Symbolic boundaries of time: Exploring the production of temporal socialisation

According to Elias (1992), in order to take up the position of an adult in society, children must learn how to regulate their behaviour and feelings to make them compatible with the social institution of time. As implied here, temporal dimensions can be highlighted as important boundaries when approaching ideas of the child in various settings (James et al. 2016). In exploring the concept of temporal socialisation (Darmon, 2018), this study sheds light on various symbolic and moral dimensions at play when children struggle with disparities between individual and collective temporal frameworks. In contrast to studies that depict children as workers or students from whom all knowledge of time was deliberately withheld as a means of power (Kydd, 1857; Lærke, 1998), this study shows children who are expected to know, embody and practice time in multiple ways. Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out among first, sixth and ninth grade children in Danish schools, the study draws on a particular institutional setting to examine what, how and why certain temporal attitudes are made more significant than others. The purpose of this paper is to: 1) pay attention to culturally specific and age-appropriate temporal norms in terms of a temporal socialisation and to 2) show how these norms are contested, produced and reproduced through everyday practices involved in the transformation and diversity of children’s classifications of time.