

# Re/conceptualising time and temporality: an exploration of time in higher education

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In this paper we deconstruct hegemonic conceptions of time in higher education. Drawing on a recent project, we argue that limiting assumptions about time dominate notions of student capability and prospects of success. The paper reveals how the conceptualisation of time is constituted within a framework that individualises and decontextualises difficulties. Within this frame, socio-cultural elitism is left largely unchallenged, with many students left out and misrecognised as purely lacking capability and commitment. Rethinking simple distinctions between ‘time’ and ‘temporality’, we consider ways to broaden understandings to enable a more inclusive and ‘inventive’ system. We apply a Foucauldian analysis to argue that we co-construct the future in the very ways that we react to the present and think about the past. We must recognise that the way we work in the present is how we create the future. Our everyday actions, assumptions and reactions re/produce our futures.

**Keywords:** higher education; widening participation; time; temporality; trajectories; equity; capability

## Introduction

Within the competitive and increasingly neo-liberalised field of higher education (HE) (Canaan, 2013), having enough ‘time’ has become one of the most stressful aspects of learning. The way that we think about time implicitly determines our assumptions about self and others. Ideas about others’ – and indeed our own – capability in a field hinge on assumptions about their/our time. Questions such as: ‘Do they/I have time for this’, ‘Are they/am I wasting time’ and ‘Am I/ are they disciplined enough with time’, dominate discourses that construct ‘capability’ in relation to notions of time. Yet, despite this profundity, experiences of time and judgments about it in HE have received very little attention (Stevenson & Clegg, 2013). This is unfortunate, given that one of the main reasons students from under-represented backgrounds cite for dis-engaging in learning and leaving study is ‘lack of time’ and ‘time pressures’ (Hodges et al., 2013; Horstmannshof & Zimitat, 2007; Bennett et al., 2012). In this paper we explore how time affects staff and students’ experiences – and the relationships between staff and students – and how dominant notions of time and timing limits who is included and who is recognised as ‘capable’ in different HE contexts.

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We conceptualise HE as a ‘timescape’ (Adam, 1998; 2004) in which participants manage their own and others’ time according to normative frameworks. Time is experienced contextually, in relation to social positioning, and it reaches deep into our psyches (Butler, 1997). Time is institutionally structured and caught within complex webs of social networks, relations and inequalities that are considered differently within different social contexts. As Barbara Adam (1998; 2004) argues in her seminal work theorising time, the relational nature of time, which is composed of irreducible elements, requires recognition. Measures of time (including clocks and calendars) are visible; however, socio-cultural aspects of time are not so easily detected. Time is not only clock-time, which is the dominant ‘ontic’ measurement-only focus that erases recognition of subjectivity and difference, and which presumes that time is ahistorical, disembodied and simply objective. We utilise a deconstructive approach to explore the problematic ways that a de-contextualised ontic (rather than ontological) focus is privileged over the importance of experience, and we reveal how hegemonic discourses about widening participation (WP) work to reproduce limiting constructions about its populations and the role of HE. It is still ‘traditional’ trajectories that are recognised as the key to what is considered a ‘successful’ way to enter and study.

Within conventional timescapes, moves in and out of HE considered ‘non-traditional’ are deemed problematic and ‘non-traditional students’ are posed as being ‘at risk’ of not conforming to hegemonic discourses of time, rather than recognising the different timescapes that frame students’ different and unequal experiences of and participation in higher education. Because conventional expectations and timeframes are imposed, this means that more considered and responsive routes in and through HE remain limited. This has implications for pedagogical assumptions, practices and imaginations, which are often deeply entwined with limited (and limiting) concepts of time and time management, thus (re)producing the traditional practices and subjectivities seen as legitimate in higher education.

People who do not manage time ‘effectively’ – who do not conform to dominant values in HE about being ‘on time’ and managing time – are often deemed ‘disorganised’ or ‘uncommitted’ and as requiring correction therapies as if the problem is simply about getting the skill or right attitude to manage time effectively (or not). If people are not able to conform to traditional structural timeframes and to deliver on time, they are considered to be lacking both the ability and commitment to study, rather than being understood as occupying a different ‘space-time’ or ‘timescape’ that is tied to socio-cultural positioning and context. What is not recognised is that time – the way it is lived, experienced and (re)constructed through our location, positionality and experience – is gendered, classed and racialised and tied to unequal power relations and socio-cultural differences.

In the following pages, we consider institutional(ised) assumptions about students’ ‘ability/inability’ to manage time. We argue that this is expressed through an ethics of (time) ‘commitment’ (and judgments about some students’ lack of it) that contributes to powerful everyday micro-politics of exclusions in and through the discursive fields and practices of HE. We take the view that unequal power relations often flow in deep, insidious ways and this is inextricably shaped by different timescapes and contested discourses of time. Power is a ubiquitous, relational dynamic that works in disciplining, regulating *and* liberating ways and is productive of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic effects. Power operates within complex historico-structural and inter-/intra-personal relational contexts. Everyone both exerts and is subject to power.

First, we provide a brief overview of theoretical insights about time that have influenced our approach. We then outline some examples of time management

discourse from university support services and draw on empirical data from our recent project *Capabilities, Belonging and Equity in Higher Education* (2015) to contextualise our theoretical arguments.

### **Differential time in timescapes**

As briefly outlined above, Adam (1998, 2004) introduces the important concept of 'timescapes' to capture the complexity and multi-dimensional aspects of time in any context. As with Heidegger's (1927) notion of unity in his conceptualisation of the beingness of time, we are all caught up – but are differently located – within a timescape. This is a similar concept to identifying the *different and diverse* elements existing in an overall unifying landscape painting, for instance.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger (1927) argued that we do not exist independently of our relation to the world, others and history. Experiences of time are therefore intensely *relational, and* profoundly shape our encounters within social fields, such as higher education, as well as our sensibilities of self and other. Time is not only purely what many presume it to be – ahistorical, 'objective' and 'rational' and reduced to 'clock-time', which presumes a sameness and homogeneity of the ways that temporalities are lived, embodied and experienced. Heidegger instead argued that a sense of time is passed-down and that the past is lived in the present. Heidegger writes about this as taken-for-granted:

Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have had such an origin .... (p. 43)

People's timescapes and their resources to have and be on/in time *are not the same*. One's social location/space/position shapes one's time. It is not enough to talk about 'temporality' (the experience of time as distinct to time itself) as if experiences of time are different to time. A simple conceptual separation requires challenge because it does not acknowledge the constitutive elements of space/place in relation to time. Time does not exist apart from context, and it is not neutral. Time is embedded in the social and cultural dynamics of power and inequality.

Timescapes are discursively (re)constructed through tradition and habits. Drawing on Deleuze (1994), Thompson and Cook (2014) trace policy 'habits' that they argue reinforce inequalities in education policy, arguing that 'much of what constitutes policy as change or "reform" in the education system in general appears to desire repetition of the past' (pp. 6-7). They write:

For Deleuze, the first passive (or unconscious) synthesis of time is that of habit. Habit refers to gestures, movements and actions that are the synthesis of earlier events. Habit can also be understood as the synthesis of contraction. The unconscious repetition of the gestures and movements of an occupation like teaching or policy-making can usefully be understood as a process of contracting past events into a (living) present. This 'living present therefore goes from past to future ... from the particulars that it envelops in contraction'. (Deleuze, 1994, quoted in Thompson & Cook, 2014, p. 7)

Through habits, new approaches to 'solutions' often become part of the deep and enduring socio-historical problematics they claim to challenge.

While highlighting the tendency for repetition and tradition, it is important to note that our approach is not a teleology in the form of a ‘repressive hypothesis’ (Foucault, 1990/1976, p. 49), which has a view of things as simplistically ‘going bad’ with neo-liberalism. Nor does it rest on a notion of scientific or utopian progress freed from the errors of the past (repetition/traditions) into an idealised future – an ‘enlightenment theory’ (Foucault, 1990/1976). Of course, traditions can be inclusive and malleable. Instead, we seek to think about how fibrous connections between neo-liberalism and traditional conservatism that are working to exclude can be brought to light and questioned. It is pragmatic thinking about the bigger picture, as well as about working on finding more inclusive and productive micro-technologies for improving everyday experiences.

### *Relationality in and through space/time*

There is significant tension and disjuncture between official institutional discourses of time that mask important inequalities and difficulties that many students experience in HE, and lived, embodied experiences of time and development. Stevenson and Clegg’s (2013) investigation of how students imagine their futures reveals why ‘there are compelling theoretical and empirical reasons for thinking more explicitly about temporality and future orientation rather than seeing it as obvious’ (p. 18). They argue that individuals’ views of desired and undesired future achievement are heavily influenced by social context and relationships, experience and wellbeing and include that which is envisaged as possible within that complex process of framing. In her 2010 paper, Clegg argues that students’ ‘experiences of time are much more complex than implied by the technical rationality of “planning”’ (pp. 347–348). Drawing on Adam (1990; 1995), Clegg outlines the multiple, co-present dimensions of time: ‘time as linear divisible clock time; temporality as our being in time; timing as in “when” time; and tempo the intensity of time’ (Clegg, 2010, p. 347). This work by Stevenson and Clegg (2013) and Clegg (2010) focuses on conceptualisations of the past, present and future.

In contrast to the conventional conceptual understanding of time as only the measurement of it, which separates measured and experiential time, we highlight the importance of understanding time itself as comprised of multiple and often contradictory aspects; it is not just about a clock or a calendar. Even what are presumed to be entirely objective measures like a clock or a calendar are culturally specific in that they represent deeply taken-for-granted, culturally-specific assumptions based on historical practices.

We experience time according to context, subjectivity, and positionality. As we have argued, time is deeply relational and is shaped by hegemonic discourses at play in particular institutional and discursive fields such as HE. Indeed, Massey (1999) argues that in addition to physicists, a number of human geographers:

... conceptualize space-time as relative (defined in terms of the entities ‘within’ it), relational (as constituted through the operation of social relations, through which the ‘entities’ are also constituted) and integral to the constitution of the entities themselves (the entities are local timespaces). (p. 262)

Importantly for questions of equity in HE, the failure to recognise the significance of time ‘has more than theoretical significance. It has practical consequences in failing to address how the spatial and temporal intersect’ (Stables & Semetsky, 2015, p. 117).

To argue, for example, that inequalities in participation and attainment in HE are largely about the ability to ‘effectively’ manage time, is to misunderstand the profound impact of differential time-space relations at play.

Time management techniques might be helpful to an extent, but they cannot eradicate different relations to time that are both connected to a student’s educational history and also to the material, structural and symbolic inequalities that are tied in with time (such as having caring or employment commitments, or having different cultural relations to time that are not recognised in HE hegemonic discourses of time). The assumption that the challenges or barriers students might face can simply disappear as one manages time better, not only individualises social relations to time but also ignores histories of structural disadvantages, material and symbolic inequalities and individual habitus. It also marginalises cultural traditions of other ways of relating to time, such as supporting family, having a strong work ethic, of needing to work, of requiring ongoing healthcare and support, should/could simply change in a matter of weeks into semester (Authors, 2012; Mills & Gale, 2009).

Indeed, the experience of a space/structure itself is differential across social differences. Time is not the wholly consistent, culturally neutral and homogenous linearity that we so often presume. Writing about UK schooling, Stables and Semetsky (2015) argue that the ‘tendency to separate spatial and temporal dimensions is deeply ingrained’, even though there is general acceptance of ‘the post-Einsteinian view, dominant in modern physics, that space and time cannot be separated, but that we live rather in multi-dimensional space-time’ (p. 117). They argue that despite these physical insights ‘such acceptance has not been fully incorporated into our social sciences’ (p. 117). Western education is dominated by linear conceptions of time and decontextualised conceptions of time and space/place.

### *Being ‘on track/on time’*

Meritocratic discourses place emphasis on access to and participation in higher education depending on the individual’s skills, motivation and capability, collapsing time into notions of ‘effective time management skills’. Such discourses overemphasise instrumentalist, skills-based strategies, such as teaching individuals to improve their time management skills, whilst ignoring the importance of providing opportunities for students to access those forms of academic and cultural knowledge(s) that carry power and provide cultural and symbolic capital, resources and recognition (Authors, 2009, 2012; Southgate & Bennett, 2014). Meritocratic logic presents a rigid and linear notion of potential which privileges fixed, developmental timeframes (Karabel, 2005; Morley & Lugg, 2009). In HE, this translates into problematic assumptions that the problems encountered by students are simply about individual deficit (Leathwood & Hey, 2009), which might be ‘fixed’ through remedial forms of student support, such as study skills. For example, the ability to write in particular ways ‘is misunderstood as a natural capacity rather than a social practice learned over time through access to certain resources, networks, epistemologies and educational provision’ (Authors, 2012, p. 193).

The rationality of remedial forms of support to compensate for individual ‘deficit’ often reinforces deficit discourses and is based on a disjointed, and inadequate, notion of time and development. Such forms of support often work to homogenise those students associated with equity and widening participation. Students judged to lack the appropriate time management skills are often considered ‘at risk’ of attrition/failing

because they do not enter, participate and complete HE in relation to hegemonic timescapes. Individualising challenges with managing time means that contextual factors are not adequately recognised and, therefore, specific strategies directed towards moving beyond individualised blame are less likely to be considered. For example, on one Australian university student support website, students are advised: ‘Remember that it’s your study and the time you spend on it is up to you’. Another institution highlights the self-disciplinary, self-help requirements of time management and associates it with ‘values’: ‘Clarify your values. What’s most important to you at this time in your life?’

‘Prioritising’ and developing the right personal ‘values’ are strong recurring undertones. This emphasises an ethics of personal responsibility that decontextualises material-structural challenges – and therefore considerations of counter-strategies. Across the sector, the lists of self-disciplinary techniques include: ‘setting goals’; creating an ‘action plan’; ‘don’t rush’; ‘use calendars/diaries’; ‘chunk’; ‘plan tasks’; ‘set deadlines’; ‘avoid time wasters’; ‘put aside material that you won’t read’; ‘have a purpose for everything you do’; ‘allow extra time for the unexpected’; ‘do creative work where you won’t be disturbed’; ‘do calls & texts, emails and social media at a regular time’; and ‘organise your workspace’. All of these strategies rely on the individual ‘having’ regular, consistent and predictable time, when many, who are carers and/or who work irregular shifts, do not. Precarious work, accommodation and responsibilities are not adequately recognised in this highly individualised, neoliberal ethics that is dominated by self-help discourse, where optional support services are mostly only able to offer advice about self-management strategies if students are not able to conform to conventional, homogenous institutional (bureaucratic and pedagogical) timeframes. Thus, instead of developing a better understanding of, and attention to, different trajectories, time and needs, students who struggle to fit study in around their essential employment and/or caring needs are problematised.

In terms of providing flexibility of time, online and blended learning delivery is often considered the structural solution. However, we are currently conducting a study that explores concerns raised by students and staff in the interviews discussed later in this paper that there are both complex challenges and benefits introduced by online/blended delivery.

There is a significant amount of sociological work on life trajectories and the myth of free choice – choice biographies – in shaping one’s future (particularly influenced by Bauman, 2000; and Beck, 1992). Importantly, writing about youth transitions, Woodman (2011) argues ‘that thinking about and shaping the future, and enjoying and coping in, the present, *are not individual pursuits but shaped collectively with significant others*’ (p. 12, emphasis added). Thus, we argue that considerations of both access and of participation need to be considered relationally – in relation to other norms, pragmatic logics and valid structures they live in (such as employment, family and healthcare) and significantly, in relation to contested discourses of time.

## **Experiences of time in HE**

In the following section we draw briefly on qualitative data extracts from our recent research project *Capability, Belonging and Equity in Higher Education: developing inclusive approaches* (2015) to illuminate points we make about the relationship between discourses of time and enduring inequities/misrecognitions in HE. The research, funded by Australia’s National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

(NCSEHE), explored the meanings and discourses associated with student ‘capability’<sup>1</sup> and the effects of these discourses on equity in HE. The mixed-methods project included a survey of 772 students, focus groups and individual interviews with students and staff. For this paper, we draw on our analysis of the data collected from individual interviews with 24 students and 12 staff to explore the connections students and staff made between constructions of capability and discourses of time. The interviews were conducted with students and teaching staff at one case study university in Australia, from Enabling (Access to Higher Education) programs and first year courses in the following subject areas: Nursing & Midwifery; Education; Design, Communication and IT; Environmental & Life Sciences; and Mathematical & Physical Sciences.

This paper focuses on the pedagogical relationships and dynamics identified by students and staff from the aforementioned study about perceptions of academic capability, where unanticipated reflections about the impact of time surfaced. Given the profundity of our findings about time from discussions with students and staff, as will be described later, another project specifically designed to study dimensions of time is currently being conducted. Therein, another important dimension of time not explored in this paper is now being studied – that of technology and the network – as part of the complex interplay with face-to-face classes in the timescapes of the contemporary university.

We learn in relation to both face-to-face others (the dimension discussed here), and through networks via technologies, many of which are mobile (for example, laptops and mobiles) and this, therefore, introduces multiple dimensions of space/time (Lash, 2001; Lash & Urry, 1994). With technology integrated into everyday life, our connection with others and other spaces (connectivity) has changed; this has introduced ‘conveniences’, connections and challenges. In relation to pace, Lash (2001) argues that technology ‘speeds-up’ experiences of time (p. 110) and Virilio (2000) explores how experiences of time increase in terms of both the intensification and the heterogeneity of activities of a shorter duration. Importantly, we are more and less connected both in time and space because of the physical/virtual interfaces that produce the increased heterogeneity of sites and s/paces that we continuously interact (or interface) with. All of this has profound effects on teachers and learners.

### *Students*

As part of our study of views of academic capability, we found that students of all ages, stages of study and backgrounds interviewed (across gender, pathway, program, grades, part-time or full-time study, Indigeneity, and whether they are first-in-family to attend university), often consider their capability in terms of being able to manage their time. If they ‘fail’ to manage their time ‘effectively’, they are considered – and they consider themselves – to be lacking diligence, self-discipline and the capacity to manage time as they presume others can. In the following extract, a female student, 18 years of age, having entered a science degree direct from school and studying full-time, describes in an interview how her relationship to time shapes her sense of being ‘capable’ as a higher education student. When asked about what being capable involves, she answered that it is about ‘diligence’ and ‘being on top of everything’, but when there is a lot on her ‘plate’, she doubts her capability:

I think it’s sort of taking the initiative and just being diligent in your studies. Like, I know that – because although it is – sometimes it is a bit of a struggle, like, being on top of everything ...

It's just that sometimes when you do have a lot on your plate it's, like, you do sort of doubt yourself a little bit.

Students who struggle to fit in study because of multiple demands on their time with work and supporting family often construct themselves through deficit narratives. Based on our research and data (Authors, 2015), we found it is unusual for these students to avoid personal or self-blame for not doing it better, although 'external' pressures with 'study-work-life' balance are a common theme for students who have multiple demands on their time and who experience financial stress. Women tend to express self-blame in terms of a lack of good organisation and men often describe themselves as being a bit 'lazy' (Burke, 2007; Burke et al., 2013, 2015). One student explained her capability in terms of being able to 'master' time management skills: 'time management and procrastination are things that I've always – are things that I haven't mastered yet'.

The idea that it is the individual who can simply learn how to 'do it better' is to overlook the social structural relations of difference in the construction of time (what appears on the surface to be an individual issue). Hence it is important not to deduce from the concept of relational place-time that time is simply a matter of individual time-management. As we have argued, it is not. Time is contextual, subjective and relational and tied to value judgments and power relations. A student's relationship to time is shaped by social and discursive positioning, as illustrated by the following male student, 36 years of age with a dependent child, studying part-time in the university's pathways program,<sup>2</sup> who talks about the ways his decisions to 'find the time' to study were formed by socio-economic positioning, which restricted his time and impacted on his sensibility about his capacity to study at university:

I think the biggest challenge is the monetary, the loss of income and the inability to pay my mortgage and things like that at the level that I'd like to. So timing-wise, financially, I wanted to wait 'til I'd paid off my mortgage to come to university but I brought it forward due to at the end of my last contract I didn't get another contract within a reasonable timeframe and made a decision that I would use my time to study and bring it forward. So on the one hand I'm excited about coming to uni and being able to study psychology and do something in a field I love. I'm also anxious about my capacity to do it, not on an intelligence level but on other levels.

Here he is referring to his 'capacity' as determined by 'time level'. A common 'solution' to time pressure is the assumption that studying online may be more effective; however, as our data show, studying online also means setting aside significant amounts of time for learning and studying. However, on-campus learning can be disengaging too. For example, the following extract describes how a female student, 18 years of age entering her degree in Occupational Therapy direct from school and studying full-time, experiences time in a lecture theatre as 'really uncomfortable'. She prefers to watch lecture material online where she has the freedom to listen, stop and rewind the lecture in order to enhance her learning.

For me I find it really hard to sit in a lecture theatre for two hours ... it's not that I have a short attention span. It's that I just get really uncomfortable, like, I don't know, I just feel, like, trapped or something and I just need to get – I need to leave. So, like, a lot of the times I go and then I just couldn't handle it so I'd have to leave early. So for me it is effective because I do it properly. I actually do listen to it and I do pause it and rewind it and listen to it if I miss it.

The data therefore suggest that a homogenous 'one size fits all' approach, as if all students are and require the same thing, is not enabling for all students. It suggests that

students are most responsive to relational approaches that aim to engage a diversity of students' experiences, backgrounds and preferences.

### *Teaching staff*

We found that teachers' expectations about students' time management, commitment and a willingness to work hard can lead to the assumption that a student has or lacks capability. Having the 'right attitude' and attending classes/accessing online systems were important in teachers' judgments about student capability. Both students and staff described being a 'good' teacher or a 'good' student as an individual issue (as attached to a set of conscious individual choice), rather than as a complex, often sub-conscious, socio-cultural construction (Burke et al., 2015).

Although many of the teaching staff talked about being flexible and adaptable when faced with exceptional circumstances, overall, they said they expect students to put their study first or reconsider whether it is possible given other demands – especially work and family. With less time and more students, both students and staff explained how changing pedagogical environments present them with significant challenges. A teaching staff member who teaches in a pathways program for younger students (under 20 years of age), explained frustration with what was perceived to be a lack of interest and attendance to both classes and tasks:

... they feel that they have this ability to get through without having to do anything. Yeah, and I'm constantly thinking about how can I make this exciting? I know that learning how to write an essay is not the most exciting thing, and because I feel that students are so – they do have such short attention spans – then they think well I could sit here ... I mean they could be interested, but they didn't have the time to do the reading. So you wonder you know what is it they expect from us, you know.

The above account suggests that perceptions of student participation in terms of time spent in class often reinforce deficit discourses of students rather than an interrogation of the ways different timescapes are reshaping pedagogical relations and expectations. The intensification of competing demands on time was a central theme emerging from the data. For example, the following senior member of staff teaching in an undergraduate program spoke about conflicting demands in detail:

There's also a great tension here, I think between our responsibilities as researchers and our responsibilities as teachers. So that tension does my head in sometimes because I've got to be all things to all people. I would love to spend more time with my students but it just can't happen because we're pushed one way and pulled another ... you needed [sic] to have some sort of self – you can't sacrifice yourself to the teaching altar. The students pick up on it. The students are quite intuitive. That's the thing that stuns me. They seem to know everything that's going on and the relationship they have with their teachers is sometimes quite profound. They pick up on all this stuff even though you don't think they are. They know. So I think the human relationship dimension in teaching is really underestimated by the powers to be.

As illustrated by the above two (very different) accounts, time has significant implications for pedagogical approaches.

Importantly, the teachers interviewed also expressed an understanding that the process of 'learning how to be a student' takes time. Although challenging because teachers themselves say they face significant (and increasing) time and associated structural constraints, student and staff data reveal that the process of becoming a

student who is both recognised as – and feels – capable at university is enabled through pedagogical strategies aiming to foster a sense of connection and belonging within HE. These relations are enabled within pedagogical spaces (virtual and physical) that are supportive and focus on developing a sense of confidence and belonging for students. A female student, aged 22 and studying Nursing full-time, having entered via a further education/training certificate, described the importance of creating a supportive environment in tutorials:

There was a lot of support in our tutorials and there was group sessions and groups that are run to help you understand what's required of you as a university student ... that really helped, the reassurance that it's okay to not get it right straight away because you're learning. That's why you're here. So I guess that helped. That's what helped me, I guess, knowing that it was okay to not get it right straight away.

Both staff and students explained the importance of having a supportive learning space that conveys the point that learning *takes time*, and that study trajectories are often different. Students 'taking time' with their study is not about lack of commitment, as it may seem on the surface and as is straightforwardly presumed. Instead, it is often about competing demands and challenges over the course of time. Re/cognition of this is critical.

## **Conclusions**

We have argued that a simple notion of 'temporality' – of time as 'merely experiential' and as distinct and different to time itself – is inadequate. We challenge this conceptualisation of temporality (ontology), as if it is distinct to 'real' (ontic) time, because it prevents recognition of the necessary contextual elements of space/place on time, as if context only matters in terms of considering temporality or experience, and as if space/place (context) is not constitutive of time and time constitutive of space/place. Instead, we highlight the importance of recognising that time does not exist apart from context and that it is not neutral; its constitutive parts are ontico-ontological. Even when people come to meet within the 'same' time-space (timescape) like HE, timeframes and timing (time) are not the same for people who are from, or are living in, different contexts. People with more of the same experiences than not, have more time in common and it is the presumption that *everyone* has exactly the same time in common that is problematic. Not everyone has the same amount of time for HE and it is this that is, most often, a critical point of exclusion for people with other obligations.

Our project data and research show that it is not, as judgments currently point to, an individual lack of diligence, time management skill, or commitment that is the (simple) issue, instead not 'having enough time' or not 'being on (HE) time' is largely a matter of difference, as well as having unequal resources that 'buy time'. This is what we need to recognise and address. We need to ask what can be done to (re)consider the way that time is currently structured in HE because it serves to reinforce taken for granted assumptions and values that reproduce inequalities. After all, it is our institutions, and the staff within it, which create and coordinate timing in HE. As much as time is highly structured and structural, as argued in this paper, time does not exist without agency (for example, decisions about timing).

The measurement of time is constructed in specific ways, many of them historical and based on traditional patterns of study and student needs. As socio-political, economic and cultural contexts change over time, and institutions and students' lives

change, with due consideration and care, the measurement and construction of time-lines that are more responsive and flexible should be attempted. Our current project, , also funded by Australia's National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) conducted in partnership with Stevenson and Clegg cited in this paper (2010; 2013), specifically explores the complexities, challenges and insights about time for students from Australia and the UK to enable further understanding.

Importantly, Moore (2004) points out that 'all education processes mobilise psychosocial repetition and this has psychological effects as subjects unconsciously repeat patterns of interaction, infused with power relations, previously experienced' (cited in Thompson & Cook, 2014, p. 2). Education operates with many subliminal assumptions and unexamined 'habits'. Analyses of the present such as the project described above, allow us 'to get behind the scenes' to make explicit what is done and how we feel in the everyday – often unknowingly – in order to see how inequities are reproduced. Thus, the above analysis assists us with finding ways to address stubborn historical limitations within HE. As Massey (1999) argues, 'a fuller recognition of difference would entertain the possibility of the existence of a multiplicity of trajectories' where difference in HE is not normatively problematised as a simple lack of organisational skills or self-discipline. Instead, moving from highly individualised problematics/ pathologies to an attention to the relational and what one can do to be inclusive, rather than to continue to insist on sameness, enables the possibility for a more diverse, culturally engaged and relevant HE.

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## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Our work is different in focus to the increasing amount of literature about the 'capability approach' inspired by Amartya Sen's work (see, for example, Gale & Molla, 2015). The work influenced by Sen is concerned with a macro-structural analysis of the outcomes, approaches, values and instrumental roles of education: 'that is, it duly recognizes that education generates economic and non-economic returns, promotes agency and supports social mobility of disadvantaged groups in society' (Gale & Molla, 2015, p. 825). Instead, our work is focused on how relational actors experience and negotiate their ways into and through higher education. In particular, it explores how 'capability' is considered by social actors within the everyday.
- <sup>2</sup> The university offers open access 'enabling' pathways programs, which are free of tuition fees, and enable students to gain a university access score to all degrees at the institution, except medicine, and to a wide variety of programs at other universities across the country.

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