

Blind Optimism: A Cross-Cultural Study of Students' Temporal Constructs and Their Schooling Engagements

Cesar Augusto Rossatto

This article examines students' perceptions and usage of time, their sense of optimism or lack of it, especially related to schooling. Positionality, or perceptions about life and projections of the future, has great impact on students' success in school. How they interpret the past, live in the present and foresee the future is significantly influenced by their intellectual locality and life perceptions. In the same way, how educators see their position in the world and their classroom "roles" determines their *operandum vivendi*. Educators' influence on students also shapes their ontological foundation and self determination. This study explores hegemonic time construction, which can be alienating to disenfranchised students. The practices within the process of schooling tend to construct and limit students' consciousness. As social institutions, schools mediate, through the distribution of curricular and extra-curricular activities, the construction of dominant time concepts into students' temporal subjectivities. For example, students in many affluent U.S. schools spend more time at creative activities than do students in poor schools.

This temporal notion means that students in poor schools will more likely learn to use their time for repetitive tasks instead of creativity, knowledge production, or critical thinking. As these temporal practices and subjectivities are not forgotten upon leaving school, they undermine poor students' success in a competitive world (Fordham, 1988; Seligman, 1990). Many scholars compare and contrast pessimistic and optimistic conceptualizations. Pessimism is here defined as the projection of the worst possible outcome and optimism as an interpretive feature of human temporal experience inclined to actions that anticipate the best possible outcome. Yet this research suggests that many students foresee relatively few optimistic possibilities in their lives and schooling but have by no means adopted pessimistic outlooks. Interestingly, both quantitative and qualitative methods used in this study support these findings, leading me to believe that comparative studies that scale pessimism versus optimism need to be revised and/or closely examined.

Schools are sites where individualistic notions of optimism hegemonically construct the learning context, excluding and disenfranchising the notions of marginalized groups and their allies. In this research, “high-” and “low”-achieving (labels used by the public schools) ninth grade students in both the United States and Brazil exhibit four constructs of optimism: *blind*, *fatalistic*, *resilient*, and *transformative*. *Blind optimism* indicates a condition of oblivion that prevents consciousness or self-determination. *Fatalistic optimism* shows beliefs and attitudes where events are fixed in time, promoting feelings of powerlessness to change these events. *Resilient optimism* reveals conformation to normative order as a means to achieve an individualistic future goal. *Transformative optimism* sees the formation of a collective resistance against social processes that produce alienating realities, with the hope of achieving a liberating future. Further, each one of these categories will be discussed.

The main focuses here are placed on how students are influenced by these temporal constructs and their consequences. Therefore, initially this article introduces and builds on the theoretical implications of temporal and fatalistic beliefs that impact students’ academic development in school and influences them to be more engaged or more disengaged in schooling. In short, this study explores: (1) the temporal beliefs of “low-achieving” and “high-achieving” students, and (2) the potential of using Freirean pedagogy to assist students in beginning to construct an engaging dialectical knowledge based on their own realities and to use their background experiences as self-empowerment tools to evolve from fatalistic or resilient optimism to transformative optimism.¹

Time Consciousness: Theoretical Critical Perspective

The principles of Freirean pedagogy constitute a search for an authentic and genuine critical consciousness. It is a consciousness that is not restricted to the reality of either the oppressor or the oppressed, but a consciousness of humans in an ongoing process of self- and collective liberation mediated by the world (Freire, 1970). In Freirean pedagogy, students learn to participate in their own historical endeavors by recreating and transforming the world within their immediate reality. It is a reality that is interrelated with temporal and spatial orientation towards life’s events. In this reality, hope represents an ontological need. Hopelessness tends to immobilize people, leading them into fatalism, and thus blocking their acquisition of the indispensable strengths required to recreate their worlds (Freire, 1992). In this context, time is perceived as a static entity, or as Freire puts it:

Indeed, whenever the future is considered as a pre-given—whether this is as the pure, mechanical repetition of the present, or simply because it is what it has to be—there is no expectancy in the struggle, which is the only way hope exists. There is no room for education, only for training. (Freire, 1994; in Giroux, AERA, 1998, p.2)

In essence, time is a fundamental factor that is directly related to action or inaction. A person makes a historical expression through both action and inaction. Regardless of any other implications, however, the time past cannot be recovered. Further, Bakhtin (1993) illustrates that one's own existence refers to an undivided form of being and to the act of self-activity. Basically, one finds one's self both by being and by taking action. Bakhtin (1993) adds to this concept:

... my own uniqueness is given, yet at the same time it exists only to the extent to which it is really actualized by me as uniqueness—it is always in the act, in the performed deed, i.e., is yet to be achieved; both what is and what ought to be: I am actual and irreplaceable, and therefore must actualize my uniqueness. (p. 41)

What is the best way to think of time? Time is typically thought of as a measured chronological sequence that passes in precise units. Most people quantitatively measure intelligence by what they consider to be appropriate or inappropriate time consciousness. The concept of quantitative time is the dominant one in modern cultures, and it implies an allocated length of measured time that is either used or wasted. Time, in this sense, is a given element that can be used wisely or thrown away. However, life also can be “measured” as an accumulation of transformative experiences, rather than as a succession of days. This former view of time holds that every person has within themselves time consciousness that they use to survive in and cope with the world. Of course, time consciousness can vary from person to person and from group to group. The version of time used by any individual depends on the kinds of transformative experiences that have occurred in that person's life.

Fatalism, the Neo-Liberal Discourse, and Post-Modernity

The difference in these two notions of time consciousness (external and experiential) can be seen in the neo-liberal discourse of fatalism, which is one of the main sources of the problem addressed in this study. Fatalism is a condition of hopelessness amongst the disenfranchised, where the future is death. Fatalism is a plague that kills the spirit of empowerment and enchantment. For fatalists, time is passively or inactively viewed and experienced. Dominant or prevailing versions of time silence students and their communities, as well as undermine the fundamental vision of education as empowerment (Shor, 1987; and Freire, 1985). Since there is no future orientation for these individuals, this condition tends to dominate among inner-city youth and contributes to a wide variety of behavioral problems in school. Drop-out rates of poor urban minorities easily reach fifty percent—and are even higher for girls.

Unfortunately, fatalism, prevalent in socially marginalized communities, tends to maintain status quo by promoting these behaviors, and is passed on inter-generationally by parents. Students attending schools in large urban centers therefore are more likely to have fatalistic views regarding their futures. This type of fatalism leads to passive conceptions of school engagement. Poverty also adds to

disenchantment and in many cases influences individuals' perceptions of time and their visions of the future.

Therefore, fatalistic and disenfranchised populations have both social and psychological characteristics that are interrelated and interdependent. Interactions with social structures become psychologically internalized, and the psychological state that results influences social interactions. The socio-psychological sources of this problem have implications that are both social, or external, and psychological, or internal.

One external factor that significantly influences the creation of fatalism is the condition of post-modernity brought on by the restructuring of the global economy. Above all perhaps is the issue of technological innovation, the secularization of society, and the extreme socio-cultural and moral traumas (e.g., the holocaust, the world wars, the cold war, "war on terrorism," etc.) experienced throughout the world over the previous century. This brings one to reflect on the central ontological position of post-modernity that can be used to distinguish it from other approaches, which is the embrace of absurdity and uncertainty, and to a great extent, nihilism. To a certain degree, Western culture has accepted the notion that life is without meaning or purpose, and it might be said that this is reflected in our popular art and culture, our moral structure, and in the rank materialism that has gripped our society. To oversimplify, in a world where meaning and purpose are inherently absent, then perhaps for many, it is on material attachment that purpose and meaning is found. Thus, those denied material wealth and comfort have nothing to mitigate for that privation, relying on religion or fatalistic culture, as has always been historically the case. Post-industrial economies, high-tech electronic media, and the breakdown of the traditional meta-narratives of nations and social institutions characterize post-modernity. It might also be worth noting the implications that evolutionary theory has for this situation.

In brief, we are, culturally, in the historically unique situation of having technology advance at a rate beyond the capability of our culture to advance; always, there is a lag between a major technological advance and the cultural advance needed to reconcile the new technological capabilities with the morals and customs of a society, but in the twentieth century technology has advanced at a rate without any precedent in human history, placing extreme *evolutionary* stresses on all world cultures, particularly in the west. More sadly even for many scholars seems that technology becomes an end on itself as opposed to the means. Subsequently technology is used in classroom as if it transmits the "almighty" when in reality many biases and stereotypes are passed on to new generations undetected. In other words, society is fragmented into numerous groups around multiple narratives. Finding a common thread to link these groups together socially in post-modernity has been difficult.

Besides the external factors, there are internal factors that comprise the psychological state in post-modernity. Just as socio-cultural fragmentation and conspicuous consumption weigh on social conditions, the empty self represents a problematic

condition of the postmodern psyche (Cushman, 1991). Cushman describes the empty self as “a self that experiences a significant absence of community and shared meaning.” He further states that the loss of these social influences leaves people with an emotional void that is often filled by consumption. This consuming, empty self is also an uncritical self that has difficulty maintaining personal and social relationships. Thus, the dominance of the empty self in post-modernity means that people are more likely to face constantly shifting roles and functions. Hargreaves (1994) explains that due to the decline of the two-parent, long-term marriage, the self often has no ties to the stability of institutions, family, religion, or moral values. The empty selves infiltrate the values and structures of the culture at large and are reflected in social institutions, such as schools.

Hegemonic Influences on Student Temporalities

Given this contemporary life scenario, one can interpret time concepts in light of the influence the aforementioned forces have on which constructions of educational reality are embraced and officially legitimated by the dominant culture, and which are repressed (Kincheloe, 1993). This notion is constructed within the boundaries of discursive practices and regimes of truth molded by power (Apple, 1993; 1990). Major questions become: How do educators and students perceive time in schooling? What are the dominant and subordinate constructions of time at the school? Do students conform to or resist the dominant construction of time in the school? Finally, how is survival identity produced relative to the construction of time? Looking at these issues from psychosocial and cultural perspectives, the student temporalities consist of their described relationships with their pasts, presents, and futures. The dominance of any one of these temporal categories over the others causes a lack of time engagement in schooling. Behaviors that lower the propensity of a student to graduate from high school place them in disenchanting positions that inhibit their potential to be functional members of society. To study such behaviors, this research relies on a cultural perspective embedded in critical theory to describe students’ temporalities through the relationship between their social beings and their constructions of the past, present, and future.

Therefore, to address the above questions within a contemporary urban school context, problematic conceptualizations of time can be best understood by both democratic and emancipatory critical pedagogies. For example, Norton (1993) found that time as a temporal organization of experience is based on an awareness of change that enables human beings to act, think, and relate to the world around them. A critical social theory, therefore, can be used to empower students to perceive and conceive different ways to utilize and synchronize their time in order to attain their life goals and desires (McLaren, 1994). Because individuals learn their cultural ideas about time either through their family or through their social institutions (Colarusso, 1992), these temporal ideas can be then expressed with different narratives according to an

individual's own specific beliefs, values, or traditions (Maslow, 1954; Erickson, 1980). Some of these time narratives become dominant in a personality and can exert powerful influences over others, thereby creating subordinate time narratives.

Dominant and subordinate concepts of time are socially induced in children. Human interpretations of time are represented by ways of knowing called temporalities, which are themselves embedded into history and curricula. In other words, time, temporalities, and history are all interdependent temporal and linguistic constructs. Many critical theories are related to language, narrative discourse, and historical materialism. These theories represent positional "truths" of the world, constructed relative to dominant and subordinate temporalities. Therefore, any interpretation of time concepts must take into consideration the larger structure of meaning, either figurative, allegorical, conscious or unconscious in nature, of particular discourses which mediate between the events of an individual's life and the universal human experiences of "temporality" that result in increased awareness and broader perspectives (White, 1987).

The structuring of dominant knowledge produces a condition called hegemony, or the reproduction of group hierarchies through cultural domination. Rather than being a conspiracy narrative, hegemony refers to the penetration of the knowledge of the social, economic, and moral leaders into the daily experiences associated with social institutions, language, and private life (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994). Hegemony is a problem of "worldview," or conceptualization that has political consequences (Weiler, 1988). Moreover, both the dominator and the dominated are complicit in the structuring of the problem (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994). On a daily basis, hegemony manifests itself in schools when teachers choose to include some forms of a given knowledge while excluding the cultural knowledge of students. When teachers practice this, they legitimate particular beliefs while delegitimizing others. This process reflects political relationships in society into the classroom (Kincheloe, 1993). Likewise, temporal narratives in schools are structured into hegemonic historical meta-narratives of the elite that subordinate the narratives of marginalized students (Popkewitz, 1997; Norton, 1993).

Conceptualizations of Time and Time Usage

The notion that time is socially constructed and is, therefore, learned (Norton, 1993; White, 1987) becomes a crucial component of this study. In essence, time has both "real" and "imagined" aspects in the context of individual behavior. Time is "real" in the context of how people perceive the passage of time and how it regulates daily life, and time is "imagined" when based on subjective beliefs and values regarding its use in life (White, 1987). In short, individuals have cultural and historical notions of time's nature learned either through their families or their social institutions that may differ according to each person's cultural background (Levine, 1997; Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These ideas of time are often

expressed in personal and cultural narratives about the way time is “supposed” to be experienced and valued. For instance, consider how time is conceptualized in the following expressions: “Time is money,” “live each day as if it were your last,” and “use your time wisely.”

Such ideas about time and time use or investment tend to structure an individual’s social and temporal behavior. Even the measure of time passage itself has cultural connections as evidenced by the various types of calendars in use throughout the world (Levine, 1997). Students in a multicultural school setting, therefore, come to the classroom with a wide variety of temporal thoughts, strategies, experiences, and discourses based on their family values and the values of the social institutions (church, family, gangs, sports, etc.) that they identify with as they are growing up in society.

Some students learn temporal notions and practices that interfere with and are highly problematic to their social development. How these students respond to opportunities in later life is also a matter of their temporal notions. One important problem is passivity with regard to future goals in life. Many students in urban areas, particularly those who experience disenchantment, do not reflect critically upon their own views of time. Instead, they passively allow their temporal subjectivities to be shaped in ways detrimental to their futures (Chideya, Ingrassia, Smith, & Wingert, 1993). These students, considered by some scholars as “adult children” have hopeless and visionless perspectives for their futures that restrict or paralyze social practices in the present.

Student Disenchantment and Critical Pedagogy

Therefore, to understand why many children lose hope and/or optimism, one must also understand their resilient attitudes and behaviors, which are a reflection of the culture at large. For example, Hargreaves (1994, p. 238) points out that Judeo-Christian values and scientific certainties are declining and impacting education in that it is increasingly difficult for teachers to communicate any sense of certitude or centeredness to students. He argues that such changes of beliefs, values, and attitudes in the teaching force may be determinants of parallel changes in the ways teachers relate to their colleagues. To further explain the relationship that teachers find themselves in, Hargreaves labels this symptom “boundless self” and says that those who succeed most are those who are able to adapt to an ever-evolving reality. He cites Giddens, (*op. cit.*, note 77) to explain, “People’s selves have no roots in stable relationships, nor anchors in moral certainties and commitments beyond them.”

Another problem for many of the students on whom this research focuses is in envisioning the organization of time as being externally located. Disenchanted students are more likely to see time, such as their views on history, as being structured in the world outside of themselves to the point that they have difficulty imagining their own historical relationship and “time connectedness” to the world. These students refrain from gaining their own historical situatedness and fail to appreciate

the potential for individual and social change (Wiley & Ballard, 1993; Colarusso, 1988). In other words, disenchantment means that whatever the agent's appeals on the subject, the response reflects a low degree of delight or a lack of attraction. Consequently, many of these students lose interest in school or in life itself and are at risk of antisocial behavior.

Much research has been completed with the objective of assisting the educationally disenchanted population (Rose, 1990; Golden, 1995; Smith, 1993; Werner, 1986). In particular, Norton (1993) explored the early socialization of children and the development of their sense of time. She found that children who were exposed and socialized early to physical time were on average better prepared for school than children who heard primarily social time statements. Better preparation for school time adds to the sense of self and is associated with the feeling of continuity from the past, to the present, and towards the future. In essence, there is a strong linkage between student behavior, time perception, schooling, and decision-making regarding career choices.

Finally, Freirean pedagogy has important time implications for students, since it uses a problem-posing, knowledge production or construction approach to learning instead of traditional memorization-based methods of learning, or knowledge reception (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994). As a result, students tend to be more actively and willingly engaged in the educational process and thus have incentives for schooling time. The purpose of education, according to Freirean pedagogy, is to enable students to develop awareness (or what Freire calls in Portuguese, *conscientização*: critical consciousness combined with action) of their historical "time" coordinates, linked to factors that are both external and internal to the individual student (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Artiles & Hallahan, 1994). Students thereby learn to be engaged in schooling, as opposed to passive participants, thus enabling them to transform their reality and liberate themselves from hopeless conditions (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In short, the insights of Freire (1997) are of particular relevance to understand the underlying formations of students' temporal concepts, since they shed significant light on pedagogical practices that might encourage more time involvement in schooling. Freire's message of hope is not constructed on the naiveté of false hope for a given future or adaptation, but rather on a historical view of time as containing possibilities. This is opposed to determinism, wherein the future is seen as problematic but immutable. Freire's vision (p. 20) of the ontological vocation of humans in the world is to be beings who become present in the world, with the world, and with others; a presence that recognizes the other's presence and its own; where humans are present and capable of thinking for themselves, that know of their presence, that intervene, that transform, that speak of what they do but also for what they dream, that verify, compare, evaluate, value, decide, break away. According to Freire, it is in the domain of the decision, evaluation, freedom, rupture and option that one establishes the necessity of ethics and becomes responsible. Therefore, for Freire

(p. 39), learning requires taking a risk to accept the new; however, the old that preserves its validity or that incorporates a tradition or marks a presence in time is continually renewed.

However, little research has been conducted to examine how knowledge of the various ways that students perceive time can be used as a motivation for their becoming more active participants in their own social development and temporal awareness. Furthermore, disenchantment has not been examined with the assumption that some students come to school with pre-learned temporal notions and that schools ought to be changed to assist them to become less passive with respect to time. To attain the goals of a more inclusive and participatory society, there is an evident need for change in curriculum and for intervention to assist students in overcoming their negative temporal knowledge, and thus assist them to be more engaged in the utilization of their time. One of the major educational issues in urban school settings is the increasingly large number of disenchanted students.

There is a need, therefore, to empirically and observationally examine the links between students' temporal notions and disenchantment behaviors at school. The important insights of Freirean critical pedagogy should also be explored for their association with the development of temporal awareness of students. Since the schools become the primary institution for changing their temporal concepts from school rejection or resistance to schooling enjoyment or from disenchanted to enchanted, they become second only to family for developing the temporal notions of students. Therefore, this cross-cultural quantitative and qualitative study explores how hegemonic time construction in the classroom can alienate disenfranchised students. The research poses two different research questions: How do U.S. and Brazilian students' time notions and distribution relate to their goals for their future? And how do students from both countries construct their motivations to engage in the process of learning in light of the tension between their current realities and their visions of the future?

Given the above needs, the purpose of this study is twofold: first, to quantitatively and qualitatively examine via surveys, observations, video taping, and direct interviews the relationships between student narratives of time, schooling experiences, temporal notions, social life, and their association with optimism or lack thereof. Second, to extract from the above findings the implications for school policies, intervention, and curricula with specific reference to pedagogy based on Freirean principles. This study was conducted at public schools in large urban areas in two cultures: the United States and Brazil.

I spent three months at schools in the *favelas* (slums) of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and three months in the inner cities of Los Angeles, California. The principal of each of the schools arranged my visit to one "low"-achieving and one "high"-achieving ninth grade class. Students' grades and attendance were the main determinant factors of the classifications of high-, or low-achieving, and the label was applied by the school administration. High school students were chosen as their logical-

abstract rationality intensifies during this time period, making it gradually more likely that students at this age are engaging in more conceptually-oriented dialogue and reflection about time (Piaget, 1969; Erikson, 1977). The research participants sample group was composed of twenty-eight Brazilian “low achievers” and twenty eight “high-achievers.” In the U.S., there were twenty-four “low achievers” and thirty-five “high achievers.” In all, a total of 115 students participated in the study.

This relatively small sample size allowed this research to focus on more in-depth interviews and their connections to survey results rather than lending itself to broad generalizations. In this manner, the study is both a case study and a statistical survey. In short, the quantitative methods were designed to take a “snapshot” of the current notions of time domains and distribution held by “high- and low-achieving” students in the sample. The data collected by statistical instruments were then analyzed using standard descriptive statistical procedures to tabulations and cross tabulations. Examining the study using observational and interview data allowed students to express their narratives about time. It provided research participants with an opportunity to give voice to their own experiences and meanings, which quantitative methods tend to omit. To supply this gap that quantitative measures fail to grasp, the study uses critical hermeneutics as a methodological interpretational approach. It offers the opportunity to deconstruct the influence of power structures on dominant versions and concepts of time. It also uncovers the importance of historical belongingness, situatedness, and the restrictions of consciousness, human will-power or aspirations, and optimism (Wallulis, 1990).

Critical hermeneutics is an outstanding methodological tool that enabled an approximation to relevant and fundamental understandings of mediations within the normative social order. This methodology allowed the possibility of critiquing meanings as well, rather than merely offering a representation of them. Critical hermeneutics opened the possibility of critiquing ideology aiming to de-mystify symbolism by deconstructing the pretenses of extra-temporal meaning and unconditional value of the human consciousness and imagination potentialities.

Furthermore, this case study uses “descriptive” and “explanatory” instruments that offer detailed examination of events with appropriate data collection potential. The descriptive aspect traces the sequences of interpersonal events over time, uncovers key phenomena, such as the level of optimism of students, and accesses the subjectivities and cultural backgrounds of research participants. This approach captures indispensable temporal issues of individuals’ performances, group dynamic structures, and the implications of social surroundings. The explanatory aspect allowed for analytical objectives, and assisted in explaining the same sets of events described above. It facilitated the connection of events in relation to other situations, offering in this way coherent and logical conclusion that allowed the data to be interpreted by the use of critical hermeneutics. The data collected were structured and organized into profiles of “low- and high-achieving” students through the coding of categories that emerged during the data collection.

Extrapolating from the findings of both methods allowed implications to be analyzed for potential interventions in school policies and curricula with specific reference to Freirean critical pedagogy. This component was also largely theoretical and literature-based, and the data collected from both methods were then related to the literature. This study refrains from claiming that findings are applicable to all school realities but it is in fact limited to disenfranchised adolescent urban children. For the sake of brevity the quantitative and qualitative results were combined.

Within the contexts established, the results of this study should now be addressed within the specifics of quantitative (surveys and questionnaires) and qualitative (observations, interviews, videotaping) measures. An important distinction which must be made is that secondary school is not compulsory in Brazil as it is in the U.S.; thus, students' attitudes and motivations vary considerably between the two countries.

Therefore, the finding as follows is a map of students' desires (aspirations) and four patterns of optimism based on Freirean perspectives.

A Freirean Mapping of Optimism and Desires

Within a Freirean perspective, four main patterns emerged from the data analysis: *Blind Optimism*, *Fatalistic Optimism*, *Resilient Optimism*, and *Transformative Optimism*, each revealing different constructs of engagement in schooling; *Blind Optimism* is a notion that shies away from examining balances of power. It indicates a state oblivion conditions that prevent consciousness of self-determination and collective action or struggle; *Fatalistic Optimism* recognizes the problem of unequal power yet is without hope of changing it; *Resilient Optimism* transforms at the individual level and gains hope transforming social power imbalances; *Transformative Optimism* looks at transformation of social power with emphasis on collective action. It is hopeful about future.

All four of these categories are similar in that they connect one's social being with one's vision of the future. At the same time, they differ in their individual temporal codings of political ideologies; moreover, as schools are in essence political institutions, some forms of optimism are dominant over others.

Optimism is a temporal term that signifies one's projections of a given future; it impacts present behaviors just as beliefs about the past do. It connects and builds explanations of findings with forces of power, which a priori may seem unrelated. Therefore, we might ask how and why time concepts produce consciousness. Whose interests are thus served? What role does schooling play in the construction of different notions of optimism? Why are some students more optimistic about the future?

Blind Optimism

The dominant time construct is *blind optimism*. The consequence of blind

optimism is an emphasis on individual hard work and a de-emphasis on collective action or struggle. The sense of optimism expressed here is blind, or, at least, fails to see the social importance and urgency of developing images of the future that include the organization of social movements. This notion is primarily supported and monitored by those in dominant positions such as teachers and administrators. Because students from disenfranchised groups must learn to survive in institutions controlled by dominant groups, some select a strategy of conforming to the hidden curriculum of blind optimism. This concept is an anti-historical instruction that perpetrates a denial of the past, which influence the present, while favoring a vision of a meritocratic future.

The reinforcement of blind optimism makes schools complicit in an historical amnesia which enables forms of education such as memorization or “banking,” resulting in students’ alienation and frustration as by-products. Many students react and resist in self-destructive ways. In extreme cases, many students lose hope and retaliate; others choose to simply conform to a given reality. As seen in some studies, high achievers are more prone to depression and an incomplete or distorted formation of racial identity, as high achievement in schools is often predicated on submitting to the domination of hegemonic social dictates and acquiescing to unjust social realities. Those in positions of authority, such as teachers and administrators, exert, unwittingly or not, the attitudes and practices of this sort of domination. For instance, one afternoon in the Brazilian school, the principal arrived at the LA classroom and proceeded to berate the students for destroying school property. She was incensed and was sharp with her words, and challenged the students by asking them how they expected to amount to anything if they always behaved inappropriately. This episode of negative reinforcement illustrates how those in authority often diminish these students, making many of them feel hopeless. Some of the students put their heads down as if they were embarrassed and ashamed. What the principal seemed to overlook was the fact that the class as a whole was not responsible, and that, while certainly destruction of school property is a serious infraction and warrants discipline, only the individual responsible should be disciplined, not berated, and the reason behind the act should be determined. Telling an entire class that they have behaved inappropriately and questioning their futures because of the act of one or a few individuals, an act that in a wider perspective was probably somewhat trivial, indicates a system of allegorical thought in which the infraction was symbolic, to the principal, of a more generalized insufficiency in the worth of the group as a whole, and the principal’s conduct becomes symbolic, to the students, of their inability to adhere to the standards and expectations imposed upon them.

Furthermore, some teachers approach their content as a given knowledge product to be memorized and mastered in preparation for the mandatory *vestibular* college entrance exam. This is a very difficult exam, and most students require extensive private tutoring to succeed; such tutoring, of course, is inaccessible to all but the most economically privileged sectors of society. Those privileged few who

pass this exam enjoy “free” public university education, but those who are economically disenfranchised are very seldom able to pass the exam, and are unable to afford private alternatives. Even though most recently with the new elected president (Lula) from a leftist worker’s party this reality in Brazil started to change. However, the existing practice then reinforces and perpetuates social class divisions. The U.S. “tracking” of students into stereotypical low- and high-achieving groups also contributes to these class differences. Students learn very early in their education which group they belong to. They internalize, project, and exhibit compliant behavior according to the “expectations” of the given label. Within such a structure, those that might fall behind know that time is against them. In this unfolding temporal reality, to be optimistically blind can offer a sense of safety and security, though a false one, which is encapsulated by many throughout their schooling experience.

In another situation among the US high achievers, I overheard a student complain to the teacher about work that he was not willing to do in class. The teacher’s reply was “I wonder if you belong in this class.” The student reluctantly did the work. Since this is a GATE program (for gifted students), the student obviously perceived a threat that he could be transferred to a lower track, a humiliating and demeaning experience. On another occasion, a teacher was observed telling students that if they continued to neglect their class work, all they could hope to be were janitors. The political subtext of this teacher’s comments is that the world is a meritocracy, and that the only route to a bright future is to “pull oneself up by the bootstraps.” In this view, the world is just, and open for everyone. The time that students spend in class becomes disciplined by this blind optimism, and this limited and politicized optimism tends to marginalize other possibilities.

The teaching experience for the Brazilian LA students as well as their US counterparts was frustrating and depressing. In one incident, I observed and videotaped a young and relatively inexperienced teacher in the Los Angeles LA (low achievers) group silencing and avoiding a discussion of racial issues raised by one student. Both the teacher and the student were African-American, and the student was obviously disturbed by this experience. The clear implication of the teacher’s avoidance of the subject was that this was not an appropriate subject. Instead of a response to an obvious expressed need for understanding and guidance, the student was rather left at the mercy of his own oblivion and internalized distress and silenced. In such a context of silence, if a student is to maintain any positive outlook at all, then he or she must believe that such issues do not exist, that if he or she works hard enough, conforms well enough, then success will be attained. This is, of course, just a couple obvious examples out of several others observed of how blind optimism can be reinforced.

Therefore, blind optimism is directly connected to fatalistic beliefs, as it excludes realities that are related to how students perceive and use time. It can create resistance on the part of the student (Cummins, 1986) if they feel instruction is alienating to them and, therefore, feel unmotivated to engage in the educational process. For instance, one day I was with the USLA, and I overheard one student saying to the teacher: “When

are you going to teach us, for a change?" The teacher smiled and didn't say much, and his apathy towards teaching was obvious. He told me in private that he was 23 years old and didn't have time to do lesson plans because after school he usually went to the gym for four to five hours everyday. In his classroom, he remained sitting behind his desk almost all the time. He would write page numbers on the board and tell the students to work on those pages for the rest of class. He enforced only silence. The curriculum also seemed foreign to the students. They were unmotivated to work, as it seemed that what they were studying (without any help from this teacher) was not relevant to their lives or realities. They responded by silencing their participation or by misbehaving in class. In essence, blind optimism becomes a dominant temporal construct directly related to how students disengage from schooling. It inhibits students' desires and creates resistance. Yet students do not desire fatalism; it is simply a consequence, as they foresee less ambitious future careers. Children from working-class families end up with working-class jobs as they narrow their vision towards new aspirations by focusing mainly on learning to labor (Willis, 1977).

The students' perception and usage of time play a major role in how they influence and shape the futures of their own individual lives and the further development of society. How this shaping of society will emerge depends on whether students learn transformative, fatalistic, or resilient attitudes. The institutionalization of blind optimism, which initiates processes such as student alienation and deferential student time-consciousness, can be categorized also in these three concepts. In analyzing the data gathered by the different observational approaches used, one can find evidence of these category patterns amongst the students' narratives. Therefore, this research addresses below these three main topics as the core results of analysis.

Fatalistic Optimism

Fatalistic optimism is an immobilizing acceptance of an alienating reality and a dismal future, in one sense a kind of "anti-optimism." It is a belief that events are fixed in time resulting in feelings of impotence and inability to change the course of events, as if a given bleak future is to be expected as a natural unfolding consequence of events. It often results simultaneously in misplaced resistance and inappropriate acceptance, or acquiescence, both leading to self-defeating behaviors, e.g. believing that education is pointless and thus dropping out and accepting low-paying, unrewarding jobs. In a sense, the student's belief that education is pointless is often not incorrect, as schools so often fail to meet either the emotional or intellectual or *physical* needs of such a student. Thus, denied the access to education that is so vital for comfort and advancement in society, tracked from early grades based simply on ethnicity or socio-economic class, the student is understandably cynical about the educational system. The student accepts a sort of second-class status in society, acknowledging (again, in a sense, correctly) the bias of schools towards certain types of students, and internalizes the belief that he or she is indeed inferior, and not fit for anything but low-wage labor and poverty. Simultaneously, and understandably, one

in such a reality becomes bitter and resentful towards the society that has imposed this status; this is a classic cycle of socio-economic reproduction. Fatalism becomes, in a manner of speaking, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Most low-achieving (LA) students can be characterized as fatalistic optimists. Unlike blind optimism, which has consequent fatalistic attitudes, fatalistic optimism is a notion embedded in resistance that leads *directly* to self-defeating behaviors, such as dropping out of school and a deep sense of hopelessness, which ultimately reproduce poverty and disenfranchisement. This attitude can still be termed as *optimistic* in that the fatalistic optimist nevertheless believes that although the future may be somewhat dismal, it is nevertheless the best that can be expected.

In sharing their thoughts through narratives, many students demonstrated a fatalistic attitude. In both Brazil and in the U.S., students expressed intimately their feelings, thoughts, and their lack of motivation to plan or prepare for the future. Several placed themselves in victim roles and immobilizing positions by blaming and complaining about given aspects of their lives as if the reality was immutable. They tended to perceive people and the world that surrounds them as harsh and unchanging. The suffering and economic hardship that they face also seems to be the root causes of their sense of low self-esteem, manifesting itself in their ambivalence and non-challenging attitude about life.

Moreover, their apparent lack of self-esteem develops into a flippant moral code for others, and a lack of feelings toward others' well being. As they talked about going along the path of life, they seemed to expect and even demand to be provided for, which produces a lifestyle of gambling with their own safety as well as that of others. They showed resistance to considerations of the consequences of their actions. This is a notion that apparently leads them on a journey of austerity, where time is running out; there is a denial about the difference between living and dying. Evidence of this fatalistic attitude is expressed in the following data gathered by first-hand interaction with the students in this study.

When asked about their hope of changing their societal situation, these students seemed to have an overwhelming sense of paralysis and a view that change would not take place in time to benefit their lives. Many lose all confidence in the school system. Some may feel the need to work in order to survive, thereby dropping out of school, and doing so contribute to the perpetuation of hegemonic social order. Those who stay in school often do not take it as seriously, and many become discipline problems.

The impression one could reasonably form is that time is not important to these students. In discussing issues connected to their past, many students stated that it was too painful to talk about. The present had little meaning for them. It was not seen as a purposeful opportunity to enhance their lives. Interestingly the quantitative aspect of this study shows that the majority of students in both countries do not associate their happiest moments of the present with the choice of "school" alone. Most students chose their happiest moments of their present when the survey

offered a combination of school and friends. With respect to the category “school/friends,” a pattern emerged between happiest moments of the present and happiest moments of the past. In both countries, LA’s selected this category at a considerably higher rate than did HA (high achievers). Approximately the same percentage of HA students in both countries selected this response (Br. 11%, U.S. 9%), as did LA students in both countries (Br. 20%, U.S. 24%). The vast majority of the students surveyed didn’t seem to recognize their best moments spent with school and friends until those moments were part of their past. The school experience in their lives was important, more so for the LA because school provided an opportunity to see their friends.

Many students feel that the future, and all that it entails, is intangible. The past was not an important thing, and for the future many students said, “Who knows?” One said, “My past was great, never flunked, but now I have low grades, and I almost flunk.” This gives the impression that these students were mainly concerned with just passing the year without having to repeat it, rather than having a meaningful or enjoyable school experience.

Reinforcing these patterns were the responses to another survey question asking students what they felt “they were not good at.” Fifty percent of Br. LA and 56% of USLA chose the category “school,” clearly indicating that LA students know their position in the spectrum of achievement and are aware that they are doing poorly. This is opposed to 39% of Br. HA and 35% of US HA who chose “school.” Despite the fact that this group of students is doing very well in school, they still are very hard on themselves to do better.

A significant difference that was immediately apparent during my research in Los Angeles was that the US students were under more pressure to show up on time for classes than were the Brazilian students. Often the principal would stand in front of the school entrance with a loudspeaker urging and almost berating students to hurry to class.

As previously mentioned, the instruction among the two groups of students showed a considerable contrast, the HA’s instruction tending to be more creative and engaging, and the LA’s instruction tending to be more passive, less creative and engaging. The teacher of the class I spent the most time with among the LA spent a large amount of his time seated behind his desk, focused on maintaining discipline instead of teaching; his approach to discipline was highly coercive in that his main technique for classroom discipline was to threaten students with referral to the principal if they were uncooperative. It might be said that the educational approach taken with these students was reproductive of social attitudes that these young people were beyond assistance and should be controlled, not nurtured. Their experience seemed to communicate to them that they needed exterior control, and were incapable of self-control, and the poor teaching techniques employed with these students seemed to reinforce the notion that they did not require more than the most basic intellectual skills and the ability to comply with the expectations of authority figures; independent or critical thought in no way enters into the education

of these students as such independence is contrary to the dictates of the hegemonic social order imposed on these students. Thus, the social immobility they experience (MacLeod, 1987; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

The predisposition towards fatalistic optimism expressed by this group can be eminently embedded in the underpinning awareness these students have that they lack both the efficiency and enjoyment needed for success in school. These findings were overwhelmingly supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. There are strong indications that they know their situations in school and therefore lack optimism about their performance. They understand the need to invest time in schoolwork, but are often unmotivated to do it, yet they are not pessimistic about their futures. Some of them show at-risk tendencies, are cynical, or have poor projections about their future, and disbelieve encouraging possibilities.

One of the survey questions asked: "What do you most enjoy doing with your time?" Students' responses were classified and quantified. What was amazing was that LA in both countries responded very low in categories related to outgoing possibilities of schoolwork and life in general (Br. 36% and US 17%). In contrast, the HA responded very positively about their enjoyment of schoolwork and life endeavors (Br. 50% and US 34%). On the other hand, when the questions asked what the students spent the most leisure time doing, 29% of the Br. LA and 33% of the US LA chose entertainment activities, whereas none of the Br. HA chose this response, and only 6% of the US HA.

When talking about Cesar Chavez, many students nonchalantly stated that they did not know who he was. One said "He was a war hero. He fought for the immigrants, like rights, fields, something like that, I don't know." Another said, "He is Mexican, Latino, a man. He fought against poisoning grapes, poisoning fruits, something like that. I'm not sure." When it was mentioned that there was a street named after him, one student stated, "That was because he was successful. And the community wants the place to be known. He was a courageous man." In short, these students, many of them Hispanic, demonstrated at best only a vague awareness of a highly significant historical leader, directly related to their own cultural background, and potentially a great symbolic example of activism and social change and responsibility.

As the interview moved to other issues related to their present and future goals, one student said "I don't know," another said, "I want to be a lawyer, because I can lie and be convincing." The survey showed that many more LA (38%) than HA (9%) in the US held life-long optimistic goals. Interestingly, HA from both countries indicated on the survey that their friends like school and will enjoy happy and successful futures. LA, on the other hand, believe that their friends are "going nowhere" in life. 42% of the US LA chose this response, while 46% of the Br. LA showed indifference to the issue by choosing "no opinion." Overall, however, the US high achievers, displayed less evidence of fatalistic optimism than any other group in this study.

Resilient Optimism

Resilient Optimism is manifested in conformation to normative order, despite an alienating reality, as a means of achieving a desired individualistic goal, the optimism being the belief that such a goal will be accomplished through conformity. The result is an assimilationist optimism that reproduces the hegemonic social order: if those who are oppressed by the social order conform to it in order to glean the rewards of that social order, then the natural opponents of oppression, i.e. the oppressed themselves, are marginalized and co-opted. This resilience is illustrated by the fact that students with this attitude have hope of succeeding in life. Yet within the school structure, these students feel that they have to give up aspects of their cultural identity in order to achieve the academic goals that will lead them to economic success. For example, discussing issues of poverty with the Brazilian students, many said that everybody could have something if they worked hard for it, and the overall impression from resiliently optimistic students both in Brazil and the US was that they wanted to do whatever they thought would give them status and money. This was a characteristic more predominant with high achievers though. Therefore, the resilient attitude is related to time as individuals find that time can be productive if put to constructive use.

Students who are resilient optimists conform to normative order, despite the fact that that order is for them an alienating reality. They engage in this seemingly frustrating conformist behavior in order to better their own situation: if you can't beat them, you might as well join them. Thus, the overriding hegemonic orders, and its socio-economic dictates, are reproduced with the complicity and participation of those most oppressed by that order. In other words, if those who are oppressed by the social order conform to it in order to glean the rewards of that social order, then the natural opponents of oppression, i.e. the oppressed themselves, are marginalized and co-opted.

Even though, with a high price to pay this concept of resilience manifests itself in positive developments, in that some students have a realistic hope of succeeding in life. Unlike fatalism, resilience stipulates that an individual accepts reality in a conscious manner. Individuals accept as a practical fact that they cannot conquer reality, but lurking in their unconscious minds is the attitude that "there will come a day. . ."

This struggle between the conscious and unconscious cause conflict within the person and this tension takes a heavy toll. It is a temporary condition dictated by a harsh environment. Furthermore, conforming to an accepted societal order seems an act of submission in the face of a doubtful future. Hence, on a conscious level, these individuals remain within the status quo, while subconsciously grappling with the constructs of rejection and resistance. In other words, they are willing to sacrifice identity for success.

Within the context of a white hegemony school structure that reproduce the culture at large, the students feel they have to incorporating a raceless persona and give up aspects of their cultural identity, in order to achieve the academic goals that

eventually will lead them to economic success (Fordham, 1996). In giving up an assortment of stereotypes, they feel that they have a better chance of accomplishing their goals. Various students comment on religious values and beliefs, that life is a meager, deprived existence lived for the sake of far-off “rewards in heaven.” They see life as something that is endured rather than enjoyed. In other words, resilience implies a sacrifice that students don’t want to undertake, but they do so anyway, because of preconceived ideas they have about the future. Many of these students go through their daily lives somewhat numb, and they become dysfunctional emotionally and socially. The following data are interview examples that demonstrate patterns of this behavior.

The characters of responses displaying resilience are markedly different from the bleak perspective of fatalism. When asked about poverty, for instance, on response that was somewhat representative was, “In Brazil, everybody could have the same things if they work for it. All my friends have graduated and that makes me want to do the same.” Another student said, “I am from the *favela* and if I don’t make an effort to be different from my neighbors, I will be part of the violence. That is why I come to school, to avoid becoming part of the problem.”

Resilience is not just an emotional construct, but one also related to time. While the fatalist dictum states that time is meaningless, due to one’s passive, inactive response to one’s environment, the resilient individual finds that time can be productive if put to constructive use. Studying, taking part in the political system and making the most of opportunities motivates these students to become resilient, and make the most of what at times may seem a desperate, hopeless life. One student commented: “I had forgotten the past, the present is troubled, but the future will be full of opportunities.”

When asked about future change and their expectation, these students expressed the fact that God would not do everything for them. They believed they had to use their own strength to change things. They had been given the power to do what is necessary to change society. One student said: “We can’t live only on promises. People need to take responsibility for their actions.” This proactive attitude was evident in other aspects of our interview.

While fatalism is a construct that defines the future as bleak and hopeless, resilience may be seen as the hope that the future can be influenced, that it is worth striving towards. Both concepts are time-related in the sense that they are both interconnected with the past, present, and future, or lack thereof.

What resilient students seem to be striving for is some version of the “American Dream,” which dictates that with hard work a person can overcome any difficulties. All it takes is hard, disciplined effort, and the individual will reap the rewards. These Brazilians high-achievers are very dedicated to their futures, which may have to do with their willingness to conform with a particular lifestyle in order to succeed. While some LA students exhibit resilience, they are using rebellious action in the sense that they are looking for a brighter future, against all the odds.

When I followed the same lines of inquiry with the US LA, I found a high degree of similarity between their responses and their Brazilian counterparts. Many students said that their past was troubled, but that their present circumstances had improved. While many students remember their troubled pasts, some still intend to pursue a better life, regardless of any feelings of remorse or regret, and in spite of the fact that they are behind in their schooling.

Similarly, when speaking of careers, some students had very hopeful attitudes, mentioning such professions as law and computer technology; others were interested in becoming professional athletes or going into the military. Some of their comments: "I want to be rich [laughs]," "Having a good job needs an education," or "I want to study medicine." Others said that they want to practice law, become a photographer, or have a career on the radio. Considering the years of dedication and stamina required for such careers, it is obvious that these students are willing, at least to some extent, to strive towards a fulfilling life.

There is, however, a dichotomy that emerges when these students talk about the present. While they might have grand ideas for their professional lives, they often say things like, "Right now there is school, school, school, and all I want to do is sleep." This illustrates the resilient paradigm, which involves striving at great cost and sacrificing for an intangible goal, which in many cases turns out to be a fantasy anyway, simply to fulfill materialistic dreams.

The general content of the stories described above was a constant pattern throughout the interviews with this group. Regarding their future career plans several students said that they wanted to be "successful," or do whatever they thought would give them status and money.

The high achievers (HA) in Los Angeles seem to be the most resilient of all the groups. Likewise, they seem to pay the highest price for their successes. They appear to be more dedicated to repetitive work, and focus all their energy on getting ahead. They exhibit a greater degree of resilience, and they desire a successful future, even at the expense of their personal lives. A boy described how his El Salvadorian father had berated him and pushed him to improve his grades, so that he might have a better education and a better life than his father. This well-intentioned concern, however, had been ineffective; the boy lacked motivation and self-esteem, and his father was not able, through negative reinforcement, to inspire those feelings. The contact with the music teacher initiated progress towards resilience. The validation received from the teacher motivated the student to strive not only in music, but in all other subjects as well. This incentive combined with now meeting his father's expectations, created a double reinforcement and feeling of accomplishment. As he put it, "I learned not to placate for good grades, but instead to work hard to achieve my goals. I must use my time to my advantage and not waste it." He was definitely determined to do well in school and in life.

Another student related:



I remember that when I was small, I had an interest in music, so my dad said I was gifted. He placed me in a music school for advanced students. I entered many competitions and I won prizes. But at the same time I was failing other grades in school so my mom got very angry. She took me out of music school. Then I began to work more in my other school subjects and my grades improved.

Clearly this student's parents had great influence, and this was a constant theme in the interviews with this group. Another student said:

I remember having fights with my dad. He saw my grades, I was in second grade then, and I had C's and D's. It was important for my dad that I would get good grades. He wanted me to work harder. He pushed me a lot. He told me to have good grades especially in math. I am a star now with all A's. I am not a troublemaker anymore.

Regarding the present, the students consistently reported that they felt overwhelmed by schoolwork. They said they had very little social life, and they don't date. Some students reported that they do participate in sports, but their emotional and physical development seems to be neglected. These students plan to become fashion designers, pediatricians, veterinarians, architects, and they want to live in places where there will be no violence. They want the "American Dream." Several commented that they wanted to have "a lot of money." One student said "I want to have a Lexus," and they all laughed. Another one said, "I do not want to be poor in the future like my family has been in the past. We suffered a lot." Another student said, "I did something in the past that I wish I could go back and change, so now I want to do my best as I know my future will depend on it. I don't want to regret and feel guilty about it."

Transformative Optimism

Transformative optimism sees the formation of collective resistance against social processes that produce alienating realities, with the hope of achieving a liberated future. Transformative optimism is an expression of a deep sense of emancipatory hope; the transformative optimist does not merely hope for or believe in the opportunity for emancipation from hegemonic and repressive socio-economic structures, but indeed sees him or herself as a necessary and viable participant in the collective process of social change; the transformative optimist does not only hope for the best possible outcomes, but sees him or herself as a vital instrument in the realization of those outcomes. As Marx (in Hammer & McLaren, 1991) asserts, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness." Transformative optimism transforms the present through a consciousness of solidarity and a clear vision of a better future which can be realized through individual responsibility within a context of collective effort.

When discussing political figures with Brazilian LA students, one student, who seemed to be speaking for everyone, pointed out that "we need to change the system

starting with us. We have been influenced to do bad things, but we must become more conscious about becoming better people . . . we can't go out there and start killing people." These remarks are emblematic of a desire on the part of the students to change their own reality through the analysis of the social influences of their consciousnesses. Several also indicated a desire to be more proactive in their political responsibility. For instance, one stated "Voting is our decision. We are the ones who vote, and the President is there because we elect him." When I asked how students might themselves bring about change, one of the Rio HA students said:

Before, our classroom looked terrible and we didn't like it, so we decided to get together and do something about it. In the beginning, we had many disagreements, but as time passed we became ore united. Afterwards, when our classroom had been painted, everyone felt better. We realized that together we can change things for the better . . . other classes didn't do this because maybe they didn't have leaderships or unity . . . you need to justify the need and the "why" to change anything.

Such comments are indicative of a zeal for and awareness of the possibility of change, and the beginnings of a transformative optimistic thought process; furthermore, these comments show the students' realization of their own ability to change their environment. The students' refurbishment of their classroom illustrates the need for a serious pedagogical view that gives students a learning experience based on practical action, which allows them to be creative and active transformers of their world.

In videotaping students and teachers in action at the Rio school, one teacher in particular stood out as embodying in her practices an attitude of transformative optimism and attempting to instill this in her students. Her classroom was decorated with images of the *favelas* where many of her students lived. One picture of a *favela* said: *Dignidade chega com asfalto* (Dignity arrives with asphalt), a reference to the fact that most *favelas* have no paved streets. Another said: *Onde o povo mora* (This is where the people live); *Eu só quero ser feliz na favela que eu nasci* (I just want to be happy in the slum where I was born); *Dignidade chega con saneamento* (Dignity arrives with sewage), a reference to most *favelas*' lack of sewage systems; *A responsabilidade do meio ambiente social e natural. O que é a responsabilidade? A solidariedade? (The responsibility of social and natural environment. What is responsibility? And Solidarity?)* Attached to this was a picture of President Clinton and Pelé in a soccer stadium with another statement: *Direito á informação, á necessidade de deixar o jovem participar* (The right of information, the necessity to let youth participate).

The teacher started class by giving the day's session a title: *Responsabilidade no meio ambiente social e natural*—Responsibility in the social and natural environment. She announced that "We will play a game in class today, and you just need to follow instructions. You may want to agree or disagree." All students were instructed to stand up in the middle of the classroom and then after each teacher's statement, students would either move to one side of the room if they agreed or the

other if they disagreed. The teacher began by asking the students, “What is solidarity? What is responsibility? What is participation?” The activity continued with questions such as “I live my life the way I want,” “Only the mayor of the city is responsible for taking care of it,” “I don’t have anything to do with anybody else’s life! Sonorous pollution [loud sound] is my neighbors’ problem!” The students moved without discussion to one side or the other, choosing sides, with a few undecided students remaining in the middle. The activity concluded with a lively class discussion in which the whole class seemed involved and interested. After this discussion, the class moved on to another activity where the students exercised their right to vote in a ballot box. In another activity, students would view the pictures on the walls and respond to them by placing messages in a box for “future Brazilian generations.” Overall their classroom activities incorporated cooperative learning and other engaging pedagogical exercises.

Observing another classroom, the students were drawing using conceptual frameworks and ideas from a variety of artists’ styles; later their works with deep and interesting messages were placed around the hallways. Students were proud of their work. With another teacher, each class made a theatrical presentation to the whole school. Every student participated. Most of the scenes performed had an environmental theme, but some also addressed poverty and hunger and the abuse of power by authorities, the “Sem Terra” movement, made up of landless citizens, many dispossessed through foreclosure, and drug use.

The H.A. group in Brazil (just like the H.A. in the U.S.) had many opportunities to express their creativity. In general, these students had interesting pedagogical experiences, which without any doubt contribute to their transformative optimistic views of schooling and life as a whole. Such activities are very much in line with the ideas of Freire (1970, p. 52), who says, “Nobody educates anybody, nobody educates oneself, men and women educate amongst themselves, mediated by the world.”

Theoretical Implications and Reflections about Possible Change Alternatives

After reviewing the four main patterns that emerged from the data, this section briefly presents a theoretical analysis of temporal implications. For instance, Ricoeur, (1988) believes that it is necessary to get into the question of temporality to examine the possibility of “Being-a-whole” or “Being-integral.” Using a hermeneutic phenomenology of time, he says that what is at stake is the articulation of moments of the future, the past, and the present as the totalization of existence.

Ricoeur was trying to convey that in these temporal experiences, the future is present, just is the past, and the present itself. The meaning of temporalities signifies the understanding and interpretation “upon-which” the projection of being can be conceived in its possibilities, or it is an anticipation of what the future can be. Therefore, for him, history responds to the phenomenologies of time consisting in a

mediation of lived time and cosmic time. His conclusion is that one can be aware of time and measure it only while it is passing. In this way, narratives can legitimize discourses between what is fictive and what is real. Thus, the understanding of the notion of language leads to the interpenetration of history, which in one sense clarifies what “making history”, signifies—the subjects recognize themselves in the stories they tell about themselves. Yet for Freire the utilization of the “word” becomes of intrinsic relevance in the process of historical liberation for those that are oppressed.

According to Bakhtin (1993) an ontological characteristic of humans is to find their own act-performing consciousness to secure historical uniqueness, by individual time and space determination in participative thinking of lived experiences. Reaching spatial and temporal representations, members are real subjects in the once-occurrent event of being. This becomes a world of affirmed existence of other’s beings and ones’ own. Therefore, assisting students in developing an emancipatory concept of time to maximize the utilization of their time is a task that helps them to focus on the present and to take appropriate actions that lead to an assured future. In other words, they develop hope and vision for the future by changing their attitudes toward life.

In short, the challenge is how to deconstruct the problematic temporal notions such as those of fatalistic, resilient, and blindly optimistic ideologies. It develops pedagogical approaches of emancipatory and transformative temporal concepts based on Freirean principles and critical pedagogy. Based on implications and theories it becomes interesting to question: What are the implications for pedagogy and curriculum design for addressing the temporal and educational needs of disenchanting students? How do the dimension, conceptualization, and utilization of time vary in different cultural contexts and impact behavior? How are problematic concepts of time deconstructed? How are temporal orientation and temporalities in the educational process (among educators and students) understood from a theoretical and practical context within the schools and the school system? How do “at-risk” students improve their fatalistic or blind optimism time sensitivity and involvement with schoolwork?

Thus, the use of an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches becomes an intrinsic alternative, where a generative theme links different disciplines at school. The content and subject matter are taught emphasizing the inter-relatedness of all aspects of information. The objective is to overcome the dissociation of knowledge with sensitive thinking about facts, which often involves respect for others’ opinions. This process facilitates a dialogue that integrates partial knowledge with global knowledge and seeks questioning and transformation of realities.

This experience is possible also when there is a democratization of administration. Rather than performing mainly supervisory and bureaucratic duties, its new role is to provide technical and pedagogical assistance to teachers in the schools with the objective of improving the quality of education. It starts by showing a concern with the wellbeing of teachers and students and assisting them in the development of critical inquiry skills to find liberating opportunities. The underlying Freirean

theory is embedded in dialectical concepts of *conscientization* to overcome alienation.

The teacher's role then, is to construct a vision of a less dehumanizing society by helping children to become themselves. This process implies a humble experience of listening to students' voices and allowing their temporal knowledge to emerge, to then challenge students to be themselves and construct knowledge rather than memorize it. It is a process of doing and taking a risk, with the freedom to make mistakes. In this way, schools function as cultural spaces of active engagement in the learning experience and social construction of identity. This concept includes the notion of becoming historical agents to interact, intervene, and transform the world. Students learn that knowledge is not created only through reason but through emotion mediated by the relationship content areas and reality.

Lastly, a curriculum based on Freirean principles contained within critical pedagogy advocates time theories and practices related to educational change conducive to the development of transformative optimism. Personal and social transformation are based on new perceptions and conceptualizations of time that deconstruct fatalist, resilient, and blindly optimistic beliefs and behavior that have been enforced by historical hegemony of the social order. This is possible by constructing the knowledge that people can be agents of their own history. This involves a change of mentality, which means unlearning old beliefs and ideologies and constructing new ones embedded on transformative critical optimism. This latter signifies a construction that is based on action that anticipates the best outcome towards a more humane and justice society.

Assuming that children from upper-class communities already invest their time in resilient optimism, it is reasonable to expect that at-risk children might require special temporal curricular orientation or intervention because of their relatively high levels of fatalistic and blind optimism engagements. Given the fact that policies addressing at-risk students at inner-city schools concentrate mostly on remedial classes, basic skills, and tighter disciplinary practices, a policy orientation promoting curricular reform that directly addresses students' time discernment and temporal orientation will result in significant tangible benefits to the students. This process will entail a change of focus for the teacher, which means that teachers would have to unlearn old beliefs. Fatalist ideologies and passive notions of time have to be transformed at school into positive future visions.

Implementing a new type of curriculum in the school requires a significant paradigm shift at administrative levels, because schools would have to lessen their funding of remedial programs and increase their funding for more constructivist efforts in the classroom. One such possibility is a critical temporal consciousness curriculum based on Freire's theories. The implementation of such curriculum could first take place at the local level, on a school-classroom-by-school-classroom basis. Local experience would then allow school reformers to develop curriculum models on a small scale before expanding to other school sites or to state or national levels.

The abstract notions of Freirean critical pedagogy and temporal theory suggest a curriculum for developing a critical temporal consciousness in the everyday contexts of classrooms. Freirean critical pedagogy can deconstruct traditional temporalities leading to the creative construction of new concepts of time for students. Such a curriculum could provide a broader design for implementing critical pedagogy that extends beyond time issues to other behavioral issues (e.g., violence) at school. The success of a critical temporal curriculum in a specific area can then be tied to the development of a larger critical pedagogy movement. A curriculum in critical pedagogy can also focus on personal and social transformation by enhancing critical thinking, and by building a vision and hope of a better future via a language of critique.

The findings of this study suggest that the potential for a curriculum based on Freirean critical pedagogy and time theories can be used to enhance time-consciousness values in contemporary social life. Case studies and practices that relate to educational change can then be used to project a new conceptualization of time perception. This conceptualization then can be used to develop a permanent process of effective change that is conducive to the development of hope for a better future. This change is expected to advocate for personal and social transformation based on new perceptions and conceptualizations of time. It can result in the elimination of the root causes of fatalistic beliefs and passive behavior that are contained within the historical hegemony of the social order.

A curriculum for critical temporal consciousness can consider children's utilization of time towards constructive activities. It can address such specifics such as: time management; advance planning, and goal-orientation as substitutes for immediate gratification.

In conclusion, the four constructs of time optimism (blindness, fatalism, resilience, and transformation) are important, because they each reflect a different pattern of engagement in the process of schooling. Teachers need to be aware of them as they relate to whether students feel engaged or disengaged in school.

Therefore, the educational role promoted in this study is a transformative pedagogy of optimism, where schools become spaces ready to receive the culture and knowledge of the local community. This can be achieved by identifying and deconstructing hegemonic structures and recreating democratic alternatives. Furthering this study proposes to look at these issues of centeredness through a discourse based on educational practices of teachers as transformative intellectuals leaders, who constantly reflect on their position in the social order. Students should also have a role as transformative intellectuals. As a theorist/researcher the challenge for me would be to promote an increased awareness and understanding of this tension, and, hopefully, to convey a sense of urgency for change. Such change will be based on the development of a discourse to unite a language of critique with the language of possibility for both teachers and students, enabling them to recognize that they can indeed effect changes

Notes

¹ A more detailed and complete version of this study was published by Peter Lang, book titled: "From Blind to Transformative Optimism: Engaging Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of Possibility."

References

- Apple, M. (1993). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (1990). *Ideology and curriculum*. (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge
- Artiles, A. & Hallahan, D.P. (1994). *Special education in Latin America: Experiences and issues*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1993). *Toward a philosophy of the act*. Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov Editors. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bowles S. & Gintis, H., (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. New York: Basic Books
- Chideya, F., Ingrassia, M., Smith, V., & Wingert, P. (1993). Endangered family. *Newsweek*; August 25.
- Colarusso, C. (1988). The development of time sense in adolescence. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*. 43, pp. 179-197.
- Colarusso, C. A. & Nemiroff, R. A.. (1984). *The race against time: Psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in the second half of life*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Cummings, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*. Vol. 56. No.1 February.
- Cushman, P. (1991). Ideology obscured: Political uses of the self in Daniel Stern's infant. *American Psychologist*. 46 (3).
- Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Erikson, E. (1977). *Toys and reason*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Fordham, S. (1988). Racelessness as a factor in black students' school success: Pragmatic strategy or pyrrhic victory? *Harvard Educational Review* Vol. 58 No. 1, Feb.
- Fordham, S. (1996). *Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity, and success at Capital High*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (23th ed.). [Pedagogy of the Oppressed]. Sao Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogia da esperanca: Um reencontro com a pedagogia do oprimido*. Sao Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- Freire, P. (1992). *Educacao Como Pratica da Liberdade*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. South Hadley, MA: Berging & Garvey.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the heart*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1985). *Paulo Freire y la Educacion Liberadora / Antologia de Miguel Escobar*. [Paulo Freire and the liberating education/ anthology of Miguel Escobar]. 1sted. Mexico City: Secretaria de Educacion Publica.
- Hammer, R. & McLaren, P. (1991). Rethinking the dialectic: A social semiotic perspective for educators. *Educational Theory*. Winter, Vol. 41, No. 1.

- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teaching, changing times*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kincheloe, J. (1993). *Toward a critical politics of teacher thinking: Mapping the postmodern*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M., (1980). *The metaphors we live by*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Levine, R. (1997). *A geography of time*. New York: Basic Books
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper.
- McLaren, P. (1994). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. New York: Longman Publishing Group.
- McLaren, P. & Lankshear, C. Eds., (1994). *Politics of liberation: Paths from Freire*. London & New York: Routledge.
- MacLeod, J. (1995). *Asperations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Norton, D. (1993). Diversity, early socialization and temporal development: The dual perspective, revisited", *Social Work*. 38 (1), January, pp. 83-90.
- Piaget, J. (1969). *The child's conception of time*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Piaget, J. (1970). *Science of education and the psychology of the child*. New York: Viking.
- Popkewitz, T. (1997). The production of reason and power: curriculum history and intellectual traditions. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 29 (2), pp. 131-164.
- Ricoeur, P. (1988). *Time and narratives. Vol III*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Rose, M. (1990). *Lives on the boundary: A moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's educationally underprepared*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1990). *Learned optimism*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Shor, I. (1987). *Critical teaching and everyday life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wallulis, J. (1990). *The hermeneutics of life history: Personal achievement and history in Gadamer, Habermas, and Erikson*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Weiler, K. (1988). *Women teaching for change*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Werner, E. (1986). The concept of risk from a developmental perspective. *Advances in Special Education*. 5, pp.1-23.
- White, H. (1987). *The content of form*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wiley, D. & Ballard D. (1993). How can schools help children from homeless families? *Journal of School Health*. Sept., 63 (7), pp. 291-293.
- Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour*. Westmead, UK: Saxon House.

Cesar Augusto Rossatto is a professor at the University of Texas, El Paso.