

## **Temporal Aspects in Class: cadence, pace and opportune moment**

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**ABSTRACT – Temporal Aspects in Class: cadence, pace and opportune moment.** This article presents a reflection about the temporal aspects of daily life in the classroom. The specificity of the topic is related to how these temporal elements can be useful for understanding the movements in the class practice in literacy classes. The aim is to analyze the constituting temporal elements in class with an emphasis on cadence, pace and opportune moment. In the analysis, we adopt some theoretical precepts of Certeau and the dimensions of time drawn up by Heller to approach the topic. The results indicate that the reflections on temporal aspects in the daily life of the classroom are fundamental in the class process and powerful in an analytical perspective to understand mediation.

Keywords: **Time. Class. Literacy.**

**RESUMO – Aspectos Temporais na Aula: cadência, ritmo e momento oportuno.** O presente artigo apresenta uma reflexão sobre os aspectos temporais cotidianos na sala de aula. A especificidade do tema recai sobre como esses elementos temporais podem ser úteis para a compreensão dos movimentos na prática da aula em turmas de alfabetização. Objetivase analisar sobre os elementos temporais constitutivos na aula com ênfase na cadência, ritmo e momento oportuno. Na análise, adotam-se alguns preceitos teóricos de Certeau e as dimensões de tempo elaboradas por Heller para a abordagem do tema. Os resultados indicam as reflexões sobre os aspectos temporais no cotidiano da sala de aula é fundante no processo da aula e potente em uma perspectiva analítica para compreender a mediação.

Palavras-chave: **Tempo. Aula. Alfabetização.**

## Introduction

[...] tactics are worthy procedures due to the relevance that they give to time (Certeau, 1994, p. 102).

The purpose of this article is to focus on the uses of time in the classroom with a view to learning. What times constitute the teaching action in class? When social time is considered, which cadences, what pace, what opportune moments are visualized? When we seek to understand the practices of class, what temporal aspects emerge? Transcripts of reports from a sexagenarian literacy teacher, fictitiously named as Maria, were produced within the classroom in conversation, while the children, the teacher and this researcher worked as part of a research project.

In this text I intend to present partial aspects of the analysis of the empirical material collected and produced in field work, an analysis of the temporal aspects of the class practice of a literacy teacher. We considered the practices as techniques and, according to Milton Santos (2002, p. 322), “[...] the technique as time, including among the techniques not only the material life techniques, but the social life techniques, which allow us to interpret contexts”.

This is the last group taught by this teacher before her retirement. We elected routines used tactically by a teacher with pedagogical purpose in literacy class. That is, classroom routines reflect our priorities of/in time. As stated by Guedes-Pinto et al. (2007), school routines give visibility to our goals and purposes. When I started the field work in a literacy classroom, I gradually realized that physical time (which invariably occurs in the form of measured time, with units of homogeneous intervals) was a homogeneous time, while the social time and daily life were heterogeneous, qualitative and led to different meanings.

The discussion of the uses of time in everyday life took into account the analyses drawn up by Ezpeleta and Rockwell (1992), by Heller (1991), to study the everyday life and non-everyday life, by Thompson (1991), and by Certeau (1994), to understand the mediation processes in the classroom. Heller (1991) considers that six temporal aspects of daily life are: irreversibility, lived time, distribution limit, pace and opportune moment. Such categories have also been used by Quiroz (1992) to study the time of everyday life in high school; in a distinct way by Ezpeleta (1992) to understand the *invisible* teaching work and by Thiesen (2011) to think the curricular issues. In observing how the experience of time in the totality of the pedagogical practices is fundamental in the process of human and professional development, Paula (2008) proposes that the temporal aspects of situations experienced in everyday life help us analyze the educational practices and other processes of teacher training.

Throughout the field research, to understand mediation in the literacy classroom, we worked with the six temporal aspects proposed by Heller (1991), in the prospect of working *with* the concepts of time and not *on* the concepts of time. However, in this article, only three aspects and the complementariness between them will be addressed: a) the distribution and chaining, the cadence and decadence, b) the paces of simultaneity and synchronicity, c) opportune moments.

Mythologically, Time or times is both *Chronos* and *Kairos*. *Chronos*, in addition to fragmentation and measurement, also brings sequence and continuity; on the other hand, *Kairos* is intensity. If the first is flowing, the second is embroidering, the change in the triangulation between warp and weft. If, allegorically, *Chronos* is the seeding, the throwing and the relations with agriculture, *Kairos* is the lassoing, the hunting, the watching and the timely moment, the herding and care relationships with animals; the bonds, the links, the connections that give intensity and chain the meanings in the flow. The most visible part of *Chronos*, nowadays, is the quantity. For *Kairos* it is the quality.

### **Social Time: reflections on the daily school time**

When discussing the daily contact as a base and reflection of social relations, Heller (1991) lists some dimensions: a) the irreversibility, as the organic part of our daily temporal conscience; (b) the limit or death and the relation with other generations, that is, a consequence of irreversibility; c) the internal temporal experience, or the internal duration, that is, the intensity and meaning that make the details of lived time unique making seconds or hours eternal (or temporal dimension of lived time); d) the pace of time; e) the division or measure of time and its distribution; f) the opportune moment, as a moment of choice.

Heller is not concerned about understanding how the temporal categories of physics or how the more scientific notions of time are apprehended and used in the daily life of people; on the contrary, the author seeks to understand which relations with time are part of everyday life and thus raise such relations to a scientific understanding of reality. Regarding the temporal aspects of irreversibility, limit and internal duration, or regarding such categories, they are very present in educational research, but not always made explicit in reports on the teacher's professional life history.

On the aspects of time, Heller (1991) assumes that her analysis takes into account the aspects of everyday life elaborated by Lefebvre and Régulier (1992). The first dimension, also shared by Elias (1998), refers to the social character of time, that is, all time is social and a product of collective life. A temporal architecture of the modern organization of production, consumption, circulation and even housing is based on a social time. The second dimension highlighted by the authors refers to the fact that the rhythmic organization of the everyday life time is, at

the same time, the most personal, the more interior, and, at the same time, the most externalized. The pace of time is neither externalized as ideology nor as illusion, but as reality. A third element of everyday life rhythmic temporality is fragmentation. The times and rhythms acquired are concomitantly internal and social.

Thus, quantified time is subject to the general law of our society, which also divides the spaces. There are fractions of spaces and times for different works, separating the times of leisure, recreation, feeding and of many other periods and moments clearly demarcated and hierarchized. As stated by Teixeira (1998; 2004), based on those authors, the three aspects are present in school times and in the time experience of teachers.

Elias (1998; 1994) states that time acquires a functional and instrumental value as orderer and regulator of social activities, subjectively built, and expresses the result of an extensive and complex civilizing process. Time depends on the socializing and civilizing cultural process of the members of the groups on the temporal representations and codes of each culture. The time perceived by each subject as an external element is integrated by mediation and appropriation to the personality of each one, models its volitional and self-regulating structure based on complex synchronization processes, planning, mediation and temporal fitting of social activities.

Firstly, we must not forget that the school is subject to historical changes. The first literacy school was organized under a random time, registered in *continuum* flux, by the individual and non-simultaneous education, marked by the student's learning pace or by the teacher's free decision. The school, especially in the form of school group, since the first decades of the twentieth century, marked a different time. It attributed importance to simultaneous teaching, to maximized, optimized and useful time (as well as to space), to common curriculum and to the development of grades. This was not only due to the pedagogical innovations, but also because of the cultural transformations and changes in the world of work, associated with industrialism, the hygienist movement, and Taylorism-Fordism that marked changes in the relationship between man and time.

The school, in its various concretizations, also produced different uses of time. In addition to learning the different contents established in the curricula, timetables and calendars, there are other virtues learned at school. It must be remembered that the very organization of the curricula, schedule and calendar is a temporal aspect, whether by annual grades or cycles; planning the education for two, four, eight or nine years brings the marks of the meanings that we establish with time.

Although the organization of the temporal architecture of grade schools and school groups throughout the 20th century is characterized by diversity, as pointed out by Gallego (2003) and Souza (1998),

the school of this investigation, at the beginning of the 21st century, is marked by attempts to standardize the Brazilian educational system: adopted from early childhood education (preschool) to elementary school I (initial years) by a prescription of temporal distribution of disciplines, both by the prescriptive grid of temporal distribution and by the organization of the deployment of two day shifts (morning, interval, afternoon). In this school each shift is marked by free aggregation activities at the opening and after the end of classes and by an interval in the second half of turn; the existence of a common registration date in November and beginning of attendance from the same day in February. In addition, it is a public municipal school bases its progression on the graded system. This school, in particular, adopts the grouping of classes more or less distributed by age (4 to 10 years) and progress of the children.

Other attributes seek also the temporal uniformity of the school day: the planned duration of 20 hours per week in 200 school days per year, i.e., 40 weeks of classes interspersed by shorter vacations during the winter and a longer vacation in the summer. This objective temporal configuration is shown to the community by a widely publicized calendar: newsletters, posters, schedule books, monthly tables in class, and the communication media. Thus, in a school *Februaries* are not *Novembers*. And, when speaking about how the school works, we often use a wide temporal vocabulary as if it were a second nature.

Despite all the legal attempts to establish a temporal rigidity at school since the end of the 19th century, a hard disciplinary system never came to be fully realized, especially because we cannot disregard the consumption of individuals and their operations. Standardizations adopted to achieve certain goals and deal with certain resistances raise others. The teachers make a distinctive use of unified school time, especially in classes with a single teacher. Within the limits of an external framework, they conduct an internal reconfiguration in the classroom.

It is an attribute of many teachers to adopt a distinct use of the prescribed time, by bending the rules or by interpreting certain standardizations in a singular manner: at times resisting verbally, at other times tacitly or apparently with full acceptance of the regulation. The distinction in the case of the investigated end-of-career teacher, here called Maria, is that her work makes sense to her when operated with autonomy. This becomes visible, among other things, by knowing what her work is, the object of her teaching and by seeking to accomplish her goals. In other words, by the comprehensive vision with which she understands her work as a literacy teacher. In general, this behavior implies a greater dedication, chronologically, in intensity, or taking advantage of the most (or better, and less) timely moment compared with her colleagues.

The greatest anxieties of Mary, according to her report, are related to her autonomy, or lack of autonomy, concerning the use of time and

the process of literacy teaching. Other anxieties were associated with the use of time by colleagues, especially in cases she called *squandering* of time to detriment of a student's learning time. The teacher says:

Discreetly, take a peek at that class (pointing). The class is writing content from the blackboard and the teacher is reading a paperback novel. It's hard ... (Field journal, April).

Or, the second grade spent the entire first day of class copying the alphabet while the teacher was sitting at the desk. You know they ended the year making large texts. Sitting all day doing the same copy! (Field journal, February).

I think that what happens on activity time is stalling, ask the kids what they did. They don't know ... see the notebooks [showing] ... almost nothing (Field journal, September).

"Stalling" is what Marilene Nunes (1999, p. 171) refers to as "[...] resistance strategies of teaching workers against the suffering generated by the disciplinary control." As argued by Vasconcellos (2002), currently, differently from the romantic ideas of a profession in which the autonomy of the teacher marked generations, the teachers' work is increasingly encoded, streamlined by the ministerial directives that prescribe in detail the program and the progression to be taken into account. As her work in school makes sense to Maria, due to being implemented bringing its meaning to children through intentional education, she makes distinct use of the time to teach. Firstly, finding time for teaching.

Although the most visible notion of school time is governed by the logic of submission to timetables, by prescribed sequenced activities, rules and internal regulations, by the constant use of time, by the chronology of calendars, by agendas, by the workload, by the hierarchization of disciplines in between the measured, quantitative time, there are singularities, anonymous subjects moving between the visible notion. There are teachers who attempt to make distinct use of time, of the time that runs, the time that is lost, the time that urges, the time spent, the time of struggle and of the struggle for time or against time, the time distributed by the other, by introducing something that makes sense to them. Finally, using time in their favor.

### **Aspects of Distribution, Chaining and Analog Continuity in Class**

Although school time is organized in long (programs, annual, bi-monthly) or short cycles (daily), the weekly cycle is relevant to observe the single-teacher class. Differently from the daily and annual, cycles which are astronomically and nature cycles-related, the weekly cycles or the week are totally arbitrary. Other peoples have used weeks of eight, ten or twelve days. Our seven-day week dates back to the period of the Babylonian Empire, through the Hebrews and Romans. It was presented by these and agreed upon by the Christians. Thus, our week carries an

internal distribution in which Sunday, or the first day, the Christian day of rest, officially is a non-working day for public agencies and also for school. During these 40 arbitrary – yet conventional – cycles and seven days, it is common to find other official and prescriptive distributions in the grid of timetables or personalized with distinctions.

One of the distinctions as to the disciplines' time distribution in the school timetable grid by the teacher is the emphasis on a certain area. Officially, the municipal curriculum, or better, the temporal grid of disciplines, is distributed with certain equivalence. For all the initial grades of elementary school students would have the disciplines of Portuguese, mathematics, sciences, history and geography, and the number of classes for each discipline is the same in all years/grades. It is necessary to highlight that this division, distribution, fragmentation is only documentary. This is an unfeasible project due to various characteristics of the relation of the teaching work in the single-teacher classes. One of the reasons is that the chronological distribution does not take into account neither the times of children or the required cadence and decadence of teaching activities nor the transversality. It is something that, according to the investigated teacher, would be a mistake. Her group of 6-year-old students carries out a number of literacy activities much higher than that prescribed. Noteworthy, the school siren sounds in the time points of entrance and exit, beginning and end of the interval. However, as the siren is not automatic and requires manual activation, it can be adjusted according to the events of the day. There is a temporal jurisprudence. It would be surprising if the school professionals decided to use the interval time as prescribed. Thus, the 20 weekly clock-hours are distributed as follows: four hours for activities time, three for feeding and recreational activities, 13 clock-hours for the teacher to make use in classroom.

How would the 13 clock-hours be distributed? In the case of the class observed, and probably in many other single-teacher classes, this fragmented measure became unfeasible, because, in addition to a lack of limits between disciplines, there was a duplication of the same: while working with science, they were taught to read. This is a dynamics which is unfeasible to count, but that enables transition, transversality, integration of modes of learning and knowing. In contrast to the discourse that the school is composed predominantly of a linear time, as would be its spatiality (walls, railings, doors, classrooms, forbidden places) with a time solely quantitative, serial and graded, clipped, busy and with rigid pace, a multitude of uses and non-passive consumption was observed. Surely there is a temporal framework, of the time of society and of the limits of school time. Nevertheless, concurrent or synchronized events, duplicated events, occasions harnessed, breaches to do something outside the standardization, redefined. In conclusion, opportunities to do differently when the dictatorship of time is not naturalized, neither in its qualitative nor in its quantitative aspect, is always a possibility.

In her work, Maria showed the need for, in dividing, distributing and overlaying the time, also keeping a pace during intervals. She referred in particular to celebration weeks (to the last week, to the week of children's day or to the civic week, the June Celebration, the mothers' week) as markers of the change in the ways of interacting with children and in the pace. Her description reminded me of the discussion of Bosi (1994, p. 416) on social measures of time: "[...] it is relevant to reflect on the social division of time that supplants the hours of the clock and imposes a new duration. A whole day can be divided as before and after an expected visit". As well as to many teachers and children, to which the personal day seems to be divided into three major parts: before class, class, and after school.

Regarding the relations about time distribution and its relation with work, I found another distinction. Teacher Maria kept an ethics in relation to her work: she refrained from coming to work late, or leaving before it finished; when, for some reason, she came late, she felt somewhat embarrassed and always had a justification, which, unfortunately due to being a sexagenarian, usually concerned her health. It was probably related to the Lutheran origin of her husband. It was a shame too little shared by her colleagues. In case of not coming to work or negotiating the day she needed to leave early, she preferred to negotiate. Ironically, she did not come on Monday, her day of activity time, and changed or compensated hours in the morning shift or at other times, prolonging the time of class. A tactic to prolong time.

Other tactics to prolong the chronological time and increase the mediation moments were to assist students before and after school hours. It involved using part of the weekly time of the interval, finish the activity even after the siren sounded and in *risky cases*, as she called them, assist students in private at home when assisting them in school space out of her work hours is explicitly forbidden. Assisting the students in her household time showed how, for teachers, the division between public and private time is tenuous. In that situation, when the time of simultaneous education was not sufficient, she made use of the old teaching time of individual class in the private environment, reinforcing the finding of Hébrard (2000) that the time of practices is slow and is based on history.

Make time, divide and distribute time, fragment and continue activities chronologically is to show the pace of social life to children. Chaining lessons or study units was essential for the teacher to achieve her goals. Distribution refers not only to fragment the class time chronologically and quantitatively into activities, but organize it and, above all, chain it. Chaining it meant, in addition to giving a cadence to the *continuum* of the sequence of classes, also avoiding boredom, inactivity and monotony. It meant promoting transition activities between the other activities. Chaining the time was making the activities and their



distribution have meaning and significance, as well as a way to mitigate the feeling of *lack of time*. According to Agnes Heller (1991, p. 389), “[...] the antidote to boredom is not pure and simple activity, rather, the activity that has meaning, that enables development of our human capabilities”.

The social importance of the division of space in everyday life, according to Heller, is much smaller than the division of time (Heller, 1991). However, it is relevant to observe that the geographer Milton Santos (1998) argues, on another analytical level, that the space and its private property in the capitalist mode of production is the result of consecutive sums of exploitation and appropriation of the times of others. According to the geographer, private space is time, time squared.

Thus, I believe that the concern with personal time is still common in daily life for many people. It is still possible to the weak to make multiple tactical uses of time, while, for the use of space, this is becoming increasingly difficult. The uses of spaces are related to ownership strategies.

Considering the perspective of the use of time in classroom, spatial organization helped the teacher to gain time: she left the room less times to obtain supplies or she could re-plan, improvise when necessary, which would ensure the continuity the transition and avoid undue fragmentation. Although the visible organization of classroom space, in the case studied, facilitated an organization of time, its visibility depended on a specific focus on this aspect.

### **Cadences and Decadences in Classes**

In distributing the time of activities and, consequently, cadencing<sup>1</sup> them, the distribution, organization and chaining of time enables assignment of priorities to timely moments. These are elements that indicate what we consider important and what we value in the time that we share with our students. Thus, school routines give visibility to our goals and purposes as teachers. Based on the relation with routine, the distribution, frequency, the time at which the tasks are carried out, the relation with the other contents of the classroom, it can be observed that to teacher Maria the priority is teaching, teaching the contents. An example of her words: “The priority time of the day is before the recess. New activities are carried out at the beginning of school day. The activities which the children already have some proficiency are conducted usually after the recess.” (Field journal, November).

Another example, the work with the mobile alphabet that in February was held at the first hour of class, had a decadence throughout the day until, by the beginning of May, it was held at the end of the day, almost as a playful activity. Then it was no longer worked by the class.

As already stated, the priorities were materialized in routines, frequencies, continuities and privileged times. Even if the continuity of an

activity developed several times it was already in decadence. Another feature observed is that Maria did not rush or race the class as a whole for the completion of the tasks, but only because of external time markers, such as the recess. Many times, I heard her saying: "First the activity is finished, then recess, and it is not a punishment, it's organization". Or, by the end of the school day: "While this group finishes activity X from yesterday, this one will do activity Y" (Field journal, May). It showed the children that the work they did at that time was important, kept the continuity and flow (cadence and decadence) and, consequently, the completion.

The English historian Thompson (1998) called such event a work ethic regulated by the task and not simply by the clock, as typical of pre-capitalist societies, i.e., of craftsmanship. This is also a characteristic of work when the meaning and significance were not subtracted from the employee. It can be said that the chronology of time (division, organization, cadences, decadences and continuities) of the activities of the work of teacher Maria occurred this way because she related the work of that time with that which would be developed throughout the year.

To distribute the time of activities and, consequently, cadence and chain them to avoid boredom, inactivity and monotony and promote sense and significance, in addition to focusing on the main developmental activity it becomes necessary to create – or let occur – at times links, at times ruptures between activities. That is, in addition to the main and developmental activities there are others, usually anonymous, maybe with a simple sense of relaxation, a simple mess, and the organization of the notebook as something simple and commonplace: these are transition activities, as I call them. After one day of observation I describe such activities in the field journal as follows:

04:20 pm - the teacher headed to the back of the room. Pulled out a chair, three tables and sat down. She carried a glass of glue and a roll of toilet paper. "Come to the back of the room!" As the children finished, they went to the back taking the photocopied sheet and a notebook. The teacher helped fold, the child applied the glue and the teacher removed the excess with toilet paper. Those who had pasted engaged in a chat. A few minutes later, they started with the textbook (Field journal, August).

Although it was an almost innocuous activity from the point of view of content – if we look only to the disciplinary content – and often seen as a waste of time, this was a special moment, involving some relaxation. Even though it was a simple activity, it involved synchronicity. Three things happened at the same time: the pace of the class changed with another movement of bodies in space, the aggregation between the peers also changed, being an interval of rest for those children and the teacher whose positioning in the back of the room seemed to indicate that that was a moment of directed teaching, but a time for and of children. Another body movement, the choice of free partners, some completing the activity that others had already completed. Although

little discussed in the pedagogical literature, the transition is part of the teacher's jurisprudence. It brings the movement of sitting of that teacher and the agitation of the class.

Transition activities<sup>2</sup> are a link between fragmentation and continuity in the cadence of time in the classroom. It is nonspecific, but frequent. Making them observable, registering and documenting the transition activities proved to be of great difficulty, being a necessary element to understand the chaining and, thus, the teaching practices. Though they are not planned in the prescribed curriculum, these activities are vital to understand the dynamics of time (cadence, pace, and timing) in class. They transpire through improvisation, consented and/or proposed by the teacher, and the teacher was always in charge, due to knowledge, of understanding the proper time to allow it.

Classes are not dots. They are not dots that can be loose. They need to be cadenced and chained. The cadence and chaining are revealed in how a class follows the other, how an activity progresses and then declines over the academic year and provides links and connections with others. It is worth mentioning that in the daily routine of classroom, the use of time, cadencing it significantly, annuls the idea of a wonderful class today, with a special planning and other wonderful lesson in a few days, because, even if planned with the best intentions, they do not constitute significant cadencing and chaining.

In addition, it relates to the work itself, so the control over the activity and the confidence as to the goals to achieve become evident, which differentiates it from those who can only be guided by measured time and by prescription. There is autonomy and authorship conquered in the work, which are maintained because of the clarity regarding the subject taught and of the disposition to carry on. The distribution, frequency, and organization take into account, consciously or not, a calculation of the future, an annual progression, a cadence and a decadence of some routines, events and interventions. What enabled the activities to become meaningful to the children over time were the distribution, the pace, the cadencing and the chaining with which Maria organized progression, continuity, transitions and resumption, or comes and goes within the content for her class: that is teaching literacy.

There are cadences and chainings that are more observed over a day and reveal to be connections, links. Bondioli (2004) defines these episodes as analog continuity, understood as "[...] the resumption of content from previous activity, the analogy involves various activities and continuity is more as didactics". I will illustrate the cadence with events reported. Excerpt from the field journal dated October 19:

03:20 pm - Siren sounds marking the start of the recess. Students move to stand. The teacher makes a gesture to wait and says: 'Open the Science book at page 69'. She writes on the board the number 69. A student exclaims: 'Teacher, are we having a recess soon?' The teacher justifies:

'You may leave the class, but leave the book open, so when you return it is ready for study'. The children understand the planning and select and open the book and then leave the class (Field journal, October).

Chaining or continuity of an activity into another within the same day is easier to be observed and reported, but I chose this event because it seemed to be different compared to similar episodes that occurred in some previous months: no child expressed even a slight dissatisfaction in losing part of the recess. Although at first continuity may seem only a strategy to save time, there was something that the activity of taking a book from the backpack and opening to a given page – or performing an action beforehand – promoted. She guided the children's actions, created a relation between now and that which comes next.

Thus, in October, the children seemed more integrated as subjects of their work and with the proposed objectives than in previous months. They were on another level of development regarding time and self-organization. Even though this organization delayed recess and did not meet their immediate desires, they abided by it. They showed that they expanded their ability to regulate their behavior and had developed an important understanding regarding time self-organization, making their psyche more complex. Yet, it is important to emphasize that the continuities within days, the temporal cadence, were already minimally understood by children.

The temporal links, the division-continuity of activities, although present in everyday life<sup>3</sup>, need, in an educational process, to be intentionally made explicit. This had been carried out since the first classes, with constant resumption of previous classes and events. Making the chaining explicit helped students to create meanings about the events in class and helped in the construction of memory about other times than the present.

The beauty of chaining is not in the extraordinary, in the unusual, but in its repetition, or rather, in the modified repetition. In the temporal dynamics of the classroom, when there is chaining, a certain routine undergoes decadence and is replaced by others. Furthermore, long chainings developed over the course of a year should also be considered. More often we see the discussions on the long chainings taking into consideration the development of the contents from the curricular point of view, of a sequence of topics, themes or points that follow another and are expanded in the next year.

### **Cadencing and Chaining Mediations with Learning Paces: *popcorn***

Although time is distributed to assist and teach everyone, students of that class noticed that, in such distribution, the time allotted to each one is not necessarily the same. One of the criteria used by the

teacher is the alternation, over the year, of the members of the group that are more closely assisted/taught by the teacher. This group with more intense and extensive assistance was, over the months, gradually replaced. The learning pace of children in this class was not yet the pace of external markers (watch, terms).

At the beginning of the year, the group with more attention from the teacher was that of repeaters and almost readers; “[...] because, if I teach them, they help me teach the others” (Field journal, April). The group with the most intense and extensive assistance was, over the months, replaced. Sometimes, the most assisted group was that of the most unruly children. However, most often, after April, the group assisted during longer time and more often over the day was the group of children with the lower degree of proficiency of the writing system. A significant portion of the time was allotted to the group that had not achieved autonomy in reading yet and needed help from the teacher or colleagues able to read to complete the activity.

Usually, this group sat in the only row of student desks positioned horizontally, close to the board and adjacent to Maria’s desk. An intermediate group was located near the two columns of the door, and within faster access to the teacher during her circulation. Students close to the window (of more difficult access to the teacher) were those who conducted activities with more autonomy. About four to eight children were distributed throughout the room to teach a colleague, a situation described by me.

The group, according to Maria, was more heterogeneous (as to levels of proficiency in writing and to particular characteristics) than other classes. However, the intensity of assistance, of intervention or of intervention in the initial months aimed at the two things simultaneously: to promote the enhancement of children with lower degree of proficiency and establish a group of readers. This group of readers would subsequently be called *helpers*.

The teacher uses popcorn as a metaphor to describe what happens at this time. I will try to reproduce her metaphor, not literally, because it was not recorded:

Teaching literacy is like making popcorn: you stir, stir, work, work, and see no popping, when one starts to pop others follow, although they keep popping, you can’t stop stirring the bottom of the pot, or else many kernels will remain..., then the popcorn begins to pop out of the pot, it’s time for another teacher’ (Field journal, September).

Thus, there is a *manufacturing art*, according to Certeau (1994, p. 139, emphasis in the original), of chaining, making *popcorn*, a chaining of learning, a chaining of small readers, who, due to being able to read, can help the teacher helping a colleague to read or to complete certain activities, or can carry out other more autonomous activities while she works with the rest of the class, or, also, can invest in learning writing.

As the author argues: “The reorganization and hierarchy of knowledge according to the criteria of productivity lead these arts to acquire a reference value, because of their functionality, and a vanguard value, because of their experimental and manual subtlety.” (Certeau, 1994, p. 139).

It should be emphasized that at early school year no *popcorn* is available, the teacher is alone, with no one to help her. Mainly, because students of her class were chosen among those who were not able to read and had the lowest degree of written language proficiency.

Thus, the cadencing and chaining of mediations and paces of learning are revealed to be more as kairological aspects of time than as chronological aspects of time. The investigation of everyday life led me to consider the actions and practices of spatio-temporally situated individuals and these to better understand school education.

### **The Pace of Interactions: synchronicity and simultaneity**

Another element to understand time is pace. Time “flows” neither fast nor slowly, it is also irreversible; however, the pace of time changes according to the historical periods (Heller, 1991, p. 390). Pace, according to the author, is expressed at different levels in the course of time periods, undergoing phases of different intensity, moments of rest or of reconstitution. Pace is the concrete mode of social time. According to the author, each historical period produces a pace, and this pace is not equal or accessible for all social groups, not even for all individuals of a same group. Even if this group is in the pace of its time.

When entering the class to observe sequence, continuity, linearity and quantify the use of time, the researcher faces an intensity of activities and a pace at times fast, or slow, sometimes in two ways. The pace that the teacher gave to the day in the classroom can be described with two distinct movements: an attempt of concurrency in which all students do the same activity (orality, oral reading, work on the textbook, copying the board to the notebook) and activities based on sync, parallels, i.e., with a duplicity in the variety of proposed activities for different groups or the same activity with distinct execution progress. The passage from a concurrency-based activity to synchronicity or vice versa involves the markers of change of pace, which I also call transition activities, usually with body movement around the room.

Some activities had, in the day, a different characteristic concerning pace. The teacher guided two different works at the same time, and had to synchronize them: while a child glued the little squares of the alphabet, the colleague helped writing the names. The pace of doubles is not the same, a dual pace, a synchronous or parallel pace.

The pace is expressed at different levels of the course of time periods, passes through regular and successive stages, of different intensities, through moments of rest and activity or reconstitution. Pace is

“a concrete mode of social time”, and cannot be mistaken for its division, discontinuity/continuity, being, rather, its chaining (Heller, 1991, p. 390).

The pace that Maria confers to her day with the children, from the point of view of the teacher, is intense work. For children it is a pace at times of intense work, at others of transition and body freedom, sometimes of slowness and attempt to enhance a drawing, a reading, a text, a mathematical challenge; at other moments, free choice and free aggregation.

The pores of *free time* are conquered as the children achieve certain goal. When a group of activities was completed, they were given permission to move around the room, play, or talk. But there were also collective free time pores, often during the transition activities, such as, for example, the moments of gluing a photocopied sheet of paper to the notebook, or drinking water outside the room, or playing with board games in the back of the room. To the teacher, however, it was a pace without pores, dense and intense. There were no moments of not working. This density, intensity and meaning seemed to neglect the extension of the chronological time range intended for the teacher, that is, it seemed to be more than 14 hours a week conducting the class and more than 20 hours in school.

Even when there was a simultaneous, collective activity intended for all students, there was a multiplicity of tasks proper of teaching: administer the remaining time, observe the students doing the activity, ask those who are doing it quick to wait or provide new activity or ask for dedication and improvement, keep the progress of synchronicity for most of the class, help the slow ones so they advance and thus keep the pace of the activities, manage the voluntary and involuntary attention of students and help them prioritize the reasons for attention; keep progression of work, the distribution of supplies that may run out, the registration of issues on the development of children or on what to resume, the shift (of body or voice) among students, provide specific answers to the students' questions and answer the adults who often knock on the door and, also, occasionally, talk with or speak to the researcher that is in the back of the room or helping.

This multiplicity of teacher tasks resembles a conductor (since I speak of pace) that directs or is the conductor of an orchestra, in which some musicians lack absolute proficiency in using the score or choose to not follow it and others who are still starting to learn the instrument. I believe that for this reason, the expression class conduct, or conducting teacher, seems to us, teachers, more suitable than others. Allegorically, as if the pace were determined by a double baton: chalk and eraser.

The multiplicity of the described activities occurred when teaching was simultaneous and an activity was designed to be performed in pace of synchronicity of parallel activities. This is one of the distinc-

tive elements of this teacher's work, probably learned early in her career when there were multigrade classes in rural school. This is concomitant coordination of groups performing different tasks in different pace and, sometimes, in different spaces. Individual assistance occurred while another group carried out a reading or writing activity with little help and, at the same time, another group performed another activity (or completed a previous one) autonomously.

The synchronicity of parallel works with children could explain why the teacher rarely rushed her students on the completion of certain tasks and why she spent a significant part of the time assisting students on their desks. On the other hand, if the students dedicated a long time to certain activities it was because there was an emphasis so the work was well done, carefully, with dedication, drawing with details, the long text read repeatedly or well understood. Synchronicity in heterogeneous classes, as to development, occurs, as observed by Certeau (1994, p. 102), as a "hit", "[...] possible crossings of heterogeneous durations and paces" in taking advantage of that which could be unfavorable.

In both movements, in seeking simultaneity or in synchronizing parallel activities, Maria prioritized the time for teaching. Her teaching was also transversal, as explained previously: she worked with the science textbook calling attention to the drawing or to literacy; worked geography calling attention to mathematics etc.

Therefore, as argued by Matos (1992), pace is not only the distribution of chronology. Pace is the fit between chronology, distribution and chaining and kairology, the timely moment, the strategic time. Pace is the fit of interactions, the fit between concurrency, synchronicity in the succession of diachrony; between intellectual tension and relaxation, fit between the movements of students and teacher, between the intensity of attention and lightness of transition.

### **Timely Moments and Knowledgeability**

The notion of chronological, measured, utilitarian and spatialized time does not exhaust the possibilities of the human temporal dimension. There is a more qualitative and subjective dimension of human temporality, that is, a time that is expressed by the filling or by the fulfilling of significances and values. There is, in the overlaps and folds of temporal movements, tensions, and the possibility of emerging moments of opportunity. These moments are unique to do something that escapes the notion of conventionalized order, of strict and continuous sequence. According to Zarifian (2002, p. 15) this becoming time:

[...] does not manifest its existence except in a widely underground manner, even if totally effective. A real effort is required to discern it and take it into account in social conducts. Its reality and importance are widely smothered by the spatialized time and its dictatorship.



Therefore, I agree with Zarifian that both the reality and the importance of the becoming-time or of the timely moments are smothered. This is a real circumstance that makes it difficult to observe the opacity of these moments. Sometimes, or most times, we are restricted to chronological and spatialized or measured observations. The opportune aspect of time presents itself in the *subsurface layer*, sometimes as connections on the back of the fabric, as the turning point of the very fabric or as embroidery on the fabric.

This notion of temporality as a “window of opportunity” (Certeau, 1994), observed in moments of dispersion or tension, emerges as creative opportunities, the opportunities to create, form, and also the time of formation. Thus, the relations that people keep both with spatialized, paced, quantitative time and with qualitative time significantly impacts the different relations built with other people. It is the time of the bond, of the personal course and of the accumulated time, of significance, of taking advantage of opportune moments.

It is important to recall that the strategic time, the opportune moment in Greek is *Kairos*. At its origin, as explained by Matos (1994, p. 253), “[...] it indicates the triangular opening in weaving and yarn chain that can present elevated or bent back or crossed by a stronger warp”. When there is unexpected, occasional opening in the triangulation of yarns, there are changes in triangulations of the weave or embroidery, a point from which it is possible to have a transformation. *Kairos* is the moment of clarity and visibility of a happening; it is the moment of recognition. As apprehension of a present that is built with the threads and patterns of an embroidery, as in the etymological sense of *Kairos*, the moment of knowledgeability (Matos, 1994).

Pace is given by the fit between *Kairos* – strategic time, opportune moment, suitable for determined action – and *chronos* – spatialized, mechanically measurable time, the fit between simultaneity and sequence. Thus, in the classroom, the little chronological time available can be offset by opportune moments used by teachers in the classroom.

As an example, I can say that many of the most significant mediations to students about learning of reading also occurred when they were asked to “stop everything and do a body activity”, to then start the listening of the reading a literature textbook. These moments were significant to students. Or when the *cue* to explain to a child the possible relations between grapheme and phoneme occurred after a very banal, yet useful conversation among children; or impromptu, retrieving from memory other events and taking advantage of the knowledge of the object.

However, it is worth mentioning that this improvisation has nothing to do with spontaneity, because, according to Certeau (1994), there is a difference between improvisation and spontaneity. When improvising during class, the teacher uses her broader experience, utilizing

her repertoire, her accumulated experiences, her prior knowledge. Seize the opportune moment, take the opportunity to do something else, embroidering on the fabric of time is dealing with a temporal dimension. Improvisation is conducted based on knowledge already consolidated, old formulas or strategies that worked. Improvisation, here, in the literacy classroom, resumes with each teacher the traditional knowledge of teaching reading and writing acquired in other decades.

Taking advantage of timely moments can be to turn or reverse the pace of a lesson, to introduce or retrieve something, lest a timely mediation is not squandered, or to emphasize and do slowly so as to facilitate imitation. That is, they mark kairological moments. In the use of time in class by the literacy teacher, this coordination of actions emerges, according to Heller (1991), taking into account the temporal internal experience and work of the time lived. Going from desk to desk checking the lessons is one of the most constant activities among literacy teachers in single-teacher classes. What differentiates the teacher's use of time in these moments is how she uses this time for mediations, or not, according to her knowledgeability. It is basically an opportune time for interaction. At first, it seems that she loses much time in this activity; yet, ultimately this is a differentiator for the use of time. While walking around the class, the researched teacher chose the moment to interact, expose the answers, solutions and relations established by a particular child, and, based on that which she observes in a child, she guides all children:

You see, she said that from this word we can also form the word actress. 'Daniel said that joining this word with that forms'. 'All of you pay attention to the details of this drawing!', Or to ask things that have already been explained: 'This HE is replacing what in the text?', 'the S is in the place of which sound? Of Z'. Thus, the dynamic relation time/space/movement/timely moment is often expressed in the words of the teacher: 'It's close to them that you can figure it out. How would I find out if I didn't talk to her?' (Field journal, July).

The conversations held with students from desk to desk showed that most of them attributed an important function to this form of assistance. The teacher believed in opportune moment for pedagogical intervention.

'[...] If I didn't do it now, maybe I wouldn't have another opportunity [...]' ' [...] I'm waiting for the opportune moment to talk about that with the Principal [...] ' ... ' [...] that kind of thing you can't let pass up'. Or even about the children's written production: ' [...] you cannot correct everything about the writing, we accept, check it, and ask them only to fix one thing. This is not the time to correct a lot of things and that the bureaucracy does not understand' (Field journal, February).

Taking advantage of every moment of contact, whether spontaneous or intentional, to teach has to do with the teacher's control over the subject taught and the clarity of her objectives.

In many moments of teaching, the teacher weaved, embroidered, bound in today's time. Under the visible, inside out, emerged her history of training and performance in the classroom. Although on the first meetings they seemed to be contradictions, in the course of the research it was revealed that the wefts and warps of the everyday fabric bring folds, creases, embroideries, several crossings inside out to form a single point in the right, clarity, entangling, bounds and ties on the back.

### Final Remarks

Throughout the research, the moments of connection with the literacy teacher were decisive, because this connection provided the possibility of thinking *with* the temporal aspects, and not only *about* them. Thus, describing and exploring the connections between the different aspects and processes that constitute the temporal dynamics of everyday life immersed in the mediations for literacy teaching with an experienced teacher became special to know the concreteness of the class. Operating with the temporal aspects also includes the learning that occurred during the process of delimiting this *universe*, the choice of subjects, the subtleties of entering the field and the attitudes during the contact, the production and register of data in the field journal, the risks and changes in which we engage.

Therefore, reflecting on the experience of time in the totality of pedagogical practices is fundamental in the class process and powerful from an analytical perspective to understand the mediation in the literacy classroom focusing on a teacher's savvy. Throughout this text, we evoked the complementariness between teaching and learning, simultaneity and synchronicity, distribution and chaining, cadence and decadence, paces and opportune moments, between chronological and kairological, between fast time and slow time.

I believe this research has made visible the aspects related to some of the uses of time in classroom and their relation with education. Other uses wait to be reported and understood. I also believe that it revealed the complexity of a literacy teacher's pedagogical work and how hard it is to enter the interlocutive dynamics of the subjects. This study showed how, in the classroom, we face opportune moments of choice and subtle movements and how these are key movements, in part, in chaining the teaching process, enabling teachers and students to build their path as protagonists. After all, it is based on these references that the past, the dream, and the possible are produced and reproduced over time (by uses).

Received on December 3, 2015

Approved on March 30, 2016

Translation from Portuguese: Carlos Eduardo Chiba  
Translation Proofreader: Ananyr Porto Fajardo

## Notes

- 1 Cadence: Regularity, chaining, regular succession, pauses and emphases, regular or rhythmic repetition, degree of speed to complete the steps of a process, relaxing and lowering of intonation at the end of a linguistic unit, pulsation, chaining of two musical notes; from the Latin to fall, to inflect, to cease, to lose force, to soften, to moderate. Falling, what falls or is falling down, analogous to the fall, decline and reduction. Chaining: Promoting links, forming a chain with the links. Providing continuity between small ruptures.
- 2 Transition activities in the researched classroom were very nonspecific: each row that was allowed to go have water in the filter in the back of the room, going to the restroom in groups, guided activities – as singing around the room, conversations, and free aggregation –, setting the table, waiting for the supplies x and getting the y, everyone leaving the room quickly to observe something and returning, collecting the paper scraps on the room floor, rearranging the student desks changing for group work, drawing, pinning the completed written tasks to the message board of the room, handing colored chalk to draw freely on the board, or the entrance of someone in the room etc., between one thing and another, or an interval within the same activity.
- 3 “Daily life is – as all other objectification – an objective in a double sense. On the one hand, as we have said, it is the process of continuous externalization of the subject; on the other hand, it is also the perennial process of reproducing the particular. In the infinite process of externalization, the same particular is formed, objectified. If these objectifications are always at the same level, “they repeat”, the particular is reproduced always at the same level; on the contrary, when the objectifications are of a new type, they contain the novel, reach a higher level, and the particular is also at a higher level in its reproduction. If objectifications are inconsistent, if they lack a unitary orderer, if they only represent “adaptations”, interiorizations, the particular is reproduced at the level of particularity; if objectifications are synthesized, if they bear the mark of personality [active subject in producing meanings and significances, conferring a personal and unique characteristic to them], the objectification of everyday life - in the sphere of the subject - is the individual. Objectification as continuous externalization and personality as objectification are, therefore, processes that require each other, which interact with each other, which cannot be separated; or, more accurately, they are two results of a single process” (Heller, 1991, p. 97).

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