

RETHINKING TEMPORALITY IN EDUCATION DRAWING UPON THE PHILOSOPHIES OF  
MERLEAU-PONTY AND DELEUZE: A CHIASMIC BE(COM)ING

Susanne Westman

Eva Alerby

Department of Arts, Communication and Education,  
Luleå University of Technology, Sweden

Abstract:

The children of today live in a time when the images of themselves and their childhood, their needs, interests, and skills, are discussed, researched, challenged, and changed. Childhood, education and educational settings for young children are to a great extent governed by temporality. In this paper, temporality and temporal notions in education are explored and discussed. We especially illuminate two different ways of thinking about children in education and care for younger children in the West – the predominant biased notions of the child as *becoming* or *being*. The child as *becoming*, is manifested primarily in classical developmental psychology while the notion of the child as *being*, has been highlighted mainly by sociological researchers in their critique of developmental psychology. This latter notion is also visible in a totally different manner in the philosophy of Rousseau, emphasizing the free and natural child. In addition, we explore an alternative way of thinking about temporality and children. Drawing upon the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze, we argue for a rethinking of temporality beyond linear views on time and biased notions of children as ‘either or’. A movement towards a perspective which not only combines notions, but where the whole is more than merely the sum of the parts, is proposed. This leads to an ambiguous, intertwined and ongoing connection between the temporal notions of *have been*, *being* and *becoming*, described by a novel concept – *a chiasmic be(com)ing*. We suggest that this alternative may be a fruitful way to overcome binary approaches and expand the discussion of temporality, and temporal notions of children, in education. Such an alternative could function as a counterweight to the predominant notions of education and teachers’ work. It may also be seen as a significant foundation for an ethical education since it is built upon ongoing and intertwined relationships, which appreciate openness and unpredictability.

Keywords: Maurice Merleau-Ponty; Gilles Deleuze; temporality; becoming; being; a chiasmic be(com)ing; ethical education

Repensando a Temporalidade no Desenho da Educação com as Filosofias de Merleau-Ponty e Deleuze: um Devir Chiásmico

Resumo:

As crianças de hoje vivem em um momento no qual as imagens delas mesmas e de sua infância, suas necessidades, interesses e capacidades, são discutidos, pesquisados, desafiados, e mudados. Infância, educação e dispositivos educacionais para as crianças pequenas são em grande extensão governados pela temporalidade. Neste artigo, temporalidade e noções temporais na educação são exploradas e discutidas. Nós esclarecemos especialmente dois modos diferentes de pensar sobre as crianças na educação e no cuidado pelas crianças menores no Ocidente – as noções tendenciosas predominantes das crianças como *dever ser* ou *ser*. A criança como *dever ser* é manifestada em primeiro lugar na psicologia do desenvolvimento clássica enquanto a noção da criança como *ser* foi ressaltada principalmente pelos pesquisadores da sociologia em sua crítica à psicologia do

desenvolvimento. Esta última noção é também visível de maneira totalmente diferente na filosofia de Rousseau, enfatizando a criança livre e natural. Além disso, exploramos um modo alternativo de pensar a temporalidade e as crianças. Partindo das filosofias de Maurice Merleau-Ponty e de Gilles Deleuze, nós argumentamos para repensar a temporalidade além das visões lineares e das noções tendenciosas das crianças como 'ou ou'. Um movimento em direção a uma perspectiva que não somente combina noções, mas na qual o todo é mais que somente a soma das partes é proposta. Isso leva a uma conexão ambígua, entrelaçada e progressiva entre as noções temporais de *ter sido*, *ser* e *devir*, descrita por um novo conceito - *um ser-devir quiásmico*. Sugerimos que essa alternativa pode ser um jeito frutífero de ultrapassar abordagens binárias e de expandir a discussão sobre temporalidade e noções de criança, na educação. Tal alternativa poderia funcionar como um contrapeso à noção predominante de educação e trabalho dos professores. Pode também ser vista como uma fundação significativa para uma educação ética desde que é construída sobre relações interligadas e evolutivas, que apreciam abertura e imprevisibilidade.

Palavras-chave: Maurice Merleau-Ponty; Gilles Deleuze; temporalidade, devir, ser, um ser-devir quiásmico; educação ética

Repensar la Temporalidad en Educación, Dibujando a Partir de las Filosofías de Merleau-Ponty y Deleuze: un Devenir Quiásmico.

Resumen:

Los niños de hoy viven en un momento en que las imágenes de sí mismos y de su infancia, de sus necesidades, intereses y habilidades, se discuten, investigan, desafían y cambian. La infancia, la educación y sus dispositivos para niños pequeños son en gran medida regidos por la temporalidad. En este trabajo, se exploran y discuten la temporalidad y las nociones temporales en educación. En especial iluminamos dos maneras diferentes de pensar acerca de los niños y su educación y el cuidado de los niños más pequeños en Occidente - nociones dominantes sesgadas del niño como *devenir* o *ser*. El niño como devenir, se manifiesta primeramente en la Psicología Evolutiva clásica, mientras que la noción del niño como ser, ha sido puesta de relieve principalmente por los investigadores sociológicos en su crítica de la psicología del desarrollo. Esta última noción es también visible en una forma totalmente diferente en la filosofía de Rousseau, quien hace hincapié en el niño libre y natural. Además, exploramos una forma alternativa de pensar la temporalidad y los niños. Basándose en la filosofía de Maurice Merleau-Ponty y Gilles Deleuze, argumentamos a favor de repensar la temporalidad más allá de visiones lineares sobre el tiempo y nociones tendenciosas de los niños como "o bien o". Se propone un movimiento hacia una perspectiva que no sólo combina nociones, sino donde el todo es más que la mera suma de las partes. Esto conduce a una conexión ambigua, entrelazada y persistente entre las nociones temporales de haber sido, ser y devenir, descrito por un concepto novedoso: *devenir quiásmico*. Sugerimos que esta alternativa puede ser un camino frutífero para superar enfoques binarios y ampliar el debate de la temporalidad, y las nociones temporales de los niños, en educación. Tal alternativa podría funcionar como un contrapeso a las nociones predominantes en educación y en el trabajo de los docentes. También puede ser visto como una base importante para una educación ética, ya que se construye sobre relaciones persistentes y entrelazadas, que aprecian la apertura y la imprevisibilidad.

Palabras clave: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, temporalidad, devenir, ser, devenir quiásmico, educación ética

RETHINKING TEMPORALITY IN EDUCATION DRAWING UPON THE PHILOSOPHIES OF  
MERLEAU-PONTY AND DELEUZE: A CHIASMIC BE(COM)ING

Recent decades have witnessed an increased public interest in children and childhood. The children of today live in a time when the images of themselves and their childhood, their needs, interests, and skills, are discussed, researched, challenged, and changed (MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007; Moss, 2007). Compared with the past, they have not only different opportunities, rights, and conditions, but also different expectations of what to be and to become.

Education and educational settings<sup>1</sup> for young children<sup>2</sup> are to a great extent governed by temporality. In education and care for younger children in the West, two different ways of thinking about children have been particularly dominant, both in isolation and alongside each other. One is the notion of children as *beings*, and the other is the notion of children as *becomings*.

The aim of this paper is to explore temporal notions of children. We more specifically illuminate and discuss the two predominant and general notions of children as *becomings* or *beings*, and then we present a third alternative way, drawing upon the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze. Based on this rethinking of temporality in education, beyond a linear view of time, we emphasize an ambiguous, intertwined and ongoing connection between *becoming* and *being*, where aspects of *have been* are included – *a chiasmic be(com)ing*. We suggest that this alternative may be a fruitful way to overcome binary approaches and expand the discussion of temporality, and temporal notions of children, in education. We further highlight and discuss how such an alternative view might influence education and teachers' work.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Education' and 'educational settings' are here understood in a broad sense, to include a range of institutions that offer teaching, learning, care, and upbringing of children.

<sup>2</sup> According to article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) children are defined as human beings under the age of eighteen years. In this paper we especially focus on temporal notions of children up to the age of approximately thirteen years.

### **Temporality in Education**

Time controls a large part of everyday life as well as activities in these educational settings. This time-control materializes through the form of the clock, which, in an extremely tangible manner, influences the activities and divides the daily life of school into different time periods, time modules or other temporal frameworks. The clock, as well as the schedule, ensures that both teachers and children are in the 'right' place at the 'right' time, and thereby makes the complex coordination of a school's and its participants' different activities possible (Alerby, 2004). The same is true for early childhood education and care. Even if preschools cannot be compared with compulsory schools that are run according to the 'ringing of the school bell', they often adopt an invisible but traditional way of thinking about schedules that strongly regulates their activities (Nordin-Hultman, 2004). This temporal control has an impact on different notions of children, and consequently on children's possibilities to be and to become.

The child as becoming, is manifested primarily in classical developmental psychology while the notion of the child as being, has been highlighted mainly by sociological researchers in their critique of developmental psychology. This latter notion is also visible in a totally different manner in the philosophy of Rousseau, emphasizing the free and natural child (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2002; Halldén, 2007; Kryger, 2004; Moss, Clark, & Kjörholt, 2005; Qvortrup, 2004).

Traditionally, becoming and outcomes of learning are placed in the future, while being and processes of learning are placed in the present. Consequently, these ways of thinking may lead to biased notions of process and product, the former strongly connected to the child as being, and the latter associated with the child as becoming. We cannot ignore the importance of desire and change in creating knowledge – the aspect of becoming in learning. Focusing mainly on the future, and thus the results of a child's education, may, however, lead to an over-emphasis of the value of becoming; a situation in which children's being and meaning-making in the present moment becomes undervalued. The reverse can also be true – one can stagnate in the being; however, aspects of have been are always present in being and becoming. In one sense we cannot change what has been – our past –, but in another



sense our past changes during our present and future life, since our experiences change how we regard the past (Westman & Alerby, 2011).

Contemporary educational philosophy, research and practice concerning young children have begun to explore new alternatives to overcome prevailing discourses (cf. Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2005; Lenz Taguchi, 2010b; Borgnon, 2007). Still, predominant notions tend to hold firm and more exploration needs to be done. The impact that notions or ways of thinking might have on those involved in education is discussed by Peters (2007). He highlights interactive classifications as common in education, and argues for new styles of thinking in terms of using philosophical and pluralistic approaches in education.

A thinking that takes us away from pure realms of cognitive science and logic towards views that are historical, temporal, spatial, cultural, and, therefore also empirical . . . If we do, a way opens to also recognising that new way of thinking and styles of reasoning come into existence (Peters, 2007, p. 360).

It is thus reasonable to assume that generalized temporal notions of children, as becomings or beings, would most likely have an effect on children and their education, as well as teachers' work. For example, teachers in early childhood education seem to have an ambiguous way of regarding children. They experience themselves struggling against the predominant and general notions of the child, while at the same time they emphasize the importance of encountering children as unique individuals (Westman & Bergmark, forthcoming). Even though each notion of the child, as being or becoming, has its advantages and disadvantages, a unilateral view may be a limitation for children in education. In general, educational discussions tend to treat concepts and notions that are related to, and even dependent on each other as dichotomies or binary patterns (Barnacle, 2009). Consequently, there is a need to move beyond biased and predominantly temporal notions of children as 'either or', towards a perspective which not only combines notions, but where the whole is more than merely the sum of the parts. As Peters (2007) points out, alternative pluralistic ways of thinking in education do not have less influence, but they may function as a counterweight to the predominant ones. So, in the following we will lay the foundations for a philosophical encounter between

the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze, opening up an alternative way of regarding time and temporality in education.

### **Philosophical Dissonances and Resonances**

Even though comparing and contrasting different philosophical approaches can sometimes be tedious or false, it can also be worthwhile if the exploration creates an encounter where mutual reinforcement is enabled and the different theories, therefore, are not reduced to the same (Reynolds & Roffe, 2006). In accordance with this, we link Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze in what we see as their mutual spirit; each, in different ways, has stressed the importance of openness and unpredictability (Deleuze, 2004; Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968). Although Deleuze has criticized phenomenology in some of his main works (cf. Deleuze, 2004), as discussed by, for example, Lawlor (1998), as the 'double challenge' in terms of immanence and difference, we find it useful to view his philosophy of time in relation to the ambiguity of temporality that is visible in Merleau-Ponty's account. Let us, therefore, briefly look at some resonances and reasons for interweaving the two, beyond philosophical dissonances.

Reynolds and Roffe (2006) argue for a rapprochement between these two philosophers since Deleuze's critique of phenomenology seems mainly to be questions that are raised when discussing problems that he connects to Kant (cf. Deleuze, 2004). Deleuze challenges the Cartesian view of the subject, of consciousness and of representation, which he connects to phenomenology. Still, this is done without exploring more deeply the diversity within phenomenology, and especially Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the life-world.

In Merleau-Ponty's account, on-going and entwined relationships, whether social, cultural, historical, or in nature, affect and are affected by our being and becoming. All things within the life-world—people, language, things, environment, history, and so on—mutually influence each other in an intertwined relationship (Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968). This agrees, to some extent, with Deleuze's view of affective experiences within a wide range of encounters—like a mode of existence. He emphasizes that human attributes or powers are not enough to govern humanity because they are linked to and dependent on—or even an effect



of—other, for example, socio-cultural and environmental forces, or encounters (cf. Deleuze, 2004; Semetsky & Lovat, 2011). However, the relationships that Merleau-Ponty points out, encroach upon one another in a sort of crossing-over—a *chiasm* (Diprose & Reynolds, 2008; Evans & Lawlor, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968; Reynolds, 2004b). He argues that we have to reject assumptions that human and world are separated, and presents the concept of *flesh*: “The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. . . The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being” (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p.139). Ultimately, the concepts of chiasm and flesh repeal the dualistic relationship between an inner autonomous subject and an outer objective world, which makes Merleau-Ponty’s account differ from that of other phenomenological branches (e.g. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology), and thereby links instead to philosophies like Deleuze’s.

Both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze may be considered as having pluralistic views that reject a binary delineation. They instead advocate or embody multidimensional and multiple approaches towards philosophy, life and experience, signified by complexity and unpredictability (Deleuze, 2004; Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968). Simplified, Merleau-Ponty expresses this in terms of ambiguity and interrogation, while Deleuze uses difference and novel concepts. In other words, Deleuze claims that his philosophy represents a methodology that aims to find “the conditions under which something new is produced” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006, p. vi); it analyses and captures phenomena by creating novel concepts, beyond representation and repetition, such as the phenomenon of time. The philosophy of the life-world, as formulated by Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, focuses on how this phenomenon is experienced “not as an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 483), as it presents itself in an open and ever changing experience. Thereby, interrogation is emphasized as a way of acting as if we know nothing about phenomena within our life-world.

In spite of, or thanks to both resonances and dissonances, we find it useful to explore Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze’s accounts of time and temporality, thereby creating an encounter allowing for the unpredictable and not yet articulated, beyond presupposed notions. But let us first outline the need for a rethinking of temporal notions in education by analysing two general styles of thinking about children in

education. More specifically, we will illuminate and discuss children as becomings or beings, and how these notions might affect education and teachers' work.

### **Children as Becomings or Beings – Binary Notions**

In the light of history, we find the traditional notion of children as becomings mainly in modernistic and positivistic views of learning and in the paradigm of classical developmental psychology, such as in the Piagetian paradigm (cf. Piaget, 1972). For example, cognitive theories made teachers wait for the child to mature and develop, in accordance with the universal, natural, and normal child (Jenks, 1996; Qvortrup, 2004; Vallberg Roth, 2002). In Merleau-Ponty's eyes, Piaget's thoughts that children, at the age of twelve, reach the cogito and associated truths of rationalism, needs to be criticized. "Piaget brings the child to a mature outlook as if the thoughts of the adult were self-sufficient and disposed of all contradictions. But, in reality, it must be the case that the child's outlook is in some way vindicated against the adult's and against Piaget" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.414). Some other examples of the classical notion of becoming in education today may be: cognitive approaches to learning, systems dividing children in classes due to age, requesting children's maturity as a prerequisite for participation, or assessment trends in combination with clearly stated goals in curricula even for younger children.

Qvortrup (2004) states that: "It is the fate of children to be waiting" (p. 267). Children are waiting to become adults, to become competent, to acquire rights and so on. This destiny is in line with the reasoning that children are our future, where the focus is on children as 'not yet adults' and as 'becoming citizens'. Hence, grown-ups and adults may represent the human beings, while children can be regarded as human becomings. This way of thinking about children can be understood as a way of objectifying them. Such a view neglects childhood as having a worth in itself and places childhood and adulthood in opposition (Halldén, 2007; Qvortrup, 2004). It is, however, important to note that pedagogical approaches drawing on Deleuze's concept of becoming are not to be seen as part of the traditional notion of the child as becoming; rather, his account challenges this view, as we will further outline in our exploration of alternatives.



From the traditional perspective of children as becomings, time exists independently of human beings and of the events happening in time, in line with the Newtonian way of regarding time as objective (Rusell, 1996), which can be called the classical linear view of time. The fact that time in educational settings is often viewed as strictly chronological and linear, runs the risk that children may be transformed into objects that are shaped by the demands of time, as physical bodies (Alerby, 2004). In the regulated time of school, signified by the temporal notions, 'time is money' and 'time is short', children learn that the way they use the time here and now will have consequences for how their future will turn out. Within this regulated time, children create their own micro-spaces as part of their embodiment of time (Christensen, James, & Jenks, 2001). This may be seen as a kind of resistance to the over-emphasis on the future within the regulated and rational time in school.

Relationships within educational settings, such as social relationships between teacher and child, and between individual children, have proved to be an important factor for qualitative education (Benett, 2004, 2007; Johansson, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2004; Bergmark, 2009). These relationships might, however, lose both their potential and power in an approach where education mainly focuses on the transfer of 'objective' knowledge, based on normative templates of children. By emphasizing what the child will know and become in a month, a year, or even as a grown-up, assessing the achieved outcomes and controlling the child, the educational situation may become somewhat instrumental, goal-orientated and rational, with teachers functioning primarily as technicians (Forrester, 2005; Hargreaves, 1994, 2001; O'Connor, 2008; Osborne, 2006; Westman & Alerby, 2011). For example, the inter-subjective relationship to the lived-other seems to blur or almost disappear in the controlling dimensions of teachers' work (Westman, Alerby, & Brown, forthcoming). Today's demands, both on higher education and that younger children's learning should be stimulated and assessed, once again, bring these issues to the fore and confirm some notions or ways of thinking that are at the expense of others.

The artwork below (see Figure 1) is known as an illustration of the opinion regarding the Swedish school system as a ruthless destroyer of childhood freedom, forty years ago. It shows the strongly regulated time structure in school, as well as children waiting for 'a profitable' future, where they finally count as adequate

rethinking temporality in education drawing upon the philosophies of merleau-ponty and deleuze: a chiasmic be(com)ing

citizens. It may, therefore, be considered useful for illustrating the traditional notion of the child as becoming.



Figure 1. The painting *Will you be profitable little friend?* by Peter Tillberg, 1972.

The other general notion—children as beings—is mainly emphasized by sociological researchers in the field of childhood. Through their criticism of developmental psychology, they have come to propose a view that emphasizes children as beings, where childhood has a value in its own right and where children are to be viewed as social actors, not as becomings (Halldén, 2007; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996; Moss, Clark, & Kjörholt, 2005; Qvortrup, 2004).

Nevertheless, features of a view that emphasize the value of childhood in itself can also be found in the philosophy of Rousseau in the eighteenth century and in the ideals of the Enlightenment in terms of freedom and nature (Rousseau, 1977, 1978). In other words, Rousseau's philosophy is based on a humanistic and romantic view of the child. These thoughts have influenced the view of a free child having the right to be a child. Such a stance has been present in various ways, for example, in Scandinavian early childhood education and care, ever since. The artwork below (see Figure 2) can be seen as an illustration of this romantic view. More specifically, it portrays childhood's freedom, the children allowed to be present in the moment.



Figure 2. The painting *Christmas morning* by Carl Larsson, 1894.

Consequently, those varied views of the child as being, have had different bases and aims. The romantic notion of children as beings can contradictorily be connected to the notion of children as becomings since children are emphasized as being of a certain kind, different from adults, where the basis is a linear view of time. The sociological notion of the child as being on the other hand, attempts to make children and adults equal. Hence, it has been especially important for questions regarding children's own perspectives in both research and practice (Corsaro, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2007; Halldén, 2003, 2007; MacNaughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). Still, Kjörholt (2005) points out that:

. . . discourses constructing children as subjects with rights to participation in society are not unproblematic [and are] related on the one hand to processes of individualisation and the construction of the autonomous, self-determining subject . . . and on the other hand to particular cultural notions of 'the free child' (p. 152).

In relation to this sociological notion of children as beings, the view of knowledge and learning is based on social, historical and cultural influences where meaning-making and self-construction play a vital role (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; James & Prout, 1997). According to Jenks (1996), the critique of the notion of the child as becoming was not intended to "address the child as [a] practical and pre-

stated being" (p. 32), but to go beyond conventional reasoning, addressing the child, as well as time, as a social construct. He points out how temporal aspects often have been neglected in sociology.

The critics relate the notion of the child as being to a perspective of learning where the self becomes the product and where a construction of 'process over product' is significant (Gibbons, 2007). As Qvortrup (2004) self-critically reflects, social studies of childhood have, to some extent, neglected children's own anticipation of their future in favour of a 'here and now' perspective. Accordingly, the temporal perspective of 'here and now' has been in focus, whether in children's everyday lives specifically or childhood in general.

A biased notion of the child as being also has consequences for education and teachers' work due to its unilateral focus on the present moment. In a view where learning involves knowledge as well as self- and meaning-construction, process and product need to overlap. For example, important aspects of young children's learning are, their strategies, and their desire to explore and understand the world. Thus, perspectives of meaning-making and 'here and now' are also related to the ongoing becoming of the child, as has been explicated by researchers drawing on, for example, Deleuze's theories (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Lenz Taguchi, 2010a; Olsson, 2009). Given this, a biased notion of the child as being might lead to a somewhat stagnated educational relationship, in which teachers underestimate the need to challenge curiosity and desire, as well as movement and dynamics, in education. This may also limit children's learning potential in both the short and the long term.

In a society characterized by constant changes—a liquid society, as Bauman (2000) expresses it—both adults and children are living under the concept of life-long learning. A grown-up can no longer be considered as a human being who has already achieved the knowledge required and therefore can live a stable and unchanging life (Kryger, 2004). Thus, children's and adults' being in the world are no longer to be regarded as opposites. On the contrary, the being of children and adults can be viewed as an on-going becoming that distinguishes the human beings of today. Still, this fluid way of regarding knowledge and learning may have its limitations. The concept of life-long learning may become a normative template equal to views of autonomous souls striving for time and more knowledge in an



ever-changing world. Flexibility and change then become aims for their own sake and for future economic profits (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Popkewitz & Bloch, 2001). How then can we avoid notions of children and learning that might lead to a rational and instrumental educational relationship on the one hand, or a more stagnated educational relationship on the other?

In the following, we will highlight a possible alternative beyond biased and traditional notions of children as becomings or beings. We will explore a chiasmic be(com)ing built upon a non-linear view of time. This is based on ambiguous and on-going connections between the temporal notions of, have been, being, and becoming. Since this alternative draws upon an encounter with Merleau-Ponty's and Deleuze's philosophies of time and temporality, we will now explore some of the important aspects of these accounts, before discussing how such an alternative would interplay with education and teachers' work.

### **An Encounter Allowing a Chiasmic Be(com)ing**

For Merleau-Ponty (2002), ambiguity characterizes our existence. Rather than an ambivalent or dualistic relationship, it signifies irreducible and inseparable aspects and components of a whole (Langer, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968; Weiss, 2008). This also applies to temporal ambiguities, since the interplay between the body and the historical situation is one of many ambiguities that are interconnected. "A point of time can be transmitted to the others without 'continuity' without 'conservation', without fictitious 'support' in the psyche the moment that one understands time as chiasm" (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p. 267). According to Merleau-Ponty (2002), time must always constitute itself, and comes into existence through people's relation to things.

Deleuze's philosophy of time can be seen as a philosophy of process and becoming; expressed, in the words of Semetsky and Lovat (2011): "Becoming is by definition an experiment with what is new; that is, coming into being, be-coming" (p. 490). Deleuze turns the concept of becoming upside-down, focusing not on a child as becoming adult, but as human becoming-child—a specific space beyond time signified by intensity, transformation and movement (Kohan, 2011). In Deleuze's account there are three concrete structures of experience that can be used as a way of

viewing time as a totality – habitual time, memorial time and time of future (Deleuze, 2004). Habitual time is the time of the living present, memorial time is the time of the past, and the time of the future is the eternal return of difference. Simplified, one may say that each mode of time is connected to a synthesis, and each of the three syntheses is a prior process in relation to the others. Hence, time is the result of a network of unique processes or states of change which all affect each other (Deleuze, 2004). Williams (2011) illuminates this in the following: “When the present is a dimension of the past the process relating the two is different from when the past is a dimension of the present” (p. 14). This quotation points to a difference between Merleau-Ponty’s and Deleuze’s way of regarding time that, at first glance, may seem critical, especially regarding the connection between the living present and the past. Both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze use the concept of the living present, although in slightly different ways. Deleuze stresses that the state of change in the living present determines processes in the past (and in the future) because the present process synthesizes the past events in a novel manner.

The synthesis of time constitutes the present in time. It is not that the present is a dimension of time: the present alone exists. Rather, synthesis constitutes time as a living present, and the past and future as dimensions of this present. This synthesis is none the less intratemporal, which means that this present passes (Deleuze, 2004, pp. 97-98).

Merleau-Ponty on the other hand, is known to accentuate the idea that the past informs the present and the future through the ‘intentional bow arch’, that is, that the subject’s earlier experiences give direction and meaning to present and coming actions. Past, present and future are bridged by the intentional bow arch. But there is more to come in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of time. He presents a non-serial theory of time, in itself chiasmic and reversible, as described briefly above (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968). Hence the temporal flow is not just a moving forward. Time has its different layers or depths, between which moments can flash or slide. Past, present and future transform and unfold into different layers, or as “vortices circling each other” (Mazis, 1992, p. 65). A temporal ‘alterity’, in the sense of a temporal radical difference, signifies human beings’ relationship with time and with themselves. In this view of time, experience is indeterminate and ever changing, like time in a circle of becoming. The experience changes, whereas the one



experiencing is involved in an ongoing process of becoming, and, therefore, views the experience from shifting points. "It is not the past that pushes the present, nor the present that pushes the future, in to being; the future is not prepared behind the observer, it is a brooding presence moving to meet him, like a storm on the horizon" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 478).

Consequently, Merleau-Ponty's and Deleuze's accounts of temporality allow for an encounter beyond the classical linear view of time and temporal notions of children as either becomings or beings. In this encounter there emerges a being that is embodied, sensuous, intertwined and multi-temporal within the process of becoming—a description of a chiasmic be(com)ing child. A chiasmic be(com)ing is thus deep and complex, and it houses a strong feeling of presence and belonging, appreciating potentialities and changes. It occurs, so to speak, in the same indeterminate temporality, although with different thicknesses of layers. The past experiences and memories we have—together or individually—are ubiquitous, while at the same time they are in a process of change, sliding between the dimensions of temporality. Thus, a mutual relationship between the different dimensions of time becomes visible. In what ways can a chiasmic be(com)ing interplay with and affect education and teachers' work?

### **A Chiasmic Be(com)ing—A Question for Education**

We suggest that a chiasmic be(com)ing opens a way towards an ethical education, in terms of teachers appreciating openness, diversity, potentialities and unpredictability, since it presupposes nothing and both enables and requires intertwined relationships. Evans (2010) suggests a fusion between Merleau-Ponty's and Deleuze's ontologies when it comes to ethics. By escaping what he calls Merleau-Ponty's sentient-centrism on the one hand and Deleuze's anonymity on the other, he creates an environmental ethics. He states that:

A unity composed of difference, the simultaneous affirmation of solidarity, heterogeneity, and fecundity . . . this multi-voiced body is also an ethico-political unity. The ethical import of this affirmation of the other voices of nature is that we must hear them in an open manner, that is, with a willingness to revise our own discourses about them in light of what they "say", in light of their interruptions in our discourses about

them, and thus desire to provide them with expressions that are as much as possible “their own” (Evans, 2010, p. 149).

We find these thoughts relevant to the discussion about a chiasmic be(com)ing as well, since it admits and requires mutual and interdependent relationships, not only within temporality, but also in terms of a pluralistic perspective. Within this perspective there are no dualisms between, for example, the individual and social, body and mind, human and nature. When it comes to education those intertwined relationships function as educational relationships, thereby a chiasmic be(com)ing may also be seen as a way of understanding learning. In other words, this ongoing process of be(com)ing works through temporal ambiguities and intertwined relationships, and through the flesh—the body of the world—grasped by affective tones.

Consequently, due to the mutual, ambiguous and sometimes paradoxical affectedness within different intertwined relationships, balance or consensus are not always the most desirable modes in educational situations. Instead, different contexts, events and processes, with their inherent ambiguities, transcend equivalence as a generality, and bring forward openness towards what is not yet known and what is about to come in to being. Complexity, discontinuity and irregularity are, therefore, of great value in education, and are at least as important as simplicity, continuity and regularity.

Deleuze’s view of life, learning and the processes of subjectification is intimately related to ethics. Semetsky (2010) describes Deleuzian ethics in education as a way of understanding and being affected by different perspectives in terms of becoming-other for a while. The ethics in Deleuze’s account can be connected to his emphasis on experience as a pre-personal encounter for change, which is open to difference and produces new meanings (Deleuze, 2004). According to Merleau-Ponty’s embodied focus, the concepts of flesh, self and other are inescapably intertwined, tending to affectively encroach upon each other—a transformative interaction—yet not reducible to each other. Merleau-Ponty points at the risk of imposing our own experiences on children and other humans. He asks: “Do we have the right to comprehend the time, the space of the child as undifferentiation of *our* time, of *our* space, etc....? This is to reduce the child’s experience to our own . . . But



the same question arises with regard to every *other*” (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p. 203, italics in original). Consequently, in Merleau-Ponty’s account, recognizing the otherness in the sameness of the other, the divergence (*écart*), opens the possibility for an encroachment or an encounter which affects those involved and “gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I *was* not capable of” (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p.13, italics in original). In other words, the intertwining of one self and the other in all our differences, makes us discover new dimensions of ourselves and each other. “[T]he self and the non-self are like the obverse and the reverse and since perhaps our own experience *is* this turning round that installs us far from ‘ourselves’, in the other, in the things” (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p. 160, italics in original).

An education that appreciates otherness—what we outline as an ethical education—may, therefore, be built upon children’s interests, competences and real influences—an ethos valuing different perspectives. Semetsky and Lovat (2011) express this as moving beyond our “own comfort zones of knowing; those familial, cultural, religious and dispositional preferences that, having . . . so far provided a feeling of inner security, have become a part of our habitual identity” (p. 490). In other words, openness in terms of listening and being responsive to children’s wishes to explore and be involved in intertwined educational relationships, appreciating alterity and difference, becomes crucial (Clark, Kjörholt, & Moss, 2005; Rinaldi, 2004; Westman & Bergmark, forthcoming).

How then do we deal with the fact that teachers in educational settings always have goals that guide their work? Since curricula govern activities in educational settings, and the trend is towards increasing assessment, there is a risk that children’s voices, hypotheses, theories and fantasies are underestimated or ignored in favour of teaching predetermined goals. For example, standard-based reforms, with centralized, detailed and often conventional curricula have led to less focus on children’s own initiative, interests and experiences, as well as on arts, and social, ethical and emotional knowledge (Hargreaves, 2001). This can be considered as an ethical issue with regard to education. We suggest that goals in education are used as the foundation for the pedagogical situation where teachers ask: Which different educational relationships can we involve the children in? Teachers also need to be

responsive to different kinds of educational relationships that the children are already involved in, such as those with the environment, materials and nature, as a part of their ongoing chiasmic be(com)ing (Westman & Alerby, 2011). Accordingly, the suggested chiasmic be(com)ing works not only beyond the classical linear view of time, but also beyond views of conquering knowledge progressively through predetermined events. Such an approach does not prevent future unplanned events and what will be affected by them. Thus, process and product overlap and become intertwined. Therefore, without the limitations of a linear view of time and temporality, or a notion of children and adults as either beings or becomings, we may have the chance to enhance education and learning beyond instrumental relationships on the one hand, and more stagnant relationships on the other. Here we would like to borrow the words of Lind (2010), who uses 'goal-rational' and 'goal-relational' when discussing education. Instead of a learning situation based on goal-rationality, education can be based on ongoing and intertwined pedagogical relationships—a goal-relational education. In such an approach the ambiguous relationships between have been, being and becoming are used with all their potentialities. As a consequence of the chiasmic be(com)ing based on intertwined relationships, and the views on openness and ethics presented here, the child as an individualized, autonomous and self-sufficient learning subject needs to be reconsidered. Critical pedagogy literature, drawing on, for example, Foucault, has claimed similar standpoints, although with slightly different reasons which we will not further explore within the framework of this paper (cf. Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Kjörholt, 2005). Instead, we point to Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh as showing that experiences and perceptions are subjective as well as inter-subjective and pre-individual; in other words, both immanent and transcendent. "That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world . . . , and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world . . . they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping" (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p. 249). Consequently, learning needs to be considered as a process of multiple and intertwined relationships within time and space, and children viewed as being involved in a chiasmic be(com)ing.



### Final Words

In this paper we have illuminated and discussed some reasons for linking the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze beyond philosophical dissonances, and argued for an alternative way of regarding children as involved in a chiasmic be(com)ing.

According to Merleau-Ponty (2002), the purpose of philosophy is not merely to clarify or understand different phenomena that exist, but to enable new connections between phenomena. Philosophy is a continual questioning which encourages us to presuppose nothing when exploring experience in all directions. “We must . . . examine the movement that inclines us to give our adherence to things and to one another and the ambiguities to which it exposes us: why it is irresistible, and why, as soon as we wish to think it out, it transforms itself [in]to an enigma” (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p. xxiv).

We have, for that reason, argued for a rethinking of temporality in education, beyond the classical linear view of time and the taken-for-granted notions of children as *becomings* or *beings*. In the spirit of Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, we have created an encounter that is rendered in a novel concept—an alternative way of thinking in the shape of a *chiasmic be(com)ing*. We believe that this alternative view may enhance teachers’ work in terms of appreciating openness and unpredictability in education in general, and, more specifically, in children’s learning.

*Enviado em: 25/10/2012*  
*Aprovado em: 18/12/2012*

## References

- Alerby, E. (2004). *Some reflections on time as a phenomenon within school*. Paper presented at the AARE, Melbourne University, Australia, November 28 - December 3.
- Barnacle, R. (2009). Gut instinct: the body and learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 41(1), 22-33.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Benett, J. (2004). Curriculum on early childhood education and care. *UNESCO Policy Brief on Early Childhood* 26.
- Benett, J. (2007). Results from the OECD thematic review of early childhood education and care policy 1998-2006. *UNESCO Policy Brief on Early Childhood*, 41.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (Eds.). (1966). *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. London: Penguin.
- Bergmark, U., (2009). *Building an ethical learning community in schools*. Doctoral thesis. Luleå University of Technology.
- Borgnon, L., (2007). Conceptions of the self in early childhood: territorializing identities. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 39(3), 264-274.
- Christensen, P., James, A., & Jenks, C. (2001). 'All we needed was to blow the whistle': Children's embodiment of time. In S. Cunningham-Burley & K. Backett-Milburn (Eds.), *Exploring the body*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Corsaro, W. A. (2005). *The sociology of childhood*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.
- Clark, A., Kjörholt, A T., & Moss, P. (2005). *Beyond listening: children's perspectives on early childhood services*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- CRC (1989). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1, accessed at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2002). *Från kvalitet till meningsskapande: postmoderna perspektiv - exemplet förskolan [Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: postmodern perspectives]*. Stockholm: HLS förlag.
- Deleuze, G. (2004). *Difference and repetition*. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (2006). *Dialogues II*. London: Continuum.
- Diprose, R., & Reynolds, J. (Eds.). (2008). *Merleau-Ponty key concepts*. Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Limited.
- Einarsdottir, J. (2007). Research with children: methodological and ethical challenges. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(2), 197-211.
- Evans, F. (2010). Unnatural participation: Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, and environmental ethics. *Philosophy Today*, 54, 142-152.
- Evans, F., & Lawlor, L. (Eds.). (2000). *Chiasms; Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Forrester, G., (2005). All in a day's work: primary teachers 'performing' and 'caring'. *Gender and Education*, 17(3), 271-287.
- Gibbons, A. (2007). The politics of process and products in education: an early childhood metanarrative crisis? *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 39(3), 300 - 311.



- Halldén, G. (2003). Barnperspektiv som ideologiskt eller metodologiskt begrepp [Child perspective as an ideological or methodological concept]. *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige*, 1(2), 12-23.
- Halldén, G. (2007). *Den moderna barndomen och barns vardagsliv [The modern childhood and children's everyday lives]*. Stockholm: Carlsson.
- Hargreaves, A., (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A., (2001). *Learning to change: teaching beyond subjects and standards*. Jossey-Bass Inc Pub.
- Hultqvist, K., & Dahlberg, G. (2001). *Governing the child in the new millennium*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- James, A., & Prout, A. (1997). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. London: Falmer.
- Jenks, C. (1996). *Childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Johansson, E. (2004). Learning encounters in preschool: interaction between atmosphere, view of children and of learning. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 36(2), 9-26.
- Kjörholt, A. T. (2005). The competent child and 'the right to be oneself': reflections on children as fellow citizens in an early childhood centre. In A. Clark, A. T. Kjörholt & P. Moss (Eds.), *Beyond listening: children's perspectives on early childhood services*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Kohan, W. (2011). Childhood, education and philosophy: notes on deterritorialisation. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 45(2), 339-357.
- Kryger, N. (2004). Childhood and 'new learning' in a Nordic context. In H. Brembeck, B. Johansson & J. Kampmann (Eds.), *Beyond the competent child. Exploring contemporary childhoods in the Nordic welfare societies* (pp. 153-176). Fredriksberg: Roskilde University Press.
- Langer, M. (2003). Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on ambiguity. In C. Card (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Simone de Beauvoir* (pp. 87-106). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawlor, L. (1998). The end of phenomenology: expressionism in Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 31, 15-34.
- Lenz Taguchi, H. (2010a). *Going beyond the theory/practice divide in early childhood education*. London: Routledge.
- Lenz Taguchi, H. (2010b). Rethinking pedagogical practices in early childhood education: a multidimensional approach to learning and inclusion. In N. Yelland (Ed.), *Contemporary Perspectives on Early Childhood Education*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Lind, U. (2010). *Blickens ordning: bildspråk och estetiska lärprocesser som kulturform och kunskapsform [The Order of Seeing: Visual languages and aesthetic learning processes as forms of culture and knowledge]*. Stockholms University, Stockholm.
- MacNaughton, G., Hughes, P., & Smith, K. (2007). Early childhood professionals and children's rights: tensions and possibilities around the United Nations "General Comment No. 7 on Children's Rights". *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 15(2), 161-170.
- MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, C. A., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001). *Doing early childhood research: international perspectives on theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Mazis, G. A. (1992). Merleau-Ponty and the 'Backward Flow' of time: the reversibility of temporality and the temporality of reversibility. In T. Busch & S. Gallagher (Eds.), *Merleau-Ponty, hermenutics, and postmodernism* (pp. 53-68). Albany: State unviersity of New York Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of perception [Phénoménologie de la perception]*. London; New York: Routlegde.
- Merleau-Ponty, M., & Lefort, C. (1968). *The visible and the invisible [Visible et l'invisible.]*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Moss, P. (2007). Bringing politics into the nursery: early childhood education as democratic practice. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(1), 5-20.
- Moss, P., Clark, A., & Kjörholt, A. T. (2005). Introduction. In A. Clark, A. T. Kjörholt & P. Moss (Eds.), *Beyond listening: children's perspectives on early childhood services*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Nordin-Hultman, E. (2004). *Pedagogiska miljöer och barns subjektskapande [Educational environments and children's subjectification]*. Stockholm: Liber.
- O'Connor, K E., (2008). 'You choose to care': teachers' emotions and professional identity. *Teaching and teacher education*. 24, 117-126.
- Osborne, M., (2006). Changing the context of teachers' work and professional development: a European perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research*. 45, 242-253.
- Olsson, L. M. (2009). *Movement and experimentation in young children's learning: Deleuze and Guattari in early childhood education*. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Peters, M. A. (2007). Kinds of thinking, styles of reasoning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 39(4).
- Piaget, J. (1972). *Psychology and epistemology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Popkewitz, T. S., & Bloch, M. N. (2001). Administering freedom: a history of the present. Rescuing the parent to rescue the child for society. In K. Hultqvist & G. Dahlberg (Eds.), *Governing the child in the new millennium* (pp. 119-142). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Qvortrup, J. (2004). Editorial: the waiting child. *Childhood*, 11(3), 267-273.
- Reynolds, J. (2004b). *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: intertwining embodiment and alterity*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Reynolds, J., & Roffe, J. (2006). Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty: immanence, univocity and phenomenology. *Journal of British Society for Phenomenology*, 37(3), 228-251.
- Rinaldi, C. (2004). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and Learning*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1977). *Emile eller Om uppfostran. D. 1 [Emile or On education. P. 1]* (C. A. Fahlstedt & I.-B. Hansson, Trans.). Göteborg: Stegeland.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1978). *Emile eller Om uppfostran. D. 2 [Emile or On education. P. 2]* (C. A. Fahlstedt & I.-B. Hansson, Trans.). Göteborg: Stegeland.
- Rusell, B. (1996). *History of western philosophy and its connection with political and social circumstances from the earliest times to the present day*. London: Routledge.
- Semetsky, I. (2010). The folds of experience, or: constructing the pedagogy of values. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42(4), 476-488.



- Semetsky, I., & Lovat, T. (2011). Bringing Deleuze's philosophy into discourse on values education and quality teaching: an Australian model. *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(4), 485-493.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2004). Quality teaching in the early years. In A. Anning, J. Cullen & M. Fler (Eds.), *Early childhood education. Society and culture* (pp. 137-148). London: SAGE Publications.
- Vallberg Roth, A.-C. (2002). *De yngre barnens läroplanshistoria: från 1800-talets mitt till idag [The younger children's curriculum history: from the mid-1800s to today]*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Weiss, G. (2008). Ambiguity. In R. Diprose & J. Reynolds (Eds.), *Merleau-Ponty key concepts* (pp. 132-141). Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Limited.
- Westman, S., & Alerby, E. (2011). *The ambiguity of temporality in education*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Continental Philosophy, ASCP, La Trobe University, Melbourne.
- Westman, S., Alerby, E., & Brown, J. (forthcoming). The phenomenology of teachers' work: Images of control, chaos and care.
- Westman, S., & Bergmark, U. (forthcoming). A strengthened teaching mission in preschool: teachers' experiences, beliefs and strategies.
- Williams, J. (2011). *Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of time. A critical introduction and guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.