Why More ‘Quality Time’ is not on the Top of Children’s Lists: the ‘Qualities of Time’ for Children

For many years the everyday reality of working parents and their children has been captured in notions of ‘quality time’ versus ‘quantity time’. On the one hand it is suggested that what families need is ‘more time’ for parents to spend together with their children and less time working. On the other hand this has been countered with arguments saying that attention has to be paid to how parents spend their time together with their children. As a result quality time is often presented through idealised images of ‘happy families’. Quality time is seen as parents engaging with their children in particular activities or outdoor excursions that create and maintain family enjoyment, care and togetherness. However, such debates are based on assumptions of what would be ‘good’ for today’s children and neglect the perspective of children themselves. This paper draws on field research carried out with 10–11-year-old children on their understandings and use of time in an urban and a rural setting in the north of England. The paper points to five ‘qualities of time’ identified by children. These qualities suggest that children’s views of time spent with their families cannot be seen as separate from the time they spend with friends, at school and on their own. The paper argues that the quality/quantity time conundrum needs replacing by fuller and more representative accounts of the varied aspects of time that matter for children. These need to be situated in the processes through which family, school and work life take place on a daily basis and in relation to children’s life course. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

This paper takes as its starting point the question: Why is more quality time not on the top of children’s lists? In the following discussion of material from a study on children’s understandings and use of time I will demonstrate why this might indeed be the case. However, there is a rather straightforward answer to this question. The answer is that ‘quality’ time has a much broader meaning for children than we often are led to believe when parents, professionals and policy makers advocate the idea. From the perspective of

Correspondence to: Dr P. H. Christensen, Hardruprej 98, DK-2720 Vanløse, Denmark. E-mail: P.H.Christensen@mail.tele.dk

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children, as I will go on to show, the problems of contemporary family life and its effects on children are not remedied through any simple notion of spending more ‘quality time’ together.

I draw on data from ‘The Changing Times’ study, part of the ESRC Children 5–16 Research Programme that investigated 10–11-year-olds experiences during the transition from primary to secondary school.2 The study was carried out with children in two small villages and an inner city area of a large provincial town in the north east of England and consisted of a large ethnographic study and a survey component. It investigated children’s understandings and use of time through a focus on how they spend their time at home and at school and how much say they felt they had over their everyday time. This paper is based on the dataset produced about children’s experiences and use of time at home with their families through interviews and discussions carried out with the children during their last year at primary school and the first months into secondary school.

**From ‘quality time’ to the ‘qualities of time’**

In contemporary society everyday time has become fast paced, hectic and pressured, which has been seen as having a tremendous impact on social relationships. Since the 1960s policy documents and public debates in the UK, across Europe and in North America have captured the everyday reality of working parents and their children in the well-known notions of quality time versus quantity time. In the same vein some sociologists have repeatedly speculated that societal change, including the increased institutionalisation of childhood, would lead parents and children to spend less and less time together (Qvortrup, 1995). The everyday lives of families would become increasingly fragmented and the pressures on family life would be greater than before. To resolve the problems of modern family life, families would need more time for parents to spend together with their children and less time working, it was claimed.

This view was, however, countered with arguments saying that it is not necessarily more time that families need. To remedy the pressures of everyday life it was suggested that attention had to be paid to how parents spend their time together with their children. In a climate, where everyday time is ‘going too fast’, being ‘squeezed’ and ‘chopped’—it is ‘quality time’ that represents the ‘islands’ of time or ‘oases’ in time that families need. ‘Quality time’ emerged as a means to break the routines of ordinary family life, whilst ‘work/family balance’ also became the new buzzwords. Parents were to take ‘time out’ with their children and, thereby, parents could actively mend the effects of ceaseless time pressures on child–adult relationships in contemporary society. In the late 90s an American study revealed alarmingly that with new patterns of family and work life the earlier indisputable values of family life may increasingly be outweighed by the rewards offered at work leading some parents to choose to work rather than to be at home (Hochschild, 1997).

A recent example of this belief in more ‘quality time’ can be found in the UK Government White Paper ‘Supporting Families’ (Home Office, 1998). One of the chapters is titled ‘Helping families Balance Work and Home’ underlining the key policy idea that restoring

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2The ‘Changing Times’ research team consisted of Pia Christensen, Allison James, and Chris Jenks. Sally McNamee worked with us on the survey component of the study.
the moral fabric of society must be done through the family. The document says, for example:

1) Work offers the surest way for families to provide for themselves. But work also takes up time, which could otherwise be committed to the family: caring for children and also for sick, disabled or elderly family members. Many families find it hard to strike the right balance, and many are suffering from intense pressures on their time.

2) Children gain from having more time with their parents...which would lead to...less reliance on social services and fewer social problems such as truancy.

As an answer to problems such as these, the Government proposes what they call ‘family friendly employment’. The overall benefits of this are summarised as being:

Good for children and people receiving care: people who are able to balance work and caring commitments find it easier to provide quality care within the family.

Underlying this argument is the assumption that more family time will yield quality time for parents to spend together with their children. ‘Quality time’ epitomises the ideal image of ‘happy families’ and here parents are key actors. Parents are responsible for making time and situations when, by giving children their undivided attention, create ‘family time’ as a harmonious experience of togetherness. This is to be achieved through parents and children engaging in activities that communicate and support their mutual affection and enjoyment. Such parental care is often illustrated with images of parents and children in conversations, playing games or going places together.

A recent American study has, however, challenged the assumptions on which this perspective is based. Comparing data from two studies carried out 20 years apart, Galinsky (1999) and her research team found that the amount of time parents spend with children has not declined in the way that is often assumed. The researchers conclude:

...because employed mothers have managed to keep constant the amount of time they spend with their children, because fathers have increased their time, and because families have fewer children today than they did 20 years ago, it appears that employed parents indeed are spending somewhat more time with their children than they were two decades ago. (Galinsky, 1999:61)

Thus, although both parents can be seen to spend more time than previously carrying out paid and unpaid work, fathers are now spending more time with their children. It is also significant that this increased time does not come from parents spending less time working. Rather, it derives from parents spending less time on themselves (Galinsky, 1999).

An international study comparing time-use diaries from 20 countries, including the UK, covering the last third of the twentieth century has confirmed the finding of this North American study and suggested it is true across this broader swathe of industrialised societies (Gershuny, 2000). Although here I have to simplify the findings of this large-scale study, it shows unequivocally that the time parents spend with children has increased substantially (Gershuny, 2000:114–116) over the period studied. Gershuny comments:

Over the more recent historical period (i.e. since the early part of the 1970’s) childcare time has increased for both sexes, by 15 minutes for women, and by 8 minutes for men. (Gershuny, 2000:195)
In these time-use studies child care time is a broad category that includes physical care of young children, playing with children and escorting them. However, Gershuny also suggests that time spent on child care is underrepresented in the data because the methodology used in them does not account for parents having a general responsibility for children whilst simultaneously engaged in other activities. Time diaries ask for the ‘primary activity’ and this will tend to miss out general supervision and responsibility for children. However, also on another point, Gershuny and his research team is in agreement with the findings of the American study. The increased time that parents use with their children derives from parents allowing themselves less personal time.

These findings suggest that we need to look more closely at the meanings of family time for parents and children. For, as Galinsky argues, ‘quality time’ has become an unattainable goal, even a burdensome one’ for parents (1999:208). She therefore suggests that it needs replacing with more meaningful notions of what time is for children and their parents. Do, for example, children and parents think in the same way about their time together?

It is also apparent that, although the debates about quality and quantity time have been going on for at least the past four decades, they have largely been based on unexamined assumptions about what would be ‘good’ for children. Hitherto, the perspectives of children themselves have been neglected. In this paper, however, I will begin to unpack the notion of ‘quality time’ from the perspective of children. To discover what ‘quality time’ means to children, I will first look at what ‘family time’ is for children and through this explore what ‘qualities of time’ matter for them.

Children and family time

The main part of this paper is based on data produced during the intensive ethnography involving 70 children. However, first I will give a flavour of the value of ‘family time’ for children as evidenced in the survey data. The survey involved 489 children (255 girls and 234 boys) in year 7 of two secondary schools located in an inner city area and in a small market town where the children participating in the study went.

In the survey the majority of children agreed that they ‘enjoy spending time with family’. This was somewhat higher in the case of the rural children: 61.4%, urban girls; 61.8, urban boys; 73.9%, rural girls; and 68.4%, rural boys.

On the surface therefore our study confirmed the family ideologies described earlier. A majority of children liked spending time with their family. They said they enjoyed this best of all and more than the time they spent with friends and on their own. Furthermore, one-third of the children said that parents’ working hours restricted the time spent together as a family. Some extracts from what the children said illustrate the way in which parental work was seen as disrupting family time: ‘When dad’s working in harvest, I don’t go out with him much.’ ‘My mum has set hours so we work out when we will do things, but my dad often gets called out unexpected.’ ‘My dad, he was like out at this club thing last night, so I couldn’t see him then. Today he had to get up at six o’clock to go to a meeting in Leeds… and then he goes back to work. So, I won’t see him ’til tonight. I haven’t seen him since yesterday morning and that was only like for about fifteen minutes.’

At a first glance these findings seem to confirm the call for ‘more time’ to working families. But, the question is whether more time, necessarily will lead to more ‘quality time’ for
children. This I suggest is unlikely. A more detailed examination of children’s experiences and views about time with their families shows that for them it represents something rather different from the notion of ‘quality time’ as it has been expounded by parents, educationalists, researchers and policy makers.

My analysis of the ethnographic interviews carried out with children shows five aspects of children’s time at home in the family that they value. These five qualities are:

a) the value of family time as ordinariness and routine  
b) the value of family time as someone being there for you  
c) the value of having a say over one’s time  
d) the value of time for having peace and quiet  
e) the value of being able to plan one’s own time

In understanding children’s perspective it is, however, important to remember its broader context. This has to do with children’s time at school and children’s time with their friends. In the limited space here it is not possible to go into a detailed discussion of these wider aspects but their intersection and interweaving with family time will become apparent.

The value of family time as ordinariness and routine

When talking with children about their experiences of everyday time with their family we introduced them to a blank circle entitled: ‘Family time, time with friends and time on my own’. During the conversation children were introduced to the topic and asked to divide the circle up into three sections illustrating how much time they thought they used during an ordinary week on each of these aspects of their life. The very concrete picture they made would then, in the course of our conversations, be filled in and explored through the children’s stories, their experiences and understandings. A detailed discussion of this methodology and description of the tools the research team developed is given in Christensen and James (2000).

At first many children found it difficult to articulate what exactly family time is. They made an important distinction between a more public and explicit sense of enacting the family through activities and events such as going to football matches, visiting grandma, birthdays and other family events and a more private or implicit notion of simply being and doing things together in a routine and everyday manner. One girl, Rebecca brought our attention to this very important distinction, which in other children’s accounts would be more subtle. She said: ‘Sometimes I do stuff with my family... we don’t really do anything as a family.’

This distinction was illustrated in more detail in Caroline’s account of the impact of her father’s work on their family time. On weekdays and weekends his work demands often hindered seeing, talking and doing things together. This was in contrast to the times when they did things together as a family. Caroline said:

I don’t really get to see my dad because he comes in quite late. At the weekend, he does like his work and all charts and stuff, so we can’t really talk to him and that, but sometimes like we go and watch my brother play football and we’re like a family—or we go out for dinner or go to the cinema.
Overall, however, children valued the very ‘ordinariness’ of family time—its routines and non-eventful character. Being with one’s family and engaging in the ‘ordinariness’ of domestic life was what family time was about. For example:

Having meals and everything that’s family time and going out swimming with my family, and going to see my grandma. And all that and erm...don’t know what to say!

I like have meals with them and watch television, sometimes play things, like Scrabble and Monopoly.

Family time is probably sitting in the lounge watching telly and watching to see what the dog does when the doorbell rings on Coronation Street. And that’s about family time really. Teatime isn’t really family time because my dad comes in after tea, and has to warm his tea up in the microwave.

Children’s time at home was shaped by everyday family routines, household chores and their parents work patterns. Children also contributed to domestic work through regularly doing household jobs. These included making tea and coffee, setting the table, clearing up, washing up, hoovering, running errands and walking the dog. They were also expected to keep their own rooms tidy. Some children, especially boys, helped by working on the family farm or business. Children living in the rural areas did more jobs than those in the urban area. Girls did more household chores overall than boys. For example, when girls went home from school during lunch break they were more likely than boys to be involved in some kind of household work.

Another aspect of family time was the routines around meals and watching television. These routine practices bring children together with their siblings and parents. In this respect ‘meal times’ and ‘watching television’ offered comparable instances of the creation of family time at home. Hanna described family time in this way:

The whole of the family (spending time together) because well sometimes on a night and I don’t have homework...and it’s like I’ll sit with my brother and my sister and then my mum will come in and my dad will come in and sit down on the settee and we’ll all start watching TV.

Many children pointed to family togetherness as sharing the sofa while watching TV. The significance and value of this was not reduced even though it may involve disputes, or even conflicts, with other family members about what to watch or other similar issues.

From children’s perspective the particular significance of ‘tea time’ was that it often was the only time when the whole family routinely spend time together. For most children the evening meal and, for a few children breakfast, is family time. In the early evening many working parents would be back home and children’s time with friends would come to an end. Children have to come in from playing outside, to eat and be together with their families. Children described time after school as a set of movements in and out of the home, determined around the temporal structuring of meal times ‘I come in about half past five for my tea and then I go back out again’ (Christensen and others, 2000). For children, ‘meal time’ represents symbolic transitions: between play-work and the family-home; and between the individual lives of family members and the family as unity. After

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3In the northern part of England ‘teatime’ is a general term used for the evening meal.
each family member spending time at work, school or other activities, the meal brings
children and parents together. After the meal parents and children may disperse again to
engage in their own activities. For example Caroline described how:

We have like family meals and go to watch my brother play football and do homework, me and
my brother do homework and my dad does his work and my mum goes on the computer.

However, it is through the temporal patterning of family members’ ‘comings and
goings’—in and out of the home and around the physical space of the house that children
enter into and out of family time (Christensen and others, 2000). In their accounts children
emphasised the importance of having a say over temporal markers such as being ‘allowed’
out of home, ‘having to’ come in for tea, ‘going to bed’, ‘stop playing’. This, as I will show
later, was performed through engaging with parents in negotiating their own time.
Children, who experienced themselves as being successful in having a say exposed a sense
of their own growing independence. At the same time, it was through such negotiations
and management of children’s time that the notion and ‘quality’ of family time was
constituted.

The value of time as someone being there for you

An important aspect of family time in children’s account can be captured in the notion of
‘someone, being there for you’ in time. This notion would crop up in our conversations
about the quality of relationships as defining a ‘good friend’ or a ‘good’ parent. For both
girls and boys it was important, in addition to forming friendships with other children that
they felt that their mum or dad would be there for them. This had to do with: someone to
talk to, someone who helps you, someone who does things for you, someone who sticks up
for you, someone who is concerned and interested to know how you are, someone to rely
on, and someone who likes you despite all problems. What children pointed to is the
enactment and significance of ongoing and lasting relationships situated in everyday time.

There are at least two important aspects to this. One is the availability of the parent and the
other is that the parent is someone who sticks up for you and supports you—at all times.
This quality of time is perhaps the strongest argument against any idea of ‘quality time’ as
a Filofax-time slot highlighted by the study of children’s perspectives. It is also apparent
that when asked if they would like to have more time with their parents most of the
children in this study said ‘No!’ (This is a finding that Galinsky also found among
American children.) However, there was general consent among children that knowing
that their parents would be there for them when they needed them was of much
greater importance. These extracts from the accounts of three girls participating in
the study illustrate some examples of how this quality of time could be expressed by
children:

I think family time for me is when I can actually sit with my mum and talk to her about stuff.
Yesterday was parents evening so tonight I’m talking about that and seeing what the teachers
said. (Hanna)

Mum, like she’s always doing things for me and we can have personal chats…and (with) my
big sister, because, she like, when I was little my mum always had to go out to work, so did my
dad. She used to like change my nappy and get my food ready, put me to bed. So I can talk to her
as well and she’ll like do things for me. (Rachel)
Today, I’ll probably, I’d tell my mum what my day was like and she’ll tell me what her day
was like. Then me and my brother would go and watch TV and then we’d go and eat and then
I’d talk to my dad whilst he was doing his work... Like my mum tells gossip and that to me. All
the things, that she thinks I should know, and my dad sort of plays around with me and Chris
and we have like pretend fights and stuff—but we don’t really see dad! (Caroline)

In my conversations with Caroline I was struck by the very strong sense of family
togetherness that she expressed. Caroline obviously had a close relationship to her mum,
who on many occasions took the role of mediating communication between Caroline and
her dad because he was busy working and often away from home. For example, after a
parents meeting at school that both parents attended, Caroline’s mum told her the next
morning that her dad was ‘very proud of her’ achievements at school. Caroline did not
express a less close relationship to her dad despite the fact that she would state strongly
that she and her younger brother did not see much of him.

How is it then possible for her (and perhaps other children in Caroline’s situation) to be
able to maintain such a strong sense of family togetherness when it was obvious also that
the family would be spending lots of time engaged in separate activities? Caroline had her
own explanation when I asked her directly:

   Pia: But, what makes it a family then?
   Caroline: Because, we’re all together, even if we’re not doing the same thing, we’re all together
   in the house.

In this way Caroline conveyed to me her own understanding that in her family she felt a
sense that there would always be someone there if you need it.

In their accounts some children revealed the experience of the effect of time passing on
their social relationships. Children related changes in time spent with parents and their
siblings in the course of their life. For example, children with older siblings who had left
home to live separately often experienced the loss of someone to talk to and confide in on a
daily basis. They missed their older brother or sister because they may have moved far
away from home (for example to pursue their education) and now the younger brother or
sister had to rely on occasional phone calls.

The 11 year-olds also described how daily routines and relationships with parents went
through marked change during their growing up. For example:

I think it’s changed since we started going to school ’cos I used to go to playgroups and stuff like
that with my mum, but now I miss the mornings and the afternoons being with my mum—and
my dad’s job’s like gone higher—so he works more hours! (Caroline)

In a conversation Billy vividly described how he experienced the changes in his parents
attitude and everyday engagement with him. Partly, he saw this as relating to how his
parents allocated their time and partly he saw it as an effect caused by that in growing up
he had lost the charm of early childhood (for a discussion of this issue, see also
Christensen, 2000). This is shown in our conversation:

   Billy: They’ve got jobs to do and everything and they’re not leaving time to erm help you or
   anything. It’s just mainly like, you’ve got to be more independent and you’ll go shopping
with them, but they don’t really play with you. Sometimes, if you’re on the computer or something, your dad will play with you or something—but not now.

Pia: Didn’t your parents have jobs when you were little?
Billy: Yeah, but you know when you’re younger, when they’d come home from their work, they’d go: Oh, hello! Like that, but they don’t really anymore they just: Oh hi! and like, erm say: Hello, and have you had a good time at school? But when you were little they used to like: Get your car! Get your toys out and everything—when you were little, when they came home from work.

Parental ‘indifference’ and the changing everyday routines is for Billy closely related to how the enchantment of the toddler–parent relationship gradually has been replaced by more modified everyday routines and increasing individualisation within the family.

The value of having a say over time

Another important value of time for children at home (and at school) is to have a say over how they spend their time. Traditionally, the planning of household schedules and routines and the allocation of tasks would be taken to be an unproblematic feature of parental care and control over children. However, the children in our study, and, by implication in wider society, locate themselves as proactive within this discourse of power. Children project themselves as actors with a crucial part to play in the creation of family time and over time use. A main arena for this is the negotiation of ‘family time’ and children’s own time. Within the home—at the dining table, the kitchen, the bedroom, the sitting room, the sofa—children come to realise the boundaries between own time and space and family time and space (cf. Sibley, 1995; Christensen and others, 2000). From children’s accounts it was clear that they exercised their say over time by entering into complex contestations over time use with their parents. In many families, choosing how you spend your time is considered a privilege and perhaps, therefore, parents may use the withdrawal of this privilege as a way of controlling or even punishing children. Disputes between family members over time and space in the home are inextricably linked to the tension between, on the one hand, the independence of children and parents, and, on the other, considerations of the family as a unit and the creation of ‘togetherness’. Families are actively engaged in managing such tensions on an everyday basis. The call for parents to spend more ‘quality time’ together with their children is in this respect problematic if ‘quality time’ denies children their need to be both with and without their families. I have previously argued that conventional ideals tied to ‘quality time’ do not take into account the perspective of children. This is because family time for children is constituted both as time that they spend together with their family but also as time they are able to spend on their own (Christensen and others, 2000).

The value of own time as peace and quiet

Children valued time on one’s own as an important time for privacy, for having peace and quiet, and being able to make independent decisions about how time should be spent. Children’s accounts also revealed that it could indeed prove very difficult to achieve this...
valued sort of time. As Simon, dryly explained: ‘The only time in our house, (there is) like peace and quiet (is) when we’re tired.’

Everyday time for many children is busy and their own time is often under pressure from demands, plans and commitments over which they may have very little say.

I’d like to have more own time but I can’t really. Because like on Mondays or Tuesdays we have to go over to one of my mum’s friend’s houses. So you can’t really do homework ‘cos she’s got like a little boy always wants you to play with him and then it’s like half five and mum comes home. So then I watch Neighbours or something like that. Then I go and do my homework for an hour and then I’ll go and speak to my dad and then I’ll watch a bit of TV and then I like to do reading and play games and do drawings and stuff like that. But I can’t really, ‘cos my day’s too packed. (Caroline)

The only time I spend on my own probably is when I’m doing my homework, and erm, when I’m reading . . . It’s peaceful ‘cos you don’t have your little sister running about and hitting you and all that. (Hanna)

My best thing on my own is I play with my rabbits, I give myself a makeover, believe it or not ‘cos I don’t look like one, I like doing that on my own. Its quiet and you get to do what you want to do. (Emma)

The value of being able to plan one’s own time

Closely related to the value of having peace and a quiet time was the quality of being able to plan one’s time. In this respect our data gave a rather depressing picture of children’s ability to have a say over their everyday time. As argued earlier children’s everyday time at home was shaped by everyday family routines, household organisation and parental work patterns. In the rural area in particular children depended on their parents (in particular mothers) to provide transport to attend after school activities or when visiting their friends. This meant that they had little say over and opportunity to have an independent social life. Children in the urban setting were more able to choose how to spend their own time because their friends lived nearby and they expected, as they grew older, to make independent use of public transport.

For many children ‘homework’ represented time spent on one’s own. ‘Homework’ was, however, a new demand for the children when going to secondary school because the population of children participating in this study had not had any regular homework at primary school. For most children it was difficult to get used to planning their time. They had to organise their time to fit in homework with other activities and plan ahead in the week, for example allocating the appropriate time slot for each homework task. For a few children it proved particularly difficult to find undisturbed time and space at home. It was a constant problem with younger siblings playing or if they did not have a table to work at. It was not before they were well into the school year that the children at both secondary schools discovered that they could use the school library in break times or after school for this purpose.

Caroline gave a rare account of how family time had been organised with a sense of mutual appreciation and respect. She said: ‘You know when each other’s like doing
something so we don’t go interfering with them and then we wait until they come down
and we’ve finished.’

This was however an exception. For most children homework had to be fitted in with the
demands on their time made by other family members (often mothers and siblings) and
their commitments. For a minority this could be a very difficult task. This is illustrated in
the following extract from a discussion about homework with three girls at one of the
village schools. One girl, Hanna, having listened to what the others had to say, suddenly
bursts out:

Well, she’s got her own room. She’s got her own room (she points with her finger to each of the
other two girls). I haven’t, so! I’ve got a little sister pestering me while I do my homework, I’ve
got a brother pestering me when I do my homework. My mum’s shouting at me all the time, and
that. It’s like: Hanna get down here for your tea. (Hanna imitates her mum’s commanding tone
of voice.) Mum, I’m doing my homework. (Hanna is now using a voice pleading with her mum
thus imitating her own usual response.) I don’t care! My mum does that (Hanna explains, the
hardness of her mum’s response). I say: Mum, I’m doing my homework (Now, in a firm tone
Hanna attempts to guard her time for homework) and she (mum) goes: I don’t care, get down
here for your tea. Now!

Negotiating the time and space to study at home in peace and quiet forced some children
to work out careful strategies to avoid the interruptions of siblings and parents. A few
children had to invest so much effort in creating some time for themselves to do their work
that they eventually stopped taking an interest in managing their own time. That children
are not encouraged to make independent decisions about how they manage their
everyday time at home and at school (Christensen and James, 2001) does not equip them
well to plan ahead for the short and long term. Children themselves perceived these skills
and competencies of crucial importance when they reached secondary school and had to
fit in homework with more complex social commitments such as friends, family, after
school jobs and other activities.

Conclusion

Some of the assumptions behind the notion of quality time are being questioned by
detailed empirical research. This questions, for example, whether children and parents are
spending less time together and suggests the need to understand time use from the
perspective of different actors. In this paper I have argued that we need to replace the
quality/quantity time conundrum by fuller, more detailed and representative accounts of
the varied aspects of time that matter for children. From children’s point of view the
problems of everyday family life are not solved only by attempts to create ‘more time’ or
‘quality time’. For children notions of time are situated in the processes through which
family, school and work life take place on a daily basis. The ‘qualities of time’ identified by
children are complex and point to the importance of content and context for an
understanding of their time. Also the time children spend with their families cannot be
seen as separate from the time they spend with friends, at school and on their own. To
have a say over one’s time is of great importance for children and policy makers need to
ensure that children can develop time management and planning skills. Finally it is
important to see these questions in relation to how children’s views and values of family
time change over their life course.
References


Contributor’s details

**Pia Christensen** is Research Lecturer at the Institute of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark and is the author of many works on childhood, including *Research with Children* (2000).