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The Heist: Neoliberal Education and the Theft of Time
The Heist – Le Hold-up : l'éducation néolibérale et le vol du temps
El atraco: la educación neoliberal y el robo del tiempo

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Résumé de l'article

Dans l'éducation, le temps est une denrée rare. Par le biais de politiques prescriptives (et même d'un programme d'études scénarisé dans certaines juridictions), les décideurs tentent de voler le contrôle local (enseignant et apprenant) sur ce qui est enseigné, comment il est enseigné et ce qui est appris. Ce vol équivaut à un hold-up. Bien que l'heure d'horloge ne puisse pas (et ne doit pas) être ignorée, ce document offre une critique des points de vue conventionnels sur l'heure telle qu'elle est intégrée dans la politique et la pratique néolibérales en matière d'éducation. Dans ce document, nous demandons comment l'éducation peut mieux contribuer à un apprentissage plus durable en adoptant d'autres conceptions du temps. En se dispensant de niveaux élevés de normalisation et de prescription, et en se concentrant plutôt sur une éducation de l'expérience pertinente pour les apprenants qui n'est pas liée par chronos, les écoles pourraient encourager la durée, ou l'apprentissage durable, résultant en une éducation axée sur l'enseignement aux étudiants : comment bien vivre avec les autres dans un monde significatif.

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The Heist: Neoliberal Education and the Theft of Time¹

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Abstract

In education, time is a scarce commodity. Through prescriptive policy, and scripted curriculum in some jurisdictions, policy makers attempt to steal local teacher and learner control over what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned. That theft amounts to a *heist*. While clock-time cannot (and should not) be disregarded, this paper offers a critique of conventional views on time as it is embedded in neoliberal education policy and practice. In this paper we ask how education can better contribute to more durable learning by taking up alternate conceptions of time. By dispensing with high levels of standardization and prescription and instead focusing on an education of experience, relevant to learners and not bound by chronos, schools might encourage *la durée*, or durable learning, resulting in education focusing on teaching students how to live well with others in a meaningful world.

Keywords: chronos, time, education, standardization, neoliberalism, neoliberal education

¹ This is an expanded version of a paper presented at the 2016 Humboldt Kolleg conference in Toronto, Ontario.

El atraco: la educación neoliberal y el robo del tiempo

Resumen

En educación, el tiempo es un bien escaso. A través de políticas prescriptivas (e incluso un plan de estudios escrito en algunas jurisdicciones), los responsables de la formulación de políticas intentan robar el control local (del docente y del alumno) sobre lo que se enseña, cómo se enseña y qué se aprende. Ese robo equivale a un atraco. Si bien el tiempo del reloj no puede (y no debe) ser ignorado, este artículo ofrece una crítica de los puntos de vista convencionales sobre el tiempo en la medida en que queda incrustado en la política y la práctica educativa neoliberal. En este artículo nos preguntamos cómo la educación puede contribuir a un aprendizaje más duradero adoptando concepciones alternativas del tiempo. Al prescindir de los altos niveles de estandarización y prescripción, y en su lugar centrarse en una educación de la experiencia relevante para los alumnos que no está limitada por *cronos*, las escuelas pueden fomentar *la durée*, o aprendizaje duradero, lo que da como resultado una educación centrada en enseñar a los estudiantes cómo vivir bien con otros en un mundo significativo.

Palabras clave: cronos, tiempo, educación, estandarización, neoliberalismo, educación neoliberal

The Heist – Le Hold-up : L'éducation néolibérale et le vol du temps

Résumé

Dans l'éducation, le temps est une denrée rare. Par le biais de politiques prescriptives (et même d'un programme d'études scénarisé dans certaines juridictions), les décideurs tentent de voler le contrôle local (enseignant et apprenant) sur ce qui est enseigné, comment il est enseigné et ce qui est appris. Ce vol équivaut à un hold-up. Bien que l'heure d'horloge ne puisse pas (et ne doive pas) être ignorée, ce document offre une critique des points de vue conventionnels sur l'heure telle qu'elle est intégrée dans la politique et la pratique néolibérales en matière d'éducation. Dans ce document, nous demandons comment l'éducation peut mieux contribuer à un apprentissage plus durable en adoptant d'autres conceptions du temps. En se dispensant de niveaux élevés de normalisation et de prescription, et en se concentrant plutôt sur une éducation de l'expérience pertinente pour les *apprenants* qui n'est pas liée par *chronos*, les écoles pourraient encourager la durée, ou l'apprentissage durable, résultant en une éducation axée sur l'enseignement aux étudiants : comment bien vivre avec les autres dans un monde significatif.

Mots-clés : chronos, temps, éducation, normalisation, néolibéralisme, éducation néolibérale

Introduction

To think afresh means to open oneself up to phenomena and to the event, it must require a change in our relationship to time through which we define the event.

(Roy, 2007, p. 275)

Modern education turns on a linear concept of time, which is tacitly reinforced in education policy that shapes precisely what occurs in schools. Contemporary education policy reform explicitly involves centralized control over time (Gándara, 2000; Slattery, 1995). The politicized imposition of prescriptive education policy is most accurately represented as a *heist*, “a crime in which valuable things are taken illegally and often violently from a place or person” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) where governments seize control of scarce clock-time from teachers and students.

While the idea of a heist of time may be applicable to other policy areas, it is especially relevant to education. Centralized neoliberal policy controls time in education in very specific ways: the amount of time (days in a school year, hours in a school day) is dictated by policy; the way in which time is used in school is dictated by curriculum policy and, in extreme cases, with scripted instruction. Few other policy areas account for time with such specific and extreme measures.

Let us be clear: we do not suggest a rejection of clock-time. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to explore how challenging false binaries about time can contribute to better education. Building on critiques by Bergson (1996; 2002; 2005), Roy (2005), and Slattery (1995), we offer an alternative approach to conceptualizing time in education policy, and re/visioning neoliberal policy and practices to reverse the time heist, with the goal of greater teacher and student empowerment that ought to lead to more equitable and durable (Roy, 2005) learning. To do so, we begin by describing time with respect to its socially constructed and value-laden nature. We then differentiate between conceptions of time (clock-time or *chronos*, *Kairos*, and *la durée*), unpacking their limits and possibilities and exploring alternatives that overcome those limitations. Finally, we investigate how common neoliberal education policy features convey tacit notions and explicit uses of time in schooling and their respective implications on the quality of education. Through extreme prescription and standardization, neoliberal policy seizes total control of clock-time in education, amounting to a heist that robs teachers and students from more durable approaches to learning. That exploration leads to a discussion of possibilities to allow teachers and students reclaim time in education by placing greater emphasis on *la durée*.

Framework: Conceptions of Time

Anthropologists have long agreed that culture shapes the way that people perceive time, or their time perspective (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008), and dictate a cultural pace of life (Glennie & Thrift, 1996; Sircova et al., 2014; Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Time contains three important dimensions: *standardization* (the degree to which my time-path is the same as yours); *regularity* (the degree to which a time-path involves repetitive routine); and *coordination* (the degree to which our time-space paths are synchronized to connect to each other) (Glennie & Thrift, 1996). Industrial and post-industrial cultures and contexts are characterized by high degrees of all three dimensions. Consider their function in a production facility, where an assembly line would require high degrees of standardization, regularity, and coordination. In an academic setting, the dimensions would certainly be necessary for classes, but other aspects of academic work contain far less standardization and regularity.

The Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZPTI) offers a normative understanding of individual and cultural differences in time-orientation. Extensive data collected using ZPTI point to three categories of time perspective: individuals and cultures can be past-oriented, present-oriented, and future-oriented (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999; Sircova et al., 2014). Time perspective influences individuals' sense of duration (i.e., a sense of how much time has passed, how quickly it has passed, or a sense of boredom vs. excitement). International ZPTI data suggest that post-industrial economies such as Canada, Australia, the United States and much of Western Europe tend to be future-oriented, while nations with more agricultural based economies are more present-oriented (Sircova et al., 2014). Time perspective is closely tied to pace of life (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999), where high levels of industrialization require a future-orientation, leading to a faster pace of life in which people attempt to fit a great deal of productive activity into the day, ranging from commutes, long and high-paced work schedules, and often commercialized leisure. Comparatively slower paced life might include cultural traditions seemingly at odds with productivity, such as the (recently controversial) Spanish siesta (Reilly, 2016).

These normative time perspectives can be understood through theoretical conceptions of time. This paper turns on the distinction between *chronos* (linear clock-time), *kairos* (transcendent time), and *la durée* (duration). Within their predominantly future-orientation, industrialized and post-industrialized societies generally and uncritically equate time with chronological measurement in the form of clock-time, or *chronos* (Glennie & Thrift, 1996; Kingwell, 2014; Thompson, 1967). *Chronos* is a linear-spatial measure, where time passes minute by minute, hour by hour, often metaphorically conveyed as a string of pearls (Hoy, 2009; Neilsen, 2011; Wróbel-Best, 2013). In this metaphor, each pearl represents a moment as a self-contained entity, and each clock-tick moves us from one pearl to the next, thereby spatializing time.

Chronological time has been measured for centuries using sundials, hourglasses, water clocks, and various other devices prior to the invention of clocks (Landes, 2000).

Clearly, *chronos* as an objective form of time is important for both individual and societal functioning. Roy (2005) goes so far as to say that *chronos* may provide psychological security, precluding the vulnerability essential to experiencing phenomena as things that are coming to be and predetermined.

A preoccupation with *chronos* can be traced to the industrial revolution and with the rise of capitalism, resulting in the commodification of time and marking it as a currency (Kingwell, 2014; Thompson, 1967). Critics in the tradition of Lyotard have gone so far as to argue that modernity is “obsessed” with controlling time (Roy, 2005, p. 453; Slattery, 1995). Contemporary phrases such as “time is money” continue to reflect that imagery. Capitalism’s preoccupation with time as a commodity to be “consumed, marketed, put to use; it is offensive for the labour force to merely ‘pass the time’” (Thompson, 1967, p. 91) is heightened within neoliberal ideology and practice. Conceiving of time as a commodity—a scarce one at that—has led to a pervasive concern with its productive and efficient use in neoliberal regimes. A “propaganda of time thrift” (Thompson, 1967, p. 90) with tacit links to morality further emphasizes the preciousness of time. Societies that value time thrift tend to separate work and life into categories, as though work is not life.

Whereas *chronos* is quantitative and spatial and effortlessly lends itself to commodification, alternative conceptions of time offer qualitative accounts. The ancient Greeks recognized *kairos*, or transcendent time, as the “the human and living time of intentions and goals” (Jacques, 1982, p. 14): the opportune time to do something. *Kairos* is associated with wisdom and timing—the quality, direction, and movement of encounters depend more the convergence of unpredictable forces and factors in a particular moment (Gallagher, 2020). In a school setting, reliance on *chronos* might dictate that a particular curricular topic or educational activity (such as a test) would be scheduled well in advance on a particular day, as you might see in a syllabus. Conversely, reliance on *kairos* would require teachers’ and students’ individual judgment to determine the opportune time for an educational event in the context of learner needs, recent events, and individual and group curiosity that may redirect curricular topics or assessments.

Bergson (1996; 2002; 2005) put forth a different qualitative conception of time he called *la durée* (in Bergson’s original French) or duration: a lived time of duration that endures, flows, and integrates past and future into the present as memory and desire. It shares emphasis on qualitative, lived notions of time with *kairos*, though it acknowledges the fluidity of relationships and experiences and their impacts on time in ways that accounts of *kairos* do not typically acknowledge.

Unlike *chronos* and *kairos*, *la durée* “unfold[s] from within phenomena, and intuition is an attempt to get past the projections of a strictly metric description of events in order to glimpse qualitative change” (Roy, 2005, p. 449). Bergson (1996) introduced *la durée* as “the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states” (p. 100). *La durée* emphasizes interconnectedness between time and space,

capturing time's multiplicity and continuous nature—an “open hole of continuous relations” (deFreitas & Ferrara, 2015, p. 571). Rather than merely passing (as *chronos* is so often depicted), time as duration “gnaws” on things (Roy, 2005, p. 451), unquantifiable as an “undividable continuous flow of time beneath all our counting” (deFreitas & Ferrara, 2015, p. 571). It directly acts on the body, expressing itself through qualitative change, making each instant an elastic, nonrepeatable event (Roy, 2005, p. 451).

Bergson (2002) used poetry as a metaphor to express *la durée's* interconnectedness. A poem's meaning cannot be found individually within in the letters that make up words or in the spaces between the letters and words. Rather, all the elements are part of the symbol and need to be taken together to make meaning. Following this metaphor, duration suggests that breaking time apart into units renders it meaningless. Like the letters and spaces in a poem, past, present, and future states must be considered holistically in order to make meaning. Roy (2005) emphasizes the importance of “*learn[ing] to differentiate between time and duration, or between the repetitive and the qualitative*” (p. 450, emphasis added). Consider that for Bergson, duration is continuous change—movement more than translation in space, a qualitative alteration of the entire relational ontology at any given moment (deFreitas & Ferrara, 2015).

What do these notions of time mean for education and schooling? *La durée* requires teachers to attend to the flow of time rather than the stop-and-start of actions (deFreitas & Ferrara, 2015) that are associated with the school bell and *chronos*. Thus, the flow of *la durée* renders the string of pearls metaphor inadequate for durable education. In Bergson's metaphor, the flow of learning is instead more like a poem where the individual pieces make sense as a whole, not as discrete, linear components. Yet, neoliberal education policy continues to treat time as a string of pearls, creating tensions over how time is used and who controls or owns it. This represents the modern heist we concern ourselves with in this paper.

In the sections that follow, we explore how policy dictates and defines time in education. From that, we problematize the apparent exclusive emphasis on *chronos* in the context of neoliberal values, and practices reflected in contemporary education policy. Finally, we explore the possibilities of an education that would embrace *la durée* as a complementary approach to time in school.

Saved or Enslaved by the Bell? Time Heists in Education

At that place only linear time was permitted, all life and teaching at the school was arranged in accordance with this—the school buildings, environment, teachers, pupils, kitchens, plants, equipment and everyday life was a mobile machine, a symbol of linear time. (Høeg, 1995, p. 237)

Mainstream, neoliberal modes of education occur in a linear and temporal progression (Roy, 2005). Kemmis et al. (2014) argue that education has been stripped “of its proper goal, that of preparing students to live well in a world worth living in, and transforms education into standardized, factory-like schooling” (p. v). More to the point, schooling has taken education’s place under neoliberalism. By schooling, Kemmis et al. (2014) are referring to what takes place at a school that “may or may not be educational” (p. 10).

Within the global context, large-scale neoliberal education reforms in most industrialized nations repeatedly introduce unprecedented amounts of policy in the form of texts, strategies, legislation, and discursive processes. Standardization and prescriptiveness abound (Pinto, 2012, 2015, 2016). This proliferation of policy dictates the length of the school year, hours of instruction, content of those hours of instruction, curriculum outcomes, and in some cases, pedagogies and assessments to be used as specific points in the school year.

When education is viewed in the kind of strict temporal progression we just described, it replicates sequences (e.g., school days and years, curriculum sequences, etc.) regardless of place, a learning environment’s qualitative features and the individuals engaged in it, and how a learning event unfolds. Bergson’s work calls attention to the impossibility of identical sequences in all contexts—it is foolish to think that one policy is appropriate for all contexts. Bergson argued that the kind of chronos embedded in contemporary neoliberal education policy compromises the possibility for students to experience the flow of learning in processual terms (Ross, 2012). Instead, Bergson called for a qualitatively different approach:

In order to advance with the moving reality, you must replace yourself within it. Install yourself within change, and it will grasp itself and the successive states in which *it might* at any instant be immobilized. (Bergson, 2005, pp. 253–254, italics in original, as cited in Ross, 2012, p. 53).

For Bergson, flexibility or indeterminacy are inherent conditions of phenomena, including education, and not something to be overcome (Roy, 2005). In colloquial terms, they are features, not bugs, in education and learning pursuits. This represents the core problem of the heist: attempts to control, standardize, and mechanize learning ignore all-important attention to temporality, which is, in Roy’s (2005) view, necessary for creative understanding. Awareness of the heist might be a first “step in breaking the habit of time” (Roy, 2005, p. 456).

Time Use Dictated by Policy

The strict temporal progression of education expressed in neoliberal policy “has roots in our general struggle with time” (Roy, 2005, p. 452). Neoliberalism has driven extreme curricular standardization that completely dictates the time use in schools (Pinto,

2012). In particular, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that mandated time for compulsory instruction per school year ranges between a low of 608 hours in Finland to well over 1,000 hours in other countries, with an average of about 900 hours (OECD, 2014). This is notable because Finland consistently scores at the top of international PISA testing, supporting research cited by Gándara (2000) that increased instructional time does not raise student achievement. As a point of comparison, Germany's mandated instructional hours fall below the OECD average, while most North American jurisdictions and Australia far exceed the 900-hour average (OECD, 2014). The point here is not to debate the optimal number of hours spent in schools, but rather to establish and illustrate the prescriptive nature of education policy in controlling time down to the hour and minute.

Obsession with time in education has not gone entirely unnoticed. In the United States, *Prisoners of Time* explored the implications of a school system "controlled by the clock" (United States National Education Commission, 1994/2005, p. 5) and advocated for a restructuring of time use in school to reflect 21st-century life and work. While the report's intent is laudable, critics (e.g., Lofty, 2000; Slattery, 2005) suggest that the report fails to sufficiently challenge chronos and its limitations. Rather, *Prisoners of Time* depicts time as both an object to control and as a dictator of the linear sequence of schooling (Slattery, 1995). The report's position is that "while standards must be held constant," time should be used differently given the affordances of technology (USNEC, 2005, p. 2). Ironically, the report advocates for more direct instruction time and lengthening teachers' workdays and/or school years with mandated tasks, thus strengthening the shackles of the metaphorical prison referenced in its title. At best, *Prisoners of Time* acknowledges cultural desynchronization in the form of flexible work, telecommuting, and the rise of other technologies that allow remote work and learning. The technologies and approaches described in *Prisoners of Time* were largely ones that schools and workplaces engaged with during the 2020–21 pandemic.

Occasional attempts to reject time thrift associated with neoliberalism appear to be emerging; for instance, the so-called slow-food movement, as described in *The Slow Professor* (Berg & Seeber, 2015; Shahjahan, 2015). Several contemporary school-based experiments also suggest an openness to challenge arguably superficial aspects of time synchronization. Toronto's Eastern Commerce Collegiate experienced success with a "late start" secondary school that was designed to better attend to adolescents' natural sleep-wake cycles to reduce absenteeism. Toronto's Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School offers an alternative format that eliminates set class times, giving both teachers and students control over when and how learning occurs (though the curriculum remains prescribed). Finally, massive online open course (MOOC) availability, especially through Ontario's Shared Online Course Funding model, provides new kinds of time flexibility for learners. Online learning was quickly implemented out of necessity during the 2020–21 global pandemic, which redefined many aspects of traditional classrooms. But the question remains: Do these models

challenge chronos as the dominant conception of time, or are they mere adjustments of conventional schedules that ignore thicker implications and features of *la durée*?

The “prison” described in *Prisoners of Time* is not unique to the United States.² Neoliberal education policy in Canada,³ Australia,⁴ Germany,⁵ and elsewhere attempts to prescribe, standardize, and monitor education, subjecting students and teachers to externally enforced time use mandates. Standardization enforced through accountability represents the ideology of *deliverology*, an approach to education policy by which content and outcomes are prescribed and corresponding accountability structures measure performance with respect to excellence and equity (Gewirtz et al., 2021). Deliverology attempts to justify standardization and narrow accountability as means of equalizing access to education for groups that are often marginalized, in this sense consistent with the concept of massification. “*Prima facie* plausibility” has resulted in enthusiasm even from progressive educators (Gewirtz et al., 2021, p. 521), though deeper investigation reveals that equity arguments are at best overstated (Gewirtz et al., 2021; Skerritt, 2020; Stevenson, 2017).

At their most extreme, “scripted instruction” programs prescribe minute-by-minute time allotments and word-for-word scripts of what the teacher is to say (Commeyras, 2007; Eisenbach, 2012; Endacott et al., 2015; Milner, 2013). This ensures that every single teacher participating in scripted programs is using classroom time in the same ways, reciting the exact words from scripts regardless of individual student or community diversity and needs. Scripted instruction of this nature has appeared in various pockets in the United States and the United Kingdom, where policy makers have the impression that high standardization and control of classroom activity might

² Although individual states have jurisdiction for setting overall education policy, including curriculum, the federal government established the Common Core State Standards, which were developed with state input. The *No Child Left Behind Act* is federal legislation that mandates standardized testing and accountability, financially penalizing low-performing schools.

³ In Canada, the ten provinces and three territories are individually responsible for education policy, with no federal interference. In Ontario, for example, high school diplomas are granted based on requisite numbers of 3.0-credit-hour courses; graduation requires thirty 110-hour course credits plus 40 hours of community service.

⁴ The Australian Curriculum guides what students learn and includes curriculum from foundation to Year 10. However, states such as Victoria have also developed their own curriculum for foundation to Year 10 that incorporates the Australian Curriculum and is based on the needs and priorities of that state. Regardless of the school (i.e., government or nongovernment) all children follow this national curriculum. The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) has been administered to all students nationally. This test is given to students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

⁵ Germany’s national Ministry of Education called for policy aimed at higher performance, increased higher education participation, and a focus on individual students’ strengths and abilities. The ensuing national standards were accompanied by a reduction of school years from 13 to 12 and the creation of a research institute (*Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen*) within Humboldt University to establish and monitor enactment (Leyendecker & Letschert, 2008), though Germany’s 16 states are individually responsible for education. The *Rahmenlehrpläne* (curriculum) defines standards, while schools and teachers design instruction (Leyendecker & Letschert, 2008). This represents a competencies orientation that departs from Germany’s more traditional input-based approach to an outcomes-based model focused on continuous quality monitoring.

improve student test scores (Commeyras, 2007; Eisenbach, 2012; Endacott et al., 2015; Milner, 2013).

This form of extreme standardization conflates quality with measurement by homogenizing and spatializing curriculum, usually with the goal of improving achievement.⁶ Ideally, measuring student outcomes ought to be “an ongoing qualitative interchange” between teacher and student (Roy, 2005, p. 455), which is obviously time consuming and cannot be reduced to predetermined packets of time like pearls on a string. In this way, time and time again, large-scale research fails to support a relationship between the allotted instructional time and student achievement (Gándara, 2000).

Take, for example, the government response to Ontario’s 2014 decreasing math test scores among elementary students (Pinto, 2016). The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME), in a bid to increase student achievement on standardized tests, enacted two measures. First, the OME increased professional development time for teachers in mathematics instruction; second, the OME mandated increased time for standardized mathematics instruction in the classroom (Pinto, 2016). Interestingly, the move to increase standardization and instructional time is certainly not supported by research—the relationship between allotted instructional time and student achievement is weak at best (Gándara, 2000).

Curricular Fragmentation as Time Heist

Bergsonian duration rejects the notion that curriculum can exist in prescriptive, single-subject silos. Rather, *la durée* invites learners to experience subjects (math, science, history, language) holistically, as different “expresseds” in a continuum of thought and information (Roy, 2005, p. 457). Yet, neoliberal curriculum is exclusively expressed in terms of discrete subjects: language and literacy, mathematics, science, geography, history, and so forth—usually with priority given to literacy and STEM (Pinto, 2012). By contrast, *la durée* requires a more flexible approach to organizing subject matter that “[breaks] down ‘immodibilities’ and fixities” (Roy, 2005, p. 452). Learners ought to make intuitive connections among ideas and accept “different snapshots of reality” while reconciling those differences (Roy, 2005, p. 452). This would encourage “fresh thinking as a coming face-to-face with the unfolding of change, and that moment of contact cannot be contained within metric time [chronos]” (Roy, 2005, p. 452).

While a durable curriculum that breaks down silos may be difficult to envision, examples of successful applications exist. Perhaps the best example is the Citizen School (*Escola Cidadã*), Brazil’s successful experiment in Porto Alegre, which organizes education into interdisciplinary thematic complexes (not subjects) to ensure

⁶ The term “achievement” over “learning” is the fashionable way to express student performance. Achievement refers to the achievement of specific outcomes, measured by tests. Policy makers avoid the term “learning” because students can “achieve” without having learnt particular things in school.

that the curriculum is locally meaningful. Although thematic complexes provide general guidelines, school communities themselves construct the fine curricular details. School councils then use the Decalogue, a 10-step guide to curriculum construction, to bring the thematic complexes to life specific to their communities through dialogue among teachers, parents, administrators and students (see Pinto, 2012, for specific examples). The resulting school experiences center around local interests and wisdom. This theme- (i.e., not subject) based curriculum overcomes the neoliberal misconception that knowledge is “ready, finished, disdained to the culture context, in the life of the student subject, that can be transferred to those who know and those who don’t know” (Azevedo, 2007, p. 31), and therefore requires more poetic conception of school time consistent with *la durée*.

Learning in a context of *la durée*, such as the Citizen School, rejects “the communication and accretion of finished ideas,” acknowledging continuous change (Roy, 2005, p. 452). The fluid nature of learning is reminiscent of Freire’s (1998) position that unfinishedness is a natural and integral to the phenomenon of life itself, and a central goal of education. Fixed and determinate curriculum, as expressed in neoliberal education policy (e.g., Pinto, 2012), fails to address the unfinishedness and fluidity that is central to both life and learning.

Implications of the Time Heist

The hidden curriculum of neoliberal, standardized education conditions teachers and students to uncritically accept linear conceptions of time as much as the use of time, thus perpetuating strictly temporal-spatial use and a static and standardized form of education. This section describes implications of the heist with respect to teacher professionalism, the hidden curriculum, and the absence of teachable moments that respond to students’ spontaneous needs and curiosity.

Teacher Professionalism and the Heist

Teachers as laborers are subjected to a heist of their professional time and judgement. Under neoliberalism, ideologically disempowered teachers hold a narrow concept of learning in which extreme standardization and accountability measures discourage them from prioritizing the whole-person growth of students (Pinto, 2015; Tsang & Qin, 2020). Deliverology imposes external accountability on teachers’ work, contributing to deprofessionalization and disempowerment. Curriculum decisions are taken out of the hands of teachers and dictated by standardized curricula that must be followed, and teachers are fully stripped of any professional judgement when scripted curricula are introduced. Compliance with standardized curricula is enforced by the accountability lever of standardized testing.

In the United States, the accountability agenda defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) relies on student testing as the measure of success. In Ontario, Canada, standardized testing is carried out under the Education Quality and Accountability Office Act (EQAO), under which third-party tests measure student achievement (Pinto et al., 2007). In Australia, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is administered to students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, and results are made public on the *MySchool* website (Hardy, 2014). NAPLAN results are “increasingly valued capitals” that demand teachers’ time and focus (Hardy, 2015, p. 335). This particular time heist means students and teachers spend disproportionate time preparing for NAPLAN at the expense of more fluid and durable learning, where competition is valued over collaboration and compassion (Connell, 2013).

The accountability systems just described leave the relationship between student and teacher undernourished because the teacher’s responsibility to the government is prioritized through audits taking precedence over the learner (Gewirtz et al., 2021; Skerrit, 2020; Stevenson, 2017), dictating time use that serves government needs over the individual. High stakes exacerbate the emphasis on performance: teachers need to focus on scores to secure their livelihoods, while school and district administrators have an interest in the financial implications of test performance when school funding, rewards, or sanctions are tied to test scores. School systems lose sight of the broader purposes of education (such as the priorities associated with durable learning, living well, and living well with others described by Kemmis et al., [2014]), while teachers are engrossed in test preparation and curriculum compliance (Sahlberg, 2010). Important aspects of durable learning are “deemed irrelevant or scientifically irrational” (Darder, 2004, p. 208) because they are not captured in standardized scores and are absent from educational debates. The resulting shift in focus from the quality of teaching in the “best interest of the child” to “quality control” reduces education to “teaching to the test” (Darder, 2004, p. 208). The result is that standardization and narrow accountability “steal” time in a way that leaves little room for professional judgement and interpretation, marginalizing the needs and priorities of students and local communities (Gewirtz et al., 2021; Hargreaves, 2008; Skerritt, 2020).

Coupled with high-stakes audits, neoliberalism has ushered in an increasingly prescriptive and standardized curriculum that further robs teachers of control over time in schools (Darder, 2004; Pinto, 2012, 2016). Darder (2004) illustrates how the monitoring of teachers’ curriculum compliance through audited script use eliminates their autonomy to stray from standardized curricula, reducing classroom practice to “dispensing packaged fragments of information” (p. 87) at the expense of richer, more durable learning experiences such as Porto Alegre’s Citizen School discussed earlier.

Teachers who are able to resist the heist, by contrast, can enact a different kind of curriculum that incorporates their professional knowledge about education, educational research, and learners’ and families’ interests and needs (Joseph et al., 2011). For more teachers working in neoliberal regimes, however, this type of resistance can be difficult if not impossible (Skerritt, 2020). Accountability and

enforcement mechanisms associated with deliverology complicate teacher resistance when time use is completely dictated by a prescriptive and narrow curriculum. While no definitive data exist to capture the degree to which teachers resist neoliberal policies, recent research describes teachers' individual and local resistance to neoliberal policy (see, for example, Bartell et al., 2019), as well as the ways in which accountability measures limit teachers' sense of agency in this regard (see, for example, Pinto, 2015; Pinto et al., 2011).

The Hidden Curriculum of the Heist

Learners, likewise, experience a time heist within *chronic* educational policy. Enduring educational aims have attempted to move learners from a present-orientation (developmentally appropriate for children) to a future-orientation, with the purpose of preparing them to be efficient workers who accept the exchange of time as a commodity for money (usually in the form of wages). Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) point out that an important purpose of schooling is to break "present-hedonistic children from their 'wild' sense of time and replace it with a more civilized future-orientation that ensures their behaviour can be predicted and controlled" (p. 288). This contemporary practice is reminiscent of similar accounts in British historical documents dating to the 1770s that describe "idle, ragged children" who are "losing their time" but can be rehabilitated by learning the "habit of industry" in which children become "habituated, not to say naturalized to labour and fatigue" (Thompson, 1967, p. 83). While, obviously, development of time-sense is important, the aims just described narrow the possibilities, and more importantly emphasize a highly commodified version of time that contributes to a neoliberal form of social engineering (Hyslop-Margison, 2000).

The heist robs students of the possibility of a broad, liberal education. In a very concrete sense, the overt curriculum is reduced to its barest bones though standardization and reinforced by high stakes testing (Berliner, 2011; Cooper et al., 2020) as just described. Schooling, as we have illustrated, is reduced to "teaching to the test" at the expense of other subjects. The evidence of extreme narrowing is revealed in education policy. For instance, Ontario's hyper-neoliberal reforms in the late 1990s reduced the provincial menu from 1400 to approximately 200 courses (Pinto, 2012). In the United States and United Kingdom, subjects squeezed through narrowing have included history, geography, the arts, and practical subjects (Berliner, 2011). Berliner's (2011) research revealed that curriculum narrowing has virtually eliminated arts in favor of test-measured literacy and numeracy, especially in lower-income jurisdictions.

Extreme curricular narrowing poses several threats to the education of the whole student. First, it denies students access to a broad, liberal education that can expose them to a variety of ideas that might contribute to living well. Second, the near elimination of various programs, especially arts, restricts the pursuit of creative and enjoyable activities that might engage students more fully in learning. Finally, students

who display talent and proficiency in subjects that have been squeezed out of the narrowed curriculum risk having their abilities overlooked, and even being labeled low achievers (Berliner, 2011).

Robbed of the “Teachable Moment”

As we outlined in the previous subsections, teachers are prisoners of time under neoliberal education policy because both time use and content are externally controlled. Likewise, students are inculcated into clock-time while being limited to only the official curriculum that is permissible within accountability structures. In this way, schooling is “done to” both teachers and students. For instance, Trebilcock (2000) describes how an inquiry-based curriculum about time with early childhood learners offered insight into their impressive capacity for making sense of time, but also the sense of powerlessness they feel over school time. Yet, both teachers and students are robbed of more fluid and durable inquiry-based learning. If a teacher is bound by a restrictive curriculum, they cannot alter outcomes or content in ways that might engage students based on local needs and spontaneous curiosity. Students may become inquisitive, or even passionate, about a question they encounter. But if that question is not represented in the official curriculum for which time is allotted, it evaporates. Spontaneous “teachable moments” like this—which are important aspects of learning—are stolen from teachers and students.

Possibilities of Time Reclaimed

Thompson (1967) posed an important question about the consequences of over-emphasis of chronos: “What will be the capacity for the experience of [people] who have this undirected time to live?” (p. 95).

When *la durée* is taken seriously, “learning becomes the collective process of actualizing the virtual movement of thought—where thought is not possessed within one body or another except insofar it saturates the entire learning assemblage” (deFreitas & Ferrara, 2015, p. 584). Roy’s (2005) response is that *la durée* “awakens the intuition, making us less dependent on mechanical time, which is finitude, and more open to the non-measurable, qualitative aspects of phenomena” (p. 442).

This question rekindles many age-old debates within the philosophy of education. Given the preoccupation with productive and efficient time use, people are left having to “relearn some of the arts of living lost in the industrial revolution: how to fill the interstices of their days with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations; how to break down once more the barriers between work and life” (Thompson, 1967, p. 95). Thompson’s (1967) concerns raise possibilities to revisit a “curriculum of life” (Portelli & Vibert, 2002) in which the idea of curriculum as “fixed” or purely academic is rejected. *La durée* in education necessarily recognizes the fluidity and intersection of

phenomena and bodies that reflect the central tenet of a pedagogy of life: an approach that requires coherence among aspects of school life (e.g., academics, culture, discipline), often viewed as disparate (Portelli & Vibert, 2002). Moreover, Portelli and Vibert's (2002) conception of a curriculum of life necessarily includes consideration of what constitutes a good life.

Addressing *la durée* in this manner has the possibility to rescue education from strictly (or predominately) economic "aims-talk" (Noddings, 2003b, p. 241). Noddings (2003a, 2003b), like Portelli and Vibert (2002), argues that education concerned with public aims (work, community, democracy) is insufficient for the development of the whole person. Rather, education must acknowledge and embrace the private—incorporating matters such as making a home, nurturing relationships, stewardship for places and nature, and so forth, as legitimate educational aims (Noddings, 2003a). Moreover, whole person development cannot be solely time based and must incorporate the social aspect of schooling, relationship building, and learning how to live well together.

Kingwell (2014) describes *freizeit*, a German term for time free of obligation. Unlike North American use of the term "free time," which sometimes carries negative connotations when it is used for unproductive or slacking activities, *freizeit* has a markedly positive connotation. It implies a time to recharge. but differs from recreation, which usually has another purpose such as getting fit or socializing with friends (Y. Phillips, personal communication, April 16, 2016). Kingwell (2008) laments the lost art of idling—not to be confused with leisure (working by other means, such as seeing a sight, or completing a puzzle), laziness (avoidance of work), or boredom (the desire to do something but not knowing what). Idling, Kingwell explains, involves inward contemplation without a particular goal or course of action. "The *flâneur* makes his idleness into an art form, cultivating refinement of taste and exquisiteness of perception and judgement, if possible leavened by *insouciant* wit" (Kingwell, 2008, p. 573). These meaningful forms of idling described by Kingwell certainly have a place in schools where they might promote deeper and reflective thought about official or unofficial curriculum, and help learners and teachers experience more poetic conceptions of time in school.

Less rigid notions of time in schooling might also cultivate curiosity ("confident and focused interest to find something out," [Opdal, 2001, p. 331]), and wonder (a state of mind in which "one is struck by the strangeness or peculiarity of the things met," [Opdal, 2001, p. 331]). In Opdal's (2001) view, curiosity is a motive, while wonder is a state of mind "that signals that the present way of looking at things are incomplete, and that the world might be different from how it appears" (p. 339). Once learners' wonder has been awakened through less regimented time in school, Opdal argues that it must be followed by inquiry into the sources of their wonder, which might lead to more student engagement in both learning and schooling. It stands in sharp contrast to neoliberal versions of static and prescriptive curricula that are ill-equipped to address what individual wonder might arise. Time devoted to standardized test preparation and

test-taking fails to cultivate curiosity and wonder. Even in the absence of testing, a need to move to the next script or lesson or unit does not allow time to extend into the reaches of wonder, or address local, democratic needs.

Conclusion: A Little Less Larceny

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win the ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul?

(Dewey, 1938, p. 49).

In this paper, we challenged the way in which time is represented in and controlled by neoliberal education policy, amounting to a time heist. Through prescriptive policy, scripted curriculum, and standardization, policy-makers succeed in seizing teacher and learner control over what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned. This is problematic because it diminishes education from learning how to “live well in a world worth living” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. v) to schooling that “may or may not be educational” (p. 10).

By no means are we suggesting that clock-time can (or should) be disregarded. Rather, a critique of conventional views on time questions how education can better contribute to more thoughtful life in the face of predominant neoliberal policy. By dispensing with high levels of standardization and prescription and instead focusing on an education of experience that is relevant to learners and not bound by chronos, schools might encourage durable learning, curiosity, and wonder. Less structuring of time in schools might promote the kind of idling Kingwell describes where students can engage in deep contemplation and reflection, even about topics in the official curriculum, resulting in curiosity and wonder.

Politically, a move to privilege *la durée* over chronos poses a challenge. Neoliberal agendas push superficial modes of accountability: standardization trumps standards; clock-time loudly ticks while *la durée* is silenced. Exposing this heist as we have in this paper is a first step in initiating change. This might lead to “deliberate resistance to the structures of controlling time and therefore of defining [education]” (Roy, 2007, p. 275).

Our exploration of time lost to neoliberal education agendas raises areas for future investigation. First, the problems we describe in this paper raise the question, what alternative modes of education exist, especially with respect to successful experimental or laboratory schools, that might shift the focus from chronos to *la durée*? Second, this paper encourages exploration of what spaces within policy discourse exist to challenge dominant conceptions of time. Third, this paper points to the identification of potential ways to move from hyper-standardization to more flexible standards in education policy that would support teacher and learner autonomy. Finally, recent seismic changes to education during the pandemic changed the way

that time is spent or conceptualized in schools. A critical analysis of pandemic schooling might shed light on new and different approaches to education time use possible with technologies brought to the fore during the pandemic.

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