown et al., 2022; Dickerson et al., 2024b; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022). Findings from these studies show that educators believe emotional labour is expected in their work and surface acting, deep acting, and genuine expressions are frequently and skilfully exercised to benefit the relationship. The wellbeing associated with educators' emotional labour with families remains unclear, given four investigations had a limited or deficit-only wellbeing focus (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Morris, 2018; Quiñones et al., 2022). A recent survey of emotional labour in educators' work with families, however, found negative, positive, and mixed wellbeing impacts that signal greater complexity (Dickerson et al., 2024b). Investigation of the nuanced day-to-day experiences of emotional labour with

different families, over time, as told by educators, is needed to provide deeper understandings of how working with families impacts educators' wellbeing, and is the focus of this paper.

Theoretical Framing

Critical Feminist Theory

The study reported in this paper adopted a critical feminist paradigm to challenge emotional labour's longstanding maternalistic positioning as innately women's work (Ailwood, 2007; Lather, 1992), which has negated the skill such labour requires, thereby oppressing the emotional labourer (Osgood, 2010). Such a framing can expose exploitative and invisible positionings of emotional labour that downplay associated wellbeing impacts (Lather, 1992) through approaches that empower participants to voice their emotional labour experiences and illuminates the wellbeing associated with such work (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Extending on feminist scholarship that emotional labour in ECEC is not merely work undertaken for organisational benefits (Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2012) at the expense of the employee's wellbeing, a critical feminist lens can, instead, unveil emotional labour's potential wellbeing affordances (Dickerson et al., 2024a). This paper reports on the wellbeing impacts of this skilful, often hidden, emotional labour in educators' work with families over time.

Bioecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory (2005) supported our investigation of the ecological factors that influence emotional labour's wellbeing impacts. The theory's five nested, ecological systems that in the context of ECEC, surround and influence the individual educator are: (i) the microsystem–service context where the educator works; (ii) the mesosystem–alignment between service and families; (iii) the exosystem–socio-cultural and

political influences; (iv) the macrosystem–discourses influencing emotional labour in ECEC; and (v) chronosystem–the influence of time within and across systems. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), individual and ecological systems have a bidirectional influence on each other. Therefore, each system can influence an educator’s emotional labour and wellbeing, while an educators’ emotional labour and associated wellbeing can also influence the systems.

Methods

Following University of Sydney ethics approval (#2022-750), an emotional labour survey ($n=147$) (Dickerson et al., 2024b) was administered online between November 2022-February 2023 to educators in New South Wales, Australia to gather broadbrush data of educators' emotional labour, and its wellbeing impacts, in their work with families. The survey was followed by longitudinal, qualitative case studies that explored in depth how educators exercise emotional labour with families (Dickerson et al., in press) and what the wellbeing impact of this labour is (reported in this paper).

Participants

Participants for the study’s qualitative component were recruited through an expression of interest form ($n=75$) at the end of the survey. Nine survey respondents voluntarily consented to participate (Table 1). Participants were a cohort of mature-aged, highly-qualified, experienced educators with an average of 17 years’ ECEC experience. Participant data was de-identified. Participants were informed that they could withdraw without consequence at any time. All nine participants contributed to the first round of data collection, after which three participants withdrew. Permission was obtained to use the data of those who withdrew. To support participants’ wellbeing throughout data collection, individualised participation adjustments (e.g., interviewing instead of journaling; shorter

interviews), wellbeing support service details, and face-to-face communication at any time were offered.

Table 1

Participant Demographics (n=9)

Pseudonym	Age	Years' Experience	Position (Qualification)	Service Type
Misty	28	7	Lead 3-5-years (Early Childhood Teacher [ECT]) Lead Birth-to-1 Teacher	Combined preschool [^] & LDC [%]
Marisse	36	10	Educational Leader [@] (ECT)	LDC
Sal	50	21	Director NDWC [§] (Certificate III)	LDC
Lisa*	51	14	3-5-years Assistant (Diploma)	Preschool
Jay	42	20	Director NDWC (ECT)	Preschool
Kelly*	45	22	Lead 3-5-years & Educational Leader (ECT)	Preschool
Joan*	52	30	3-5-years Assistant (ECT)	LDC
Ally	49	27	Educational Leader NDWC (ECT)	LDC
Ana	27	3	Birth-2-years Assistant (Diploma)	LDC
			3-5-years Assistant	LDC

Note. *Withdrew after interview one

[@]Educational Leader—leads a service's pedagogical program and practice.

[§]NDWC—Not directly working with children

[^]Preschool—ECEC setting for children aged three-to-five years, operational for shorter hours (e.g., 9a.m. – 3p.m.) during school terms.

[%]LDC—Long Day Care: centre-based ECEC for children aged birth-to-five, operational for extended hours, between 7a.m.-6p.m., five days a week.

Data Collection

Qualitative data on participants' emotional labour and wellbeing while working with families was collected by Dickerson between March 2023-March 2024, with six participants engaged for the full 12 months of journaling and interviewing. Participants completed fortnightly online journal entries. PebblePad, an encrypted, private online platform, provided a space for participants' journal reflections on their emotional labour and associated wellbeing impacts with three-to-five families they frequently interacted with. Prompts provided on PebblePad to support participants' reflections included: What role did my use of emotions play in the success or difficulty of the interaction(s) with families this week? How did I feel while engaging in this interaction? What did I feel afterwards? In lieu of journaling, Misty opted for 30-minute fortnightly interviews, while Ally opted for one-hour monthly interviews.

Five one-hour semi-structured interviews with each participant were undertaken at approximately three-month intervals via Zoom, allowing participants to select convenient locations and times that encouraged open dialogue. Interview one expanded on participants' survey responses, with subsequent interviews expanding on journal entries and prior interview data to clarify and explore nuanced emotional labour practices and related wellbeing impacts. Interview guides included core questions for all participants and tailored questions according to each participant's circumstances (see Appendix 1). Core questions included: any reflections you want to discuss on how your relationships with focus families has progressed and what emotional labour you have used to progress relationships? How does the work you do with these families impact your wellbeing? In the immediate and over time? Questions also sought to identify whether maternalistic notions of educators' labour impacted wellbeing: Do you think others (society/families) see these skills/this work you do? Why/why not? How does that make you feel? Lastly, interviews sought to understand what influenced

participants' emotional labour with families and its wellbeing impact: Do you think these (cultural /language/perspective) differences (between yourself and the family) have an impact on your emotional labour? And wellbeing? Transcribed interviews were shared with participants for member checking prior to analysis. Clarification from participants during interviews and via email correspondence (with participant consent) after data collection ended ensured the meaning of interview and journal data was understood as participants intended.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed in an ongoing deductive-inductive process using Braun and Clarke's (2022b) six stage thematic analysis that included: data familiarisation; generating initial codes; searching for, reviewing and, defining themes; and, reporting findings. Interviews and journals were transcribed and re-read before being coded in NVivo (V.14). Data collection and analysis occurred synchronously to support in-depth, reflexive and iterative data collection.

Researchers collaboratively developed an initial coding frame informed by the study's conceptual constructs—emotional labour and wellbeing—and critical feminist and bioecological theoretical frameworks. Emotional labour theory informed codes about how participants exercised emotional labour such as 'genuine expressions', 'surface acting' and 'deep acting.' Cumming and Wong's (2019) wellbeing theory informed codes about psychological, physiological and organisational and policy impacts on educators' wellbeing that in turn influences their emotional labour, such as 'workplace stressors' and 'strong leadership'. Critical feminist theory informed codes that reinforced or debunked maternalistic constructions of emotional labour as natural, unskilled work and enabled deeper insights into wellbeing impacts, for example, 'innate carer/mothering' and 'professional judgement'. The

bioecological model informed codes pertaining to influences on emotional labour's wellbeing impact such as 'preparedness' and 'supportive colleagues'.

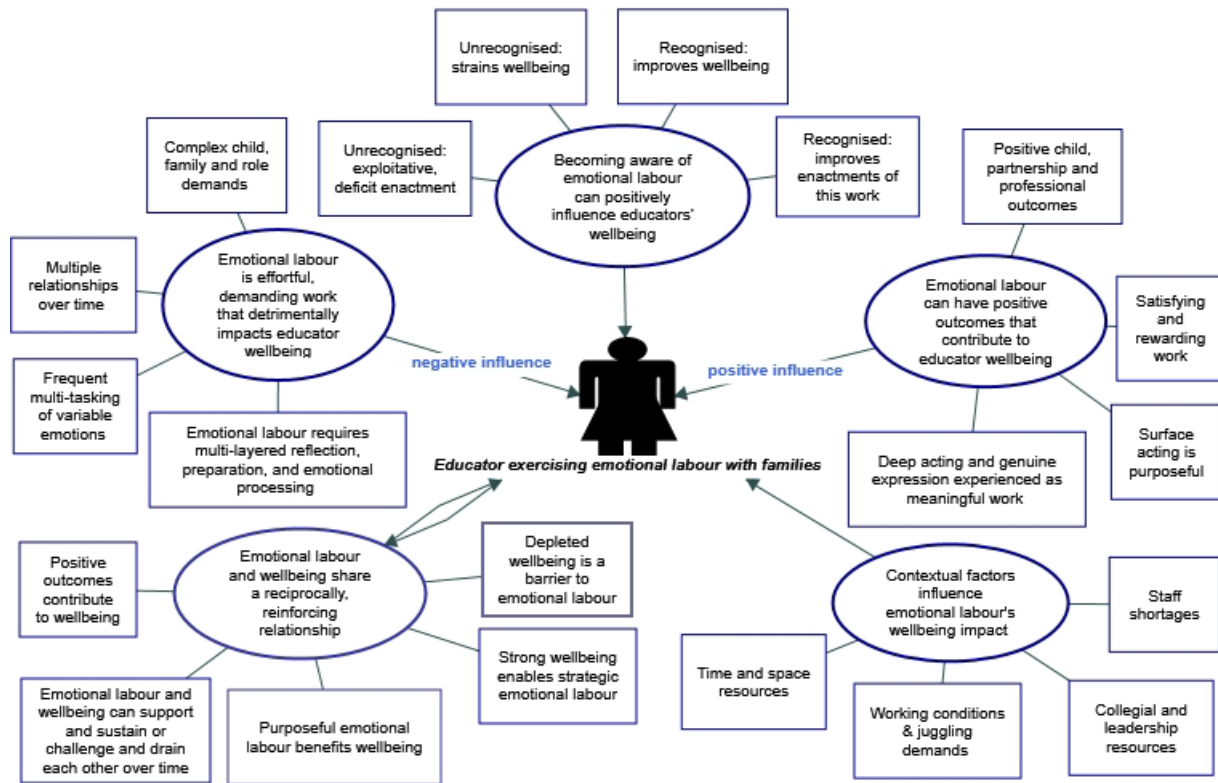
Once the coding frame was established, all researchers independently coded interview and journal samples before comparing and resolving coding discrepancies. Adjustments to the coding frame occurred before additional rounds of coding, discussion, and adjustments were made. This process continued until agreement on independent analysis of data samples was reached. Dickerson then completed the remaining data analysis and reviewed and clustered codes with reference to the research question and to meaningfully identify patterns in the data. Member checking of analyses with participants, iterative revision of the coding frame, ongoing reflective discussions between researchers and reflexive approaches by Dickerson supported interpretive richness and analysis credibility (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

Findings and Discussion

Data analyses supported the identification of five themes pertaining to the wellbeing impacts of the emotional labour educators exercise with families: (i) emotional labour is effortful, demanding work with negative wellbeing impacts; (ii) emotional labour contributes to educator wellbeing; (iii) contextual factors influence wellbeing impacts; (iv) awareness of emotional labour influences wellbeing; and (v) emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship that can be negative or positive. These themes are presented in Figure 1 and discussed below.

Figure 1

Concept Map of Emotional Labour's Wellbeing Impacts, Influenced by Contextual Factors and Educator Awareness of Emotional Labour.



Theme 1: Emotional labour is effortful, demanding work that detrimentally impacts educator wellbeing

All participants (n=9) described emotional labour as ongoing effortful work involving many different families, frequent switching of emotions and complex family-child needs leaving them physically and psychologically drained and resulting in detrimental wellbeing impacts. For example, daily drop-off and pick-up periods often required juggling relational and workplace demands necessary to sustaining relationships over time and was exhausting work. Ana described that

after drop-offs you're tired because it's twenty things to remember about twenty different babies... To each parent you gave all your empathy, attention, like, 'Yes I'm listening; yes, this is important'...each day to build and keep that relationship...while setting-up environments, doing morning tea, calming upset [babies].

Given the volume of interactions, participants (n=9) had to frequently shift between multiple emotions in short periods which was exhausting and deleteriously impacted their wellbeing. Jay explained: "some days you're sympathising with one, then...someone's angry about lost clothes...then someone's giving you a 'thank you' hug...then someone's...brought nuts in... It's spot-fire-to-celebration at once...suddenly I realise...I have this headache...I'm tired." High-frequency, variable emotions and expressions with many families is, as Morris and Feldman (1996) previously argued, effortful emotional labour that can strain wellbeing. Such descriptions resonate with evidence that emotional labour in busy environments requiring multi-tasking drains educators (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Huang & Zhou, 2024) and depletes psychological and physiological energy (Cumming & Wong, 2019).

These negative wellbeing impacts were experienced before, during and after interactions with families. Participants (n=9) experienced stress or anxiety before interactions, particularly when family needs were challenging or unpredictable. Before complex, sensitive discussions with families, Sal shared: "I feel stressed...anxious...about what I might say, what their response might be. ...I've got to psych myself up...it's energy depleting." Complex, sensitive interactions often left participants feeling stressed (n=9). Sal explained that such experiences lasted until she and families found ways to work together. Jay felt dread before interactions with one mum because she would "often break down and cry [afterwards]. The way [mum] spoke to me was horrible. Later I discovered what was happening in her life, which changed my approach... It [was]...emotionally exhausting."

Where participants (n=6) struggled to find a breakthrough with a family, wellbeing could be strained for extended periods that filtered into their personal lives. Long-term strain related to educators' need to continue working closely with families despite challenges, as Marisse shared: "I stay awake at night thinking about what's going to happen to that particular child? How am I going to support this family? How this continues for us... I carry this emotional weight." Misty's ongoing work with culturally diverse, lower socio-economic, at-risk families required masking stress which was "exhausting...tiring. When I get home, I'm unable to give the better part of myself...It becomes easy to snap." Regular suppression of negative emotions depleted participants' (n=8) energy which aligns with findings that surface acting has negative wellbeing impacts (Purper et al., 2022) associated with concealed negative emotions (Gabriel et al., 2023). Such practices and those described throughout this theme, however, showed emotional labour enabled educators to maintain relationships and be responsive to individual families and context through ethical care practices essential in ECEC (Langford, 2019), which is complex work that can be exhausting.

Theme 2: Emotional labour can have positive outcomes that contribute to educator wellbeing

While emotional labour with families is effortful, participants' purposeful emotional labour resulted in positive child, family, and professional outcomes which they experienced as rewarding, satisfying work that sustained their wellbeing. Strategically exercising emotional labour strategies safeguarded wellbeing, reduced workload, built and maintained strong relationships and left participants (n=9) feeling good about the positive impact their work had on families and children. Jay intentionally used emotional labour to

be compassionate... [offer] families a safe place to express themselves...find ways to connect [and sustain] the relationship. [Then] you see [the] positive impact on the family...child...and that makes me feel great.

Participants' (n=8) wellbeing benefitted from their intentional surface acting that buffered relational tension, sustained educator-family relationships and safeguarded their wellbeing. Sal suppressed "frustration where [parents] don't get what you're saying... rather than causing a rift. I take it as a positive challenge... to find... workarounds... eventually we get there and that's...fulfilling." Similarly, Ally masked anger to ease tension between parents and herself to "not ruin the relationship... that [would] make more work for myself later... [and instead] work out ways to get the message through, but in a manageable way for myself." Such findings resonate with existing evidence that surface acting can buffer against negative impacts, preserve relationships, reduce workload, and enable genuine relationships to develop over time (Brown et al., 2022) sustaining wellbeing.

Deep acting and genuine expressions were experienced as meaningful work leading to impactful long-term outcomes that contributed to participants' (n=9) wellbeing. Jay's interchangeable deep acting and genuine expressions with one mum made discussions about her son less negative and draining because "I make time for her...ask how she is...knowing no one else is asking her...[then] she's more open to discuss [and implement] strategies for her son...[which has] made a massive difference for [son], our work with him...less effortful." Similarly, Sal believed "being honest [about what] is and isn't working for babies...validating parents' feelings that [their babies being unsettled] is hard but important. It's rewarding work...that creates positive experiences that supports [children, families, us] over time."

Descriptions such as these highlighted that child, partnership, and professional affordances were meaningful work with impactful outcomes that sustained wellbeing. Such evidence offers a contrasting view of emotional labour compared to the negative experiences reported in ECEC literature (Colley, 2006; Jena-Crottet, 2017; Quiñones et al., 2022). Moreover, these descriptions support findings that while educators recognise the strain of emotional labour, they also understood its value for achieving positive outcomes (Carey & Sutton, 2024) which can sustain wellbeing. As such, these findings highlight how educators understand how to manage and use emotions to flexibly meet others' and their own professional needs (Osgood, 2012; Sevenhuijsen, 1998).

Theme 3: Contextual factors influence emotional labour's wellbeing impact

Emotional labour's wellbeing impact was found to depend on contextual factors that either hindered or enabled educators' capacities to exercise emotional labour effectively with families. Poor working conditions and limited resources made emotional labour more effortful, reducing positive outcomes and diminishing wellbeing. In contrast, consistent workplace supports and resources facilitated emotional labour and led to positive outcomes and wellbeing.

Participants (n=6) described stress associated with insufficient opportunities away from children for reflection with colleagues and preparation for their work with families hindered participants' intentional exercising of emotional labour and strained wellbeing. Misty shared having "no time for reflecting on emotional labour, teaching, or me, [leaving her] unable to meaningfully engage families... [causing relational] difficulties... [which] feels disappointing, stressful... [because families] aren't getting a lot of quality out of me." Descriptions like this extend existing evidence that where educators are unable to support

families' and children's needs, relational challenges emerge that further increase educator stress (Jeon et al., 2018).

Contrastingly, opportunities to plan for and reflect on emotionally intense interactions enabled consistent, strategic exercising of and recovery from emotional labour that contributed positively to relational and wellbeing outcomes. Participants (n=5) explained that reflections allowed for decompression and problem-solving that mitigated potential future emotional labour challenges and enabled more confident, successful practices that sustained wellbeing. Jay debriefed with managers or colleagues on intense family interactions "to offload... learn, develop strategies for next time." Sal shared that reflection and collegial planning supported her and her team "to get our message across to parents...that supports collaboration and avoids child...parent challenges," thereby safeguarding her wellbeing. Time and space for reflective planning and decompression renewed participants' cognitive and emotional energy that enabled them to "better manage complex emotional interactions...with families" (Elfer, 2015, p. 508).

Staff shortages also strained participants' (n=5) wellbeing by reducing time, psychological, physical, and social resources that made emotional labour with families more demanding. Marisse highlighted "educators are burning out, staff shortages worsening...workloads keep increasing...making my work more difficult, increasing my emotional labour...it's exhausting." Turnover and absenteeism reduced collegial and leadership engagements; increased participants' emotional labour efforts with families; and required they undertake work beyond their time, energy or skill, causing exhaustion, which is linked to burnout that potentially fuels a cycle of burnout-turnover-burnout (Bull et al., 2024). Conversely, participants (n=4) with enough staff could engage in professional collaborations with colleagues, leadership, families and external supports that provided consistency for families, children and educators, increased authentic educator-family interactions, and

buffered emotional labour's negative wellbeing impact. Consistent staffing enabled Jay "additional time to... shar[e] information [with team] ...have lovely conversations with parents... that builds relationships by... being clear with how we operate, how we can support them."

Some participants (n=3) described feeling drained and stressed due to limited or strained leadership and collegial support which increased their emotional labour efforts with families. Misty described "colleagues [who] don't deliver messages [to families] in a professional way [that] impacts my relationship with the family, [increasing] the emotional, mental work I have to do with that family. It's draining." Ana experienced increased stress due to having little leadership support and "not knowing who to turn to." That the fulfilling nature of emotional labour, as theme two described, can be overshadowed (McMullen et al., 2020) by contextual demands that cause burnout (Jeon et al., 2018) highlights the influence that contextual factors have on whether emotional labour has positive or negative wellbeing impacts.

Conversely, some participants (n=4) described sustained wellbeing through positive leadership and collegial collaborations that supported their work with families. Sal shared "I trust all [colleagues]...if they've said they've had that conversation [with parents], then they have. We have really good systems around how we do things." Strong leadership support enabled decompression from and reflection on challenging interactions, allowing recovery and future strategic emotional labour to manage complex family needs. Jay shared that

talking with my manager about [mum's angry behaviour]—my manager realised I didn't understand what was happening—[I discovered] mum was going through a messy separation. Once I realised...I adapted what I was doing...the relationship improved, I felt better.

Evidence shows that healthy collegial collaborations (Ng et al., 2025) and strong leadership (Zheng, Luo, et al., 2024) enables greater authentic emotional labour that results in job satisfaction, reduced job demands, and sustained wellbeing. Time and social resources motivated participants to intentionally exercise emotional labour for positive professional and wellbeing outcomes, buffering the strain from relational demands and preserving wellbeing. Such conscious enactments of emotional labour show its potential contribution to wellbeing.

Theme 4: Becoming aware of emotional labour can positively influence educators' wellbeing

Initially unattuned to the emotional labour in their work with families, participants (n=6) believed that their emotions were either irrelevant or unprofessional. Sal revealed “putting aside my emotions...I'm there for the goodness of the child and to build a partnership...my needs...don't matter.” Participants (n=6) also initially understood emotions to likely be perceived as unprofessional. Jay used emotions only “where it doesn't question my professionalism.” Ana recognised there was a limit to what she could show families “before [they] think I'm not a professional.”

Consequently, participants (n=6) disregarded the emotional aspects of their work. Lisa revealed “we [dismiss] our feelings before we even acknowledge...how we might really feel.” Such perceptions of ‘professional’ potentially stem from long-held socio-political constructions of professionalism as rational not emotional, and emotion-based work as women’s ‘natural’ work that is easy (Osgood, 2010). Such beliefs, however, come at a cost. Ana felt that disregarding her emotions while tolerating families’ demands and negative emotions “undervalues my professional worth...” Participants’ accounts reinforce feminist scholarship that the skilled, morally significant work of ethically caring for others requires employees also be cared for to undertake and be sustained in such emotional work

(Sevenhuijsen, 1998). As participants' (n=6) awareness deepened throughout data collection, they frequently described their unpreparedness, and their desire to be prepared for, emotional labour. Marisse explained that “partnerships [are required] but no one explains how to achieve them or understand the emotions involved.” Furthermore, Ally revealed not having been prepared for safeguarding her wellbeing in this work.

Through twelve-months' research engagement participants' (n=5) awareness and understanding of their emotional labour enabled them to better manage the wellbeing impact by adjusting their emotional labour practices. Ally, for example, recognised that being authentic meant being more “explicit” with families from the beginning and taking time to think about “what [am I] doing in that relationship?” Ally described now being:

hyper aware of how I'm interacting with families and setting the tone from the start. I'm explaining, ‘we work together, it's a partnership... [you and I] are here for your child...anything that happens, we can work through it. I see now how it [prevents]...challenges, miscommunication and lessens the intensity when there are challenges... [which] is less draining, stressful.

Participants (n=5) identified that self-awareness was important for managing difficult emotions from working with families, particularly since emotional labour strain could impact their personal life. Ana reflected that “knowing why I'm tired, frustrated, feeling this way is important...[because] it impacts if or how...I work with families...and what goes home to my family” Ultimately, participants (n=5) acknowledged that their emotions were important for being both emotionally available and well enough to exercise strategic emotional labour with families. Sal shared in her final interview: “what I feel...matters deeply...[because] that's how I build relationships...understand what families need, how I can support them... but

also, myself.” Thus, participants’ wellbeing benefitted from their recognition that their emotions mattered.

Increased awareness of the potential impact of emotional labour on participants’ wellbeing empowered them to be more intentional about their emotional labour practices to protect their wellbeing. Sal described intentionally wanting “to have positive [educator-family] experiences, that are... less emotionally draining for myself and my team.” Jay intentionally aimed for interactions “to become emotionally easier over time... with emotional labour supporting boundaries [about] how much I take on.” Participants began to recognise that these types of practices could improve their wellbeing or mitigate negative impacts, even if the initial work with families was effortful. Such empowered, conscious practices were more sustainable for participants’ wellbeing over time and supports arguments that signify the importance of systemic care for professionals undertaking such work and encouraging such professionals to develop professional self-care practices (Langford, 2019; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). These findings reinforce evidence that emotional labour knowledge and skills can support educators’ work with families and wellbeing simultaneously (Byun & Jeon, 2023), signalling that emotional labour need not only impact wellbeing negatively.

Theme 5: Emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship

The final theme shows that emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship where emotional labour influences wellbeing and vice versa. This influence can be either negatively or positively reinforcing. Contextual challenges and demands were found to negatively compound this reinforcing effect over time. Conversely, well-resourced contexts enabled educators to manage their work-related demands—such as emotional labour—resulting in a positively reinforcing effect.

Ongoing contextual demands with insufficient resources were found to make emotional labour more effortful or limited its purposefulness, causing negative wellbeing impacts. Poor wellbeing, in turn, reduced emotional energy for such labour. Participants (n=4) who frequently juggled multiple documentary, regulatory, and relational demands in contexts with limited resources simultaneously compromised their emotional labour with families, which in turn had deleterious wellbeing effects. Misty shared:

I'm [managing] both classrooms, teams, the children's routines, documentation, service rostering, health and safety requirements while [Director] is away. Being drawn in many directions is mentally taxing [especially] when it's daily [and]...it's exhausting...[and limits] energy for all the thinking and feeling involved in [emotional labour] with families.

Such evidence corroborates Cumming et al.'s (2024) findings that multi-tasking is stressful and interferes with educators' capacities to secure positive child and family outcomes, further increasing their stress. Where participants (n=4) felt stress, frustration, and exhaustion that they did not want families to see, dissonance between feelings and the emotional displays used with families drained their psychological resources further, causing feelings of inauthenticity that challenged authentic emotional labour. Ana often

suppressed accumulated frustrations from the day...to have hard conversations with families...[or] avoid parents at pick-up...so they don't see the chaos...my exhaustion, stress. It's a chaotic space, with almost thirty under-twos...most haven't been in care before...I had all this responsibility [and no] support.

The detrimental impact of juggling multiple responsibilities in contexts with limited support resulted in Ana and Misty leaving their jobs. Ana changed workplaces mid-way through participation due to "feeling burned out...undervalued...stressed." In her final

interview Misty shared her decision to leave the workforce, citing severe depression. Misty and Ana's experiences highlight the negative reciprocally-reinforcing effect that strained wellbeing has on emotional labour and under-resourced emotional labour has on wellbeing over time.

Stress and depression are linked to high ECEC relational and emotional demands (Cumming & Wong, 2019) such as those inherent in emotional labour. Exhaustion from trying to meet such demands with limited contextual resources reduces possibly already reduced psychological and physiological energy needed to achieve relational goals. Resultingly, reduced energetic resources impede collaborative partnerships, thereby increasing emotional labour's relational demands and associated psychological and physiological strains (Cumming & Wong, 2019).

Whether the wellbeing impact from emotional labour was positive or negative was dependent on the ecological factors surrounding participants, and if they could purposefully exercise emotional labour. Ana's new workplace facilitated her relational work because

this centre is smaller, [all educators] know each other and the children...it's easy to...have support. Parents are [positive] ...because they know [all educators]. The director [creates] this sense of community, everything flows, feels more positive...I function better...feel more confident with families.

Additionally, compared to her prior workplace, Ana now experienced interactions with families more positively:

before I'd go through in my mind what I was going to say...having this mental labour before conversations.... Now, the anxiety is removed...I'm less tired...I'm myself. There's support here...more experienced staff, the director leads by example...I know why and how I'm communicating. It feels good.

Strategic emotional labour was found to benefit wellbeing and mitigate future effortful emotional labour that also sustained wellbeing. Wellbeing was found to be necessary for intentionally exercising emotional labour for professional affordances. Participants' (n=5) purposeful emotional labour often had professional, child and partnership benefits that positively impacted their wellbeing in the short and long-term. While relationships with families could initially be challenging, participants (n=5) understood they had to keep working with families. Sal shared: "you don't give up on the relationship." Instead, working through frustration and misaligned communication or perspectives to establish and maintain trusting relationships was essential and could benefit participants' wellbeing, as Sal explained:

There's definitely been some frustration, but...I have to be patient, try to support them. [Eventually through] shared understanding, values, perspectives...[then] when their child...falls and [injures themselves] ...Or [has] behavioural challenges...the parents...value your professional judgement, they trust you. Those relationships become lighter, collaborative...Satisfying, sustainable work for me.

Even though emotional labour can be effortful when educator-family relationships are formed, and collaborations yield positive outcomes, educators' wellbeing benefitted. The reward for persisting with effortful labour was, as Jay described, witnessing family "gratitude at their child's progress...sharing joy at seeing the positive impact on the child... [But] also, work[ing] with the child and parents becomes less stressful."

Participants (n=5) reflected that strong wellbeing was, however, necessary for exercising emotional labour with families to meet child and family needs, but also their own needs. Jay explained: "you can't give for [child and relational outcomes]...if you're not okay, emotionally stable and available." Ally described that

if interactions with families [are] contentious and...you [experience] anger, shock, outrage, you have to regulat[e] yourself...not to ruin the relationship. If you're not in a good headspace, that can really impact negatively on your wellbeing...mak[ing] it harder to continue...do[ing] that work with the family. If your wellbeing is up...[difficult conversations] only bring you down [a little] ...but you can bounce back...and keep going with that family.

Our evidence signals greater complexity than a negative-positive binary and raises questions about wellbeing's negative conceptualisation within emotional labour theory. Findings showed emotional labour, when supported and when educators are well, can become less effortful and potentially more genuine over time, sustaining wellbeing. Sustained wellbeing further enables intentional emotional labour that despite challenges, enables positive outcomes. Thus ideally, emotional labour and wellbeing enter a reinforcing cycle where they each support and sustain the other over time.

Implications

Findings highlighted that emotional labour has positive and negative wellbeing impacts and that emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship that can be negative or positive. Additionally, wellbeing impacts and this reciprocally-reinforcing relationship depend on contextual factors. It is therefore critical that emotional labour is not invisible to employees, employers, training providers, policymakers and regulatory authorities, but instead, is acknowledged as a core component of professional practice that can mitigate relational challenges that might otherwise strain educator wellbeing.

Educators' practices and wellbeing stand to benefit from having sufficient workplace resources and opportunities to learn about and apply emotional labour in ways that support

relational and contextual demands over time. Implications for ECEC employers involve providing educators with the workplace supports and resources they need to undertake emotional labour with limited detrimental wellbeing outcomes. Employers can support educators by providing, for example: access to strong leadership; collegial collaborations; time and space to reflect on, prepare for, and decompress from emotional labour; safe spaces for sensitive, challenging educator-family interactions; and, external supports (e.g., free counselling and wellbeing services) for confidential decompression of their emotional labour, to sustain them in this work.

Implications for training providers pertain to educators' need for knowledge of emotional labour and how to intentionally exercise it to meet relational and contextual demands without depleting their wellbeing. Pre-service and ongoing training could attend to emotional labour strategies, their value, and how educators utilise them for professional and wellbeing outcomes. Osgood (2010, p. 131) has similarly advocated that, "through training and...professional development, an emotional form of professionalism can become sustainable."

For ECEC policymakers and regulatory authorities, implications include requiring employers and training providers to support emotional labour and its associated wellbeing ecologically in ECEC contexts. Given the expectation to partner with families, which necessitates emotional labour, educators require structural, organisational and societal care to professionally support and sustain them in such work (Langford, 2019). Contextual resources and structures necessary for sustaining educators in their emotional labour that could be stipulated in policy and regulations include: consistent staffing; time for planning and reflection; opportunities for regular leadership and collegial collaborations; confidential spaces for educator-family interactions; professional development opportunities relevant to emotional labour; healthy workplace culture; and access to free wellbeing services for

decompression. Implementation of such structures and resources may shift such labour from its deficit self-sacrificing, ‘mothering’ position (Lather, 1992) and lead to pay and professional status commensurate with the complexity of this work, further contributing to educators’ wellbeing.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Limitations pertain to the small educator-participant cohort who were highly-qualified, experienced, and older than Australia’s vocationally-trained, younger ECEC workforce. Despite this limitation, findings from our study position wellbeing as necessary for emotional labour, and emotional labour as a potential wellbeing strategy. Such evidence illuminates possibilities for re-articulating how and why emotional labour can be beneficial for educators’, and potentially other relational professionals’ wellbeing. For researchers, exploring relationship-specific emotional labour, through a critical feminist lens, might offer evidence that informs training and development programs and supports employers, policymakers and regulatory authorities’ understandings of emotional labour’s influences on wellbeing. Recent investigations suggest the potential for emotional labour to be more than a burden, but further exploration is needed to understand this possibility (Carey & Sutton, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Future research might explore more deeply the contextual factors that resource and support educators’ emotional labour and associated wellbeing and the ways to promote the positive bidirectional relationship between emotional labour and wellbeing.

Conclusion

This study’s purpose was to explore the wellbeing impacts of educators’ emotional labour in their work with families. Emotional labour in ECEC is generally associated with negative wellbeing impacts, potentially stemming from Hochschild’s (2012) conceptualisation that such labour is costly for the individual. Findings contribute to a small,

emerging body of ECEC evidence that supports this view, while also highlighting wellbeing affordances.

Our findings show that participants both unconsciously, and later, more consciously exercised emotional labour with families in ways that preserved their wellbeing. Being aware of emotional labour and its wellbeing impact empowers educators to understand how to resource and intentionally utilise emotional labour for meaningful work that safeguards their wellbeing. As such, educators avoid exercising emotional labour at the expense of their own wellbeing and in deprecating, self-sacrificing ways that cause burnout.

Instead, educators are empowered to take responsibility, in a professional capacity, for their own wellbeing by valuing their feelings and dismantling long-held discourses of ECEC's self-sacrificing 'mothering' (Ailwood, 2007) and 'nice ladies' (Stonehouse, 1989). There is scope for preparation programs, employers, regulatory authorities and policymakers to acknowledge and value emotional labour and its associated wellbeing. Doing so may inform stakeholder initiatives aimed at resourcing and sustaining wellbeing for emotional labour and emotional labour for wellbeing that may ease current workforce challenges and enable educators to engage, and flourish, in meaningful work.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide for final interview

(participant specific guide with generic template at the end)

- With your permission this interview will be recorded – is that okay?
- How have you been?
- [A brief reminder as per prior interviews] Of importance in this emotional labour work, is the fact that it is not always possible for our emotions not to influence – consciously or subconsciously – how the emotional work occurs. So, if there is anything significant happening at work or in your personal life that may make it a little easier or trickier for you to do the relational work, it is important to consider, reflect, acknowledge this if you are comfortable in doing so. You also do not need to disclose this explicitly but may like to acknowledge that you have things going on that make you feel a certain way.

PebblePad follow-up and generally, how are your families going:

1. Family 1 – always chasing for things
2. Family 2 – any further reflections on how this relationship started versus how it has progressed and the emotional labour you have used to progress this relationship?
3. Family 4 – child who is not going on excursions: how is that relationship with the family going now?
 - a. You recently wrote, *“I feel really disrespected by her especially because she feels comfortable asking for information and doesn't apologise or feel uncomfortable about the fact that she hasn't given me the things I need. I feel that our relationship is quite transactional, regardless of the amount of time I spend with her I can't seem to get any closer to her, which is quite frustrating.”*

- b. How does working with a family like this impact you professionally? And your wellbeing?
 - c. Do you interact with mum genuinely or inauthentically – why?
 - d. How does this relationship differ to, say, Family 1 or 3? Why?
4. Family 5 – had a meeting with dad recently- I saw via your PP entry- and he seems receptive – tell me a bit about how your interactions felt/feel (authentic or inauthentic and requiring certain kinds of strategies – such as?) and how did you arrive at this point?
5. Any other critical PebblePad moments you want to discuss further?

Clarifications from prior interview:

1. You mentioned in the last interview that trust is expected “...*because we live in relationship, we work within relationship like that having a relationship is key, it's this 3-way partnership with the service, the child, the family ...*”
- a. Do you think developing trust in a professional relationship requires skills?
 - b. To work within this three-way partnership, this relationship-based role and profession– What types of strategies and skills would you describe yourself as using? Why these types of strategies and skills?
 - c. Do you think others (society/families) see these skills/this work you do? Why/why not? How does that make you feel?
2. “*we say that to babies’ parents all the time, the orientations are about you as the parent getting to know the educators and the space and trusting what we are doing because if you're happy. And trust us, the child will be happy in 90% of the cases.*”
- a. This quote highlights the significance of having those trusting, reciprocal partnerships with families. How would you describe your emotional labour when establishing trust – what kinds of strategies do you use?

- i. Perhaps an example of success and an example of a relationship that is still challenging?
 - b. Is establishing trust with families an expectation of your work?
 - c. And what is expected of you to achieve this trust with families / what do you feel is expected from you to achieve this?
 - d. Who or what expects this?
 - e. How do such expectations make you feel?
3. You talked about ... *“how do I feel or what does this do to my wellbeing or whatever? And I think it's just part of who I am as a person, is that it really doesn't matter how I feel about any of this stuff... You know, my job is to try and help children and families to navigate this period of their life so how I feel doesn't matter?”*
 - a. I wondered, in a job where families and sometimes you the professional may both have intense connections to the wellbeing of the child and sometimes feelings on both sides might be involved, is it always possible to distance yourself from feelings that can impact your wellbeing? As in, can how you feel really be left out of all partnership work with families?
4. One more thing, in earlier interviews you mentioned things like *“it can be quite energy sucking when you engage”* with mum #4 and we talked earlier about the *“transactional”* nature of the relationship – elsewhere you talked about working with a father where it doesn't *“feel like they...respect what [you're] saying”* – **How does the work you do with these families impact your wellbeing? In the immediate and over time?**

Generic guide for final interview- if not answered above: (bold questions must be asked)

1. Any reflections you want to discuss on how your relationships with focus families has progressed and what emotional labour you have used to progress relationships?

2. How does the work you do with these families impact your wellbeing? In the immediate and over time?
3. IS there anything you would like to share with me or any thoughts you have had that you want this research to potentially share / make known?
4. **Were you aware that you were exercising emotional labour with families before you started participating in this research?**
5. **So, now that you know about emotional labour, now that there is a label for this work that you do with families, how does that impact you or what does it mean for you? Why?**
6. If you had to explain emotional labour with families to a colleague, what would you say?
7. In your work with families, I noted that your interactions with families from the get-go are aimed at developing trust and establishing common ground, but this may be easier with some families than others – could this be related to differences between yourself and the family?
 - a. What examples of difference have you experienced?
 - b. do you think these differences have an impact on your emotional labour? And wellbeing?
8. [if not answered above] Extending on this, is emotional labour with migrant, refugee or CALD families different to families who perhaps share your culture, language, country? Why do you say that?
9. Is emotional labour a negative or positive thing? Why do you say that?
10. **When your wellbeing feels compromised/ negative, what type of emotional labour do you think you tend to use with families? Why?**

11. **How does using your emotions**, either inauthentically – like hiding your stress, frustration of tiredness to be pleasant and calm with families – or authentically, like showing compassion and concern when a family are experiencing difficulties or you are sharing child development aspects – **impact your wellbeing?**
12. Thinking about these strategies, how and why are the strategies/ interactions with one family so similar or so different from/to another family?
13. **Any other thoughts or reflections on your emotional labour and the wellbeing involved with this work?**

Chapter Seven: Contributing to and Expanding Emotional Labour Theory

Introduction

This chapter draws on the findings presented in Chapters Four to Six, as detailed in Dickerson et al. (2024b, in press, under review), to illuminate theoretical contributions to, and expansions of, emotional labour theory. While emotional labour theory has been advanced by other relationship-based professions (i.e., nurses, aged care workers, psychologists, social workers, teachers)—where the nature of the work revolves around the care, learning, and wellbeing of another in complex, dynamic contexts—it has not been advanced in ECEC. I suggest that the evidence from this doctoral study contributes understandings of emotional labour through the lens of ECEC educators' work with families that reaffirms, but also expands on, advancements from the relationship-based professions' scholarship.

In the sections that follow I first briefly highlight the limitation of emotional labour's seminal conceptualisation within the context of service work and draw attention to the difference of such work to that in relational professions. Then I unpack, and use the study's findings to affirm, the theoretical advancements from other relationship-based professions. Finally, I present theoretical contributions that extend these conceptual advancements, discussing their implications for ECEC and other relational professions.

Emotional Labour from Service Work to Relationship-Based Professions: Theoretical Advancements

As discussed in Chapter Three, while Hochschild's (1983/2012) work highlighted the significance and complexity of emotions in workplaces, her theoretical conceptualisation in the context of service work, similarly adopted by Grandey, Diefendorff and Rupp (2013), is limiting for professional, relational work, such as in ECEC where forming and sustaining

relationships is critical. Service work involves working directly with people typically in customer-facing roles within service occupations (e.g. sales, hospitality, tourism, call centres) where employees provide a service in quick time and experience customers as a source of joy or frustration (MacDonald & Korczynski, 2008). Here, emotional labour occurs with strangers in short interactions to satisfy customers and generate revenue according to perceived requirements for the job (MacDonald & Korczynski, 2008). Described this way, employees appear to have, or require, little agency to decide how, when, and why they use emotional displays with customers whom they generally have limited knowledge of and responsibility for and may never interact with again. In this way emotional labour's theorising that feelings and expressions are managed according to organisational expectations which can be costly to the employee are upheld.

Professions involving relational and care work, however, are different to customer-facing service work, with implications for how and why emotional labour is exercised, understood and experienced. The core tenet within relational professions is relationship-building that results in positive outcomes for others (e.g. patients, clients, students) (Lamph et al., 2023) rather than simply meeting organisational outcomes. Such work includes ethical practices for establishing and sustaining relationships (Gilligan, 1982) that provide for the care, education, and wellbeing needs of others over time. Given such differences and in line with arguments that stress the significance of identifying skills specific to a profession's emotional labour demands (Dickerson et al., 2024a; Gabriel et al., 2023; Payne, 2009; Taggart, 2011), it is clear that theorising emotional labour must be specific to the work context and professional relationships in which such labour is undertaken.

Exercising emotional labour in ECEC and other relationship-based professions goes beyond merely complying with occupational rules to only benefit others (i.e. clients, customers) and organisations. Teachers (Brown et al., 2023; Horner et al., 2020; Stark &

Bettini, 2021), ECEC educators (Brown et al., 2022; Cooper, 2017; Malhotra, 2022; Monrad, 2017; Morris, 2018), nurses (Delgado et al., 2017; Tafjord, 2021), aged-care workers (Guan & Jepsen, 2024), social workers (Lavee & Strier, 2018; Winter et al., 2019), and psychologists (Van Der Merwe, 2019; Weaver & Allen, 2017) exercise emotional labour to sustain relationships, meet their own professional and wellbeing needs, and provide for the needs of others over time. Furthermore, ECEC, education, health and welfare professionals from these studies exercise emotional labour according to knowledge of and a professional commitment to the care, education, and wellbeing of others. Similar evidence emerged from this doctoral study (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review) revealing educators exercise emotional labour in their work with families according to deep professional understandings of their work and the professional, child, partnership, and contextual outcomes they sought to achieve in the moment and long-term.

Emotional labour exercised according to professional understandings of one's work reveal such labour to be enacted strategically and autonomously to meet the needs of others, and for professional and wellbeing affordances in ECEC contexts (Brown et al., 2022; Monrad, 2017; Morris, 2021) and other relationship-based professions (Brown et al., 2023; Guan & Jepsen, 2024; Lavee & Strier, 2018; Tafjord, 2021; Weaver & Allen, 2017; Winter et al., 2019). Such evidence supports the findings presented in Chapters Four to Six of this thesis and are contradictory to emotional labour as a perfunctory performance of emotion compliant with organisational expectations. Nurses and teachers recognised that supporting patients and students and their own emotional wellbeing required decisions about how best to exercise emotional labour. Nurses understood that their "emotional expressions must be moderated in emotionally loaded interactions" so as not to overwhelm their patients or themselves (Tafjord, 2021, p. 934). Teachers also moderated their emotional displays to intentionally support students and their own teaching practices (Horner et al., 2020).

Chapters Four, Five and Six report evidence of the skilled, agentic nature of emotional labour in educators' work with families (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review). Such evidence aligns with scholarship from relationship-based professions and shows that these professionals exercise emotional labour through flexible reflective planning and professional judgement. Thus, emotional labour is seen to not only be enacted through surface and deep acting and genuine expressions, but also through additional processes that support purposeful emotional labour. Reflection, for example, facilitated the integration of "required emotions" into one's professional identity necessary for genuine expressions in nurses and psychologists' emotionally intense work with others (Tafjord, 2021; Van Der Merwe, 2019, p. 33). Being mindful of how one's "[emotional] positionality influences" professional practices and relationships with others (e.g. students) guided teachers', nurses' and social workers' professional planning and intentional decision-making (Brown et al., 2023; Dunn et al., 2025, p. 8; Theodosius, 2008; Winter et al., 2019). Such practices enhanced professional confidence, practices and outcomes as seen for teachers, nurses and social workers (Horner et al., 2020; Tafjord, 2021; Winter et al., 2019). Autonomous exercising of emotional labour through reflective decision-making for professional and relational purposes results in positive outcomes that can be professionally satisfying and identifies professional emotions as valuable.

Some evidence from ECEC (Brown et al., 2022; Ming & Pek, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024; Zheng, Fu, et al., 2024) and other relationship-based professions (Brown et al., 2023; Guan & Jepsen, 2024; Lavee & Strier, 2018; Tafjord, 2021; Weaver & Allen, 2017; Winter et al., 2019) supports the assertion that emotional labour can positively impact wellbeing. Such evidence resonates with findings presented in Chapter Six and reported in Dickerson et al. (under review), and contradicts original emotional labour theorising that emotional labour is only costly for the individual. ECEC educators have described elsewhere that their emotional

labour practices benefit their relationships and themselves (Brown et al., 2022; Lee & Brotheridge, 2011; Mikuska & Fairchild, 2020; Morris, 2018). The implicit articulations of such evidence and limited clarity on how and why such implications may positively impact educators' wellbeing have, however, kept such understandings hidden (Dickerson et al., 2024a).

Evidence from relationship-based professions, meanwhile, shows that emotional labour can be satisfying work that supports employees' wellbeing, career longevity, professional boundaries, and professional relationships (Brown et al., 2023; Guan & Jepsen, 2024; Lavee & Strier, 2018; Tafjord, 2021; Weaver & Allen, 2017; Winter et al., 2019). For example, a social worker surface acted neutral, calm feelings that sustained professional boundaries while ending a relationship with her client to safeguard her and her client's wellbeing (Winter et al., 2019). In another example, aged-care workers used emotional labour to balance professional expectations in their close relationships with residents, with ensuing positive outcomes for residents, and experienced by workers as rewarding (Guan & Jepsen, 2024).

Although some ECEC (Brown et al., 2022; Carey & Sutton, 2024; Zheng, Luo, et al., 2024) and relationship-based professions scholarship (Delgado et al., 2017; Guan & Jepsen, 2024; Horner et al., 2020; Kirk et al., 2023; Winter et al., 2019) have explored contextual influences on emotional labour, adoptions of a holistic ecological approach have been limited. Additionally, the use of a critical feminist lens remains relatively absent in explorations of emotional labour in relationship-based professions. Therefore, while advancements to emotional labour theory through ECEC broadly and the relationship-based professions are important, the following section shows that this doctoral study's application of emotional labour in a critical feminist and ecological framing enabled further theoretical contributions to emerge.

Theoretical Contributions to Emotional Labour Theory

Findings from this doctoral study serve to advance emotional labour theorising in five ways. First, empirical evidence suggests that emotional labour through a critical feminist lens enables a strengths-based conceptualisation of emotional labour that dismantles deficit perspectives of such labour as unskilled, intuitive work with only negative wellbeing impacts. Second, an ecological framing reinforces the skilled, intentional nature of emotional labour undertaken according to multi-level ecological influences that thereby challenges simplistic perspectives of such labour as passively exercised according to occupational rules. Through a critical feminist and ecological systems framing of emotional labour a third, fourth and fifth contribution emerged. Third, evidence illuminates emotional labour's reflective planning and professional judgement processes. Fourth, emotional labour includes genuine expressions as both internal and display work. Last and fifth, findings identified that emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocal relationship. The following five sections respectively presents the five contributions.

A Critical Feminist Framing Enables a Strengths-based Conceptualisation of Emotional Labour

The first theoretical contribution pertains to this investigation's critical feminist framing of emotional labour theory (Dickerson et al., 2024a). The contribution of positioning emotional labour theory in a critical feminist paradigm is the broadening strengths-based conceptualisation of emotional labour that allowed for positive wellbeing impacts to be revealed. Without a critical feminist paradigm, some earlier ECEC investigations have adopted a deficit view of emotional labour theory (e.g., Annor et al., 2023; Ntim et al., 2023a; Purper et al., 2022; Quiñones et al., 2022; Ren & Li, 2023), where findings have reinforced—entirely or partially—original conceptualisations of emotional labour as exercised according to organisational rules for organisational goals at the expense of the employee's wellbeing.

Such a reinforcement is the result of the direct application of emotional labour theory without a critical stance. Consequently, emotional labour as nuanced, skilled, purposeful, and exercised by an agentic professional are not made explicit, while the wellbeing impact associated with such hidden skilled work remains unclear or negatively articulated.

A critical feminist framing sought to avoid the deficit, maternalistic framings that earlier emotional labour investigations of educators' work with families reinforced and instead, enabled the professional and wellbeing affordances associated with exercising emotional labour in ECEC to emerge (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). Such a framing illuminated emotional labour as skilled, purposeful work, undertaken with intentionality through all emotional labour strategies interchangeably to support and benefit educators' professional practices, child outcomes, relationships with families and service needs (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press). As such, this doctoral investigation both reinforces and extends on feminist scholarship in ECEC.

Emotional labour as intentional and responsive to child, partnership, and contextual needs requires reflective planning and professional judgement, thus contributing to feminist arguments that such labour is an ethical practice rather than merely the management of feelings according to workplace expectations (Langford, 2019; Page, 2018). Additionally, such work reflects responsibility and ethics of care, which are dominant features in care professions (Gilligan, 1982; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). The evidence of the work involved in emotional labour with families and the influence of the context that can increase the effort in such labour makes explicit that emotional labour is effortful work. Feminist scholars denounce emotional labour's naturalised positioning; or as work undertaken for passion or as a vocational commitment, arguing that such positionings fail to frame such labour as work and instead secures ongoing undervaluation and exploitation (Langford, 2019; Noddings, 2013; Osgood, 2012; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). This doctoral study, like Osgood's (2012) work,

illuminated how deficit, maternalistic discourses might be challenged through understandings of educators' emotional labour in their professional work with families. Additionally, however, this doctoral study expands on Osgood's work by revealing, through educators' practices with families, how such work is shaped and influenced by relational and context factors, and that such work is undertaken intentionally for professional and wellbeing affordances (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review).

Another contribution of this doctoral investigation's critical feminist framing is that it enabled participants to develop awareness of their emotional labour over 12 months of research participation. This awareness, in turn, empowered participants to reflect on and strengthen their emotional labour practices to secure professional and wellbeing affordances (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). This finding extends feminist scholarship perspectives that emotional labour must be acknowledged, supported, and fairly remunerated to mitigate its negative impacts (Colley, 2006; Elfer, 2015; Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2012; Page, 2018; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). The evidence adds nuance by illuminating the significance of the relationship between emotional labour and wellbeing where positive implications of this relationship may exist when both are supported to support each other.

Consequently, emotional labour emerges as "not biological on account of gender" (Taggart, 2011, p. 93) and, therefore, not natural, unskilled work as Osgood (2010) and others (Bolton, 2004; Langford, 2019) have argued. Emotional labour is, instead, effortful work because it requires complex, nuanced skills for dealing with the varied ongoing wellbeing needs of another (Bolton, 2004; Osgood, 2010). As such, emotional labour is depicted as autonomous, exercised according to professional knowledge to intentionally meet relational, organisational and professional objectives and can be effortful and satisfying work. Additionally, the skill in such work includes profession-specific ecological understandings of emotional labour.

An Ecological Systems Perspective Illuminates the Multi-level Influences on Emotional Labour and its Wellbeing Impacts

The second theoretical contribution is that the exercising of emotional labour and the wellbeing impacts associated with such work are better understood according to interconnected ecological influences over time. Adopting an ecological approach extends emotional labour theory by positioning emotional labour in relationship-based professions as skilled work that is enacted with respect to multiple, not single, interconnected factors. While prior investigations in ECEC and other relationship-based professions have considered some ecological factors that influence emotional labour, holistic ecological framings of emotional labour within these investigations have not been undertaken. The evidence from this doctoral investigation illuminated the complexity of emotional labour that centred the child and their development at the core of ongoing educator-family partnerships in everchanging contexts. As such, an ecological framing enables clearer understandings of the context-specific influences on the professional's emotional labour in relationship-based professions that may support and sustain professionals in such work.

An ecological framing of emotional labour theory yielded evidence that contradicts the simplistic positioning of emotional labour as exercised with another in once-off, non-relational interactions for organisational gains. Instead, the complexity of emotional labour that occurs over time within relationships (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review) was illuminated and reinforces the skilled, purposeful nature of such work, rather than it being feminised labour based on the innate, natural capacities of women.

Emotional Labour involves Ongoing Reflective Planning and Professional Judgement Processes

The third contribution that emerges through this investigation's critical feminist framing and ecological approach identified the ongoing reflection and professional judgement required to support surface and deep acting and genuine expressions over time (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). Professional understandings of one's required work and emotional labour's purpose for such work are embedded within a strong sense of professional identity that informs autonomous decisions for exercising emotional labour (Dickerson et al., in press). Ongoing reflective practices informed professional judgements that enabled strategic and autonomous enactments of emotional labour strategies, including genuine expressions that secured the authentic relationships educators sought (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). Since reflective planning and professional judgement occurs before, during and after educators' interactions with families, emotional labour is work beyond a momentary interaction (Dickerson et al., in press). Such ongoing processes better enabled educators to exercise emotional labour more genuinely with families over time, and in ways that led to strong, authentic relationships which was satisfying work (Dickerson et al., in press, under review).

Emotional Labour includes Genuine Expressions as Internal and Display Work

The fourth theoretical contribution to advance emotional labour theory is the positioning of genuine expressions as both internal and display work. The application of a critical feminist framing and ecological approach to emotional labour illuminated for the first time that genuine expressions require internal processes and effort to secure strong, professional relationships. Seminal emotional labour theorising situates genuine expressions as emotional displays that are authentic but not part of the internal processes and effort associated with emotional labour's emotion management (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild,

1983/2012). Reflective planning and professional judgment were, however, critical for educators to find meaningful, professional ways to be genuine with families where educators felt that their genuine feelings – not just the displays – mattered for emotional labour (Dickerson et al., in press). Genuine expressions were not only spontaneous enactments of felt emotion in the moment, but were also intentional, well-informed, and respectful approaches to individual family, or parent, needs and sensitive matters (e.g. developmental or behavioural concerns; personal family life impacts on the child) (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). As such, the internal reflective and judgement work required for these genuine expressions were laborious and often draining (Dickerson et al., in press).

Educators were found to exercise genuine expressions intensely and frequently with different families according to the nature or progression of the interaction. In particular, empathy for a grieving family; relief for a family whose child received disability funding; joy at a child's achievement; and patience with an unreasonably demanding parent (Dickerson et al., in press). This ongoing shifting from empathy-to-grief-to-joy-to-patience in short periods, while educators engaged with children, was found to be mentally and emotionally taxing given the time pressure for reflecting and deciding on the best approach that supports individual family needs (Dickerson et al., under review). Although effortful work, educators' genuine expressions developed strong educator-family relationships that enabled collaborations which secured child outcomes and felt satisfying (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). That genuine expressions require internal processes and effort, warrants their inclusion in emotional labour theory as both display and internal work.

Emotional Labour and Wellbeing Share a Reciprocal Relationship

The final conceptual contribution is the identification of emotional labour and wellbeing's mutually supportive relationship, given they can support and sustain each other over time in a reinforcing cycle (Dickerson et al., under review). That is to say, through

evidence presented in this study, educators' emotional labour and wellbeing were shown to share a bidirectional relationship (Dickerson et al., under review) which has implications for professionals and those they share workplace relationships with. As such, the negative focus of emotional labour's wellbeing impacts are challenged and instead bring into question the wellbeing affordances potentially associated with such labour, particularly if both wellbeing and emotional labour are ecologically supported. Whether surface acting, deep acting, and genuine expressions have negative or positive wellbeing impacts was found to depend on the interplay between the ecological factors surrounding the professional and whether the strategy was purposefully exercised (Dickerson et al., under review). Such distinctions are critical for professions facing wellbeing challenges.

Additionally, exercising emotional labour autonomously through a strong sense of professionalism and deep understandings of the professional and wellbeing objectives being sought can result in the educator experiencing positive outcomes that makes such work meaningful (Dickerson et al., under review). Emotional labour as exercised for self, rather than only *for* others (i.e., the organisation, employers, customers) (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 1983/2012) warrants consideration given that emotional labour presents as a tool for relational work with professional and wellbeing affordances. This is particularly the case in contexts that are well resourced for emotional labour, despite the effort required in such labour (Dickerson et al., under review). Positive outcomes and experiences mean that further enactments of emotional labour are likely less effortful and potentially more genuine, which consequently supports the employee's wellbeing (Dickerson et al., under review). When emotional labour sustains the professional's wellbeing, their capacity for reflective planning and professional judgement necessary for strategic emotional labour increases, further yielding professional and wellbeing affordances (Dickerson et al., under review). Emotional labour and wellbeing enter a reinforcing cycle that sustains professionals in emotionally

demanding relational work and has important implications for relational professions, including ECEC, facing high employee turnover and absenteeism pertaining to ongoing wellbeing challenges. Such understandings about the ways that emotional labour and wellbeing relate to each other in ECEC contexts provides a broader scope within which emotional labour's wellbeing implications can be theorised.

Implications

The critical feminist framing of emotional labour theory through an ecological approach explicitly illuminated skilful, purposeful enactments of emotional labour that dismantles long-held deficit perceptions of such work, particularly in highly feminised relational professions where emotional labour is considered innate for women. Such a theoretical repositioning dismantles deficit framings of emotional labour and illuminates skilful emotional labour and its professional and wellbeing affordances that can empower the employee. Identified ongoing reflective practices that support professional judgements about how best to autonomously utilise and manage emotions in ECEC's relational work signals an intentional approach to professional emotional labour. Discourses of professionalism have historically been dominated by ideas of rationality over emotionality (Osgood, 2010). ECEC scholars, however, argue that subjective, autonomous and collective commitments to "ethical qualities such as patience, courage, persistence or care" exercised flexibly by a reflective emotional professional through emotional labour (Osgood, 2010; Taggart, 2011, p. 86) are quintessential for professional practice. Evidence showed that emotional labour, understood in this way, could be learned and adapted to sustain professional practices and employee wellbeing and highlights that training and ongoing professional development that supports emotional labour in relational work are necessary. As such, educators' purposeful emotional labour, including genuine expressions' internal and display work, according to complex, multi-layered factors for professional and wellbeing affordances, reveals a deeply

professional component of educators' relational work. Such work warrants being acknowledged and valued by educators, employers, training providers, policymakers, regulatory authorities and society more broadly.

Ecological understandings of emotional labour identified in this doctoral thesis (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review) have implications for those exercising emotional labour, but also those seeking to train, support, resource and sustain employees who utilise emotional labour. Emotional labour was adapted and exercised according to the complex interplay of ecological factors over time in educators' work, explicitly identifying emotional labour as skilled, intentional work based on expert knowledge of interconnected factors. The enactments and experiences of emotional labour described in Chapters Four to Six are unique to ECEC and unveil interconnected ecological factors that influence emotional labour and its wellbeing impacts, moment-to-moment and over time. Such understandings are important for identifying the multi-level resources and supports necessary for emotional labour training, practices and wellbeing impacts that shift beyond the focus of the individual educator. Moreover, given the significance of time in educators' relational work, consideration of such supports and resources for emotional labour and wellbeing that sustains educators throughout their career, is critical.

Conclusion

The expansion of emotional labour theory as outlined in this chapter positions such work in a discourse of strength and empowerment. From this positioning, professional emotions and skilled emotional labour can be acknowledged and valued. The theoretical contributions expose work requiring more than customer satisfaction for a service sold in momentary interactions with strangers—such as ECEC, nursing, teaching, psychology, aged-care or social work—as relational in nature and fundamentally different to service work. Such professionals undertake their ongoing, relational work because it is purposeful, meaningful

work that they do for varied reasons, such as educators' passionate commitment to children. Such work is based on the ecology in which the emotional labourer is situated.

The theoretical contributions I have presented here may support future empirical explorations to explicitly identify the skilled, strategic emotional labour within, but also beyond, relationship-based professions, and the professional and wellbeing affordances of such work. Resultingly, potential supports and resources necessary for emotional labour and its associated wellbeing that are context specific, may be more easily illuminated. I believe a strengths-based conceptualisation of emotional labour theory enables understandings of emotional labour and its wellbeing impacts that can contribute to and support initiatives seeking to address persistent workforce challenges, not only in ECEC, but across demanding relational professions.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The doctoral study reported in this thesis explored emotional labour in early childhood educators' work with families and the wellbeing impacts of such work. The study was the first to explore emotional labour in Australian educators' day-to-day work with families in birth-to-five contexts through a mixed-method, longitudinal approach. The approach taken in this investigation is different from how other ECEC investigations, including the four family studies, have explored emotional labour. This study used a critical feminist and ecological systems framing of emotional labour theory to explore whether emotional labour had professional and wellbeing affordances.

The findings from this study extend the extant literature by explicitly illuminating emotional labour in educators' relational work with families as skilled, purposeful work exercised according to multi-level influencing factors and with both positive and negative wellbeing impacts (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review). Moreover, emotional labour was found to be undertaken autonomously through professional understandings of ECEC and intentional practices that sought professional and wellbeing affordances (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). As such, this investigation's findings are different to emotional labour theory's description of work that is passively undertaken according to occupational requirements with only negative wellbeing impacts, as argued in Chapters Four, Five and Six. The findings presented in this study are also different to other ECEC investigations that have tended to articulate emotional labour as exercised according to organisational rules to meet occupational requirements and usually with negative wellbeing impacts, as detailed in Chapter Two and Dickerson et al. (2024a). Through the applied theoretical framings of emotional labour, theoretical contributions and advancements to emotional labour theory emerged, as detailed in Chapter Seven.

In this chapter I first highlight the methodological contributions of this study to investigations of emotional labour in ECEC that stem from the innovative approaches this investigation took. Then I highlight this study's key findings and contributions to the academic literature about emotional labour in ECEC before I discuss the implications this doctoral investigation has for ECEC educators, service providers, training providers, policymakers, and regulatory authorities. In conclusion, I acknowledge the study's limitations and suggest possible directions for future research.

New Approaches to Investigating Emotional Labour in ECEC

New approaches to exploring emotional labour in ECEC enabled the findings as discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six to emerge. This section addresses the contribution of five methodological innovations of this doctoral study for investigations of emotional labour in ECEC. First, the adapted *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale* is a key contribution of my doctoral research to the ECEC field nationally and internationally. As detailed in Chapters Three and Four (Dickerson et al., 2024b), this study's adapted scale is the first emotional labour scale for Australian educators' working in birth-to-five contexts, and the first to extract data on emotional labour in educators' work with families in such contexts. The tool includes a detailed demographic section to extract individual, contextual, and relational data to elicit quantitative understandings of emotional labour in educators' work with families. Additionally, the tool included questions on wellbeing to meet this study's purpose but are also relevant given that emotional labour theory includes wellbeing (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 1983/2012).

Second, the mixed-method approach responds, as highlighted in Chapter One and Two, to the limited mixed-method and qualitative investigations of emotional labour in ECEC and extends specifically on the existing four investigations of emotional labour in educators' work with families. A mixed-method approach enabled both broadbrush and in-

depth, nuanced understandings of emotional labour in Australian educators' work with families and the wellbeing impacts of such work to be revealed for the first time. Quantitative findings highlighted some individual, relational and contextual influences on educators' emotional labour while the qualitative data, expanding on the quantitative results, provided detailed understandings of such influences according to individual educators' experiences of working with families in their ECEC services. The complimentary mixed-method approach enabled understandings of the impact of contextual, relational and individual educator factors on educators' exercising of emotional labour in their work with families, as well as on their wellbeing in such work over a 12-month period.

Third, as outlined in Chapters Four to Seven, a longitudinal approach to interviewing and journaling allowed for emotional labour to be revealed as influenced by ecological factors, but particularly time, since interactions with families are ongoing and emotional labour in ECEC is more than a momentary, once-off encounter. Additionally, following educator-participants' work with selected families over 12-months identified that emotional labour practices shifted over time between and within events such as changing child health and development needs, family life circumstances and contextual factors pertaining to time (i.e., drop-off / pick-up periods; winter illness periods; beginning and end of year) that impact the educator-family relationship. Lastly, longitudinal interviewing and journaling over 12 months supported participants' awareness of emotional labour that then empowered them to choose how and why they exercised such labour and to do so in ways that safeguarded their wellbeing.

Fourth, the application of emotional labour theory through a critical feminist research paradigm and an ecological systems perspective enabled a complex and nuanced understanding of emotional labour in educators' work with families. A multi-theoretical approach enabled evidence that shifted emotional labour away from simplistic articulations

and offered new theoretical and empirical contributions. The use of a critical feminist lens uncovered knowledge and power in relation to educators' emotional labour in their ongoing work with families, not just truth and experience of such labour. As such, a critical feminist framing illuminated findings that provide insights for policy, training, practice and broader wellbeing initiatives in ECEC that are beneficial for educators and have the potential to drive social justice and change.

Fifth, although not intentionally recruited this way, participants were predominantly older, highly qualified and experienced educators who represented the workforce stayers, and although potentially viewed as a limitation, such a cohort contributed understandings about what might sustain educators in their work. The evidence presented in this study showed emotional labour to be effortful and difficult work and suggests that educators, despite their experience and qualification, require awareness of emotional labour, and resources and training to support purposeful emotional labour and their wellbeing in such work. Overall, the educator-participants in this investigation were found to exercise emotional labour thoughtfully and intentionally for professional purposes that supported their practices and relationships and mitigated relational challenges, which thereby sustained them in their work.

Key Findings and Empirical Contributions of this Doctoral Study

Six empirical contributions emerged from this doctoral investigation of emotional labour in educators' work with families. First, a key finding from the investigation's quantitative results (Dickerson et al., 2024b) was that five interconnected ecological levels (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) inclusive of the (a) individual; (b) service context (microsystem); (c) educator and service level interactions with families (mesosystem); (d) regulatory and socio-cultural-political factors (exosystem-to-macrosystem); (e) and time (chronosystem) influenced educators' emotional labour while working with families and associated wellbeing impacts. Evidence from the qualitative component of the investigation confirmed these

ecological influences (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). The influence of ecological systems is important as it provides in-depth understandings of the complexity involved in skilled and purposeful emotional labour and has not yet been explored within ECEC investigations of emotional labour. Attention to the influence of time within, across, and between each of the first four systems is particularly relevant to the ongoing nature of ECEC relationships and illuminates the complexity within and between each ecological level (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review). Educator-participants' emotional labour, and ensuing wellbeing impacts, were influenced by ecological systems that change over time according to relationships with children (whose development is always progressing) and their families (whose lives are constantly shifting) in unpredictable contexts (Dickerson et al., in press, under review).

Second, emotional labour was shown to be skilfully and purposefully exercised through professional understandings of children, families, and their service context to intentionally achieve outcomes that supported and benefitted professional practices and child, partnership, and service needs (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press). All emotional labour strategies were utilised with families frequently, interchangeably and at various times based on professional, child, family, or contextual needs, occurring both in the moment and for long term outcomes (Dickerson et al., under review-a).

Third, the nuanced exercising of emotional labour for such purposeful outcomes identified that emotional labour requires critical reflection, planning, and autonomous decision-making (Dickerson et al., 2024b, in press, under review). Termed in this study as reflective planning and professional judgement, these processes supported educators' emotion regulation and intentional management of complex individual, child, and family needs, while also considering contextual factors, revealing a deeply skilled approach to emotional labour (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). Moreover, emotional labour's reflective planning

and professional judgement work supported emotional labour practices that preserve educators' wellbeing (Dickerson et al., under review).

Fourth, educator-participants' awareness of emotional labour influenced and strengthened their exercising of such labour through reflection and adjustment of emotional labour practices that had professional and wellbeing affordances (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). That awareness and knowledge of emotional labour enabled educator-participants to thoughtfully and purposefully exercise emotional labour, reinforces the skill and intentionality associated with such work. Moreover, that educator-participants acquired awareness through research participation over 12 months which supported the development of their emotional labour skills, signals that such work can be learnt and developed over time.

Fifth, while emotional labour was shown to impact educator wellbeing both negatively and positively, such impacts were shown to be influenced by: whether emotional labour results in positive professional, child, or family outcomes; contextual factors that support or hinder emotional labour; and, educators' awareness of emotional labour (Dickerson et al., in press, under review). Such evidence revealed, as detailed in Chapter Seven, that emotional labour and wellbeing share a mutually beneficial relationship where each can support and sustain the other over time. Seeking out the affordances associated with emotional labour is significant for understanding how to support such labour for positive professional and wellbeing outcomes that sustain the educator in their work over time.

Last and sixth, the application of emotional labour theory through a critical feminist research paradigm and ecological systems perspective revealed theoretical contributions to emotional labour theory in the context of ECEC. Such contributions include a strengths-based positioning of emotional labour theory through a critical feminist lens that can illuminate such work as skilled and intentionally and autonomously undertaken for professional and

wellbeing affordances. The ecological perspective revealed that emotional labour is enacted according to interconnected ecological systems that also impact such labour and educators' wellbeing in ECEC and, therefore, highlight understandings of the context-specific resources that may sustain educators in their relational work. Through the critical feminist and ecological systems framing of emotional labour theory, reflective planning and professional judgement necessary for emotional labour were identified and highlighted that such labour includes genuine expressions as both internal and display work. The final theoretical contribution is that emotional labour and wellbeing share a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship which is a shift from emotional labour theory's stance that such labour is only costly to the employee's wellbeing.

Implications of this Doctoral Study

The findings from this study have implications for educators, service providers, training providers, policy makers, regulatory authorities, governments and emotional labour theory. For *educators*, awareness of emotional labour appears critical for undertaking this work autonomously, through reflection and with intentionality, to yield professional and wellbeing affordances, as evidenced in Chapters Five and Six. As such, it seems important for educators to develop understandings about what emotional labour is and to learn how it can be utilised to support their relational work and wellbeing. Expanded understandings of emotional labour theory, as detailed in Chapter Seven, may also support educators' understandings of the complexity and benefits associated with emotional labour's reflective planning, professional judgement, and wellbeing.

Educators may also benefit from regular opportunities to talk about and reflect on emotional labour and their emotions in their relational work. This implication emerges from evidence presented in Chapters Five and Six of educator-participant descriptions of emotional labour being supported through engagement with leaders and colleagues. Talking about their

emotional labour and emotions in their work with families enabled emotional labour practices to be reflected upon and strengthened, so that professional outcomes were achieved and their wellbeing preserved. Additionally, through ongoing dialogue and reflections in their 12 months research participation, educator-participants who originally dismissed their emotions came to recognise that these were critical for how and why they undertake emotional labour in their work with families. Some evidence in ECEC has shown the professional and wellbeing benefits associated with educators, particularly leaders, having the space and time with and support from others external to the organisation, to discuss and develop deepened awareness of the complex emotional and relational aspects in their work (Elfer, 2012; Wong et al., 2024).

Moreover, given the ecological factors that influence emotional labour and wellbeing, it may serve educators to develop the capacity to purposefully exercise emotional labour to balance professional, relational, as well as contextual demands over time, thereby sustaining them in their work. Key to shifting deficit socio-political discourses of educators' emotional labour is to shift the understandings, language, and enactment of such work within the educators themselves. As such, advocacy can emerge through explicit professional practices and dialogue between educators, and with employers and the families and communities they work with. The strengths-based theoretical re-positioning of an expanded emotional labour theory may enable educators to become more aware of the affordances of this work that supports the shift in their understandings, language, and enactment of this labour.

Understanding the implications for educators reveals implications for *service providers* who employ educators. While educators require awareness of emotional labour to achieve its positive professional, relational and wellbeing outcomes, service providers also need to understand and acknowledge such labour as a skilled and effortful component in educators' relational work with families that can be rewarding. Additionally, the

interconnected ecological factors that influence educators' emotional labour, as revealed in Chapters Four, Five and Six, highlight the need for service providers to make relevant workplace and contextual adjustments that are supportive of such work and sustains their employees. For example, educator-participants revealed that time for reflection and planning, and access to leadership and collegial collaborations supported their intentional exercising of emotional labour in ways that resulted in positive outcomes without inflicting long-term negative wellbeing impacts or provisioned recovery from such emotionally intense work. Such provisions for educators working directly with children seems critical given the greater wellbeing struggles faced by the educator-participants in this study who worked directly with children and who had limited time and collegial support in their contexts. Moreover, leaders have the capacity to support educators, particularly new educators to the service or to ECEC, to understand the families attending their service and their service's unique contextual positioning.

Since emotional labour and wellbeing have a reciprocally-reinforcing relationship, as detailed in Chapters Six and Seven, it would benefit service providers to support and resource emotional labour and wellbeing simultaneously through contextual level provisions beyond individual-only supports. Service providers should pay special attention to contextual factors that can support those working directly with children to experience positive professional and wellbeing outcomes from their emotional labour with families that may serve to support educators' future emotional labour practices and their wellbeing. Supports for emotional labour are necessary throughout educators' careers and include ongoing professional development to learn and reflect on their emotional labour work that can be intense and difficult, but also meaningful, satisfying work. Service providers stand to benefit from embedding these, and potentially other, resources that support educators in their deeply emotional relational work within their service's contexts and leadership practices. By

enabling educators to thrive in such work, high-quality family partnerships are maintained, child needs are met, and services retain staff who continue to achieve positive child and family outcomes.

Implications from this investigation for *training providers* pertains to pre-service (university and vocational training providers) and ongoing professional development providers. Enabling skilled, intentional exercising of emotional labour in educators' work with families and the use of such labour to manage relational and contextual demands requires, as already mentioned, that educators have awareness of emotional labour and their own emotions in their relational work with families. The positive positioning of and theoretical expansions to emotional labour theory from this investigation's findings may support training providers to plan for and deliver training and development for emotional labour that benefits educators, children, families and services while sustaining educators in their work. Training and development that delivers understandings of emotional labour strategies, their value, and how they might be utilised for professional and wellbeing outcomes that serve the educator and their relational work, are important.

Given that emotional labour is influenced by ecological factors at interplay over time, detailed in Chapters Four, Five and Six, training providers should deliver practical understandings of how such factors influence emotional labour, but also, how emotional labour may support educators to manage individual, child, family and service demands. This is particularly important for working with children and families facing adversity and with experiences of trauma or where children have additional needs. As such, pre-service training and ongoing professional development may foster educators' capacity to purposefully exercise emotional labour to balance professional, relational, as well as contextual demands over time, that enables them to thrive in their work rather than burn out. Moreover, training providers could support pre-service educators to understand emotional labour as a tool that

can preserve their wellbeing throughout their careers and how wellbeing is necessary for exercising emotional labour for positive partnership and child outcomes, that can further support wellbeing. There may be scope for training providers to pay more attention to the professional value of emotional labour that supports educators to develop a deep professional appreciation for their emotional labour and the role of their emotions in their work with families.

For *policymakers* and *regulatory authorities*, the evidence in this doctoral study points to the need for skilled, intentional emotional labour in educators' relational work to be acknowledged in regulatory requirements. As discussed in Chapter Two and throughout the thesis, policy and regulation require educators to partner with families in Australia and internationally, yet the inherent emotional labour in such work and the potential wellbeing impacts of this work remain absent from such documents. The significance of such an absence of acknowledgement for this inherent work is the negative impact it has on educators' wellbeing, as revealed in Chapters Five and Six where educator-participants felt undervalued. Additionally, emotional labour was shown to be demanding and complex work that requires expert professional understandings about partnering with families in ECEC. The absence of acknowledgement for such skilled work means that the workload associated with emotional labour is unrecognised, thus unsupported, and the pay and professional status not commensurate with the complexity of the required work, thereby negatively impacting educators. Such factors – unsupported workload, poor pay and professional status, and feeling undervalued – have long been associated with negative wellbeing impacts for educators (Cumming, 2017; Demirci-Ünal & Olgan, 2025; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013).

Chapter Six highlighted educator-participants' awareness of partnership expectations, but that they were provided with little guidance in policy and regulatory documents and at training levels on how to undertake such work and how to safeguard their wellbeing in such

work. It seems pivotal, given current educator burnout, turnover, and attrition challenges (Doromal et al., 2022; Fenech et al., 2021; Heilala et al., 2022; Hur et al., 2022; Schaack et al., 2022; Thorpe et al., 2020), that emotional labour and how it can be utilised in relational work to yield positive professional and wellbeing outcomes, be articulated in policy and regulatory documents. This articulation could, for example, include guidance for educators on what this work is, how it might be undertaken for positive professional and wellbeing outcomes and include specific stipulations for service providers to acknowledge and support this work. In Australia's National Quality Framework (2020) such inclusions might occur for educators alongside practice guidance for partnering with families in Quality Area Six; while stipulations for service providers can be included in Quality Area Seven pertaining to governance and leadership. Additionally, such articulation may also support educators', service providers', and perhaps governments' and societies' acknowledgement of the professional value of educators' emotional labour and wellbeing in their relationship-based work with families.

The significance of recognising educators' emotional labour at policy and regulatory levels is that it enables such labour to be supported; professionally valued; understood for its affordances; and, exercised with limited negative wellbeing outcomes for educators. Such acknowledgement would contribute to current Australian and international policy makers', regulatory authorities', and governments' initiatives seeking to address workforce challenges (see for example, ACECQA, 2021; Kulakiewicz et al., 2022; United States Department of Health and Human Services' [DHHS] Administration for Children and Families, 2022). Australia's ten year Workforce Strategy (ACECQA, 2021), for example, aims to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the workforce across six key areas which includes both professional recognition and wellbeing. Critical, however, is that recognition and wellbeing provisions must genuinely support and sustain educators to thrive in their work

rather than to bolster broader economic agendas, such as those seeking to expand ECEC access for families to support parental workforce engagement for economic gains (Productivity Commission, 2024). While ECEC access for children and families is important, doing so without well-planned structural and systemic supports that focus first on sustaining educators in their work, will likely result in further workforce challenges that limit high-quality ECEC access for families. Although governments are aware that they need to be involved in ECEC reform (Productivity Commission, 2024) how they do so alongside other ECEC stakeholders to meet initiatives set to address workforce challenges (ACECQA, 2021) will be important. Such collaboration requires holistic approaches that reveal more clearly the work educators are undertaking and its wellbeing, contextual and professional complexities.

Moreover, the evidence from this doctoral investigation provides important insights for identifying specific challenges and multi-level resources and supports associated with emotional labour that has relevance for policy and regulatory authorities seeking to address wellbeing beyond the focus of the individual educator. Findings reported in Chapters Four, Five, and Six suggest that specific contextual supports that enable emotional labour necessary for educators to develop partnerships with families are required. For example, structural factors such as consistent staffing that is above the minimum adult to child ratio; time away from children and with leaders and colleagues; and, ongoing professional development opportunities need to be supported at policy and regulatory levels so that requirements for partnering with families can be met. Importantly, poor working conditions, that are partly influenced by structural and systemic challenges, limited contextual resources as well as unrecognised workload, drive educators to leave their jobs more than other factors, such as poor pay (Grant et al., 2019; McDonald et al., 2018; Thorpe et al., 2020). Addressing policy and regulatory level recognition of, and training, contextual and wellbeing supports for, emotional labour may sustain educators in their relational work that benefits educators, but

also families, children and service providers and contributes to bolstering the workforce, retaining existing and new educators.

Implications for *emotional labour theory* pertain to its application in future research. Strengths-based framings of emotional labour theory in future investigations are likely to draw attention to the skill and intentionality in, and complexity of multi-level influences on emotional labour in ECEC. Such an application of the theory in future research will support investigations to purposefully seek out the professional and wellbeing affordances associated with such labour. As such, future studies, may instead, illuminate professional, autonomous enactments of such work that may empower and sustain educators and enable its recognition at educator, employer, training and socio-political levels. Findings that repeatedly reveal emotional labour's complexity and affordances may shift long-held deficit perceptions that emotional labour is merely undertaken according to organisational requirements with negative wellbeing impacts. As such, acknowledgement of skilled, purposeful emotional labour may support educators, training providers, policymakers, regulatory authorities and governments to understand the resources required for emotional labour more clearly and how to sustain educators' wellbeing pertaining to this work.

Study Limitations

I note eight study limitations of this doctoral investigation in this section. First, and as reported in Chapter Four, the skewed respondent profile—predominantly older, highly-qualified, experienced educators with leadership positions who represented the workforce stayers— may have led to an over-representation of respondents who were more able to exercise emotional labour through deep acting or genuine expressions with families. Although reflective of the sector in which 95.5% of the sector are female (DESE, 2022), it may be relevant to capture more male educators and teachers in future studies. Furthermore, it was not possible to ascertain how many services the respondents were from, or whether

some respondents were from the same service. The number of respondents was lower than expected for a statewide survey, and so generalising the findings to the broader population was limited. Reviewing the start times and days of survey attempts indicated that educators were accessing and completing surveys in their personal time. Considerations for the workforce crises and the stressors educators were potentially facing (ACECQA, 2023) may explain why many of the surveys were not completed or even attempted beyond providing consent. Additionally, it was the end of the year and ECEC educators and teachers may have been feeling exhausted.

Second, a self-report, anonymous survey does not allow respondents to clarify questions where they are uncertain of the meaning. Third, respondents may have under- or over-reported their emotions due to social or professional expectations or work-related pressures experienced at that point in time. Fourth, a survey may be challenging for respondents with English as an additional language or where cultural interpretation of questions, particularly of emotions, may misconstrue or make difficult the purpose of the question. Fifth, in seeking participants' wellbeing impacts of their emotional labour, the framing of the open-ended questions may have led respondents to assume that the survey was seeking the negative implications, rather than an understanding of all the potential implications—positive, negative and neutral.

Sixth, while the recruitment strategy for the qualitative component aimed to select ten case study participants with as much diversity as possible, the participants who were willing and available to participate fell outside of my control. A potential limitation may pertain to having just nine qualitative participants within this investigation, where only six participants remained until the final interview. As already mentioned for the survey, the qualitative participants were also predominantly older, experienced and teacher-qualified, rather than a mixture of the ECEC sector's workforce that consists largely of vocationally-qualified

diploma and certificate III educators (ACECQA, 2021). As such, qualitative data may have been skewed to real-life accounts from more experienced educators and not generalisable to the overall ECEC workforce in Australia.

Seventh, while this investigation provided some evidence of educators' work with families from culturally diverse backgrounds, clear and distinct understandings of the cultural implications for emotional labour were not detailed at depth and is another limitation of this investigation.

The eighth and final limitation pertains to the limited Australian ECEC research of educators' emotional labour that exists for comparison of this study's quantitative and qualitative findings. It is hoped that this study sets the way for further mixed-method longitudinal emotional labour research within the bounds of specific relationships in the Australian ECEC context and internationally.

Future Research Possibilities

In this section I discuss possible future research directions that could expand on the findings and contributions and address some of the limitations from this doctoral investigation. I suggest future research undertake a wider, national administration of the *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale* survey across Australia, which may be generalisable to larger populations of the workforce, particularly and crucially, vocationally-qualified educators, who make up the majority of the ECEC workforce. Furthermore, including the scale in larger quantitative investigations that perhaps also explore causal relationships between, for example, tenets of job satisfaction, efficacy, wellbeing, demands and resources in educators' emotional labour with families might prove useful for deeper understandings of this work and its wellbeing impacts. Additionally, future surveys should include a way to identify if respondents work in the same service, so that correlation between

their responses and between those working in different services may be explored.

Furthermore, investigations of Australian educators' emotional labour across a range of relationships are also necessary.

A post-doctoral study might focus on educators working in services that are struggling to meet National Quality Standards and that are situated in regional and remote locations – many of whom have more complex families in attendance. I acknowledge the difficulty of recruiting educators from such services and locations which accounts for the limited diversity of respondents within this study. Future research that targets these groups is important for deepening understandings of nuanced emotional labour and educators' wellbeing of such labour in their interactions with families within these contexts.

While the question was raised during the review of the literature (Chapter 2), findings did not directly clarify and respond to whether, how, or why emotional labour is culturally specific. Future cultural and cross-cultural investigations are critical, particularly comparative and longitudinal studies that explore in depth the distinct influences of educators', children's and families' culture on emotional labour. Such specific focus on the cultural aspects at play in educators' emotional labour may further highlight professional and wellbeing challenges and affordances.

Findings in this doctoral investigation highlighted examples of emotional labour with families with children with additional needs. Research that explores educators' emotional labour in their work with families whose children have additional needs may provide insights that are not yet understood but can inform on the affordances and wellbeing impacts of emotional labour in these circumstances. Such evidence may yield understandings that have implications not only for how and why educators undertake such work in such circumstances but may also illuminate important implications for families and children. Emotional labour in

educators' work with children with additional needs is also another avenue worth exploring in the context of ECEC.

I suggest future research that considers the perspectives of families. An investigation of educators' emotional labour while interacting with families, and families' perspectives of these interactions may provide understandings of the effectiveness of emotional labour practices exercised by educators in educator-family relationships in ECEC. Additionally, families' perspectives may offer insights that support educators to develop their emotional labour practices and may be particularly relevant for families from diverse backgrounds. Framing these investigations in critical and ecological theories will reveal the complexity within such work. Additionally, it will be beneficial to undertake such explorations at a much larger scale and across contexts that includes cross-cultural components.

Although PebblePad journaling was not as successful as I had hoped, the interviews were highly informative, with participants often reflecting on the understandings they gained from dialogue and sharing their thoughts out loud (as reported in Chapters Five and Six). As such, in hindsight, an alternative to the ongoing journaling may have been to bring the participants together in focus groups, so that they could share their experiences of emotional labour while working with families in a supportive, collegial space. This research method may be an option for future investigations. In addition, it may also be beneficial to employ an app that collects details of interactions with families through item-selection: time, context/place, interaction topic, family mood, purpose (child needs / family needs/ curriculum question / illness/ complaint / feedback / policy), outcome, educator strategy (authentic, in-authentic, etc.), educator feeling (satisfied, drained, frustrated, rewarding, joyful), additional comments. Offering a streamlined approach may be both more time and energy efficient and feel less burdensome. Investigations utilising an app for data collection on educators work

have already been employed in ECEC with success (Gibson et al., 2023; Harrison et al., 2019).

Understanding emotional labour's mutually supportive relationship with wellbeing can support clearer understandings about how emotional labour becomes more effortful where workplace challenges and poor working conditions cause employee burnout and turnover. Future research should seek out such distinctions that may signify more clearly how wellbeing within professional contexts is resourced and supported to enable emotional labour practices that yield professional and wellbeing affordances. Clearer distinctions will also illuminate how emotional labour's work (i.e. reflective planning, professional judgement, emotion management strategies) might be contextually supported for the purposeful achievement of professional and wellbeing outcomes for self and others.

Lastly, I suggest future research explores emotional labour through a strengths-based discourse that avoids a deficit articulation of this labour as unskilled, women's work that only has negative impacts, particularly in educators' relational work. Such explorations require theoretical framings, such as a critical feminist and ecological systems framing, to draw out the professional and wellbeing affordances associated with emotional labour. Importantly, future research must consider the ecology in which this labour is being exercised and explore professional and wellbeing affordances of emotional labour within the context in which it is being utilised to reflect the complexity in such labour.

Concluding Thoughts

I return now to my thoughts, shared in Chapter One, about the tendency for emotional labour to be articulated in the literature as a burden with negative wellbeing impacts, and how I perceived this as problematic. I believed this negative perspective obscured any professional purpose and benefit associated with emotional labour for children, families, and services, but

also for educators. For me this felt counterintuitive given my own experiences that this work was critical, indeed the enabler, for all other work I needed to do in my role as teacher and leader in ECEC. I hope future research continues to expand on this doctoral investigation's findings and that it does so through the voices of educators and theoretical framings that challenge the limitations of emotional labour theory.

In highlighting the positive purposes and outcomes associated with emotional labour, I learnt new things and have new questions. I reflect back on Patti Lather's (2017, p. 17) words that a critical and empowering approach to research, results in the "researcher and researched becom[ing] 'the changer and the changed.'" Undertaking this doctoral investigation left me, the researcher, much changed. I discovered that how research, indeed theories and educators' work, is framed is essential for whether deficit, limiting perspectives are reinforced or whether evidence that supports the elevation of educators' professional status and provides positive wellbeing insights can be illuminated. Despite recognising and challenging emotional labour theory's positioning that such work only has negative wellbeing impacts, I still acknowledge the profound value the theory has in illuminating the constructs and practices of emotional labour in educators' relational work. I see more clearly now how such constructs identified in educators' practices are significant for making emotional labour visible to educators, employers, training providers, and ECEC researchers, policy makers, and regulatory stakeholders. I wonder now, however, in what other ways and through what other theoretical framings emotional labour theory might illuminate educators' relational work and the professional and wellbeing affordances to advance professional understandings and advocacy of this work.

The impact of research engagement for participants, that left them changed, also impacted me as the researcher. As noted in Chapters Five and Six, impacts from participants' research engagement left them much changed and provided clarity on my earlier wonderings

in Chapter One about whether emotion in the workplace was seen as unprofessional or whether internal emotional effort that is not easily seen is not perceived as work. Most notable was the shift for all participants that their emotions were important and valid, despite prior thoughts at the beginning of their participation that emotions are unprofessional and their work is about others' needs, not their emotions.

Moreover, when participants acknowledged their emotions and reflected on their emotional labour —particularly once their knowledge of this labour had deepened— they could control how and why they utilised emotions to achieve professional and wellbeing affordances. For some, the shift in their thinking was recognising, through 12 months of discussion, how their emotional labour was purposeful and that the more they could reflect on it, the greater the intentionality and the more successful the outcome. I came to understand that educators, and other ECEC stakeholders, likely require support to see the work that is difficult to see because it is, in part, internal work, but that once it is seen, by the self and others, it is empowering and becomes visible.

Such impacts, along with the empirical and theoretical contributions from this investigation, gave voice to what I could not, even as a teacher and leader in ECEC for 12 years. Suddenly, I was empowered by the knowledge the study's participants had illuminated to me about emotional labour and its wellbeing. I had not understood this impact until participants shared their thoughts in the final interview. Finally, I understood the significance of myself as a researcher was disseminating what participants had shared with me: the things that had changed both them and I, in a hope to change emotional labour's invisibility in ECEC and expose new insights for sustaining the workforce and supporting educators to flourish.

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Appendix A

Summary Table of ECEC Emotional Labour Literature Collected since Dickerson et al. (2024a)

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/ Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
Quantitative studies: 24					
Focus: General or NS% = 21; Children & Families = 3					
1. Ntim et al., (2023b)	“I-just-wanna-get-by” hurts teachers and their work: Linking preschool teacher identity to work withdrawals in an emerging economy.	Mixed level ^s (diploma-and-higher) (n=574)	Ghana	Teacher Identity Scale; Emotional Labour Strategy Scale; Emotional Exhaustion Scales; Job Demands-Resources Theory; COR Theory	Personal resource, i.e. - strong teacher identity - promotes deep acting but diminishes surface acting; deep acting and surface acting determined work withdrawals; emotional exhaustion mediated deep acting on presenteeism and lateness.
2. Annor et al., (2023)	Emotional labour and contextual performance amongst Ghanaian preschool teachers: The mediating role of emotional exhaustion. (F=children, family)	Mixed level (diploma, Montessori trained, teachers) (n=288)	Ghana	Emotional Labour, Maslach Burnout Inventory, Contextual Performance	(1) deep acting had a direct positive relationship with contextual performance; (2) deep acting and surface acting were indirectly related to contextual performance via emotional exhaustion.
3. Ren & Li (2023)	The effect of emotional labour on professional well-being among early childhood teachers based on structural equation modelling.	ECTs [#] (Kindergarten teachers)	Thailand	Emotional Labour, Maslach Burnout Inventory, Conservation of Resources,	(1) Surface playing =negatively impact on physical and mental pleasure, environmental satisfaction, and professional well-being. (2) Natural playing and deep playing = positively impacted all dimensions of occupational well-being

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
4. Huang & Zhou (2024)	Are emotional labor strategies good or bad for work engagement among Chinese preschool teachers? The mediating role of teacher efficacy and grit.	Mixed level (>50% Bachelor or higher) (n=647)	China	Job demands-resources, Emotional labour,	(1) expression of naturally felt emotions showed both a direct and an indirect (via teacher efficacy and grit) positive relationship with work engagement; (2) deep acting was associated with work engagement via promoted teacher efficacy; (3) surface acting was associated with work engagement via weakened teacher efficacy. Neither deep acting nor surface acting was linked to engagement via teacher grit.
5. Carey & Sutton (2024)	Early childhood teachers' emotional labour: The role of job and personal resources in protecting well-being.	ECTs (n=320)	New Zealand	Emotional labour, Job demands-resources, Psychological Capital	(1) Resources of perceived organisational support, hope, and optimism positively predicted well-being. (2) Surface acting was negatively associated with well-being and partially mitigated by optimism. (3) Suggest: the negative effects of emotional labour could be exacerbated by the demands of longer working hours
6. Zhang et al., (2024)	The effect of emotional labour on job dedication among early childhood teachers in the UAE: The mediating role of teaching self-efficacy.	Mixed level (>70% Bachelor or higher) (n=305)	United Arab Emirates	Emotional labour Scale, Self-Efficacy and Job Dedication scales	(1) Naturally felt emotion expressed most, the deep acting and surface acting least; (2) expression of naturally felt emotions had a positive, direct effect on dedication and teaching self-efficacy; (3) teaching self-efficacy had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between expression of naturally felt emotions and job dedication.
7. Zheng et al., (2024)	Kindergarten teachers' emotional labor and occupational well-being: How do different interpersonal relationships matter? (F= child, families, colleagues)	Mixed level (53% ECT) (NS) (n=1324)	China	Trust in Parents & Colleagues Scale; Teacher-Child Relationship; Emotional Labour Scale; Emotional Exhaustion-Satisfaction scale	(1) Surface acting- negative wellbeing implications; (2) Deep acting – no significant correlation; (3) Natural expressions – benefits wellbeing; (4) “social interactions influence kindergarten teachers’ well-being directly through their emotional work”

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
8. Yang & Lim (2024)	Relationship between emotional labor and job satisfaction: A study on preschool teachers.	Mixed level (n=280)	China	Emotional labor strategy Minnesota Satisfaction questionnaire	(1) emotional labor performed a lot and often; (2) deep acting the most, surface acting the second most, and natural acting the lowest. (3) differences in emotional labor based on gender, kindergarten type, marital status, age, and job position. (4) positive relationship between teachers' emotional labor and job satisfaction; (5) deep acting positively predicted job satisfaction
9. Zheng et al., (2024)	Exploring the relationships among display rules, emotional job demands, emotional labour and kindergarten teachers' occupational well-being.	Mixed level (n=1220)	China	Job Demands-Resources scale; Emotional labour scale; Emotional exhaustion scale; job satisfaction scale	Negative display rules and surface acting – exhaustion, burnout Positive display rules, deep acting, genuine expressions = wellbeing Surface Acting and Natural Expression Matter for Teachers' Occupational Well-Being: surface acting raised the level of teachers' emotional exhaustion, while the natural expression of authentic emotions promoted job satisfaction.
10. Ntim et al., (2024)	Emotional labor and absenteeism among early childhood educators: The mediating roles of negative affect and psychological meaningfulness.	Mixed level (diploma-and-higher) (n=574)	Ghana	Conservation of Resources Theory; Teaching Emotional labour strategy scale; Positive and negative affect scale	(1) Surface acting results in absenteeism; (2) negative affect and psychological meaningfulness mediated the association between surface acting and absenteeism; (3) psychological meaningfulness mediated the association between deep acting and absenteeism
11. Ming & Pek (2024)	Preschool teachers' emotional labor strategies from the perspective of positive psychology.	Kindergarten teachers (n=349)	China	Emotional Labour Scale; Psychological Capital Questionnaire (self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope)	(1) Deep acting engaged most, then natural acting, and surface acting least; (2) deep and natural acting = positively impacts psychological capital (PsyCap increases) and all four of its dimensions; (3) surface acting = negatively impacts psychological capital (PsyCap decreases) and hope dimension;

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
12. Kim et al., (2021)	The impacts of emotional labor, social relationships, and working conditions on psychological burnout in Korean childcare teachers.	Mixed level (NS) (n=496)	South Korea	Emotional labour, Psychological Burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory), Social Relationships, Working Conditions	(1) psychological burnout differed with marital status, the age of the children taught, and the type of childcare centre. (2) psychological burnout associated with emotional labor, but not with work related social relationships and working conditions. (3) marital status, emotional labor, social relationships (with co-workers and parents), working conditions affected teachers' psychological burnout.
13. Qi et al., (2017)	Correlation of emotional labor and cortisol concentration in hair among female kindergarten teachers.	Mixed level (NS) (n=43) Female only	China	Emotional labour, Conservation of Resources, Cortisol level measurements	(1) Surface acting contributes more to the increase in cortisol than deep acting; (2) Surface acting threatens one's attentional resources, energy resources, self-worth and social resources; (3) deep acting is an effortful process that drains cognitive resources but (4) can help workers generate and protect resources in form of good social interactions or positive emotions
14. Oh & Kim, (2020)	The effects of childcare teachers' emotional labor and resilience on their burnout.	NS	South Korea	Emotional Labour, Resilience, Burnout	Abstract only-article not in English. (1) natural acting, deep acting, and resilience = negative correlations with burnout (2) pretending acting = positive correlations with burnout; (3) pretending acting = positive effect on burnout and resilience = negative effect on burnout
15. Yin et al., (2022)	Emotional labour matters for kindergarten teachers: An examination of the antecedents and consequences (F= children, families, colleagues)	Kindergarten Teachers (n=541)	Hong Kong	Emotional labour, instructional leadership, trust in colleagues, satisfaction	(1) surface acting negatively predicted satisfaction; (2) deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion positively predicted satisfaction; (3) instructional leadership and trust in colleagues were positively related to deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion; (4) teaching experience was found to be positively related to expression of naturally felt emotion and satisfaction.

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
16. Sun et al., (2025)	Relationship between Kindergarten Teachers' Emotional Labor and Occupational Well-being: Mediating Effect of Organizational Climate.	Kindergarten teachers (n=512)	China	The Emotional Labor Scale, Occupational Well-Being Scale, and Organizational Climate Scale	<i>Abstract only-article not in English.</i> (1) surface play = negatively impacted organizational climate and occupational well-being. (2) deep play and natural strategies = positively predicted organizational climate and teachers' well-being. (3) organizational climate partially mediated the relationship between teachers' emotional labor dimensions and occupational well-being.
17. Sun, Yan & Sun, (2025)	Kindergarten teachers' emotional intelligence and surface acting: the chain mediating effects of self-efficacy and work engagement.	Kindergarten teachers (n=1017)	China	Wong & Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, Self-Efficacy Scale, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Surface Acting Scale	(1) teachers' emotional intelligence significantly positively predicted surface acting rather than negatively. (2) self-efficacy and work engagement mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and surface acting in kindergarten teachers. (3) self-efficacy and work engagement have chain mediating effects in the relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and surface acting.
18. Hwang (2010)	The Influence of Emotional Labor and Ego-Resilience on Child Care Teachers' Burnout.	NS	South Korea	Maslach Burnout Inventory, California Personality Inventory, and Emotional Labor Scale	<i>Abstract only-article not in English.</i> (1) child care teachers' burnout was not so high. (2) teacher's burnout was different depending on their personal factors such as age, marriage, and income. (3) child care teachers' burnout was explained by their emotional labor and resilience.

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
19. Yin et al., (2019)	Implications of emotional labour for kindergarten teaching: A quantitative study.	Kindergarten teachers (NS) (n=1040)	China	Stress, burnout and emotional labour	Abstract only-article not in English. (1) teachers "seldom" display surface acting, "sometimes" or "often" display deep acting, and almost "always" display natural acting; (2) surface acting is positively related to teachers' work effort, teaching experience, and family interference; (3) deep acting has a negative effect on emotional exhaustion and low accomplishment, (4) while natural acting has a negative effect on low accomplishment and depersonalization. Results are somewhat inconsistent with traditional studies but reflect the uniqueness of emotional labor in preschool education
20. Baek et al., (2024)	The Effects of Surface and Deep Acting on Childcare Teacher's Turnover Intention: Mediating Effect of Organizational Commitment and Moderating Effect of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX).	Mixed Level (NS) (n=334)	South Korea	Emotional Labour Strategies, Turnover Intention, Organizational Commitment	(1) surface acting = positive effect on the Turnover Intention, while deep acting = negative effect; (2) organizational commitment mediated the relationship between both emotional labor strategies and the Turnover Intention; (3) the leader-member exchange =moderating affect: weakening the relationship between deep acting and turnover intentions.
21. Lee and Cho, (2023)	The effect of emotional labor of early childhood teachers on role performance - Mediating effect of empathy	NS (n=327)	South Korea	Emotional labour, role performance, empathy	Abstract only-article not in English. (1) Surface behavior had a negative effect on childcare guidance and counselling support; (2) Inner behavior was found to have a positive influence on all the sub-factors of role performance; (3) natural behavior was found to have a positive effect on counselling support, research practice, and related roles; (4) a partial mediating effect of empathy between emotional labor and role performance of early childhood teachers.

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
22. Xia et al., (2024)	The relationship between organizational climate and job satisfaction of kindergarten teachers: a chain mediation model of occupational stress and emotional labor	NS (n=1091)	China	Emotional Labour, Organizational Climate, Job Satisfaction, Occupational Stress	(1) organizational climate, kindergarten teachers' occupational stress and emotional labor all significantly predict kindergarten teachers' job satisfaction directly (2) organizational climate could indirectly influence kindergarten teachers' job satisfaction through three pathways: the separate mediating effect of occupational stress and emotional labor, and the chain mediating effect on both.
23. Zhang et al., (2024)	The effect of emotional labour on job dedication among early childhood teachers in the UAE: The mediating role of teaching self-efficacy	Mixed Level (n=305)	United Arab Emirates	Emotional Labor, job dedication, teaching self-efficacy	(1) surface acting performed least- appears unpopular, natural acting performed most, deep acting between the two; (2) natural acting had a positive effect on job dedication, neither surface acting nor deep acting had a significant (+ or -) effect on job dedication; (3) natural acting had a positive effect on teaching self-efficacy; (4) absence of negative effect of surface acting on teaching self-efficacy; absence of a positive effect of deep acting on self-efficacy
24. Zeng et al., (2025)	The effect of emotion regulation strategies on work engagement of kindergarten teachers: The mediating role of emotional labor	Mixed Level (n=1275)	China	Work engagement scale, Emotion regulation strategies scale, Emotional labour scale	(1) cognitive reappraisal is positively related to work engagement; expressive suppression has no significant impact on work engagement; surface acting is negatively related to work engagement; deep acting and genuine emotions are positively related to work engagement. (2) cognitive reappraisal can indirectly affect kindergarten teachers' work engagement through surface acting and genuine emotions; (3) surface acting plays a full mediating role between expressive suppression and work engagement.
Qualitative studies: 1					
Focus: Children = 1					

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
25. Hodgkins et al., (2023)	'We cry together every day' - - expressing complex emotion in research with early childhood practitioners	Mixed level (vocational and university) (n=9)	United Kingdom	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) within a Feminist Paradigm, Emotional Labour Theory	<i>Not strictly researching emotional labour, but findings of emotional labour in relation to empathy are important:</i> (1) Emotion exists within close empathic relationships with children; (2) inherent emotional labour = can cause stress and burnout; but (3) empathic satisfaction can counter this to some extent.
Mixed Method studies: 1					
Focus: Children, Colleagues & Family = 3					
26. Brown et al., (2023)**	"Acting often and everywhere:" Teachers' emotional labor across professional interactions and responsibilities. (F=children, families, colleagues) Qualitative component of Brown et al., (2014)	K-12 teachers (n=329)	USA	Emotional Labour	(1) emotional labor is embedded across teachers' professional responsibilities and interactions; (2) emotional labor has a variety of professional purposes: instructing, engaging, sustaining students in learning; positive classroom climate; school-based collaborations – families, colleagues, policies and procedures.
Conceptual Publications: 3					
Focus: General= 3					
27. English (2022)	Emotional labour and the childcare crisis in neoliberal Britain.	Mixed Level (NS)	England	Neoliberalism, Feminist approaches	Argues: that the feminist mobilization of the term emotional labour is a distraction from the collectivizing processes that carers actually need to enjoy their participation in social reproduction to its fullest extent, to enjoy it with a fullness of heart and soul.

Authors	Title (Focus)	Participants	Country	Measures/Theoretical Perspectives	Findings
28. Liu (2024)	Study on the Current Situation and Influencing Factors of Kindergarten Teachers' Emotional Labor	Kindergarten Teachers	China	NA@	Summary Paper: unpacks the significance, dilemma and influencing factors of kindergarten teachers' emotional labor; summarizes and puts forward strategies and suggestions to improve kindergarten teachers' emotional labor.
29. Hao (2019)	Kindergarten Teachers' Emotional Labor: A Post structural Feminist Perspective	Kindergarten Teachers	Hong Kong	NA	Examination of kindergarten teachers' emotional labor through a post structural feminist lens reveals the complexities of gender dynamics and power relations in early childhood education. Highlights how societal expectations impose emotional burdens on female educators, often leading to burnout and emotional dissonance. By recognizing the fluidity of power and the potential for agency, teachers can challenge normative discourses and redefine their professional identities.
Unpublished Thesis: 1					
Focus: Colleagues=1					
30. Ng, (2024)	[Masters] Early childhood teachers' use of emotional labour and their retention intention.	ECTs (<i>n</i> =7)	Australia	Emotional labour; Job Demands and Resources; Conservation of Resources	Work challenges require emotional labour; two demands that are unique to the ECEC sector, relating to contributing to curriculum and operational and pedagogical needs; emotional dissonance and feelings of burnout among participants, accompanied by comments from those intending to leave their current workplace

Note. %NS = not specified

#ECT = early childhood teacher

§Mixed Level = ECTs, Diploma & Certificate III

@NA = not applicable

**= Studies of K-12 teachers inclusive

Two South Korean articles were not accessible due to being in Korean, including their abstracts:

Lee, H. J., & Kim, N.-H. (2017). The effects of early childhood teachers' difficulties in both organizational and parent-teacher communication on their emotional labor. *The Journal of Korea Open Association for Early Childhood Education*, 22(5), 163-186.

Lee, N.-Y., Kook, J.-Y., & Kim, Y.-O. (2014). The mediating effect of emotional labor on the relationship between childcare teachers' burnout and teacher- young children interaction. *Korea Journal of Child Care and Education*, 89, 341-359.

Appendix B

Exported Qualtrics Questionnaire Sample that includes the Adapted *Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale*



Welcome!

The Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Survey

Welcome!

This survey explores the emotions early childhood educators utilise in their work with families.

‘Emotional labour’ is the term used to describe how employees manage their emotions to meet the requirements of an occupation or role. For example, a flight attendant may be required to be friendly and kind even if a passenger is rude or hostile. The attendant may genuinely enjoy their role and meeting the needs of passengers, thus such expressions can be genuine. Additionally, the attendant may understand the benefits of such emotional expressions for calming their anxious or hostile passengers such that it makes engaging with them and their role expectations more manageable. In another example, in an attempt to be reassuring, a nurse is positive and cheerful when a patient is worried about their test results and health condition.

While emotional labour has been studied extensively in other occupational areas, it is relatively new and under-researched in early childhood education and care. This research aims to investigate how educators use emotional labour

in their work with families, and how this labour impacts educator wellbeing.

This survey is anonymous and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. If you run out of time to complete the survey in one sitting, you can continue working on your responses later by using the same device to access the survey again. Your responses will still be there.

There is an option to participate further in this study at the end of the survey.

Full details of this study are located in this [Participant Information Statement](#)

Knowing what is involved in this study will help you decide if you want to take part in the research.

Are you currently working in either a long day care service or preschool service?

If you are not working in either setting, please select NO as you are unfortunately not eligible to participate in this survey. We thank you for your time and interest.

- Yes
 No

Participant Consent

Participant Consent

By selecting '**I consent: Continue to Survey**' below, you are giving your consent to take part in this study and you are telling us that you:

- **Understand what you have read in the Survey Participant Information Statement.**
- **Understand that the survey is anonymous.**
- **Understand that participation in this study is voluntary.**
- **Agree to take part in the research study as outlined in the Participant Information Statement and details herein.**
- **Agree to the use of your personal information as described.**
- **Understand that by completing and submitting the survey, you are giving your consent for your survey responses to be utilised for the purposes of this study.**

- I consent: Continue to Survey
 I do not consent: Exit Survey

Unique Survey ID

Before you begin, please create a unique survey ID code. This code is necessary in the event that you self-select to participate further in this research study at the end of this survey.

Your code is the first two letters of your mother's maiden name, your 2-digit day of birth, and the last three letters of the suburb in which you were born. For example, someone whose mother is Kathy Smith, whose birthday is the 9th of September and was born in Mudgee would write: SM-09-GEE

The first two letters of your mother's maiden name

Your 2-digit day of birth

The last three letters of the suburb in which you were born

Part 1: Demographic Information

Part 1

This section collects some details about yourself, your work context and the families you may be working with.

1. How do you describe your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / gender diverse
- Prefer not to say
- I identify as:

2. How old are you?

3. In which country where you born?

4. What best describes your culture or ethnicity?

Select as many that apply.

- Australian
- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Other: Please specify

5. What early childhood qualification do you hold?

Select all that apply.

- Certificate III
- Diploma
- Bachelor qualified ECT
- Masters or other equivalent: Please Specify
- Other: Please Specify

6. How long have you been working in early childhood education and care?

Less than one year

More than one year: please enter number of years

The next few questions relate to your work context. If you are currently employed in more than one service, choose the service that you would most like to share your experiences about.

7. How long have you been working at your current service?

Less than one year

More than one year: please enter the number of years

8. What is your current role?

Select all that apply.

- Assistant
- Educator
- Room leader
- Early Childhood Teacher (ECT)
- Educational Leader
- Centre Director
- Nominated Supervisor
- Other. Please specify:

9. In a typical working week, which age group/s do you spend most of your time working with?

Note: If you typically work with more than one age group in equal amounts of time, please select both.

- Infants & Babies (birth-2 years)
- Toddlers (2-3 years)
- Preschoolers (3-5 years)
- I do not work directly with children

10. Is your service located in an / a

- Urban area
- Rural / regional area
- Remote area

11. What is your service type?

- Preschool
- Long day care

12. For how many children is your service licensed?

- 0-30
- 31-50
- 51-100
- 100 >

13. In a regular week, approximately how many families would you interact with?

- 0-15
- 16-30
- 31-60

- 61-100
- 100 >

14. What is your service's National Quality Framework rating?

- Excellent
- Exceeding
- Meeting
- Working Towards
- Significant Improvement Required
- Not Sure
- My service has not yet been rated

15. What is your service's Quality Area 6 rating?

Quality Area 6 is 'Collaborative partnerships with families and communities'

- Exceeding
- Meeting
- Working Towards
- Significant Improvement Required
- Not Sure
- My service has not yet been rated

The following questions ask you to consider the families you work most closely with.

Please answer according to the best of your knowledge.

16. Considering the families who you work most closely with at your service, approximately what proportion:

	None	A few	About half	Most	I don't know
a. are generally keen to partner with you to support their child's learning, development and wellbeing?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. have English as an Additional Language?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. have cultural backgrounds different from yours?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. are migrant families / families coming from other countries?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. are on middle-high incomes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. are single-parent families?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part Two: The Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale Survey

Part 2

Section One: Emotional Display Rules

Questions in this section are about emotional display rules. Emotional display rules are the expected expressions of emotion while working with others. In a restaurant, for example, an emotional display rule might be that a waiter must smile and welcome customers as they are entering or being seated in the restaurant. In a hospital, an emotional display rule might require nurses, doctors and medical staff to be calm, kind and reassuring towards their patients, even if the patient is anxious or hostile. Since we know very little about emotional display rules in early childhood education and care services in Australia, we are asking you to share your perspectives on what these rules might be at your service.

	I strongly disagree	I disagree	I neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I strongly agree
17. I am expected to express positive emotions with families as part of my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Part of my job is to make families feel supported and trusting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	I strongly disagree	I disagree	I neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I strongly agree
19. I am expected to act happy and enthusiastic in my interactions with families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. I am expected to suppress or hide my bad moods or negative reactions to families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. If I am upset or distressed, I am expected to hide these emotions while working with families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. If I am angry, I am expected to hide my anger while working with families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. Is there anything that you would like to share about the emotional display rules that are expected of you? If so, please add your comments here.

Part Two: The Early Childhood Educator Emotional Labour Scale Survey

Part 2

Section Two: Emotional Labour Strategies of Educators

Thank you for your responses in section one! Now we are asking you to share your practices of emotion displays or strategies while working with families.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
25. The emotions I show to families match the emotions I feel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display with families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. The emotions I show families come naturally.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. The emotions I express to families are genuine.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
31. To work with families I need to act differently from how I feel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
32. As an educator, I feel I must show or perform certain emotions with families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
33. Even if I'm upset or angry, I make families think that I am in a good mood.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
34. To interact with families, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
35. I hide the emotions I feel to establish and maintain family partnerships.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

36. Working with families is an emotional practice. Perhaps as an educator you've had to hide your real emotions while working with families. Please explain a situation where you have had to hide your emotions while working with families.

37. While working with families, you may have expressed emotions you really didn't feel. Please explain a situation where you have had to express unfeelt emotions while working with families.



38. While working with families, you may have expressed emotions you genuinely felt. Please explain a situation where you have expressed genuine emotions while working with families.



Part 3: Reflection & Wrap-Up

Part 3
Reflection & Wrap-up

39. Reflecting back on your survey responses, and your emotional practices with families, please comment on how these practices impact your wellbeing, if at all? And why you say this.

"Wellbeing encompasses the health of the whole person – physical, mental, social and emotional." ~ [Be You](#) on educator wellbeing

40. Is there anything else you would like to share about your emotional practices with families?:



Thank you for your responses in this survey on educators' emotional labour in working with families in early childhood education and care in Australia.

Are you interested in participating in the next phase of this study which involves follow-up interviews and journaling? Please select '**YES**' to find out more.

If you do not wish to participate further, please select '**NO**' and your anonymous survey results will be submitted.

Please note that if you are interested in participating, you must be 18+ years of age and currently working in a preschool or long day care service.

- YES
- NO

Appendix C

Permission from Dr Elizabeth Brown to Adapt her *Emotional Labor of Teaching Scale*

Hi Melanie,

Nice to hear from you and I'm glad you are enjoying work in the line of emotional labor. Your study sounds interesting. I too have adapted my scale for early childhood audiences (see some publications below). My measure has been used across P-12 audiences and I'm happy to share the adaptations if that's helpful. But you are certainly welcome to edit my measure. I just ask that you share your new scale and findings so we can all benefit from evolving this field together!

Take care.

Betsy

Brown, E. L., Vesely, C., Mehta, S.*, & Stark, K. (2022). Preschool teachers' emotional labor and classroom interactions with students and families. *Early Childhood Development and Care*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01326-1>.

Brown, E. L., Vesely, C. K., Mahatmya, D. & Visconti, K. (2017). Emotions matter: The moderating role of emotional labour on preschool teacher and children interactions. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(2), 1771-1785.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1286336>

Dear Dr. Levine-Brown,

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to share with you that, as a doctoral student, I have found your work thoroughly informative, and am seeking permission to adapt your version of the Emotional Labour Scale (Brown, 2011) for the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care Context. Included is an attachment that shows how I make these adaptations.

My project includes a quantitative component (the scale) and a longitudinal qualitative case study component on early childhood teachers and educators emotional labour while working with families and the wellbeing implications of this work. I am being supervised by Assoc. Prof. Marianne Fenech.

If you have any questions or comments, I welcome these.

Warm Regards,

Melanie Kate Dickerson |
 Doctor of Philosophy Student |
 Early Childhood Education Research |
 Sydney School of Education and Social Work |
 The University of Sydney

Appendix D

Table of Adaptations to Brown's (2011) *The Emotional Labor of Teaching Scale* with Rationale

Code	Original Item	Adapted Item	Rationale
<i>Emotional Display Rules</i>			
5-point Likert Scale			
1-I strongly disagree – 2-I disagree – 3-I neither disagree or agree – 4-I agree – 5-I strongly agree			
PDR [§]	My school tells me to express positive emotions to students as a part of my job.	I am expected to express positive emotions with families as part of my job.	Specific to this study and ensures the key point as to whether the individual feels the expectation
PDR	Part of my job is to make my students feel good.	Part of my job is to make families feel supported and comfortable leaving their child at the service.	Relevance and NQF requirement
PDR	My school expects me to try to act excited and enthusiastic in my interactions with students.	I am expected to try to act happy and enthusiastic in my interactions with families.	Relevant emotions for educator-family interactions
NDR [%]	I am expected to suppress my bad moods or negative reactions to students.	I am expected to suppress or hide my bad moods or negative reactions to families.	Clarity Specific to this study
NDR	If I am upset or distressed, my school expects me to hide these emotions.	If I am upset or distressed, I am expected to hide these emotions while working with families.	Specific to this study
NDR	If I am angry, I am expected to try to hide my anger while working at school.	If I am angry, I am expected to try to hide my anger while working with families.	Specific to this study
	I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to students.	I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to families.	Specific to this study
Open-ended question			
	Please share anything you'd like about emotional display rules that your school expects of you.	Is there anything that you would like to share about the emotional display rules that are expected of you? If so, please add your comments here.	Relevance to this study's focus
<i>Emotional Labor Strategies of Teachers</i>			
Title adaptation: <i>Emotional Labour Strategies of Educators</i>			
5-point Likert Scale			
1-Never – 2-Rarely – 3-Sometimes – 4-Often – 5-Always			
NE [#]	The emotions I show to my students match the emotions I feel.	The emotions I show to families match the emotions I feel.	Specific to this study

Code	Original Item	Adapted Item	Rationale
DA@	I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display at work.	I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display with families.	Specific to this study
NE	The emotions I show my students come naturally.	The emotions I show families come naturally.	Specific to this study
DA	I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me.	I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me.	
NE	The emotions I express to students are genuine.	The emotions I express to families are genuine.	Specific to this study
DA	I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show.	I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to families.	Specific to this study
SA*	To work with my students I act differently from how I feel.	To work with families I need to act differently from how I feel.	Specific to this study and clarity
SA	As a teacher I feel I must show or perform certain emotions to my students.	As an educator, I feel I must show or perform certain emotions with families.	Specific to this study
SA	Even if I'm upset or angry, I make others think that I am in a good mood.	Even if I'm upset or angry, I make families think that I am in a good mood.	Specific to this study
SA	To do my job, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display.	To interact with families, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display.	Specific to this study
SA	I hide the emotions I feel to perform my job.	I hide the emotions I feel to establish and maintain family partnerships.	Relevance to partnerships
Open-ended questions			
	Teaching is an emotional practice. Perhaps as a teacher you've had to suppress your real emotions to do your job. Please explain a situation where you have had to suppress your real emotions while teaching.	Working with families in ECEC services is an emotional practice. Perhaps as an educator you've had to hide your real emotions while working with families. Please explain a situation where you have had to hide your emotions while working with families.	Relevance to this study's focus
	As a teacher, you might have expressed emotions you really didn't feel. Please explain a situation where you have had to express unfelt emotions while teaching.	While working with families, you might have expressed emotions you really didn't feel. Please explain a situation where you have had to express unfelt emotions while working with families.	Relevance to this study's focus
	N/A&	While working with families, you may have expressed emotions you genuinely felt. Please explain a situation where you have expressed genuine emotions while working with families.	Addition of requesting educators to share genuine experiences to account for inclusion of genuine expressions

Code	Original Item	Adapted Item	Rationale
N/A		Reflecting back on your survey responses, and your emotional practices with families, please comment on how these practices make impact your wellbeing, if at all? And why you say this?	Relevance to this study's focus on educator-wellbeing and responding to research question three.
Reflecting on your Emotional Labour (Additional section added)			
N/A		Is there anything else you would like to share about your emotional practices with families?:	Relevance to this study's focus on educator-wellbeing

Notes ^{\$}PDR = positive display rules

[%]NDR = negative display rules

[#]NE = natural expressions, known as genuine expressions in this study

[@]DA = deep acting

^{*}SA = surface acting

[^]NQF = Australia's National Quality Framework for ECEC

[&]N/A = Not Applicable

Appendix E

Table of Survey Questionnaire Structure and Purpose

	Question / Scale	Purpose
Part 1	16 Demographic Questions	Contextual individual, service, and family data
Part 2: Section 1	<p><i>Emotional Display Rule Scale</i> (7-items) comprising 2 subscales and 1 additional item:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Positive Display Rules</i> (3-items) - <i>Negative Display Rules</i> (3-items) - <i>Knowledge of Display Rules</i> (1-item) <p>1 open-ended question</p>	<p>Perceptions on emotional display rules expected while working with families, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - expectations for happy, supportive, calm, enthusiastic displays - expectations to hide or suppress negative emotions like anger, distress, sadness - perceptions of knowledge on expected displays <p><i>Any other</i> thoughts on emotional display rules</p>
Part 2: Section 2	<p><i>Emotional Labour Strategies Scale</i> (11-items) comprising 3 subscales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Surface Acting</i> (5-items) - <i>Deep Acting</i> (3-items) - <i>Genuine Emotions</i> (3-items) <p>3 open-ended questions</p>	<p>Clarification on the surface acting, deep acting, genuine emotion strategies exercised while working with families</p> <p>Understandings of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. suppressed emotions 2. faked emotions 3. genuine emotions
Part 3	2 open-ended questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educators' perceptions of the impact of emotional labour on their wellbeing 2. Any further thoughts that respondents would like to add

Appendix F

Participant Information Statement for the Survey



Research Study: Educators' Labour in their Work with Families: Implications for Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing *Exercising of Emotional*

Dr. Marianne Fenech

Associate Professor, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney
Phone: +61 2 9351 6375 | Email: marianne.fenech@sydney.edu.au

Melanie Kate Dickerson

PhD student researcher | Email: medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au

1. What is this study about?

We are conducting a research study about the relational and emotional work that early childhood educators do with families, and the impact this work has on educator wellbeing. 'Educators' in this study are inclusive of degree-qualified early childhood teachers and vocationally-trained Certificate III and Diploma qualified educators.

If you are a qualified educator working in a NSW long day care or preschool setting and are older than 18 years of age, you are invited to respond to the survey that is exploring the emotional work of educators in family interactions and partnerships, and the impact of this work on educators' wellbeing.

This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this study is voluntary. By acknowledging this Participant Information Statement and completing the survey, you are giving your consent to take part in this study and you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ Understand that by completing and submitting the survey, you are giving your consent for your survey responses to be utilised for the purposes of this study.

2. Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Melanie Dickerson is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at The University of Sydney.
- Dr. Marianne Fenech (Associate Professor, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney)

- Dr. Tina Stratigos (Lecturer, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney)

3. What will the study involve for me?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to respond to the survey on emotional labour and its impact on educator wellbeing while working with families.

By responding to the survey you consent to participating in this study.

The survey should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The survey comprises of 3 parts:

- Part 1: Demographic information
- Part 2: A 5-point Likert Scale Survey with open-ended questions in two sections
- Part 3: One open-ended reflection questions on wellbeing.

4. Can I withdraw once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind you can withdraw by closing this page or the survey link at any time.

By submitting your survey, you consent to take part in the study. You can withdraw any time before you submit by closing the survey link. Once submitted, if you wish to withdraw, you will need to email the researcher and provide your unique survey code (created at the beginning of the survey) so that your survey may be located and withdrawn.

5. Are there any risks or costs?

Since this survey covers the sensitive topic of educator emotional work and wellbeing, please access any of the following free, confidential support services if you feel any discomfort or distress when completing the survey (these support services are also listed at the end of the survey):

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 | <https://www.lifeline.org.au/> | 24/7 support via phone, chat, text
- **Headspace:** 1800 650 890 | For webchat <https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace>
- **Be You / Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 | <https://beyou.edu.au/> | Additional Support Services <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/mental-health-services-and-support-helplines>
- **Your workplace EAP** (Employee Assistance Program): If your workplace has an EAP, this information would most likely be available in your staff room, in your contract or welcome pack, within your workplace employee policy folder.

6. Are there any benefits?

Your responses to this survey will benefit the early childhood education and care sector and its workforce by identifying and acknowledging the work that educators do with families, and advocating for the resources and support that could improve educator wellbeing and the capacity to engage with families. Your contributions would inform such efforts.

7. What will happen to information that is collected?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting information about you for the purposes of this study.

Any information you provide us will be stored securely and we will only disclose identifiable information with your permission, unless we are required by law to release information. We are planning for the study findings to be published.

As the survey is anonymous you will not be identifiable in these publications.

You will be required to create a survey code at the beginning of the survey. This code will ensure that your responses are anonymous, but should you later decide to withdraw you can email the researcher to request your responses be withdrawn.

Should you wish to participate further in this study, you will have the opportunity to complete an expression of interest. In order to complete an expression of interest survey, you will be required to first provide consent for your survey data to be made known to the researchers only, for the purpose of recruitment in and planning for the next component of this study. You will provide the unique survey code within your expression of interest so that your survey responses can be identified by the researchers for selection purposes. Should you complete the expression of interest, your personal details will remain confidential and your identity will not be revealed at any point in this research study or its ensuing publications / conference proceedings.

Please note that employers will not have access to the information you share in this study, but employers may access the research publications in which you will not be identifiable.

8. Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. Since this survey is anonymous, personal feedback is not possible. However, survey findings will be reported in professional and academic publications, at conferences, and theses output during this researcher's PhD.

9. What if I would like further information?

When you have read this information, the following researcher/s will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have:

- Melanie Dickerson: medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au

10. What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of The University of Sydney [INSERT HREC Approval No. once obtained] according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the University:

Human Ethics Manager
human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
+61 2 8627 8176

This information sheet is for you to keep

Appendix G

Expression of Interest Survey with Consent

Participation Details

Thank you for completing the survey and considering further participation in this research.

The second phase of the study will be undertaken over a 12-month period and include:

(i) Four individual interviews of approximately one-hour duration, undertaken with the researcher in person or over Zoom; and

(ii) Online journaling of your experiences of working with families on PebblePad. PebblePad is a secure and private online platform that allows you to add written, audio, video and/or visual journal entries via an app on your phone or a computer.

If you are interested in participating, you must be 18+ years of age and currently working in a NSW ECEC service.

Consent to De-Identify

It is important for you to understand that by providing your personal details in this expression of interest, that you will be consenting to your survey data becoming known and accessible to the researchers of this study. The researchers require access to your survey data so that they can make decisions regarding recruitment and planning for component two of this study. Your identity, however, will remain anonymous in all publications or conference proceedings of this research study's findings. That is, only the researchers will know your identity.

If you do not wish to make your survey responses known or do not wish to complete the expression of interest, please select 'No'.

If you do give consent for your survey responses to become known, and you wish to complete the expression of interest, please select 'Yes':

Yes [continue to Expression of Interest]

No [End of Survey]

Expression of Interest**Unique Survey ID**

This is the code that you created when you completed the Emotional Labour survey. Your code is the first two letters of your mother's maiden name, your 2-digit day of birth, and the last three letters of the suburb in which you were born. For example, someone whose mother is Kathy Smith, whose birthday is 9th September and was born in Mudgee would write: SM-09-GEE

Please enter your unique survey ID code created in the first survey:

Contact Details

Full Name:

Email address:

Contact Number:

Thank you for your time.

DONE.

Appendix H

Survey Promotion for Online Social Media and Email Distribution

**EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATOR SURVEY**

Working with families is relational and can be both rewarding and exhausting.

This research is exploring the emotions early childhood educators and teachers use in their work with families. The research is also seeking educators' and teachers' perspectives on the impact of this work on their wellbeing.

Use this [survey](#) to share your experiences with us.

 THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Embedded link: https://sydney.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ea22Tr5CubN7gFg

Barcode option also provided:



Appendix I

Distribution of Survey by The Sector and Early Childhood Australia

Tuesday, December 06



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ECEC educators needed for important survey on emotional labour

The University of Sydney is conducting important research into the emotional labour undertaken by early childhood educators in the course of their role.

'Emotional labour' is the term used to describe how employees manage their emotions to meet the requirements of an occupation or role. For example, a flight attendant may be required to be friendly and kind even if a passenger is rude or hostile. The attendant may genuinely enjoy their role and meeting the needs of passengers, thus such expressions can be genuine.

Additionally, the attendant may understand the benefits of such emotional expressions for calming their anxious or hostile passengers such that it makes engaging with them and their role expectations more manageable.

In another example, in an attempt to be reassuring, a nurse is positive and cheerful when a patient is worried about their test results and health condition.

While emotional labour has been studied extensively in other occupational areas, it is relatively new and under-researched in early childhood education and care (ECEC).

This research aims to investigate how educators use emotional labour in their work with families, and how this labour impacts educator wellbeing.

The survey is anonymous and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete, with an option to participate further in the research at the end of the survey.

Full details of this study are located in the Participant Information Statement.

To complete the survey, which is open only to those who are working in long day care or preschool services, please see here.

ECEC matters now more than ever. To keep up with the key highlights of the week, sign up to our newsletter.



Making news this fortnight...

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) CEO Samantha Page appointed to the Early Years Strategy Advisory Panel; affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC) bill passes the Parliament; responding to family violence in ECEC settings; environmental scan of ECEC in Independent schools released; responding to family violence in ECEC settings; lessons from Canada on how educators can thrive; surveys on child health behaviours and educator emotional labour; and participate in the Crayola Creativity Week.

Scroll down to read more, find the latest in state and territory news, and discover what ECA teams have been doing.

SPONSORED AD

2023 Professional Development Events



KU has just released an exciting calendar of PD events for 2023!





Affordable ECEC bill passes the Parliament

The *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022* has passed both houses of parliament with amendments. From July 2023, early childhood education and care will be more affordable for around 96% of families. [Read more.](#)



ECA CEO on the Early Years Strategy Advisory Panel

ECA CEO Samantha Page has been appointed to the 14-member Advisory Panel to inform the development of the Commonwealth Early Years Strategy. The Government will also host a National Early Years Summit in 2023 on how to best support Australia's children and their families in the early years. [Details here.](#)



Environmental scan of ECEC released

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) has released its environmental scan of the early childhood education and care sector today. The report compiles information from different sources and jurisdictions to paint a picture of early childhood education and care in the Independent school sector. [Access here.](#)



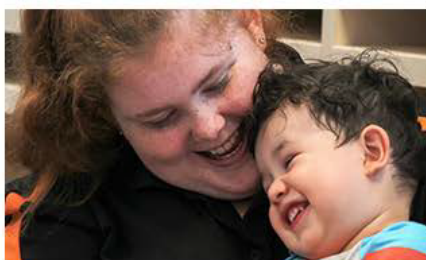
Research proposals invited

ECA, on behalf of all governments, is seeking proposals from suitably qualified organisations, consortiums or groups with industrial relations expertise to undertake research to explore and identify the structural barriers to, and strategies for, improving pay and conditions in the ECEC sector. [Learn more.](#)



Responding to family violence in ECEC settings

In this blog ECA reflects on the role of early childhood education and care in responding to family violence, which puts the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women into an Australian context and provides links to further information and resources.



Lessons from Canada on how educators can thrive

This [article](#) explores the Canadian peer mentoring program model for early childhood educators, which helps staff feel valued and avoid burnout and addresses workforce shortages.



Survey on child health behaviours

Share your knowledge and skills about child health behaviours through [this online survey](#) by Deakin University and go in the draw to win a \$50 supermarket voucher.



Survey on educator emotional labour

University of Sydney researchers are conducting a survey exploring the emotional labour early childhood educators and teachers use in their work with families and its potential impact on their wellbeing. [Participate here](#).



Participate in the Crayola Creativity Week

Sign up for Crayola Creativity Week, running globally on 23–29 January 2023. The campaign aims to nurture young children's minds with free resources and giveaways to spark creativity. [Details here](#).

Thank you for your readership this year. WebWatch will be back in 2023 with the latest updates from the sector.

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Appendix J

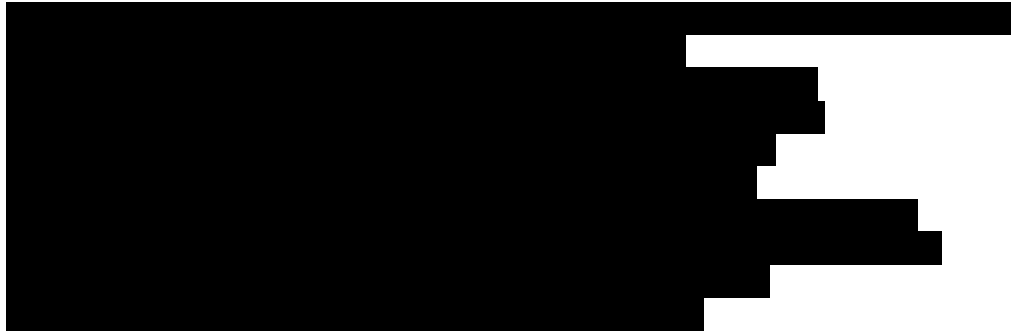
Final Survey Promotion in March 2023

Thank You for your ECEC Emotional Labour Survey Responses

Melanie Dickerson <medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au>

Mon 20/03/2023 11:56 AM

Bcc:



Dear ECEC Emotional Labour Survey Respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the survey on Early Childhood Educators' Emotional Labour and Wellbeing while working with families.

The second component, consisting of interviewing and journaling, has a few spots available for educators in NSW to participate. Should you still have interest and time to participate then please respond to this email.

However, if you are not available, but perhaps know someone working in a NSW services who may be interested in participation, please direct them to complete the [Early Childhood Educators' Emotional Labour survey](#) and thereby express their interest to participate further.

Thank you once again and wishing you a great week ahead.

Warm Regards,

Melanie Kate Dickerson |
Doctor of Philosophy Student |
Early Childhood Education Research |
Sydney School of Education and Social Work |
The University of Sydney

Appendix K

Table of Survey Respondent (*n*=147) Demographics

Question	Response	Count	Column N %
Gender	Female	144	98.0%
	Male	2	1.4%
	Non-binary / gender diverse	1	0.7%
Age	20-29	30	20.4%
	30-39	51	34.7%
	40-49	36	24.5%
	50>	30	20.4%
Birth Country	Australia	102	69.4%
	Other	45	30.6%
Culture	Australian	109	74.1%
	Other Culture	38	25.9%
Early Childhood Qualification	ECT (Bachelor or Higher Teacher Qualification)	66	44.9%
	Diploma	63	42.9%
	Certificate III (includes working towards Certificate III)	18	12.2%
ECEC Experience (Years)	<1	8	5.4%
	1-3	16	10.9%
	4-6	20	13.6%
	7-9	20	13.6%
	10≥	83	56.5%
Time at current service (Years)	<1	40	27.2%
	1-3	38	25.9%
	4-6	26	17.7%
	7-9	20	13.6%
	10≥	23	15.6%
Respondents with a director / nominated supervisor / educational leader role	No	85	57.8%
	Yes	62	42.2%
Age group respondents typically work with	Birth-three	47	32.0%
	Birth-five	23	15.6%
	Three-five	59	40.1%
	Not directly working with children	18	12.2%
Service location	Urban	109	74.1%
	Rural/regional	38	25.9%

Question	Response	Count	Column N %
Service type	Long day care	121	82.3%
	Preschool	26	17.7%
Service size (number of children the service is licensed for)	0-30	18	12.2%
	31-50	30	20.4%
	51-100	74	50.3%
	100 >	25	17.0%
Number of family interactions per week	<30	47	32.0%
	31-60	62	42.2%
	61 \geq	38	25.9%
National Quality Standard overall rating	Not sure	2	1.4%
	Excellent	7	4.8%
	Exceeding	69	46.9%
	Meeting	58	39.5%
	Working towards	2	1.4%
	Significant improvement	1	0.7%
	Not yet rated	8	5.4%
National Quality Standard 6 Rating	Not sure	14	9.5%
	Exceeding	68	46.3%
	Meeting	56	38.1%
	Working towards	1	0.7%
	Significant improvement	0	0.0%
	Not yet rated	8	5.4%
Families keen to partner with educators at respondent's service	A few-to>About half	63	42.9%
	Most	83	56.5%
	I don't know	1	0.7%
Families with English as an Additional Language	None-to-a-few	91	61.9%
	Half-or-more	55	37.4%
	I don't know	1	0.7%
Families whose culture is different from the respondent's	None-to-a-few	57	38.8%
	About half	30	20.4%
	Most	58	39.5%
	I don't know	2	1.4%
Migrant families	None-to-a-few	91	61.9%
	Half-or-more	53	36.1%
	I don't know	3	2.0%
Families on middle-high incomes	None-to-a-few	31	21.1%
	About Half	48	32.7%
	Most	52	35.4%
	I don't know	16	10.9%
Single parent families	None-to-a-few	128	87.1%
	Half-or-more	12	8.2%
	I don't know	7	4.8%

Appendix L

Survey Questions, Response and Variable Type, Labels, and Category Codes to Support Analysis in SPSS

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
Part 1					
<i>Demographic Questions – multiple choice responses or ‘select all that apply’</i>					
Q1 How do you describe your gender?	Options: <i>Male, Female, Gender Diverse, Non-binary, Prefer not to say, Other [self-entered option]</i>	Gender - Nominal	Gender	1 – Female 2 – Male 3 – Non-binary / gender diverse	
Q2 How old are you?	Type: enter age (numbers only)	Age_Workforce Bracket – Nominal [However the non-categorical version of ‘Age’ as appears from the data set is Continuous and appears in SPSS as this is how we retrieve mean age etc]	Age	1 20-29 2 30-39 3 40-49 4 50>	
Q3 In which country were you born?	Type: enter country (letters only)	CountryOfBirth_ Binary - Nominal	Country of Birth	0 – Other 1 – Australia	Analyses on only one of these (Q3 or Q4) will be necessary. Possibly cultural identity
Q4 What best describes your culture/ ethnicity?	Select: <i>Australian, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Other [self-entered option]</i>	AU_Other_Culture - Nominal	Australian and Other Cultures	0 – Other Culture 1 – Australian	
Q5 What early childhood qualification do you hold? Select all that apply	Type: <i>Certificate II; Diploma; Bachelor Qualified ECT; Masters in Teaching or similar [please specify]; Other [self-entered option]</i>	Ecqual_3Category - Nominal	Early Childhood Qualification	1 – ECT 2 – Diploma 3 – Certificate III	
		ECT-NonECT_Binary - Nominal	Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) qualified and Non-ECT qualified	1 – ECT 2 – Non-ECT (Certificate III & Diploma qualified)	

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
Q6 How long have you been working in ECEC?	Select: less than one year; More than one year [enter to nearest year] (numbers only)	ExpECEC_3Category - Nominal	Experience in ECEC (Years)	1 - ≤3 2 - 4-9 3 - 10≥	Pending numbers for Q6 and Q7, it may suffice to base analysis on these 3 categories
		ExpECEC_WorkforceCompa - Nominal	Experience in ECEC (Years)	1 - <1 2 - 1-3 3 - 4-6 4 - 7-9 5 - 10≥	
[However the non-categorical version of 'ExpECEC_More1' as appears from the data set is Continuous and appears in SPSS as this is how we retrieve statistical summary: mean, median, standard deviations etc.]					
Q7 How long have you been working at your current service?	Select: less than one year; More than one year [enter to nearest year] (numbers only)	ExpService_3Category - Nominal	Time working in current service (Years)	1 - ≤3 2 - 4-9 3 - 10≥	
		ExpService_WorkforceCompa - Nominal	Time working in current service (Years)	1 - <1 2 - 1-3 3 - 4-6 4 - 7-9 5 - 10≥	
[However the non-categorical version of 'ExpService_More1' as appears from the data set is Continuous and appears in SPSS as this is how we retrieve statistical summary: mean, median, standard deviations etc.]					
Q8 What is your current role?	Select: <i>assistant;</i> <i>educator;</i> <i>room leader;</i>	Leadership_Role_binary - Nominal	Has a Centre Director / Nominated	0 - No 1 - Yes	

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
	<i>early childhood teacher (ECT); educational leader; centre director; nominated supervisor; Other: [self-entered option]</i>	Director_Nominated_Supervisor_binary - Nominal	Supervisor or Educational Leader Role Respondents holding a director or nominated supervisor role only	0 – No 1 - Yes	
Q9 In a typical working week, which age groups do you spend most of your time working with? <i>Note: If you typically work with more than one age group unequal amounts of time, please select both.</i>	Select: <i>Babies/ infants (birth-2); Toddlers (2-3); Preschoolers (3-5); I do not work directly with children</i>	NDWC_binary- Nominal Birth_Three_binary - Nominal Birth_Five_binary- Nominal Three_Five_binary- Nominal Age_Group_4Category- Nominal	Respondents not directly working with children Respondents working with birth-to-three Respondents working with birth-to-five Respondents working with three-to-five Age group respondents work with across the week	0 – No 1 - Yes 0 – No 1 - Yes 0 – No 1 - Yes 0 – No 1 - Yes 1 – birth-three 2 – birth-five 3 – three-five 4 – NDWC	
Q10 Is your service located in an / a ...	Select: <i>Urban; Rural/regional; Remote</i>	location_binary - Nominal	Service location	1 – Urban 2 – Rural / regional	
Q11 What is your service type?	Select: <i>Preschool or Long Day Care</i>	type_binary- Nominal	Service type	1 – Long Day Care 2 – Preschool	
Q12 What is your service size?	Select: <i>0-30; 31-50; 51-100; 100></i>	size_binary- Ordinal	Service size (number of children the service is licensed for)	1 – 0-30 2 – 31-50 3 – 51-100 4 – 100>	
Q13 In a regular week, approximately how many families would you interact with?	Select: <i>0-15; 16-30; 31-60; 61≥</i>	Famperwk_2 - Ordinal	Number of family interactions per week	1 – 0-30 2 – 31-60 3 - 61≥	
Q14 What is your service's National Quality Framework rating?	Select: <i>Excellent Exceeding Meeting Working towards Significant</i>	NQF - Ordinal	National Quality Framework Rating	0 "not sure" 1 "excellent" 2 "exceeding" 3 "meeting"	Q14 and Q15 Running analyses may require looking only at services

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
	<i>Improvement Required</i> <i>Not sure</i>			4 "working towards" 5 "significant improvement" 6 "my service has not yet been rated"	where there is a rating – depends on frequency counts
Q15 What is your service's Quality Area 6 rating?	Select: <i>Exceeding</i> <i>Meeting Working towards</i> <i>Significant Improvement Required</i> <i>Not sure</i>	NQS6 - Ordinal	National Quality Standard 6 Rating	0 "not sure" 1 "exceeding" 2 "meeting" 3 "working towards" 4 "significant improvement" 5 "my service has not yet been rated"	
Q16a Considering the families who you work most closely with at your service, approximately what proportion:	Select: <i>None; a few; about half; most; I don't know</i>	keenfam_2- Ordinal	Families are perceived to be keen to partner with educators at respondent's service	1 – A few-to-About half 2 – Most 3 – I don't know	For the 'I don't know' category it may be appropriate to exclude these from analyses – to discuss with statistical consultant
Q16b Considering the families who you work most closely with at your service, approximately what proportion:		EALfam_2- Ordinal	Families with English as an Additional Language at respondent's service	1 - None-to-a-few 2 – Half-or-more 3 – I don't know	
Q16c Considering the families who you work most closely with at your service, approximately what proportion:		Cultfam_2- Ordinal	Families whose culture is different from the respondent's	1 - None-to-a-few 2 – About half 3 – Most 4 – I don't know	
Q16d Considering the families who you work most closely with at your service, approximately what proportion:		migrantfam_2- Ordinal	Migrant families at respondent's service	1 - None-to-a-few 2 – Half-or-more 3 – I don't know	
Q16e Considering the families who you work most closely with at your service, approximately what proportion:		middleIncfam_2- Ordinal	Families on middle-high incomes at respondent's service	1 - None-to-a-few 2 – About half 3 – Most 4 – I don't know	

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
Q16f Considering the families who you work most closely with at your service, approximately what proportion:		singlefam_2- Ordinal	Single families at respondent's service	1 - None-to-a-few 2 – Half-or-more 3 – I don't know	
Part Two					
<i>Emotional Display Rule Scale</i>	Ordinal – Likert Scale – 1 "I strongly disagree"; 2 "I disagree"; 3 "I neither agree nor disagree"; 4 "I agree"; 5 "I strongly agree"				
Q1 I am expected to express positive emotions with families as part of my job		EDR1_positive	I am expected to express positive emotions with families as part of my job	As per Likert Scale	Part of the <i>positive display rule subscale</i>
Q2 Part of my job is to make families feel supported and trusting.		EDR2_positive	Part of my job is to make families feel supported and trusting.		Part of the <i>positive display rule subscale</i>
Q3 I am expected to act happy and enthusiastic in my interactions with families.		EDR3_positive	I am expected to act happy and enthusiastic in my interactions with families.		Part of the <i>positive display rule subscale</i>
Q4 I am expected to suppress or hide my bad moods or negative reactions to families.		EDR4_negative	I am expected to suppress or hide my bad moods or negative reactions to families.		Part of the <i>negative display rule subscale</i>
Q5 If I am upset or distressed, I am expected to hide these emotions while working with families.		EDR5_negative	If I am upset or distressed, I am expected to hide these emotions while working with families.		Part of the <i>negative display rule subscale</i>

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
Q6 If I am angry, I am expected to hide my anger while working with families.		EDR6_negative	If I am angry, I am expected to hide my anger while working with families.		Part of the <i>negative display rule subscale</i>
Q7 I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to families.		EDR7_rules	I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to families.		Perceptions of emotional display rules.
<i>Emotional Labour Strategies</i>		Ordinal – Likert Scale – 1 "Never"; 2 "Rarely"; 3 "Sometimes"; 4 "Often"; 5 "Always"			
Q1 The emotions I show to families match the emotions I feel.		ELS1_g	The emotions I show to families match the emotions I feel.	As per Likert Scale	Part of the <i>genuine emotion subscale</i>
Q2 I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display with families.		ELS2_d	I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display with families.		Part of the <i>deep acting subscale</i>
Q3 The emotions I show families come naturally.		ELS3_g	The emotions I show families come naturally.		Part of the <i>genuine emotion subscale</i>
Q4 I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me.		ELS4_d	I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me.		Part of the <i>deep acting subscale</i>
Q5 The emotions I express to families are genuine.		ELS5_g	The emotions I express to families are genuine.		Part of the <i>genuine emotion subscale</i>
Q6 I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to families.		ELS6_d	I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to families.		Part of the <i>deep acting subscale</i>

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
Q7 To work with families I need to act differently from how I feel.		ELS7_s	To work with families I need to act differently from how I feel.		Part of the <i>surface acting subscale</i>
Q8 As an educator, I feel I must show or perform certain emotions with families.		ELS8_s	As an educator, I feel I must show or perform certain emotions with families.		Part of the <i>surface acting subscale</i>
Q9 Even if I'm upset or angry, I make families think that I am in a good mood.		ELS9_s	Even if I'm upset or angry, I make families think that I am in a good mood.		Part of the <i>surface acting subscale</i>
Q10 To interact with families, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display.		ELS10_s	To interact with families, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display.		Part of the <i>surface acting subscale</i>
Q11 I hide the emotions I feel to establish and maintain family partnerships.		ELS11_s	I hide the emotions I feel to establish and maintain family partnerships.		Part of the <i>surface acting subscale</i>
Weighted Means					
Mean scores for statistical analyses created for each subscale and scale		EDR_P	<i>positive display rule subscale</i>	Weighted mean scores – statistical score between 1 - 5	
		EDR_N	<i>negative display rule subscale</i>		
		EDR_7	<i>Perceptions on knowing the rules expected for emotional displays (1 item)</i>		
		EDR_Total	<i>Emotional Display Rule Scale</i>		
		ELS_SA	<i>surface acting subscale</i>		

Survey Question	Response Type/ Options	Variable Type	Label	Value (Category)	Notes/ Comments
		ELS_DA	<i>deep acting subscale</i>		
		ELS_Gen	<i>genuine emotion subscale</i>		
		ELS_Total	<i>Emotional Labour Strategy Scale</i>		
Part 3					
Open-ended questions					
<i>Wellbeing</i>		Split into two variables:			MF: This is the only o/e question that I wonder could be coded quantitatively. If you code the qual responses as quant variables, and then do counts, you could then use responses to this question in subsequent association tests
<i>i. Whether respondents felt that emotional labour while working with families impacted their wellbeing</i>		WB_Impact	Do respondents perceive their to be a wellbeing impact of their emotional labour with families?	0 – No 1 – Yes	
<i>ii. What is this wellbeing impact?</i>		WB_Pos_Neg	How do respondents perceive this impact on their wellbeing?	0 – Negative 1 – Positive 2 - Both	
<i>iii. Anything Else</i>		Other_Comments	Is there anything else you would like to share about this work, your emotional labour or wellbeing?		

Appendix M

Descriptive Statistics of the Emotional Display Rule Scale and Emotional Labour Scale

Responses

		Count	Column N %
<i>Emotional Display Rule Scale</i>			
I am expected to express positive emotions with families as part of my job	I strongly disagree	2	1.4%
	I disagree	1	0.7%
	I neither disagree nor agree	7	4.8%
	I agree	51	34.7%
	I strongly agree	86	58.5%
Part of my job is to make families feel supported and trusting.	I strongly disagree	6	4.1%
	I disagree	0	0.0%
	I neither disagree nor agree	1	0.7%
	I agree	18	12.2%
	I strongly agree	122	83.0%
I am expected to act happy and enthusiastic in my interactions with families.	I strongly disagree	2	1.4%
	I disagree	2	1.4%
	I neither disagree nor agree	2	1.4%
	I agree	51	34.7%
	I strongly agree	90	61.2%
I am expected to suppress or hide my bad moods or negative reactions to families.	I strongly disagree	2	1.4%
	I disagree	1	0.7%
	I neither disagree nor agree	15	10.2%
	I agree	54	36.7%
	I strongly agree	75	51.0%
If I am upset or distressed, I am expected to hide these emotions while working with families.	I strongly disagree	1	0.7%
	I disagree	2	1.4%
	I neither disagree nor agree	13	8.8%
	I agree	60	40.8%
	I strongly agree	71	48.3%
If I am angry, I am expected to hide my anger while working with families.	I strongly disagree	2	1.4%
	I disagree	0	0.0%
	I neither disagree nor agree	7	4.8%
	I agree	54	36.7%
	I strongly agree	84	57.1%
I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to families.	I strongly disagree	0	0.0%
	I disagree	3	2.0%
	I neither disagree nor agree	7	4.8%
	I agree	55	37.4%

		Count	Column N %
	I strongly agree	82	55.8%
<i>Emotional Labour Strategy Scale</i>			
The emotions I show to families match the emotions I feel.	Never	2	1.4%
	Rarely	26	17.7%
	Sometimes	67	45.6%
	Often	47	32.0%
	Always	5	3.4%
I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display with families.	Never	5	3.4%
	Rarely	9	6.1%
	Sometimes	48	32.7%
	Often	59	40.1%
	Always	26	17.7%
The emotions I show families come naturally.	Never	2	1.4%
	Rarely	8	5.4%
	Sometimes	46	31.3%
	Often	73	49.7%
	Always	18	12.2%
I try to actually experience the emotions that are required of me.	Never	1	0.7%
	Rarely	13	8.8%
	Sometimes	38	25.9%
	Often	68	46.3%
	Always	27	18.4%
The emotions I express to families are genuine.	Never	1	0.7%
	Rarely	6	4.1%
	Sometimes	36	24.5%
	Often	77	52.4%
	Always	27	18.4%
I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to families.	Never	5	3.4%
	Rarely	17	11.6%
	Sometimes	50	34.0%
	Often	56	38.1%
	Always	19	12.9%
To work with families, I need to act differently from how I feel.	Never	5	3.4%
	Rarely	21	14.3%
	Sometimes	72	49.0%
	Often	37	25.2%
	Always	12	8.2%
As an educator, I feel I must show or perform certain emotions with families.	Never	2	1.4%
	Rarely	7	4.8%
	Sometimes	40	27.2%
	Often	55	37.4%

		Count	Column N %
	Always	43	29.3%
Even if I'm upset or angry, I make families think that I am in a good mood.	Never	0	0.0%
	Rarely	4	2.7%
	Sometimes	23	15.6%
	Often	62	42.2%
	Always	58	39.5%
To interact with families, I pretend to have emotions that I think I should display.	Never	4	2.7%
	Rarely	18	12.2%
	Sometimes	48	32.7%
	Often	51	34.7%
	Always	26	17.7%
I hide the emotions I feel to establish and maintain family partnerships.	Never	2	1.4%
	Rarely	13	8.8%
	Sometimes	39	26.5%
	Often	57	38.8%
	Always	36	24.5%

Appendix N

Sample Table of the Surface Acting Subscale Group Statistics of Explanatory Variables

T-Tests and ANOVA

<i>Independent Samples T-Tests</i>						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
Question and Response Options (Variables)		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	Two-Sided <i>p</i>	Lower	Upper
Australian and Other Cultures	Other Culture	38	3.57	0.805	0.131	0.151	-0.457	0.071
	Australian	109	3.76	0.675	0.065			
Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) qualified and Non-ECT qualified	ECT (Bachelor or higher qualified teacher)	66	3.62	0.757	0.093	0.166	-0.397	0.069
	Non-ECT (Certificate III & Diploma qualified)	81	3.79	0.671	0.075		-0.400	0.072
Respondents with a director / nominated supervisor or educational leader role	No	85	3.76	0.718	0.078	0.313	-0.115	0.356
	Yes	62	3.64	0.705	0.090			
Respondents with a director or nominated supervisor role only	No	104	3.71	0.712	0.070	0.960	-0.250	0.263
	Yes	43	3.71	0.723	0.110			
Respondents not directly working with children	No	129	3.77	0.710	0.063	0.013	0.096	0.792
	Yes	18	3.32	0.618	0.146	0.010	0.116	0.771
Respondents working with birth-to-three age range	No	100	3.67	0.704	0.070	0.353	-0.367	0.132
	Yes	47	3.79	0.733	0.107			
Respondents working with birth-to-five age range	No	124	3.70	0.710	0.064	0.743	-0.374	0.268
	Yes	23	3.76	0.741	0.154			

Respondents working with three-to-five age range	No	88	3.69	0.730	0.078	0.602	-0.300	0.175
	Yes	59	3.75	0.691	0.090			
Service location	Urban	109	3.68	0.741	0.071	0.348	-0.392	0.139
	Rural/regional	38	3.81	0.625	0.101			
Service type	Long day care	121	3.70	0.727	0.066	0.786	-0.348	0.263
	Preschool	26	3.75	0.656	0.129			
Families keen to partner with educators at respondent's service	A few-to-	63	3.78	0.768	0.097	0.317	-0.116	0.356
	About half							
	Most	83	3.66	0.672	0.074			
Families with English as an Additional Language at respondent's service	None-to-a-few	91	3.76	0.758	0.079	0.285	-0.110	0.371
	Half-or-more	55	3.63	0.629	0.085			
Migrant families at respondent's service	None-to-a-few	91	3.76	0.709	0.074	0.388	-0.137	0.351
	Half-or-more	53	3.65	0.723	0.099			
Single families at respondent's service	None-to-a-few	128	3.73	0.712	0.063	0.416	-0.249	0.599
	Half-or-more	12	3.55	0.683	0.197			

<i>ANOVA</i>		95% Confidence Significance Interval for Mean						
Question and Response Options (Variables)		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	Two-Sided <i>p</i>	Lower	Upper
Age	20-29	30	3.72	0.710	0.130	0.957	3.45	3.99
	30-39	51	3.73	0.756	0.106		3.52	3.95
	40-49	36	3.73	0.664	0.111		3.50	3.95
	50>	30	3.65	0.727	0.133		3.38	3.92
	Total	147	3.71	0.713	0.059		3.60	3.83
Experience working in ECEC in years	≤3	24	3.53	0.714	0.146	0.093	3.23	3.83
	4-9	40	3.91	0.725	0.115		3.67	4.14
	≥ 10	83	3.67	0.695	0.076		3.52	3.82
	Total	147	3.71	0.713	0.059		3.60	3.83
	≤3	78	3.74	0.728	0.082	0.083	3.57	3.90

Time at current service in years	4-9	46	3.81	0.737	0.109		3.59	4.03
	≥10	23	3.42	0.539	0.112		3.18	3.65
	Total	147	3.71	0.713	0.059		3.60	3.83
Age Group	Birth-three	47	3.79	0.733	0.107	0.100	3.58	4.01
	Birth-five	23	3.76	0.741	0.154		3.44	4.08
	Three-five	59	3.75	0.691	0.090		3.57	3.93
	Not directly working with children	18	3.32	0.618	0.146		3.01	3.63
	Total	147	3.71	0.713	0.059		3.60	3.83
NQF Quality Rating	Excellent	7	3.31	0.540	0.204	0.224	2.82	3.81
	Exceeding	69	3.65	0.711	0.086		3.48	3.82
	Meeting	58	3.79	0.748	0.098		3.59	3.99
	Other: including working-towards; significant improvement required; service not yet rated; and not sure	13	3.91	0.575	0.160		3.56	4.26
	Total	147	3.71	0.713	0.059		3.60	3.83
NQS 6 Quality Rating	Exceeding	68	3.69	0.684	0.083	0.426	3.53	3.86
	Meeting	56	3.66	0.794	0.106		3.45	3.87
	Other: including working-towards; significant improvement required; service not yet rated; and not sure.	23	3.89	0.578	0.120		3.64	4.14
	Total	147	3.71	0.713	0.059		3.60	3.83
Service Size (Welch's)	≤ 30	18	4.11	0.618	0.146	0.015	3.80	4.42
	31-50	30	3.57	0.507	0.093		3.38	3.76
	51-100	74	3.62	0.758	0.088		3.45	3.80
	> 100	25	3.86	0.756	0.151		3.54	4.17
Families with cultures	None-to-a-few	57	3.82	0.691	0.092	0.372	3.64	4.01
	About half	30	3.61	0.677	0.124		3.36	3.87

different from the educator's	Most	58	3.70	0.704	0.092		3.52	3.89
	Total	145	3.73	0.693	0.058		3.62	3.85
Families on middle-high incomes at respondent's service	None-to-a- few	31	3.60	0.693	0.124	0.414	3.35	3.85
	About Half	48	3.78	0.721	0.104		3.57	3.99
	Most	52	3.78	0.716	0.099		3.58	3.98
	Total	131	3.74	0.711	0.062		3.61	3.86

Appendix O

Sample of the Survey's Emotional Display Rules* Open-ended Question Initial-to- Refined Codes

Initial Code & Definition	Refined Code	Identified data extract
Professional Behaviour Definition: Respondent descriptions of perceiving emotional display rules as part of the professional behaviour expected of them in their work with families in ECEC settings.	Split Code & Definition (i) Identifies as professional (having a sense of professionalism): Descriptions of respondents' perceptions of emotional display rules as internal professional understandings and enactments of professional behaviour, where the respondent identifies as a professional. (ii) Expected to be professional: Respondent descriptions that indicate they perceive emotional display rules as emerging from external requirements to be professional (i.e. from families, service, sector level) Reason To capture the distinction between the two.	(i) Limited training: <i>"...we can be feeling all kinds of personal emotions but...it is part of our professionalism...to ensure that families and children feel safe and secure"</i> (Respondent #61) (ii) Limited professional development: <i>"...we are expected to behave in a professional manner."</i> (Respondent #20)
	New Code Added Positive emotional displays. Definition Respondents' descriptions reveal that they perceive positive emotional display rules as the expected norm. Reason Descriptions revealed the requirement for positive emotional displays.	(i) <i>"...general expectation is that we are positive during all of our interactions"</i> (respondent #128)
Emotion-multi-task juggling Definition: Respondent descriptions of perceiving emotional display rules as the expectation to juggle emotions with regulatory, pedagogical and compliance tasks	Adapted Code Balance authentic and professional self Adapted Definition Respondent descriptions of perceiving emotional display rules as guiding the practice of balancing the emotional and professional requirements. Reason Initial code was too broad. Data revealed a more nuanced and balanced enactment of perceived emotional display rules with regulatory, pedagogical and compliance demands.	(i) <i>"Beyond being positive and welcoming we also ... empathise with families while also ...enforce centre policies as needed, do daily handover with families while working directly with children (multi-tasking) ... and responding to the range of their emotions (settling or comforting a child)."</i> (Respondent #42)

Note. *The emotional display rule question was: Is there anything that you would like to share about the emotional display rules that are expected of you

Appendix P

Sample of Code Clustering and Theme Development for Open-Ended Survey Question on ‘Respondents’ Perceptions of Emotional Display Rules’

Clustering codes	Data Extracts	Theme	Over-arching Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sense of professionalism. •Professional boundaries •Perceived professional understandings of child and family 	<p><i>depends on closeness of relationship...and individual family's attitude and preference...</i></p> <p><i>professional balance between happy, positive, friendly with not "too happy" or "too friendly" ...families ee me as unprofessional</i></p> <p><i>part of our professionalism is to ensure that families and children feel safe and secure</i></p>	Emotional labour is exercised according to individual educator's emotional display rule perceptions.	Emotional labour is not only exercised according to organisationally derived emotional display rules.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Family expectations influence emotional rule requirements •Team and leadership influence of display rules for working with families •Service-based emotional rules for working with families •Sector-based rules for working with families 	<p><i>...we must always make the parents happy (family level)</i></p> <p><i>covering up how I feel to ensure my team and committee feel secure and confident with how I work with families (team-leadership level)</i></p> <p><i>...in the workplace...are expected to be always looking happy (service level)</i></p> <p><i>In our sector we are asked to meet these expectations daily. (sector level)</i></p>	Emotional labour is exercised according to multiple external emotional display rules.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Negative emotional display rules •Leave emotions at the door •Expectations to manage negative emotions 	<p><i>Sometimes this does mean to suppress what you are experiencing and other times, it may be required to display a tame version of your emotions</i></p>	Emotional labour in ECEC predominantly requires the management of negative emotions.	Emotional labour is exercised according to positive and negative emotional display rule requirements for ECEC.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Positive emotional display rules •Expectations for positive expressions 	<p><i>the general expectation is that we are positive during all of our interactions</i></p> <p><i>expected to be happy, positive, friendly and warm</i></p>	Emotional labour in ECEC predominantly requires positive emotional displays.	

Appendix Q

Descriptive Statistics for the Survey's Wellbeing Variables

<i>Wellbeing Question</i>		Count	Column N %
Does respondents' exercising of EL impact their wellbeing?	No	1	0.7%
	Yes	93	63.3%
	Did not respond to the question (includes question is blank or answer was unrelated to wellbeing)	53	36.1%
Does respondents' exercising of EL have a positive, negative or positive and negative impact on their wellbeing?	Negative	72	49.0%
	Positive	1	0.7%
	Both (positive and negative)	7	4.8%
	Did not respond to the question (includes question is blank or answer was unrelated to wellbeing)	67	45.6%

Appendix R

Introductory Zoom Agenda

1. What this study is about and Who the researcher is

Thank you for showing an interest in this research study on educator emotional labour in working with families and the impact of this labour on educator wellbeing.

My name is Melanie Dickerson and I am undertaking this research to meet the requirements for a Doctor in Philosophy (PhD) at The University of Sydney.

2. What participation in Component 2 will involve

- a. Four 1-hour individual interviews conducted and recorded in person or via Zoom throughout 2023, possibly with the final interview in early 2024. If possible, the first interview conducted in person will support the establishment of this research, however the choice is yours and a combination of in person and Zoom may be chosen. If you chose to participate in this study, interviews would be based on your survey and journal data findings, and seek your thoughts, feelings and perspectives on your emotional labour with families, and the impact of this labour on your wellbeing.
- b. Concurrent, ongoing, online educator journals through PebblePad: If you decided to participate you would be required to make at least one entry per fortnight (taking no more than 15 minutes of your time per entry), but would be free to include more and as often as you like. Journal entries would aim to report and reflect on your experiences and accounts of emotional labour while working with families, and the impact that this labour has on your wellbeing.

3. Privacy and confidentiality:

For this research it will be necessary to use pseudonyms of your service, colleagues, families and children in order to respect and preserve their anonymous.

4. PebblePad:

- a. **What it is:** A private and secure online platform for journal entries to record and reflect your emotional labour with families, and the impact of this labour on your wellbeing.

b. PebblePad Overview:

- i. The researcher shares her screen to show the educator a brief navigation of the app and desktop versions.
- ii. The researcher will demonstrate briefly how the platform allows journal entries to be created.

5. Zoom: Q&A on the study's data collection methods and PebblePad

6. Wellbeing Support: The researcher will provide details of support services that can be accessed by the participant if necessary during the research process (e.g. Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Beyond Blue, Headspace and Lifeline).

7. Closing questions.

8. Next steps: The researcher will advise all educators that she will email a Participant Information Statement and consent form after the meeting so they can decide in their own time, away from the researcher, whether or not they will participate. The email will also state that should they then decide to participate in component two, to complete and return the consent form within 7 days.

Appendix S

Participant Information Statement for Journaling and Interviewing



Research Study: Educators' Exercising of Emotional Labour in their Work with Families: Implications for Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing

Dr. Marianne Fenech

Associate Professor, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Phone: +61 2 9351 6375 | Email: marianne.fenech@sydney.edu.au

Melanie Kate Dickerson

PhD student researcher | Email: medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au

1. What is this study about?

We are conducting a research study about the emotional labour that early childhood educators use with families, and the impact this work has on educator wellbeing. 'Educators' in this study is inclusive of degree-qualified early childhood teachers and vocationally-trained Certificate III and Diploma qualified educators.

You have been invited to participate in this study following your expression of interest to do so. This component of the study aims to explore your experiences of this work, through individual interviews and journals.

As a reminder, emotional labour requires that an employee “manages a wide range of feelings” (Hochschild, 2012, p.8) necessary for meeting occupational requirements. For example, a flight attendant meeting the needs of all her passengers with a smile, despite the demands in providing a safe and comfortable space and regardless of whether the passengers are appreciative or aggravated. It is possible the flight attendant enjoys her job such that this work is effortless and natural, while it is also possible that such work requires effort and is not natural to the flight attendant at times or at any time. Emotional labour such as this is part of early childhood educators' professional practices in caring for and supporting families and their children (Andrew, 2015; Osgood, 2010); yet very little research on this emotional labour in early childhood education and care exists (Brown et al., 2022; Quiñones et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020).

This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study, covering similar content to the recent Zoom Introductory meeting. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this study is voluntary. By signing the consent forms to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

2. Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Melanie Dickerson is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at The University of Sydney.
- Dr. Marianne Fenech (Associate Professor, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney)
- Dr. Tina Stratigos (Lecturer, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney)

3. What will the study involve for me?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in

- i. Four 1-hour individual interviews conducted and recorded in person and/or via Zoom throughout 2023, possibly with the final interview in early 2024. If you choose to participate in this study, interviews would be based on your survey and journal data findings, and seek your thoughts, feelings and perspectives on your emotional labour with families, and the impact of this labour on your wellbeing. You will also have the choice of in person and/or Zoom interviews.
- ii. Ongoing educator journals through PebblePad: If you decided to participate you would be required to make at least one entry per fortnight, taking no more than 15 minutes per entry, but would be free to include more and as often as you like. Journal entries give you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences of emotional labour while working with families, and your wellbeing while working with families.

4. What is PebblePad and how will I gain access and use it?

PebblePad is an electronic platform that allows its users secure access to a private, personalised creative space in which journal entries may be recorded. PebblePad offers its users the unique opportunity to transcribe, use visuals, videos or audio recordings for their entries, thus meeting the preference or need of each individual. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be free to use all forms of mediums in your entries.

If you decide to participate in this study, upon returning your consent form, you will receive an email with PebblePad login and step-by-step setup details. Additionally, you will receive a PebblePad Journal Guide, outlining the journaling expectations, the use of PebblePad and guiding reflective questions.

Should you participate in this study, PebblePad will allow me, the researcher, to address any questions you may have during your participation and to clarify and understand your journal and interview accounts by asking you some follow-up questions. Your shared experiences on PebblePad will inform subsequent interviews or future PebblePad engagements

5. Can I withdraw once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind you can withdraw at any time by notifying Melanie Dickerson via email (medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au). Following your withdrawal notification, we will not collect any more information from you and you may choose what you would like us to do with the information we have collected about you up to that point.

At any stage during your PebblePad journaling, you may refuse to answer any of the questions or prompts for clarification. Similarly, you may refuse to answer any interview questions that you do not wish to answer, or stop the interview entirely if you so wish. Refusing to answer questions or provide further details or even ending an interview, does not mean you have to withdraw from the research.

6. Are there any risks or costs?

Since this research study covers the sensitive topic of educator emotional work and wellbeing, you would be advised to access any of the following free, confidential support services should you feel any discomfort or distress in relation to the study (these will also be provided on the PebblePad Platform and available in the interviews):

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 | <https://www.lifeline.org.au/> | 27/7 support via phone, chat, text
- **Headspace:** 1800 650 890 | For webchat <https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace>
- **Be You / Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 | <https://beyou.edu.au/> | Additional Support Services <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/mental-health-services-and-support-helplines>
- **Your workplace EAP** (Employee Assistance Program): If your workplace has an EAP, this information would most likely be available in your staff room, in your contract or welcome pack, within your workplace employee policy folder.

Should you decide to participate in this research study, the researcher will be aware of the time commitment you have willingly made and this will be greatly appreciated. While it is important to keep to the timeline commitments of this study, should an unforeseen circumstance arise on the date or time of any interview, you may contact the researcher at the earliest opportunity to renegotiate a more convenient time to conduct the interview.

7. Are there any benefits?

We cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study. However, journaling and interviewing may offer therapeutic and reflective benefits for yourself and support your professional capacities and wellbeing.

Additionally, this research aims to advocate for the unrecognised work of educators and the resources and support that could improve educator wellbeing. Your contributions would inform such efforts.

8. What will happen to information that is collected?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting information about you for the purposes of this study.

Any information you provide us will be stored securely and we will only disclose identifiable information with your permission, unless we are required by law to release information. We are planning for the study findings to be published.

Please note that employers will not have access to the information you share in this study, but employers may access the research publications. You will not be individually identifiable in these publications. Anonymity in the dissemination of research findings and any ensuing publications and/or conference presentations will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms.

9. Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. Feedback of the research will be made available to participants via PebblePad's study information page throughout the 12-month data collection period where necessary. Such feedback may be summary updates by the researcher, or sharing of publications detailing the study findings to date. Once data collection has been completed and PebblePad is no longer in use, the researcher will ensure a summary and any ensuing publications/conferences are shared with you via email if you have indicated this on your consent form.

10. What if I would like further information?

When you have read this information, the following researcher/s will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have:

- Melanie Dickerson: medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au

11. What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of The University of Sydney [[HREC Approval No. once obtained](#)] according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the University:

Human Ethics Manager
human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
 +61 2 8627 8176

This information sheet is for you to keep

Appendix T

Participant Consent Form for Journaling and Interviewing



Research Study: Educators' Exercising of Emotional Labour in their Work with Families: Implications for Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing

Dr. Marianne Fenech

Associate Professor, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Phone: +61 2 9351 6375 | Email: marianne.fenech@sydney.edu.au

Melanie Kate Dickerson

PhD student researcher | Email: medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au

Participant Name _____

I agree to take part in this research study. In giving my consent, I confirm that that:

- The details of my involvement have been explained to me, and I have been provided with and read the written Participant Information Statement.
- I understand the purpose of the study is to investigate the emotional labour that early childhood educators do with families, and the impact this work has on educator wellbeing.
- I acknowledge that the risks and benefits of participating in this study have been explained to me to my satisfaction.
- I understand that in this study I will be required to participate in
 - Four 1-hour individual interviews over a 12-month period in 2023-2024. And,
 - Concurrent, ongoing, online educator journals through PebblePad over a 12-month period in 2023-2024, with a minimum of one entry per fortnight, of no more than 15 minutes for each entry.
- I understand that my participation in interviews in person or via Zoom will be audio recorded and my choice of journaling may include entries which are audio and/or video and/or visual and/or text accounts of my emotional labour and my experiences pertaining to my labour with families. I understand that these records will be collected and used by the researcher for the purposes of this research as explained to me.
- I understand that the researcher will request my verbal consent for each interview and the audio recording of each interview, and that these verbal consents will be audio-recorded at the beginning of each interview. I understand that if I do not give my consent for the interview or the audio recording, or I wish to withdraw from the interview, the recording will be stopped immediately.

- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part.
- I am assured that my decision to participate will not have any impact on my relationship with the research team or the University of Sydney now or in the future.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time and that I can choose to withdraw any information I have already provided (unless the data has already been de-identified or published).
- I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be protected and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information identifying me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me. I also understand that employers will not have access to the information I share in this study, but employers may access the research publications.
- I confirm the following:

I consent to audio-recordings in interviews Yes No

I consent to my audio, video, text and visual / photographic journal recordings via PebblePad being accessed by the researcher Yes No

I would like to review my interview transcripts Yes No

I would like feedback on the overall results of this study Yes No

If you answered **yes**, please provide your preferred contact details (email/telephone/postal address):

- I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher, and that I may request a copy at any time.

Participant Name

Signature

Date

Appendix U

Blank Journal Sample Exported from PebblePad

Emotional Labour



Emotional Labour

"Emotional labor... is the work for which you're paid, which centrally involves trying to feel the right feeling for the job. This involves evoking and suppressing feelings. Some jobs require a lot of it, some a little of it." - Arlie Hochschild, 2018

Welcome

Welcome to your private, online journal: a space for you to record your experiences of emotional labour while working with families in your early childhood education and care context. All the sections below the 'Important Information' tab at the top of this page are there to support you along the way, however, should you need any assistance, please reach out to me via email: medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au

Who I am

My name is Melanie Dickerson and I am currently undertaking my PhD at the University of Sydney. Since 2010 I worked as a teacher with children of varying ages and in varied settings and locations around the world. I have been an early childhood teacher and educational leader in Australia's early childhood education and care sector since 2015. I have also worked in a birth-to-six international preschool in Singapore and in public schools in South Korea teaching across the five-to-thirteen year old age range.

This Research Study

Working with families is relational and can be both rewarding and exhausting. This research is exploring the emotions early childhood educators and teachers use in their work with families. The research is also seeking educators' and teachers' perspectives on the positive and negative impact of this work on their wellbeing.

Your Privacy

PebblePad is a secure, private platform. PebblePad ensures that each user has "ownership and control over their account... In order to maintain your privacy, you must keep your login details strictly confidential."

The researcher (Melanie) will be able to read and make comments in your PebblePad journal for the purposes of this research. Copies of your journal entries will be kept and securely stored for data analysis purposes.

For further details about the security of your data on PebblePad you may visit

<https://www.pebblepad.co.uk/terms/en-AU/terms.html>



'Emotional labour' is the term used to describe how employees manage their emotions to display expressions, attitudes and/or behaviours with others in order to meet the requirements of an occupation or role.

Arlie Hochschild introduced 'emotional labour' in 1983 and gave examples of flight attendants who may be required to be friendly and kind even if a passenger is rude or hostile. The attendants may genuinely enjoy their role and meeting the needs of passengers, thus such expressions can be genuine. Additionally, the attendants may understand the benefits of such emotional expressions for calming their anxious or hostile passengers such that it makes engaging with them and meeting their role expectations more manageable. In another example, in an attempt to be reassuring, a nurse is positive and cheerful when a patient is worried about their test results and health condition.

While emotional labour has been studied extensively in many occupations, it is relatively new and under-researched in early childhood education and care. This research aims to investigate how educators use emotional labour in their work with families, and how this labour impacts educator wellbeing.

Since Hochschild's conceptualisation of emotional labour, others have extended her work. Notably, *Emotional Labour in the 21st Century* by Grandey et al. (2013) frames emotional labour according to: *occupational requirements, emotional displays, and intrapsychic experiences*. These theoretical dimensions of emotional labour are defined below, along with other relevant terms associated with emotional labour.

Key Terms



Occupational requirements (dimension 1) - occupations in which employees have frequent interactions with others, and where *emotional display rules* dictate the emotions deemed necessary for working with others to meet role and workplace expectations.

Emotional display rules - define how employees should socially interact with others to meet occupational and role requirements.

Emotional displays (dimension 2) - the outward expressions and behaviours/attitudes that employees use while working with others in order to meet workplace, relational and/or role expectations. Dictated by *emotional display rules*, emotional labour theory proposes three *emotional display strategies*: *surface acting*, *deep acting* and *natural/genuine expressions*.

- **surface acting** - regulating or managing emotions to suppress (hiding) or exaggerate (faking) displays (expressions / behaviours/ attitudes) necessary for working with others and meeting the occupational requirements.
- **deep acting** - involves modifying or regulating feelings so that the employee's display and internal feelings match (that is, the dissonance between experienced and expressed emotions is resolved), and, may therefore, be authentic.
- **natural/genuine expressions** - the individual does not modify, suppress (hiding), or exaggerate (faking) expressions or displays different from their feelings.

Intrapsychic experiences (dimension 3) - are the internal processes requiring "effort, planning and control" (Morris and Feldman, 1996: 987) to "regulate feelings and expressions" (Grandey, 2000: 97). Generally, the greater the effort of these internal processes the greater the negative wellbeing experiences.

References

Grandey, A., Diefendorff, J., & Rupp, D. E. (2013). Emotional labor in the 21st century: Diverse perspectives on the psychology of emotion regulation at work. Routledge Academic. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203100851>

Hochschild, A. R. (2012). The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling (3rd ed.). University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt1pn9bk>



Journal Guidelines



Journaling

“Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.” - William Wordsworth

It is not possible to export **Journal guidelines** here. The file type is not supported by the pdf. The file has been made available alongside this PDF at [Files\journal guidelines.mp4](#)

Journal Guidelines Introduction Video: Please read below for details on journaling.



Journaling Guidelines

- **One entry per fortnight** (two entries each month)
 - If you wish to add more, you can either edit an existing journal entry by typing the date and adding your additional reflections and thoughts below the existing entry, **OR**
 - You can add additional entries in the '**Additional Entries**' page under the month's tab.
 - If you are adding additional entries into the journal entry space, **please ensure you start with the date you are adding in the entry.**
 - **Reminder:** hit the **SAVE** button before closing the page or web browser or you will lose your journal entry.

- Aim to include the following four aspects in each journal entry:
 - **Which Family** you interacted with
 - **The context** of your interaction/ engagement
 - **The details** of the interaction
 - **Your reflection** on **what emotions and expressions** you used, and whether these were genuine or surface acting or deep acting **and your experience** of the interaction (how it made you feel and/or impacted your wellbeing).

- You only need to select **five families** to track your work with over the next 12-months. This is explained further in the 'Family Profiles' tab (and in interview one).

- Each journal entry does not need to include descriptions of interactions/ engagements on **ALL FIVE families**, but please make a short note in the 'Additional Entries' page under each month's tab of how things are going generally with the families you have not reflected on in that month.

- Please ensure you **do not use any names or identifying information** of families, children or your colleagues and service.
 - It may be helpful to refer to families as the renamed version within your journals (as seen in the 'Family Profiles' tab e.g., Family 1, Family 2, Family 3, Family 4, Family 5).

- If a family that you are working with, but have not selected for this research study, **experience exceptional challenges or family-life changes at any point in this 12-month period, you may dedicate your journaling to the work you are engaging in with this family.** If you are uncertain, please feel free to reach out to me as soon as possible to clarify any questions you may have.

Researcher's PebblePad engagement

- I will read your journals frequently:
 - for data analysis and interview preparation purposes
 - to comment on your journals
 - to answer any questions about the study that you raise (there will be a question box on each journal entry page and I will endeavour to check this fortnightly. For urgent questions, please email me)



Some guiding reflective questions to support and prompt your journaling

(these are a guide for those moments when you need a little inspiration about your journal entries and reflections)

- 1. What family interactions were successful or challenging this week and why?*
- 2. What made these interactions successful or challenging?*
- 3. What emotions did I express? Did they come easily and naturally to me? Was I required to hide, fake, or exaggerate any feelings in these interactions?*
- 4. How did I manage my emotions during these interactions? Was I successful or did I have difficulty in managing and using my emotions? Why did I struggle?*
- 5. Could there have been a better way to manage my emotions?*
- 6. What role did my use of emotions play in the success or difficulty of the interaction?*
- 7. What were the benefits or implications of using my emotions in this way for professional practice and relationships with families?*
- 8. How did I feel while engaging in this interaction and what did I feel afterwards?*
- 9. Did I have support (from colleagues/leadership/other)? Did I debrief with anyone afterwards?*
- 10. What skills or supports could improve my ability to use emotions to benefit my interactions with families?*
- 11. What did I think the family felt about the interaction?*



Wellbeing Resources



Your Wellbeing

“A healthy outside starts from the inside.” – Robert Urich

Educator and Teacher Wellbeing

Throughout this project, and your personal and professional life, your wellbeing is a priority.

Please ensure you take care of your mental health needs by reaching out to any of the services listed below if you require them.

- **Your workplace EAP** (Employee Assistance Program): If your workplace has an EAP, this information would most likely be available in your staff room, in your contract or welcome pack, within your workplace employee policy folder.
- **Lifeline**: 13 11 14 | 24/7 support via phone, chat, text | [Chat Crisis](#)
- **Headspace**: 1800 650 890 | webchat | email
- **Be You / Beyond Blue**: 1300 22 4636 |
 - [Be You Educator Wellbeing Resources](#)
- [Reach Out](#)
- [Suicide Call Back Services](#)

Research Feedback



Feedback and Updates
any feedback or updates relevant to this research project will be placed on this page by the researcher

PebblePad Help



PebblePad Support

Reminder: hit the **SAVE** button before closing the journaling page or web browser or you will lose your journal entry.

PebblePad Support

- Any major issues with access or navigating PebblePad, please contact me ASAP: medi6013@uni.sydney.edu.au

How to add video, audio or photo journal entries



Family Profiles



Family Profiles

Select **five families** that you will journal on and track your interactions with over the next 12-months.

- Please consider selecting a mix of:
 - families you get on with
 - families you don't know very well
 - families who are new to your service
 - a family who is familiar to you (e.g., their child is remaining with you this year; a family with a sibling child)
 - families who are facing adversity / difficulties (includes difficulties in their parenting role; family illness or disability; family break-up; child development, behaviour or wellbeing difficulties; other extenuating circumstances)

Family 1

- Please explain **why you have chosen this family**
- Give a short description of the **family** (e.g. culture, family structure, languages spoken, circumstances and context)
- Any other **important information regarding the family**

Family 2

- Please explain **why you have chosen this family**
- Give a short description of the **family** (e.g. culture, family structure, languages spoken, circumstances and context)
- Any other **important information regarding the family**

Family 3

- Please explain **why you have chosen this family**
- Give a short description of the **family** (e.g. culture, family structure, languages spoken, circumstances and context)
- Any other **important information regarding the family**



Family 4

- Please explain **why you have chosen this family**
- Give a short description of the **family** (e.g. culture, family structure, languages spoken, circumstances and context)
- Any other **important information regarding the family**

Family 5

- Please explain **why you have chosen this family**
- Give a short description of the **family** (e.g. culture, family structure, languages spoken, circumstances and context)
- Any other **important information regarding the family**



Interview One

ASSESSOR FIELD

Interview Details

These details will be confirmed closer to the date of the interview.

ASSESSOR FIELD

Interview Transcription

Once the interview has been transcribed, a copy of the transcription will be placed here for you to read over and leave any comments on if you wish to do so.

If you have any comments on these transcriptions, please add these here:



Journal Entry One



Date

Please select the date of your entry.

Journal Entry Structure:

Please add journal entries in relation to one family at a time.

Your entry may include journaling on more than one family interaction, but please keep each family reflection separate.

Please structure each individual family's entry under 4 main headings:

- **Family:** e.g., Which family you had the interaction with: Family 1

- **Context:** e.g., short description of
 - Time
 - Place or space
 - What was happening at the time of the interaction
 - Whether other parents and/or educators were around
 - What tasks or responsibilities you were engaging in before, during and after the interaction
 - What the children were doing or needing

- **Details** (of the interaction):
 - What happened, what was said etc
 - The mood or tone of the family / family member before, during and after the interaction you are journaling about
 - Any build-up to the interaction (anything that may have occurred to lead to the interaction you are journaling about)
 - The specific needs, requests, questions the family had
 - The type of collaboration between yourself and the family / family member

- **Reflections:** e.g., the emotional labour you used and your experience/reflections of the interaction overall
 - Your experience of the interaction: how you felt before, during and after, and **why**
 - What feelings and emotions you used or displayed to the family during this interaction **and why**
 - Your critical reflections of the whole experience after it occurred (including later that day or the next day)
 - **Why** - why you felt a certain way; why you showed certain expressions, attitudes or emotions; why you think the family engaged as they did; why it was a successful or not successful collaboration or



interaction; why you may interact differently next time

Journal Entry

Please remember to use the structure outlined above for each family you write about below, making it clear when you are adding another entry on a different family.

Audio or video reflection

As an alternative to typing your journal entry, you may upload a video, audio, or a photo of a hand-written reflection here. There are additional media upload boxes below if you require.

Through the PebblePocket instructions (See 'PebblePad Help' page under the 'Important Information' tab) you will be able to create your video, audio, photo file.

Questions

If you have any questions, please write them here and I will respond. If you need urgent help or technical assistance, please email me ASAP.



ASSESSOR FIELD

Audio or video transcription

The transcription of your audio or video journal entry will appear here once it is completed.

ASSESSOR FIELD

Researcher's feedback or comments

I will leave any comments, questions or feedback here on your journal reflections if required.



Appendix V

Participant-specific Interview Guide for First Interview

(with Draft Guiding Questions)

Interview One Guide

1. Introduction and Consent

- a) Welcome...how are you...
- b) **Gain consent for audio-recorded interview on recording:** I would like your permission to begin video-audio recording?
- c) Any information shared is confidential and you will not be identified in any part of this research study. You may choose to withdraw from the interview at any time.

2. **PebblePad: any urgent questions?** [Check for set-up/ selection of families etc.]

3. **Have you identified which families you will focus on? Any questions?**

4. Contextualising [brief]

4.1 Your role(s) & responsibilities

- a) Could you briefly describe your role(s) and responsibilities? [What do you do; who supports you; who do you support; main interactions in a week]
- b) Do you like your job? [Prompt for what they like/ don't like / why they say what they say]

4.2 Your service

- c) Can you tell me a little about your service [service type; Prompting for location; structure & leadership (stand-alone/ franchise / preschool / for-profit / not-for-

profit etc); SES; A&R; size; how many and who (ECTs & Vocational) in your whole service team and working directly with you across the week (i.e. in the classroom)]

4.3 The families you interact with

- d) Reflecting on the families within your service/ room, can you share a little about the families you work with/ who attend your service? [Prompting for understandings of family demographics e.g., socio-cultural, socio-economic, EAL, family structure factors]

5. Working with families (generally)

- a) Can you share with me what interactions with families you have across a regular week? [Looking for what their role demands in terms of interactions with families: child incidents, development & learning, behaviour, illness, complaints, general discussion, all of the above]
- b) What feelings and emotions do you generally experience when interacting with families?
- c) What influences how you experience working with families? [Prompt: Who or what makes you use these kinds of emotional skills and or expressions in your work with families? Why do you say this?]

6. Emotional Display Rules

- a) What is your understanding of 'emotional display rules'?

Open-Ended Response: NONE

- b) In the survey you mentioned the emotional display rules at your service with regards to working with families, such as [read 2 or 3 to remind] are there any [other] examples you can think of?

Likert Scale Responses:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 17. I am expected to express positive emotions with families as part of my job. | I agree |
| 18. Part of my job is to make families feel supported and trusting. | I strongly agree |
| 19. I am expected to act happy and enthusiastic in my interactions with families | I agree |
| 20. I am expected to suppress or hide my bad moods or negative reactions to families. | I agree |
| 21. If I am upset or distressed, I am expected to hide these emotions while working with families. | I strongly agree |
| 22. If I am angry, I am expected to hide my anger while working with families. | I strongly agree |
| 23. I know the emotional rules I am expected to display to families. | I strongly agree |

- c) Where do you think emotional display rules come from?
- d) **Do you tend to follow these rules? Why ‘YES’ or Why ‘NO’** [Prompt for examples / why they may not follow the rules / what are the exceptions i.e. is it necessary to do so sometimes and why?] and
- e) How does it make you feel to follow and/or “break these rules”? [Is there a wellbeing implication]

7. Emotional labour strategies

Survey Responses for Emotional Labour Strategies

A parent had come in demanding the educators in my room, along with myself to find some items her child had misplaced in the previous week at school. The parent continued to get frustrated, speaking in a nasty tone and demanding we help her. I had started to become frustrated that I was being spoken to and addressed in such a way, but ensured my response

did not match my internal emotions, and I continued trying to assist the parent regardless of how they were making me feel.

When the child had been aggressive or physical toward me in the day, but expressing this would only make the child's home life worse, so maintaining a healthy interaction with the family and ensuring they felt happy and safe leaving the school.

Sharing the pride I had felt in a child when they had been a helpful peer and assisted their friend in a time of need/ sadness. Seeing the child's compassion and feeling pride that they were able to assist and help their friend instead of walking away and leaving them.

I definitely notice the decrease in my energy levels and emotional responses depending on how challenging children's behaviours or emotions are throughout the day. I recognise that these have an impact on my own emotions and I notice that I can go home and be short or unapproachable to my partner because I have spent my entire day being emotionally available to children and managing their emotional needs. I find myself with less to give in my home life.

That as well with any job or career there are hard days and off days, I'm still showing up to support their children's emotional and behavioural needs and just some time to reflect that I'm doing these things to help support their home life as well.

- a) When working with families, do you ever need to **hide or suppress** certain emotions? Why? [If so, **how often do you hide/suppress certain emotions** when working with families? If not already discussed, prompt for **how this supports the relationship** between educator and family? Prompt for **how this impacts the educator's wellbeing POSITIVELY and/or NEGATIVELY?**]
- b) When working with families, do you ever need to **fake, exaggerate or pretend to feel / express** certain emotions? [If so, **how often do you fake/exaggerate/pretend certain emotions** when working with families? Prompt for **how this supports the relationship between educator and family?** Prompt for **how this impacts the educator's wellbeing POSITIVELY and/or NEGATIVELY?**]
- c) How do these ways of managing your emotions support your work with families and the establishing and maintaining of partnerships? Why? [If not answered above]

d) When working with families are your emotional expressions ever **genuine and or effortless**? Why do you think this is the case? And how do these genuine expressions impact your wellbeing?

8. **Wellbeing Impact** [If not already discussed above]

a) Do you think your use of emotions while working with families impacts your wellbeing? [Prompt: for positive examples and negative examples of wellbeing impact - If they indeed indicate that this work requires emotions/ displays. If not answered above]

b) Why, do you think interacting with families this way impacts your wellbeing?
[Maybe be answered above]

c) What factors support your emotional work with families? Explain why.

d) Could this emotional work be better supported? How or why do you say this?

e) What factors support your wellbeing while working with families in this way?
Explain why

f) Could your wellbeing while working with families be better supported? How or why do you say this?

End

- **Thank you for your time**
- **Do you have any preference for the second interview's dates being in June or July? And preferred time?**
- **Email with resources for mental health and wellbeing organisations (e.g., Beyond Blue, Headspace and Lifeline) and interview two date**

Interviews 2, 3 and 4: Will be prepared following analysis of interview 1 and educator journaling to date. However, these subsequent interviews will also cover questions pertaining to changes over time, new families and arising challenges or issues as the year progresses.

Thus, questions may consider:

Additional Draft Guiding Questions

1. Reflecting on your current work with families, what emotional practices have you been using now compared to earlier in the year? [Prompt for Descriptions with examples]
2. How do you think these emotional practices and expressions have been supporting you to meet the expectations of your role?
3. Are there new challenges or circumstances that have come up recently which require you to hide/suppress or fake feelings and expressions with any of your families?
[Describe with examples]
4. How have these emotional practices impacted your relationship with this/ these families? And why? [This question depends on responses from above]
5. While working with this/these families [discussed above] did you require and seek support? [What support did you access? If support was required but not sought, ask why?]
6. In our prior interview/ your journaling you described that discuss/ clarify
7. What kinds of support do you think this work with families requires? Why do you think this?
8. Do you think this emotional labour is important in your work with families and for meeting the NQF requirements for partnering with families? Why do you think this?

Appendix W

Participant-specific Interview Guide for Second Interview

(with Generic Template)

Interview Two

- With your permission this interview will be recorded – is that okay?
- How have you been?
- Of importance in this emotional labour work, is the fact that it is not always possible for our emotions not to influence – consciously or subconsciously – how the emotional work occurs. So, if there is anything significant happening at work or in your personal life that may make it a little easier or trickier for you to do the relational work, it is important to consider, reflect, acknowledge this if you are comfortable in doing so. You also do not need to disclose this explicitly but may like to acknowledge that you have things going on that make you feel a certain way.

Clarifications from interview one:

1. *“I think that curiosity of trying to find out what is happening for that family or that person at that time is worthwhile.... I definitely try to think and listen to, to understand before sort of jumping in and trying not to be judgmental or make conclusions about things.”*
 - a. How does this strategy of working with families support
 - i. The family?
 - ii. Your role?
 - b. Is it expected that you behave this way? (Why / Why not?) [If YES – WHO or WHAT expects that?]

2. Why do you think that it is *“really important to be informal, I think, and just have that professional sort of friendly disposition that we're all here to help, we're all on the same page, you know, we're all on the same team”*
 - a. And is it expected that you behave this way – informal, friendly?
 - b. Is it expected that you are there to help, that you’re on the same side in terms of supporting the child?
 - c. Who or what expects this?

3. *“...quite energy sucking when you engage with her about these things and we know it's going to be quite a process. So, we've got to be prepared to actually go down that path and do that for that child.”*
 - a. When you prepare for something like this – what kinds of preparations are you making and
 - b. does it all happen in work time only?
 - c. Why does the type of strategy and approach matter?

4. *“there are times sometimes when we have fathers... often when you're having a conversation with the mum it can be - even though you can disagree on things - I think the tone of the conversation is generally much more measured. And it's not always the case if you've got a father in the room, it can, I feel, sometimes they feel like they don't respect what we're saying is of as much as they could”*
 - a. How does experiencing this with fathers, for instance, influence the type of emotional labour and strategies you may use?
 - b. How do interactions like this make you feel – personally and professionally?

5. *“If someone's got something to say, the more that you interrupt and the more that you antagonize or cause, you know, basically interrupt, then that is just going to cause so much more stress. So you better just allow someone to say their piece. Especially if they've got a view on something that's happened that they don't like, just get it all out and then try and be conciliatory.”*
- a. I wonder how engaging with someone like this impacts the way you interact with them in the future?
 - b. In a situation like this with a family, what is the expectation from you? [You mention being conciliatory, why is that up to you?]
 - c. Do you think engaging with families like this requires support? What types of support?
6. In terms of the emotional display rules, you mentioned the last time that you follow the rules because if you don't then it makes it harder to have relationships with families and then you said, *“... also in my position there's, you know, if I'm the one that's not gonna follow the rules, then there's no point having the rules either, you know?”*
- a. Does that mean that there are rules you believe families should follow too?
 - b. How do you use the emotional display rules you are expected to adhere to – like being professionally friendly, listening, being non-judgmental, show support – to ensure that families in your service follow the rules? Is there such a thing? What outcomes come from this?
7. You used this example of how you work with families, *“I want my child to sleep every day in the stroller in the playground. I'd probably, you know, try and explore*

how and why they want that, what is the reasoning there. In the back of my mind I'm thinking we can never do this. But tell me all about it, because I can probably find you another way that you can get that same result by doing something that matches our rules. And I'd rather have that than just say no straight away because, generally, they're not telling you the full story at the start."

- a. It is not the first time you have indicated that you give families space to share their minds before you collaborate on solutions or share your opinion, what has influenced your way of working with families like this?
- b. How do you feel when you work with families like this – where you give them space to share their perspectives, their needs, ideas?

PebblePad Follow Up:

1. What has been happening with Family 2? What strategies have you been using with them to mitigate the difficulty of the relationship?
2. How have things progressed with Family 3 and what types of strategies have you had to plan for, use and reflect on?
3. I note that your first journal entry was about Family 3's mum who came in talking over educators and wanting her needs met – how do you find your work overall with Family 3 and are there specific strategies you use with them?
4. When contrasting Family 3 with Family 1 (*"types of conversations are heartwarming, as I know this family so well"*) – the type of relationship, the way you work with each – how is your emotional labour (the use of managing your emotions or moderating your emotions and expressing your emotions) in your interactions with these families different? And why is it important that it is different?
5. While supporting dad in Family 3, you are also supporting the team, you explained recently: *"I have been brave and stopped him to have conversations. Especially when*

we think the root of the problem is the parent and not the team or the child this can be a difficult conversation, however, if not addressed it can get awkward if the pattern continues. This means I have had to be purposeful in my interactions, making sure when I see him that I can start a conversation that is purposeful to my needs. I don't think this is manipulative, but productive to the best interests of the child and the family.”

- a. How do you think your work, or emotional labour, with dad supports how the team work with dad and the outcomes for the child
 - b. and how do you think the team’s work with dad supports you or your emotional labour with him?
6. Family 4 – how is this relationship going? I recall you said, *“I left the interaction with little hope that I would have the information I needed on Monday, and thinking about when I should remind her again, plus different strategies about how I can get her to complete the information I need....because I want to ensure the child is safe and the team have all the information they need to care for the child. I ...think when I am asking for something from her, I have power in a sense, it's not me feeling incompetent. I didn't show how angry or annoyed I was as I need to remain respectful and to maintain the relationship I have with the family.*
- a. How does working with a family like this impact you professionally?
 - b. Did you, and do you generally, interact with mum genuinely or inauthentically – why?
 - c. How does this relationship differ to, say, Family 1 or 3? Why?
7. Any other general critical moments?

Generic Guide Designed for Interview Two:

(consider these if not answered/ provided as per above)

1. Thinking about the families you are observing in this research, are there any specific critical interactions or incidents that stand out for you that you would like to share?
Includes face-to-face, phone and email interactions and your reflections on working with families this way [looking for context, precursor, responsibilities of educator at the time, any personal challenges the educator has also faced at the same time, the issues/ reason for interaction]
2. How did you navigate these critical interactions / incidents [looking for what strategies were used]and how did you manage your emotions in these interactions?
3. Why did you navigate these interactions / incidents this way? [looking for what influenced or why they selected such strategies]
4. Is there an expectation that you navigate these interactions this way / a specific way?
Where does that expectation come from? [M & T encourage asking this throughout interviews]
5. How would you describe your experience of these critical interactions or interactions and the way you navigated them?
6. Was it easy to manage and use your emotions? Why or why not?
7. Was all your preparation, emotion management and reflection for such interactions done within work time? [looking for whether any emotional labour occurs outside of work time]
8. Did you require and gain support for this work or debrief with anyone afterwards?
9. [looking for] were any of these interactions satisfying for you? If so, why? And, how did that – the fact that they were satisfying – make you feel?
10. [looking for] were any of these interactions stressful / effortful / challenging? And why?
11. how did you manage the stressful / effortful / challenging feelings?

12. what were the outcomes of your interactions with families in these scenarios?
 - a. For the family?
 - b. For the child?
 - c. For you professionally?
 - d. At a service/ preschool level?
 - e. For your wellbeing?
13. How and why are the incidents / interactions with one family so similar or so different from/to another family?
14. **Any other why's?** - why you felt a certain way; why you showed certain expressions, attitudes or emotions; why you may interact differently next time; why you think the family engaged as they did; why it was a successful or not successful collaboration or interaction?

Appendix X

Interview Guide for Final Interview

(participant specific guide with generic template at the end)

- With your permission this interview will be recorded – is that okay?
- How have you been?
- [A brief reminder as per prior interviews] Of importance in this emotional labour work, is the fact that it is not always possible for our emotions not to influence – consciously or subconsciously – how the emotional work occurs. So, if there is anything significant happening at work or in your personal life that may make it a little easier or trickier for you to do the relational work, it is important to consider, reflect, acknowledge this if you are comfortable in doing so. You also do not need to disclose this explicitly but may like to acknowledge that you have things going on that make you feel a certain way.

PebblePad follow-up and generally, how are your families going:

6. Family 1 – in your final reflections, how do you think of your work with this family now compared to the beginning of our research collaborations?
7. Family 2 – any further reflections on how this relationship started versus how it has progressed and the emotional labour you have used to progress this relationship?
8. Family 4 – child who is not going on excursions: how is that relationship with the family going now?
 - e. You recently wrote, *“I feel really disrespected by her especially because she feels comfortable asking for information and doesn't apologise or feel uncomfortable about the fact that she hasn't given me the things I need. I feel that our relationship*

is quite transactional, regardless of the amount of time I spend with her I can't seem to get any closer to her, which is quite frustrating.”

- f. How does working with a family like this impact you professionally? And your wellbeing?
 - g. Do you interact with mum genuinely or inauthentically – why?
 - h. How does this relationship differ to, say, Family 1 or 3? Why?
9. Family 5 – had a meeting with dad recently- I saw via your PP entry- and he seems receptive – tell me a bit about how your interactions felt/feel (authentic or inauthentic and requiring certain kinds of strategies – such as?) and how did you arrive at this point?
10. Any other critical PebblePad moments you want to discuss further?

Clarifications from prior interview:

6. You mentioned in the last interview that trust is expected “...*because we live in relationship, we work within relationship like that having a relationship is key, it's this 3-way partnership with the service, the child, the family ...*”
- a. Do you think developing trust in a professional relationship requires skills?
 - b. To work within this three-way partnership, this relationship-based role and profession– What types of strategies and skills would you describe yourself as using? Why these types of strategies and skills?
 - c. Do you think others (society/families) see these skills/this work you do? Why/why not? How does that make you feel?
7. “*We say that to babies’ parents all the time, the orientations are about you as the parent getting to know the educators and the space and trusting what we are doing because if you're happy. And trust us, the child will be happy in 90% of the cases.*”

- a. This quote highlights the significance of having those trusting, reciprocal partnerships with families. How would you describe your emotional labour when establishing trust – what kinds of strategies do you use?
 - i. Perhaps an example of success and an example of a relationship that is still challenging?
 - b. Is establishing trust with families an expectation of your work?
 - c. And what is expected of you to achieve this trust with families / what do you feel is expected from you to achieve this?
 - d. Who or what expects this?
 - e. How do such expectations make you feel?
8. You talked about ... *“how do I feel or what does this do to my wellbeing or whatever? And I think it's just part of who I am as a person, is that it really doesn't matter how I feel about any of this stuff... You know, my job is to try and help children and families to navigate this period of their life so how I feel doesn't matter?”*
- a. I wondered, in a job where families and sometimes you the professional may both have intense connections to the wellbeing of the child and sometimes feelings on both sides might be involved, is it always possible to distance yourself from feelings that can impact your wellbeing? As in, can how you feel really be left out of all partnership work with families?
9. One more thing, in earlier interviews you mentioned things like *“it can be quite energy sucking when you engage”* with mum #4 and we talked earlier about the *“transactional”* nature of the relationship – elsewhere you talked about working with a father where it doesn't *“feel like they...respect what [you're] saying”* – **How does the work you do with these families impact your wellbeing? In the immediate and over time?**

Generic guide for final interview- if not answered above: (bold questions must be asked)

10. IS there anything you would like to share with me or any thoughts you have had that you want this research to potentially share / make known?
- 11. Were you aware that you were exercising emotional labour with families before you started participating in this research?**
- 12. So, now that you know about emotional labour, now that there is a label for this work that you do with families, how does that impact you or what does it mean for you? Why?**
13. If you had to explain emotional labour with families to a colleague, what would you say?
14. In your work with families, I noted that your interactions with families from the get-go are aimed at developing trust and establishing common ground, but this may be easier with some families than others – could this be related to differences between yourself and the family?
 - a. What examples of difference have you experienced?
 - b. do you think these differences have an impact on your emotional labour? And wellbeing?
15. [if not answered above] Extending on this, is emotional labour with migrant, refugee or CALD families different to families who perhaps share your culture, language, country? Why do you say that?
16. Is emotional labour a negative or positive thing? Why do you say that?
- 17. When your wellbeing feels compromised/ negative, what type of emotional labour do you think you tend to use with families? Why?**

- 18. How does using your emotions**, either inauthentically – like hiding your stress, frustration of tiredness to be pleasant and calm with families – or authentically, like showing compassion and concern when a family are experiencing difficulties or you are sharing child development aspects – **impact your wellbeing?**
19. Thinking about these strategies, how and why are the strategies/ interactions with one family so similar or so different from/to another family?
20. **Any other thoughts or reflections on your emotional labour and the wellbeing involved with this work?**

Appendix Y

Case Study Participant Profiles for Sal and Misty

Participant Profiles

Sal

Sal, a born-and-raised Australian, was a director and approved provider (franchisee-owner) of a small service in Sydney's inner west, with two decades of experience working with families, educators and children in ECEC contexts. Sal worked closely with her second in-charge educational leader and operated a service with a higher than required number of ECTs and adult-to-child ratios. Sal did not come from an early childhood background originally, however, over the years her passion for ECEC had led her to complete postgraduate studies on leadership in ECEC. Sal is an active member of the wider ECEC research community and has collaborated in various projects and research engagements.

Sal has grown-up children and often described understanding where families come from by relating to parenting concerns and occasionally shared her own parenting experiences in interactions with families to establish trust and connection. Sal saw families from a strengths-based perspective regardless of their backgrounds, culture, life journey or approaches to parenting. She described drawing on years of prior experience working with families in different cultural contexts to the current context she was in and believed that understanding culture is about giving it time. Sal acknowledged that parenting was difficult and together with families, she and her team, were "figuring it out together." Sal held strong critical reflection skills and through discussion shifted her own thinking to articulate clearly the processes she used for her work with families. Sal acknowledged that in her position, with higher than required staffing and ECTs, she and her team could have time and space to

prepare for working with families which she believed was critical as ECEC is all about strong relationships.

Postscript to Sal: In November 2023 Sal's service was awarded an 'Excellent' rating –which first required her service to receive an 'Exceeding' rating across all seven NQF quality areas– and she also took ownership of a new service in Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory. In the final interview Sal shared that she was about to pursue a PhD focussing on aspects of leadership in ECEC.

Misty

Misty, a born-and-raised Australian, was the second youngest participant (28-years old), with an ECT qualification and seven years of ECEC experience. Misty worked in a combined Long Day Care-Preschool service (operational from 7am-6pm, 5-days per week, 50 weeks per year, with preschool sessions running from 8.30am-4pm during school terms). Her setting was based in a rural area and was predominantly accessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds where most faced hardship and had experienced trauma that impacted their mental health. Misty revealed that most of her colleagues identified as Aboriginal and lived within the same community as the families. Misty's service director was due to take 6-months of leave from June 2023 which would result in her and some of her colleagues acquiring some leadership responsibilities. Misty highlighted that her director was a trusted mentor and support person for her.

Misty spoke professionally about her passion for and practices with young children and their learning, development and wellbeing, but also about their families and her work with colleagues. Misty detailed clear understandings and practices of respectful interactions and pedagogical decisions based on the needs of children and families, specific to Indigenous

communities and their ways of being. Misty revealed mature understandings of working with a community, families and children experiencing adversity and trauma. Misty shared a deep passion for play-based pedagogy and thorough understandings of and experiences in trauma-informed practice. Child rights and protection were embedded within all of Misty's practices. These aspects influenced Misty's work with families, where her pedagogical knowledge and practices informed decisions and approaches to support families through collaboration. Misty was assertive, thorough and held knowledgeable understandings of ECEC frameworks, ethical practices and compliance requirements for working with children and their families. Misty was committed to improving the lives of families and their children and reflected deeply on how she could do that in practice.

Postscript to Misty: As research participation progressed Misty experienced contextual factors that influenced her work with families which I kept note of to remain aware of Misty's wellbeing impacts. In August Misty was shifted into the birth-to-one space two days per week to provide leadership support to the team within that classroom. Some of the families in the birth-to-one space were the same as the ones Misty had in the preschool space, and we continued to reflect on these families and additional families Misty was building relationships with. Misty described severe staff shortages due to winter sickness (June-September) and limited casual staff to call in that was adding to workplace stressors. In September Misty took leave to manage her mental health due to both professional and personal stressors co-occurring. Misty sought support from the Employee Assistance Program (a counselling service that many workplaces sign up with to provide confidential, anonymous mental health support to their employees). Once Misty returned to work, I checked whether she wanted to continue as a research participant, mindful of her wellbeing, to which she responded that she did. I remained mindful of Misty's wellbeing throughout the rest of data collection, checking in with her regularly. Misty reflected back that discussion

through interviewing supported her work and she was learning new things about how her emotions were involved in her work with families.

In our final interview in late January 2024, Misty shared that she had received a formal diagnosis of depression in early 2024 and had since resigned from her workplace. Her final interview revealed deep reflections on her research engagement, emotional labour and work with families. She consented to me sharing her story unreservedly because “maybe it can help others working in ECEC not have these experiences.” Although the details here reveal some of the strains and challenges Misty faced, she spoke of her interactions with children and families from a strength-based perspective with deep professional understandings about engaging with at-risk families and children to provision high-quality education and care. Under different circumstances and in other periods of her career Misty had described this work as rewarding.

Appendix Z

How Emotional Labour, Critical Feminist, and Bioecological Systems Theories

Supported Code Development

How the Theory Helped Identify Codes	Examples of Codes	Example Data Extracts for Codes
Emotional Labour Theory		
To identify educator-participants' surface acting.	Surface Acting (D)	Misty: [choosing to mask feelings associated with or downplay the child's behaviour with parents to protect the child] ... <i>I guess my authenticity is a bit questioned because I'm thinking more about the child and what they have to deal with... I'd rather them [misbehave with me] and me have to deal with it, try to influence positive change in that child's life, because I can't [change] the parents... to not yell at their children or, you know... (Interview 3 in lieu of journalling)</i>
To identify educator-participants' deep acting.	Deep Acting (D)	Ally: <i>when you...need to work out ways to get the message through, [but] you're feeling...angry or frustrated...you need to take a step back so you can see clearly and be able to verbalise in a way that we can understand each other... So, taking a step back and then coming back and saying, "I just want to circle back to what we were talking about. I don't know if I was clear when I said da-da-da-da." I think that's still being authentic, but in a manageable way. (Interview 1)</i>
To identify educator-participants' genuine expressions.	Genuine Expressions (D)	Lisa: <i>I've had tears with families when it's...something emotional. ...For example, maybe they're going through a really hard time... I wouldn't be a blubbery mess, but I would show my true feelings that I was very touched or felt emotional about what was happening to them. (Interview 1)</i>
To identify educator-participants' wellbeing impacts	Positive Outcomes (D)	Jay: <i>I can really empathize with a lot of the families in this area and their situations. I think that helps...because there's a lot of compassion between myself and them, and sharing ideas, or talking about [support/ allied health] services. And then you see how that has a positive impact on the family and the child, and that makes you feel great. (Interview 1)</i>

How the Theory Helped Identify Codes	Examples of Codes	Example Data Extracts for Codes
To identify educator-participants' wellbeing impacts	Negative Outcomes (D)	<i>Misty: ...working with families from culturally diverse, lower socio-economic, at-risk backgrounds with mental health difficulties... is challenging [because] I don't know what I'm gonna get...what [reaction/outburst/trauma] today. It's exhausting... (Interview 3 in lieu of journalling)</i>
Critical Feminist Lens		
To identify educator-participant descriptions of emotional labour practices and experiences that reinforced maternalistic views (unskilled, mothering work to meet the needs of others at the expense of self)	Notions of carer ('mothering') (D) Exploitation (taken-for-granted) (D)	Notions of carer and Exploitation <i>Sal: ... I put my needs last. Or you know what is it that the parent needs or what does the educator and the child need? And my job is to coordinate things together and what my needs are, don't matter... Because we do put other people first all the time. And there's obviously that sort of deeper feeling of frustration or, I suppose, it is just frustration that a parent is unable to see what you're trying to do to support them... (Interview 1)</i>
To identify educator-participant descriptions of emotional labour practices and experiences that debunked maternalistic views (skilled, purposeful work with potential professional and wellbeing affordances).	Intentionality (I) Benefits own practice (I)	Intentionality and Benefits own practice <i>Sal: I was able to use this opportunity to plant some seeds about what might be happening for the child, wondering whether the impassivity is a 2-year-old thing or something developmental. From my perspective, this is a great way to start families thinking about what might be happening in their child's development and where I can help to support them and the educators. It was fulfilling to finish the conversation with a clear plan moving forward. (Journal, July 2023)</i>
Bioecological Model		
To identify enablers for educators' emotional labour in their work with families pertaining to individual, family / partnership, service, sector and socio-political levels.	Preparedness (Individual level) (D) Shared focus on the child (Partnership enablers) (I)	Preparedness and Shared focus on the child <i>Sal: ...requires respectfully probing into their private life because what is happening for the child is completely based around what is happening with the family and that information supports how I prepare for practice, suggestions I need to make to the family, the support they might need. (Interview 5)</i>

How the Theory Helped Identify Codes	Examples of Codes	Example Data Extracts for Codes
To identify barriers to educators' emotional labour in their work with families pertaining to individuals, families, services, sector and socio-political levels	<p>Role-related stressors (Individual level) (D)</p> <p>Perceived unreasonable demands (Family level) (I)</p>	<p>Role-related stressors</p> <p>Ana: <i>Why am I feeling so stressed out in the end of the day? Why is the room so chaotic in the end of the day. And how to fix that. So I was trying not to talk to parents at pick up time as well. So, I was sort of avoiding the parents. (Interview 2)</i></p> <p>Perceived unreasonable demands</p> <p>Ally: ... <i>Which was what we were trying to address with her in terms of, it is a one to four ratio. It's not the same as you with your child in a play group, because you're right there with them... Or at home... And we can't be next to your child all the time. Which is what I think she expected or wanted. Even just trying to explain, an educator could be in a group of one to four and we gather children together to get their clothes on and the educator might turn to get a jacket for another child and then this child's wandered off or, pushed someone or, put their hands on them ...this happens. (Interview 2 in lieu of journalling)</i></p>
To identify the <i>outcomes</i> of educator-participants' emotional labour for individual educators, families, children, services and wider sector and socio-political levels.	Benefits relationships & partnerships	<p>Jay: ... <i>We have looked out for the parents, supporting them to access support, understand the transition to school, hugged them on the bad days or spent extra time talking with them. Then we see that positive impact on the family and the child... (Journal, June 2023)</i></p> <p>And ...<i>so...myself and my team give a lot to our families... like, parents say to us: "Thank you so much. Thanks for identifying that in our son...we took him to therapy, and now he's doing so well... thanks for listening to me... you saw me at my worst, thanks for listening" (Interview 2)</i></p>

Note. *Codes were deductively (D) and inductively (I) added to the coding framework.

Appendix AA

Sample of Initial Codes that were Later Refined

Initial Code	Definition	Refined Code	Identified data extract
Limited training for emotional labour with families/ relationships with families	Descriptions of the limited pre-service training or ongoing development in relation to working with families. Specifically, about <i>how</i> to establish and sustain relationships and <i>how</i> to use emotional labour in such work.	<p>Split Code & Definition</p> <p>(i) Limited training for working with families: Participants' perceptions that their pre-service training and preparation for working with families in ECEC is limited.</p> <p>(ii) Limited professional development for working with families: Participants perceptions that ongoing professional development for working in partnership with families in ECEC is limited.</p> <p>Reason To capture the distinction between the two.</p>	<p>(i) Limited training: <i>It's definitely not something anyone studies when they're doing either their degree or their diploma. (Jay - Interview 3)</i></p> <p>(ii) Limited professional development: <i>There is not a rule of how you perform right. There is not a rule of how you create relationships and how you continue working on those relationships. There is...what you're expected to do, but there is no... support, development "This is how you do it." (Marisse - Interview 1)</i></p>
Intention	The reason why (intention behind) emotional labour is exercised.	<p>Adapted Code Intentionality</p> <p>Adapted Definition Emotional labour strategies are exercised with intention and thought to achieve a purpose or goal.</p> <p>Reason To capture the full complexity for the intention, such as the beliefs, desires, or thoughts within the intention, as seen in the excerpt.</p>	<p><i>I felt at ease that Mum was able to share her feelings about her child...</i></p> <p><i>I was able to use this opportunity to plant some seeds about what might be happening for the child... From my perspective, this is a great way to start families thinking about what might be happening in their child's development and where I can help to support them and the educators. (Sal - Journal, July 2023)</i></p>
Professional Judgement	The strategic, thought-out application of emotional labour strategies (deep acting, surface acting, genuine expressions) that draws on professional knowledge and experience and is perceived to have	Unchanged	<p><i>I think it would be very easy to avoid him[dad]. And therefore... I feel like he would feel more suspicious of what's going on ...we keep trust, keep talking to him and bringing him in and understanding his perspective, then the more relaxed he will be about what we're doing and that, I suppose, also supports the team looking after the child (Sal - Interview 3)</i></p>

Initial Code	Definition	Refined Code	Identified data extract
	professional benefits		
Contextual Influences	The contextual setting and circumstances that influence emotional labour.	<p>Split Code Service – with subcodes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workplace stressors - Time of day - Service policy and procedures (expectations) - Service structure - Workplace conflict - Time of Year - Service-based events or incidents <p>Definition Examples Workplace stressors: staff shortages, juggling documentary, policy, pedagogical requirements, limited time and support for planning and interacting with families.</p> <p>Service structure: hierarchical structure, leadership style, size of team, number of children, number of classrooms, demographic composition.</p> <p>Reason Initial Code was too broad. Split code captured specific and nuanced contextual influences on emotional labour.</p>	<p>Workplace Stressors: <i>... after drop-offs you feel tired because it's twenty things to remember about twenty different babies. And to each parent you gave all your empathy, attention, like, 'Yes I'm listening; yes, this is important' ...each day to build and keep that relationship ...while setting-up environments, doing morning tea, calming upset Tommy here (Ana - Interview 2)</i></p> <p>Service Structure: <i>I work in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait...based service that has a high intake of trauma or at risk children so to work with those children, you have to be really aware of what you're putting out and... your voice or your tone, or those things, you have to be really mindful of because, otherwise it might trigger another child or a child in your care... that will trigger them to then do a behaviour or something else (Misty - Interview 1)</i></p>

Appendix BB

Sample of Code Clustering for Theme Development

Clustering codes	Emerging Ideas	Data Extracts	Theme	Over-arching Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sense of professionalism. •Individual characteristics. •Participant-family relationship. •Family expectations. •Service level influencing factors. 	Emotional labour is... for self i.e., who educator was as a professional and, for genuine relationships; for maintaining professional boundaries	<p><i>“it comes from a place in myself, and how I value myself as a professional”</i> (Ana - Interview 1)</p> <p><i>“when I need you to know that ... we're following policies and procedures.”</i> (Jay - Interview 1)</p>	Emotional labour is an enactment of professional identity.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Shared focus on the child. •Focus on the child. •Benefits child. 	Emotional labour is... for the child; for positive child outcomes; for shared focus on the child.	<p><i>“it's in the best interest of the child”</i> (Misty - Interview 2 in-lieu of journalling, July 2023)</p> <p><i>“it's not productive to give up on families, because that's not respecting the child.”</i> (Sal - Final Interview 5)</p>	Emotional labour is an enactment of professional commitment to young children	Emotional labour is an intentional enactment of internal professionalism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Relatability. •Shared Perspectives. •Family expectations. •Participant-family relationship. •Time of day (drop-off/ pick-up). •Benefits partnership. 	Emotional labour is for ...developing partnerships ...maintaining partnerships ...partnerships that support the child	<p><i>“a type of trust building”</i> (Ally - Interview 4 in lieu of journalling, September 2023)</p> <p><i>“...on the phone mum, who is also an educator, asked me not to give her child Panadol. When she arrived I told her the temp was 39 still... I shared that my doctor once told me that with under 2's sometimes you should wait a bit after it reaches 39 before medicating because the temp might drop by itself. Mum agreed and said she does the same and always waits before medicating. She joked about 'that time of year' and I laughed saying, 'in my house someone is always sick...’”</i> (Ana - Journal, May 2023)</p>	Emotional labour as a professional investment in partnerships.	

Clustering codes	Emerging Ideas	Data Extracts	Theme	Over-arching Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Preparedness. •Reflective. •Barriers to partnerships i.e. unreasonable family demands. •Family influencers i.e. expectations •Workplace stressors. 	<p>Emotional labour is skilled and requires...</p> <p>Questioning.</p> <p>Thinking / reflection.</p> <p>Planning / preparing for expected and unexpected.</p> <p>Nuanced exercising.</p>	<p><i>"...to think ...objectively. 'What's just happened?' To work emotionally with families, I had prepared beforehand..."</i> (Ally - Final Interview)</p> <p><i>"...and thinking about ...what is happening for the child is completely based around what is happening with the family."</i> (Sal - Interview 2)</p>	Reflective Planning	Emotional labour is multi-layered, skilled work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Role Type. •Professional Judgement. •Service level influencing factors i.e. policies, procedures. •Timing. •Multi-strategy •Family level partnership barriers. •Family influencers. •Regulatory Requirements. 	<p>Emotional labour is intentional and purposeful and requires...</p> <p>Autonomy.</p> <p>Flexibility.</p> <p>Decision-making for how to achieve positive outcomes / meet regulations / safeguard wellbeing.</p> <p>Intentional enactments.</p> <p>Interchangeable exercising of all strategies.</p>	<p><i>"...decide whether or not it's worth telling them [parent] about their child's behaviour"</i> (Misty - Interview 3 in lieu of Journalling, August 2023)</p> <p><i>"...it's deciding whether this benefits the family, the child, my work with them."</i> (Marrisse - Journal, April 2023)</p>	Professional Judgement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Emotional labour is inherent. •Participation Impact. •Reflective. •Identifies as professional. •Limited training. •Limited professional development. 	<p>Awareness of emotional labour</p> <p>...enables emotional labour</p> <p>...supports wellbeing</p> <p>...makes emotional labour more explicit</p> <p>...reveals significance of time and space to decompress, reflect on, prepare for and safeguard against negative impacts.</p>	<p><i>"having awareness that, in a moment, I quickly assess what type of person this is; how I deliver a message; what my tone, facial expression, body language is"</i> (Jay - Final Interview 5)</p> <p><i>"[I was] not appreciating how much of my role is emotional labour. Now I'm much more aware of it."</i> (Misty - Final Interview 5)</p>		Illuminating emotional labour empowers educators