

**PUSHING AGAINST THE CLOCK: CHILDREN'S MUSIC-MAKING
AND TIME NEGOTIATION IN SINGAPORE, NEW YORK, AND
DARWIN AUSTRALIA**

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In the author's dissertation research, the way time is experienced within children, schools, and societies was investigated in terms of the way children's spontaneous music is manifested. Culturally-specific educational philosophies, including conceptions of work and play, free time, and socialization were explored to gain an understanding of children's music making in context. The global phenomenological experience of time acceleration is addressed in terms of the struggles that arise within schools and communities as they negotiate clock time, scheduling, and the reality of children's non-linear learning.

This was a triple case-study, in which one classroom of five-year-olds in each of three geographical settings (New York City, USA, Singapore, and Darwin, Australia) was observed. Each instance of children's spontaneous music was noted and described in relation to their contexts such as dialogue, play, teacher instruction, scheduling, and time issues. Observations in the local setting, interviews with child focus groups, school faculty, class parents, and members of society, as well as newspaper clippings, and other relevant documents contributed to the data generated.

The results highlight large cultural differences in the way music and time are conceptualized. Across all three settings, however, a clear relationship between children's personal time experience play engagement, and their spontaneous music was found to exist. Children who seemed to operate at a slower internal pace, who needed more time, and who struggled with the structure of time within their classroom and/or school, were also the children who sought out more opportunities to play, and who created the greatest abundance of spontaneous music. Conversely, children who produced little or no spontaneous music seemed to operate on a faster internal pace, and generally did not engage in play.

These findings indicate that music may function as an important time-adjustment tool for children in terms of their developmental and learning needs. As such, it is suggested that the intrusion of adult time experience into children's play culture in the interest of teaching more material sooner should be reconsidered. It is further suggested that we may be able to look at children's spontaneous music as a lens through which to diagnose healthy learning environments.