Summary

For a number of years, a ministerial language test has been disseminated to Danish municipalities and daycare institutions as a measurable, objective and compatible means of assessing the language of three-year-olds. Since 2007, nursery school teachers have been instructed to subject children to homogenous testing. For instance they have been instructed to pronounce the word “mouth” and ask the child “Can you repeat that?” The present PhD dissertation builds on the supposition that the language test – like any other method – reflects cultural values and norms, rendering it less neutral than it may often appear to be. The dissertation examines what kinds of interplay may occur between standardisation of the language test and pedagogical practice within daycare. It analyses the ways in which the language test is centrally standardised as a method suitable for assessing the language of children. The dissertation analyses the concomitant regulation of what knowledge and methods are made available by way of the dissemination of the language test to municipalities and daycare institutions as a suitable standard. Through field work, the dissertation zooms in on pedagogical everyday practice as it unfolds when actors relate to each other through various tasks. The daily interaction and business of nursery school teachers, parents, speech and language therapists and children is observed and the social order of everyday rhythm is identified. The dissertation explores how the language test creates potential ruptures in the everyday rhythm while at the same time constituting such rhythm. The question, in other words, is how the language test – among other manifestations of everyday rhythm – influences actors, and how actors influence the language test. In particular focus are the social categories, knowledge and positions which adult actors attempt to make significant. This concerns both when adults assess children’s actions and each other on a daily basis, as well as how the children themselves act. Thus, the dissertation is comprised by analyses of institutional power relations. Analytically, it homes in on not only social connections between adults and children, but also on the struggles that play out between adults concerning children.