

**Marking time, making methods: Temporality and untimely dilemmas in sociology of youth and educational change**

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## Marking time, making methods: Temporality and untimely dilemmas in the sociology of youth and educational change<sup>1</sup>

Time is a central aspect of educational practice and research. In lessons and lectures, developmental milestones, curriculum design and transition points, time organises educational experiences and structures institutional arrangements. This extends to conceptions of growing up and processes of subjectivity, of becoming someone during or despite schooling. Sociological studies of education are themselves framed by time, in both the topics and problems investigated and in the field's diverse methodological and interpretive approaches. This is true not only of research projects that make time an overt theme or category – such as time series data, longitudinal and tracking studies or historically-framed inquiries: the signature of time is on even those studies that do not directly announce time as their focus. At a straightforward level, all research takes place in and over time, research methods and ways of knowing and theorising emerge and take hold in particular times and places and, as I argue in this article, research projects mobilise different and cross-cutting temporal registers. Moreover, sociology of education is not isolated from the 'temporal turn' across the social sciences, which is associated with a range of approaches that privilege time as an object of analysis, allow for understanding of the social in greater time perspective and interrogate the presumed linearity of temporal processes (Savage 2010; Thomson and 2015). Temporality is engaged here not as a fancier word for time, but as signifying the messy, moving relations between past, present and future (Harootunian 2007; Lorenz and Bevernage 2013).

The predominant temporal orientation of much contemporary educational discourse is towards the future. Policy reforms and social justice agendas all look to better things to come, associated political rhetoric tells us that we are perpetually 'moving forward', going beyond present stalemates, that whatever times we are in are inevitably New Times, student pathways and identities unfold into the future, and the language of aspirations is fuelled by and reinscribes longstanding narratives of education as a modernist project dedicated to social and individual improvement and progress. To not hold out these possibilities for education appears nihilistic and somewhat pointless – so why question this? The philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (Grosz 2010) has observed that feminist scholarship habitually looks to the past or the present and has not been sufficiently attuned to the future or to grappling with 'the force of temporality' (p. 51). She proposes that a key question for feminism today 'as it faces a changing future, as it directs itself to the question of change, should be about what is untimely, what is "out of its time"' (p. 48). It is tempting to put forward the inverse case for education – that it has been so pre-occupied with the present-future that it has not been sufficiently attuned to the past and past-present relations. Such a proposition would be supported by the declining institutional provision of history of education courses (Fraser 2015) and the scant

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2 scholarly and policy recognition of how the past leaves a mark on the educational present, despite  
3 seeking to break from the determinations of that past. Yet, this simple corollary is only part of the  
4 argument and, indeed, expressed this way, serves to position the past as the antithesis of the future  
5 and vice versa, and as such overlooks the play of intersecting temporalities.  
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9 The challenge I take from Grosz is how to address – empirically and conceptually – the ‘force of  
10 temporality’ and the untimely in sociological studies of education, a field of theory, research and  
11 policy consumed with questions of change. To begin this task, I touch lightly on debates in the  
12 philosophy of history, explaining what I see as their relevance for understanding time in qualitative  
13 educational research and methodologies. In doing so, I point to some of the ways in which renewed  
14 attention to time and temporalities invites a fresh look at the affordances of working across and in  
15 between historical and sociological imaginations (Thomson 2014).  
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21 The reference point for this discussion is longitudinal approaches to researching youth identities and  
22 schooling, a topic that brings questions of change, continuity and generation to the fore. The  
23 specific focus is a longitudinal and cross-generational study of secondary school students and their  
24 parents, *Making Futures* (2016), in which the experience and movement of time have been central  
25 to the project design and rationale. First, I sketch the socio-historical contexts in which conceptual  
26 and empirical concerns with time and temporality have arisen, focussing on notions of multiple and  
27 non-linear temporalities, and the relevance of these issues for sociological research in education.  
28 Second, the concerns of the *Making Futures* project are located in reference to related scholarship  
29 on youth and social change as part of giving an account of its motivations and theoretical interests,  
30 noting how the ‘force of temporalities’ is being explored – across generational, biographical and  
31 historical time: and I identify two fruitful approaches to analysing temporalities in qualitative  
32 research. Third, I illustrate a further way in which historical and generational time is being engaged,  
33 via comparison of the methodological and thematic concerns of the *Making Futures* project with  
34 those guiding an earlier longitudinal study of secondary school students (McLeod and Yates 2006):  
35 the examples briefly discussed concern gender and sexuality. One interest in revisiting and  
36 comparing related studies is to see what this reveals about changes in educational contexts and  
37 gender relations. A second interest is in tracing the methods and concepts that shape and animate  
38 research projects, seeing these as also registers of social and historical change, and of the shifting  
39 pre-occupations of sociological studies of education. As Mike Savage has argued ‘There is no more  
40 telling way of understanding historical change than by focussing on the methods and practices of  
41 social scientists themselves’ (Savage, 2010, p.xii – see too, pp.237-249): these arguments are  
42 returned to in the final section of this article.  
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54 Critical attention to time in the sociology of education can be taken up in various ways, such as time  
55 in everyday experiences, as historical or generational perspectives, and in terms of surfacing time as  
56 an otherwise silent backdrop and organiser of structures and subjectivities. However, the overall  
57 argument here is that more explicit attention is also needed to *temporal* processes and registers, to  
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2 how these are manifest and mobilised in particular types of research methodologies and questions.  
3 Why does this matter? It matters because the vision and scope of sociology of education is not –  
4 and should not be – only oriented to the present; it speaks to and anticipates a future, it calls forth,  
5 emerges from and gestures to a past. Moreover, sociology of education's hallmark preoccupations  
6 with processes of change and continuity express fundamental historical and temporal questions –  
7 change from what? continuities with what? To not explicitly address temporality and historicity  
8 risks bland and blanket statements about change from the good or bad old days or, equally empty  
9 optimism or pessimism about the future.  
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14 A Foucauldian legacy looms large in the sociology of education (Ball 2013; McLeod 2009; Baker  
15 and Heyning 2004), creating an opening to explore questions of time and history, with histories of  
16 the present central to Foucault's oeuvre. Despite this, and with notable exceptions of course (e.g.  
17 Popkewitz and Brennan 1998; Tamboukou 2003), these approaches tend to have been  
18 'sociologised' in educational research, such that the past is used in a contextual way to critically  
19 analyse the present (Baker 2007; McLeod and Wright 2012): governmentality, for example, has  
20 largely become a study of the present. The problematisation of past-present relations, which  
21 Foucault's work called for, rightly falls within the remit of sociology of education, and a more  
22 thorough-going engagement with temporality might also be helpful in advancing such work. Some  
23 might still object that sociology of education is about the present, so what's the fuss. Yet, as C.  
24 Wright Mills (Mills 1959, 145) famously observed, 'Every social science – or better, every well  
25 considered social study – requires an historical scope of conception and a full use of historical  
26 material'. Further, the present does not stand apart from the past or the future, and one purpose of  
27 this article is to canvass approaches and conceptual resources for exploring empirically and  
28 methodologically the different dimensions of temporality in sociological studies of education. This  
29 leads me to ask what counts as historical sociology in educational research in the contemporary era.  
30 I call for work that not only examines large-scale changes over time – the classic remit of historical  
31 sociology (Skocpol 1984; Szokolaczai 2000; Dean 1994) – but also for a shaking up and widening  
32 of that rubric to encompass critical attention to the effects of multiple temporalities and exploration  
33 of novel intersections between sociological and historical imaginations. While it is beyond the  
34 scope of this article to fully develop the case for a renewal of historical sociology in education, it  
35 nevertheless seeks to open up that discussion and to do so in part by offering an example of how  
36 this question is being pursued in relation to qualitative longitudinal studies of youth identity and  
37 schooling. I now turn to note some of the contemporary context in which temporality has come  
38 under scrutiny.  
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### 51 52 **A plane of temporalities**

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54 The heralding of a temporal turn jostles with the affective, material and spatial turns, and stands in  
55 defiance to what was deconstructed by Frederic Jameson in 2003 as the 'end of temporality'.  
56 Jameson was in part developing a critique of dualistic thinking in relation to time and space, and the  
57 concomitant mapping of that dualism onto historical epochs of modernity and postmodernity, with  
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2 the moderns seen as ‘obsessed with the secret of time, the postmoderns with that of space’ (Jameson  
3 2003, 697). Describing the explosion of interest in space during the 1990s, Jameson illustrates how  
4 space and temporality, even when understood as dominant motifs for an era, are not neatly  
5 separable, sequential or alternating on a pendulum. More recently, renewed interest in temporality  
6 across the social sciences reflects the impact of a raft of massive social changes upon research  
7 imaginaries and methodologies. The speeding up and compression of time/space associated with  
8 digital communication, including the explosion of digital data and changes in research practices and  
9 possibilities (Savage and Burrows 2007; Tinati et al. 2014), the intensification of work time for  
10 some and precarious time for others under neoliberalism, and rapid global movements of capital,  
11 expertise and people – these are all part of the context in which the lived experience of time is  
12 changing.  
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20 Dramatic ecological transformations in the era of the anthropocene are also reshaping the  
21 experience of time and how temporalities are encountered and understood. As the postcolonial  
22 historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, the crisis of climate change not only signals that the ‘wall  
23 between human and natural history has been breached’ (Chakrabarty 2009, 221), but it has also  
24 ‘precipitated a sense of the present that disconnects the future from the past by putting such a future  
25 beyond the grasp of historical sensibility’ (Chakrabarty 2009,197).<sup>2</sup> Other historians link  
26 disruptions to the linearity of past, present and future with the impact of socio-political events.  
27 Harootunian (Harootunian 2007), for example, refers to the new ‘temporal tectonics’ following,  
28 variously the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the cold war, post 9/11 wars and the rise of  
29 fundamentalism, which have led, he argues, to the ‘withdrawal of a foreseeable future as a  
30 perspective for figuring the aspirations of the present’ (p.473), such that the ‘future has been  
31 emptied of its promise of progress’ (p.474). Harootunian’s formulation of ‘always colliding  
32 temporalities’ is pertinent here and underscores not only how the past leaves its mark on the  
33 present, or the future inheres in the present, but also the intersecting, unpredictable configurations  
34 of present, past and future. Related to this, metaphors abound for capturing the past in the present –  
35 spectres, ghosts, hauntings, traces, palimpsests – and these afford valuable insight for educational  
36 research, for the reasons noted above concerning a relentless future focus and neglected recognition  
37 of how the historical past and memory shape the educational present. The notion of colliding  
38 temporalities, however, introduces other dimensions, ones that also call for research approaches that  
39 can address these dynamics empirically – as I elaborate below.  
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50 Across many spheres of life, then, profound changes are underway that bring the experience of time  
51 and temporalities into sharp relief. This includes attention to different modalities and scales of time,  
52 to unsettling the sequencing and alignment of time periods, such as modernity and progress, and the  
53 intersection of ‘multiple temporalities’ (Jordheim 2014): for example, the deep time of geological  
54 movements, the time periodization and scope of macro and micro histories (Armitage 2015), digital  
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58 <sup>2</sup> More simply, such transformations have produced ‘anxieties around futures that we cannot visualise’ (Chakrabarty  
59 2009, p. 211)  
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2 time, the big time of epochal and generational change and the little time of everyday life. The  
3 philosopher of history, Helge Jordheim conceives these ‘multiple temporalities’ not as discrete  
4 layers – such as in geological formations – with the rhythms of daily life on top, and the slow  
5 change of the environment on the bottom (Jordheim 2014, 508). Rather he suggests that ‘it might be  
6 more useful to imagine different temporalities existing in a plane, as parallel lines, paths, tracks, or  
7 courses, zigzagging, sometimes touching or even crossing one another, but all equally visible,  
8 tangible, and with direct consequences for our lives’ (Jordheim 2014, 508). Jordheim employs the  
9 term ‘temporal regimes’ to characterize ‘the plurality of times inherent in the plurality of social  
10 phenomena’ (2014, 509) and, drawing out the regulatory aspects of the phrase, ‘regimes’, adds that  
11 ‘time is also a question of power, the power to control movements, to decide about beginnings and  
12 endings, to set the pace, to give the rhythm. In other words, how to organize time, by means of  
13 calendars, clocks, narratives, encyclopedias, social media, mobile phones, and so on is intrinsically  
14 linked to questions of power and government’ (2014, 510).

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22 These are suggestive formulations for researching time and education, and so too is the emphasis on  
23 such ‘regimes’ as regulatory, as realized for example in grade progression or the normative  
24 developmental and transition expectations of schooling. In the following section, I engage these  
25 approaches to understanding temporality – not as linear relations between past, present and future,  
26 but as multiple and intersecting temporal regimes – in relation to two research projects that have  
27 employed qualitative and longitudinal methodologies to explore young people’s experience and  
28 identities in interaction with secondary schooling, *Making Futures* and *The 12 to 18 Project*. There  
29 has been a flourishing of studies which have both qualitative and longitudinal dimensions,  
30 suggesting the influence or zeitgeist of a particular research sensibility that is oriented to questions  
31 of change and temporality in an historical period self-consciously and reflexively marked by  
32 disruption, de-traditionalisation and by widespread social and theoretical attention to the politics of  
33 identity (McLeod and Thomson 2009); Harootunian 2007). These two projects are thus located  
34 within a wider field of qualitative longitudinal research, much of it addressing identities and  
35 experiences over the life course ((Neale, Henwood, and Holland 2012; Saldana 2003). Within the  
36 sociology of youth and education a robust scholarship draws on these methods, and there is an  
37 accompanying well-developed body of methodological discussion (Henderson et al. 2007; Dwyer  
38 and Wyn 2001; Andres and Wyn 2010; R Thomson 2009; McLeod and Yates 1997; Woodman and  
39 Wyn 2015).

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49 Of particular relevance here is Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody’s (Walkerdine,  
50 Lucey, and Melody 2001) longitudinal study of a group of girls from ages six to 21, which  
51 employed a psycho-social lens to examine the intersections of class and gender in shaping  
52 subjectivities and orientations to self, other and futures. This did not begin as a longitudinal study  
53 and the girls’ growing up was not followed in regular waves of contact. Rather, the researchers’  
54 first contact began with a discrete research project when the girls were six. The girls were contacted  
55 again at age 16 and a more in-depth study undertaken when they were 21, at which time the  
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2 researchers ‘gleaned’ their childhood histories from narrative interviews and video diaries with the  
3 young women and their families (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001,12). This revisiting of an  
4 earlier project or ‘dataset’ with a view to initiating a longitudinal analysis points not only to a  
5 creative design but also to the potent ways in which multiple temporalities are engaged – through  
6 memory, longing and desire, biographical histories enacted in family dynamics in the present, and  
7 the social and classed location of these narratives over time and in particular economic and political  
8 circumstances. Reflecting a poststructural focus on discourse (a motif in much feminist and cultural  
9 studies research at that time), they attended to the ‘discursive constitution’ of these young women  
10 and their families as subjects ‘in the new economy, yet importantly also emphasised the ways in  
11 which these processes worked through ‘desires, anxieties and defences’ (Walkerdine, Lucey, and  
12 Melody 2001, 83)).  
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19 Drawing out similar themes, notably the psychic and social dimensions of gendered identity, Harriet  
20 Bjerrum Nielsen and Monica Rudberg (Bjerrum Nielsen and Rudberg 1994) combined a  
21 longitudinal and cross-generational design to compare how three generations of Norwegian women  
22 – grandmothers, born between 1910-1927; mothers born between 1940-1948; and daughters born in  
23 1971-72 – navigated relationships, futures, and education. They too engaged and interrogated the  
24 intersection of psychological and sociological insights, against a backdrop of transformations in  
25 Norwegian society, including the shift away from a predominantly rural and agricultural economy.  
26 Again, registering a frustration with the limits of ‘discourse analysis’, Nielsen and Rudberg ask  
27 ‘How does cultural discourse “turn into” the psychological projects and desires of individual boys  
28 and girls?’ (Nielsen and Rudberg 1994, 2). The respective designs of these two earlier studies drew  
29 out different aspects of longitudinality and temporal depth, one grasping it largely via retrospective  
30 accounts, memory and circumstances in the present, and the other via generational comparison to  
31 chart large-scale historical and social shifts alongside family dynamics and gendered identity. They  
32 both illustrated the analytic value of working across and with different lenses – simply expressed,  
33 sociological and psychological – to understand the complexities of identity formation over time and  
34 in specific social and cultural settings. The arguments and concerns of these studies echoed in the  
35 background of the two projects I discuss here, where questions of gender, memory and generation  
36 are engaged, but with some different emphases on generational time (including family, study  
37 cohort, and shifts in methodological and theoretical interest) and with an accent on grappling with  
38 the intersections of historical and sociological imaginaries.  
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### 49 **Making futures, making methods**

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52 A key argument here is that questions of temporality pertain to how research is done, not only to  
53 what is researched or to the themes and topics explored. In other words, temporality enters into  
54 research designs, practices and imaginaries, and moreover, research methodologies mobilise  
55 intersecting temporalities, as Rachel Thomson and I have argued elsewhere (McLeod and Thomson  
56 2009). For example, oral and life histories while oriented towards the past are also about how the  
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2 past is remembered and remade in the present; ethnographic studies are putatively concerned with  
3 phenomena as they are happening, which end up being frozen in (research) time, representing a  
4 time that has passed yet more or less masquerades as the present. Longitudinal research is, by the  
5 nature of its design, typically future oriented – following people, events, communities,  
6 relationships, over time and into the future, waiting and watching a future unfold. Questions about  
7 transitions and pathways are recurring ones in both youth studies and the sociology of education,  
8 and longitudinal projects offer unique insights into those experiences – over time, embodied and  
9 situated (Woodman and Wyn 2015). Further, and regardless of the methodological design, the  
10 future is a strong theme, implicitly and explicitly, in policy and research imaginaries in the  
11 sociology of youth and educational change: schools are called upon to interrupt, or prevent, or  
12 enable certain pathways and outcomes, for example. How else might temporalities be engaged to  
13 understand questions of educational change and youthful subjectivities? The projects discussed  
14 below, individually and in juxtaposition, are one illustration of engaging with temporality to address  
15 these matters.  
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24 *Making Futures: Youth identity, generational change and education*<sup>3</sup> (Making Futures 2016) is a  
25 qualitative, longitudinal study of young people as they move through the final three years of  
26 secondary school and into the world beyond, and it seeks to address temporality in a number of  
27 ways. On one level, the passage of students as they go through schooling is self-evidently a  
28 movement across time, of growing up, of anticipating life and work after school, of following a  
29 sequential pathway – even when people fall off that path, it governs expectations. The study,  
30 however, is also designed to address intersecting temporalities through combining research  
31 strategies and narratives that focus across time on memory and life histories and future dreams, on  
32 retrospective and prospective views, all criss-crossed with stories about everyday experiences.  
33 Based in three contrasting regions and school communities in Australia, it investigates the diverse  
34 ways in which young people at these schools navigate their educational, social and familial worlds,  
35 imagine their futures, remember their pasts, and how social and personal values form in interaction  
36 with schooling, families and place. Themes examined include everyday ethics such as perceptions  
37 of social differences, inequalities and social justice, gender and sexuality, immigration, citizenship,  
38 place and identity, religion: overlaying these are concerns with memory, desire and education, and  
39 the material and affective cultures and memories of school sites.  
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48 In this respect, the project addresses some classic concerns of sociology of education – processes of  
49 social differentiation, schooling and forms of subjectivity, dispositions (habitus) and social field,  
50 structural and identity categories of difference. In addition to school and place contrasts, there are  
51 two other comparative and temporal perspectives. It explores how young people, living in earlier  
52 times and now, think about such matters over time – over biographical time and across generational  
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57 <sup>3</sup> This project is supported by a program of work funded by an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship 'Youth  
58 identity and educational change in Australia since 1950: Digital archiving, re-using qualitative data and histories of the  
59 present' FT 110100646, J. McLeod.  
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2 time. As part of these generational juxtapositions, parents are interviewed separately about their  
3 own educational experiences and hopes for their children, building a cross-generational perspective  
4 and bringing questions of memory and longing into the picture – a collision between the past and  
5 the future. A second point of comparison is consideration of young people’s views and values today  
6 in light of questions and approaches informing an earlier longitudinal qualitative study of a  
7 generation of young people and schooling conducted during the 1990s/2000s by myself and Lyn  
8 Yates (McLeod and Yates 2006) – engaging comparative perspectives and historical time – and this  
9 aspect is discussed in the final section. Comparison of projects to elicit generational comparison, in  
10 part to more sharply understand the specificity of a particular generational cohort is gaining  
11 scholarly attention. Woodman and Wyn’s (Woodman and Wyn 2015) account of two waves and  
12 cohorts (both studied longitudinally) in the Australian mixed methods *Life Patterns Project* is a  
13 case in point; this comprises a cohort first interviewed at the end of their schooling in 1991 and a  
14 second cohort recruited in the mid 2000s, finishing school in 2006. Here changing social contexts,  
15 and young people’s transitions, relationships and pathways post-schooling are the focus, with the  
16 analysis anchored in sociological debates and approaches.  
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25 Juggling historical, generational and socio-spatial comparisons presents a number of different  
26 challenges, from practical issues of data management to decisions about the units of analysis and  
27 axes of interpretation – mixing cross-school comparisons, generational comparisons and  
28 biographical case-study narratives (Thomson 2007). There are risks too, in inadvertently making  
29 glib ‘generational generalisations’, for example, in seeking out or even caricaturing apparent  
30 generational differences, or in asserting the intersections and collisions of temporality yet losing  
31 focus on the specificity of temporal regimes, or on how these collisions actually happen empirically  
32 and in particular times and places. A key challenge of the *Making Futures* study is how to  
33 analytically combine a focus on memory, the collective and biographical inheritances of the past  
34 and recent past – held by children and their parents – and a focus on future thinking, and the  
35 possibilities for making the self in the present and into the future. This requires a double focus on  
36 processes of ‘inheritance’ and ‘invention’, in which the latter does not collapse into historical  
37 determinism, without heed for change, and the former does not lead into freedoms of self-making,  
38 without attention to persistent continuities. A further dilemma is precisely navigating temporal  
39 dualisms – of the past leading to the present, of then and now, of directional time moving forward  
40 into the future and the nuances and multiplicities of little time in the time/space of the present. That  
41 is, it is one thing to theorise the collisions of multiple temporalities across a plane, and quite another  
42 to realise these ideas methodologically and in relation to particular qualitative projects.  
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53 Here I elaborate two approaches that are proving helpful for navigating such challenges and  
54 interpreting connections, disconnections and entanglements of biographical (lived), generational  
55 and historical time in the *Making Futures* longitudinal project. Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen argues  
56 (Bjerrum Nielsen 2016) that dualisms are often generated in research imaginaries in relation to  
57 temporality and space, giving the example of the difference between an historical and an  
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1 anthropological imaginary. The latter looks to the detail and texture of the ethnographic present,  
2 with the risk of losing sight of movement and change, while the former looks to change over time,  
3 potentially overlooking the minutiae and everyday ways in which continuities are achieved and  
4 sustained. Qualitative longitudinal approaches afford a different imaginary, she suggests, allowing  
5 one to grasp the interplay between space and time, to see ‘times arrow’ – that is linear time going  
6 forward – as well as the space of the present. Her question is ‘How are the processes of becoming in  
7 the moment of the present connected to historically and biographically accumulated experience and  
8 to expectations of the future?’ (2016, 4); a question that resonates with the concerns of the *Making*  
9 *Futures* project. In answering this question, Bjerrum Nielsen draws on the notion inspired by  
10 psychoanalysis of “temporal modes of becoming” (2016, 8) and proposes that ‘linear and non-  
11 linear concepts of time are not alternatives but co-constitutive of subject formation’. Constancies in  
12 subjectivity, for example, can exist alongside a reconfiguring of subjectivity in relation to changing  
13 times and context. She concludes: ‘If you throw out the arrow of time you also throw out vital  
14 aspects of subjectivity, and are left with actions of the present in a moving cultural space. If you  
15 throw out the subject you lose the arrow of time and are left with endless processes of  
16 resignification’ (2016, 9).

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27 A complementary approach, but one that gives more emphasis to a plane of temporal intersections  
28 in the volatility of the present, is suggested by Reinhart Koselleck’s (Koselleck 2004, 255-75)  
29 categories of ‘*space of experience*’ and ‘*horizon of expectation*’. ‘The space of experience allows  
30 one to account for the assimilation of the past into the present ... [and] Horizon of expectation  
31 reveals the way of thinking about the future’ (Boym 2001, 10; see too Pickering 2004). These  
32 categories thus offer a way into analysing the dynamic tension between biographical and  
33 generational processes of inheritance/memory and the imagination and invention of futures.  
34 According to Koselleck (Koselleck 2004, 259), ‘experience is present past, whose events have been  
35 incorporated and could be remembered’; it includes ‘rational reworking [of the past] together with  
36 unconscious modes of conduct which do not have to be present in awareness’; while expectation ‘is  
37 the future made present, it directs itself to the not-yet to the non-experienced, to that which is to be  
38 revealed’; it encompasses ‘Hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis, receptive  
39 display and curiosity’. The space of experience and the horizon of expectation both share a  
40 ‘present-centeredness’, yet they are not symmetrical concepts, rather they are of ‘different orders’  
41 (Koselleck 2004, 259). This is because the ‘[p]ast and future never coincide’ (260) and moreover it  
42 is the ‘tension between experience and expectation which, in ever-changing patterns, brings new  
43 resolutions and through this generates historical time’ (262). Koselleck develops an analysis of  
44 these categories through an account of historical and social movements, and the ‘temporality of  
45 history’ (2009, 259). Of particular relevance here is his observation that these categories are  
46 ‘suitable for detecting historical time in empirical projects’ (Koselleck 2004, 258). Returning to the  
47 earlier account of the collision of temporalities, and of multiple temporalities criss-crossing on a  
48 plane, Koselleck’s categories sharpen focus on the contingency and nature of these collisions as  
49 they are expressed in biographical and generational narratives. That is, they offer a framework for  
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2 identifying intersecting temporalities in the present, and for (provisionally) dis-entangling  
3 multiplicity – analytically, empirically and in the historical specificity of time and place. This  
4 pertains to participants in qualitative educational research as well as to research imaginaries and  
5 practices, as I now turn discuss in relation to two qualitative longitudinal research projects.  
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### 8 9 **The shifting times of qualitative longitudinal research**

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11 One risk of qualitative longitudinal research is to narrow the lens of temporality to the passage of  
12 time and the collision of temporalities over the duration and within the scale of a particular project.  
13 Another important angle is the historical time in which the study itself is conducted and associated  
14 with this, yet often neglected, is comparison of research approaches and concerns across time – that  
15 is, historical comparison of social science methods and questions. The *Making Futures* study was  
16 designed in part to have some echoes with an earlier longitudinal study of secondary school  
17 students, *The 12 to 18 Project*, that Lyn Yates and I undertook, beginning in the mid 1990s and  
18 finishing in the early 2000s (McLeod and Yates 2006). That study followed 26 students in four  
19 contrasting schools from the end of primary school to the first year after leaving school. Twice a  
20 year students were interviewed individually, and in the earlier years in friendship groups, with  
21 interviews video and audio recorded. Key themes across the study were young people's views on  
22 gender, relationship with schooling, and future thinking, and these were explored across  
23 biographical case studies (following an individual's interview narratives over the 8 years); in  
24 grade/age cohorts (for example, Year 9 students' views on race and racism in Australia); and  
25 according to cross-school comparisons (how school cultures were evident and in interaction with  
26 subjectivities). A central interpretive challenge was to understand patterns and processes of change  
27 and continuity over time – biographically, collectively and socially.  
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31 In terms of gender, for example, there was a ready association of different types of behaviour with  
32 girls or with boys. Girls were seen as being concerned with appearance, and boys as 'naturally'  
33 mucking around. Girls' friendships are built around talk; boys' around activities. For the boys,  
34 social changes of recent decades were most reflected when they expressed uncertainty or anxiety  
35 about what their future family life might look like. Their patterns of making choices and proceeding  
36 through school were strongly marked by differences in their family norms and experiences and  
37 socio-economic background, and reflect in process, if not in outcomes, patterns that are not so  
38 different from their own fathers. They seem less marked by a sense that these were changed times,  
39 with different possibilities and problems in relation to paid work as well as to family life. Both girls  
40 and boys were quick to tell us that boys and girls had 'equal opportunities', and to identify practices  
41 or ideas that they thought were sexist. We found that most students were very conversant with this  
42 language, could easily label comments as 'sexist', and they knew about sexual harassment and  
43 gender equality. All students assumed a future where women will work in some way, and the young  
44 women all imagine having a period of work and independence before committing to permanent  
45 relationships or having children. However, masculinity for boys tended to be seen as just innate and  
46 not influenced by social norms and changes. Femininity, in contrast, was seen as open to change  
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2 and as needing to undergo some re-shaping to respond to a different social and economic period.  
3 For boys, there was less recognition that the education and work choices they were making might  
4 be a problem, or needed attention, or might be able to be changed, as well as less evidence of their  
5 relating to changes when it came to their sense of their pathways and jobs.  
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9 There has been a wave of interest in revisiting and re-analysing approaches and data from earlier  
10 qualitative studies (fieldwork notes, transcripts, images, interview protocols, and so forth) as well as  
11 the methodological and conceptual framing of particular studies. Critical reflections on this work  
12 have emphasized methodological and interpretive challenges in contextualizing and making  
13 meaning from research material that was collected at one time by a group of researchers, and then  
14 looked at again in another time and place by a new group of researchers: matters of ethics, consent  
15 and context figure prominently (Corti & Thompson 2003; Mauthner *et al* 1998; Timescapes  
16 2011). Two broad trends can be identified in these discussions: one debates ethical and  
17 methodological risks, often linking to wider trends in data sharing (risks of security, privacy and  
18 ownership) and knowledge-building practices (Bishop 2009; Broom *et al* 2009). A second strand,  
19 while not indifferent to these debates, looks to re-analysis of qualitative data for their potential as  
20 sources to aid historical study, and for fostering creative disciplinary engagements between  
21 historical and sociological research (McLeod and Thomsom 2009; Moore 2007; Savage 2005).  
22 The type of re-analysis I am proposing here falls into this latter category, juxtaposing two related  
23 sociological studies to highlight temporalities of research time and historical changes via attention  
24 to research practices and methods.  
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34 In commencing a new qualitative longitudinal study in 2015, there were interests in charting how  
35 schooling and student identities had changed in the intervening period, notably how gendered  
36 subjectivities and relations had or had not changed, and the kind of identity and future making  
37 practices that were now either prominent or receding. The interests were partly contextual – what's  
38 changed, what has not, what are the new contexts, the current taken-for-granted discourses in  
39 education policy and practice, how do young people think about the future, gender, social and  
40 political values, now compared to almost two decades ago. However, the type of cross-temporal  
41 comparative analysis I am trying to develop here is not only to build a straightforward empirical  
42 account or historical check-list of gender 'then and now'. For one thing, being in the first phase of  
43 *Making Futures* it is too preliminary to be making authoritative comparisons and connections.  
44 Rather, it seeks also to juxtapose what we as researchers notice about what young people do and do  
45 not talk about in relation to 'gender', to examine the means and modes of knowing and how what  
46 we do and do not notice as significant or trivial is shaped by historical circumstances and  
47 theoretical/political agendas, not only analytic acuity! The interests are thus to do with research  
48 practices and methods – how projects are framed, the type of questions posed and theoretical  
49 approaches mobilised, then and now, and in relation to two qualitative longitudinal studies with  
50 some shared thematic interests. This engaged another dimension of temporality and historical  
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2 change, not only the temporal regimes of different methodologies but also the historical time and  
3 historicity of research methods themselves.  
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6 The generational shift that has taken place in the time between *The 12 to 18 Project* and *Making*  
7 *Futures* is not only evident in the changing social contexts of schooling, but also in new theoretical  
8 and methodological hot spots. These reflect broader cultural, techno-practical and epistemic  
9 changes shaping how research is done, imagined and enacted: digital communications and digital  
10 data, renewed attention to temporalities in a moment of time/space compression, arguably giving  
11 rise to a strong interest in memory, transformed technologies for doing, recording, capturing and  
12 disseminating research – all this has radically changed since Lyn Yates and I first travelled to  
13 schools with our large video cameras that needed a tripod, our boxes of VHS tapes and our cassette  
14 recorders with big external microphones. Ways of seeing and framing questions have also changed.  
15 Much of the earlier methods in *The 12 to 18 Project*, were focussed on questions of ‘identity’,  
16 interpersonal relations, inequalities, and interactions between subjectivities and schooling. We  
17 approached gender as a process and practice of becoming, yet looking back we also deployed it as  
18 an organising category, even though it was understood, to be sure, as a category to be taken apart,  
19 as psycho-social, historically situated and so forth. Our approach was unmistakably in conversation  
20 with and marked by debates about gender equity and the sociology of education at that time, with a  
21 focus on the politics of representation and participation, equality and difference debates, concerns  
22 about how girls and boys anticipated family life, looking for commonalities or differences in  
23 perceptions within and across schools, and then within gender groups. This recalls the challenge  
24 discussed above of attending to both constancies and reconfiguring of gendered subjectivities in  
25 relation to shifting historical contexts, as elaborated by Bjerrum Nielson (Bjerrum Nielsen 2016).  
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28 By the time the *Making Futures* study was commencing, issues of gender difference, subjectivity  
29 and inequality had not entirely disappeared from scholarly, educational and policy discourse, yet  
30 they had receded somewhat and questions in the air were more ontological, concerned with the  
31 affective, material, and place-based (e.g. Walkerdine 2013). *Making Futures*, for example, gives  
32 attention to place and place memory, temporalities, and combines narrative interviews with  
33 historical study of the school environment and wider community. Issues to do with sexuality and  
34 gender in schooling have changed so radically that in some respects they are barely recognisable in  
35 the same way: policy agendas of ‘gender equity’ and the politics of participation no longer seem to  
36 have purchase as official or informal discourses, while issues of sexuality, respectful relationships,  
37 violence are now much more on the ground in schools.  
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40 While seeking to understand shifts in young people’s perceptions of gender relations, dynamics and  
41 subjectivity, during the first wave of interviews in *Making Futures* it felt that my concepts of  
42 gender, my trained ear and eye for the qualitative encounter, had not changed much from when I  
43 conducted the earlier longitudinal study. Had I made a fundamental and particularly awkward error,  
44 given the focus on historical change? It felt as if I had insufficiently attended to how the changed  
45 historical times also radically altered how gender is apprehended, noticed, made recognisable or  
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2 not, as well as how it is researched. On the one hand, that was precisely my question, yet there was  
3 a kind of methodological time lag, a temporal dislocation on my part, as if that seemingly mundane  
4 technical aspect of interviews – the schedule, the topics of the interview prompts and conversational  
5 starters – had been formed, rolled out, in another time, and did not feel up to the task for now;  
6 exhibiting, perhaps, a kind of methodological nostalgia for an approach with which I felt very  
7 comfortable, having been habituated to it for the duration of the earlier longitudinal study. That is,  
8 my questions, my early-stage prompts felt out ‘of synch’ with what I was being told by participants;  
9 did my questions actually serve to ‘straitjacket’ them into a mode of performing gender that was  
10 somewhat foreign to them and indeed ‘out of time’? Was I working too much from categorical  
11 politics and gender identities, and the tracking of life pathways that were more a feature of the  
12 earlier study but were issues that did not readily resonate in interview responses with young people.  
13 For example, in *Making Futures*, questions about gender differences in school experiences elicited  
14 few extended comments; questions to do with gender equality or gendered futures were in a way  
15 not intelligible, did not gel in the way they had with their counterparts in the earlier study. Both  
16 young women and men more readily brought issues of sexuality, sexual diversity, as well as  
17 violence and safety into the conversation – with the school seen variously as a space of refuge or  
18 vulnerability.

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28 A longer account is needed to elaborate these differences and the broader cultural and political  
29 context in which they emerge. Suffice to note that differences across the two studies in how gender  
30 was mobilised as a category of research concern and responded to in interviews underline that the  
31 concepts and research methods deployed, what is noticed or not noticed, are an important index of  
32 wider socio-cultural and epistemic changes. Moreover, understanding the form and effects of  
33 intersecting temporalities has methodological dimensions, ones that go beyond recognising how  
34 non-linear time shapes subjectivities, how the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of  
35 expectation’ might collide and be negotiated among particular individuals or cohorts; these are also  
36 dimensions of research imaginaries and practices. In the case outlined here, generating disjunctions  
37 in the technical and practical aspects of doing research – questions, topics – helps shed light on  
38 processes of historical change, as Savage has proposed (Savage 2010). It also sheds light on the  
39 temporal registers of research methodologies, and the collisions between past, present and future of  
40 research imaginaries in which particular projects might emerge.

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48 Savage’s arguments have been part of the motivation for revisiting *The 12 to 18 Project* and  
49 juxtaposing it with the new *Making Futures* longitudinal study, as a way of trying to think about  
50 sociological studies of education from a fresh angle, one that brings to the fore temporalities and the  
51 historicity of research practices, while not ignoring the specific epistemic and generational time of  
52 each study. In doing so, I have been arguing for the value of engaging historical and sociological  
53 imaginaries, and exploring what that could look like in contemporary sociologies of education and  
54 youth.

## Concluding remarks

This article has offered a number of perspectives and provocations for considering how temporality and temporal regimes might be engaged in relation to qualitative research in the sociology of education. An immediate prompt for this discussion is the experience of commencing a new qualitative longitudinal study, framed in part by memory of an earlier one and an interest in understanding the specificity of the historical present in relation to youth identity, gender and schooling: intersecting temporalities govern the researcher as much as the ‘subjects’ of research. A second motivation has been to explore dimensions of the historicity of research methodologies, their colliding temporal registers and what changing research approaches might reveal about broader socio-historical change. A background question has been to consider what an historical or an historicising sociology of education might look like in the present. Historical sociology has classically been concerned with epochal time, with big movements of change over time, and understood ‘as an ongoing tradition of research in to the nature and effects of large-scale social structures and long-term processes of change’ (Skocpol 1984 p. 359). At the same time, a reconsideration of the scope of historical sociology is well underway, with calls for more reflexive and situated accounts (Szokolaczai 2000). Taking off from these discussions, I have looked to possibilities for re-imagining and enacting an historical sociology of education, such as navigating a shift in optic from big time – that historical sociology has traditionally addressed – to little time, to looking both panoptically and myopically<sup>4</sup>, and to the collision of multiple temporalities. Perhaps the language and traditions of historical sociology – even if rejuvenated – are not what is needed; perhaps instead new terms are required to recast the commingling of historical and sociological ways of thinking about social, generational and biographical change in relation to education.

History was once regarded as a ‘more or less practical pursuit, a guide to public life for rulers, their advisors and citizens’ (Armitage 2015, 209) and, David Armitage continues, History ‘deployed analysis of the past precisely to shape the future’. Yet, he observes, in ‘the past half-century ...History gradually lost its public, future-oriented mission, though there are signs that its vocation – in a more critical, democratic, even radical guise – may be returning (pp.209-210). The temporal regimes and orientations of research practices are not necessarily fixed, and as Armitage’s remarks suggest, this is even so in disciplines such as history, which seems so self-evidently ‘about the past’. Could a related argument be made that sociology of education has perhaps too readily turned away from the past, from historical time as part of its vision. Might it now be time for a rethinking of what the past and historical time means in the sociology of education, for crafting a new kind of historically rich sociology of education attuned to multiple temporalities. Such questions return us to the challenge posed at the start of this article, confronting the force of temporalities and for seeking out the (un)timely in the field of education.

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<sup>4</sup> I thank Inés Dussel for this way of phrasing the different scales of looking.

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