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THE CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORICAL DURATION:  
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND MALAY  
PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER IN EDUCATION  
AT MASSEY UNIVERSITY

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1981

1826.1.18

## ABSTRACT

The present study is concerned with childrens' judgement of the duration of historical events, distant and recent, and, in particular with ethnic differences in a multi-cultural setting. It was designed to seek relationships between;

- ( i ) the ways in which children construct the duration of historical events using time cues, and
- (ii) race and sex differences in such construction.

The study was confined to Malay and Chinese primary school children in Malaysia. The sample consisted of 436 students, all in the 12 year age group. This age group was chosen because many of the studies relating to time and time judgement (e.g. Wallace and Rabin 1960) suggested that the development of a time concept occurs in children approximately at the same age and is generally expected to become fully established by the age of eleven years.

The investigation was carried out in two phases. The first phase comprised a group test designed to;

- ( i ) assess group performances in judging the duration of historical events and
- (ii) permit the selection of students for subsequent in depth interviews.

The interview which constituted the second phase, was divided into five separate parts. Its purpose was mainly to uncover the ways in which children used time cues in coming to conclusions about the duration of historical events and, in particular, beginning and end points.

The data from the group test were quantitatively analysed using analysis of variance to yield mean score differences between groups. The bulk of the findings from the interview questions are presented in the form of graphs, tables and profiles.

The group test findings indicate that there is little difference between sub samples in the way in which children come to conclusions about the duration of historical events. However, there is some relationship to be found between certain categories of answers and student performances in judging the duration of historical events. Dates of the events, in particular the beginning and end dates, were shown to be relevant to the process. Some of the other alternatives (other than the conventional scale of measurement e.g. dates) used by the children to come to conclusions about the duration of historical events are interesting. Many of them indicate the involvement and synchronization of two or more disciplines on which historical events bear. This knowledge is important because children can then be taught to develop the necessary frame of mind for cross discipline reference and consensus on historical time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is impossible to acknowledge all the assistance and help that I have received directly or indirectly. However, I should like to offer special thanks, firstly to the New Zealand Government. The Commonwealth Scholarship provided the opportunity to undertake the study while Miss Anderson's understanding and efficiency indeed made it possible.

On the academic side, it is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to Professor R.S. Adams for his support and assistance throughout. I owe a very special debt to my supervisor Dr Roy Shuker - his encouragement, diligent guidance and, even more his patience were all most helpful. Thanks are also due to Ms Roselyn Dixon and Ms Dorothy Gardiner for proof reading and editing the thesis. I would also like to thank Mrs Veronica Lobb for typing the final draft.

Lastly I should like to express my gratitude to my family for their encouragement and support during the time of my study in distant New Zealand.

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