

# Eventicizing Curriculum

## Learning to Read and Write through Becoming a Citizen of the World<sup>1</sup>

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THE RESEARCH PROJECT “The Magic of Language” has its origin in a small pilot-study between the years 2007-2009 and has been conducted at the department of Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden (Dahlberg & Olsson, 2009). The project is supported by the Swedish Research Council and takes place in a network structure where researchers, preschool teachers, students, and student teachers have been working in close cooperation since the mid-nineties (Barsotti, Dahlberg, Göthson, & Åsén, 1993; Dahlberg, 2003; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Lenz-Taguchi, 2000; Olsson, 2009). The project “The Magic of Language” received funding in order to work with preschool children’s relations to, and preschools’ didactic tools concerning, language, reading, and writing, departing from the assumption that these questions are strongly affected by the fact that we today live in a globalized society. Thus, our contemporary globalized society could be described through its continuously transforming features. One important current and ongoing transformation concerns what is described as a changed knowledge production, where knowledge is crossing borders, exchanged, changed, and re - evaluated at great speed (Castell, 1997). At the same time, there is, within what has become called “the standards/accountability movement,” an enormous increase in devices intended to produce stable and permanent knowledge through the taming of learning processes as well as entire practices by planning, supervising, controlling, assessing and evaluating them towards preset goals (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Grieshaber & Hatch, 2003; Lenz-Taguchi, 2009; Masny & Cole, 2009; Olsson, 2009; Taubman, 2009). This article proposes a way of orienting ourselves in the current situation through joining examples of preschool children’s learning to read and write and teachers’ and researchers’ work with pedagogical documentation with the concept “event,” which was introduced by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992). Deleuze and Guattari use the concept “event” in order to contest that we can have such a thing as permanent and stable knowledge of the world and ourselves and, simultaneously, they present some important ideas on language through this concept (Zourabichvili, 2003). As we shall see, the concept “event”

counter-effectuates what is described as “orthodox thought,” which underlies the attempts to tame learning and practices and to standardize and trivialize method within the accountability/standards movement. The concept “event” theoretically reinforces our pedagogical and scientific work with pedagogical documentation, and, most importantly, it seems to relate to children’s way of using language in the most congenial way.

### **Irresistible Reading and Writing Opportunities and Pedagogical Documentation**

The cooperative work within the research project “The Magic of Language” takes the form of a mutual exchange, very much in line with how the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1984) puts it in relation to political practice: “Use political practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of the forms and domains for the intervention of political action” (p. xiv). In our work, we attempt to find a certain kind of dynamic relationship between theory and practice where both are seen as practices but as different kinds and with different roles. Practice can, and should, intensify theory and analysis by connecting examples to them, and theory, in turn, may broaden the field of intervention for practice (see further Olsson, 2009).

We conducted research through performing empirical interventions in preschool classes with the help of pedagogical documentation (observations, filming, interviewing, and collecting children’s artifacts within learning processes)<sup>2</sup>. Concretely, teachers and researchers, together with children, try to stage scenes for experimenting with language, reading, and writing that take on the features of “irresistible reading and writing opportunities” (E. Theorell, personal communication, October 5, 2010), where children’s own learning strategies and *production* of knowledge is acknowledged as the starting point and continuous focus for pedagogical intervention. Teachers and researchers carefully listen to children’s own learning strategies and production of knowledge through documenting learning processes. All participants: children, teachers, and researchers use the documented material in order to prepare, conduct, and continuously analyze learning processes. However, there is an important distinction that needs to be made in relation to the reference of the word documentation. Documentation is usually referred to as a means to record and represent reality or to reproduce a chronological process of learning. Rather, pedagogical documentation, as used in the preschools and in the present research, is considered a living and collectively constructed material that does not represent “what really took place” but instead represents how intense and vital experimentation can project something into the current situation and invite people to further investigation. This seems of utmost importance when working with very young children, since our experiences since the mid-nineties tell us that children very much prefer staying in the process of learning rather than imitating what is already known. Children, when allowed to, seem to enjoy a certain kind of intense, undomesticated, and vital experimentation rather than looking for any kind of permanent and stable knowledge (see Dahlberg & Olsson, 2009; Olsson 2009).

The pedagogical and scientific work with pedagogical documentation in the project “The Magic of Language” concerns, then, a specific image of knowledge that sharply contrasts with contemporary attempts to produce stable and permanent knowledge through the taming of learning processes as well as entire learning practices by planning, supervising, controlling, assessing, and evaluating them against preset goals.

### Aligning Theoretical Perspectives

The pedagogical and scientific work with pedagogical documentation within the research project “The Magic of Language” is, rather than trying to fit children’s learning into preformed theories and practices, striving to find ontological and epistemological perspectives on language that align themselves with or are close to children’s own strategies for learning language, reading and writing. Useful resources have here been found in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (2004) *neo-materialist* or *incorporeal materialist* philosophy. The ontological perspective put forward by Deleuze and Guattari concerns an insistence on materiality in a constant process of becoming, there is a focus on the emergence of material strata in favor of the already established and emerged. The incorporeal is the term that refers to this emergence by indicating that reality not only has one dimension, the one we can see, feel, and hear, but that there is also an incorporeal dimension of material reality, that is, the continuous transformation of all strata (organic and non-organic) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). In relation to our research project “The Magic of Language,” all of this becomes of utmost importance. Not only does the focus on process connect to our experiences of children’s preferences for intense, vital, and undomesticated experimental processes of learning, rather than a desperate search for predetermined outcomes or permanent knowledge, but it also theoretically reinforces the attempt to use pedagogical documentation as a non representative, living, and collectively constructed material that projects something into the current situation and invites further investigations.<sup>3</sup>

The most common underlying assumption and definition of language within linguistics, also also within scientific and pedagogical theories and methods, is that language is considered a homogenous system of universal and abstract representations used in information and communication (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). Young children are commonly considered as not capable of the meta-linguistic capacity needed to enter such a representational logic (Kress, 1997; Roy, 2005). However, early in our pilot-project we discovered, with the help of Gunter Kress’ (1997) writings on children as “language-makers,” that children do work within a representational logic, although a very different one. Just as young children seem to prefer to stay in the process of learning rather than focusing on predetermined outcomes and stable and permanent knowledge, they likewise seem to prefer working with the *production*, rather than the acquisition of representations. When young children relate to language they do so through re-inventing it over and over again. They rhyme, sing, exchange the first letter in a word or a name, and invent new letters and even new and never before heard of languages. In relation to this, Deleuze and Guattari’s writings on language seem to fit very well. They not only question the seemingly self-evident definition of language presented by linguistic, scientific, and pedagogical theories and methods, but also place a certain insistence on the becoming character of language.<sup>4</sup> Through our findings, it becomes clear that it is in this dimension of language that children work.

As appears above, there is a tension between the intense, vital and experimental work with pedagogical documentation, focusing the incorporeal and becoming aspect of reality and language on the one hand, and on the other hand the current emphasis on learning as tameable and knowledge as stable and permanent. Before proceeding to show in more detail how the concept “event” works in relation to young children’s production of representations, we shall take a closer look at the features of these latter assumptions. The next section presents what has been called the “standards/accountability movement” and its pressure for school-reform.

## Standards/Accountability Movement: The Result of Orthodox Thought?

### Standards/Accountability Movement and Pressure for School Reform

How are we to understand the features of knowledge in a globalized society? Despite the contemporary discourse on a changed knowledge production, where knowledge is thought to be border-crossing, exchanging, changing and re-evaluated, and seen as being a globalized citizen, learner, teacher, or researcher today, it is undoubtedly also about being caught within ontological and epistemological assumptions that contradict that definition and instead rely on knowledge as a stable and permanent feature. Within what has become called “the standards/accountability movement” and its pressure for school-reform, policies and programs are formulated for the entire field of education, and not the least the field of literacy (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Grieshaber & Hatch, 2003; Lenz-Taguchi, 2009; Masny & Cole, 2009; Olsson, 2009; Taubman, 2009).

Taubman (2009) analyses this movement as having its origin in a choreographed and manufactured crisis, producing feelings (and fantasies) of fear, shame and guilt in teachers, with the purpose of opening up the field of education to neoliberal capitalism and social and political neo-conservatism. What we are witnessing is,

something new, and something much more dangerous than a worship of science or the ‘cult of efficiency.’ Its uniqueness lies in its pervasiveness, its threat to the very foundations of public education, its wide embrace by the educational establishment, its direct assault on the intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical life of teachers, and its radical misunderstanding of teaching. (Taubman, 2009, p. 5)

Grieshaber and Hatch (2003) state that there is in the U.S. and Australia a patterned relationship between the advance of accountability concerns and the retreat of traditional child observation, concerning a changed focus from using observation in order to develop child-centred curricula, to using observation as a technologized and instrumentalized tool for assessment and evaluation in relation to externally imposed and narrow standards. Also, in Sweden, the advance of the accountability/standards movement and pressure for school reform is taking on unexpected dimensions and strongly affecting the work with pedagogical documentation. Teachers and researchers are under great pressure to deliver written accounts of their practice and live up to expectations and standardized norms of what is globally considered to be “excellent” and “best” practice (Elfström, 2009). According to Dahlberg and Moss (2005), these devices and technologies are all marked by a “cognitive-instrumental-performative-utilitarian rationality” containing a desire to order the world and to tame nature through measuring and calculating in a rational manner to ensure the access of predefined outcomes in the most effective way (pp. 5-9).

### Orthodox Thought

One cannot but think of what Deleuze (1994) draws up as an *orthodox* thought: something produced through the Western history of philosophy and embracing seemingly self-evident ontological and epistemological assumptions. For Deleuze, orthodox thought comes down to being the same thing as not thinking at all. Thinking with orthodox thought is more a question of going in circles, where we rarely see anything new: “Everybody’ knows very well that in fact men think rarely, and more often under the impulse of a shock than in the excitement of a taste for thinking” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 132).

Deleuze (1994) draws up a number of postulates working within orthodox thought that are clearly traceable within the accountability/standards movement and the pressure for school reform:

- Orthodox thought poses a postulate of a true nature of thought and of the best intentions of the thinker. In relation to this, it is possible to define “excellent” and “best” practice on the basis of what is true. This is done with good intentions and supposedly in the best interest of everyone.
- Orthodox thought also postulates a common sense. When “excellent” and “best” practice is seen as a self-evident category it becomes a naturalized feature; it becomes common sense.
- Orthodox thought is further built on the postulates of recognition and representation. In relation to these postulates, it is presumed that we can recognize what is “excellent” and “best” practice and fit it into the map, the representation that is being drawn up of it.
- Within orthodox thought the error is the postulate that permits us to judge when practice is wrong, lacking, or not fitting into the map.
- Since pre-given meaning as pre-given is another postulate of the orthodox thought, “best” or “excellent” practice is considered as already having its sense, and the problem of establishing “excellent” and “best” practice is considered as having its preformed and corresponding solutions.
- Thus, the point is to arrive as quickly and effectively at the final and predetermined knowledge. The process is subordinated to the outcome and the focus will be on the most effective method, subordinating the culture surrounding the problem of “excellent” and “best” practice.

Under these circumstances, knowledge is seen as a permanent and stable feature intimately connected to truth, good will, common sense, recognition and representation. When meaning is taken for granted as pre-given, problems already preset with corresponding solutions, everything turns around finding, standardizing (and trivializing) method in order to effectively reach the goal; stable, permanent knowledge. This logic seems to be at work whether we speak of individual learners or entire practices. Also, individual learners are through different devices according to the above logic. It is an all-encompassing logic that has spread into every corner of the educational system.<sup>5</sup>

Added to the above analyses of the underlying mechanisms within the standards and accountability movement as being of economical, political, social, and psychological character, there is the possibility of seeing these mechanisms as being of a fundamentally philosophical nature. What we have is a certain kind of ontology, a specific image of thought that is also the origin and the perpetual functioning behind the accountability/standards movement and the pressure for school reform. However, there is always the possibility to twist these moves differently, and, following Deleuze and Guattari (1994), if one is not content with the current metaphysics one just have to set out to create a different one. In the next section follows an example where children, teachers and researchers, within the research project “The Magic of Language,” work with pedagogical documentation and the philosophical concept “event” in a learning process on the reading and writing of names conducted over two semesters in a preschool class with 25 children aged five.

## Eventicizing Curriculum

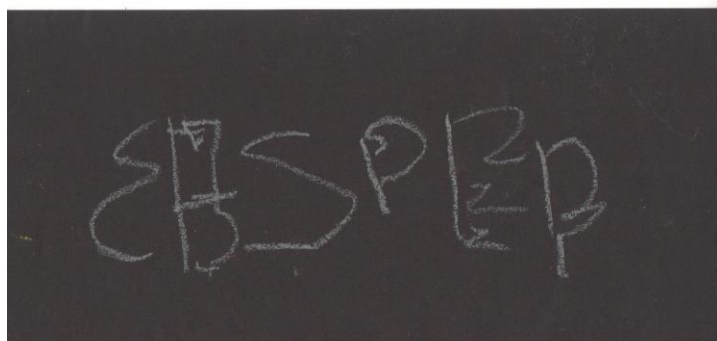
### The Event and its Relation to Language – Experimentation in Practice

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the concept “event” is one way of theoretically accessing the underestimated creative dimension in language, in which children seem to find themselves and work. In *The Logic of Sense* (2004), Deleuze carefully draws up the relationship between language and events. He shows how we normally treat events through three dimensions in language: denotation, manifestation, and signification. Denotation is the dimension in language where we *comment* upon events, manifestation is the dimension where we *interpret* events, and signification is the dimension in language where we *reflect* upon events. However, for Deleuze, none of these dimensions and functions in language are capable of keeping the event open-ended, since they each lock it down in a specific way within truth claims. With commenting, the event is closed down when truth is looked for in things and the world’s inner essence. With interpretation, truth is claimed within the subject itself. With reflection, it is said that one is looking for the conditions of truth, but Deleuze argues that this leaves truth itself unquestioned (pp. 16-22).

We have tried to use these ideas by avoiding using only the commentary, the interpretation, or the reflection when working with pedagogical documentation. As said, documentation is not used as a means to represent any reality or rational and chronological learning process; it is used as a living material that projects something into the current situation and invites further investigations. In line with Deleuze’s reasoning in *The Logic of Sense* (2004), language and linguistic signs, in relation to our everyday events, are used neither from the point of view of the comment, the interpretation, nor the reflection. They are opened up for *experimentation* (Olsson, 2009). For instance, when starting up a project on a subject in a class, we use documentation to observe what type of relation children already have to the subject. Here, teachers and researchers use observation and documentation as strategies for *listening* to children (Halvars-Franzén, 2010), and we adopt a very careful attitude in order to not crush children’s relations and strategies.

Most of the time, we do not intervene in the children’s doings, and, if we do so, we do it very, very cautiously. We read a lot, try to get as many perspectives as possible on the subject, and are very careful to value children’s own relations to the subject as equally important as the already established knowledge on the subject. When we gather enough material, we start collectively analyzing, being on the lookout for some sort of track to follow with the children. In the project on reading and writing names, we spent the whole autumn semester doing careful, and listening observations and documentations of children’s strategies when producing alphabetical signs. A collective analysis between teacher and researchers early in spring semester lead to the conclusion that alphabetical signs were most frequently produced when the children wrote their own names, or the names of their friends and families. However, we saw that not all children participated in this activity and that the children who did not participate said they did not know how to read and write. We made a choice to pick up one name made by Casper where he used both visual and alphabetical signs to produce a “freezing name,” where each letter is shaking of cold. With a tentative and experimental attitude, our ambition was to play with the names and, following Casper, use both visual and alphabetical signs in order to see if working more creatively and process-oriented would make more children hook on to this way of reading and writing names. We gathered Casper and a group of his friends and asked Casper to talk about

what he did. But Casper did not have the time to start before the other children started engaging and asking him questions:



Kelly: What have you done?

Filip: It looks like a frozen name.

Hannah: Is it an ice-name?

Albert: Like icicles hanging in an ice-cave.

Casper: Well, it's sort of a shaky-name. I did it a while ago. It is bloody freezing so I am shaking.

Kelly: But you haven't made a C, it looks like a 3 but turned around.

Casper: Well, you know, it's not so easy to write when you are shaking...

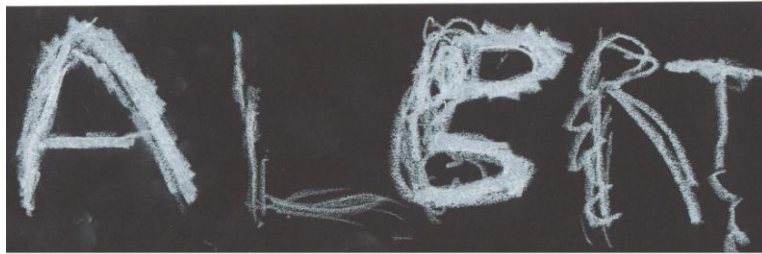
All of a sudden, all of the children in the class wanted to make frozen names. There was a true explosion of name making:



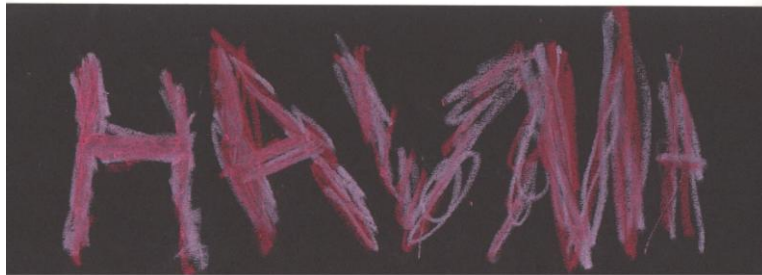
Filip: All letters are shaking and finally they all break down just like ice does.



Kelly: At first the name is shaking because it is ice cold and then it becomes even colder.



Albert: B is freezing the most, it is all white, you can play hockey on it.



Hannah: I was warm at first, but then I started freezing. The white stuff is ice. I am freezing so I'm shaking, that's why I wrote so carelessly.

Filip and Kelly seemed very inspired by Casper's shaking letters. Albert started creating a story where the letter B gets a specific character. Hannah seemed to be working with the transformation of a physical state: first warm then freezing. Each child got their proper strategy but it is also perfectly clear that they picked up and transformed their friends' strategies. In contrast to the earlier setting where only a few children engaged in the reading and writing of names, all of a sudden all of the children in the class wanted to be part of this new way of writing and reading names. When they saw this intensity and so many children interested, the teachers decided to continue down this road. They asked the children if they could make angry names. The children hooked on immediately and started discussing:

Kelly: You have to make an angry face.

Albert: Yes! It is easy to make faces in letters.

Kelly: How?

Albert: You just draw them in the circles, and you need to use a red pencil.

Kelly: Show me how you mean.



Albert: A got kicked by a boxing glove and got really mad and hits L, that's why L has got an angry face. L hits B so he starts to scream. Check the mouth! And then R starts screaming and T gets twice as mad because he can have two mouths. It's like in the story *Håkan and the big fight*, at first one is mad and then everybody else get mad as well. Do you get it now, Kelly, do you understand how to make angry names?



And, as seen below, Kelly obviously hooked on to Albert's strategy. All of the children now got down to making angry names. They used signs and strategies that they used for the freezing names, but they also invented new signs and strategies, fire, for instance, expressed anger. Filip added a visual sign in the shape of helmets since one can fall and hurt oneself when one is really angry.



Kelly: I have made a screaming K with a screaming mouth. L has got a scratching hand and scratches its friend. So the other L gets so angry that he gets fire in his hair. And Y just yells out loud!



Märta: I get so angry so I am on fire. It is fire up there at each letter.



Filip: I have made helmets for everybody. When you get angry you might fall and hit your head. That's why they wear helmets.

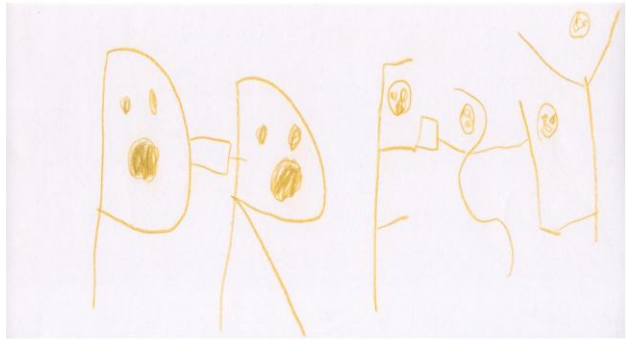


Hannah: I have written hard because I am angry. And red because it gets red when you are angry. And you also forget to do all the letters. But the angry has passed now so I have written green Hannah twice and I have drawn some hearts as well.

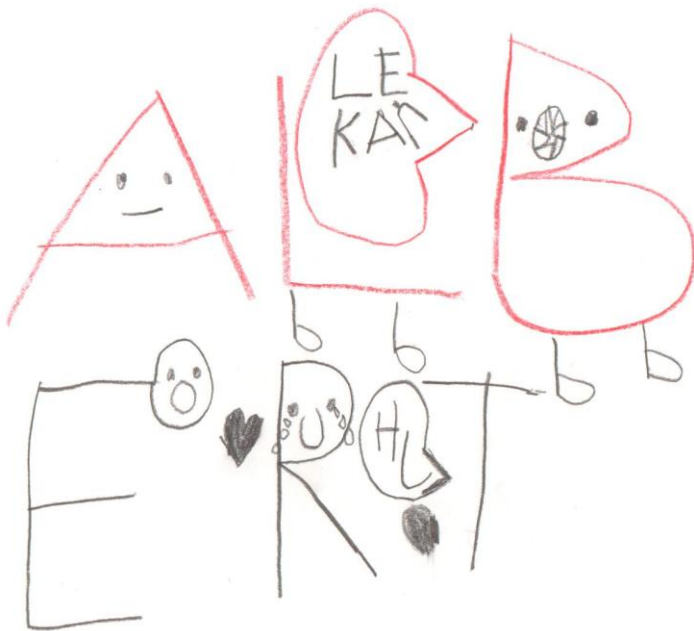
Again, the strategies flowed between the children and the intensity was high in the classroom, verbal stories flourished simultaneously with alphabetical and visual signs. Kelly picked up Märta's strategy of adding a symbol of fire to a letter. Albert and Kelly continued their strategy of giving each letter a character. Hannah continued working with the transformation of a state: when anger passes. This way of working with the children and with pedagogical documentation is about tentative experimentation. Experimenting tentatively can only be done if truth and good will are no longer the issue. Common sense needs to be mistrusted if not left behind. Instead, we need to depart from the idea that we do not know and show that we are willing to listen and engage. It is hard to admit that our everyday events are somewhat untameable, but there is still the possibility to, through careful preparations, through documentation, and through experimentation, create a common stage for children, teachers, and researchers to work upon.

### **Sense Production = Truth Production – Hanging up the Alphabet in Life**

At the same time as we, together with the children, continued to invent new names to read and write: names in love, tired names, sick names, we also continued analyzing what was taking place. In that analysis, we tried to get an idea of what kind of *sense* the children were departing from in their reading and writing of names. In addition to the three general ways of relating events to linguistic propositions: commenting, interpreting, and reflecting, Deleuze (2004) inserts sense as a fourth dimension in language. Through defining sense as the unconditioned production of truth in a proposition, the event seems to escape closing down within claims of truth. According to this, we always have as much truth as we deserve in relation to the specific sense under production, truth is here considered as nothing more than a proportional side-effect (Deleuze, 1994, p. 154; 2004, pp. 22-25). The devices used within the standards/accountability movement very rarely take into account what comes before truth as these devices only measure whether the child/the practice have adapted to truth as predefined. These devices never get close to what is going on in the learning process, they have no way of conceptualizing and working with sense producing truth as an effect. We have tried to use the idea of truth as being produced in a proportional relation to the sense it departed from by asking the question: "What sense are the children departing from in this learning process, what are they after?" Whilst continuing working on the name-project, teachers and researchers together engage in such a tentative analysis. When looking at, for instance, Presley's and Albert's "mischievous name" below, we can see how they dealt with the very situation they live everyday: 25 five-year-olds who need to get along with each other. The names certainly do imply dealing with the difference between "a little mischief and a real quarrel":



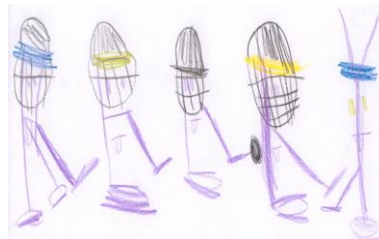
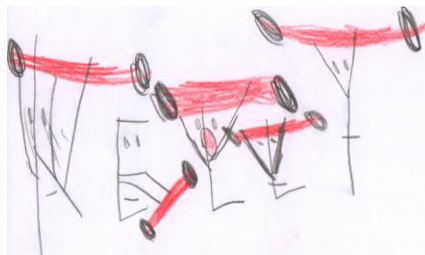
Presley: Sometimes there's a real quarrel and not only a little mischief, it depends on who is part of it. If somebody hits too hard there's quarrel. P is running after R, they both want to so that's just a little mischief. S is cheating, he is fighting, you must not fight with two people at the same time because you will not see if your friend is alright.



Albert: I am going to make a balloon and write something in it. Because you say "mischievous things" when you're mischievous. I make running legs because you run when you're mischievous. B is laughing I've made a laughing mouth that asks the L if it wants to play. I've done the one you need to do if you ask something (question mark). The B says: "Oh! I was just joking" so they start chasing each other. A is not part of the game. Then they happen to run into E so he gets mad, and T gives an olive to R, but R hates olives. He thinks it tastes like junk so he gets sad and starts crying. R thinks that was not a good joke so he gives a chocolate heart to E and then they can play together. Sometimes there's more quarrel than mischief, because not everybody likes the same jokes. So T doesn't make jokes he's just nasty giving that olive. He is upset because he is the last one in my name. Actually, one needs to feel sorry for him...

It seems to us that the engagement and the intensity in the situation have something to do with the letters all of a sudden being *more alive*. They are more alive not only in being reinvented over and over again but also as if the sense the children work with when writing and

reading names consists in connecting the reading and writing to physical and psychical states, existential problems and every day events that concern them. It is as if they *hung up the letters in Life itself*. This is further confirmed when Kelly came back one Monday and started making a proper “diary of names” describing everything she did during the weekend: drawing, working in the garden, had pancakes for lunch, went with mum to workout, vomited at the amusement park after having a ride in the “Wild Mouse,” and watched brother play hockey...



Rather than judging the children’s reading and writing as recognizable and representative of the map drawn up by linguistics, science, and pedagogy we try to understand what sense is produced in children’s reading and writing. In order to access this, one also needs to reconsider the relation between sense and nonsense.

### Sense/Nonsense – Too Many Lines on an Old E

That sense is never an origin, but continuously produced, and that truth is just a side effect of this process, is demonstrated by Deleuze (2004) through connecting it in an amalgamated way to nonsense. Normally, we consider some words to make sense and others as nonsense. But Deleuze proposes a relationship between sense and nonsense where sense is always and continuously produced through nonsense. All words, including the ones we consider to make sense, pass momentarily through a nonsense status. Sense production is thereby considered an act of *creation*, not acquisition, and this seems to fit very well with what we have seen so far when working with the children. When children creatively and pragmatically invent and reinvent visual and alphabetical signs they use this non-contradictory relationship between sense and nonsense and probably find themselves in this creative dimension of language where they work with the production, rather than the acquisition, of sense and mediating representations. As, for instance, in Albert's "old name":



Albert: A is wrinkled, wears glasses, and has not many teeth left. L is an old man with grey hair and moustache. B rides in a wheelchair and waves. E has got too many lines because he doesn't remember how many he is supposed to have... (Albert takes a pause and laughs a lot). He has got a bad memory and forgets things all the time! R is riding a skateboard. Old folks can do that as well, they are also supposed to have fun!

Normally, and as said earlier, within existing linguistics, scientific, and pedagogical theories and methods in the field of literacy, a child that puts too many lines on an E is not yet meta-linguistically competent or intellectually mature enough to deal with the representational and universal E. But Albert shows us that he *chose* to put too many lines with intention, and moreover, with a great deal of humour: an old E obviously forgets things all the time, including how many lines it has! In sharp contrast to orthodox thought's way of defining error in relation to truth, good will, common sense, recognition, representation, and pre-set meaning, sense is used here as continuously produced and especially produced from nonsense, giving a *proportionally deserved truth*. Children's sometimes very odd expressions can now be re-evaluated and taken seriously. To further push this point, one also needs to take a look at how children construct problems rather than working with them as predefined with corresponding solutions.

### **Construction of Problems – Representation as Production and the Sense of Life**

Deleuze (2004) shows how the event and its sense production through nonsense always relate to the construction of problems. Problems are normally considered as pre-given and as corresponding to equally pre-given solutions considered to be the warranty for truth. This approach does not take into account how problems closely relate and depend upon the actual sense production at stake, and it does not acknowledge truth as a side-effect. What Deleuze (1994) suggests, is that problems are always constructed in relation to the sense departed from, and that truth and solutions are proportional in relation to this sense:

Far from being concerned with solutions, truth and falsehood primarily affect problems. A solution always has the truth it deserves according to the problem to which it is a response, and the problem always has the solution it deserves in proportion to *its own* truth or falsity – in other words, in proportion to its sense. (p. 159; original emphasis)

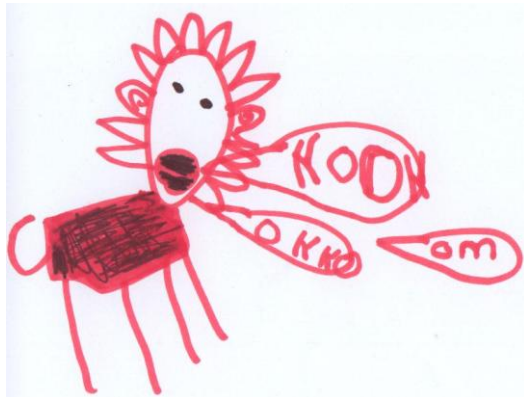
In the name-project, it seems to us that the problem that the children are constructing is the very *problem of representation*, but they do so through departing from a sense of representation as *production* and by *hanging up the letters in Life itself*. Moreover, they treat representation not as universal alphabetical signs but as both *visual and alphabetical signs simultaneously*. This certainly presents a challenge to the standards/accountability movement as this kind of reading and writing does not fit into its devices since it departs from the idea that the problem of reading and writing is given; it has its set sense and its corresponding solutions. It is exactly here that we need forceful theories that align themselves with children's own strategies. And even though the quite complex ideas of the event presented here might seem abstract, they really do not have to be considered abstract at all. Or rather, they could be considered *sufficiently abstract to match children's doings* and to help us reconsider and re-evaluate our concrete everyday events. Children seem to almost always consider truth in total proportion to the sense at stake and, therefore, are quite reluctant to given solutions and seem to prefer to stay in the construction of problems. This might be why we sometimes have a hard time understanding young children, because they come up with things that to us adults seem very odd. But our experiences tell us that if one takes a closer look, children's thinking, talking, and acting are never random (Olsson, 2009). Children always have a sense production going on that corresponds in a proportional way to their way of formulating problems.

### **The Events Relation to Learning and Knowledge – A Thinner Skin Mentality**

Problems and their solutions concern the domain of learning and knowledge. Depending upon how we define problems and solutions, we will define learning and knowledge in specific ways. From the above definition of problems as never givens, but as derived from sense and thereby deserving their solutions as well as their proper degree of truth and falseness, a specific view on learning and knowledge can be drawn up. From this perspective, learning is to enter into a *problematic field* (Deleuze, 1994, p. 165). This is different than adapting oneself to an already set sense or solving a predetermined problem with a corresponding solution. This latter learning is really nothing more than a question of imitation and reproduction. According to Deleuze (1994), the importance of the process of learning is frequently highlighted in educational contexts, but still, it seems that it is said only because it is a fashion. The process of learning is still treated only as “the empirical conditions of knowledge,” that will sooner or later have to

“disappear in the result” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 166). That is, the process of learning is still and always subordinated to knowledge.

What stands out, when we analyze the name-project is that, even though the focus is on the process of learning, the children still seem to learn what they from a more formalized educational perspective are supposed to. However, this is only an effect of having engaged in a vital process. The children never stop pushing their problem of representation, that is, they don't settle with their results. As the project continues the children continue reading and writing at other occasions and in relation to more things than their names. The further we go into the semester new and more alphabetical signs, words, sentences, and even different languages are being produced by the children.

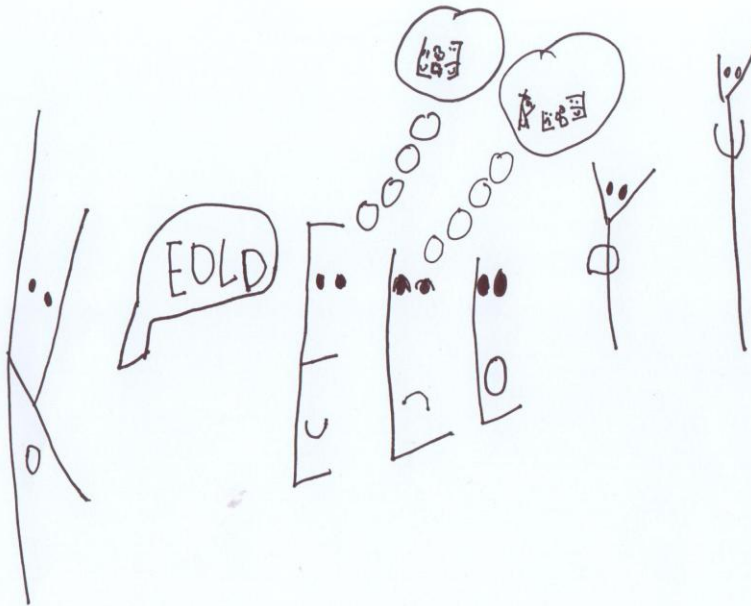


This is a dog and balloons. It can speak human language. In the first balloon I write first K then O. Then I write O and K. I think I have written "cow" (cow= ko in Swedish), and "okay". Have I?

Teacher: Yes you have.

Then I have written okay in the other balloon. Will it be cow if I do it the other way around?

Over and over they show us examples that contradict what we think we thought linguistics, science, and pedagogy knew about language and children. Kelly's name below, for instance, makes it necessary to question the idea of children not having enough intellectual capacity or maturity to deal with representations as abstractions. Kelly's name contains so many dimensions that an adult's abstractedness probably isn't *abstract enough* to comprehend it:



K says: but what about L and E (observe that in the balloon there is an attempt to construct this sentence in Swedish: "men E och L då?"). E and L have nothing to do so they think about what they want to do (observe the corresponding images in the balloons where E and L is illustrated with the puzzle in between them). E thinks that it wants to do a puzzle (observe the happy mouth on E also in the balloon). But L doesn't like to do puzzles so it's not going to do that (observe the sad mouth on the L also in the balloon).

Indeed, these processes seem to concern a more creative and profound learning than one that is simply about imitation and reproduction. The children *relate* to language, reading, and writing by creatively constructing the problem of representation and by hanging up alphabetical as well as visual signs in Life. Another relational phenomenon that strikes out in the name project is the children's way of working together with each other, the teachers and researchers, constantly being attentive to other strategies and propositions, using, borrowing and transforming them (see also Eriksson, 2010). It is as if children, teachers, and researchers, as well as the actual content – the reading and writing of the names – find themselves in some kind of “pact” where everything takes place in a relational field (see Dahlberg & Olsson, forthcoming). Or, as our artistic adviser expresses it: “It is as if children have thinner skin than adults” (E. Theorell, personal communication, February, 3, 2011). Children do not seem to divide the world and themselves up in quite so many categories as adults do. They seem to be working from a very relational state of mind, a proper “thinner skin mentality.” In the name-project, it is the fact that the alphabetical code is exploded, that gives more singular strategies. At the same time, since children are allowed and encouraged to borrow and use each other's strategies, there is also a larger and ever changing “collective bank of knowledge” to deal with. Considering children, teachers, and researchers as well as the content and form of learning processes as measurable according to permanent and stable knowledge would totally block the relations and the creativity seen above.

### **The Relation between Events and Method – Bring in the Culture, even the Loss of Teeth**

The general subordination of problems to solutions and of learning to knowledge can also be seen when it comes to method. In this case, what is subordinated is the culture surrounding a problem. In a learning that is about imitation and reproduction, sense and problems are givens and solutions wait for them ready made, so the process of learning is just a preparatory movement to attain the goal, the knowledge (Deleuze, 1994). In such a situation it becomes important to find the most effective method to achieve the solutions, reach knowledge and attain the goal. This is exactly what occurs within the standards/accountability movement and its pressure for school-reform. But, with a definition of learning as the production of sense and the construction of problems, there is the need for a different methodological approach. An alternative is to bring in the whole culture surrounding this entering into a problematic field (Deleuze, 1994). Pedagogical documentation, as used didactically and scientifically in the setting described above, takes this seriously.

The questions asked here take into account the entire culture that surrounds the problems being constructed: What is the sense that the children's construction of problems departs from? How is the entering into the problematic field happening? Everything plays a role here, the persons involved and their different thoughts, speech, and actions, the material, the environment, even the loss of teeth. Denise, at one point in the project while the children were investigating how angry and happy mouths and words can be represented, brought in her own actual experience of loosing her teeth:





I've made a "friends-mouth". It says nice things and asks if the friend wants to play (observe the lost teeth).



This is a shouting mouth, you see the yucky thing in the throat. It looks angry and uses a bad language. He hasn't lost any teeth yet...

Pedagogical documentation, as used above, presents an alternative to the accountability/standards movement in that it is continuously, simultaneously, and stringently used to prepare, conduct, and analyze learning processes. The specific didactical and scientific work shown above makes of it a proper counter-effectuation of orthodox thought governing the accountability/standards movement. Prepare, here, does not mean plan in detail. It means opening up to as many perspectives as possible on the problem to be worked upon. Conduct, here, does not mean to follow the plan in a rational manner. It means to experiment with the photos, the observations, and artifacts to let them be used as projections and catalysts for a continuous work of constructing the problem. Analysis here does not mean to measure the learning process against already set goals. It means to look for and engage in the collective construction of problems derived from the actual sense under production and that thereby deserve their solutions as well as their proper and proportional degree of truth and falseness.

### **Conclusion: Eventicizing Curriculum - Learning to Read and Write through Becoming a Citizen of the World**

It is time to turn the standards/accountability movement's logic on its head. Standardized and trivialized method as the means of permanent and stable knowledge connected to truth, good will, common sense, recognition, representation, error, set meaning, and pre-given problems with

corresponding solutions will only continue to reduce the process of learning to a preparatory movement that will disappear in a predefined result. If there is something real in the proposition that we live in a *transforming* globalized society, this logic is no longer a functioning logic. When performing this turn on the head, we need to choose how to do this. Herman Melville's story of Bartleby the Scrivener, a clerk in a law-firm at Wall Street, who simply but politely answers to all demands, "I would prefer not to," has been used by several writers as an example of how to resist contemporary domesticating attempts (Taubman, 2009), but our Bartleby is a revisited one, who's answer firmly and effectively goes: "I am too busy doing the important stuff." Doing the important stuff must begin with really listening to and taking seriously children's *production* of knowledge. We need more elastic theories that align themselves with and are closer to children's learning processes. From the present theoretical perspective we can acknowledge children's own learning as equally valuable. The children in the above examples really do treat language as an event. When they connect the problem of representation to a sense of Life they are very close to how Deleuze (2004) talks about the event as "making language possible" (p. 208). That is, it is not language that is the cause or origin of our events. Language is part of events but does not resemble events or contain them. The children neither overestimate nor underestimate language; they experiment with it departing from a sense of Life. They hang language up in Life, as part of Life. When the children in the above examples ask about and experiment with the very foundations of language as a representative system, linguistics, science, and pedagogy's theories and methods are totally thwarted. Rather, it is the children who push the problem furthest by asking the real meta-linguistic question and performing the real meta-linguistic action: "How come we chose this specific connection between words and things? Let's try another one!" Deleuze (2004) writes that to encompass the event, is to impersonalize and pre-individualize ourselves and the world in order to keep them alive, "It is a question of becoming a citizen of the world" (p. 169). When the children in the above examples creatively and relationally reinvent or impersonalize and pre-individualize the problem of representation in language, they seem - rather than being globalized citizens still caught up in a domesticating definition of knowledge - to be much closer to "becoming citizens of the world."

## Notes

1. Liselott Mariett Olsson, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University. This research is supported by the Swedish Research Council. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Liselott Mariett Olsson, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Frescati Hagväg 16 B, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden. Contact: liselottmariett@me.com
2. In the project "The Magic of Language" pedagogical documentation has been developed in close relation to different philosophical and theoretical perspectives such as those presented by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Adriana Cavarero and Emmanuel Levinas. We also want to acknowledge that pedagogical documentation has its origin in the preschools in the Italian town Reggio Emilia, where pedagogical documentation is closely connected to their "pedagogy of listening". Through our cooperation with these schools, we have been able to develop not only theoretical and analytical tools but also the didactical skills needed when working with pedagogical documentation.
3. The incorporeal or neo-materialist philosophy is also the origin of the name of the research project "The Magic of Language". According to Deleuze and Guattari, if one chooses this path, one needs a "ghostly capacity for the apprehension of incorporeal transformations", and the need for a faculty that is "mediumistic, glossolalic, or xenoglossic" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.p. 93-94). In fact, to choose to work with a multidimensional reality truly is to engage in some kind of magic, although without any kind of romantic or nostalgic connotation. If magic,

it is a very pragmatic magic; it concerns simply a means to appreciate and work with our daily events in preschool through not taking for granted that everything is what it seems to be.

4. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the history of philosophy has through its logic of representation given language non-spatial and temporal features that makes it seemingly independent of its formed materiality. All other strata are considered to spatially evolve over time, but language is normally (and especially within language-based theories) treated as disconnected from spatial materiality. This lack of spatial materiality creates somewhat imperialist pretensions of language, where language is over-estimated and thought to be able to encompass all the other strata. But at the same time language is underestimated in that it harbours a much more creative, pragmatic and becoming dimension than expected (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 70).

5. It is not by accident that we sometimes feel that the accountability/standards movement seem to have become self-sufficient and no longer even in need of a practice to connect to. The orthodox thought that is the very starting point for this movement is in itself self-sufficient, closed in within itself and it does not let itself be affected by the complexity of life. Moreover, this thought has got a very special relation to language. Just as thought is supposed to represent the world and/or our experiences of it, language is in the same way imagined to represent thought. And when taking into account how Deleuze and Guattari, describe the imagined all-encompassing and non-spatial features of language that makes it seemingly independent of its formed materiality, we can clearly see the workings of the imperialist pretensions of language in our current situation. It seems that this over-estimation of language is brought to its extreme within the accountability/standards movements. It is through language and written down accounts obeying the idea of a true nature of thought, already set representations and meaning, already defined problems and corresponding solutions and predetermined and permanent knowledge that practices are supposed to progress through the use of standardized methods. It is like a great administrative vicious circle where orthodox thought represents our selves, the world and/or our experiences of it and where language is representing orthodox thought. We are asked to believe that all of this takes place without any external relations and in absence of any kind of materiality.

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