

“Contemporary Higher Education: Close-Up research in times of change”.

Generating (new conceptions of) time in higher education: ‘making’ time for change through pedagogical methodologies

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Time and change have become significant but also taken-for-granted discourses in our collective and contested (re)imagining(s) of contemporary higher education and its future. Contemporary higher education is often characterized by uncertainty and precarity, increasingly driven by strong narratives of anticipated future(s) and the need (desire) to be future-oriented, often framed in terms of aspiration, employability and productivity. Anticipated change in the present and the future is projected onto the institutional and individual investments, risks, promises and possibilities that higher education presents at multiple levels and in a range of contexts. However, the inequalities that underpin different future-oriented investments in higher education are often made invisible by the logic of making the ‘right’ (calculated and rational) choices and ‘effectively’ managing time and change in the present (this plays out differently in different contexts). Despite the centrality of time in the (re)framing and restructuring of an imagined contemporary higher education landscape, there has been limited consideration given to *conceptualizing* time in HE research. The dearth of research on higher education that foregrounds questions of time tends in itself to assist in the taken-for-granted ‘business-as-usual’ or TINA (there is no alternative) effect, reproducing particular spatio-temporal structures, practices, embodiments and investments.

In this think piece, I want to foreground time and our understanding of it through a praxis-based lens – that is to bring to light how our hegemonic understanding(s) of time frames higher education research and practice, often in ways that is complicit in deeply entrenched inequalities. I argue for ‘close-up’, pedagogical methodology that ‘makes’ time for (social) change within a praxis-based framework, drawing on critical theoretical insights to reframe change as a transformative project of social justice. This requires that we (re)conceptualize ‘time’ through the lens of critical theory/practice (praxis) to draw attention to its deep relationship to the reproduction of material, cultural, structural and symbolic inequalities in higher education and the ways time frames our understanding of – and orientation to – change.

As political forces such as globalization, neoliberalism and marketisation re/shape higher education, these processes of change reposition students and staff in relation to time, generating new relations of inequality and difference. This might include how social class intersects with gender and race to re/produce unequal relations to time (e.g. not being able to afford childcare or not having access to a car to get to campus ‘on-time’) and space (e.g. the ways different bodies are constructed in pedagogical spaces through deficit discourses such as ‘lacking time-management’ or motivation). The concept of ‘timescapes’ helps to bring to light the spatio-temporal relationalities that profoundly shape our subjectivities (e.g. as students, teachers, academics, practitioners and leaders), discourses (e.g. of equity,

aspiration and choice) and practices (e.g. of teaching, learning, research and leadership) through participation in the timescapes of HE.

Underpinning subjectivities, discourses and practices across diverse timescapes of HE are competing policy concerns. These include the need to address diversity, and relatedly to create more inclusive assessment, curricula and pedagogies, to promote equity and social justice in higher education. These policy concerns operate against and within other discursive framings of the timescapes of HE, articulated through the lens of 'the market', and the imperative to compete for rank and position in global prestige cultures that channel our energies across a range of competing spatio-temporal domains and desires. These include aspirations for research and teaching 'excellence', for preparing graduates for 'success' through employability agendas and for displaying innovation in relation to new technologies that hold the promise to transform educational timescapes.

The concept of landscape is a helpful one in conceptualizing the spatial dimensions of higher education and the ways we 'picture' what higher education 'is' (and who and what it is for). However, it also works to make invisible the deep entwining of space with time and the ways spatio-temporalities constitute our experiences, subjectivities and knowledges of higher education. Together with my colleagues in the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE), we have been developing close-up research to understand time in higher education in relation to space (Burke, Bennett et al, 2016; Bennett and Burke, 2017). We have drawn on Adam's concept of 'timescapes' (1998, 2004) to understand new spatio-temporal structures, discourses and relationalities and how these generate change in higher education whilst producing formations of difference, misrecognition and inequality. In relation to this work, we are developing pedagogical methodologies to 'make' time and space for praxis-based, critically reflexive approaches to reimagining higher education as trans/formative and deeply connected to social justice.

Doing theoretical and close-up work through the conceptual lens of 'timescapes' helps shed light on how we understand, construct and anticipate change and 'the future'. The mechanisms, discourses and relations by which time and space is structured, managed and made inequitable becomes more visible through the lens of timescapes. This is crucial as temporal inequalities play out in and through everyday experiences and practices but are reduced to notions of good 'time management' skills. Thus experiences of time are reduced by discourses of both individualism and management, constructed as mechanistic and technocratic, whereby simply providing staff and students with the training to develop the skills to manage time (and change) is identified as a central focus of equity agendas. This renders invisible the ways that social, cultural and symbolic inequalities are profoundly shaped by, within and through timescapes.

Conceptualizing higher education as 'timescapes' vividly captures our embodied sensibilities of self in time and space, to analyse the complex structures and relations of inequality and power that produce temporal and ontological dis/positions and propel us towards particular future aspirations and orientations. Timescapes point to the cultural and symbolic nature of time and space, as both material *and* discursive. We also *feel* timescapes – our experiences of the timescapes of higher education are deeply shaped by the politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2004) and this forms aspirations, hopes and imagined possibilities in complex ways. Drawing

on Ahmed's work, I have written elsewhere about this in relation to the concept of 'shame' in pedagogical spaces – and how social experiences of shame are tied to the cumulative experiences of misrecognition over time – the ongoing symbolic violence of internalizing discourses of individual 'failure' through the residual memories of not being 'good enough' (Burke, 2017) or the right kind of person (Burke, 2012). Aspirational formations are tied in with the residual and cumulative histories and project a sense of future im/possibility. This is tied to both collective and personal sensibilities, dis/positions and aspirations, as well as the pressures that come with the accelerated pace in which we are expected to display our propensity towards 'success' through the outcomes or outputs we produce and then by which we are assessed.

Dis/positionality is central to understanding that timescapes are relational, tied to our social positioning, and are also experienced through everyday routines, habits and practices. That is, different relations to timescapes generate im/possibilities and im/mobilities across and between different institutional structures, rhythms and pressures. Timescapes are not neutral or linear. Time and space is not something that we 'have' or 'manage' in any straightforward sense. Yet temporal and spatial resources are vital to parity of participation in higher education – the resources that enable pedagogical, ontological and epistemic access and participation (Burke, Bennett et al, 2016).

Such insights emerging from 'timescapes' have contributed to developing Pedagogical Methodologies (PMs) (Burke, Crozier and Misiaszek, 2017; Burke and Lumb, 2018) that frame CEEHE's approaches and programs. PMs reframe research *as pedagogy*. Underpinned by social justice principles of redistribution, recognition and representation (drawing on the seminal work of Nancy Fraser), pedagogical methodologies are inspired by Freirean pedagogies (creating reciprocal and dialogical spaces of meaning-making through participatory re-search processes) and feminist theories of embodied subjectivity (see e.g. Fraser, 1997, 2003; Freire, 1972, 2014). PMs emphasize notions of 'parity of participation', seeking to 'empower those involved in change' as well as in critically understanding the social world (Lather, 1991: 3). Re-search emphasizes that all involved in research processes have the capacity to search for and contribute to meaning and knowledge, which is part of our everyday experiences, although conventional academic research excludes Others from the ontological dis/position of be/com/ing recognizable as a legitimate knower.

Developing pedagogical spaces through PMs attends to the complex ways in which (iterative) processes shape our sensibilities of self and personhood through the meaning-making timescapes of research, and the impact on what is imagined and what is seen as possible. The meanings we produce are part of a circle of knowledge (Freire, 2004), enabled through participation in the research process and through the relationships between pedagogy, identity formations and difference (Burke, Crozier and Misiaszek, 2017). PMs allow for meaning making to be refined through participatory practices, creating spaces of praxis both through and *beyond* the research and enabling diverse perspectives to be re-cognized and re-presented. PMs facilitate new ways of knowing and understanding that otherwise might be unavailable or closed down. Such approaches create possibilities for refusal, resistance, and doing things differently, provoking our pedagogical and methodological imaginations.

A central aim of praxis-based PMs is to engage all participants in the research/practice nexus,

opening up access to the theoretical, methodological and conceptual tools and resources to illuminate and examine the complexity of inequalities, as well as then translate these insights for practice and 'making a difference'. A praxis-based PM framework seeks to bring participants together in iterative, close-up research and practice, creating pedagogical timescapes that facilitate the deepening of understanding from and across multiple perspectives and dimensions.

CEEHE has developed praxis-based PMs to create the time and space for participants across diverse dis/positions to engage deeply with questions of equity in HE. This includes the creation of professional development resources that move beyond conventional framings of teaching inclusively (see for example www.equityHE.com). It also involves the redistribution of resources to generate communities of praxis, aiming to deepen our understanding and practice of equity and social justice in HE, through programs such as the [National Writing Programme](#).

Researching higher education demands attention to the complex inequalities that are woven through its historical and present formations. This consideration can challenge the dominant understanding that 'equity' is a distinct and separate strand of higher education research and practice. We must acknowledge that knowledge of higher education, its purpose and who participates is always tied to power relations and the politics of distribution, recognition and representation. Research is a site of contestation over claims to truth and author/ity. A praxis-based, pedagogical methodology makes time and space for collaborative, reciprocal, critically reflexive and ethical ways of re-searching collectively across, through and with difference to deepen engagement with social justice in and through higher education. The aim of such approaches is to disrupt homogenizing, standardizing and limiting timescapes that operate to re/author/ise those in positions of privilege and power to influence what we can know, how we know it and who is positioned as knower.

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