

OTHER ARTICLES

Working with children? Transforming tiredness into Deleuzian exhaustion

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Abstract: Educational contexts are often built on assumptions that are considered common and good by the majority of persons working within these contexts. Policy and specialisation, originally means to operationalising these assumptions, have become ends and reference points in themselves. The encounter with children is becoming less and less the centre of education endeavour. This often brings about the experience of tiredness as endless effort is placed by different educational professionals in trying to contain the different forces at play within particular scenarios. Following Deleuze, we suggest exhaustion, which he distinguishes from tiredness. Exhaustion comes about from having endless possibilities. This however involves the violent encounter of non-sense which shakes sense assumptions. We argue that engaging with children is this violent encounter which is essential for the professional in education.

Keywords: Deleuze, exhaustion, policies, educational psychology.

Introduction

*This is such a waste of time! Do we really think we are helping
our school children?*

This was a frequent and exasperated expression which one of the authors kept exclaiming as she relived the story which she was writing for the purpose of this paper. The author became more and more irritated as the story and its details were unfolded and then reported being in a bad mood by the end of it all, reiterating her conviction that she was deceiving herself and the children if she thought she was helping them through her work.

This paper is not about burnout. It is not about reaching that state of fatigue when the only way is out and the only thing we can do is to collect as much of ourselves as is left before we completely go to pieces. This paper is about an echo of that feeling, which we call feeling tired. It is when time and energy is invested in a situation, reasonably hoping for a return on that investment. However, there is always that phone call, that flat let-down instead. It is not even anything dramatic, not even anything worth crying about. It is just flat, when we have gone back to square one, and we know that as there has been backward movement, square one is really square minus five, also because all the 'tricks' up our sleeve have been tried and still no positive result is yielded. Here is the story:

What happened...

Thomas is a seven year old boy in care and a baggage of horrific experiences in his past. He is wrecking havoc in the school which he attends daily and the input of a psychologist is deemed essential so that support can be provided to this little boy, and more importantly, to his teacher, who cannot manage him anymore. This is how one of the authors, being an educational psychologist, became involved.

When at his foster home, Thomas is one of about six children, looked after by young loving carers who, however, have a no nonsense look about them. Thomas is known to sometimes try and test boundaries and have tantrums, but his behaviour is reported to be relatively manageable and it is greatly in his favour that he always feels remorse after he loses his temper. The carer recounts that she sits patiently waiting for Thomas to blow off steam, and then invites him to sit down next to her and pet the dog which belongs to the family. Thomas does this, when he has calmed down.

He did so also in school. He apologised to the head of school for kicking her, saying that he had not wanted to hurt her. This was when the head of school showed him the bruise which he had caused. This incident was used to put pressure on the powers that be to take action regarding Thomas. The following week saw a meeting of about sixteen persons taking place in the head's office. I had consulted with the class teacher prior to the meeting. The latter had told me that she was soon to have a student teacher take over her class and I pounced on that, asking her whether she would welcome it as an opportunity to build a relationship with Thomas. Would she agree to withdraw Thomas from the class and engage with him individually for a few weeks? – I was eager to invest in the belief that Thomas would respond to that and would then be more amenable to working in the class after the student teacher's practice was over. Besides, I promised that by then we would have managed to get a Statement of Needs for a support assistant in Thomas's class.

The formal meeting started. With the teacher's agreement to what I had proposed, I felt that I had a card up my sleeve and was thrilled when one of the Education Managers supported me as I put forward my proposal. The head of school is one of those 'yes-but-ers' but the Education Manager urged her to give her support to this

scheme, saying that Thomas is a special case and that we cannot give up on him. The teacher also openly agreed with my proposal; I perceived her as willing to take the chance of trying to establish a better relationship with Thomas, following a massive blow-up a few weeks before which had left the school staff involved shattered and Thomas with a temporary exclusion. All systems seemed to be go. I promised to visit the school frequently to support the teacher and felt very enthusiastic about this child whom we were all going to save collaboratively. A play therapist was also present in the meeting, someone engaged by the authorities to work with Thomas. Since he was involved we all decided not to meet Thomas and form relationships with him needlessly. The person who was to do this, besides the teacher, was the play therapist.

That same week I visited the school again and spent some hours with the teacher, devising ways in which Thomas was to spend the school day, how much time he was to spend with the main class and what activities he was to carry out when alone with the teacher. I was a little taken aback when the teacher said that she was committed to help out with the forthcoming school open day. Was she not going to be committed to Thomas for these few weeks? Her reaction took the form of a little resistance, saying that she was always involved in organising this event and she did not feel that she relinquish it. However, my original suggestion was motivated by the belief that Thomas could build a relationship with his teacher on a one-to-one basis, and I did not see how this could happen if she was more invested in preparing for this event, which we all knew takes over all school activity. It would be setting Thomas up for failure, to put him in a situation in which it was very easy to get into trouble. Nonetheless, we set about trying to find ways how Thomas could join other groups during the time that the teacher was otherwise engaged.

I felt reasonably happy when leaving school that day. I had two students shadowing me for that Friday morning and was pleased that they had had an interesting experience. I kept feeling positive until Sunday afternoon when I sent a text message to the school counsellor, also a personal friend of mine. The joke is that she sends essays as replies so I was not apprehensive upon hearing my mobile phone give several beeps. However, this particular afternoon, I received seven messages from my friend, recounting the disastrous way in which the Friday school day ended after I had left from school. Apparently, Thomas had a tiff with someone and gave a massive tantrum, hitting and kicking anyone in sight. The school counsellor tried to calm him down but there was no doing so. She recounts in her messages:

“then he had a tiff with the assistant head. Don’t ask me what about but he screamed and hit her and even tried to bite her. In the end they had to call carer and ask her to come and fetch him. At this point he seemed to run out of steam and sat in his corner crying with a big box over his head :-(! I could have cried out of sheer frustration, Dan, and just sat in his place with him till Carer came and took him home. I know it’s a lot of hurt and anger for a little boy to carry but he left us breathless.”

I was shocked to read this; gone was my self-complacency and replaced with dismay and anxiety. What was worse was the next part of the message:

“His teacher in particular was very very tired! They said that they were willing to give it a go next week but thought it more likely that what we proposed would not work out and that Thomas would earn himself a permanent exclusion:-(!”

Plan B was definitely needed, but we did not have one. After an hour on the phone, the counsellor and I agreed to meet first thing on the next day to see what could be done, but it was very obvious that we were being unrealistic in thinking that Thomas was going to form any kind of bond with his teacher. The fact that the school was even considering a permanent exclusion meant that they were not going to be able to give time and their all to this; Thomas was on very shaky ground.

Sense assumptions

Standish (2002a, 2002b, 2003) writes warnings in numerous editorials against teachers being encouraged to unquestioningly take on ‘what works’ with the children they teach. It seems that the ‘runaway world’ (Beck and BeckGernsheim [2002, in Nixon 2003]) in which we live leads us to develop tendencies to adopt ready-made things and to cut corners. The education sector is not immune to this trend in development. In an attempt to streamline practice, a system of checks and inspections has been adopted to safeguard members of society. It is counted as a good thing to be involved in creating check-lists, formulating policies and setting up proformas and procedures for the professionals who work in the education sector to act upon. A department of education can be judged as very much behind in coming up with an anti-discrimination policy, or with a behavioural policy, or with a procedure for reporting cases of bullying or suspected harm to children. Another measure seen as progressive is when opportunities are afforded to professionals to specialise in an area which is seen as necessary for the sector. It is assumed that specialised training implies better professionals and, hence, better results.

These actions are based on taken for granted assumptions about educational ideas and concepts. It is assumed that we all agree upon what is ‘good’ behaviour, what is ‘good’ teaching, what inclusive schools mean, what dyslexia is, etc. The list is endless – it is a list of terms which seem to have meanings and implications which are established, although perhaps not debated. They are fixed according to taken-for-granted criteria and possible contradictions are ignored, until crisis situations bring them sharply into focus. The concepts seem to be based on a natural and pre-philosophical ‘image of thought’ borrowed from the pure element of common sense. According to Deleuze (1994) we build an image of thought that has an affinity with the true based on what we think is common sense. We think that this

common sense assumption possesses the true and wants the true, thus making it 'good sense'. What makes it a common and good sense is that it seems that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means and what its implications are. We always suppose that sense is understood and that it is there. It is because we assume that sense is established that we can enact possible denotations, and even to think their conditions. Sense is always there as soon as we begin to speak and do anything. We would not be able to begin without this presupposition.

In an education system which is increasingly after results, it has become essential that everybody is accounted for and accountable, that it is made very clear which roles are whose and where responsibility stops. We need to know whom it is we can blame when something goes wrong. And the fear that something *might* go wrong drives our every action. Professions are regulated, templates and proformas are issued, schools and services are inspected, even risks are assessed (an oxymoron if there ever was one). Any issue or situation is categorised and operationalised, into doable actions. These lists of doable actions seem to be accepted as good and as sensible. It is as though the complexities in which professionals are required to work are too much and it has become necessary to regulate their decisions and actions for the sake of efficiency and streamlining, and to reduce contingency (Smith, 2006). This is starting to turn the professional in the realm of education into a technician, one who accepts and follows, whereas in the area of education, the professional could be radical, innovative, to lead in revolutions and to overturn that which is tepid. But such stances are being discouraged. The stance which is not discouraged is the one where the professional goes through the motions and makes sure that she is covered.

Policy documents represent common and good sense assumptions. These documents 'write' the professionals and students - "who they should be, what they are to do and say, and when and how they must do or say it" (Cormack and Comber, 1996, p.119). As Honan (2004) argues, the ideas and assumptions of teachers are subsumed by the assumptions in policy documents. This process is expected by the same policy document which also assumes that it takes place automatically and is not in any way challenged. Thus the identity of teachers and other professionals within education is constantly being qualified owing to the increase of assumptions of what such a professional is and what is expected of her. It is not unheard of that contradictory positions are posed without the attempt to iron out the inconsistencies (Cormack and Comber, 1996, p.121). With every update of policy, such change needs to be incorporated, if possible, without the removal of anything in the older versions. Honan claims that teachers seem to have a *superhuman* identity in policy documents - they have to make impossible ends meet in their classrooms (2004, p.274). Policy document assumptions remove responsibility from the teachers and other professionals, thus reducing their

ethical possibilities and providing a risk-free environment, in an attempt to become perfect (Smith, 2006).

Most of us will agree with these statements which we believe are based on common and good sense. In spite of our various experiences with children, educators and parents, which experiences often make us act, be passionate and sometimes suffer, yet our common and good sense assumptions always take precedence. The experiences, being uncertain and messy are put aside, as exceptions, as things which do not fit, which are considered non-sense (see Deleuze, 1990, p.31-32). Instead we turn to the common sense statements in which we have invested and we feel that they are our lighthouses in troubled waters. These lighthouses, rather than being the means which represent ends which are more complex, become ends in themselves. They are points of reference, so that in a discussion, substantiating one's argument with reference to a policy, or to one's status as a specialist, is a clincher. It denotes the end of the argument, because of the foundational status with which they are imbued. It does not occur to us to question the policy in itself, to ask whether the policy represents what we are agreed upon, to see whether it is about time to revamp the policy again. The buck stops with these representations. We thus enter into the infinite regress of that which is presupposed: n1 refers to n2, which denotes the sense of n1; n2 refers to n3; etc (see Deleuze, 1990, p.28).

The establishment of *sense* fascinates Deleuze. Sense for him is able to adjudicate with regard to its own universality, and to suppose itself universal and communicable in principle. Deleuze gave a number of metaphors to work out these ideas: tree structure, state (royal) science, sedentary space, striated space, Robinson Crusoe. These metaphors all assume common and good sense as the starting point. For Deleuze, what continues to work out the establishment of sense is the model of recognition. Recognition is the harmonious exercise of all the faculties upon a supposed same object: the same object may be seen, touched, remembered, imagined or conceived. It is when all the faculties together relate their given and relate themselves to a form of identity in the object. Recognition thus relies upon the collaboration of the faculties for *everyone* - in other words, a common sense as a *Concordia facultatum*. (Deleuze, 1994, p.133)

Within the same assumption, one encounters persons who have considered and concluded that the assumption is the foundation on which their actions and beliefs are based. One also comes across persons who do not agree with it, and others who oppose. Then there are those who follow it blindly. But still, all emerge as a result of an engagement with the assumption. It is still what unites people; it is what harmonises them. At the limit, there is a unity of all bodies.

This model of recognition could help us read some of the educational situations that often evolve in our schools and educational settings. We try, under some common sense assumption to unite all the different ends, different people and circumstances together. We try and get all the different splits in some sort of harmony and try to make them work together. We labour constantly to create our own identity in relation to the assumption of our profession and of the situation by attempting to recognise the different elements and make them collaborate together. This process is one which tires us and causes us to feel that no progress is being made.

What was happening on the side...

When I was asked to get involved in Thomas's case, I was told that this was a quick one – just to coordinate who did what and how. Tongue in cheek I accepted, knowing that things were never that simple. I was somewhat relieved when I was told that Sylvia, the counsellor, had agreed to get involved. She was someone I could trust implicitly. The head of school was a person who believed in well run schools and situations like the one involving Thomas seemed to throw her easily off track and cause her to panic slightly while in search for the solution to the problem. The solution, in turn, needed to be one which did not upset the daily routine. The first thing that the head told me was that before Thomas could attend school, his home problems needed to be solved. My reaction was to say, while trying as hard as I could to curb the sarcastic tone in my voice, "Yes, right. Let's get Thomas a mother and father who love him and can look after him and then we'll let him come to school." "No that's not what I mean," she responded. "So what do you mean?" I asked. How could we possibly get Thomas 'sorted out' before he comes to school?

The problem is to convince these various persons in the picture that although I do not partake what they see as a solution, I still understand that they have a situation on their hands which is very, very difficult. It is as though everything is seen in terms of black or white – if I do not agree with their position (which is veering towards a rejection of the child), then I am perceived as against them. I know that the situation with Thomas just cannot keep going on like this, that it is a crisis waiting to turn into a tragedy. But this does not mean that I have to condone their attitude towards this boy. The head of school wants the administration offices to be clear of children. So even when some reprieve is given to the class teacher, the children need to be 'put' somewhere where the normal routine is not messed up. It is difficult to convince the head that extra efforts need to be taken with such children.

In the meantime, Sylvia, the counsellor, was also very concerned about another two children in the same school with a history of exclusions and tentatively wondered whether I could possibly fit them in for an assessment, as they desperately needed to be supported in school. Procedure demanded a formal assessment and writing of a report, after which a Board would decide whether to allocate extra resources. These children seemed to be heading for a crisis just like the one that Thomas was now producing. They were misbehaving wildly in school. Thus, while getting involved in

Thomas's story, I was also carrying out classroom observation in two classes, speaking to two more teachers, carrying out two assessments of the boys' abilities and needs and dealing with numerous misunderstandings and misinterpretations of my actions. The latter are inevitable when situations have reached crises and when there is very little time to check that each individual understands the minutia of even the smallest decisions and actions.

In my standard assessment, I did not feel that I was tapping into these boys' skills – they did not even know what I was talking about half the time. I felt that my assessment reflected the uselessness of the curriculum for these boys' learning. It's pointless, it's a waste of time. But it is enough. The authorities would accept the report which I would write and would give them the learning support assistants they needed, because I would have lobbied well beforehand. I know that the learning support assistants would probably also not be able to help these boys. They would just be baby sitters unless we were lucky enough to get a person who instinctively knew how to engage with difficult children.

In the meantime, we were having meetings regarding Thomas. The Education Manager insisted on calling me the expert. He even compared me to a radiologist who could locate the problem in an X-ray film. I parried, saying that this was an inaccurate and unhelpful comparison. I tried to explain that these situations were complex, that the causes were various and that this was not a within-child problem. He agreed, reflecting on the irony of putting the school's open day before the welfare of one of the school's most vulnerable children – the irony of working to present the school 'open' to others, but in so doing, closing it even more for Thomas. But the Manager's hands are tied. If he takes direct action, then he is going to have a bigger unignorable problem on his hands – a school which resents his action! Thomas as a problem is relatively ignorable because as a child, he can be excluded – but what would an Education Manager do with a head of school who resents him?!

Another part of the background story is that the teacher and head of school somehow ranged themselves against the child's foster parents. They feel that the carers are insinuating that Thomas is not happy in school and believe that they are hiding the fact that Thomas gives them trouble also at home. This feeling is very obvious and it influences many of the decisions taken regarding Thomas in school. When he gives a tantrum, the head of school contacts the carers and asks them to pick him up from school. This is always the point at which Thomas's tantrum abates and he starts crying piteously. The head of school takes it as a sure sign that the carers also find Thomas difficult to handle and that they therefore resort to some dire punishment which Thomas dreads. The carers, on the other hand, resent that their fostered children seem to be precipitately labelled by the school. They feel that they are pushed to defend the children, and that the school needs to find ways of managing these children. The school staff does not seem to be able to move past this point. Nothing I can say will bring them on board. It is very irritating. I feel annoyed and fed up and retreat from the scene.

I can only work with persons whom I can work with! Petitio principii – the vicious circle argument, but it is true! All these little petty agendas which deflect our attention from the main issue tire me out. We waste our energy on them and I feel like I am a teacher in a year 3 class, trying to placate children and make them friends again. These things take all our time away from the children. Where does Thomas fit in all this? I try not to speak to him myself because I know that my involvement flits in and out and I do not manage to do anything properly. I feel very negative about my own involvement in all this. How have I contributed to helping?

So I am tired – it is not the kind of tired one feels after a good game of volleyball, with aching limbs and muscles which clamour for a hot bath. It is mind tiredness, which nonetheless leaves one physically exhausted. It is tiredness with a taste of bitterness and cynicism, where it is difficult not to think awful things about the persons who have made every step of this process tortuous, especially when at the end of the day all you have reached is still status quo. You will have spent your day fighting so that the situation does not deteriorate. And still it may deteriorate the moment you think that you can rest. That morning which I had spent talking with Thomas's teacher; I had left school feeling pretty good about the situation and my involvement in it. Then I received those messages that the school are already considering permanent exclusion. Of course, they too were tired after dealing with Thomas's tantrum...

Exhaustion

Our suggestion is for 'tired' teachers and professionals working in educational contexts to engage in exhaustion.

Deleuze (1995a) draws a distinction between tiredness and exhaustion. Tiredness, as has been pointed out, occurs in terms of the taken-for-granted assumptions which we have and which are also inherent in the institutions which house our professions. These assumptions take the form of needs, preferences, goals and signification on the part of educators in relation to common and good sense. Tiredness is always caused by something (ibid, p.4). "...when we usually attempt to realise the extent of what is possible, it's always in relation to certain goals or preferences – it's geared towards some intentional purpose. We always proceed through the deliberate exclusion of other possibilities in order to realise our specific needs of the moment" (Gardner, 2012, p.1-2). As mentioned in the final sentences of the section entitled Sense Assumptions, we get tired in the constant process of identity creation in relation to the assumptions inherent in our profession, and the assumptions of the situations which we encounter in our profession. There is a constant attempt to recognise various factors and acknowledge the sense they make collaboratively. Such engagement with our assumptions leads to tiredness.

However, for Deleuze, life lived only in terms of these sense assumptions, does not work. If we had to capture Deleuze's philosophy in a nutshell, we

might say that it rotates around the desire for (radical) life. A life hinged on what makes sense is restrictive, it operates within limits and is self-referential, protective against any hint of challenge. In contrast, Deleuze's idea of life comprises the dissolution of the subject (I - identity) through the contingency of the encounter which we experience as violence. Such a life involves experimentation, allowing oneself to be in the middle, knowing (or actually, not-knowing) the risks that this involves.

Deleuze notes that whereas 'the tired' has exhausted all realization of objective possibility, the exhausted 'exhausts' all the possibilities that are available beyond the sense assumptions. The sense assumptions act as a limit to our possibilities. Following Samuel Beckett's idea of Godot - the infinite waiting - Deleuze invites us to think beyond what we are given through the sense assumptions and open ourselves to the infinite possibilities. As Gardner argues "there is no intentional purpose in exhaustion - it is completely (in)different because there is no more possibility of realisation. To put it in Beckettian terms, you press on, but towards nothing, because the exhausted protagonist has literally renounced all teleological need or desire for meaningful signification" (Gardner, 2012 p.1-2). What attracts us to this idea of exhaustion is the sense of freedom that one can have and engage in. It is this sense of freedom that exhausts us!

Thus exhaustion is not caused by anything, "he exhausts himself [dismantles himself] in exhausting the possible" (Deleuze, 1995a, p.3). The exhausted exhausts all the possibilities. What Deleuze may be implying is that we engage in exhaustion when we engage in the fantastic decomposition of the "I" (ibid, p.5), since "free images" can only be "free" on the condition of the disappearance of the subject (Szafraniec, 2007, p.106). Educators may engage in this by looking at their own identity and how this is constructed by the various qualifications in policy documents and specialisations. Educators may open and question such identities, thus breaking the mould which has defined who they are, and in so doing limited their being. Exhaustion is a de-subjectivisation (see Szafraniec, 2007, p.106). However, while we think that the idea of a fantastic decomposition of the "I" has interesting implications for education contexts, we acknowledge the complexity and the accompanying difficulties. We therefore take this as an attempt and suggest the following:

First, we need to be open to violence. Through the sameness of procedural engagement (here we are understanding this in the widest possible sense, thus also including institutional memory among others, often couched in words such as "this is how we've always done this"), our images of thought close themselves to stupor; for thought tries to be constant and to eternally produce the same (see Deleuze, 1994, p.139). The violence of thought that Deleuze is suggesting comes from the contingency of an encounter (ibid.), which forces thought to rise up and start having the passion to think. This

will result in the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself, and thus bring about “the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself” (ibid.). Our perception of the teacher in the narrative who initially attempts to consider the possibility of engaging with this encounter, but then falls back to her unchallenged role “...but I’ve always been involved in organising the school’s open day; There are limits to how much we can adapt ourselves to Thomas” is one where thought presupposes itself.

However, the very vocabulary used by Deleuze, that of violence and destruction, are indicative of the forces at play here. Encountering Thomas was a violent experience, which furthermore threatened to destroy what had made sense for years. Such violence thus challenged the identities constructed through such sense-making. After engaging with children through ticking boxes, here was an experience which requested the individuals involved to go beyond this, an opportunity to extend through Thomas – yet many opted to stay within the comfort of what had always made sense. Working with Thomas shook the assumptions too much – it was violent to their thinking in presuppositions – and, although disappointed, we are also part of this discourse. Violence and destruction are important terms which point out that the encounter can only be sensed and is not sensible. This implies that sense (in terms of what is encountered) is problematic to the sensible. Sensible is not only what is sensed but that which is recalled, interpreted, imagined, conceived – that which we called common and good sense and the constant process of recognition. Therefore, the sensible closes down the sense, limits it (ibid. p.140). The teacher and the head of school refuse the encounter and decide to move away from it – the procedure allows them to do this, indeed it encourages them, by detailing which kind of behaviour should result in an exclusion from school. Rather than engaging with the risks and the infinite possibilities that this encounter promised, they opted out. If they tried, they would have been more amenable to trying.

The contingency of an encounter is a connection among different bodies. For Deleuze it is a line of flight through which new bodies can release new power in their capacity to act and respond. It is interesting to note that all bodies have this possibility of encounter and this eliminates the possibility of some bodies being more important than others. Again, this poses questions which shake our presuppositions, questions such as the following: Why do we automatically assume that the sense-making of professionals is more valid than Thomas’s? Why does it carry more weight, have more worth? We seem to share the same sense assumptions, to have the same currency, to speak a common language. Thomas does not yet do so. Engagement with him necessitates that violence which shakes us and disturbs us. The violence of encounter brings about the destruction of common and good sense, and makes us acknowledge that non-sense lives with common and good sense, considering non-sense is the first step to the possibility of the decomposition

of the “I”. However the non-sense, different from the common and good sense, is seen as neither true nor false (ibid. p.153) while it was argued that the good sense is seen as the condition of true, which is the condition for a series of effects.

This leads us to the second point, that of seeing professionals in education as plateaus, as in the middle: we suggest that professionals see themselves as in the *middle* of situations, contexts and spaces. They are in between common and good sense and non-sense. In Deleuzian terminology they are plateaus. Plateaus are always in the middle (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.21). Deleuze and Guattari use the word plateau to designate a *continuous self-vibrating region of intensities*. This region does not develop in terms of a point of culmination or an external goal (ibid., p.22). Teachers and other professionals working with children have to echo Franz Kafka (Brod, 1948) “those things which occur to me, occur to me not from the root up but rather only from somewhere about their middle. Let someone then attempt to seize them, let someone attempt to seize a blade of grass and hold fast to it when it begins to grow only from the middle” (p.12).

But being in the middle is not considered easy by Deleuze and Guattari (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.23). They urge us to “try it, you’ll see that everything changes” (ibid.). The following quote from Deleuze captures the force and energy from of this engagement: “There’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging into an electric circuit” (Deleuze, 1995b, p.8).

Our suggested mode of being-teacher with the contingency of an encounter necessitates that the teacher questions what is termed as common and good sense in teaching and being teacher, and be open to non-sense: the new intensities and possibilities of the encounter. For Deleuze these intensities and possibilities can be also in-human and non-human. For Deleuze, being a teacher is to desire to let intensities and possibilities flow. It is not a desire of lack as we usually understand it, where she feels a need and thus looks to meet that need. Teacher’s desire should be that teacherness disappears, that the closed identity of teacher is disturbed and that she connects to other flows.

We suggest that the specialisations, procedures and policies allow the flows through, rather than try to account for each as explained in the section on sense assumptions. If the identity of the teacher is decomposed and is open to experiment with contingency of the encounters, Deleuze similarly argues that space should be decomposed. Within particular spaces “need, preferences, goal, or signification” (Deleuze, 1995a, p.5) are at play. Deleuze’s suggestion is to go beyond the given space, envisage a ‘de-situated’ subject in order to allow for new possibilities, a ‘de-potentialised space’ (Szafraniec, 2007, p.106)

to transcend the totality of the possible (i.e., to exhaust the possibilities offered by a given space). As Ma (2009) reminds us, “space is prior, and hence constitutive, both structurally and functionally, of any systems of signification” (p.306).

Is it a question of doing away with all and everything? To do away with teacher identity and the spaces they operate in? Certainly not! “What matters is the order in which he does what he has to do, and in what combination he does two things at the same time” (Deleuze, 1995a, p.5). If we go back to our narrative, what comes first: engaging with the Thomas or following our procedures? Restricting ourselves to a particular space or thinking outside the given space?

This is the shift that Deleuze points out between tiredness and exhaustion. Whereas tiredness involves the subjectivity of each educator and professional to “bring about a synthesis of things” (Deleuze, 2005, p.27), the exhausted exhausts all the possibilities. We engage in exhaustion when our identities come about with experimentation. This implies a different identity: an identity (if it can be called so) that is in the middle of things, a multiplicity of interconnections, that empowers the collective, and subjectivity. The idea of multiplicity needs to be highlighted here – it goes beyond what we are accustomed to consider as possible. A rhizomatic or nomadic identity, that maps and not traces, that draw from various and often contradictory works, ideas, concepts and connections. A professional that has “no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movements and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuals that constitute collective assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.266).

Conclusion

This paper is made up of two series: primarily, there is the main story of Thomas, and what was happening on the side. The latter is not something which would be spoken about officially, but nonetheless its effects on the main story are far-reaching. The second series consists of some ideas from the writings of Deleuze which raise questions about tiredness and later suggest, ironically, exhaustion as a possibility for consideration. These two series are separate but yet we would want them to interact with each other. We would like Thomas to violently encounter Deleuze and Deleuze to violently encounter Thomas.

These policies, the inclusion of professionals who have specialised in order to help children further, are all attempts to operationalise the assumptions which we have on what is good and common sense. Without further

questioning it is accepted that we all want to help children and woe betide anyone who might doubt this of anyone else. In Thomas's story we were all sitting around a large table, sixteen persons who work with children. The statement of the Education Manager before starting the formal meeting was that he felt certain that the good will of everyone present was on board and that we all wanted to help Thomas with love. It was an exercise of saving Thomas collaboratively. This was the foundation – that was our starting point. All present were working within this assumption, even if there was a variety of interpretations and even if not all agreed upon the best course of action. The head of school, seen as unengaged by the psychologist, also had her agenda and thoughts about helping Thomas. It did not seem as inconsistent to her that while professing that she wanted to help, she would refuse to allow the deputy head to keep Thomas quietly occupied in the office so that he could stay out of trouble.

When it comes to Thomas kicking the head of school, this was used as clout so that pressure could be made to bring in specialised help. The psychologist became involved and with her came the counsellor. The Education Manager saw the psychologist as the expert, the one who could tell everyone what his or her job was, so that Thomas could be helped. All these services and offices formed part of the Student Services department. We all tried to create a seamless net so that Thomas could not slip through the cracks. We tried to contain him, we tried to find a place where he could fit. All the possible contingences were thought about in the attempt to help the teacher look after him. The play therapist was the one appointed to be on the front line, the one appointed to work with Thomas and his emotional needs. A play therapist should know how to come across Thomas, while the other professionals are there behind him. But what does this imply? That in order to come across to a seven year old boy we need someone who is an expert in play? Have the professionals forgotten how to play? We do not want to trivialise the situation, but we are concerned about the assumptions that are at play here. The assumption of expert involvement can make Thomas better, and reach Thomas, with the support of other professionals to think in advance all the possible contingencies that can crop up and see how they can be handled and solved. What also concerns us is that it seems to us that a number of professionals involved in the story do not encounter Thomas. They substitute their encounter with the encounter of the play therapist. The teacher who is involved in the working policy group, the head of school who does not want children in her office, and the educational psychologist who never engages with Thomas in spite of being one of the main actors in the plot. But this does not only happen in Thomas's situation. Ballard (2004) argues that we have stopped talking about children in our classrooms and schools and instead talk of learners. The learner for Ballard is closely related to outcomes. Now educators focus on outcomes of learners not on children. We are sympathetic to Ballard's idea, and argue that the risk-free educational settings are

reinforced by the absence of encountering children in educational settings. Professionals working with learners are moving far from children, and retreating in policy documents and specialisation for their identity. This is what forms the identity of most professionals working with learners. This exercise is a laborious and tiring one. The tiredness of the educational psychologist in Thomas's case can be felt in the story recounted.

Following Deleuze we argue that professionals working within educational settings should start encountering children again. This implies living with the contingency of the encounter – this is risky. However we think that it is worth trying. Encountering children will open up the closed identities that are being established within the professionals. We need to start re-introducing the child in educational settings in order for us to form our identity. We need to acknowledge, live and interact with non-sense and with sense – we need policy and specialisation, but above all we need children.

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Endnotes

- [1] We authors, over the course of a number of years, have worked with children and educational contexts. We have often experienced 'tiredness' from encounters with children and in particular the context where they are learning as the story tries to capture. Several encounters with children and their educational contexts make up this story. The story tries to capture the tiredness written from our perspective and voice without highlighting any particular child or context. It is a narrative of how the author lived through this story. Thus the only details which have not been changed are those which only the author can recognise, through her lived experience. Other identifying details have been modified. There are text messages quoted from the school counsellor, but her permission was obtained, prior to using them. The aim of the story is that readers working in educational settings are able to recognise the feeling of tiredness which the authors are mentioning.
- [2] While we write of teachers, under such a term we are here considering all professionals, working within educational settings. This includes professionals like the educational psychologist and counsellor in the story, who are not resident in one school.