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Time and Temporality in Education and Schooling: Introduction to the Symposium

Vasco d'Agnese*

Over the last couple of decades, a decisive question about the nature of educational time has emerged in scholarly debates about pedagogy. On the one hand, some scholars have argued that temporality is critical to understanding the nature of educational theories and practises, and thus merits explicit analysis. On the other hand, other scholars have concerned themselves with reformulating homogeneous, linear temporality and imagining alternative forms and flows of educational time. This debate has challenged the idea that such homogeneous, linear educational time is possible or, indeed, desirable.

Scholars who have profoundly reconceptualised temporality have described a "messianic" temporality (Lewis, 2010, 2017; Vlieghe and Lewis, 2017), worked towards "decolonizing time" (Shahjahan, 2015), described *scholè* as the time "of the regard for the world" (Masschelein, 2011; Masschelein and Simons, 2015), or conceived of educational time as *kairos* (Duarte, 2009; Papastephanou, 2014). These scholars have highlighted that alternative temporalities may well question traditional, assumed orders and identities within classroom and replace them with a space of pure possibility. They call for a temporality yet to come, a temporality where teaching and learning may nurture, in Arendtian terms, a new beginning. As Duarte puts it,

> Understood as occurring in the time of radical possibility, thinking happens in the temporality of *kairos*, when the linear flow of time, *kronos*, is interrupted by an opening that allows for something wholly different to emerge. To be free is to be that moment, a beginning, when something new is initiated. (Duarte, 2009: 251)

Today, such challenges assume even greater importance in the face of an educational time which is measurable, invested, and useful in line with the neoliberal, performance-based accountability policies which ground schooling and, indeed, much of the world. This standardised, syncronised educational temporality, with its deep reification of time and "internalization of the importance of managing time in a demonstrably efficient man-

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ner" (Walker, 2009: 284) constitute a colonising, alienating temporality that compresses and colonises education. As Shahjahan aptly notes, educational time today is "constructed as a continual efficient progress from the past into the future" and "already packaged into a particular way of knowing whereby, as a particular unit of time progresses, the student's knowledge supposedly should increase by a particular amount" (2015: 491).

Beyond this, however, it seems to me that the homogeneous, linear temporality which grounds this deeply neoliberal and bureaucratic vision of time does a poor job of capturing the temporality teachers and educators experience under late capitalism. Rather than reify time, today's teachers and educators feel that time becomes ever more elusive and paradoxical – they complain of a scarcity or absence of time while trying to escape its grip. They seek to acquire the very thing they are escaping from; thus, time in current educational practise is eerily evasive and tyrannising.

The more teachers do, the more time squezees them. Here, the point is not so much that bureaucratic time is flat, existentially meaningless, and/or Kafkaesque. I agree that, "for schooling practices, this [temporality] means a regimented formulation of education according to schedules, deadlines, performance goals, annual reports, and other prescribed timetables" (Lewis, 2010: 233). However, when analysing temporality in relation pedagogy, I do not understand temporality as an "indifferent force, a reified and abstracted entity that happens to us above and beyond our immanent control" (Lewis, 2013: 97 – emphasis in original). Indeed, it is anything but homogeneous, flat, and indifferent – on the contrary, it is deeply internalised, and this internalisation leads to the development of a coercive impulse, an urge to chase ever-changing commitments. Rather than being linear, uniform, objective, and constant (as Western notions of time claim to be), educational time, with these internalised commitments, is shifty, ambiguous, and oppressive. Neoliberal temporality is the ubiquitous backdrop against which one's actions and their utility, one's progressions and regressions, and one's accomplishments and things left undone are assessed. Such temporality is anything but linear; rather, it places both teachers and students in a relentness cycle of obligations that they can never fulfill. It contracts, disappears, looms over, and overwhelms.

For my purposes below, it might be useful to recall St. Augustine's well-known passage about the partition of time:

> Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation. (Augustine, *Confessions*: 196-197)

Reframing Augustine for my purposes here, I argue that his three dimensions of time have been radically transformed in the context of edu-

cational time: memory is reduced to a list of requirements to be fulfilled, the present becomes an endless experience of chasing remaining requirements, and the future is not an expectation but a looming threat. Likewise, following Heidegger's well-known tripartition of time, educational time does not consist of "expecting", "making present", and "retaining" (Heidegger, 1982[1927]) – instead, it is a continuous present wherein given tasks must be fulfilled.

Thus, the growing emphasis on the control of time in neoliberal educational discourse does not produce teachers who control time, but teachers who are consumed and obsessed by time. The rational control of time, signified by the division of the school day into chunks and the school year into performance evaluation blocks, does not fulfill its function of helping students develop skills and knowledge – it merely exhausts teachers and students alike. Teachers today are forced to anticipate a time that slips away from them, one which eludes any possibility of authentic and integrity-driven engagements with their students. In short, education time not only fails to fulfil its stated function, but unfolds as a radical privation of whatever can make teaching meaningful.

Teachers' experience of chasing after and being tyrannised by time dramatically dulls and narrows the creative potential of education by, for instance, removing teachers' attention from students' becoming and experience towards the endlessly repetitive and dull path of accountability and continuous assessment. Through this process, structure and time are reified and fresh insights, experiences, and ways of being in the world never have a chance to grow (or, indeed, be planted). I contend that, rather than being homogeneous and linear, educational temporality has a peculiar quality whereby time, compressed by measurement, seizes and suffocates (rather than regiments) its subjects, producing a kind of schizophrenia. The current educational system, rooted as it is in this devouring temporality, stifles any kind of effort, attentiveness, or growth on the part of teachers or students which reaches beyond the obsession for dead lines and due dates. Thus, it is worth analysing the quality of the commitments teachers are expected to fulfil.

Such commitments are as detailed as they are elusive and ambiguous. They change continuously and yet are repetitive. Their ambiguous and contradictory nature means that they fuel a teachers' feelings of alienation and inadequacy. These feelings alter teachers' professionalism, judgement, and capacity to act because these qualities come to be forged within this narrow, ambiguous, and fleeting space. Students are caught in this divided and dividing temporality – and the way it splits and compresses knowledge, emotions, ideas, and ways of being in the world – as well. Thus, the subjects of educational temporality experience a twofold alienation – they are a) divided from knowledge and curricular content (which feel oppressive and extraneous) and b) internally divided (detached from their emotions, projects, ideas, and so on). As a result, both teachers and students come to feel that their ideas, projects, and emotions are irrelevant to the

educational process. They learn to subjugate these feelings and ideas to this ubiquitous, demanding temporality and create an aura around educational settings which produces feelings of alienation and disembodiment. Indeed, such temporality and its internalisation is the very ground on which the relationship between teachers and students is built. Thus internalised, it seeps into teachers' and students' personal lives. In short, educational temporality is characterised not only by its ruthlessness but by its pervasiveness and ubiquity – combined, these factors do not allow for the emergence of alternative temporalities.

If educational temporality is compressing, then alternative, emancipatory temporalities must consider time not as a uniform continuity, but rather as a frame enabling the spreading out of time's subjects (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017). Such a spreading out is marked by both continuity and discontinuity – by cracks, fissures, and moments of epiphany. If education is to be meaningful, time must speed up, slow down, compress, and expand; it must not be homogeneous. Today's educational framework denies the existence of the diverse, multiple, simultaneous, and fragmented temporalities (e.g. in the pace of students' learning) which are essential for meaningful teaching. It is therefore the duty of teachers to make room for alternative, diverse, and complex educational temporalities through their concrete work. By allowing such temporalities to emerge, we can move education well beyond administrative routines, knowledge acquisition, and evaluation of curricular content – not because these are not important, but because they stifle teachers' and students' deep creative and existential potential. Of course, we should steer clear from advocating rupture and discontinuity *per se* because such discontinuity is not necessarily meaningful in the realm of education (Ibid.: 170). Educational temporality is linear and discontinuous, it ruptures and is binding, it leaps back and forth, returning time and again to starting points and jumping to conclusions.

If today's neoliberal educational temporality stifles education, then teachers should ask themselves what the concrete temporality which grounds their praxis moment by moment evokes in their students, and whether and to what extent such a temporality might allow for meaningful transformations to emerge in their teaching and students. In what follows I shall attempt to give a hint of such a gesture.

1. Exploring a diverse temporality for education

Now, before introducing an outlook of what such a diverse temporality could mean and imply, let me say that the issue at stake will always resist a clear, coherent, and comprehensive answer, and depends to a great extent on teachers' sensitivity and intuition. This is not a drawback – these are the means by which important parts of classroom life, including but not limited to evaluation, are understood and framed. Indeed, intuition may be important here because it is impossible to develop a clear, rigid

conceptualisation of the path towards theorising and actualising alternative temporalities, given that temporalities ground concepts and insights rather than being dependent upon them.

Here, I do not want to make an anti-methodological argument that teachers' individual sensibilities should drive pedagogy or that we should wait for moments of epiphany to happen within students. I do not wish to romantically or naïvely deny teachers' commitments to and responsibilities regarding framing curricula, learning, and relationships. Instead, I wish to highlight that there is a subtle but important difference between thinking of growth and relationships as 'objects' consciously managed by the teacher and thinking of them as essential features of learning in which teachers dwell. Such growth and relationships could be the key to creating the necessary room and time for reflection towards moments of epiphany and disclosure.

Pedagogical questions should not be limited to teachers' capability, competence, the kinds of knowledge they produce and teach, and the protocols they need to follow. They should be expanded to embrace knowledge, teaching, and curricular content as means through which students are disclosed to themselves and the world is disclosed to them. Such disclosure is not a permanent, objective revelation to be assessed; rather, it is a subtle, delicate moment in which habitual modes of understanding are displaced and something different may emerge. Although we might be eager to glimpse, look after, explore, and build on these moments, we must also admit that they are unfathomable and unpredictable – that disclosure is received rather than produced. In these moments, subjects undergo (rather than receive) epiphanies as experiences of the radical possibilities of their own growth. Pedagogical questions which focus on disclosure and epiphany do not have to be irresponsibly relativistic. The hard work lies in encouraging teachers to be receptive to the unique, qualitative unfolding of students' learning without encouraging, at the same time, naïve or senseless gestures; in disentangling qualitative appreciation of students' knowledge and experience from the yoke of continuous assessment and compliance to given protocols; in asking and determining what is worthy of teaching outside of these moments of epiphany and disclosure.

This work can only be done in spaces which inhabit alternative temporalities. Neoliberal educational temporality creates teachers who are so haunted and obsessed by deadlines and tasks that genuine interaction with students is impossible. This forecloses the possibility that the delicate, precious spaces *between* teachers, students, and the curriculum might develop into (or be cultivated as) a space of disclosure. Of course, when caught up in neoliberal temporality, such spaces are a threat – they are unpredictable, unmeasurable, unkonwable in their utility and potential to be evaluated. However, the potential of these spaces to revitalise and humanise education resides precisely in their unknown depths.

It is difficult to find practical advice or prescriptions which might help us find and/or create such spaces. This is subtle work which requires a

continuous making and remaking of the conditions of teaching. Such a relationship may produce displacement, uneasiness, and even discomfort in teachers because it entails the disawoval of mastery and the weakening of one's position of power over the classroom. In fact, teachers engaged in such work are exposed and vulnerable insofar as they call for and produce a space for exposure while being exposed themselves. We may even say that in such moments the power relationship between teachers and students is momentarily suspended. This is a reconfiguring, not an abdication of teachers' responsibility for teaching; it creates space for the acceptance of contingency. In Arendt's words, it is a space where the "startling unexpectedness" (Arendt, 1998[1958]: 177–178) which characterises the human condition may arise. This space may be fragile, and teachers' commitments to it may be inconclusive – especially in the light of challenges to such an abstract, intuition-driven approach to teaching. But this is precisely the point: it is impossible to know in advance what the worth and pay-off of such a space will be, because the space itself is grounded in possibility and surprise. Such a space might produce a special kind of knowledge which drives us to reconsider the relationships between ourselves, what is hidden from us, what we know (and how we know it), and what constantly slips away from us. This space is located outside of teachers' will and intentionality but is also the result of the teacher's choice to both provoke and hang back.

By exploring such spaces, teachers and students can take the 'leap' into the unknown that education is (Dewey, 1910: 26) and respond to a call that "comes *from* me, and yet *over* me" (Heidegger 1996[1927]: 254 – emphasis in original). It is necessary for teaching to take this leap and respond to this call in order to gain meaning beyond policies, curricula, and given practises. It must produce uncertainty. It must view curricula as both central and instrumental to teaching and learning processes; central because leaps can only be taken from peculiar engagements with subject matter, instrumental because curricula should not be aims in themselves. Rather, curricula should exist to engage students in ways which open up the kinds of temporality and spaces described above.

Exploring these spaces requires teachers to be radically open and attentive. They must be able to identify moments of disclosure with (or within) their students and capture them. This is difficult work; such moments emerge from experience as sudden, unexpected breaches in the given flux of understanding. Teachers must be aware of how they can provoke such moments in each of their students and how their students respond best to these moments. How, then, can we teach teachers to build on these fleeting, largely internal moments which are by definition exceptional, ambiguous, unpredictable, and so on? Furthermore, how can a teacher count on or capture these moments if they, the moments themselves, disrupt habitual learning discourses and divide their attentional and other resources? How can teachers ground the classroom in this way, still teach the curriculum, and engage in daily lectures and assessments in ways which respect stu-

dents', families', and society's legitimate expectations? This approach of seeking and exploring moments of disclosure and epiphany seems irreducible to any meaningful and mainstream notion of responsible teaching.

Although teachers cannot achieve or produce epiphany directly or intentionally, their behaviour effects the emergence of these moments in important ways. Teachers should reflect on which behaviours hinder or facilitate the emergence of such moments. It seems to me that disclosure grows in moments where teachers are both vigilant and working towards blurring the boundaries of disciplines and power relations. Such moments are not produced by external factors (teachers, curricula, school setting, etc.) alone – we never know which parts of the curriculum, which interactions, and which life circumstances will trigger those rare, unfathomable, and precious moments of epiphany. Rather, such moments always surprise the subject – they erupt from unknown territory and rip the texture of the subject's experience and knowledge. These moments twist and overturn our experiences. They escape easy, consistent description, and are more a matter of engagement and sensibility than rules or protocols. We are not far from truth in saying that such moments are the educational moments *par excellence*. In these moments, teachers momentarily give up their position as knowers and embrace the role of listeners who await, welcome, and sustain such moments.

Conroy describes these fleeting moments and the attitude that allows them to arise with the idea of "liminal disposition" – i.e. a disposition that requires "the willingness to take chances, the capacity to let things take their own course, the patience to hang back" (Conroy, 2004: 65). This dovetails with Todd's description of epiphanies as the "instantaneousness of becoming, without plan or intentionality", located in the "subtle gestures of everyday life" (Todd, 2014: 238). It seems to me that both Conroy's and Todd's insights point towards discursive knowledge and understanding's dependence upon a non-discursive universe, one that may display "the human, existential quality of educational settings" (Ibid.: 234), a universe which we may only allude to and never inhabit. Such a universe "requires a language of in-betweenness, or liminality, that gives full weight to the complex processes of human becoming" (Ibidem). I mention Conroy's and Todd's insights to assert that a non-discursive universe is not necessary an unconscious one; it is, rather, the universe of our daily contact with others and the world. It is a universe of the "immense multitude of immediate organic selections, rejections, welcomings, expulsions, appropriations, withdrawals, shrinkings, expansions, relations and dejections, attacks, wardings off" which ground one's experiences (Dewey, 1929[1925]: 298–299). It is "of the most minute, vibratingly delicate nature", and although we cannot 'objectively distinguish and identify' the qualities and acts which define it, they have tremendous, direct effects on our behaviour – indeed, even our most highly intellectualised operations depend upon them as a 'fringe' which guides our inferential movements (Ibidem). This means that our interactions with the world – and thus moments of disclosure and

epiphany in the classroom – are grounded in something that we cannot know or master. They are at once new and unpredictable and solid, concrete, and consistent. What they bring about and how they come about are not under our direct control. However, hearing and responding to the call that unsettles our teaching behavior and conditions, running the risk of taking an uncomfortable and even weak position, may be a step toward accomplishing the edge-situation that teaching can be.

2. Structure and stream of the symposium

Allow me to say a word of gratitude before introducing the six essays that make up the symposium. First, thank you to Enrico Corbi, the Editor of the Journal, who gave me the opportunity to stage this dialogue and the freedom to stage it as I wanted. Second, thanks to the symposium's six contributors; the depth and quality of the papers presented here exceeded our expectations.

I will begin with Carl Säfström's essay, which is a profound analysis of equality, democracy, and change in educational temporality. By contrasting two archetypes for understanding educational temporality – one Socratic and one Sophistic – Säfström gives us an insight into what a "democracy of teaching" may imply not only for education but for society at large. In Säfström's understanding, Sophist teaching relies on a logic of difference and plurality, a logic that "makes equality over difference possible". Drawing from Rancière, Butler, and Barbara Cassin, he then displays how teaching is both inside and outside time and has to be understood as "the *instantiation* of change". Precisely such an instantiation will, he argues, allow us to change rather than reproduce the present order of things.

Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski's contribution is an intense meditation over an 'untimely' yet central theme: against the backdrop of growing pessimism and anxiety, if not hopelessness in relation to the future, which connection may we stage between education, progress and hope? Or, in Vlieghe's and Zamojski's words: "Is there any sense to educate, if there is no future? […and] what it would it mean to educate beyond the scope of eternal growth, beyond the modern imaginary of progress?" They draw from Adorno, Badiou, Derrida, Arendt, Citton, and Bernard Stiegler's analysis of the rise of irrationality in the contemporary world to argue that "genuinely educational response" to the crises of our times "has to do with recalibrating how we relate to scientific knowledge production". They endorse "practices of *studying* that generate new collective forms of attention as well particular commitments to local places we want to start taking care for". Such a commitment, they argue, might generate a new and different hope for the future.

Tyson Lewis' essay is a deep and disquieting inquiry into the logic and the temporality of studying as opposed to learning. The essay begins with two images from Johann Amos Cominius' *Orbis Senualium Pictus*: a diurnal depiction of learning in a schoolhouse and a nocturnal depiction of

study. Lewis then employs Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis to show how the rhythms of study are "not connected to the daylight and to sunshine" and "therefore oddly outside the typical notions of Enlightenment. Instead, [study] focuses on and comes out of obscurity and shadows". The student is therefore "a kind of educational monster, prone to addiction and melancholy", and is "lycanthropic" and "werewolf-like". As such, the temporality of cyclic study is "more an expression of endarkenment rather than enlightenment".

Anders Schinkel provides a vivid illustration of the connection between wonder and temporality. He begins by describing how education today is structured as "a roughly linear cumulative process". Against this backdrop, he endorses wonder – which he conceives as a type of experience "in which we experience something as 'other', as puzzling or mysterious, yet as worthy of our attention for its own sake" – as a phenomenon that may interrupt such a temporality. In his analysis, wonder requires time and has a fundamentally more diverse temporality than learning. Wonder, then, connected to a "qualitative concept of education", allows for "the occurrence of transformative moments of deep awareness" – certainly a pivotal educational task. The paper concludes by reflecting on the temporality of that "dispositional wonder".

Francesco Cappa and Ivano Gamelli's contribution aims to explore the rhythmic patterns that inform educational practises and how such patterns and practises relate to agency and emancipation. Drawing from Italian scholar Riccardo Massa, they analyse educational time, space, and body and the relationships among them. They aptly argue that transformations in praxis are engendered by ruptures, interruptions, and discontinuity in these relationships, and that it is important to reflect on the connection between personal and institutional rhythms and temporalities when considering these relationships.

Vittoria Colla's contribution is a careful analysis of time management in parent-child homework interactions and its moral implications for child rearing. Colla notes that, despite the large amount of research that has been done on family life and time management, comparatively little research has focussed on time management "as a joint, interactive accomplishment of family members as well as one of the crucial cultural, and even moral, dimensions children are socialized to". Colla focuses on parent-assisted homework and argues that "parent-child conversations about time management constitute a *locus* where moral stances and beliefs are displayed", and that "by temporally ordering children's activities, parents convey the culture-specific hierarchy that organizes everyday activities according to a moral order". It is precisely by taking part in such ordinary interactions that children "are socialized to morally appropriate ways of using time and planning activities".

In short, the essays collected in this symposium analyse questions related to educational time from a range of perspectives and with different ends in view. Each stages and explores different temporalities which are themselves

grounded in different pedagogical practises. In staging this discussion, we hope that the problems and questions left by the present symposium will fuel further studies of what may be a powerful lens for understanding education and pedagogy and the unpredictable space of pure possibility.

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