

Images of School Times: Organising rhythms, Revealing pedagogiesⁱ

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Images of school times

Although invisible, time manifests in many schools through administrative tools such as bells, clocks, time punching machines or attendance books, and through pedagogical devices such as weekly class schedules, exams calendars, or late work folders, among others. Overall, a large number of school cultures seem to organise their pace around time-based decisions of different types such as terms, classes, units and lessons, all of which have specific visual expressions.

Despite the fact that there is research aimed at unveiling the visual culture of schools through their artwork decoration (Burke et al., 2013), classroom imagery and school milieu (Errázuriz et al., 2015), and building attributes (Marini et al., 2018) among other

perspectives, the question regarding how time could visually manifest in schools remains largely unexplored. However, if one considers the tools, devices and decisions mentioned above, together with their specific context, and the fact that their habitual meaning is 'unquestioned and unwritten' (Prosser, 2007), it may be possible to approach the visual culture of schools from the peculiar stance of time.

This consideration is not only relevant because it may add new layers to the 'visible but hidden curriculum' (Fram and Margolis, 2011), but also because it may encourage researchers and educators to explore new ways of relating the visual and time in favour of heightened school experiences.

Diverse comprehensions of school times

The relationship between schooling and time looks very much like a tightrope act. On the one hand, across different education systems there seem to exist ubiquitous pressure for

efficiency in the management of a scarce and expensive resource as timeⁱⁱ. Usually, this translates into demands to do more things, innovatively, in a race 'against' or 'with' the clock, while achieving

better academic results and meeting higher standards (Hargreaves, 2012). In fact, it is worth noting that the bulk of time-based studies discuss the economic cost and social impact of the number of years students spend in schools, the contractual organization of 45' – 55' lesson slots, and what administrators and teachers can do to improve student achievement in those periods (Tenti et al., 2010).

On the other hand, there is a need to cherish an alternative dimension of time in schools, manifested in everyday expressions such as 'free time',

'break time', and 'circle time'. This is the perspective about time that philosophers have characterized as 'own' (Gadamer, 1977) implying that there are everyday happenings, like the conversation with a friend, that depend on intersubjective rhythms. These experiences surpass chronological comprehensions of time, revealing the value of pause, and the satisfaction of living a present time where there is no need for an outcome other than enjoying that very present (Masschelein, 2011). Schools seem to refer to this type of time through events like 'birthdays', 'book days', 'grandparents days'.

Organising rhythms, revealing pedagogies

For the past two years, the authors of this visual essay have been registering the visual culture of eight primary schools in Santiago de Chile in a photographic record that shows what teachers, students and administrators see during the school day. Throughout the process, questions regarding the relationship between school visualities and time have arisen, fundamentally concerning:

1. How does time manifest, through the visual culture of these

eight schools, as a dimension of school life?

2. What is it that the visual culture of these schools reveal about time, both as an organizational variable and an interpersonal condition?

3. What is it that we may learn from the images of school times, about the ways in which schools associate chronological and interpersonal rhythms with different pedagogical practices?



Figure 1. Municipal school, 1389 students, head teacher's office, windowless wall, next to the door. © Juan David Rodríguez Merchán

Figure 1 exhibits the organization of school time as seen on the wall of the head teacher's office. Creating a true curricular palette, each one of these 1080 colour magnetic rectangles represent a subject period so that, if one counts the number of same-colour slots, this will reveal how much time each course receives in the Chilean education system: Red (Language) and Orange (English) have more periods than Pink (Science) and Yellow (Physical Education). Empty blocks indicate those days when students leave school earlier. Weekdays and school periods are located to the left, class groups on top, the name

on each block refers to the teacher in charge.

In addition, it is worth noticing that even though the Ministry of Education does allocate time for non-instructional activities such as morning announcements, break-time and extracurricular activities, none of these are visible on the board. Considering not all teachers have full-time contracts in the same school, fixing this impressive week-based master schedule requires intense micromanagement and negotiations. According to the head teacher, it had to be done 'by hand'.



Figure 2. Municipal school, 84 students, 7th grade classroom, next to a secondary whiteboard. © Juan David Rodríguez Merchán

If **Figure 1** gave a feeling of overwhelming organization from a school-wide viewpoint, **Figure 2** edits such order as it stresses some of the everyday conditions that give life to education. For example: a cramped room where students can hardly hang their backpacks, a cold space that requires a massive heater, and a week schedule that looks like 'work in progress', although this image was taken during the second month of classes.

Focusing on this schedule, the fact that the English class (*Inglés*) on the last period of Monday (*Lunes*)

has a different colour than the English at the beginning of Friday (*Viernes*), only adds to its unusual character. What is more, it is not clear who decided to place this device on the corner of the room, as if Monday, Tuesday -missing label- and Wednesday provided one perspective of the week, and Thursday and Friday another. Regarding the subject labels lying on the heater, one could guess that there had been some last minute teacher changes -or maybe students have fun puzzling their tutors as they swap times at pleasure-.



Figure 3. Municipal school, 204 students, 7th grade classroom, front wall, next to the whiteboard. © Juan David Rodríguez Merchán

Figure 3 shows what students see behind their teacher’s desk. A red cardstock with the school’s Mission and Vision, two folders that collect parents’ communications, four posters naming the elements and rules of basic arithmetic operations, and a blue butterfly already account for an extremely oversaturated sight. In the middle of it, a clock, a yearlong calendar, and a month organiser appear to get lost within this sea of shapes, colours, themes and purposes.

However, these devices provide rich information concerning how this school merge ways of organising times with educational

orientations. For example, the clock hides the top drawing of the calendar, and the calendar covers what looks like a set of flowers making chronological time overshadow, at least symbolically, non-instructional images. Also, the month organizer... organizes examinations: out of the 24 available working days, 9 have tests reminders (3 of history!) and 1 a trip to the observatory, the rest are left blank. Intriguingly, the calendar was crisscrossed, markedly until April, and then it remains untouched for no apparent reason. One wonders if these stimuli offer students diverse ways of comprehending and enacting time in education.



Figure 4. Subsidized school, 463 students, 7th grade classroom, front wall, next to the whiteboard. © Juan David Rodríguez Merchán

In the corner of this classroom, **Figure 4** presents a birthday board. The handcrafted quality of the balloons, ribbons and garlands, together with their colour choice, the dates and names written on them and the decision to keep past parties' balloons, suggest that both teachers and students have taken ownership of this device.

If **Figure 3** strews academic commitments the entire class has to face at the same time -and cross out as soon as possible-, the floating clown on **Figure 4** appears

to overshadow the relevance of the green clock, the objective's chart and the whiteboard, revealing a choice to pause routine and secure time to personally recognize students. In fact, **Figure 4** demonstrates how classroom-based educational experience may integrate moments to celebrate, give thanks and remember, challenging simplistic and chronological conceptions of time, and allowing for the emergence of alternative rhythms, both instructional and relational.

Concluding remarks

Taking serious consideration of images of school times could contribute to further revealing relationships between time and pedagogy in Chile. For example, by focusing on time-organising devices on the wall (their size, height from the floor, colour, location among other qualities), one could discover insinuations of the school's preferences regarding what are the key moments, desired learning rhythms, and overall purposes of education. In this sense, whereas **Figures 1 & 3**, appear to show a decision to organise time using discrete and manageable units, in recursive patterns, for the sake of being efficient and meeting future demands; **Figures 2 & 4** seem to allow for the emergence of individual paces, pauses and celebratory times, all dimensions that interrupt or surpass clock-based exchanges.

It is no surprise to find that these perspectives coexist in everyday educational practice in Chile. What is unsettling is to see how school communities seem to rely on proven traditional connections between their visualities and times, rather than exploring new possibilities. No one denies that schools must organise the time they have available to make the most out of it, but there is no actual imperative to homogenize

administrative periods into repetitive patterns. Likewise, there is no doubt that students have to meet their learning objectives (Hargreaves, 2012), but there is no evident reason to regulate these performances based on extraneous deadlines that ignore or neglect personal rhythms and motivations. Finally, teachers have the moral obligation to teach all students, but in the rush to meet the school calendar (Tenti et al., 2010), it seems the underlying conception of educational time becomes closer to an expensive and scarce resource than to an existential and plentiful value (Masschelein, 2011).

In an age when the contribution of diversity is central to education, the development of fresh educational opportunities based on new approaches to visual culture and time looks like a promising inquiry. In this sense, among the different dimensions of visual experience that schools organize, model and reproduce, time is one of the least researched. In projects to come, we want to problematize local and international examples that go beyond repetitive visual and temporal patterns, incorporating personal rhythms and problematizing how the very nature and practices of pedagogical time may echo some

of the challenges XXI century societies need to confront and reshape.

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- ⁱ Funded by the Chilean Commission for Science and Technology (Conicyt).
- ⁱⁱ We recognize the value of progressive practices concerning time, as those developed by Froebel, Steiner, A.S. Neill and Hori, among others. However, within the scope of our research, the Chilean school system heavily relies on traditional chronological and 'scarce time' practices, with very few instances of 'free time' (Martinic, 2015).