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Competing time orders in human service work: towards a politics of time

Helen Colley, Lea Henriksson, Beatrix Niemeyer, Terri Seddon

Abstract

Human service work is being reconfigured by welfare state reforms driven by neo-liberal globalisation. Sectors are being merged; 'hybrid' occupations formed; and occupational boundaries renegotiated. Yet time is rarely considered in the study of such boundary work. This paper conceptualises time as generated by human action, in different orders that may operate in tension with one another. Three case studies of reform in educational work, from Finland, England, and Germany, each illustrate a particular configuration of these competing time orders. The paper concludes by arguing for a politics of time to create a more democratic climate for education and other human service work.

Keywords: human services; education; neo-liberal reform; occupational boundaries; time orders.

Disciplines: sociology; education; health and social care.

Introduction

Two decades ago, time was a largely invisible topic in most social science, and was 'consistently theorised out of existence' (Adam, 1989: 464). Whilst much has been done to redress that balance in the broader social sciences, thinking about time still remains infrequent in research on education, health and social care, and other forms of human service work. This paper seeks to understand time in these contexts, focusing on the ways in which educational work within them is re-ordered by global economic and political changes.

Our interest in time orders arises out of a larger research program that began by examining the implications of global transformations in human service work. We use the term 'human service work' here to refer to occupations in public services such as education, healthcare, social work and youth work, which directly involve practitioners with learners, patients and clients in the work of social reproduction; this narrower sense does not include public services not focused on care, such as transportation, nor customer services. Such work is – or is largely perceived as – work 'for' people, although capitalism all too often drives it to become a service 'to' people, in which users are treated as objects ('consumers') rather than as active agents in the provision of care (Goffman, 1969; Stacey, 1984).

Our initial collaborative work theorised the effects of globalisation in teaching, nursing and social work in Finland, Germany, the US, England and Australia (Seddon, Henriksson and Niemeyer, 2010). We highlighted the intersections between welfare state regimes and occupational ordering of human service work; that mix of carework, educational work and governing work, which secures inter-generational societal reproduction within publicly agreed rules and principles. From the latter quarter of the 20th century, neo-liberalism has provided the backdrop to this nexus, as the dominant ideology of globalised economies. Such policies, based on the assumption that individual consumption is the key to production and progress, have pursued the downsizing of the welfare state, the unfettered marketization of all public services, and the commodification of many areas of personal and public life (Mooers, 2006; Hanieh, 2006). The effect of neo-liberal policy reforms in

working life, we argued, disturbed the social and symbolic boundaries of human service work. This in turn disrupted established occupational relations and also created the terms and conditions for emergent politics that centred on the renegotiation of occupational boundaries and their contents; the work practices, individual and collective identities and professional projects through which occupational entities make themselves and their work. Occupational groups within human service work are both subject to, and actively mobilise, time as they re-position relative to key audiences (clients, the state and the university), which secure their occupational identity and professional standing (Abbott, 2005).

In our current research, a global ethnography of occupational boundary work among educators in a wide range of lifelong learning settings (Seddon, Devos, Joseph, Henriksson and Niemeyer, 2009), we are examining the reconfiguration of boundaries, emerging boundary zones, and practices of boundary work, which are prompted by lifelong learning reforms. Using case studies drawn from national systems of education and training, and more dispersed contexts of professional, workplace and community-based learning, we are documenting the way boundaries of time, space, knowledge and power are being re-negotiated and their effects in re-making 'educational work' as a distinctive deployment of human service expertise (Colley, Niemeyer, Henriksson and Seddon, 2010b).

This paper therefore focuses on time as a critical social and symbolic practice that is negotiated by educators in their occupational boundary work. We do not claim that it is the only factor contributing to the processes of change we are witnessing. However, it is an aspect that is both largely overlooked and misunderstood in research on educational and other human service work. We therefore single it out, both for heuristic purposes as a practice requiring closer attention in these fields, and in order to suggest that it points to particular responses from those working in them. Firstly, we discuss the theoretical framework for our understanding of time, define the time orders to which we are referring, and consider the ways in which they compete in the current context. We then present a series of case studies from empirical research, each revealing different ways in which competing time orders may be mobilised in occupational boundary work. We conclude by pointing to the immediate lessons that can be learned from our findings, and to the need for an explicitly radical politics of time in order to meet the challenges increasingly faced by human service workers.

Competing time orders in human service work

In 'common sense', time has largely been viewed as an external backdrop for human agency, independent of social actors or differentiations of status and power between them (Neary and Rikowski, 2002). Almost all educational research assumes this common-sense notion, resulting in a simplistic teleological understanding, in which educators and learners alike are constructed in moral terms of individual responsibility to pursue the imperative for lifelong learning (Colley, 2007). By contrast, a very different sociological perspective treats time not as a contextual dimension of human practice, but as *engendered by practice* (e.g. Bourdieu, 1992; Harvey, 2006; Mészáros, 2008; Postone, 1993; see also Castree, 2009). The diachronic categories of past, present and future are replaced by a synchronic conceptualisation of different time orders. This framework asserts the importance of attention to the historical time order, determined overall by the mode of production (such as feudalism or capitalism), but also divisible into recognisable epochs, periods and moments expressing the distinctive character of particular times (Heydebrand, 2003).

Within the era of capitalism, two other time orders are generated. On the one hand, abstract time, expressed primarily as 'clock time' (we shall use the two terms interchangeably), is essential for calculating profitability in the workplace (Allman, 2010; Postone, 1993; Rikowski, 2002a,b). Abstract time is disciplinary, since it is used both as the

measure of commodified labour and as a regulatory force upon it. It is also indifferent to the content of activity, focusing on exchange-values rather than use-values. It therefore operates as a tyranny that is both degrading and alienating for workers (Heydebrand, 2003).

On the other hand, concrete time is associated with the use-values of work, and is anchored in the duration of social practices, tasks and processes (Postone, 1993). Here, labour is the measure of time, rather than time the measure of labour (Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003). It is therefore particularly visible in spaces devoted to social reproduction, where use-values rather than exchange-values dominate the concerns of those involved (Harvey, 2006): unpaid work within the family, and paid work in healthcare, social services, education and other human services. In these spaces, processes take as long as they take, and cannot be hurried, whether they consist of feeding an elder or engaging a troubled youngster in learning. Davies (1994) extends such a concept of concrete time in her notion of ‘process time’ (accordingly, we also use ‘concrete’ and ‘process’ time interchangeably in this paper).

Needs are frequently unpredictable and the relation on which care is premised often requires continuity and a form of time that is not primarily determined by a quantitative and abstract conceptual measure. Care requires process time. (1994: 279)

She notes the non-linearity of this time order, as well as its association with quality in caring work and its inherently ethical dimension (see also Postone, 1993: 202), and emphasises its difference from simple task-orientation:

The latter tends to stress the task per se and risks separating the activity, at least conceptually, from its context. Process time, on the other hand, emphasizes that *time is enmeshed in social relations*... process time is on many occasions not measurable or at least hard to measure. The boundaries are fluid. (Davies, 1994: 280, original emphasis)

Since human service work falls disproportionately to women, process time can be seen as feminised, engendered by stereotypical roles of nurture for women in patriarchal capitalism (Colley, 2007: 434). Whilst it presents significant contrasts with abstract time, and may even appear incompatible with it (see Fig. 1), this belies the relationship between them.

Abstract time	Concrete time
Clock time	Process time
Focus on exchange-values	Focus on use-values
Measures labour	Is measured by labour
Qualitatively homogenous	Qualitatively heterogeneous
Quantitatively divisible	Quantitatively indivisible
Indifferent to material content	Defined by material content

Figure 1: Abstract time and concrete time

Both concrete and abstract time orders are bound together by their generation within the historical era of capitalism, including in human service work, which is integrated in the circulation of capital via taxation and state debt even where publicly owned (Shaikh and Tonak, 1994), and is increasingly being privatised (Allman, 2010). The conditions of neo-liberal globalisation privilege technical rationality and economic profiteering over a rationality of caring (Waerness, 1984) - ‘putting the care-receiver’s interests first’ (Davies,

1994: 279) – so that process time becomes permeated by abstract time. Tensions between the two competing time orders can overwhelm practitioners, as they come to perceive time as a ‘prison’, or a ‘screw’ that is ever tightening (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003: 69). We can see these effects of time constraints in the way that experience is reconstructed temporally in the construction of coherent professional narratives, which often strongly reflect the ethical ordering of work and the reordering of practices that conflict with an established professional ethos (Ylijoki, 2005). In such a situation:

Logics of rationalization and efficiency, with their close linkage to a time that is measurable and accountable, profoundly shape the practices of this form of labour activity. (Davies, 1994: 279)

The historical time order can be understood to intensify this competition between abstract and process time. During historical periods of economic crisis when ‘austerity drives’ are put in place, major disjunctures are provoked as we see in a number of European countries today. Typical capitalist strategies of accumulation are disrupted, impacting on the state and the services it provides (Hope, 2011). Harvey (2006) argues that three disturbing tendencies arise in such a context, to re-order human service work across time, space and ethical values:

1. Capitalism moves to reduce social expenditure on human service work, by reducing the labour-time devoted to it. This increases the tension between abstract and concrete time.
2. As unemployment grows, there is less imperative for capitalism to support the most needy and the least employable: the space for human service work becomes restricted.
3. Insofar as capitalism is obliged to maintain some social expenditure (including via privatisation of public services) it acts to shift the space of human service work away from the use-value of caring, and along a spectrum which tends towards a use-value of control.

The first two of these points may indicate processes of time-space compression, which ‘so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves’ (Harvey, 1990: 240). Alternatively, they may indicate a simple restriction of time and space in this sphere. The third point reveals a deeply ethical as well as political dimension of the re-ordering of human service work produced through the interrelationships of competing time orders. Human service work has never been absolutely at one end of the caring-control spectrum under capitalism, and often encapsulates some degree of social control. But neo-liberal reforms render such work more sharply commodified, with negative consequences for both the practitioner and the service user. Changes in organisational values threaten traditional occupational values, especially in a context of increased demands and decreased resources (Ylijoki, 2005; Colley, Lewin and Chadderton, 2010). The pressure of time can create a sense of powerlessness and stress for professionals, as the pace of work is intensified, its rhythms are fragmented, and orientations to work are re-ordered (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003; Tronto, 2010).

However, not only does the historical time order – in the current conjuncture at least – intensify these tensions between the two other time orders. We can also discern competition between different historical periods, as in Davies’s (1994) remarks on rationality of caring in the Scandinavian welfare regime established earlier in the twentieth century. The characteristics of this period, discussed below in relation to our Finnish case study, are not

simply swept aside by neo-liberal policies, but practitioners and educators continue to try to enact and defend them in the face of this new historical period. Historical conditions do not switch directly from one period into another, but are themselves the subject of on-going contestation and struggle.

Researching time orders in human service work

As Harvey (2006) notes, there is far too little empirical research about such contradictions of time in the space of human service work. Our research on global transformations and resultant occupational boundary work in this field begins to address this gap in knowledge. Time is an important dimension of occupational boundaries and their negotiation. Historically, it has been a central feature in industrial politics, which defined the working day and provided a basis for contesting the extension and intensification of work. In neo-liberal times, these time boundaries are rendered slippery in a 24/7 culture. Through global transitions, time is mobilised to erode the possibility of collective responses, through the intensification of work and the tensions between clock-time and process-time. Yet dissonant rhythms of time also continue to provide a locus for identity work, which enables individual workers to say ‘we’ (Sennett, 1998). While often short term, we found that these memories and experiences of time disjunctures could be mobilised to provide a basis for collectivising ethical claims: claims which confirmed shared understandings of work, expertise and social contribution that underpinned collective agency and advocacy related to the social use-value of human service work (Seddon, Henriksson, & Niemeyer, 2010).

Here we consider three case studies, from Finland, England, and Germany, each of which illustrates a particular configuration of competing time orders and the ways in which they are implicated in occupational boundary work in the field of education. The case studies are culture-sensitive, related to the historically evolved norms and values of welfare and education in each country, and therefore need to be understood in the light of this transnational comparison. Each case, for example, is constructed within a very different welfare state regime which shapes its national context (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Niemeyer, 2007).

Finland’s welfare state represents a Nordic model that has a history of universalism, with social and health care service provision and education as the right of all citizens. The Finnish case allows us to highlight the multilayered nature of time – historical, abstract and concrete. As well as the competition between ‘clock’ and ‘process’ time, it exemplifies sharply the contradictions created by the collision of the historical time order of the Nordic welfare state era with that created by the neo-liberal policy shift, which now places Finland’s long-standing welfare settlement under pressure. Analysing policy documentation from a range of stakeholders, it examines contestation around proposals for new statutes to change the institutional architecture of health and social care education, as policy-makers seek to blend the two sectors. On the one hand, this intermingling has comprised the upgrading of front-line care practitioner education by way of hybridising occupational roles, and opening up access to a new cross-sector occupation through more inclusive levels of qualification. On the other hand, this merger-in-the-making encompasses the flexibilising and downgrading of qualifications for professional educators teaching health and social care, which is the focus of our case study here. This shift is provoking competition between co-existing and conflicting time orders, revealing their power geometries and inequalities: the historical time order of the neo-liberal period competes with that of the Nordic twentieth century welfare settlement; and

abstract time competes to prevail over concrete time, as the drive to make health and social care education more policy-reactive and cost-effective gains ground.

The welfare regime in England and the UK, by contrast, is based on a residualist model of provision for economically deprived groups, with high risk of social exclusion. It has been dominated since the early 1980s by neo-liberal welfare-to-work discourses such as ‘no rights without responsibilities’. As in the Finnish case, policies to re-order the infrastructure of human service work are highly significant: in this instance, the work of ‘Personal Advisers’ to provide information, advice and guidance to 14-19 year olds in transition. A particular kind of occupational boundary work is entailed here, as the government explicitly sought to hybridise different specialisms in a generic support service. However, this case study, like the German one which follows, is focused primarily on practitioners’ narratives of front-line work, and of the tensions they encounter between clock time and process time. These tensions are produced also by a drastic reduction in resources for such work in England, driven by government austerity policies since the economic crisis hit in 2008. It therefore illustrates the impact of a historical moment which impacts crucially on the competition between abstract and concrete time orders.

The German case study is set in the context of a corporatist welfare model which is work-oriented and based on individual contribution, so that access to social provision depends on position in the labour market. As in the English case, similar tensions emerge between abstract and concrete time for front-line practitioners supporting disadvantaged youth through school-to-work transitions, although time and boundary work are implicated differently here. Again, a particular historical moment contributes to the complexity of competing time orders and occupational boundary work, relating in this case to long-term youth labour market conditions, the process of national reunification, and recent institutional change. The particular cases discussed form, of course, only part of much wider schooling systems which have long been understood to reproduce socio-economic inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977); but they offer important insights into some of the socially situated mechanisms by which such reproduction is currently being effected. Examining each case in turn, we consider how they reveal the generation of competing time orders, as well as the occupational boundary work implicated with them.

Competing time orders in Finnish health and social care education

This case study concerns an intensive debate around recent government policies to re-order the institutional architecture of Finnish welfare. The data derive from documentation comprising a ministerial report (Ministry of Education (ME), 2010) proposing to reduce the qualification requirements for vocational educators, and 29 consultation responses to these proposals from a variety of stakeholders (including employers, vocational education providers, trade unions and professional bodies). Specifically, the case focuses on temporal disturbances in the occupational boundary work of vocational educators, prompted by earlier government policies to re-order health and social care occupations in Finland, as well as by the recent debate about vocational educators’ qualifications. These disturbances reveal the interplay of multi-layered time orders, and a complex web of contestation. We begin by considering the historical dimension of their background context, played out for some years in the erasure of occupational boundaries, then go on to discuss the current implications for vocational educators of the policy debate around their required levels of qualification.

Understanding the particular historical context of the Finnish welfare state and its arrangements for provision of human service work is essential to situate the current debates about changes in VET for health and social care occupations. As noted above, the Nordic welfare ethos is renowned for its claims of equality for users; but in addition, it is also closely

associated with the development of a rationality of caring (Waerness, 1984). As Nordic feminists have argued, this ethos has entailed an emphasis on concrete process time, with an over-riding concern for the realities and needs of both care receivers and care providers. This emphasis has not been typical in other advanced capitalist countries with different welfare arrangements (cf. Tronto, 2010). In turn, this has created space for women's professional agency, including for front-line practitioners. Based on a conceptualisation of human service work as 'people work' *praxis* – the unity of consciousness and action *for* people (Goffman, 1969; Stacey, 1984) – it has placed particular importance on high-standard educational opportunities and terms and conditions of employment for the predominantly female workforce, and raised the status of such work.

However, this gendered historic settlement is being re-ordered in the current period. Neo-liberal policies are re-structuring the Finnish welfare state according to a 'rationality of efficiency' (Wrede et al., 2008) rather than of caring, a shift to prioritise exchange-value over use-value. In human service work, public expenditure is being reduced and its *praxis* being renegotiated as a commodified service *to* people. A new emphasis on cost-efficiency and accountability, along with growing marketization, have impacted adversely on working conditions, and made careers in health and social care, as well as in vocational education and training (VET) for these sectors, less attractive and more insecure. Along with the ageing of the population, this has led to a crisis in recruitment to these sectors, which the policy actors are expected to address.

In this turbulent time, one policy instrument has been the blurring of sectoral and occupational boundaries, not only to streamline service provision, but also to re-regulate the cross-sector workforce. The discourses accompanying these changes reflect the competing historical time orders described above. The traditional and hierarchical boundary between the health and social care sectors is characterised as one of 'old barricades' (ME, 2010: 123) which need to be brought down. Already in the mid-1990s a critical juncture of this re-ordering had been reached, as seven healthcare and three social care occupations – such as nursing and dental assistants, daycare workers, home helps and carers for the disabled – were merged into one new occupation entitled 'the practical nurse for social care and health care' (Henriksson, 2008, 2010). Education for this 'hybrid' occupation was extended to a three-year vocational qualification, but established at upper secondary rather than tertiary level.

These measures could be seen as positive in a number of respects. Policies across Europe have promoted multi-agency and even multi-disciplinary working as a more holistic approach to the delivery of human service work, and have criticised 'professional vested interest' and the preservation of occupational 'silos' as a brake on this modernisation process. In addition, these changes have also opened up access to a licensed health and social care occupation for women who would have been excluded if initial tertiary education were a requirement. However, as primary care and hospital settings have declined and 'care in the community' has expanded with cuts in funding and the restructuring of human services, this type of work has become precarious, with a significant worsening of employment conditions.:

In the context of service pruning, these new professionals [*practical nurses*] were also expected to become entrepreneurs, to create their own occupational careers, employ themselves and bear the risks of service provision, in the growing private sector labour market... (Henriksson, 2010: 36)

The regulation of practical nurse work is less strict than for other licensed health and social care occupations, and they are often marginalised to low-level tasks, undermining their status and 'professional respectability' (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003). Moreover, many employers

continue to recruit less-qualified staff at lower wages by using previous occupational titles such as ‘home help’.

The historical rise of the Finnish welfare state had strengthened these workers’ occupational status, and opened pathways to employment not only for urban women, but also for women from poorer rural backgrounds with lesser access to education. However, the period of neo-liberalism now competing with it seems to have weakened the position of these workers overall. Here we see that the shift from a concern for use-value to the prioritisation of exchange-value is intimately linked to a parallel shift in the use-value from care to control. Users have their access to commodified human services controlled and limited, whilst professional carers’ status and conditions are increasingly controlled and downgraded by market forces in the interests of cost reduction and private profit.

This reform has subsequently been followed by a proposal from a governmental committee to reduce qualification levels for VET educators in general, including those in health and social care, and particularly for those teaching practical nurses. Prior to this policy initiative, a Master’s degree has been required for VET educators, in addition to pedagogic studies and at least three years’ work experience. 81% of employed health and social care educators fulfil these criteria, a very high proportion compared with other VET fields in Finland (ME, 2010: 11).

In the responses to consultation on this proposal, the measures to degrade educators’ qualifications were supported by a range of employer organisations and education providers. A number of these characterised the current requirements as old-fashioned, echoing the competitive discourse of the neo-liberal historical period. They argued that the existing standards were exaggeratedly high and ‘behind the times’. At the same time, they claimed there were regional and local obstacles to recruiting qualified educators with ‘a long and expensive education’, thus introducing an appeal to the efficiency of abstract time *versus* the concrete time of educational processes. This appeal was further supported by challenging boundaries relating to appropriate knowledge within human service work, and arguments that adequate development of hands-on occupational identity is now key to practitioner education, with suggestions that a Master’s degree in fact sets educators apart from workplace practices. Moreover, the responsibility for training and education in industrial and other workplace settings could easily be taken on by enterprises themselves, rather than by higher education institutions, reducing time and costs. With respect to VET for practical nurses, responses to the proposed reform from their trade union and from the principals of polytechnics advocated that either the upper-secondary practical nurse qualification accompanied by pedagogic studies, or a Bachelor’s degree, should be sufficient for a VET educator – a significant downgrading from the established norm.

Other stakeholders, however, robustly defended ‘strong teacher professionalism’ (Heikkinen, 2002) and objected to the speed with which the reform was being pushed through. (Interestingly, here the pressure of the neo-liberal time order to assert new arrangements is closely associated with the negation of process time for the consultation and the expediency of abstract time in the government’s short deadlines to ratify the new statute.) One typical argument defending the *status quo* was put by the National Teachers’ Union. They advocated that VET in Finland is so popular, desirable and internationally high-quality that it should not be endangered. In this vein, the Board of Education and its commissions claimed that, in social and health care, educators traditionally have high motivation for continuing education and professional development, and that therefore a broad knowledge base in addition to nursing is essential for them. Based on its historical ethos and legacy, human service work requires process time, and therefore VET is not only about practice-oriented capacities, they argued; rather, it is about guiding and supporting vocational growth. These accounts defending the concrete time order in VET moreover emphasized that

shortages in the VET workforce would be better met by ensuring high-standard employment terms and conditions than by lowering eligibility standards, advocating industrial schemes, and commodifying social interactions.

Although the governmental group working on this VET reform proposed further preparatory work, the policy process was curtailed, with a statute promulgated on 1 August 2011 enacting the flexibilisation of educators' qualifications. Within this debate, conflicting ethical and political dimensions collided, and 'time as currency' (Adam, 1995: 106) was privileged over the process time of a VET praxis that emphasized human growth and a broad knowledge base. In the new decree, it is the concern of the *education provider* to decide whether a Master's degree or a practical nurse qualification is suited to the 'teaching task' at hand (FINLEX, 2010). Yet in health and social care, unlike other VET fields, a special emphasis on a Master's degree continues to prevail. Aspects of the historical Nordic welfare regime continue – for the time being at least – to co-exist alongside changes wrought by the neo-liberal regime.

We turn then, to the next case study from England, which considers a policy experiment to form a hybrid profession in youth support work, and its vulnerability to competing time orders. It links macro-level processes at governmental level with actions at the institutional meso-level and with the micro-level of practice.

Competing time orders in generic youth support in England

This case study focuses primarily on practitioners' day-to-day experiences of increased tensions between abstract time and concrete time in their work to support young people in school-to-work transition, particularly those not in education, employment or training (NEET). Throughout the New Labour administration, from 1997 to 2010, the neo-liberal policy shift and concomitant erosion of the welfare state was closely associated with a disciplinary concept of social inclusion (Levitas, 2005), especially for young people. This viewed 'socially excluded' youth as a threat to social cohesion, and targeted youth support initiatives on 'employability' and short-term measures to engage youth in formal pathways to employment, even though the youth labour market in England has been extremely weak (Colley, 2003). A particular historical moment also arose within this period as the economic crisis hit the UK in 2008, and collapses in the banking system led to an increase in the national debt. This prompted austerity policies of severe cuts in funding for human services, which – as in this case – hit smaller and more marginal services both quicker and harder than mainstream services such as schooling.

These neo-liberal imperatives had already led to a rapid and radical re-ordering of previously disparate institutional infrastructures in youth support work. The government had established the Connexions service in 2001, incorporating a number of specialist occupations in one single service. The former career guidance service was integrated whole scale into Connexions, alongside youth workers, teachers, social workers, education welfare officers and others. A key cornerstone of this policy was one of occupational hybridisation. Not only was Connexions supposed to provide a generic youth support service – characterised in policy rhetoric as 'holistic' – but its workers, uniformly designated 'Personal Advisers' (PAs) and forbidden to use their specialist occupational titles, were supposed to become generic professionals, able to deal with a wide range of issues from vocational decision-making to mental and sexual health, homelessness and substance abuse.

Although the government prospectus for Connexions had promised a workforce of 15-20,000 PAs, only around 8,500 were actually employed. As a result, caseloads were up to four times higher than expected, creating unfeasible workloads. At the same time, the service's funding was tied to targets for reducing numbers of youth in the 'NEET' category,

whatever their social problems, and despite a lack of adequate or appropriate opportunities for many of them. Our study revealed many aspects of occupational boundary work for practitioners in this situation, not least around questions of occupational identity and status. Here, though, we focus on just three of the areas in which time orders emerged as a central aspect of practitioners' experience.

First, managing the boundaries between quantity and quality of work was a constant concern, not only because caseloads were so large, but also because PAs were expected to take on roles outside their specialism with minimal time for training. Former careers advisers, for example, found themselves required to give sexual health advice with only two days' training on this topic. At the same time, excessive caseloads left them little time for the on-going research required to maintain their specialised knowledge of and links with the labour market and educational provision. This abstract time pressure on concrete time for both continuing professional development and work with individual clients often led to unsustainable tensions, with some PAs deciding to quit the job (taking themselves outside the occupational boundary altogether) as a result:

I just felt like I was doing a really poor quality of job everywhere and actually not being particularly effective with anybody, and that was really stressful, and I thought that I'm not going to continue doing this. It's not me. (Henry, ex-PA)

Second, the size of PAs' caseloads and the unfeasible nature of service targets generated constant ethical decision-making about *how many* clients they could help, *which* clients they would help, and *how* they would try to help them. PAs felt under pressure to prioritise work with young people most likely to come off the 'NEET' register quickly (because they needed less support), and to avoid devoting longer time to the most vulnerable. This represented a paradoxical process of double exclusion – Connexions was supposed to prioritise the most excluded youth, but in fact its targets focused on the 'easiest-to-help' of the 'hard-to-help'. In this situation, PAs could be inconsistent in their stance, sometimes privileging process time measured by their clients' needs, sometimes focused on abstract time measured by targets:

I spent most of last week with one client who is homeless and has got lots of issues and no one seems to want to help him because they've tried before, and they say he doesn't engage and goes round and round in circles. That was most of my week. (Beth, PA, page 2 of transcript)

If you can help the majority a bit, it's better than helping one person a lot when they might not even move into something positive. (Beth, PA, page 4 of transcript)

Others talked of coming under pressure from managers to push young people into opportunities, however vocationally inappropriate, according to abstract timescales for meeting targets: before the young person's 18th birthday; to meet monthly targets for 'NEET' reduction; and especially approaching the annual government census of 'NEET' figures. These examples show how the policy and institutional privileging of abstract over concrete time could shift practice along the spectrum from caring and meeting needs to surveillance and control. Conflict over defending process time was often described by PAs as a regular feature in supervisory encounters with their managers. But again, the work of refusal to cross these ethical boundaries also led some PAs out of the occupation, whether through disciplinary action or their own decisions.

Third, alongside these bleaker outcomes of competing time orders, PAs also talked of ‘making time’ and forming collectivities – saying ‘we’ (Sennett, 1998) – to support each other. Sometimes this peer support revolved around narrower collectivities, sharing specialist occupational knowledge, expertise and problem-solving to combat de-skilling and the erosion of occupational boundaries. PAs would cluster at the same ‘hot desks’, often squeezing time for this into lunch hours or at the end of the working day. For PAs working with the most disadvantaged young people, given the lack of clinical support and the managerial focus of their supervision, it was important to make time to offer and gain emotional support amongst themselves. It was in these looser collectivities that specialist occupational boundaries seemed most permeable. Nevertheless, worrying about clients and engaging in peer support were most likely to spill over into weekends and evenings, extending the abstract time of the working day. In trying to overcome the logic of the organization – which purported to be about social inclusion, but was in practice more geared to surveillance and control of young people – PAs were resisting the privileging of clock time over process time, and seeking to defend the use-value of caring against the use-value of control.

Since the end of the research, there is a postscript to add, however: one which points to the power of the state to overcome such resistance on the part of a small and marginalised profession. A further wave of austerity measures from April 2011 has seen funding for the Connexions service entirely withdrawn, with large-scale redundancies among staff, and a loss of provision for young people in many areas of the country. Other services for young people have also been severely cut back, posing questions about the role that such policy signals played in helping to spark the wave of youth riots across England the following summer. We turn now to a more optimistic case from Germany, which illustrates how, over time and in small, localised ways, the struggle to make time for process – for caring human service work – can achieve some success.

Competing time orders in German school-to-work transition support

This case also focuses on front-line work in the field of support for youngsters outside of mainstream education, training and employment, but needs to be set first in the context of the historical time order. Within the global historical period identified above, we are also witnessing a particular historical moment in Germany. This arises from the convergence of long-term, medium-term and recent trends. Foremost are the growth of youth unemployment since the late 1970s; the collapse of the apprenticeship market in east Germany after national reunification in 1990; and the former ‘youth support jungle’ of relatively uncoordinated initiatives to bridge the gap between school and work, which has recently coalesced into a school-to-work transition system with a variety of learning programmes focused on work experience (Niemeyer, 2011). This has created a historical disjuncture with the traditional corporatist culture of German welfare and its social contract of lifelong work security. While historically learning and work have been conceptualised as a consecutive pathway from school to apprenticeship and on to employment, the concrete time assigned to learning and work and learning to work is becoming hybrid.

These changes also relate to a globalised historical acceleration and compression of the social time of learning (cf. Harvey, 1990). The school bell may still ring every 45 minutes, but beyond its gates, where further education and career guidance are mediating the demands of the labour market, the rhythm of educational work is speeding up. Periods of learning are becoming shorter, and qualifications must be achieved ‘just in time’ and kept constantly up-to-date (Seitter, 2010). At the same time in the frame work of a lifelong learning and social inclusion policy, these demands on individuals to ‘upskill’ themselves now extend over the whole life course. This results in an *extensive* process, *intensifying* the

pressure to learn and adapt one's skills rapidly and often. This extensive intensification is most evident in the field of school-to-work transition support where a complex mix of political strategies, technical instruments and institutional arrangements, including shortened periods of funding and budget cutbacks in education and welfare disrupt the established time orders of the normative model of a lifelong, upwardly mobile career. The 'emancipated citizen' who used to be seen as the outcome of educational activities has been replaced by the 'employable citizen', and education itself is elided with the economy.

In studying the field of 'model programmes' for youth at risk of 'dropping out', which offer 'disadvantaged' pupils with learning and social difficulties two to three days' work experience per week with an accordingly reduced school timetable, this tendency to impose the logics of rationalisation and efficiency with its according practice of fragmenting the time dedicated to social processes of education and learning, comes into the focus. These projects are funded mainly by the European Social Fund and shaped by its employment and social inclusion policies. Abstract time is foregrounded sharply: schemes are supposed to make young people employable within as short a period as possible – ranging from 6 weeks to a maximum of 11 months (Niemeyer and Frey-Huppert, 2009). The idea is to provide as much real workplace experience as possible, and as soon as possible. The way in which working is privileged over learning, and education is geared first and foremost to 'employability', thus becoming an individualised risk and responsibility, illustrates the conflicting time orders between abstract and process time. On the one hand, the period assigned to an individual's transition from learning (at school) to work is fragmented and controlled by the prescribed structure of the guidance and support schemes. On the other hand these funding regulations affect the nature of educational work in these schemes. The work practice of youth and social workers in transition programs is determined by the process time needed to enable a young person to develop a career perspective and to (re)build his or her motivation to learn and work. The following micro-study illustrates these conflicting time orders and shows how the command of process time is part of workplace policy and politics.

Here, we draw on an interview with a founding practitioner in one institution within this system to explore the time pressures he experiences, and the way in which he has worked against them to defend process time against clock time. Mr M. has worked in his institution for 8 years, always on one or two-year contracts. His main role is to coach and case-manage boys who are 'NEET' or at risk of becoming 'NEET'. The boundaries of his occupational role have shifted over recent years, from office-based work receiving referrals from other organisations to much more mobile multi-agency working in local VET schools and other youth services, including the youth justice system. While this has accelerated his personal work rhythm, he values the flexibility of space and time it allows him to respond to demand, and especially the importance that process time can have in his educational work:

If something goes wrong [*with a client*] then something has been missing. This applies in 90% of the cases, but there are also youth who you can't reach at the moment – then you simply need time. I find this important, to carry this category in mind.

At the moment he is counselling and accompanying unemployed youths over a period of two years, assisting them to find their way into adult life. Allowing them adequate time to make this transition is a central aspect of his work, going through problems with them, and discussing obstacles over and over again. He gives an example:

Well, right now I am working with a guy with whom I visited a workplace, where he is supposed to start an internship. This was four weeks ago, and for three meetings we have been talking about his fears. Like 'Oh, what will happen if I can't cope, what

will happen to me then?', and we talk that through. And with this guy, it's so obvious that he is so surprised – that this is possible. Well, in the beginning I really made the mistake of telling him: 'Okay, next time we are going to decide on it!' I guess this was far too quick for him. And every time he really is surprised that I am going through all his fears with him again. But this simply is a large part of our work task.

Here we can see that surprise is an interruption of a continuous time flow. It stops an ongoing process and enables it to start again, thereby allowing for and inviting change. The paradox of being surprised by being given time hints at a tension which runs through the whole interview. The funding regulations and expectations of awarding authorities push for rapid integration of unemployed school leavers into the labour market, thereby imposing abstract time, but Mr M. distances himself from other colleagues who measure their success according to these outcomes. He has had to learn for himself that pressure is an approach that does not work in relationship-building with young people, and that allowing time is crucial. Hence time politics constitutes a part of his work practice. It plays out in the way how he structures his counselling practice *and* is a constituent part of his workplace politics.

Together with his team Mr M. successfully negotiated with the funding bodies a reduction of the caseload from 350 youths to around 220 per year. This was a collective effort to secure the process time they assumed to be necessary to do their educational work in an ethical way. So their target group is now more precisely defined as young people who have dropped out of several education settings before, and need extra support to find their way into adult life; and the focus of their practice is on front-line case-management. This puts their organisation in a special position vis-à-vis the local market: 'We were the first, we are really good at it', Mr M. stresses several times. Becoming aware of the importance of process time in young people's career histories, and as an educational as well as a personal resource, has been a crucial step in taking command of time as a part of workplace policy. Here then, we see a local and contingent success in making (process) time as opposed to making targets, and in being first by slowing down. This has been achieved by expanding the boundaries of work with a multi-agency approach, but also narrowing the occupational boundaries in other respects: unlike in the English context, Mr M.'s organisation can support the most disadvantaged young people, thanks to the success of its advocacy with policy makers. The strategy of the team was neither active resistance nor mere compliance. Rather they were consciously negotiating the boundaries of their educational work by collectively engaging in a politics of time to secure the space needed for an ethical responsible educational work.

Towards a politics of time in human service work

I am convinced that re-creating our use of time is absolutely essential to re-creating democracy. (Allman, 1999: 130)

These case studies make visible the practices that generate particular time orders, and competition between them, in human service work. They also reveal different political responses these competing time orders have engendered. Whatever the historical tradition of welfare – and here we have considered three very different models – the global rise of neo-liberalism is disrupting established trajectories for this work. Occupational boundaries are being fundamentally re-ordered, as sectors are merged and new 'hybrid', 'generic' or 'bridging' occupations are formed. Policies for healthcare, social care, education and youth transition support are being re-forged to prioritise abstract time over concrete time, to compress and/or simply restrict the time-space for learning processes, and to promote

exchange-values over use-values in the conceptualisation and enactment of human service work. These are deeply ethical and political issues.

Two of the case studies presented highlight radical attempts to alter the institutional architecture of a human service, through its qualifications structure in the Finnish case, and through its professional infrastructure in the English one. In both cases, high-speed policy changes demand that human service work adjust to the 'reality of the times', that is to say, to prioritise the exchange-values associated with abstract time rather than the use-values associated with concrete time; and in doing so, to shift use-values from care to control. This also necessitates a rupture of historical time orders, with the loss of institutional memory typical of neo-liberal regimes (Wilson, 1999), as well as the loss of collective occupational legacies and memory that hybridisation fractures and dissolves. Both raise questions about whether longer-established and/or higher-status professions are simply in a stronger position to preserve the *status quo* in their own interests, whilst new professions such as practical nurses and personal advisers have less collective agency. On the one hand, new prospects for collective agency are visible, as PAs begin to find ways to resist the unethical pressures of clock time and as practical nurses achieve pathways to qualify themselves as educators. On the other hand, resistance to change by stronger professional groups is not inevitably going to remain successful as neo-liberal policies pursue ever greater 'efficiency' in human services. In Finland, the statutory basis of high-level VET has been removed; in England, the PA profession has disappeared along with the service that created it. Arguments against resistance as 'vested interest' takes our attention away from the day-to-day practice of human service work as service *for* people, from the importance of process time and the use-value of caring, and from the historical shift which threatens that.

At the same time, the English and German case studies illuminate how these competing time orders can be played out in the politics of the workplace and day-to-day practice with clients. Here, we see how, in the historical period of late capitalism, this competition is intensified by the compression of time (Harvey, 1990). Learning must be 'lifelong', but skills and qualifications may only have a short 'shelf-life' and must be constantly up-dated. In this context, the slow process of overcoming disadvantage for young people becomes a focus of struggle, for better or for worse. Such politics of time must be playing out in many other ways in human service work across the globe today, and lessons can be learned from these cases for that wider context.

Those resisting or re-organising themselves against the impact of neo-liberal policies need to find a discourse of time to challenge the dominant mantra that we must accept 'the realities of the times'. Opportunities need to be found at every level of decision-making to explain how this type of work requires time to be generated differently; that education, school-to-work transition support and other caring work should not be reduced to an industrial model of 'efficiency'; that alternative rationalities based on use-values of caring *for* people should prevail; and that use-values of control, whether over practitioners or over service users, should be opposed. These discussions about time should become part of initial and continuing education for practitioners, integrated into their learning about ethics; and they should be pursued vigorously by professional bodies, trade unions, and service user organisations. In addition, a wider public debate needs to be encouraged through media channels, one which speaks to the lived experiences most people will have had of these competing time orders (whether as providers or receivers of human service work), and which can build into a movement for change.

In any such movement, however, there is also a need for a longer-term vision of an alternative settlement, one which offers a far-reaching critique to the wider systems reproducing inequality in capitalist society, and poses the need for more radical social transformation. As Haug points out: 'The art of politics is about building connections and

creating a space of orientation which can re-contextualise fragmented struggles' (2010: 222). Without this approach, the problems addressed by local struggles can simply be shifted elsewhere; even their victories can be 'used to defuse and depoliticize – that is, domesticate – the crucial significance of the local effort' (Allman, 1999: 6).

This task of creating spaces of orientation is one which calls for a radical and *collective* notion of democracy which generates and is sustained by an entirely different time order. It requires a full acknowledgement of four different dimensions of our life – employed work, social reproduction work, personal self-development and political activism – across which everyone's time would be distributed in a proportional way in a more comprehensively just society. Such a transformative vision must be a fully integrated one, which:

...takes as its point of departure the division of labour and the time dedicated to each. In other words, it seeks to alter our society's time regime in a fundamental way (Haug, 2010: 224).

This is a transformation that would not only see human service work – the work of social reproduction – fully valued and recognised, but would also break down its confinement to a feminised, and therefore oppressed, time-space in which clock time grinds against process time, and process time subordinates women's needs to the needs of others. As in any dialectical relationship, in which opposing categories cannot exist without each other, the negation of one necessarily also entails the negation of its negation. In a transformed society, all time, including the time dedicated to social reproduction work, would be generated differently: a time beyond the gendered binary of abstract *versus* concrete time (as we know them) would emerge. Major steps forward in securing this compass in human service work would be, we conclude, to recognise the competing time orders at work; to study them in depth and critically; and to engage more explicitly in time politics at every available opportunity.

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FIGURE 1

Abstract time

Clock time
Focus on exchange-values
Measures labour
Qualitatively homogenous
Quantitatively divisible
Indifferent to material content

Concrete time

Process time
Focus on use-values
Is measured by labour
Qualitatively heterogeneous
Quantitatively indivisible
Defined by material content

Figure 1: Abstract time and concrete time