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1

Emotion work as human connection: gendered emotion codes in teaching primary children with emotional and behavioural difficulties

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Introduction

Teaching children has long been associated with a particular gendered emotion code whereby symbolic representations of the ‘good teacher’ rely upon feminised codes of care involving empathy and nurturing – characteristics assumed to be inherent in the dominantly female teaching workforce. This image is magnified in primary school teaching (children aged 4–11) where teachers spend long periods of time with their pupils and the private space of the classroom emulates the private space of the domestic sphere. The ‘culture of caring’ (Nias, 1999) that permeates primary school teaching cultivates and promotes the expression of the ‘natural woman’. As such, teachers of young children are generally celebrated as dedicated vocationalists caring for the very young as they find their way through the education system, with the emphasis being far less on the acquisition of technical skill than on how to be effective social citizens. As Steedman (1985) notes with some irony, primary school teaching is a ‘pedagogical model of mothering’.

In line with other feminine professions, attached to teaching is a strong and enduring feminine emotion code that involves norms, values and assumptions based on what the feminine or masculine attributes and qualities are. Thus the emotion code of teaching draws on the symbolic and material resource of ‘woman’, creating the powerful ideological image of the teacher as a nurturing, maternal figure. The emotion work involved in successful

teaching practice is assumed to be natural and fundamental to what it is to be a woman, hence not recognised as a skill or duly rewarded as such ensuring that teaching remains a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969; Tancred, 1995; Bolton, 2004, 2005a,b). Recently, however, a combination of apparently contradictory forces – an emphasis on accountability and control of the teaching profession and teaching’s own professionalisation project – has meant that the emotion work of teachers now draws on an apparently masculinised emotion code which is couched in terms of procedural efficiency (Woods *et al.*, 1997). Commitment to care of a pupil remains central to conceptions of good teaching but it is no longer what many have identified for decades as the emotion work of teachers – nurturance, warmth and love (Nias, 1989, 1999; Acker, 1995). According to the performativity agenda this would be seen as too narrow and exclusive a categorisation of emotion work and, of course, due to its association with feminine knowledge and the private domain does not meet the professionalisation criteria or match the language of ‘quality’ teaching. Contemporary teachers, via the ‘competent teacher’ or the ‘standards teacher’, should conform to an instrumental, objective and procedurally focused account of teaching. Such an emphasis celebrates and sustains a masculine vision of what it is to be a professional (Davies, 1996). Thus the emotional elements of a teacher’s work is being subject to the public–private divide – with the public, in association with masculine emotion codes, being accepted as ordered, competent and effective and the private, in association with feminine emotion codes, being marginalised as chaotic, disordered and inefficient. As a result, there is far more invested in processes and abstract procedures than intimate relationships.

The process of the professionalisation project and the enactment of the gendered emotion codes of teaching are exemplified by a particular group of teachers – those who teach primary aged children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). In the same way as every other group of teachers in whichever sector, these teachers have been subject to the powerful discourse of ‘quality’ and various measures of performativity (Jeffrey, 2002). However, unlike other arenas of primary education, this group of teachers and support staff rely almost entirely on building strong foundations of ‘connectedness’ with children that is not peripheral to their work but the central tenet in their success with children who have a history of exclusion and failure in the education system. It is through the human connectedness of their work that much of the success and joy from teaching is derived. Without this it would be a constant battle to control and discipline without the mediating and transformative effects of care and devotion.

The concept of ‘gendered emotion codes’ highlights that teaching cannot be split into a ‘his and hers’ of symbolic resources; it is not either feminine care and commitment or masculine control and performance but a complex human dynamic involving both. In other words, the gendered emotion codes of teaching offer resources for care and control for men and women. Nevertheless, what the recent emphasis on ‘professionalisation’ and performativity displays is that feminine and masculine gender codes do not carry the same power and influence or attract the same value judgements. Drawing on qualitative data collected from teachers and support staff who teach children with EBD, this chapter reviews the concept of ‘gendered emotion codes’ and the performativity agenda in education and goes on to suggest that the ‘masculine cultural project’ of professionalisation is particularly damaging for certain sectors of education precisely because of the way it values the quantification of procedural efficiency in teaching without recognising the essential contribution of its qualitative elements. Talking with and observing staff in a pupil referral unit (PRU) highlights that the emotion work invested in relationships with children creates and sustains human connection that is of crucial importance for all involved.

The gendered emotion codes of teaching’s professionalisation project

In contemporary notions of teacher professionalism the ‘rational man’ is clearly represented. The accepted construct of what it is to be a professional has been forged in historical processes that rely on cultural conceptions of masculinity – individualistic, competitive and predictable; and deny qualities culturally assigned to femininity – expressive, involved and informal. In a desperate attempt to discard the status of the feminine, caring or semi-professional, all regarded as a mutant form of professionalism, teaching endorses the State’s recent emphasis on performativity and has embarked on a masculine cultural project with an exaggerated emphasis on rationality, objectivity and control. As Woods and Jeffrey (2002: p. 105) highlight,

From a notion of the ‘good teacher’ based on personal qualities, the emphasis is now on teacher competencies, such as subject expertise, coordination, collaboration, management and supervision.

There is a central paradox in this professionalisation process. The accepted masculine emotion codes that make up the ‘competent’ and ‘professional’ teacher contradict the profession’s fundamental reliance on feminine emotion

codes such as nurturing, caring and so on. The masculinised professional project resolves this paradox by attempting to shape the emotion work of teaching into a masculine form – the integrated caring and curriculum model. But in doing so, the emotion work involved in caring labour – mostly (but not exclusively) performed by women – is marginalised and the work that they do to support children is devalued, ignored and unsupported. As Dillabough (1999: p. 379) points out,

Since knowledge about teaching appears to be tied to very particular gender codes and categories, the reproduction of masculine ideals through the concept of ‘teacher professionalism’ leads to the devaluation of those gender codes which are typically associated with the ‘feminine’.

The devaluation of teachers’ emotion work performed according to feminine emotion codes of practice is reflected in the way that the emotion work that cannot be shaped into the rational form is delegated to ‘non-professionals’ such as the growing army of learning support assistants (LSAs).¹ At one and the same time, teaching is undergoing a process of professionalisation and de-professionalisation as its practices are split into the masculine/public (professional work) and the feminine/private (support work). In effect teaching, broadly defined as ‘women’s work’, is classified and controlled by the ‘masculine cultural project’ (Davies, 1996).

The additional irony of this process is that without the attachment to the rational, objective, goal-centred masculine model of professionalism, teaching will remain a semi-profession and women teachers will be forever consigned to the role of surrogate mother rather than professional educator. And yet as this process grows in momentum and authority, there is a very real danger and growing evidence to suggest that this is already the case (Vogt, 2002; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002), and that the sense of vocationalism attached to teaching is being set to one side as the new masculine emotion codes squeeze out opportunities for teachers to create and sustain the emotional practices of teaching that represent, for many teachers, the core of their identities as caring professionals (Hargreaves, 1998). In what Woods and Jeffrey (2002: pp. 93–4) describe as an ‘assault on child-centred philosophy’ and a ‘diminution of elementary trust’ we can see that

This attack strikes at the heart of teachers’ humanism. The marketization and managerialization of schooling, the subject orientation of the new prescribed National Curriculum, and new forms of assessment and inspection inform the new order. These developments are accompanied by government and inspectorial pressure on teachers to abandon child-centredness and adopt a more traditional approach to their classroom teaching.

As a means of understanding the ongoing, and changing, process of teacher professionalisation the notion of gendered emotion codes is a potentially effective device (Davies, 1996; Dillabough, 1999). Its strength as a conceptual device is its ability to display the dominance of masculine forms of emotional expression and practice and the resultant devaluation of the emotion codes that are typically associated with the feminine. Using this device it can be seen how the recently introduced masculine emotion code emphasises caring as a rational activity integrated with curriculum design and a clear means–end relationship which devalues caring as an interpersonal relationship and denies its importance in the management of the classroom. In doing so, it further marginalises the emotion work done by teachers, focusing as it does on only those aspects of teaching that create an immediate and tangible outcome.

As a conceptual device, however, gendered emotion codes has a fundamental weakness in that it tends to invite the division of masculine and feminine emotion work into separate symbolic universes; abstract entities and symbols that represent an endless reproduction of the same but do not reflect the daily lived reality of people’s lives (Butler, 1990, 1993; Gherardi, 1994; Weedon, 1997). This weakness can be overcome if emotion work according to various feeling rules and inherent gendered codes is acknowledged as an active and continuing (social) process (Bolton, 2005b). Though individuals perform emotion work and draw on symbolic representations of femininity and masculinity (gendered emotion codes), it is a situated ‘doing’ accomplished through the lived experiences of women and men within interactional and institutional arenas (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Davies, 1996; New, 1998; Bolton, 2005b). This is clearly seen in the way the professionalisation project of teaching is built on a combination of gendered emotion codes – caring and control, discipline and devotion, rationality and relationality. However, it is necessary to note that masculine and feminine emotion codes do not speak with the same authority. The masculine emotion codes of control, discipline and rationality, which results in a goal-oriented, systematic approach to teaching, are emphasised and brought to the fore of contemporary teaching practice rather than the feminine emotion code of caring motivated by the desire and need to connect to another human being.

Methodology and background

Data presented in this paper is drawn from a qualitative study situated in a PRU for primary aged children. Over a period of two years (April 2003–

March 2005) visits were made to the PRU, including an invitation to join the staff team-building day in a local seaside resort. During this period the PRU underwent an OFSTED inspection, was declared as requiring a status of 'special measures', inspected on three separate occasions over a period of 12 months and eventually declared 'out of special measures'.² Time at the school was spent observing individual teachers in class, sitting in assemblies observing the whole school together, shadowing the head teacher and joining staff in the staff room at break and lunch times and also for staff meetings after school. Data collected is entirely based on lengthy periods of observation in various settings and casual conversations with staff, which could hardly be described as 'interviews' as they were spontaneous, unstructured and dependent upon context. In this way the pace and movement of life at the PRU is effectively captured with observances of daily life depicted as they happened and staff offering commentary on incidents as they occurred or reflecting on incidents with colleagues in the staff room shortly afterwards.

This, of course, also means that the researcher cannot dissolve into the background and be a mere observer, neither can they claim bias-free interpretation of the data. There was a great deal of interest in the research, and staff were curious as to why anyone might be interested in their working lives. A comment that reflected much of the reaction to the research was 'Are you taking notes? I can't believe you're interested in what we do here'. Staff were also very conscious of the researcher's presence and in their enthusiasm for and interest in the research would offer involvement in the day-to-day life of the PRU. They were solicitous and continually expressed concern about the 'culture shock' of experiencing life in the PRU and any detrimental effects it may cause to the researcher. As one LSA explained, 'Are you ok? It's a bit strange when you first come in here. Takes a bit of getting used to and it can come as a bit of a shock.' Another cheerfully remarked that 'It's a mad house in here. The first day will be the worst.' Children were also curious and would ask who the 'stranger' was, though teachers overcame any sense of an outsider in class by continually offering involvement in the class proceedings and asking questions of the researcher; 'hasn't *** been a good boy, miss?' and 'what do you think of this wonderful work *** has done?'³ Despite the curiosity and concern about the research, life at the PRU continued in the usual way as staff and pupils accepted the presence of the researcher as part of their rhythm of life.

The PRU is an unknown entity to many people as it is neither a school nor a special school. It is more of a 'holding pen' for children who have been excluded or referred from mainstream education due to behavioural problems. Some of the children attend full-time, some attend mainstream

school and split their time with the PRU 50/50 and some come part-time and go home for the rest of the day. The PRU is small – 32 children, 6 teachers (including head and deputy head teachers) and 15 LSAs. The majority of the staff are female with 2 teachers being male and 2 LSAs. Unusually in the gendered division of teaching, all senior staff are female. On average one teacher will take a class of 5–6 children. As in the standard primary school setting, teachers stay with the same group of children for the whole school year covering the entire national curriculum. Each teacher has the support of LSAs – some of whom are assigned to offer one-to-one assistance with particular children.

A major part of a teacher's job at the PRU is the implementation of a behaviour improvement programme (BIP). Various tactics are employed to encourage good behaviour at the PRU – walls are covered in charts and reward schemes are carefully displayed, and assemblies deliberately celebrate each child's success. What may appear trivial in a mainstream school can be a major achievement at the PRU. It is noticeable how a child is continually praised for something that would go unnoticed and be taken for granted in other settings – such as maintaining attention for more than a few minutes. The objective of the PRU is to reintegrate children into mainstream school. However, in many cases this proves to be impossible and children may remain at the PRU for several years before eventually finding a placement at a special school.

The children who attend the PRU display numerous EBD that manifest themselves in an array of erratic behaviours. The majority of the children have very real communication and learning difficulties and are unable to maintain attention for any length of time. Many have suffered emotional trauma in their short lives. The children become easily frustrated and agitated. It is an everyday occurrence in the school for a teacher to be physically attacked by a child – kicking, biting and throwing things are the most popular strategies of attack employed by restless children. When a child becomes highly agitated and physically violent a cry of 'kick off' can be heard and staff will run to the aid of a particular teacher. In addition, verbal abuse is a moment-by-moment occurrence. Each child has a range of bad language that some teachers comment they had never heard before starting work at the PRU. It is just as likely that a teacher will be called 'f*** bitch' than the traditional address to a teacher of 'miss'. Each day passes in a constant buzz of frantic activity and noise with frequent outbursts of shouting and aggressive activity followed by periods of calm. At the end of the school day a senior teacher can be heard bellowing 'get these children on that bus NOW' and the PRU appears to breathe a collective sigh of relief when the children have left the building.

The gendered emotion codes of teaching

Staff in the PRU exemplify what it is to 'do' gender. As they draw on the feminine emotion code of caring and nurturance, the staff at the PRU are the first to proclaim that they use special 'women's knowledge' in their daily activities:

*These kids need love but to most people they're not very lovable. But we love 'em, all of 'em, warts and all. There's only a very special type of person can do that. I think it's because we're mostly women and we know how to put up with a load of s*** and still offer love.*

It is interesting to note, however, that whilst drawing on the feminine code of caring associated with teaching the women who talked about their role as 'carers' of the children were also very clear how this linked with their own positions in the world – as mothers and as emotion workers outside of the workplace:

I think I'm good at what I do. But then I'm a Mother and have been through some tough times with my own kids.

Nevertheless, 'caring' for the children does not entirely depend on women's experiences of emotion work in the private realm. Existing studies claim that emotion work in teaching does not rely on the teacher's gender and that men and women care about children in the same ways (Hargreaves, 2002; Vogt, 2002). This may be the case but the concept of teaching and emotion work does rely on feminised emotion codes of care and it may well be that men who teach young children do so precisely because they identify with the emotion code associated with teaching (Nias, 1989). The two male teaching staff who work at the PRU are very aware of this and often talk of their commitment to the children and how teaching was one of the few occupations where they felt they could fulfil their wish to 'contribute something' and to 'feel fulfilled' in their work. However, their status as men in a women's world does mark them as 'different' and some women staff question the role of men in teaching with comments such 'why would a man want to do this job?' or 'I'm not sure this is the job for a man' or most commonly with particular reference to work in the PRU 'we only need men here for the physical aspects of the job – some of these children get too big for us to restrain'. As West and Zimmerman (1987) point out in their analysis of 'doing gender', to do gender is to engage in behaviour at the risk of gender assessment. Whilst drawing on a multitude of often conflicting gendered emotion codes the staff at the PRU are continually engaged in

the process of gender assessment; judging and categorising behaviours and approaches according to gendered criteria. As one male teacher commented following a light-hearted exchange concerning discipline in the classroom:

You hate me because I'm a man. But I'm more of a woman than you – you're a hard bitch.

The comments of the male teacher clearly highlights what it is to 'do gender' and refutes the essentialising tendencies of attributing the emotion work of nurturing and caring to women only (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). The notion of gendered emotion codes allows that men and women share the same space and draw on the same symbolic resources, though some may be more familiar and enacted differently (Segal, 1987).

This example also serves to highlight that the notion of 'gendered emotion codes' to neatly categorise life into male and female domains of emotion work would be to render it a crude and inaccurate device. The emotion code of a feminised profession such as teaching suggests that teachers draw on the symbolic resource of 'woman' and that caring and nurturing is at the heart of their everyday practice (Noddings, 1984; Nias, 1989, 1999). The teachers speaking above appear to endorse that. Nonetheless, teachers at the PRU draw on other symbolic resources too and they are gentle and aggressive, emotional and rational, kind and controlling. Their world is full of contradictions as they deal with difficult situations and demanding, unpredictable children. Staff express these contradictions very clearly when they articulate mixed feelings about the children they teach. An exasperated teacher exclaims. 'I'm going to slit x's throat with a blunt knife today – he's driving me mad . . . , (sigh) but he's so gorgeous'. Another expresses her sincere wish that a particular child will not attend the PRU that day and then retracts her statement by declaring: 'I hate the little b*****, but if he doesn't come in I'll be worried sick what's happening to him'. Observing teachers also highlights how care and control go hand in hand in a setting such as the PRU – a small child bites a teacher and the teacher wraps her arms around him, sits him on her knee and calmly continues to teach the class whilst he struggles to break free. She later explains,

You've got to be strong for them. I don't mean physically, I mean to show them the boundaries. But I like to show them who is boss whilst letting them know I'm there for them.

The teachers and LSAs in this study highlight how there are multiple and often conflicting emotion codes that impact upon the interpretation and enactment of teaching practice at the PRU. The staff are 'caring' but

if this is used to declare a special 'women's knowledge' then it carries the danger of also emphasising the associated weaknesses and misses the very real strengths of the work done at the PRU (Segal, 1987; Foster, 1999). In addition it discounts existing practice as having any contribution to make to the exaggerated masculine emotion code of professionalisation.

The masculinisation of a feminine profession

The masculine emotion code of professionalism emphasises efficiency and performativity, management systems and audit accountability. In education this means ensuring the production of tangible 'results' in the form of deliverance of the full curriculum, achievement in national tests of ability and endorsement by the national inspection service. All these processes are informed and supported by the discourse of quality and the perceived need to raise standards in education. For an educational establishment such as the PRU, however, it is difficult to apply 'standards' to a non-standard educational experience. The pupils are at very different levels of academic attainment and it is sometimes difficult to give academic work the priority it may receive in other schools. As a frustrated teacher notes,

I don't care about the curriculum – we have to get through the day. That's a major achievement and a huge educational experience for these children if you want to look at it that way.

The reason children attend the PRU is that they are unable to survive in a mainstream setting due to behavioural difficulties. One LSA referred to the children as 'the odd squad' and this is a sentiment reflected in many statements made by staff:

I suppose we're a dumping ground for children that no one else wants or can handle. These children don't make a school look good.

The inability of the children to make the 'school look good' via tests and measures of their academic performance is of very real concern when the PRU is to be 'inspected'. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the process staff, though nervous, were optimistic that there would be positive outcomes. The main one being the gaining of recognition for the special work they do:

I think it's good that we're being OFSTEDed. They may actually see what goes on and see that it's not us failing the children.

However, this optimism was short-lived as it became apparent that the technical–rational ideology of performativity is incapable of recognising the emotion work the staff do with the children who attend the PRU. The male-centred model celebrates formal attachment and severs intimate connections with others. It proposes what has been described as a ‘technicist professional’ (Hatcher, 1994), a model that teachers at the PRU find difficult to identify with:

I’ve taught at pleasant, middle-class schools where introducing exciting lessons and interesting activities was the route to good classroom management. Caring in that setting would be all about supporting children’s’ work and encouragement with the odd playground incident thrown in. Here – it is a completely different world. Yes, we make lessons exciting and it’s important to capture the interest of these children. But how do you do that with children who have disengaged from life? These children often come from harsh, unkind worlds and we want them to get excited about literacy? We have to nurture them, circle them with care, create strong boundaries and entice them into our world. Yes, good planning is essential but there is an awful lot of groundwork to be done before that is going to matter to these children.

In a previous study of primary school teaching, Nias (1999) reports a sense of grief and loss when rationalised systems crowd out caring aspects of teachers’ work. Whilst complying with the new masculine emotion codes of the professionalisation project, the teachers at the PRU often feel bewildered and under attack with the negative aspects of work at the PRU being highlighted and the positive being sidelined:

We have such a mixed bag of children with a wide variety of needs. We’re expected to meet these needs and produce academic results – we quite simply can’t. Then it becomes a case that it’s us letting the kids down.

This emphasises the contradictory demands placed upon teachers. Teachers are being held accountable for children’s successes (and failures). Current reforms focus on academic rigour as a means of producing the perfect future citizen (Rogers and Webb, 2002), to the apparent exclusion of recognising the importance of complex social relationships and the emotion work involved, in and out of the classroom. These contradictions are especially highlighted in a setting such as the PRU where the children arrive with complex ‘baggage’ and as the teachers speaking here note, humanistic concerns and simply ‘getting through’ the day often become a priority.

Nevertheless, the teachers are also concerned that the children do advance academically. Every success is celebrated but there is no sense of objectives

achieved as in the tick box requirements of new performance measurement systems. Teaching and learning is seen as a continuous process:

It's important that these children leave here fully armed. That means being able to feel confident in their abilities both as a fully functioning human being but also knowing in themselves that they can learn and enjoy it and gain from it. When we see that a child has settled enough to really get something from the lessons it's a real talking point in the staffroom. It's important that in making more of a push academically we don't lose the ground we've made in simply making sure the child can function in the classroom at all. And, of course, children are applauded and awarded certificates for effort in addition to achievements in assembly. But it's not an overnight success, we have to hope that each child starts to believe in themselves a little bit and this then has an accumulative effect.

Teachers at the PRU display a strong sense of professional identity. They do not simply 'care too much' to the exclusion of all other concerns, they make careful professional judgements about each individual child (Acker, 1995) and attempt to create and maintain academic standards under very difficult circumstances. Their professional practice, however, relies far too heavily on a nurturing model for it to be recognised and valued by the masculine emotion codes of teaching's own professionalisation project or the State's results orientation. Despite the push towards a 'new' professionalism (Troman, 1996), teachers at the PRU maintain a very distinctive approach to their work and managing human connection remains at the heart of what they consider to be good teaching practice.

Emotion work as human connection

During time spent at the PRU, many instances of caring behaviours and intimate moments between staff and pupils were observed; small everyday occurrences of concern, compassion and consideration – humanity expressed and shared. There were, however, occasions when the ability to connect to a child appeared to be an extraordinary achievement. Teachers are under constant attack from the children – bad language and physical attack are a part of the everyday interaction of pupils with teachers. It is common for teachers to reveal their frustration and anger with each other in the staff room but rarely does it appear in their interactions with children. On the contrary, they meet verbal and physical abuse from children with calm responses and it is at these moments of skilfully enacted emotion work that truly human connection occurs. Of all the incidents observed, two particularly stand out

as providing examples of the forging of human connection: the ‘Christmas Concert’ and the ‘Rainbow Room’.

The Christmas Concert

Rehearsals for the Christmas Concert took place in the school hall and involved all staff and pupils. This is a major event in the PRU’s calendar and staff approached the task with enthusiasm and, it appeared, some joy. All the children were carefully dressed; as shepherds and sheep, ‘wise men’, and several ‘Marys’ and ‘Josephs’. There is also the choir who were meticulously lined up and enthusiastically conducted by the deputy head teacher. This enthusiasm never waned whilst the rehearsals continued in apparent chaos with children in the choir inserting ‘we wishing you a f***ing Christmas’ into the chorus and headbutting each other, one child being physically carried off to the ‘quiet room’, the ‘baby’ (doll) from the Nativity scene being thrown across the room and a shepherd rocking back and forth so forcefully that it brought the scene onto his and a teacher’s head. Of particular note were the actions of several LSAs, sitting in the front row of the audience. Whilst pandemonium broke out all around they continually directed remarks at one particular child; whispering to a boy in the front row of the choir ‘well done Andrew’, ‘Oooh, you are a good boy, Andrew’; ‘You’re fantastic, Andrew’. When later asked why this was the case when ‘Andrew’ was apparently well behaved throughout, the exhausted staff laughed and replied: ‘the little bastard has never sat still for that long before, he’s usually running round like a demented animal’. And in further response to a gasp of amazement when a teacher declared what a success the rehearsal had been, she stated: ‘aagh but the children feel special and didn’t they sing beautifully!’

The Rainbow Room

One of the days at the PRU was spent in the ‘Rainbow Room’. A euphemistic reference to the possibility of improvement after a ‘storm’, as children who are excluded from other classrooms in the PRU due to poor behaviour are sent to the Rainbow Room for intensive one-to-one attention. The deputy head teaches in the Rainbow Room and each child is attached to an LSA. Whilst there, children are asked to complete particular learning activities with the aid of one-to-one support and their progress and behaviour are closely monitored and recorded. A child of nine years old, Damien, was asked to perform handwriting exercises. He steadfastly refused despite constant encouragement and reminders that his ‘playtime’ would be lost if he did not comply. Eventually, Damien’s frustration got the better of him and he

stood up throwing books, pencils and, eventually, the portable whiteboard. The whiteboard struck the deputy head teacher on the shoulder. Staff sprung into action and restrained Damien and he was placed in the 'quiet' room. Once calm, Damien returned to the Rainbow Room and his handwriting exercise was once again placed before him. Finally, Damien completed the task and the deputy head teacher displayed sheer delight with his achievements; approaching him, cupping his face in her hands and declaring, 'that's my boy – well done!' showing no acknowledgement of previous events or the remaining pain in her shoulder.

Neither of these incidents can be measured in terms of performativity, though there are clearly excessive amounts of emotion work being performed – containment of anger, expression of joy, a cheery determination to succeed despite disappointment and despair. The overall impact on the work of the staff at the PRU, and by association the life and futures of the children, is profound. Though the emotion work performed represents caring behaviours, it also signifies a strong and steady commitment to opening up new possibilities for children who attend the PRU. Staff draw on a combination of gendered emotion codes and yet remain intimately linked with the symbolic representation of the matriarchal figure – an image forever assigned to the predominantly female workforce and a thorn in the side of teaching's professionalisation project.

Conclusion

The notion of gendered emotion codes helps to highlight that teaching has long associations with women's work and despite various professionalisation projects continues to do so. The push towards a masculinised model of professionalism ensures that the emotion work of teaching involving the caring and supportive elements remains 'women's work', which, as the growing army of LSAs and the disproportionate numbers of men in senior positions represent, is carried out by 'non-professionals' and is deemed to be unskilled work which receives little recognition and attracts little reward. The very real danger of such a professionalisation project is that teachers do indeed become 'technicians' whereby the emotion work will continue to be provided by the feminine semi-professional in a supporting role whilst the concept of the 'good teacher' will rely entirely on competencies such as coordination, control, management and technical expertise (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002).

However, the day-to-day lived reality of working life for teachers at the PRU draws attention to how the gendered emotion codes of teaching, caring, professionalisation and performativity are not fixed; they encompass much more than discourses of femininity or masculinity and draw on material realities of what it is to be a woman, or a man, and what it is to be structurally positioned according to gender. In other words, women are not just a symbolic resource of caring and nurturing but are assigned these roles in life, experiencing the physical and emotional realities of what it is to carry out a caring role. Hence, whilst the language around teachers' caring, mothering and natural qualities is compelling and contributes a great deal to the symbolic representation of gender in teaching (Cammack and Phillips, 2002), gendered emotion codes are not a static category but an enactment – a 'doing'. Therefore, though powerful influences on the structures of teachers' work, attempts to impose masculine emotion codes of practice can be dislodged, disrupted and redefined. Thus the teachers and support staff in this study draw upon and enact a complex web of ever-shifting gendered emotion codes that draw from the symbolic *and* the material. The teachers' and LSAs' comments throughout the research show how they draw on past experiences and representations of the feminine, for example: 'I'm a mother and I've been through some tough times with my own kids' and 'we're mostly women and we know how to put up with a load of s*** and still offer love'. They weave their way through the demands placed upon them by the masculine cultural project of professionalisation and implement management systems of control and external accountability complying with the need to represent efficiency and performativity in their practice. Yet at all times they firmly hold on to the central tenet of human connection and offer a relational bond to the children they are asked to educate that no performance management system or professionalisation project could ever hope to capture.

The teachers who feature in this study are neither masculinised professionals nor maternal figures – they are a complex mix of both. They care for their pupils but not unconditionally and uncritically as some commentators might suggest (Hargreaves, 1994). The teachers at the PRU would never suggest that caring is all that is needed to help the children they are asked to educate. Unlike the abstract notion of particular feminine/private/emotional modes of knowledge, gendered emotion codes are much more than discourses of femininity (Cammack and Phillips, 2002). Whilst the language around caring, mothering, natural and so on is powerful and contributes a great deal to the production and reproduction of gendered emotion codes, what informs teaching practice at the PRU is

neither biologically nor discursively determined but is shaped by social and structural relations and personal histories that involve not only experiences such as nurturing and caring, but also control and rational objectives. The gendered emotion codes of teaching represent an ever-shifting symbolic resource for these teachers and LSAs. As many of the staff at the PRU comment, they are 'strong' and 'determined' in their hopes and ambitions for the children but recognise that their aims can only be realised if founded on a bedrock of human connectedness.

Despite, or perhaps because of, strong influence from the masculinised professionalisation project the teachers in this study communicate, negotiate, reflect and successfully manage human connections with each other and with the children they teach. These women and men endorse their positions as professionals in the way that they successfully perform emotion work drawing on the gendered emotion codes of teaching and are able to reconcile two apparently contradictory impetuses: the desire to care for children and the desire to professionalise (Rogers and Webb, 2002). Rather than the emotion code of a feminised profession being excluded and devalued, the staff at the PRU harness its emancipatory powers to promote education through cooperation and community rather than individualism and performativity.

Notes

1. Learning Support Assistants are generally people from the local community. The majority are women. It is not an occupation recognised for its skill content, though some LSAs are working their way through the national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels, and is poorly rewarded with the average pay of the LSAs being barely above the minimum wage.
2. Fieldwork did not take place during periods of 'inspection'.
3. Though the children feature in this study in their relationships with the teachers and staff at the PRU, personal details about the children were never discussed or revealed and children were never directly involved in the research process.

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