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Christopher M. Schulte

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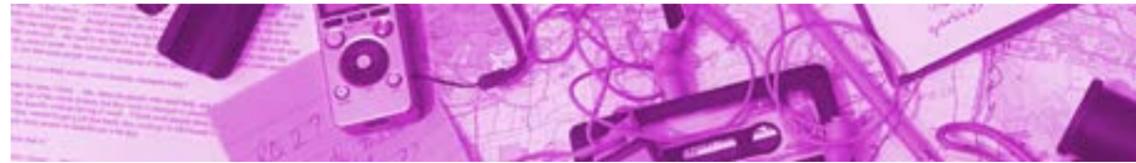
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## The encumbrances of time: a récit from Tallen Förskola

Christopher M. Schulte

It was around 11:00 am when the familiar sound of a school bell began to ricochet off the equipment on the playground at Tallen Förskola<sup>1</sup>:

*Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg...*

*Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg...*

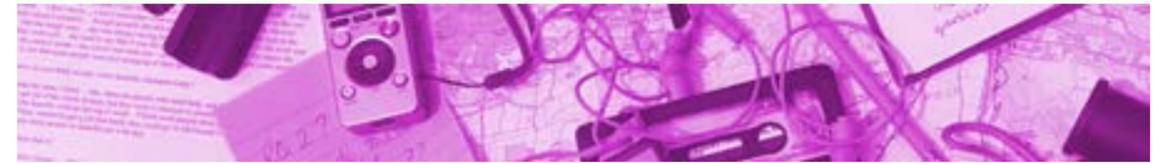
*Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg...*

*Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg...*

*Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg... Rrrrrnnnnngggg...*

I didn't think much about it at the time. In fact, I'm not even sure that the sound of the bell, perhaps beyond recognizing that it was in fact a bell, registered as something worthy of additional consideration. The children were scattered about, engaged in various explorations—some solitary, others collective. I observed a small group of children walking carefully atop a series of tires that had been laid out on the ground. On the other end of the playground, a tandem of boys took turns climbing and jumping from a large rock-like structure, their feet landing softly in the sand at the base of the rock. A boy from the toddler classroom was walking purposefully around the perimeter of the fence, tracing the outermost contour of the playground, while a small cluster of girls gathered near the flagpole could be seen passing around the dandelions they'd collected just a few minutes before.

Standing there, I contemplated whether or not to approach the group of children negotiating the labyrinth of tires. I was curious to know if the grass had become lava, which would have matched the conditions of a similar game the children had played the morning before—hopping from one boulder to another, so to avoid a fall into



the burning lava below. But then, amidst of all of this activity and my own curious speculation, I noticed that a few of the children had removed their bright yellow vests and gone inside, along with one of the teachers. Again, it wasn't something that struck me as significant, or important to follow up on. After all, the majority of the children were still playing about on the playground. Perhaps they had gone inside for a drink, or to use the restroom. But as I continued to linger on this seemingly nondescript occurrence, I found myself thinking again about the bell. Why had it rung? What exactly was it intended to signal or bring about? I mean, a few of the children did go inside, as did one of the teachers, but their departure from the playground wasn't exactly an immediate follow up to the bell's sound. In fact, it was several minutes after the bell had finished ringing that the children removed their vests and then made their way inside.

As an observer, I didn't see a clear connection between the two events. But there was something curious about it all. So, I stood there for a few minutes, attempting to re-remember what had happened in the moments that followed the sounding of the bell. But nothing specific came to mind. My befuddlement must have been visible to Maja, one of the teachers from the toddler classroom, who at the time happened to be standing near me. In English, she spoke to me, asking, "Are you okay?"<sup>2</sup>. After a brief bout of laughter and providing confirmation that I was okay, I decided to inquire further about the bell:

*Me: "Maja, I have a question for you."*

*Maja: "Yes."*

*Me: "Earlier, I heard the sound of a bell."*

*Maja: "Yes."*

*Me: "What was the purpose of that bell?"*

*Maja: "You mean the school bell?"*

*Me: "Yes, the school bell."*

*Maja: "That bell means that lunch is to begin. So, we go inside and get ready."*

*Me: "...Okay. Thanks."*

*Maja: "Yes, you're welcome."*

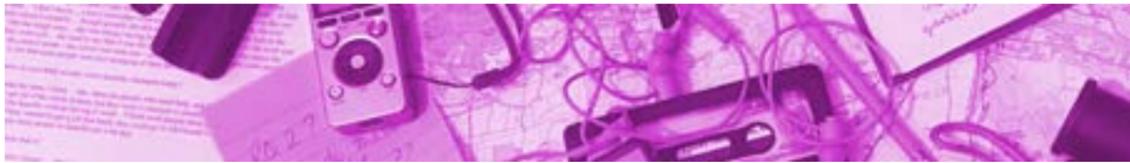
*Me: "...But, only a few students went inside. Why is that?"*

*Maja: "Yes, a few students went inside to get ready. Agnes, too."*

*Me: "Right. But, why then are most of the children still outside playing?"*

*Maja: "Because the children are finishing their work."*

The fact that I was dumfounded by Maja's response must have been apparent, even more so than my earlier bout of puzzlement regarding the bell, as she followed up with me again, asking, "Are you okay? Children's work is important, no?" Feeling a bit silly, I responded, "Yes, I'm fine." "And yes, of course, children's work is important. I guess I am just a bit surprised to witness the valuing of children's work in this way, with such clarity and conviction, and to see directly the time of school being organized in ways that are so visibly in service to children's interests and learning." With a bit of a shrug, Maja replied, "Well, that children's work is important, I think, is a cultural idea, at least in Sweden."



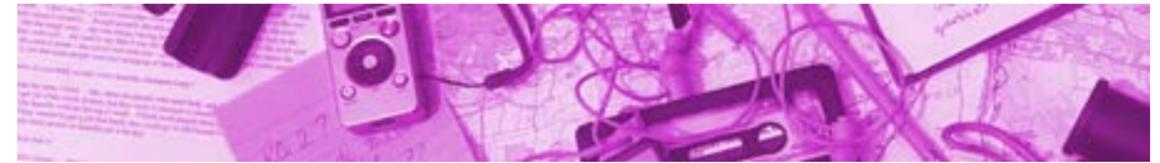
Walking away, Maja left me to reflect on our conversation and the events that had transpired. I stood there, alone, thinking about the encumbrances of time; reflecting on my experience as a child and the extent to which the “tyranny of time” (Dahlberg et al., 1999:17), especially in school, goaded and guided my body, constituting my subjectivities and the realities I took up. Then, I began to think about where I was, on the playground of Tallen Förskola, my intrigues and attentions flexing in rhythm with the world around me. I was lingering with time, time was lingering with me. I thought to myself, “This is privilege, to be certain.” But should it be? I began to wonder if my own children, routinely - even occasionally - experienced time in this way. I wondered: What does schooled time feel like for them? What ways of doing, thinking, and being become possible, or don’t become at all?

Then, quite suddenly, the sound of a truck began to roar in the distance: “Vrooooooooooom... Vrooooooooooom... Vrooooooooooom... Vrooooooooooom...” I looked up to find Jimmy and Hilmer, the authors of this mechanical roar, kneeling down in the sand nearby. They were driving a small plastic dump truck, using the bucket as a hoist for a little green boat. After arriving at what I presumed was an agreed upon destination, Jimmy carefully lowered the boat to the ground, his hair dancing across the surface of the sand, a proximity that was established to ensure this transition went as smoothly as possible. Then, with the boat officially lowered, Jimmy began to make a beeping noise to signal that the dump truck was now backing away: “Beeeeeeeeep, Beeeeeeeeep, Beeeeeeeeep.” Pleased with their progress, Jimmy and Hilmer brushed the sand from their pants and ran inside, along with Maja, who’d been waiting for them on the steps of the schoolhouse, just behind me.



Figure 1. Children’s Time: A Worksite.

Rather than join Maja and the rest of the children for lunch, I elected to stay outside on the playground for a while longer. I was keen to take a closer look at the children’s worksite, so to experience and observe more closely the quality and depth of their time.



### Notes

- [1] Tallen Förskola is a Swedish pseudonym that translates to mean pine trees (tallen) and preschool (förskola).
- [2] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of participants.

### References

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: postmodern perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.

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[Christopher Schulte](#) is Assistant Professor of Art Education and Early Childhood Education at Penn State University. Informed by a childhood studies approach and poststructuralist and posthumanist theory, Christopher’s research centers on the art making of young children, specifically drawing. His research has appeared in handbooks and other edited volumes, as well as national and international peer-reviewed journals in art education, early childhood studies, and qualitative studies. He is the editor of *Ethics and Research With Young Children: ‘New’ Perspectives* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and co-editor with Christine Marmé Thompson of *Communities of Practice: Art, Play, and Aesthetics in Early Childhood* (Springer, 2018).  
Twitter: [@\\_chris\\_schulte](#)