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**Making Sense of Time as Context: Theoretical Affordances
of Chronotopes in the Study of Schooling and School Success**

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Making Sense of Time as Context: Theoretical Affordances of Chronotopes in the Study of Schooling and Student Success

Catherine Compton-Lilly

Time regulates the lives of educators. Time on task, 45-minute classes, 2-hour literacy blocks, 10-week marking periods, and 40-week school years are central to teachers' lives and to the operation of schools. In contemporary schools, benchmarks, standards, promotion, retention, graduation, and ultimately school success are all intricately connected to time. Recently, politicians, policy makers, and educators have increasingly focused on what students should be able to do at certain points in time. Passing standardized tests, achieving grade-level standards, and attaining text-level benchmarks all involve temporal expectations.

Time plays a significant role in the culture of schools and in the ways students and staff experience schools (Ben-Peretz & Bromme, 1990). As Zerubavel (1981) argued, "time seems to constitute one of the major parameters of the context on which the meaning of social acts and situations depends" (pp. 101–102). However, recent analyses have focused on time as a resource and have neglected the sociological and semiotic meanings that accompany time. Unlike earlier discussions of time, this paper makes a case for recognizing *time as context*—as a constitutive dimension of experience that informs the ways students make sense of literacy, schooling, and themselves.

Time is important because long-term processes—such as literacy learning, identity construction, and school trajectories—all involve longitudinal meaning construction. As Bloome, Beierle, Grigorenko, and Goldman (2009) explained, "people take hold of time, they structure, organize, and represent it, give it meaning and social significance, and experience it both individually and collectively in terms of those meanings and social significances" (pp. 314–315).

In this paper, I use a case study approach to explore various aspects of time as it relates to the specific learning trajectory and affordances of one low-income, African American student, Jermaine Hudson.¹ I argue that time is a dimension of the contexts in which Jermaine made sense of his world and himself.

Background and Theory: Conceptualizations of Time

Conceptualizations of time in education have been limited to recognizing time as a resource, defining and describing aspects of instructional time, exploring cyclic dimensions of schooling, microanalyses of time in classrooms, and discussions of students' personal time. While the various other dimensions of time have generally been neglected in education, I argue that recognizing time as context enables educators to recognize how meanings are constructed within institutions and across time.

In an effort to extend the idea of time, I present Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) construct of *chronotope*, which literally means *timespace*. The construct of chronotope allows us to analyze time as a constitutive and qualitative dimension of experience. Brown and Renshaw (2006) said

¹ All names of people and places presented in this paper are pseudonyms.

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that Bakhtin's (1981) concept of chronotope provides a way of viewing student participation in the classroom as a dynamic process constituted through the interaction of past experience, ongoing involvement, and yet-to-be-accomplished goals.

Bakhtin (1981) adopted the term *chronotope* from Einstein to explore how texts incorporate constellations of time and space to shape the narrative possibilities of novels. Specifically, Bakhtin argued that in literature “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (p. 84). While Bakhtin argued adamantly for the inseparability of time and space, he identified time as “the dominant principle in the chronotope” (p. 86) and as the organizational feature that is often neglected. It is the chronotope of the novel that “defines genre and generic distinctions” (p. 85) and ultimately the ways people make sense of texts. Specifically, chronotopes and their accompanying temporal motifs have relevance to the ways characters are constructed and defined. The chronotope constructed in texts “determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature” (p. 85).

I attend to the ways time informs the meanings of literacy and schooling. I argue that Bakhtin's construct of chronotope reveals how students are situated within time in terms of the amount, degree, and types of changes that are expected or conceivable, and the degree to which students can affect or are affected by schooling. I also argue that the construct of chronotope can illuminate the effect of actual and historicized worlds on education and the role of critique and humor in making sense of literacy and schooling. In this paper, the case study of Jermaine provides illustrative examples that highlight the potential of chronotopic analyses to explore how students come to define their literacy, schooling, and themselves within temporal contexts.

Time as Context

Scholars have generally agreed that context matters (Berliner, 2002; Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Hanks, 1996; McHugh, 1968; Perinbanayagam, 1974; Rex, Green, & Dixon, 1998; Thomas, 1927; van Dijk, 2006); however, they have not recognized the full contextual nature of time. While earlier conceptualizations of context drew on the fields of anthropology and sociology (see Thomas, 1927; McHugh, 1968)—defining context in terms of space and time, with the exception of references to participants' background knowledge or prior linguistic experiences—recent discussions of context (e.g., Duranti & Goodwin, 1995; Rex et al., 1998; van Dijk, 2006) have generally attended to its social, linguistic, and interactional aspects. For example, Duranti and Goodwin (1995) described four dimensions of context: (a) the setting or the social/spatial framework; (b) the behavioral environment, including the ways actors use bodies and behavior to frame and organize talk; (c) language as a context for ongoing interaction; and (d) any extrasituational context that extends beyond local talk and includes relevant background knowledge. Rex and his colleagues (1998) distinguished among three types of context: context within texts, contexts surrounding texts, and macro contexts that extend beyond texts and their immediate surroundings (i.e., political, institutional, cultural contexts). While time, in the form of people's background experiences and past language practices, is implicated in these definitions, none directly addresses time as a dimension of context.

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Though I agree that context involves social and linguistic aspects, my own longitudinal research has revealed additional aspects of time that frame the ways people make sense of their experiences. Time is a constitutive dimension of experience, alongside space, language, texts, artifacts, relationships, values, cultures, policies, traditions, social roles, practices, and institutions.

Because we learn, develop, construct identities, and experience school trajectories over the course of time, it is essential that education researchers identify theories that support explicit and focused attention to time. *Time as context* references time as a constitutive dimension of experience. I advocate that explicit attention be paid to time as a contextual dimension of experience and maintain that this attention has the potential to reveal insights and understandings about time and personhood that can help educators understand students in new ways.

Time as a Resource

In the late 1800s, William T. Harris, then the U.S. Commissioner of Education, lamented the shortened length of school days and years, arguing that students would learn more if they spent more time in school (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994/2005). Between 1910 and 1930, the efficiency movement focused on making U.S. businesses and schools more productive—producing more learning in less time (Callahan, 1962). Efficiency initiatives included the adoption of standardized achievement tests to monitor students' progress, rating systems to evaluate teachers' use of time, and policies that would ensure that time was not wasted (e.g., minimizing transition time between classes, limiting the time students spent at the blackboard). In 1994, the National Educational Commission on Time and Learning released *Prisoners of Time* (1994/2005), a critique of the ways time was allocated in schools. The report noted that “time is a resource, not a barrier” for students and called “not only for more learning time, but for all time to be used in new and better ways” (p. 2). *Prisoners of Time* was followed by a report from the Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force (2007), *A New Day for Learning*, which supported after-school learning opportunities that would extend the school day, and another report from the American Educational Research Association (2007), which reiterated the importance of attending to learning time.

While I agree that time is a resource that can be allocated in different amounts, with different effects, it is the quality of instructional time, specifically, that has concerned most researchers up until now. Berliner (1990) outlined the various ways instructional time has been defined and discussed. His analysis highlighted the importance of considering the amount of time students are involved in learning academic material successfully (through engagement and time on task). He argued that aptitude, perseverance, and the pace of instruction are among the temporal constructs that affect learning. Each construct conceptualizes learning in terms of the time it takes students to learn or the time they remain fully engaged with academic tasks. Berliner argued that these considerations have “passed the test of usefulness” (p. 22) and are critical tools for improving instruction.

Anderson (1985) further complicated discussions of instructional time by considering the developmental capacities of students, the appropriate selection of curricular topics, and the sequence in which topics were introduced. Ben-Peretz (1990) argued that time allocated to

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particular curricular areas always overlapped with learning in other areas. For example, instruction in reading comprehension strategies affected students' learning in science.

These descriptions consider elements beyond the amount of time devoted to instruction; they consider the types and qualities of interactions that occur within instructional contexts. However, time in these discussions refers to instructional time within the routines and calendars of schools.

Time and the Cycles and Routines of School

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) drew upon a sociological model of time (Zerubavel, 1981) and focused on “the temporal structure of schooling as experienced by individuals and as evidenced in the conventional temporal structures of the school” (p. 38). Specifically, they attended to the rhythms, schedules, and cycles of schools and classrooms, including school years, school holidays, semesters, report card cycles, weekly schedules, daily cycles, class cycles, and students' and teachers' on- and off-duty routines. Anderson-Levitt (2002) explored the sequence, pacing, and routines of French first-grade reading classrooms and the way these learning sequences related to expectations for achievement. By drawing attention to the routines and calendars of French teachers, she invited educators in other countries to recognize and consider the normalized routines of their own instructional programs. As reported by Ben-Peretz and Bromme (1990), “School plans and curriculum requirements tend to impose norms of duration and location. These may be perceived as ‘unnatural’ by the participants of the situation, creating possible difficulties in the teaching-learning process” (p. vii).

While school schedules have almost no relation to the cycles of nature, they are treated as natural. They are accompanied by depersonalized evaluation and the possibility of failure that could result in having to repeat a cycle. Ben-Peretz and Bromme (1990) maintained that cycles reflect a moral order related to what should be accomplished at particular points in time as students move through school. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) reported, “few social systems [are] more structured than the school” (p. 41). They explained that “the primary definition of schooling is in terms of years, not in terms of what is to be known” (p. 43). In addition to attending to instructional time quantitatively and qualitatively and considering the cycles of schooling, some educators have examined interactions across time within classrooms.

Time in Classrooms

Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, Bloome and colleagues (2009) explored how participants in a high school classroom used time to generate learning opportunities. As these authors explained, “people take hold of time, they structure, organize, and represent it, give it meaning and social significance and experience it both individually and collectively in terms of those meanings and social significances” (pp. 314–315).

In a unique quantitative analysis, Nystrand and colleagues (2003) used “event-history analysis” (p. 135) to explore patterns related to the use of monologic and dialogic discourses (Bakhtin, 1984) in English and social studies classrooms. Specifically, they explored the antecedents and the consequences of particular discursal moves within unfolding discourse

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processes. Time is central to their analysis of how dialogic interactions are temporally related to the use of authentic questions and student/teacher uptake of ideas.

Personal Time

Ben-Peretz and Bromme (1990) extended the discussion of time to include subjective and personal aspects. They traced personal conceptions of time and development back to the work of Rousseau (1762/1963), who argued that schools must “lose time” (p. 212), allowing growth and development to direct learning rather than the clock. Genishi and Dyson (2009) recently rearticulated this argument in their discussion of “child speed,” maintaining that educators must allow students the time they need to learn language and literacy. They imagined Luisa, a 3-year-old second language learner, in a classroom where teachers use a scripted literacy program and encourage their students to play “say-it-fast” (p. 5). Genishi and Dyson argued for learning opportunities that not only follow the “diverse developmental time lines” (p. 35) that students bring to school, but also enable students to draw on the past as they construct themselves as members of literate communities:

Children might play games that their teachers played in their childtimes, recite rhymes that have been passed through generations of children, . . . sing songs that were written decades ago, . . . all alongside child-created dramas and stories of contemporary superheroes. (p. 139)

Time and Literacy Learning

Literacy learning brings its own set of temporal constructs and expectations. The constructs of *reading readiness* (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Graue, 1993) and *emergent literacy* (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) offer two conceptions of literacy learning within time. Reading readiness focuses on preparing students to meet institutionally imposed benchmarks that are believed to correlate with success in formal literacy learning. Emergent literacy views learning as an ongoing process that develops over long periods of time and is characterized by unique sets of skills and abilities. While all students bring literacy experiences to school, their experiences differ. Variation is expected, and all literacy experiences are recognized as providing a basis for formal literacy instruction. Standardized temporal expectations related to literacy continue as students encounter basal textbooks with accompanying scope and sequences (Shannon & Goodman, 1994), leveled books that correlate with grade-level expectations (Pinnell & Fountas, 1996), and standardized reading and language arts assessments that ostensibly identify students who have and have not mastered literacy skills at particular points in time.

Historically, literacy assessment involved public recitation of text (Smith, 2002). Students were evaluated on their ability to read texts with fluency and expression. Students were not expected to hesitate, read slowly, or problem-solve difficult words. This historical emphasis on public oral reading is reflected in current assessments that emphasize speed over strategic problem solving with text or comprehension (DIBELS, 2010).

Time and Compensatory Education

Time is one of the variables manipulated by compensatory educational programs. In particular, instructional programs designed for special education students often cover materials at a slower pace or in smaller groups, allowing students access to more of their teachers' time (Arlin, 1984; Gerber, 1995; Heshusius, 1989; Hocutt, 1996). However, other compensatory programs (Clay, 2005a, 2005b; Renaissance Learning, 2009; Scientific Products Learning, 2009) are designed to accelerate students' learning, enabling them to catch up with their peers. For students in compensatory educational settings, time is often allocated between various instructional contexts—sometimes to the extent of identifying the number of minutes per week students spend in mainstream classrooms, resource rooms, and/or self-contained classrooms (Hocutt, 1996).

In a classic work by Carroll (1963), student aptitude was identified as a contributing dimension of the time students needed to learn material. Twenty years later, advocates of mastery learning approaches, drawing on the work of Bloom (1980), applied this premise to the teaching of low-performing students. In this instructional model, students were tested after being instructed on a body of material. Low-performing students were provided with more time and retested until they met established learning criteria. As Arlin (1984) explained, "Individual differences in learning abilities are reflected in the individual differences in the amount of time taken to learn material" (p. 66). By treating time as a resource, mastery learning models promised equity of educational outcomes. While time as a resource has been the dominant temporal model when applied to special education settings, qualitative perspectives have also been voiced. For example, Zigmond and Baker (1995) maintained that the essential dimensions of a special education program involve "monitoring individual progress" and adapting "pacing, intensity, structure and materials to the unique needs of each individual child" (p. 250).

Chronotopes in Literature

Bakhtin explored how characters in literature are located within and move through time and space. In the essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope," Bakhtin (1981) analyzed the ways authors accessed time and space to shape meanings and narrative possibilities. Chronotopes organize narratives in ways that suggest particular sets of expectations and meanings that readers negotiate as they read. Various historical genres (e.g., adventure time novels, biographical novels, idyllic novels, the bildungsroman) draw upon familiar temporal features to construct particular types of narratives while shaping the limits of meaning conveyed by those narratives. In general terms, these genres create chronotopic worlds by addressing (a) the amount and degree of change that is expected, conceivable, or possible for characters; (b) conceptualization of change in characters as external (related to roles, positions, and public image) or internal (related to identity, character, or values); (c) the degree to which characters are connected to real and historicized worlds; and (d) the capacity characters have to act upon and change the world versus the degree to which they are acted upon by the world.

Table 1 presents chronotopic questions related to literature and schooling. The left-hand column focuses on literature. In the right-hand column, I have translated these questions to an educational context. Chronotopic questions related to schooling are discussed in the next section of the paper.

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Table 1
Chronotopic Questions in Literature and Schooling

Chronotopic questions related to literature	Chronotopic questions related to schooling
What is the relation of characters to historical time and political/social contexts? Do characters leave traces of their existence in the real world? Do they accomplish anything or affect history? Are the characters' metamorphoses connected to real multifaceted worlds, including social, economic, and political dimensions?	What is the relation of students to educational history and political/social contexts? Do characters leave traces of their existence on schools or the larger world? Do they accomplish anything or affect history? Are the characters' metamorphoses connected to real multifaceted worlds, including social, economic, and political dimensions?
What are the connections between human life and nature? Are the pursuits of men and women determined by the cyclical time of seasons, days and nights, and/or agricultural cycles of planting and harvest? Is the everyday time of people a series of random, fragmented events that are disassociated from the cycles of nature?	What are the connections between student life and nature? Are the pursuits of people in schools determined by the cyclical time of seasons, days and nights, and/or agricultural cycles of planting and harvest? Is everyday time in schools a series of random, fragmented events that are disassociated from the cycles of nature?
Are events in the narrative random and/or interchangeable? Are narratives composed of separate incidents that could occur in different sequences without disrupting stories? Or are they bound within a chronology that requires a particular sequence of events?	Are events in school random and/or interchangeable? Are trajectories composed of separate incidents that could occur in different sequences without disrupting trajectories? Or are they bound within a chronology that requires a particular sequence of events?
Are the lives of characters fused within significant turning points and junctures? Are these turning points connected to the outside world? Are these turning points reversible? Is reversibility contingent on the supernatural, magic, and/or chance or on the powers, will, and/or abilities of the characters? Can characters recover lost ground or return to past ways of being?	Are the lives of students fused within significant turning points and junctures? Are these turning points connected to the outside world? Are these turning points reversible? Is reversibility contingent on idiosyncratic events or on the powers, will, and/or abilities of students? Can students recover lost ground or return to past ways of being?
What is the relation of characters to the past? Is the past presented as an idyllic or epic past that is folkloric and beyond the reach of man? Or is it presented as a lived history that includes real people in domestic situations rather than legendary heroes acting in public forums?	What is the relation of students to the past? Is the past presented as an ideal and nostalgic past that is beyond the reach of man? Or is it presented as a lived history that includes real people in complex and sometimes problematic and inequitable situations?
Are the perspectives of everyday people presented—including servants, rogues, and fools? Do we hear the voices of people who critically read the world and can articulate irony and critique? What is the role of laughter and irreverence?	Are the perspectives of everyday people presented—including those who have historically been marginalized within educational institutions? Do we hear the voices of people who critically read the world and can articulate irony and critique? What is the role of laughter and irreverence?
Are accounts limited to polite and public accounts of experience? Are the grotesque and/or extreme situations presented? Do characters grapple with bodily functions, eating/drinking, sexuality, defecation, or death?	Are accounts limited to polite and official accounts of schooling? Are the extreme situation presented? Do characters grapple with bodily functions, sexuality, anger, or death?

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The questions in the left-hand column highlight the ways authors have appropriated various dimensions of lived time and space in novels. While Bakhtin did not use the term *agency*, the chronotopes reference the capacity or incapacity of characters in literature to act upon or be acted upon. Articulations of agency in novels involve characters' abilities to change, name, critique, and reflect on inequities and ironies, as well as the ways characters are contextualized within historical events (Bakhtin, 1981). By drawing attention to the intersections of time and space in novels, Bakhtin's chronotopes provided a lens for considering the agential capacities that authors extend to their characters and thus the image of humanity presented in a genre of literature.

As Keunen (2000) correctly explained, Bakhtin used the term *chronotope* to refer to two different constructs. In some places, he used the term to refer to historical generic types of literature as described above; in other places, he used it to refer to specific motifs that operate within these genres and carry meaning within texts. I use the term *chronotope* to refer to generic categories of literature and the phrase *chronotopic motifs* to refer to the specific images and semiotic tools used within those genres (see Table 2). Through their knowledge of other narratives and texts, readers are familiar with the chronotopic motifs used by authors. These motifs have meanings that people draw upon to make sense of texts. An author's choice of familiar motifs locates a text within a particular genre or chronotope that carries certain assumptions about change, characters, and the world.

Table 2
A Sampling of Chronotopic Motifs in Literature

Motifs in literature	Associated meanings
Roads, paths, or trails	Journey of life, trajectory or course of events, road as the analogy for life
Unexpected encounters	Points of departure, meetings of fate, points of departure for a series of events
Crossing thresholds	Points of crisis, the brink of new experiences, changing of course in the story or a person's life
Mystery and magic	Fate, subject chance, references to the unknown, events outside people's control
Rogues, fools, and clowns	Stepping outside of the ongoing story and talking back, often not listened to, voice of the author

Chronotopes in Schooling

Like Bakhtin, I access the construct of chronotope to focus on issues related to time. However, I am interested in the temporal complexities of students' school lives rather than those of literary characters. Bakhtin argued that chronotopes are the organizing categories of the real world—specifically, the familiar time and space relationships that authors were obliged to draw on when they created worlds in literature. These chronotopes are grounded in the real world and in lived experiences. I contend that because the chronotopes involve the ways time and space are operationalized in both literature and life, they provide a powerful means for understanding how

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time is made visible and how students construct identities. In other words, the chronotopes act as semiotic devices that link time and space, informing the understandings of students.

The full impact of time as a contextual dimension has been neglected in schooling (Berliner, 1990; Bloome et al., 2009). I argue that there are chronotopes of schooling and literacy that inform the ways students make sense of their situations. These chronotopes carry meanings related to the ways students are characterized and thus the school trajectories that are made available to them. Chronotopes of schooling suggest particular patterns of participation. Specifically, they suggest conceivable school trajectories that are grounded in the amount, degree, and types of changes that are expected, conceivable, or possible for students, as well as the degree to which students are positioned as affecting or being affected by actual and historicized worlds that exist beyond school. The right-hand column of Table 1 lists chronotopic questions that surround schooling. Ultimately, it is the chronotope that presents particular images of students and evokes potential and probable trajectories.

Just as chronotopes in literature use familiar motifs to locate characters in the temporal and spatial worlds of texts, chronotopes of schooling and literacy draw on similarly meaningful motifs (see Table 3).

Table 3
A Sampling of Chronotopic Motifs in Schooling and Literacy

Motifs in schooling	Associated meanings
Promotion/retention	Success/failure, ability, normalcy, abilities correspond to age
Graduation	Accomplishment, success, achievement, grade attainment
Meeting grade-level standards	Abilities commensurate with grade level, proficient, successful
Special education	Failure in regular programs, needing extra help and additional time, slower pace, diminished potential
Vocational education	Salvageable, potentially worthy, academically challenged
Motifs in literacy	Associated meanings
Not reading fluently	Not proficient in reading, assumed to have difficulty comprehending text, unsuccessful reader, poor public display of reading
Reading grade-level texts	Proficient in reading, on track, normal, successful, not in need of intervention
Failing standards-based English language arts examination	Being left behind, below standard, inadequate progress, literacy problem
Taking honors English course	Advanced, college track, capable
Meeting criteria on standardized writing rubric	Proficient writer, college-bound, literate

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Chronotopes enable us to move beyond conceptions of lives as a series of random events. Chronotopes provide frames that lend meanings to events. Motifs associated with chronotopes invite people to recognize themselves as particular types of people who engage in certain types of activities and pursue particular trajectories.

Complexities of Chronotopic Motifs

While chronotopes of schooling and their accompanying motifs contribute to the meanings students bring to school, they do not carry static and universal meanings. Chronotopic motifs are always contested, messy, complicated, and incomplete (Bloome et al., 2009). While they may suggest a particular understanding of experience, other meanings are grounded in multiple and often marginalized perspectives that exist in direct contention with dominant chronotopic readings (Burton, 1996). Chronotopic motifs continuously draw upon multiple discourses and hybrid syntheses that carry more than one meaning (Brown & Renshaw, 2006); their meanings can be interwoven in contradictory ways within complex interrelationships (Burton, 1996). Chronotopic analysis provides a means of considering the meanings students make of school and literacy experiences over time while also revealing tensions and divergent readings of experiences grounded in past lived and historical experiences that complicate and challenge dominant understanding and discourses.

Methodology: The Longitudinal Study

According to Saldaña (2003), longitudinal research helps researchers view the breadth and depth of people’s life experiences. It also helps them document change by analyzing data collected through long-term research projects. The longitudinal nature of this project allowed me to consider the various meanings that students brought to their experiences across time. These meanings were intimately connected to the meanings associated with chronotopic motifs of schooling and literacy embedded in the accounts of students and members of their families.

The full longitudinal qualitative case study involved seven students and their families over a 10-year period. The study was conducted in four phases, each occurring 3 or 4 years apart. This “periodic restudy” (Saldaña, 2003) of the families, in contrast to continuous data collection, enabled me to follow the families for a significant period without becoming overly intrusive or producing unmanageable amounts of data. Table 4 depicts a timeline for the project noting the research phases, participants, data collected, and general analytic procedures used during each phase of the study.

Table 4
Research Phases, Data, and Analysis

Research phases	Data	Analysis
Phase 1		
Grade 1 (1996–97)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 parent interviews• 4 student interviews• Field notes• Portfolio/classroom assessments• Classroom discussions	Coding across studies

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Research phases	Data	Analysis
Grades 2–4 (1997–2000)	No data collected	
Phase 2		
Grade 5 (2000–01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 parent interviews • 2 student interviews • Reading assessments • Writing samples 	Case study development
Grades 6–7 (2001–03)	No data collected	
Phase 3		
Grade 8 (2003–04)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 parent interviews • 2 student interviews • Reading assessments • Writing samples 	Coding across studies
Grades 9–10 (2004–06)	No data collected	
Phase 4		
Grade 11 (2006–07)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 parent interviews • 3 student interviews • Reading assessments • Writing samples • School observations • Teacher interviews • Student-created writing, photos, audiotapes journals, and/or drawings 	Case study development

The Research Setting

I began the collective case study when I was a first-grade teacher and concluded the study when the students were chronologically expected to be in high school. In first grade, the students attended Rosa Parks Elementary School, where 97% of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The city in which the school is located continues to struggle with unemployment, substandard housing, a lack of high-quality physical and mental health care, the closing of local libraries, gang violence, and a proliferation of illegal businesses, including drug trafficking. It also is a community of residents who consistently demonstrate high levels of resilience, agency, and hope for their students' futures.

Participants

During the initial study, I used a convenience sampling procedure to select 10 students from my first-grade class. I started at the top of my class list and contacted 10 parents in alphabetical order. All contacted parents agreed to participate. The families participated in the study during what would have been the students' 1st-, 5th-, 8th-, and 11th-grade years. By high school, 7 students out of 10 remained in the study and attended schools across the district. Two

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had moved out of the school district and could not be located; one student chose not to participate in the final phase of the study.

For the case study in this paper, I chose to focus on Jermaine Hudson. Jermaine's case study illustrates how temporal dimensions of schooling contributed to his understandings of literacy, schooling, and himself. Throughout school, Jermaine did not meet grade-level expectations in reading or writing. In first grade, he received Reading Recovery services. Jermaine qualified for resource services, and an individualized educational program (IEP) was written for him when he was in fourth grade. In Grades 4 and 8, he failed the state English language arts assessments; he was among the first cohorts of students to take these tests, which eventually became part of the state's policy to address the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). Jermaine was an African American student.

Data Collection

When I began my study, I was interested in the concepts about reading held by first-grade students and their families. While literacy remained the focus of the research, the scope of the research broadened over time and across the research phases in response to students' and parents' comments about school, teachers, and their goals for the future. This broadening in focus influenced the type of data I collected.

As indicated in Table 4, the full study included a range of data sources, including interviews, classroom observations, field notes, reading assessments, state test scores, and writing samples. Multiple data sources allowed for triangulation and reflected the complexity and the situated nature of participants' experiences.

Interviews with parents lasted approximately 60 minutes; early interviews with students were shorter, lasting approximately 20 minutes. As the students grew older, their interviews grew longer, eventually lasting approximately 1 hour. Interviews captured participants' perspectives and often revealed the discourses they drew upon. Throughout the study, parents were invited to discuss their childhood literacy experiences, reading ability and practices, opinions about literacy and technology, and satisfaction with their students' school experiences. In elementary school, the students were asked about their experiences at home and school with reading and writing, book preferences, experiences with computers, and plans for the future. In middle and high school, they were also asked about favorite classes, teachers, friends, and interests outside of school. With the exception of the first-grade student interviews that occurred at school and some fourth- and fifth-grade student interviews that were conducted at local fast food restaurants, all interviews occurred in the families' homes. Interviews were audiotaped, and detailed written notes were recorded.

Over the 10-year period, participants consistently welcomed me into their homes and always seemed happy to talk. Several parents thanked me for the longitudinal interest I took in their students and commented on my tenacity. When things were going well, parents shared their students' accomplishments—in middle school, Alicia tested at a 10th-grade reading level, Peter placed second in his school's poetry contest, and Marvin shared his sports trophies. When things were going poorly, parents often appealed to my long-term knowledge of their students—"He [Bradford] was good. He was a good little boy" or Jermaine is "still stubborn."

Data Coding and Analysis

Data coding and analysis involved four separate and lengthy phases over a 10-year period. The same general procedure was used during each phase of the study. In each phase, I used data analysis programs—first HyperQual and later NVivo—to sort segments of interview and field-note data into code sets based on patterns suggested by multiple readings of the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because of the longitudinal nature of the study, it was necessary to revisit codes throughout the process.

Data coding. Initial codes were supplemented, expanded, condensed, combined, and abandoned as additional interviews were coded and as other data sources were added to the data sets. Transcripts coded early in the analysis process were revisited during later stages to reflect the revised codebook. Once interviews were coded, I conducted a close reading and again revised, condensed, and combined these codes into categories. I combined code sets that were similar or re-sorted data from particularly large code sets to reflect more specialized codes. I simultaneously clustered categories around shared themes as I identified larger, salient themes related to my research questions. Although similar research interests and interview questions contributed to a degree of consistency across the phases of the project, each round of coding was completed separately, and new sets of codes were identified for each phase.

During Phases 1 and 3, I coded data from across the entire data set. During Phases 2 and 4, I coded the data from each family separately and constructed case summaries for each family prior to identifying intercase patterns. This process of moving back and forth between the identification of general analytical categories and case study analyses has supported a balance between identifying themes shared across cases and maintaining attention to unique dimensions of individual cases. As I coded data from each phase of the study, I crafted a chart to link similar themes across the phases of the research project (see Table 5). This chart highlighted longitudinal categories, themes, and patterns.

Table 5
A Sampling of Codes Related to Time Across the Research Project

Code	Description	Examples
Phase 1		
Hope	Statements from parents about their hopes for their children’s futures	Ms. Hudson: Well he [Jermaine] say he want to be a teacher. . . .[I] think he can do that.
High expectations	Statements from parents about their expectations for their children	Ms. Hudson: I be telling him to read, and he don’t want to do it. I say Jermaine you got to do it. I said because reading is the most important thing, you know.

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Code	Description	Examples
Phase 2		
College/graduate	Statements about children attending college	Ms. Hudson: It's when you graduate. You got to have a diploma in order to get a what? Jermaine: Report card? Ms. Hudson: No! A good job.
Fears	Statements from parents concerning fears for their children's future	Ms. Hudson: I don't have no fear. . . I have faith in him.
Phase 3		
Change	Changes that have occurred in families since the last phase of the project	Ms. Hudson: But now he say he going, he want to go to charter school. . . I guess because he get into too many arguments and stuff in school with the other kids and stuff.
Now and then	Times when parents compare the current situation and events with their past	Mr. Hudson: When I was growing up, I had an excuse. Especially the black man, 'cause. . . the white people went to the school but the black people had to work white people's farms while the white kids go to school.
Phase 4		
Next steps	Statements about children's futures	Jermaine: I wanted to be a lawyer, a fireman, I wanted to be a doctor. [pause] I wanted to be so many things. . . . I could still do that. It going to take me awhile but I could still be them things. Not right now, because I got a lot of stuff that I got to catch up on. I can't like just go study my GED and I'm not on the right level yet.
Across time	Examples when speakers draw across time	Jermaine: School Number 67 [Grade 2] was the terriblest school I ever went in. Like I [was] suspended so many times [for] fighting people.

Types of data and how each was analyzed. The students' first-grade writing samples came from their portfolios. These samples of independent and assisted writing were selected at various points in the school year to document their growth as writers across the school year. During Phases 2 and 3, students were asked during interviews to write "a story about school" or "a story about reading." During the final phase of the study, students were invited to draw pictures, take photographs of their favorite things and places, keep a written journal, and audiotape their thoughts. These projects were presented as optional, and students mailed their data to me in prepaid envelopes. Each artifact was analyzed twice. As the artifacts were collected, notes were taken relative to each artifact, capturing information about how and when the artifact was collected, as well as thoughts and insights in relation to the emerging project. Once all spoken data from each phase of the project were coded and analyzed, artifacts were

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revisited, initial notes were read, and artifacts were reanalyzed in conjunction with the coded data set.

Reading assessments were collected during each phase of the project. Informal reading inventories were administered, including graded word lists and running records of leveled reading materials (Beaver, 1997; Ekwall & Shanker, 1993; Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). These assessments captured students' reading accuracy on texts at various levels of difficulty. They also captured their comprehension abilities via one of two methods: (a) answering questions about the texts and/or (b) retelling the texts. State English language arts scores were collected at Grades 4, 8, and 11.

Finally, I collected school data for students during the initial and final phases of the project. During the initial phase, as the students' teacher, I was able to collect a rich set of data including daily field notes, audiotapes of guided reading groups, and student portfolios. During the final phase of the project, I shadowed students for 2 days and interviewed their English language arts teachers. Audiotapes from my first-grade classroom and high school teacher interviews were transcribed and coded along with other spoken data. Reflections were recorded after each visit to students' schools; once the other data were coded, these reflections and the observations were analyzed in conjunction with the larger patterns and categories that were noted.

Temporal data analysis. Close analysis of the data, along with what I learned in my long-term relationships with the families, revealed various patterns, insights, and findings, especially in relation to time. As I coded interview data from Phases 3 and 4, I identified a set of codes related to time (*time, change, future, now and then*). I also noted how participants recursively and selectively drew on experiences across time as they repeatedly returned to some stories while neglecting and forgetting others or framed some stories as examples of larger patterns. Some books and literacy practices were mentioned at multiple interviews; others were forgotten. In some instances, participants voiced and revoiced the same comments using almost the same words across long periods of time. It became clear that meanings were not constructed within simple, linear, and chronological landscapes. In contrast, people drew selectively on events and ideas across time.

Methodological Limitations

While this methodology has many advantages for examining the construction of meaning over long periods of time, it also carried limits. In particular, by relying primarily on the words of students and parents, my analysis is limited by what people chose to tell me and how they chose to present themselves as readers, students, and individuals. For example, I collected only a small amount of data presenting the perspectives of educators and their understandings of Jermaine as a student and literate person.

Researcher Reflections on Time

As a teacher, I have always grappled with the temporal expectations of schools. I spent 18 years teaching in public schools. During that time, I witnessed students' failing tests, being retained, and being placed in special education. When Jermaine was in first grade, the state

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education department cited our school for failing to meet state standards in reading and math. I experienced the repercussions of being a school that faced sanctions (e.g., imposed curricula, displaced administrators, surveillance by the state education department, or closure). Thus, while I believed that students are entitled to the time they need to become literate and educated, I also recognized the consequences that falling behind had on students. As a result, I spent a lot of effort monitoring students' reading levels and attempting to accelerate their progress.

As Jermaine's former teacher, I brought my hopes for him as a literacy learner to my longitudinal study. I believed that without strong literacy skills, Jermaine's future would be in jeopardy. I held my breath each time I assessed him, hoping that he would be able to read grade-level texts. Yet I also was motivated by a need to substantiate my own sense of efficacy as a teacher. This sense of efficacy related not only to Jermaine, but to the approximately 400 students I had taught during my career. As a White teacher in a predominantly African American classroom, I needed to believe that my daily work was making a difference in the lives of students. Like many educators, I wanted to change the world.

Case Study of Jermaine

Background

In first grade, the other students often teased Jermaine about his dreadlocks and small stature. He was the youngest of three children and lived with his mother and father in an apartment not far from the school; his brother and sister were young adults who lived in the community. During Grade 1, Jermaine made notable gains in Reading Recovery, but these improvements ended when he completed the program midyear. By the end of first grade, he was approximately 3 months behind his peers. In Grade 4, Jermaine was classified as having a "disorder of written language." An IEP was written, and he was provided with resource services—first in writing and later in all subject areas—for the rest of his school career.

His mother, Ms. Hudson, grew up in a midsized city about 60 miles from the city in which the research was conducted. She described doing "a lot" of reading with her own mother, yet sometimes found school boring, had "failed" the seventh grade, and did not graduate from high school; she enrolled in a GED credential program but left after a few weeks, explaining, "[I] didn't like it. . . I guess it was just the long hours" (interview, 5/12/97).

Jermaine was a social person who always enjoyed talking with me and consistently greeted me with a hug. When asked to draw a picture during the final year of the study, he drew a heart with the words "I love Ms. Lilly" inside. In elementary school, he often spoke about his friends; at the same time, he spoke extensively about getting in fights, especially with his nemesis, Curtis, who was mentioned at almost every interview, even after Jermaine lost contact with him. Jermaine had won a talent contest as soloist with his church choir; he described himself as a good singer and discussed the possibility of auditioning for the *American Idol* television show. In middle school, Jermaine was a member of the school's wrestling and step teams. He also took boxing lessons at a local community center. Jermaine had a notable sense of humor that he displayed during interviews when he bragged about registering his fists as lethal weapons or described his teachers in entertaining and perhaps exaggerated ways.

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Jermaine’s older sister graduated from high school and attended a 2-year college to become a registered nurse. His brother did not graduate from high school but held a steady job repairing trucks for a large company. While Ms. Hudson previously had worked as a home health care aide, during most of the study she was on disability due to a history of back problems. Mr. Hudson was a retired nurse and a former jazz musician.

Time, Literacy Learning, and Schooling

Chronotopic motifs related to schooling and literacy contributed to the meanings that Jermaine and his mother constructed about literacy and schooling, and about Jermaine as a reader and a student. The data excerpts presented in this section explore particular motifs in literacy and schooling that support the construction of particular images of students in terms of expected, conceivable, and possible change; types of change; the degree to which characters are connected to historicized worlds beyond school; and the extent to which the world acts upon students rather than the reverse. I also explore these motifs in the context of grade-level retention, compensatory educational experiences, and the pace of instruction as these things relate to Jermaine.

Time manifested itself in various ways for Jermaine as a reader and a writer. Based on both official state test scores for English language arts and my own assessments, Jermaine struggled with reading and writing. In Grades 4 and 8, Jermaine failed his state English language arts assessments and never took the 11th-grade test. Based on the informal reading inventories I administered (Beaver, 1997; Ekwall & Shanker, 1993; Leslie & Caldwell, 2006), Jermaine made very little progress in reading after leaving elementary school. Despite receiving Reading Recovery services in Grade 1 and resource room services starting in Grade 4, and participating in a computerized reading intervention program in middle school, Jermaine continued to struggle with reading throughout school (see Table 6).

Table 6
Jermaine’s Reading Progress

Phase	Grade										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1: Age 6											
Age-approp. grade											
Actual grade											
Text reading level											
Word list											
2: Age 10											
Age-approp. grade											
Actual grade											
Text reading level											
Word list											
3: Age 13											
Age-approp. grade											
Actual grade											

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Phase	Grade										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Text reading level											
Word list											
4: Age 16/17											
Age-approp. grade											
Actual grade											
Text reading level											
Word list											

When reading words in isolation (e.g., graded word lists) in Grade 4, all of Jermaine’s attempts—whether correct or incorrect—were actual words (e.g., *or* for *our*; *place* for *please*). By middle school, Jermaine often produced nonsense words when he did not recognize a word (e.g., *reliz* for *realized*; *obstructules* for *obstacles*). While Jermaine sampled the letters and sounds in words, he was satisfied with attempts that did not make sense.

According to an informal reading inventory (Ekwall & Shanker, 1993) administered when Jermaine was in Grade 7, Jermaine read at the fifth-grade level. He often made minor errors that did not affect his comprehension (i.e., *didn’t* for *did not*; *caves* for *caverns*). However, some of these errors created syntactical problems within the sentences that Jermaine did not correct, raising questions about how well he monitored his reading. While his ability to answer general comprehension questions was adequate, he demonstrated difficulty with questions that asked for the precise recall of information. For example, he described a *herd* of elephants as *a lot* of elephants rather than providing a specific response that could be counted as correct—*about 30 elephants* (Ekwall & Shanker, 1993, p. 196). At the final interview, when Jermaine was 17 and in the eighth grade, he continued to instructionally read at the fifth-grade level. Again, he made multiple minor errors while reading and provided imprecise answers to comprehension questions.

Jermaine’s writing also documented the challenges he faced with literacy (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). In June of first grade, Jermaine used a simple sentence pattern (*I can*) and scattered known words throughout his story (*love, to*). Although I initially helped him with the spelling for the word *read*, he did not maintain that correct spelling throughout the piece. In fourth grade, he spelled most high-frequency words correctly, but he presented three different spellings of the word *because*. His handwriting had improved since first grade.

In Grade 7, Jermaine wrote about his resource teacher, Mr. Davis. The writing sample included crossed-out text and errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax. During the final round of interviews, the students were invited to complete four optional tasks. Jermaine completed all of the activities except the journal writing request. While improvements were apparent in Jermaine’s writing, his seventh- grade sample and his reluctance to write reflected his continued struggle with writing.

I can read.
I love to read.
I love to read.
I can help.
I can play with
you
I can read.
I can read to myself.
I can read.

Figure 1. Jermaine’s independent writing sample, Grade 1.

1 I like gym because I like to run.
2 I like art because I like to paint and draw
3 I like my teacher because he is nice.
4 I like my friends because they is not mean to
me.
5 I like my mom because she is nice to me
and my friends.

Figure 2. Jermaine’s independent writing sample, Grade 4.

The person I am going to
write about is my teacher Mr. D.
He help me with a lot of my homework.
He help me with math English Science. in sence he
been helping me I been doing
better in my classes.

Figure 3. Jermaine’s independent writing sample, Grade 7.

Like many students, Jermaine fixated on speed as an indicator of good reading. In fourth grade, when asked who in his class was a good reader, he described a classmate, Doris—“She just looks at the word that she knows [it].” He explained, “We got to read the words real fast. She be like vlu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu. And she be [the] first one [done]” (interview, 7/20/00). For Jermaine, good reading was a performance that involved speed and accuracy rather than comprehension. During my final interview with Jermaine when he was 17 years old, his mother encouraged him to slow down when he read, saying, “I don’t think you’re no bad reader, if you take your time”

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(interview, 5/23/07). Jermaine's mother challenged his conflating of speed with reading ability and suggested that successful reading involved dimensions beyond speed.

Jermaine also repeatedly described reading as a performance. In fourth grade, he explained that he appreciated when his teacher sent him to the back of the room to read alone.

I don't want no help for reading. . . I need to try by myself. . . . They should have me do my reading alone. Cause [then] I don't be sad. I just be sad at myself because I can't read. Everybody pick on me and everything. (Interview, 4/12/01)

During the same interview, Jermaine's mother also referenced the public nature of reading in classrooms, explaining, "He can't concentrate on a book with a bunch of people around" (interview, 4/12/01). While Jermaine aspired to the image of the competent student, personified by Doris in an earlier interview, the difficulties he encountered with reading resulted in his request to be left alone—to struggle with his reading challenges away from his peers and their harsh words. While peers and teachers were presented as acting on Jermaine, agency was also apparent. Jermaine dismissed the possibility of getting help, arguing that he needed to try by himself. However, these statements of agency were complicated by his own admission, "I can't read." When Jermaine was in seventh grade, he continued to voice concerns about his reading ability: "[I'm] not that good a reader. . . that's why I don't read in front of people" (interview, 5/30/04).

At age 17, Jermaine reflected on himself as a reader:

I don't like reading. If I was reading like when I was with y'all [in first grade and in Reading Recovery], [if] after I left that school, if I would have kept on reading, I would have been a real good reader. But I don't like reading. It's not me. (Interview, 5/23/07)

In this short excerpt, Jermaine stated twice that he did not like reading and maintained, "It's not me." However, Jermaine still argued for a degree of agency. His explicit and implied use of the word *if* suggested possibilities, presenting himself as an agent who had once had the potential to become a "real good reader."

While Jermaine's literacy progress as measured by school assessments was far below grade-level expectations, he had books that he enjoyed reading. In particular, he identified the Bluford series (Langan, Kern, & Schraff, 2007–2008), a set of mysteries written at the fifth-grade level and featuring African American and Latino/a youth. In addition, Jermaine was excited about the poems he wrote in his middle school English language arts class. He described the response when he read one "to the class, the *whole* class": "They was shocked. My teacher said it was great, [that's] the first time she said something to me like that." He explained, "I write sad poems that make you think about life and stuff like that" (interview, 5/23/07).

Jermaine's literacy experiences presented a set of chronotopic motifs that contributed to his image of himself as literate. But Jermaine had fallen behind in terms of school literacy expectations: he could not read and comprehend texts that were expected of students who were his age; he had not passed his state English language arts tests; and based on the writing samples I collected, he did not meet school writing standards. In addition, Jermaine was very aware of the criteria for a successful public display of reading proficiency—reading quickly and accurately.

This emphasis on the public display led Jermaine to ask to be left alone to figure out reading without the help of teachers or peers, reflecting a sense of agency. He argued that he needed to try by himself and blamed himself for not becoming a reader. However, it is not Jermaine's reading progress alone that informed his school trajectory. Other factors, including grade retention, also imposed messages about self and possibilities for the future.

Grade-Level Retention

Retention is a chronotopic motif that carries meaning about the nature of the student and his or her relationship to schooling. In the United States, retention policies have had a long and controversial history. As Labaree (1984) noted, two alternative policies on promotion—social promotion and merit promotion—have been adopted in response to social and cultural influences at various points in U.S. history. While merit promotion functioned well when only a small percentage of the U.S. population was expected to finish high school, it is more difficult to achieve when a much larger proportion of the population is being served. Consistent with findings from other studies (Natriello, 1996), retention did not appear to enhance Jermaine's learning; after spending 5 years in middle school, he still read at a fifth-grade level. In fact, being retained eventually contributed to Jermaine's leaving school.

In first grade, Jermaine produced the two writing samples presented in Figures 4 and 5.

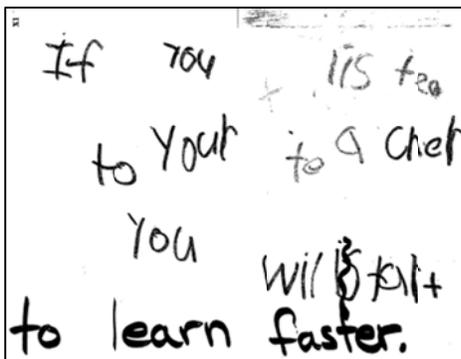


Figure 4. Jermaine's assisted writing sample, Grade 1, example 1.

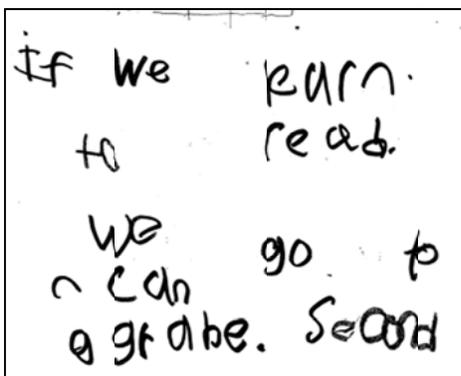


Figure 5. Jermaine's assisted writing sample, Grade 1, example 2.

While I sat beside Jermaine and helped him with spelling, he decided what he wanted to write. In both examples, he presented maxims about school, learning, and time. In the first example, he

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noted that listening to the teacher will help students “learn faster.” In the second example, Jermaine associated learning to read with being promoted to second grade. Even in Grade 1, Jermaine was aware of temporal expectations associated with schooling and the need to keep pace with those expectations.

Unfortunately, Jermaine repeated second grade due to his difficulties with reading and because his “grades went down” (interview, 7/13/00). He described this experience 3 years later: “The third grade people be saying ‘Ah-hah, you’re a second grader’” (interview, 7/13/00). Ms. Hudson commiserated, remembering her own retention in grade school, saying “they [the kids] did that when I was going [to school]” (interview, 7/13/00). For both Jermaine and his mother, messages related to failure in school were articulated through the voices of their peers, which Jermaine presented as an identity marker—“*you’re a second grader.*” While Jermaine was distraught over this teasing, several years later he made similar comments about a classmate who was retained multiple times in middle school:

Jermaine: This boy he’s 7’ 5” and he’s in seventh grade. And he been there for *5 years* in seventh grade!

Researcher: No.

Jermaine: Yes. He retarded. I don’t know if he’s retarded. Oh my God! He’s been in Tubman School [for] *7 years!*

Researcher: Do you worry about that happening to you?

Jermaine: Yeah. (laughs)

Researcher: Really?

Jermaine: That’s why I be trying hard to get my work done. (Interview, 5/30/04)

While Jermaine may have exaggerated the student’s physical size (7’ 5”) and the time spent in seventh grade (5 years) and feigned shock with the colloquialism, “Oh my God!,” this exaggeration infused humor into a description that Jermaine viewed as actually quite serious. At the time of this interview, he had failed Grade 2 and Grade 7 and was concerned about being promoted to Grade 8.

Perhaps most disconcerting was Jermaine’s strategy for avoiding a similar fate. “Trying hard” to get his work done involved only external changes. Jermaine believed that task completion, rather than learning, was the key to promotion. Just as Jermaine argued that he needed to “try” to learn to read by himself, in this case he proposed to “try” to get his work done. During the final phase of the study, when Jermaine reflected on what it had been like to be 14 in the seventh grade, he highlighted the gap between himself and the younger students: “I didn’t like the seventh-grade little kids. It didn’t work for me” (interview, 9/1/06).

Unfortunately, Jermaine was retained multiple times in middle school. At age 17, he had repeated seventh grade twice, eighth grade three times, and was assigned to repeat eighth grade again the following year. Expectations beyond school eventually caught up with Jermaine. At

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our final interview, Jermaine was 17 and still in the eighth grade. It was doubtful that he would be promoted to high school. Jermaine's girlfriend was pregnant, but he did not want to quit school. "I don't know what to think. I'm just going to do the best I can. I'm still going to be in school. I'm not dropping out of school because I'm gonna have a baby" (interview, 5/23/07). However, Ms. Hudson planned to enroll him in a vocational program, saying, "How can you be a father and be sitting in the eighth grade?" (interview, 5/23/07). Ms. Hudson considered fatherhood as incommensurate with being an eighth grader. As she explained, the financial strain that the baby would place on the family required Jermaine to get a job; to her, vocational education was the best option. Here, we view not only the imposition of the outside world on Jermaine's school trajectory but also multiple meanings of chronotopic motifs. While Jermaine read his upcoming retention as yet another opportunity to continue in Grade 8, his mother read recent events as an indicator that Jermaine's school trajectory had come to an end. For Jermaine's mother, it was too late to consider staying in school, despite Jermaine's articulated commitment to do his "best."

Jermaine was drastically out of sync with the temporal expectations of schooling, and the school district offered no viable options. Jermaine and his mother were unaware of alternative schools, GED credential programs, transitional programs, or vocational programs provided by the school district. Other than the option to remain in the eighth grade, which Ms. Hudson found untenable at age 18, Jermaine had no recourse and found himself acted on by school programs and the lack of opportunities. Jermaine's dilemma echoed situations described by Fine (1991), who documented high school students' being "pushed out" of school. As Fine explained, school practices and policies made school so unwelcoming and inhospitable to low-income students, particularly students of color, that students were left with no option but to leave.

Jermaine's agency and tenacity were remarkable considering the school policies he encountered. Despite his repeated failing of grades during middle school, Jermaine was prepared to return to eighth grade in pursuit of his diploma and resigned to leaving school only when viable options were not offered. Just as the clowns and the rogues in Bakhtin's analysis of texts name the ironies existent in textual worlds (see Table 2), Ms. Hudson critiqued school policies, describing the school district's decisions to place her 18-year-old son in middle school as unreasonable and ironic. Significantly, Ms. Hudson did not criticize Jermaine for leaving school—she encouraged him to leave. While official meanings of retention and dropping out of school focus on the abilities and commitment of students, Ms. Hudson articulated a different and more nuanced understanding; her view was that repeated retentions in school had left her son with no alternatives. Dropping out was the only viable option. In fact, Ms. Hudson challenged school-imposed images of Jermaine by consistently describing Jermaine as capable but "stubborn." Despite multiple retentions, low grades, and struggles with literacy, Ms. Hudson did not question Jermaine's ability or intelligence. She maintained faith in not only his capacity to learn but also his ability to choose whether to learn or not.

Retention was not only a temporal disruption of expected school trajectories, it also involved an imposition of meaning on the self (e.g., "you're a second grader," "he's retarded"). While Jermaine used humor and exaggeration when he described a peer who had been retained, the conversation was serious, and ironically predicted Jermaine's own situation. However, school was no longer insulated from the outside world; Jermaine's age and his responsibilities beyond school converged and contributed to limited choices and his ultimate decision to leave school.

Compensatory Education and Temporal Expectations for Jermaine

Compensatory educational programs in the United States address cognitive, experiential, and academic deficits. I use the term *compensatory education* to refer to the various services, including special education programs, that Jermaine received as he moved through school. In compensatory classrooms, time is a variable that can be manipulated to increase learning. Some classrooms provide students with more time to master material (Arlin, 1984; Gerber, 1995; Heshusius, 1989; Hocutt, 1996); others use specially designed instruction to accelerate students' learning (Clay, 2005a, 2005b; Renaissance Learning, 2009; Scientific Products Learning, 2009).

As noted earlier, Jermaine's fourth-grade IEP identified him as a special education student due to a "disorder of written language" (interview, 4/12/01). This same year Jermaine's teachers told Ms. Hudson that Jermaine "couldn't really read" (interview, 4/12/01). She described working with Jermaine's teacher to "confront" the school board in order to ensure that Jermaine got the help he needed. Together, they rallied the school district and were able to obtain remedial services for Jermaine three times a week. While Jermaine hated attending resource classes, his mother was pleased that he was getting extra help and believed that things were "going to get much better" (interview, 4/12/01). In this scenario, Ms. Hudson viewed herself as an agent with the capacity to act on behalf of her son to change his school trajectory. Notably, she was successful in obtaining the extra services that were identified as appropriate for Jermaine. In middle school, Jermaine attended resource classes for 45 minutes each day with a small group of peers. The classes provided support in all subject areas. He was never placed in a self-contained special education class.

In middle school, Jermaine repeated the seventh grade and was assigned to a compensatory program that involved approximately 10 students spending half of their school days in a computer lab. Jermaine described the program: "I'd go to the one room for the whole, for the rest [half] of the day. And we do our work—sometimes we work on the computers and stuff like that" (interview, 9/1/06). This special program included *Fast ForWord*, a computerized reading intervention program that is described on the company's website as developing and strengthening "memory, attention, processing rate, and sequencing—the cognitive skills essential for learning and reading success" (Scientific Products Learning, 2009).

Jermaine understood that if he did well in this compensatory program, he could be promoted to a higher grade: "They let me know they had a program I could join and they could skip me up [to a higher grade]" (interview, 9/1/06). As he explained, "I was like in eighth grade class. They gave me 8th-grade work and everybody else 7th-grade work . . . and now I'm in the 9th or 10th grade now" (interview, 9/1/06). During the summer before he repeated seventh grade, Jermaine assumed that because of his progress in the compensatory program he would be promoted to high school. He said,

I passed that program. I took the test for them, passed it and they put me in 9th and 10th grade and into another program where I could take it again and I could be in my right grade. My right grade is 11th grade. (Interview, 9/1/06)

However, when I visited Jermaine later in the school year, he was still in the seventh grade. While time was presented as malleable and Jermaine believed that he had the power to regain

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lost time, this possibility was not realized, explanations were never offered, and institutional policies were enacted that contradicted Jermaine's assumed sense of agency. While Jermaine positioned himself as capable of, and successful in, completing activities that promised to change his educational trajectory, he simultaneously used the pronoun *they* ("they let me know," "they had a program," "they could skip me up"), linguistically highlighting the power of the school to act upon him.

This experience raises questions about what was learned and how well it translated into criteria for advancement through middle and high school. While Jermaine sat at the computer terminal each day and completed activities to develop cognitive skills such as "memory, attention, processing rate, and sequencing" (Scientific Products Learning, 2009), it is questionable whether these cognitive drills resulted in the types of changes (e.g., changes in reading proficiency, mathematical understandings, or mastery of concepts related to science or social studies) that are valued in secondary school classrooms. My assessments of Jermaine's reading abilities were unaffected by his participation in the program. Rather than providing Jermaine with specialized help in reading or any other subject area, the school required Jermaine to complete activities—external rather than internal changes.

This emphasis on task completion was evident when I observed Jermaine at age 17 in his eighth-grade resource classroom. Five students were making corrections to a paper they had completed in math class. Jermaine spent half of the 45-minute period locating a working calculator and then struggled to get the numbers entered correctly. The teacher circulated among the students as they corrected their papers, but spent most of the period with one particularly frustrated student. A few minutes before the bell rang, the students gathered their materials and waited by the door. Jermaine had corrected only two math problems (from field notes, 12/22/06).

Activity in the resource room focused on task completion—external changes rather than internal growth or development that might have been possible with more specialized, targeted instruction. Jermaine was not assisted with the challenges he faced in decoding, comprehending, or reading fluently, or with conceptual difficulties with math. He was allowed to use time inefficiently as long as he kept busy. By the time he was 17, Jermaine blamed himself:

I ain't want to be like this. I would have been going to my prom this year. I think about that too. I'm just messing [up] my whole life, but I would be getting out of school next year. . . I messed up. I took a wrong road. (Interview, 5/23/07)

However, the situation cannot be blamed solely on Jermaine or his teacher; it implicates the outside world in the form of available resources. Specifically, providing Jermaine with authentic learning experiences that might have changed his educational trajectory would have involved giving him significant periods of time with well-prepared, knowledgeable teachers. Catching up to his peers would have required a significant investment of time and high-quality instruction. While economic issues ultimately loom in the background, they were never named or raised by Jermaine and his mother.

Jermaine's resource room classroom provided him with more time to master the material and compensatory computerized programs that promised to make up for lost time. Neither program changed Jermaine's school trajectory. While both Jermaine and his mother engaged in

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acts of agency that they believed would help, these efforts proved ineffective and failed to disrupt the course of events. While schools often invite parents and students to engage in acts of agency (e.g., advocating for appropriate services, working hard, completing work), the invitations from Jermaine's school were misleading. Despite being classified as a special education student and receiving various compensatory services, Jermaine remained behind his peers as measured by school assessments and never regained lost time or managed to keep pace with other students.

Time and the Pace of Instruction

Standardized testing, grade-level standards, and benchmarks contribute to the pressure educators feel to cover large amounts of material. As a result, educators often attempt to move students quickly through textbooks and units of study and efficiently cover large amounts of material (Brandon, 2002; Garan, 2004). However, quick-paced instruction can be devastating. Instructional pace is calibrated so that students of average ability are able to master the material presented within a specified time frame. Students who do not master material in the allotted time fail tests, courses, and grade levels and are referred for compensatory educational services and programs (Arlin, 1984).

Jermaine said that teachers contributed to problems related to the pace of instruction. He complained about teachers who “only give us 5 minutes to do something.”

When they teach you so fast, you don't pick up that fast. . . They do like a week of this and then next week . . . [they] do something that's different. . . Cause I don't pick up stuff fast like the other kids. . . you gotta wait. Like do 2 weeks of it. (Interview, 5/30/04)

Jermaine distinguished himself from other students, saying that he did not learn as quickly; this statement is in accordance with dominant discourses about disability (Arlin, 1984; Gerber, 1995; Heshusius, 1989; Hocutt, 1996). Jermaine identified himself as a slow learner. Internalized meanings related to time and the pace of instruction had implications for how Jermaine understood himself as a learner. In the above description, Jermaine again used the pronoun *they*, describing teachers as acting upon students (i.e., “they teach you so fast,” “they do like a week of this”). When I asked Jermaine if he had any advice for his teachers, he responded, “I'll tell them to slow down with the math, go slow for some students that don't get it and help the students that don't get it” (interview, 12/17/03).

In contrast to his earlier description of his special education teacher, Mr. Davis, Jermaine characterized other teachers as not providing meaningful assistance. In seventh grade, Jermaine reported that when he needed help, his teachers would say, “Well, I can't really help you. Just learn by yourself” (interview, 5/30/04). Jermaine continued:

And [then they] go to the next person. I hate that. I be like, he [the teacher] pretends [that] what he's doing [helps]. I be like, “Just go. Leave me alone.” . . . Cause they make me mad . . . they should know [and tell you] the details and stuff to it—how to do it. They just skip parts and do it. I'm like this, “Just go ahead and leave me alone. I'll find it by myself.” (Interview, 5/30/04)

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Jermaine described teachers as withholding necessary details, skipping critical information, and only pretending to help. As in the reading examples presented above, Jermaine ultimately asked to be left alone. In addition to general complaints about teachers, on several occasions Jermaine presented humorous and highly critical views of particular teachers.

I had like a red mark, right here okay? [Jermaine points to his arm] He goes and says, “Mm, get away from me. Go away from me. You got a disease!” He’s like, “I don’t want a disease from you. You got a nasty disease.” I say, “I ain’t got no disease. I say it’s just like something bit me or something.” He’s like, “Mmm-mm, disease. Get out my room.” “Damn,” I said, “I’m not getting out your room cause that’s the stupidest thing cause I got a little mark on my arm and it’s not no disease.” [Spoken in the voice of the science teacher:] “It’s a disease! Shut up. Shut your mouth. You got a disease.” “Mr. Lyons,” I said, “Do not ____ me off [Jermaine paused as he spoke to indicate an implied expletive]. I was like, “I don’t got no disease. I tried to be nice to you for so long. I’m the nicest person in the classroom until you make me mad.” And he come and tell me he gonna shoot the desks and jack me up and told me to get out his class. “Well,” I said, “you put your hand on me one more time, I smack the crap out of you.” (Interview, 5/30/04)

The story continued with Jermaine’s throwing a book at the teacher, hitting him “dead in the face,” and getting suspended from school. While this story dealt with a serious matter, it was told with humor, explicative language, amusing affect, and I suspect some exaggeration. Similar stories were told throughout middle school. For example, Jermaine described one teacher who kept a “bong” under her desk, another who repeatedly and publically called Jermaine “gay,” and a third who publically admonished a classmate for smelling bad. These critiques referenced topics that are decidedly inappropriate for school (e.g., bodily functions, diseases, body odor, illicit activities and language). In a Bakhtinian analysis, Jermaine entered the world of Rabelais. He drew upon the illicit and unspeakable to express critique. His examples, while generally serious in terms of content and consequences, were presented with humor and exaggeration. They provided a means for speaking back and a forum for highlighting the ironies of school. While his descriptions were not necessarily indicative of what actually happened, Jermaine presented teachers as uncaring and school as acting on students, naming some of the ironies that accompanied a school trajectory that was characterized by stagnation and institutional neglect. Like the voices of rogues and clowns in classic literature, his critiques went unheeded by those in positions of power—school officials and teachers—and had no impact on his ultimate trajectory.

Discussion

Slattery (1995) contended that time is more than a resource that can be divided up, allocated, and manipulated to ensure learning. He maintained that people live within time and make sense of their experiences across time as they draw on these experiences and the meanings that are attributed to them. To explore the potential of chronotopic analysis for understanding the construction of meaning within and across temporal contexts, I explore several issues raised in the current analysis.

Temporal Dimensions of Schooling

For Jermaine, success in school and literacy meant passing tests at particular points in time, reading at grade level, and keeping pace with his peers; these temporally based criteria are deeply intertwined with the schedules and cycles of schools. Not meeting these criteria had particular meanings for Jermaine, his mother, and school personnel.

Successful progress through school (e.g., passing tests and classes, being promoted to the next grade level) is ostensibly linked to learning, particularly measurable learning, over time. However, Jermaine found himself in a bind. When he was retained, failed classes, and failed tests, his teachers focused on task completion rather than helping him to learn. While the need for qualitative changes in Jermaine's word-solving strategies, comprehension abilities, and writing processes was clearly evident, the emphasis in school remained on completing work. In an extreme example, Jermaine was assured that if he completed a particular series of computer activities he would be promoted to his "right grade." This was not the case, and Jermaine remained in middle school receiving resource room services that focused on completing more work. Indeed, the most remarkable aspect of Jermaine's story was the degree of stasis and the lack of change.

The Role of Agency

This case study also presents important insights into the ways Jermaine and his mother negotiated Jermaine's difficulties in school. Both Jermaine and Ms. Hudson tried to act as agents; this is supported throughout the data. Ms. Hudson advocated for Jermaine and obtained the special education services that she believed would help. Jermaine repeatedly stated his intention to listen in class, get his work done, and graduate from high school. He claimed agency and blamed himself for his reading difficulties, saying that if he had kept up with reading he would have been a "real good reader." Jermaine successfully completed the computer program that promised to place him in his "right grade." However, agency did not reap the promised rewards. Jermaine's and his mother's actions did not change his school progress or his trajectory. Jermaine and his mother were not passive or uncaring; they actively attempted to change Jermaine's school trajectory. However, the options that were presented were false, ultimately resulting in external changes in activities and programs rather than actual learning.

The Role of Irony

Both Jermaine and his mother noted ironies related to school. Ms. Hudson highlighted the nonsensical situation of turning 18 and being assigned to the eighth grade in the same way Jermaine marveled at a classmate who had been retained seven times in middle school. Just as Bakhtin's (1981) clowns and rogues used humor to critique literary worlds, Jermaine used humor to portray his teachers as uncaring, illicit, and ironically inappropriate. For both Jermaine and his mother, these critiques and the humor invoked involved their stepping out of the narrative—stepping out of time—and analyzing their world. As Bakhtin (1981) explained, laughter in particular has the capacity to strip "the object of the false verbal and ideological husk that encloses it" (p. 237), revealing hypocrisy and irony. In particular, Jermaine used satire and parody to depict his teachers in ways that disrupted the traditions and conventions of schooling (e.g., teachers as using drugs, embarrassing students, behaving inappropriately).

Disjunctures Between School and the World Beyond School

Perhaps most unsettling was the disjuncture between Jermaine's school experiences and the world beyond school. Despite his preference for staying in school and working toward high school graduation, Jermaine's school trajectory ended with no options for employment or further education. Throughout his school trajectory, Jermaine had good attendance and completed the work that was assigned. He trusted rhetoric that advocated staying in school and getting a diploma even when he was repeatedly retained. Notably, his school experiences were unconnected to life beyond school. Discussions about vocational education, GED programs, or alternative schools did not occur, and the implications of his school trajectory were not apparent until fatherhood, his 18th birthday, and the prospect of another year in eighth grade collided. Other aspects of the historicized, real world beyond school were also evident, although they were rarely mentioned. Specifically, living in a low-income neighborhood, attending high-poverty schools facing economic challenges, and contending with a lack of family resources (to pay, e.g., for a computer, tutoring services, or private schools) contributed to the challenges Jermaine faced in school.

In their critical quantitative analysis, Lee and Burkam (2003) identified how school structures and organization influence student decisions to leave school. They cited a tendency for school officials to blame the victims, the students who leave school, as responsible for their ultimate decisions. Specifically, being overage—a situation often attributed to students' inability, inattention, and behavior—correlates with leaving school. However, as Lee and Burkam argued, other factors—including school organization, the quality of student/teacher relationships, the amount of individualized attention, and school size—also are relevant. Significantly, it is the accumulation of events that contributed to the positioning of Jermaine as destined for particular types of school trajectories, in this case leaving school.

Bakhtin's Notion of Chronotope

As noted earlier, while time has been a focus of education research, it has not been analyzed as a contextual dimension that frames students' construction of meaning in relation to institutional expectations. Chronotopic analysis brings together multiple aspects of time, enabling researchers and educators to conceptualize how these aspects work together to inform the school trajectories of students.

While it was clear that Jermaine and his mother were aware of the dominant meanings associated with chronotopic motifs (including retention and failure to keep pace with instruction), it was not clear that they recognized the ways these motifs accumulated in Jermaine's educational trajectory. In fact, at several points Jermaine seemed confident that if he completed his work, stayed out of major trouble, and stayed in school he would graduate from high school. It was not until the outside world intruded on Jermaine that he felt a sense of urgency related to schooling and life beyond school. This may be due the separation between school and the outside world.

As Lee and Burkam (2003) argued, it is time *from the students' point of view* that matters. They identified being overage for one's grade, not getting help when needed, and not being challenged to learn new things as factors that inhibit learning. Chronotopic analysis enables us to

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explore not only the events that occurred as Jermaine progressed through school, but also the perspectives that he and his mother articulated throughout the process. In the end, despite attempts by Jermaine and his mother to change his school trajectory, Jermaine was acted upon by school and relegated to a trajectory that provided few options and limited possibilities. Opportunities for change were external, involving task completion rather than actual learning. Timelines and turning points proved irreversible, and lost time was not regained. While Jermaine and his mother voiced critiques from the sidelines, they ultimately had no effect on the schools or institutional policies.

Conclusions and Implications

Focusing on chronotopes allows researchers and educators to look across multiple instantiations of time to consider the sociological and semiotic meanings embedded in time. This paper used the illustrative case of one student to make the case for recognizing time as context. Chronotopic analysis made it possible not only to tell Jermaine's story, but also to explore time as a context in which meanings about literacy, schooling, and self were constructed, defining Jermaine as a particular type of student and literate person and ultimately relegating him to a particular school trajectory. Just as Bakhtin's literary analysis revealed how authors accessed time to shape meanings and narrative possibilities, chronotopes of schooling organize possible trajectories in ways that suggest particular sets of expectations and meanings—including images of literacy, schooling, and self—that students negotiate as they move through school.

Educators must be vigilant in interpreting the chronotopic messages, negative or positive, that students encounter. Decisions about retention and special education placement must be considered carefully, and negative messages and consequences must be examined. In addition, students must be encouraged to construct school identities that extend beyond academics to their non-school interests and talents. School success cannot entail a narrow, one-dimensional trajectory. There must be more than one way to succeed in school, and every student must be provided with obtainable options that reflect possibilities in the world beyond schools.

This study offers four major implications for educators and researchers:

1. *Attend to students as learners.* Rather than focusing on covering material and completing tasks on schedule, educators must attend to students as learners. Policies and mandates must be flexible, enabling educators to teach students what they need to learn. If a student cannot read well enough to succeed in school, reading must be a priority, rather than covering curriculum and completing assignments with a certain time frame.
2. *Recognize the danger of stasis.* Educators must recognize the danger of stasis. Lack of change in an educational trajectory is a serious problem, both in terms of what it means to the student and in terms of educational trajectory. Countering stasis will involve economic expense, specially trained teachers, engaging materials, and perhaps individual instruction. While short-term costs will be high, long-term gains could change students' trajectories and must be considered a moral and ethical obligation.
3. *Consider critiques from parents and students.* Educators and researchers must seek ways to hear and consider critiques voiced by parents and students as they name the ironies they

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encounter in schools. Students, educators, administrators, and researchers must be invited to step back from existing educational policies and practices to name the ironies and identify the hypocrisies that surround schooling. Following students through school, speaking with parents, and listening to students are essential. Student and parental agency must be genuinely invited, with the potential to revisit, reverse, and revise current trajectories.

4. *Reconsider standards-based programs.* It is time to reconsider strict standards-based educational programs that convey messages of failure and assign problematic trajectories to students who do not conform to an expected schedule. Hierarchical symbols of school success (e.g., reading levels, standardized test scores, promotion to the next grade level) carry meanings with real effects on students' lives. While high expectations are certainly important, they become problematic in the absence of high-quality instruction, undermining accountability by placing the onus for learning on students rather than teachers and schools.

There are also limitations to the current study. Specifically, it does not adequately reflect the perspective of teachers and other school personnel who worked with Jermaine. The current analysis is limited to the perspectives of people—a teacher/researcher, a parent, and a student—who have shared longitudinal knowledge of the student across 10 years. While this limitation is appropriate for a paper that focuses on longitudinal knowledge construction over time, I do not claim to present a balanced presentation. In fact, there are other accounts that could be presented. Jermaine could easily be presented as an African American student with sagging jeans, who often fought in school and was suspended on multiple occasions. In fact, his middle school language arts teacher described Jermaine as “having a mind of his own” and “not applying himself to learning”; she maintained that no one could help Jermaine except himself. Jermaine’s mother could be portrayed as an underinvolved, unemployed parent who rarely visited the school. I would argue that those accounts would also be limited. In particular, they would deny Jermaine’s persistence in the face of significant learning challenges throughout school and his mother’s unwavering belief in him and her efforts to secure the services he needed.

Time contextualizes the meanings students make of their school experiences and themselves. Educators can begin to craft policy and instructional practices that can transform classrooms and other spaces into “creative spaces in which identities, both personal and collective, may be imagined, enacted, or contested” (Brown & Renshaw, 2006, p. 249). Chronotopic analysis alerts us to possible changes in school practices and policies that have the potential to create new visions of schooling that entail new conceptions of change, agency, and connection to the world beyond school.

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