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A politics of imperceptibilities, possibilities and early childhood practice
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Abstract
A growing body of research suggests that a range of ‘hidden’ or ‘less tangible’ aspects of early childhood practice play an important part in early childhood practice. Our purpose in this paper is to contribute to this existing research literature, by identifying some of the complex ways that less tangible aspects work. To do this, we focus on a data fragment describing ways that conceptualisations of secret are at work in one educator’s practice. To give readings of this data fragment, we use a strategy of ‘plugging in’ everyday and theoretical understandings of ‘the secret’, and, a popular culture text. We also use post structural understandings of ‘being’ and ‘language’, and additional illustrative data fragments to illuminate these complex aspects of practice at work. The paper concludes by considering some implications and cautions of the politics of possibility that our readings of imperceptibility and early childhood practice have opened.
Participant: ...it almost is like a secret language of its own.
Researcher: What is?
P: Being an early childhood educator, we’ve got all the – we all know that you – I don’t have to say to Mary Jane, “Go and stand over there because you need your back against the wall because you need to look at all the children.”... We automatically know that. We speak about pedagogy and speak about all these words that – these now little secret words. Or we bend down to look at the children so the children can look at us in our faces. It’s almost like this little secret movement we’ve got going on. (data fragment from an interview with an early childhood educator)

Is the secret in the content or in the form? And the answer is already apparent: neither. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 289)

Introduction
There is growing recognition of the complexity of early childhood practice in policy discourses in many national contexts, as well as in research concerned with educators’ practice. For example, in Australia’s national curriculum for prior to school early childhood settings — the Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] (DEEWR, 2009, p. 11) — complexity is evident in characterisations of educators’ professional judgements as requiring a weaving together of educators’ ‘professional knowledge and skills... awareness of how their beliefs and values impact on children’s learning, personal styles and past experiences’. Their ‘creativity, intuition and imagination’ are also required, in order to ‘improvise and adjust practice’ to learning contexts (p.11).

The complexities evident in these quotes from the EYLF also gesture to what have been described as ‘less tangible’ (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2005) aspects of practice. We see these as relational, affective, sometimes ‘hidden’ (Goodfellow, 2003) aspects of practice that are difficult to observe and measure, yet that also seem to play an important role in how early childhood practice works (see also, Cumming, Sumision and Wong, 2014). Examples from existing research concerned with educators’ practice include: practical wisdom - ‘the hidden dimensions of professional practice... an educator’s capacity to make sound judgement in the use of personal/professional, theoretical, and practical knowledge’ (Goodfellow, 2003, p. 48), and, ‘attunement to one’s colleagues’ (Dalli, 2011, p. 279).

These examples of ‘less tangible’ aspects of practice tend to draw upon humanist conceptualistions of practice, whereby individual educators might be seen as making decisions based on their rational, intuitive or emotional judgments. In contrast, researchers working with post humanist perspectives are articulating other aspects of the complexity of educators’ practice that seem to produce change out of the un-known. These aspects have included, for example, what is produced in encounters between human and other-than-
human elements (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), and between forces, sensations and materials (Giugni, 2011). Affective ways of knowing and learning – what Olsson (2010, p. 3) calls ‘bodily logics’ – and the possibilities that might emerge from spaces in-between events in time (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013) have also been explored. Together with the examples in the previous paragraph, these encounters suggest some of the ways that possibilities can, and do spring from less tangible aspects of early childhood practice.

Early childhood educators’ practice operates in policy contexts where multiple conceptualisations of practice may be perceived to be closing (for example, in Denmark (Jensen, Broström and Hansen, 2010), opening (for example, in the UK (Nutbrown, 2012), or offering both possibilities (as in Australia – Cumming, Sumsion and Wong, under review). With these possibilities in mind, our purpose in this paper is to explore other ways that important, yet less tangible, aspects of early childhood practice are at work – and implications these understandings might have for the politics of this work. To do this, we use a strategy of ‘plugging in’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) a number of texts to give readings of ways that ‘the secret’ works in the data fragment in the epigraph. We begin by outlining the source of the data fragment that opens this paper, our reasons for choosing to work with this fragment, and the analytic strategies we brought to the task. We then outline two very different resources relating to secrets, that we plugged in to the fragment. Firstly, everyday, and theoretical concepts of secret – including ideas from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Colebrook (2010), who highlight the productive capacity of secret. Secondly, an encounter with an episode of the television series Peppa Pig (Astley & Baker, 2005) that shows how understandings of secret are interconnected. Next, we give three readings of the data fragment in the epigraph, using post structural ideas about ‘being’ and ‘language’, and additional data fragments from the same research project, as further illustrations of our readings. We conclude with a discussion of what new thinking about less tangible aspects of early childhood practice have become possible by exploring how secret works in the data fragments, and, some possible implications of this thinking for educators’ practice, and the politics of this work.

Identifying and working with the data fragment

The data fragment in the epigraph comes from a research conversation with an experienced diploma-qualified early childhood educator, working as a room leader of a group of birth-two year old children in a long day care centre in Sydney, Australia. The educator was a participant in a study that set out to explore ways that early childhood educators negotiate discourses and subjectivities informing practice (see Cumming, Sumsion and Wong (2013) for further detail). Our interest in this topic was explored by asking educators about their ways of working with mixed messages (defined for participants as contradictory ideas about ways of doing and being in early childhood settings). This way of framing educators’ negotiation of discourses and subjectivities was chosen in order to highlight the multiple, sometimes competing ideas, regulations, beliefs (and so on) that are involved in educators’
practice. We also anticipated that working from the idea of mixed messages would enable a focus on how practice was working, and the possibilities that this produced for educators.

The quote that opens this paper was generated during a loosely structured research conversation with Tamara. These conversations were a second stage in research that also included initial and follow up focus group discussions, and the generation by participants of visual material responding to the initial focus group discussion. The visual material generated by each participant (such as the photograph included later in this paper) was used to stimulate discussion in the individual research conversations, and, with the follow-up focus group of which each participant was part.

The fragment in the epigraph has been selected as the focus of the current article for its resonant quality — that is, the fragment continually jumped-out of the transcript, it seemed to ‘glow’, and to have what MacLure (2006, p. 229) describes as the ‘transgressive jolt...that makes us think again, and more slowly about what is taken for granted’. Identifying material to work with (such as this fragment) by attending to ‘visceral prompts’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 79), and affective alerts (such as those described above) – are akin to what Deleuze describes as processes of ‘reading intensively’, in which: ‘there’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging in to an electric circuit’ (1995, p. 8).

Reading intensively is a way of being open to multiple aspects of texts, and of orientating to the possibilities produced in readings of texts, rather than towards representing what participants or a particular text means (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). On reading the data fragment intensively for example, a jolt seemed to come through the sudden appearance and repetition of the word ‘secret’ in the data fragment, and the concepts ‘language’, ‘words’, and ‘movement’ with which it connected. A jolt also seemed to come through moments of stop/start as the participant struggled to put something unnamed (or unnameable) into words, and, in the ambiguity in the data fragment – for example, we were not sure how it was possible to ‘be’ a secret language. In addition, unfinished sentences (such as, ‘we’ve got all the – we all know that you...’) gave a sense that there was more to this fragment, and to the concept of secret, than what was, or could be, spoken by the participant. These unexpected and intriguing aspects led to questions about how the concept of the secret was at work in this data fragment. In the next part of the paper, we explore some conceptualisations of the secret, beginning with everyday understandings, then considering Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas. We also include an encounter with Peppa Pig, as a way of further illustrating the possibilities that conceptualisations of ‘the secret’ can open up in relation to early childhood practice.

**Conceptualisations of (the) secret**

In an everyday sense, secrets are often thought about in relation to content — a secret that is ‘kept hidden from others or known only to oneself or to a few’, or ‘something that remains beyond understanding or explanation; a mystery’ (The American Heritage®
Dictionary of the English Language, 2009, n.p.). The ‘something’ might be an object, information, ideas or gossip (for example) that someone, or a group of people have ‘...judged fitting to isolate or disguise for various reasons’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 316). These understandings of secret are tied firstly, to there being some kind of content requiring, or being worth hiding (i.e. that it has value to someone, and likely to others). Secondly, to be secret, access to the content must be withheld or restricted – so that its secrecy depends on a lack or scarcity. Thirdly, that this secret is defined, and maintained, by a human subject or subjects.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 316) have another way of thinking about secret – as the interplay of ‘perception and the imperceptible’. They argue that the quality of imperceptibility—what is sensed, but is not able to be fully known – offers limitless possibilities for expressions by human subjects (Colebrook, 2010). Therefore, rather than being limited to particular content that is either known or unknown by human subjects, secrets are conceptualised as forces of positive imperceptibility (Colebrook, 2010). These forces are becoming – not towards a particular point, and not limited to particular content, but on the move, and always on the threshold of something, or somewhere else.

At the same time, and as the quote from Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 289) in the epigraph suggests, there is ongoing exchange between secrets working as (limited) content, and as (unlimited) imperceptibility. These relations came to life for us in a chance encounter with an episode of a children’s television series, Peppa Pig (Astley & Baker, 2005), as we now recount. In the episode ‘Secrets’ (Astley & Baker, 2005), Mummy Pig gives Peppa a box in which she can hide ‘secrets’. Peppa keenly grabs the box, and her eyes dart side to side in anticipation of having a secret of her own, especially one she can hide from her little brother George. Peppa hides something in the box (as viewers, we do not know what it is), and to her delight, neither George, her father or mother guess what is inside. The tables are turned on Peppa when Mummy Pig also gives George a box for secrets, and Peppa cannot guess what is inside George’s box. All returns to balance when Peppa and George each reveal what is in their box at the same time.

Before Peppa places something into the box, the force of imperceptibility is at work, as the possibilities of secrets (rather than particular contents of the box that are given the status of secrets) proliferate. However, once Peppa has placed something into the box – and knows what the secret is – the possibilities for expressions of imperceptibility are closed to her. The possibilities of the secret proliferate again as Peppa interacts with her family and they try to guess the secret content (could it be Daddy Pig’s glasses, Mummy Pig’s shoes, or George’s dinosaur?) As none of these is correct, the (particular) secret remains imperceptible, and its possibilities proliferate until it is revealed.

Once the secret content is revealed in the Peppa Pig episode, the contents (musical instruments) lose the unlimited potentiality that goes with being secret (Colebrook, 2010), and this potentiality returns to the empty box. However, the contents that have been
revealed are becoming-secret again, through their potential for combining with other elements (human, material, senses, forces) to undertake other functions. In these ways, secrets can be seen as forces or movements between imperceptibility and content, rather than simply one state or the other.

We now return to the data fragment, and consider what new thinking about less tangible aspects of early childhood practice might become possible by plugging in the understandings of secrets explained above. We explore three ways that secret is at work in the data fragment - firstly, through connections between secret and language in the description of being an early childhood educator, secondly, ways in which secret is at work as positive imperceptibility (Colebrook, 2010), and thirdly, connections of secret with embodied movements, and notions of ‘secret societies’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 317).

Readings

Being a secret language
One way that the notion of secret is at work in the data fragment is through connecting with language in the participant’s description of ‘being an early childhood educator’ as ‘almost like a secret language of its own’. From a post structural perspective, ‘to be is to be related’; ‘nothing ever “is” alone’ (Mol, 2002, p. 54). Being can be understood then, as a momentary expression of the relations in which human subjects find themselves — a stabilisation of otherwise shifting and relational processes (Lenz Taguchi, 2011). This way of being might be characterised as ‘becoming’ – as always at the threshold of something, or somewhere, else.

Conceptualising being as a momentary stabilisation of becoming (rather than as a static position) foregrounds the possibilities for ways that educators connect with other human and other-than-human elements, forces and sensations in early childhood settings. This is also how Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest language works – in continuous combinations with other elements. These combinations create order, disrupt order, or facilitate movement to other possibilities. Being an educator as an embodied ‘secret language’ then, can be read as a sense of merging with other elements into a fluid and relational force. It is through these combined forces that things happen in early childhood settings.

These fluid and relational forces can be seen at work in the following imagined scenario, which was outlined by the participant in the same research conversation that generated the data fragment in the epigraph. In the following scenario, she describes what her actions would be (and her rationale for these actions) if a child’s feelings had gone beyond the child’s control:

So this child could be the child... that is smacking somebody else or the child that is swearing or whatever the little scenario is. But this child’s got to the stage now where they’re out of control... as the educator, you
need to be calm, you need to be kind – and **he needs me to stay with him until we feel that we both understand what the feeling is and he’s not on his own.**

The example above conveys a sense of the child’s body, the educator’s body, their collective feelings, the smacking and the swearing, and the events that preceded and followed them merging into one. The process of merging (highlighted in bold) in the imagined scenario ensured that the child was ‘not on his own’ with feelings that had gone beyond his control. Staying with each other in close proximity and enabling the child’s ‘out of control’ feelings to merge with the educator’s ‘calm’ and ‘kind’ response, allowed new understandings to emerge. One such shared understanding is of ‘what the feeling is’ and the child realising that he was not alone. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to these processes of merging for particular functions as **assemblages.** A key quality of assemblages is that by merging, the elements have a collective capacity greater than their parts. In the example above, the understanding produced through the merging of the various elements creates order (in the child’s feelings and in the setting) and facilitates movement to other possibilities. In this scenario, in merging with the child to create new possibilities, the educator has embodied being ‘a secret language’.

**Secret and the imperceptible**

Another way that secret is at work in the data fragment is through the quality of imperceptibility – the sense that there is ‘something’ at work, but uncertainty as to what exactly it is. For example, the participant says: ‘we’ve got all the – we all know that you – I don’t have to say… We automatically know that’. There is evidently something that the ‘we’ have ‘got’ and ‘know’, yet she does not, or cannot, quite pin this down. This is the interplay of perception, imperceptibility and expression that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) include in their notion of secret. It is also implicated in some of the research that we referred to earlier, regarding less tangible aspects of early childhood practice.

How might the imperceptibility of secret – that which is uncertain or unpredictable – be productive in early childhood settings? To explore this idea, we turn to Colebrook’s (2010, p. 293) argument for the ‘positivity’ of imperceptibility, which she contrasts with the deficit created by the perception of not knowing a secret. Colebrook says that it is from the uncertainty of secrecy — from what is not specified, not certain, not for sure — that multiple possibilities can be expressed. In the data fragment in the epigraph, for example, ‘bending down’ is done with a particular purpose — ‘so the children can look at us in our faces’. However, exactly what happened/s next — for the educator, for the child, for the assemblage of which they are part — is unknown. As Colebrook also suggests, imperceptibility proliferates with possibilities that are beyond (and will always be more than) what human subjects see and know, and always more than human subjects can express. It is from this unknown-ness that ‘lines of perception and interpretation’ (p. 287) can be activated, and via these lines that there is room for innovation to flourish.
The following visual material and accompanying comments (produced by a different participant as part of her response to the initial focus group discussion), show how lines of perception and interpretation can be expressed in early childhood settings:

![Figure 1. Picking flowers](image)

... you don’t always have to follow the rules, or not the rules, you don’t always have to do what’s right because if you do, you miss out on lots of beautiful things. Maybe that’s what it is. Or not, I don’t know – maybe you can miss – **if you don’t open your eyes to what’s bigger than the norm, or whatever, you’re missing out on stuff** because to me, this is beautiful... I could’ve said, “don’t pick the flowers or the leaves and put your shoes on the shoe rack”... And **if we don’t keep things open to allow for those possibilities, you miss those, you miss that**...But in that moment – because there’s maybe something — **maybe at that moment, there was something far more important happening.**

In this fragment, and in the image, imperceptibility is at work in this participant’s sense of: ‘what’s bigger than the norm’, in keeping ‘things open for...possibilities’ and in the ‘maybe something’, that is ‘far more important’ than following the rules. Although what the participant senses is never completely clarified, she works with the imperceptibility in productive ways. Even in making this photograph, she has recognised the possibilities of things being and becoming more than what they first appear. The flowers, leaves, shoes, socks and decking, along with her own shadow, and the traces of the children who placed the materials, work as an assemblage with open-ended possibilities. Being open to the unpredictability and uncertainty of other possibilities in this way — acknowledging and working from her ‘perception of potentialities’ (Colebrook, 2010, p. 291) rather than following the ‘rules’ or ‘right ways’ — has allowed her to negotiate dominant narratives of how things should be in an early childhood setting. In this way, valuing and allowing for the unpredictable and transgressive has kept space open for expression and innovation to flourish, and for new lines of potentiality to be activated.
Secret movements
The notion of secret also connects with movement in the original data fragment — in both bodily movements of bending and standing, and, in what the participant describes as a ‘secret movement going on’. In her account, the examples of bodily movements — standing with your back against the wall, and bending down to look at the children — are practices that are as much a part of being ‘a secret language’ as are ‘speaking the secret words’. As the participant indicates, the doing of a movement is not necessarily a conscious act — it is done in what seems an automatic way, a way that does not need to be said — but that nonetheless embodies what is known, and something imperceptible besides. In this way, being ‘a secret language’ is not just about what is known, what is said, or what is done, but about the possibilities that might be produced when all these things come together in combination with other elements in assemblages.

Further, seen as part of the embodied secret language, the function of these movements could be read simply as directing order — for example, standing in a particular way ‘...so we can look at all the children’. However, the conjunction of speaking, bending and the sense of a ‘secret movement going on’, also gestures towards other possibilities. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987 (p. 317) talk about imperceptibility sometimes operating like a ‘secret society’, that has particular ways of working, and of exercising influence. This influence can (for example) make particular ways of being, or ways of talking about things possible, or even expected in particular settings, even while it is sensed but is not clear. So, in the data fragment, the participant’s sense of a ‘secret movement going on’ could gesture towards collective influences on and in the assemblages of which the participant is part. These collectivities might include: the profession, the academic community, policymakers, media, families, or an educators’ team. In this way, speaking secret words like pedagogy might demonstrate the discursive influence of some of these collectivities — perhaps in this case, discourses elicited by the academic community, or policy discourses, or relations between these and the assemblage of elements in an educators’ setting.

The relations of collectivities, with their attendant discourses (and the mixed messages these can create) illustrate what Deleuze and Guattari describe as micro and macro politics — the interweaving and exchange of forces of negotiated becomings (the micro), and regularising or stabilising forces (the macro). Speaking pedagogy as a ‘secret word’ might therefore demonstrate compliance with sanctioned ways of being, or might be operating as a ‘password’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 317) that demonstrates membership in the ‘secret movement’. Yet, being an early childhood educator, and speaking the ‘secret language’ does not always automatically confer membership in the ‘secret movement’, as the following data fragment (from one of the focus groups conducted as part of the broader research project) shows:
...even though my skin colour’s white, I am African, that’s African blood that runs in these veins ...we had a casual [relief educator] in the room that was from [an African country]... so a lot of comments that we had about this girl was that ‘she stinks’, and I’m not even talking about from the children, though it did come from the children as well, but this came from the staff. She had her bachelor but ...she would work as an assistant because she hadn’t had her qualifications sorted out...and even though I could talk to the [staff] and just say ‘look that’s part of their culture can you accept it?’... it’s like more than just this little isolated incident now... I go to the director and we speak and she phones the agency and they deal with it like that... but the whole thing was that she’s now picking up the vibe from the rest of the staff. She was at our centre twice a week for a prolonged amount of time, people aren’t talking to her, people don’t accept her, people are not – you know even just saying to her ‘How was your weekend?’

This account comes from the same participant who generated the opening data fragment. Although she does not name the influence in this fragment as ‘a secret movement’, the style in which the ‘people’ who ‘aren’t talking to’ and ‘don’t accept’ the relief staff member are operating, illustrates a shadow side to the ‘we’ of the original data fragment. In this second fragment, imperceptibilities (such as unspoken but sensed collective beliefs and prejudices) seem to coalesce as a ‘secret movement’ which acts to ostracise the relief educator, despite qualifications that might otherwise be seen as automatically granting membership in the ‘secret movement’. In this way, the experience of the relief educator with imperceptibility — the ‘content that is not disclosed’ (Colebrook, 2010, p. 287) — has not been the open-ended source of possibilities enjoyed by the ‘we’ who ‘know’. Rather, imperceptibility has been directed through collective influence, to foreclose possibilities for her to become part of the productive assemblages of the setting. Put another way, macro-political discourses such as inclusion and social justice have been disrupted (in this example) through micro-political movements by educators in ‘isolated incidents’. The force of these micro-politics coalesces to eventually include ‘the rest of the staff’ in a macro-political movement of exclusion.

Through the three readings presented above, being an early childhood educator is shown to be a complex and ever-shifting process that involves not only talking, but ‘embodied doing and handling the world and things around us’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2011, p. 39). While speaking particular words or making particular movements might embody the influence of groups beyond the immediate assemblage of which an educator is part, there remains something imperceptible yet productive, in the combination of elements as they come together. As the readings also show, these processes involve micro and macro political movements that can disrupt and reconfigure dominant discourses in more and less desirable ways.
A discussion of the readings
At the beginning of this paper, we wondered about what new thinking about less tangible aspects of early childhood practice might become possible by plugging in multiple readings of secret, and what implications these understandings might have for the politics of this work. Here, we discuss some of our thinking, drawing out some possible implications for the politics of educators’ practice.

Imperceptibilities and educators’ practice
Reading the data fragments through conceptualisations of the secret, has reinforced for us the value of attending to the imperceptible as a key aspect of early childhood practice. In this sense, the paper reiterates what others have said about the importance and productiveness of less tangible aspects of practice. For example, the educator whose calm feelings merge with a child’s distressed feelings is practising the kind of attunement and ‘being present’ that Dalli (2011, p. 237) recognises as helping to bring things together in practice. At the same time however, our readings make a contribution beyond reiterating identified effects through reading closely some of the moments of practice that might otherwise remain taken-for-granted. This process makes visible some of the ways that less tangible aspects of early childhood practice work, and what possibilities they can produce, rather than simply identifying what they are. For example, the ‘bringing together’ of the educator’s and child’s feelings is more than the result of conscious judgment, skills and awareness (EYLF, 2011), more even, than ‘being present’ (Dalli, 2011, p. 237) – it works as a relational assemblage that produces new affective capacity for the child.

Our readings of the data fragments also show moments of early childhood practice as a ‘vital, intense and unpredictable experimentation’ (Olsson, 2010, p. 6), from which possibilities can, and do spring. This is especially evident in the example of the educator who ‘keeps things open’ in relation to the children’s flower-picking, as she leaves space open for possibilities that are beyond her own perception. These are possibilities of the ‘in-between’, and the richness of spaces’ (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013, p. 228) for producing difference, rather than just an interval between points moving towards pre-determined ‘best outcomes’.

Politics and educators’ practice
Our focus on ways that secret is at work in the data fragments also raised questions for us about the politics of subjectivity around ‘being’ an educator. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) emphasise, through relays of movements, assemblages are constantly undergoing change. Our readings show educators as innovators and producers of possibilities through engagements with other parts of assemblages. Moreover, our readings also demonstrated aspects of educators’ practice that involved unconscious, bodily logics (Olsson, 2010) (such as ‘automatically’ knowing how or where to stand, or ‘the vibe’) that lie beyond the realm of readily observable or codifiable professional expertise. Conceptualising educators and practice as intertwined parts of assemblages therefore challenges dominant, humanist...
conceptualisations of educators as ‘autonomous subject[s], independent and detached from [their] environment’ (a view that Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010, p. 525) also criticise).

Reading examples of the productive capacity of imperceptibility also highlighted some politics of possibility - what Giardina and Newman explain as being “…generated out of, generating possibilities within, and opening, pathways outside of existing conditions and flows” (2011, p. 400). In addition, we contend that a politics of possibility includes the exchanges between minor and major politics - a dynamic that can be seen at work in the example of the ostracised relief educator (discussed above). The ‘pathways outside of existing conditions and flows’ that were produced from imperceptibility in this example suggest the necessity of acknowledging that possibilities produced from imperceptibilities are not universally ‘positive’ (Colebrook, 2010), nor necessarily just.

A final politics of possibility that we wish to acknowledge concerns our contentions about the importance of imperceptibility and less tangible aspects of practice. Despite the emerging recognition of the complexity involved in early childhood practice in policy discourses (such as in the Australian context), it is not yet clear whether educators’ (self-reported) sense of marginalisation as a profession (Fenech, Waniganayake & Fleet, 2009) has been alleviated, or whether there is now more public recognition of the complexity of early childhood practice. The possible persistence of deficit discourses regarding the profession could mean that ideas like fluid and relational being (rather than having an identity grounded in status as a professional, for example), or that productive aspects of practice will always be imperceptible, might exacerbate educators’ sense that they, and their practice, are poorly recognised.

Conclusion
In this paper, we have read moments of imperceptibility – in which there is a sense of ‘something’ at work, but uncertainty as to what exactly it is – as spaces from which multiple lines of perception and interpretation might flow. As we have also suggested however, the possibilities produced through imperceptibility can be more or less desirable – for individual educators, as well as for the profession as a whole. Our readings therefore contribute to (keeping) possibilities open for more fluid understandings of the work of educators, whilst also highlighting some of the politics of possibilities. The politics we have attended to reiterate the importance of not romanticising educators’ practice (as raised by Sumsion (2003) for example), nor imagining that opportunities for interpretation and expression of possibilities are uniformly available to all educators. In the same way as studies by Olsson (2010) and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) suggest, working with, rather than trying to tame or erase less tangible forces (such as those we have discussed), may lead to new possibilities for pedagogical engagements. At the same time, continued attention to how practices work, and how educators negotiate assemblages of practices is crucial, in order to sustain an early childhood workforce, and, educators themselves.
References


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Endnotes
1 The term early childhood educators (also abbreviated to ‘educators’) is used here as a generic term for those working directly with children aged birth-5 years. In this context, educators may have university, vocational, or no qualifications in early childhood education.