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## centre of **excellence** for **equity** in higher **education**

**Changing Pedagogical Spaces:  
Capability, Belonging and  
Difference in Higher Education**

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## Mis/recognition

- Equity in HE is tied to the politics of (mis)recognition about capability – often based on assumptions that ‘capability’ is straightforwardly measured, assessed, identified
- Misrecognition & maldistribution deeply entwined in construction of capable university student (highly contextual and contested)
- discourses of ‘capability’ are subjective, tied to **value judgements** & located in communities of practice (historically & discursively formed)
- Yet - little attention to the problematic way that judgments of capability are made - often unwittingly reproducing inequalities
- This is not only about *access to* but also *participation in* higher education

**Recognition of ‘potential’** -- those with the **institutional authority to make such judgments construct ‘capability’** in particular disciplinary and institutional contexts (**Art for a Few**, Burke & McManus, 2009)

the meanings that circulate around capability **mark out differences:**

between ‘types’ of students (often classified by equity group), different subjects of study (e.g. vocational and academic) and differentiated HE institutions (e.g. research-intensive, teaching-focused, etc).

Contributes to **legitimization of inequality** in patterns of HE access & participation & impacts on **students’ self-perceptions of capability and worth**

(e.g. Leathwood 2008; Burke, 2012)



## Overview of Capabilities, Belonging & Equity project

- Mixed methods (funded by NCSEHE & CEEHE).
- Draws on data from a 2014 pilot study: examined students' **beliefs** about their capability, intelligence & levels of confidence in these attributes -- 772 first year undergraduate students took part in a survey.
- Focus groups and interviews with 41 foundation & undergraduate students) and 19 university lecturers
- The project examined capability discourses & their effects: particular attention paid to the symbolic & emotional level of identity-formation, experience and confidence.

## Research questions

- **What are the different meanings of capability at play in higher education? In what ways do these shape, constrain and/or enable equity in higher education?**
  - What does being capable of study at university involve and mean to students, academic staff and equity practitioners? Are students differently constructed in relation to capability discourses? If so, in what ways and with what possible effects?
  - How might academic staff and equity practitioners address the challenges posed by capability discourses to develop equitable and inclusive practices?

## Theoretical framework

- **Multidimensional social justice framework** (Fraser 1997; Fraser & Honneth 2003) to examine the ways that inequalities might not always operate at the explicit level, but are often subtle, symbolic and insidious – beyond but including attention to barriers
- Sense of capability formed through **lived and embodied experiences of misrecognition** (McNay 2008) but also tied to **material inequalities** (e.g. access to resources) and the **politics of representation**
- Deepen and broaden **conceptualization of pedagogy** – beyond teaching & learning styles and methods to complex relational dynamics at play
- **Parity of participation** – attention to belonging and equity across **material, social, cultural, symbolic inequalities** that are formed through complex intersections of difference and at level of emotion - **embodied subjectivities** (Burke, 2012; Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek, 2017)



## Capability and performativity

- **ontological exclusions** - to be seen as 'capable', the student must embody certain ways of doing/being – be(com)ing (recognized as) capable - formed **through social *practices***
- E.g. recognition of '**academic capability**' depends on ways of **doing/being** - through body language, literacy and communication practices, analytical and critical practices, demonstrating certain skills in particular ways (such as time management and organisational skills) and so forth.
- Each of these are **shifting discursive practices**; there are a *range of ways of understanding these* even within a single unit such as an academic department or program of study

## Belonging

- Sensibilities of belonging -- formed **in relation to constructions of capability**; about connection – relationality – our personhood – sense of self – always formed through relational dynamics and in context(s)
- To belong in a field of HE, the student must be recognised as having the capability to belong (Burke & McManus 2009).
- This is an **ongoing struggle of both mastering *and* submitting to the discourses of capability** within the context of the subject field
- The discourses & practices within these fields are **not static or fixed.**



## Discourse

- **Discourse** (power/knowledge) produces ‘**regimes of truth**’, which shape the meanings & understandings of ‘capability’, ‘belonging’, ‘equity’ - this are historically entrenched in our practices (e.g. practices of selection and assessment) – **insidious inequalities**
- These discourses have **exclusionary practices** as part of their effects (Nicoll & Feje 2008, p. 5):
  - ‘All knowledge, once co-implicated with action, has real effects, and in that sense becomes true, or more accurately counts as true’ (Edwards 2008, p. 23).

## Hegemonic constructions of capability

- Hegemonic discourses are ways of defining, thinking, doing and recognising that are **taken-for-granted**.
- **(re)produce** dominant forms of knowledge/power/being in the everyday.
- Foucault -- power is positive and productive -- **power produces** 'capable' subjects.
- Simultaneously -- power **differentiates** individuals in relation to an average -- measures the person in quantitative terms - places them in a hierarchy of levels and values.
- Disciplinary power compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises, excludes and normalises (Rabinow, 1984).
- **Students are deeply reflexive and aware of hegemonic discourses of deficit at university, school, the media and society...**

## Embodiment & Capability



- Yeah students who **looked a little bit low SES**, they didn't look like they were going to achieve. I don't know if they did or didn't. But just that was - yeah, and a lot of the **ethnic students**, depending on what ethnicity, that also was a **major factor in what people thought in terms of whether they were going to achieve** or do really well (Frances)

## Being constructed as a WP student...

- Well, even - look, not even specifically relating that you should come to universities but when they conduct media reports on *Today Tonight* or *A Current Affair* and they go into a **low socio economic environment** and there's Housing Commission and they're saying - oh, they're painting with the broad brush. All these people have a very high chance of being drug dealers and all these people have a very high chance of being dole bludgers, then I think that **as a side-effect of that, whether intentional or not, makes people watching think - oh well, they're not going to achieve anything.** Well in reality that's not true and the reality is not there (Raymond)

## Misrecognition and fear

- Misrecognition - processes in which a **pathologising gaze** is projected on to those bodies & persons who have historically been constructed as a problem, as 'suffering' from a range of **deficit disorders** (Burke 2012) (e.g. lack of aspiration, confidence, resilience, capability, etc)
- Bodies become **marked as different** through (often implicit and subtle) reference to **deficit discourses** – tied to structural and historical power relations (e.g. of gender, class and race)
- The **injuries of misrecognition** are often embodied, through the **internalisation of shame** and self-denigration and the **fear of not being 'good enough'** (Raphael Reed et al. 2007).
- This is tied to the emotional level of pedagogical autobiographies and experiences – **residue of feeling in institutional spaces**

## Shame a social emotion:

- Shame: **internalized as a feeling of lack of self-worth** or sense of failure (Raphael Reed et al 2007, p. 19).
- Shame: exacerbates feelings of **not belonging** and disconnection as well as sensibilities of unworthiness.
- Shame: a 'signal of disconnect, alienation'





## Fear of (being) shame(d)

- The data reveals the **intensive forms of anxiety** many students experience during their transitions to university and throughout their studies
- Connected to their sense of (in)capability & anxieties attached to being assessed, judged and perceived as incapable
- **the residual memory of shame** from earlier educational experiences as well as the ongoing fear of being shamed again fuels such anxieties.



## Symbolic Violence



- Bourdieu's (1984) concept of '**symbolic violence**' speaks to the ways that **feelings of being 'stupid'** are made to appear natural through the legitimisation of particular forms of cultural capital & ways of being (such as knowing how to pose the 'right' questions in class)
- Many teachers aware of students' feelings of fear & anxiety – enabling pedagogies were important to the students' developing a sense of capability and belonging

## Feelings of belonging (and not belonging)

- Yeah. That's probably true with me too. I've felt dumb all my life and I thought uni was out of my reach. Only smart people – not people like me went to uni. Yeah. (female Foundation student, 44 years)
- ... those who come in and they think 'oh I'm so stupid, I only got an ATAR of 30, I don't even know why I'm here, I don't think that I'm university material', and it's constantly downplaying themselves, and it really is. It seems to be just two entirely different schools of student that you're teaching. (female Humanities lecturer)
- From my experience in teaching; fear of failure, fear of making mistakes and maybe a fear that they don't have the intelligence to do what they want to do, they don't have the self-belief that they can learn something new that can be a benefit to them (female STEM Lecturer)

## Reflections & reframing of equity & belonging

- Institutional support be provided to university teachers in developing their pedagogical practices.
- Raise the awareness of university leaders, teachers and policy-makers.
- Appropriate resources, time & continuing professional development to support university teachers to develop pedagogical.
- Proactively challenge stereotypes about the 'types' of students who are capable of university study.
- Opportunities, resources, support -- available to students from diverse & under-represented backgrounds.
- Attention needs to be shifted away from blaming individual teachers and students to generating educational structures, cultures and practices that are underpinned by strong principles of equity and inclusion for both staff and students.
- **A praxis-based framework is required (Burke, 2002; 2012; Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek, 2017; Burke, 2018)**

## CEEHE - A unique, praxis-based framework for equity in HE

- CEEHE brings together research, evaluation, theory and practice in continual conversation because one of our guiding principles is that **equity practice should be informed by research, and equity research should be informed by practice**. CEEHE fosters this dialogue by drawing on the notion of ‘**praxis**’, an approach that brings theory and practice together in cycles of **reflection-action and action-reflection**
- The **dialogic relationship between critical reflection and critical action** is reflected in the **collaborative and participatory ways of working** that CEEHE encourages. A **process of ongoing exchange** helps sensitise participants to the multiple layers, contexts and challenges that characterise the field of equity in higher education. These methods help us to question and disrupt **entrenched and historical inequalities** that are often sustained by **taken-for-granted assumptions**.

## Methods with greater sensitivity to complex inequalities

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- It is important that we collect data that identifies and reveals unequal patterns of access to, participation in, impact of, and outcomes through, higher education. However, such data needs to be gathered and analyzed within broader methodological frameworks that seek to capture the contextual, intersecting, multiple and often contradictory layers of inequality. Such approaches are sensitive to the *intersecting social differences and systems* that play out in complex ways to form *participatory possibilities*. **Critical research methodologies embedded in praxis are attuned to the explicit forms of inequality at play but also to the processes by which inequalities are *unwittingly reproduced through taken-for-granted methods, practices or assumptions*** (Burke, 2012).

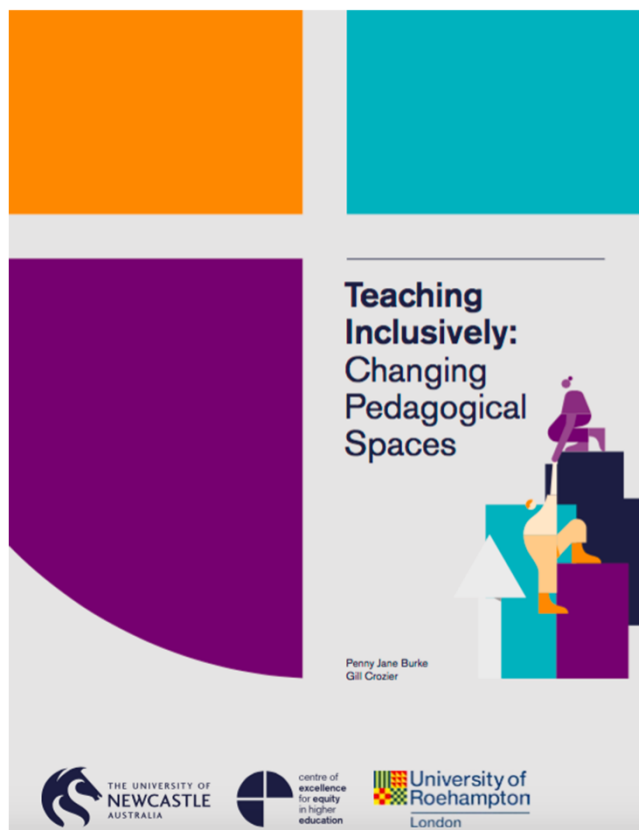


## Pedagogical Methodologies

- premised on aim to provide **parity of participation** through **praxis-based approaches**.
- Aim to create & open up collaborative, collective, dialogical, participatory methodologies and spaces, which **engage participants in processes of collaborative sense- and meaning-making**.
- create opportunities for refusal, resistance, & doing things differently, **provoking our pedagogical imaginations**
- (see Burke, 2012; Burke et al, 2017; Burke & Lumb, 2018)

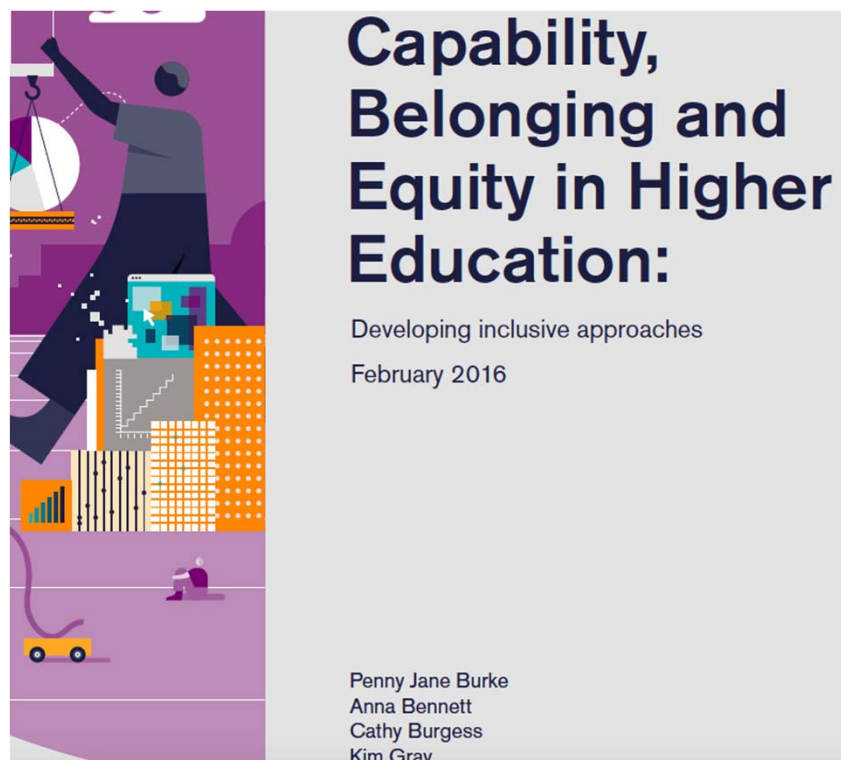


## A praxis-based approach to professional development

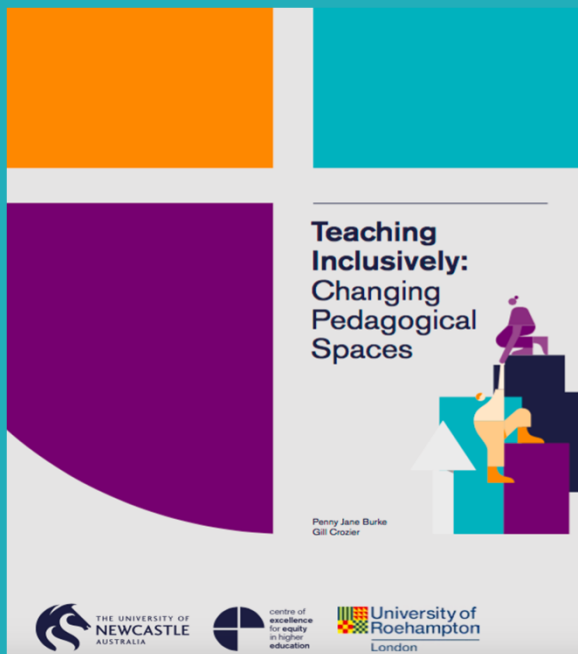
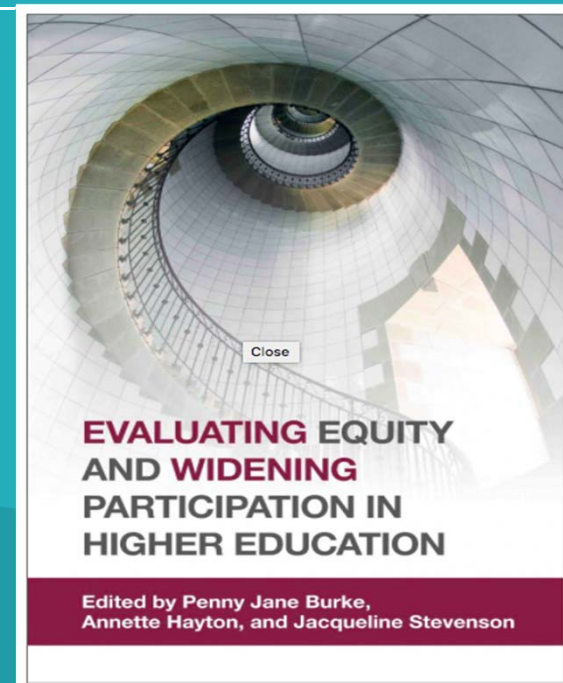
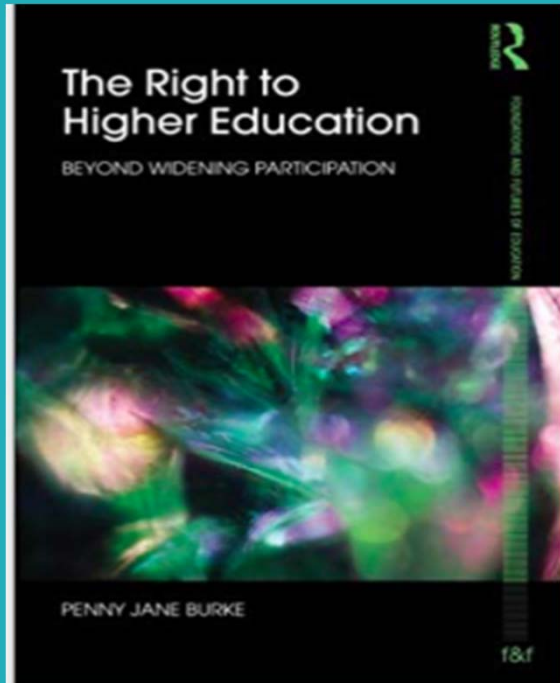


- Creating spaces of **critical reflexivity** to consider the complex processes and relations in which feelings of not belonging and/or not being capable are (re)produced
- Making this accessible through conceptual think pieces (*Teaching Inclusively*, Burke and Crozier, 2013; 2016)
- Building on this through the power of film ([www.equityhe.com](http://www.equityhe.com))

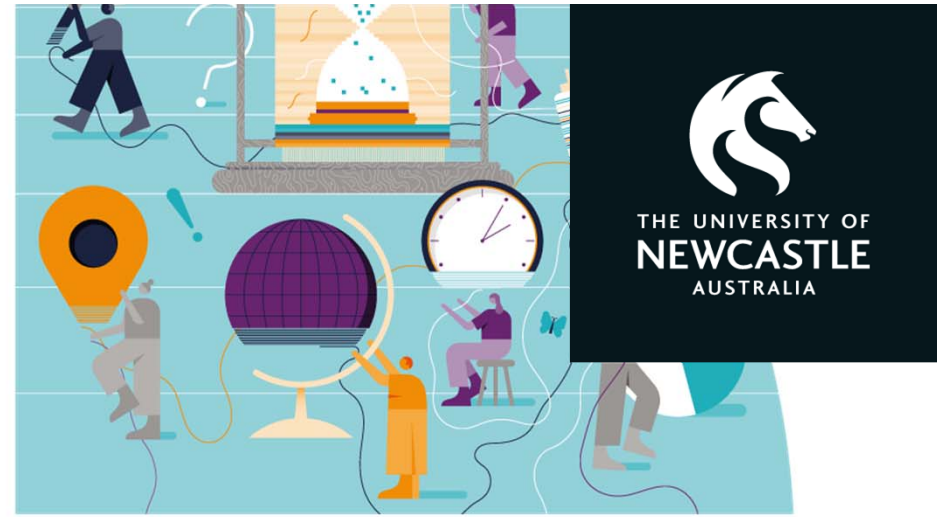
## Praxis-based CPD



- Drawing on research praxis to provide cutting edge CPD resources
- Grounded in a praxis-based framework, this suite of conceptual film ‘**think pieces**’ opens up time and space for deep engagement with complex questions of equity and WP
- The aim is to provide accessible high quality resources that create **communities of praxis** in which we engage with meaningful dialogue about the challenges we face in our work
- [www.equityhe.com](http://www.equityhe.com)







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**Thank you**