

# Time in education: Intertwined dimensions and theoretical possibilities

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## Abstract

In this article, Compton-Lilly proposes that time acts as a constitutive dimension of people's experiences that significantly affects the ways people make sense of their worlds. After briefly examining the ways time has been conceptualized in educational practice, she explores the temporal affordances of three highly influential theories described by Bakhtin, Bourdieu, and Lemke. To illustrate the temporal potential of these theories, Compton-Lilly draws upon data from a 10-year case study of one student and his family. Temporality is revealed as a multifaceted contextual dimension. Attending to the various ways people operate within time provides important insights into the construction of longitudinal processes including identity construction, literacy learning, and becoming a student. These insights are important not only to researchers who attempt to make sense of the experiences of children and teachers, but also to educators who must seek ways to acknowledge and effect the longitudinal trajectories of children.

## Keywords

Time, temporality, longitudinal, timescales, habitus, chronotope, qualitative, identity

Giddens (1991) argued that few things in life as are commonplace as time. Time constantly passes as people allocate hours of their days and organize

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their lives. However, time is generally treated as a backdrop to experience and rarely contemplated as a significant contextual dimension that contributes to how people make sense of themselves, their experiences, and their worlds. In this article, I propose that time acts as a constitutive dimension of people's experiences that significantly affects how people make sense of their worlds.

I begin this theoretical examination of time by exploring how time has been conceptualized in terms of education and people's lives. Drawing on scholarship that presents time as multidimensional and intersectional (Adam, 1989, 2000; Schatzki, 2006), I challenge the notion of time as a simple, singular, and linear contextual dimension of people's experiences. Instead, I explore time as entailing multiple and overlapping dimensions that significantly affect how people make sense of themselves and their worlds. I draw on the work of Schatzki (2006) who identifies two categories of time—physical time and human or lived time. Human time is the subjective, anthropomorphic, and experiential sense of time that accompanies activity. Adam (1989, 2000) concurs; she situates time and space within “timescapes” (2000: 125) in which phenomena are encountered, processes are enacted, and events are experienced. She challenges social science researchers to maintain the complexity of situations and experiences that complicate time as simply passing. As Adam notes, “A focus on time highlights multiple realities that all bear on social life simultaneously” (Adam, 1989: 458). The construct of timescape acknowledges the “spatial and temporal features of a social situation as well as the importance of the wider context. Moreover time is conceived as not one but multidimensional” (Adam, 2003b: 96). The multidimensional nature of time has been recognized by a vast range of scholars (Bidart, 2012; Cipriani, 2013; Firth and Robinson, 2014; Keightley, 2013). For example, Facer et al. (2004) explores how technology can be used to provide opportunities for students to physically enact and interact within scenarios that support embodied learning experiences while promoting meta-level reflection. These learning experiences involve activity in time—moving, thinking, talking, acting, planning, and ultimately learning.

To explore the multidimensional nature of time, I apply the work of three highly influential theorists, Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Bourdieu (1980/1990, 1991), and Lemke (2000) to examine various temporal dimensions of schooling and learning. Each theory reveals important insights into the roles time plays in educational spaces. Specifically, I argue that Lemke's notion of timescales highlights the temporally layered experiences that people draw upon to make sense of their worlds (Lemke, 2000). Bakhtin's description of chronotope invites us to explore the motifs and tropes that accompany being a successful student (Bakhtin, 1986). Finally,

Bourdieu's notion of habitus draws our attention to the embodied ways of being that children assume early in life and carry with them across time (Bourdieu, 1971, 1980/1990; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). While I do not begin to claim that these three theories present a comprehensive understanding of lived time, I do suggest that they help scholars and educators to think about the multidimensionality of time and to complicate time as a significant contextual dimension of experience. To illustrate this potential, I draw upon data from a 10-year case study of one student and his family.

## Time in educational practice

Historically, time in school has been conceptualized as a resource that can be invested to increase learning. In the late 1800s, William T. Harris, then the U.S. Commissioner of Education, lamented the shortened length of school days and years (NECTL, 1994); he argued that that students would learn more if they spent more time in school. Between 1910 and 1930 the efficiency movement attempted to make American businesses and schools more productive—producing more in less time (Callahan, 1962). School administrators advocated for “standards so that the efficiency of the work of schools could be determined, demonstrated, and communicated to the public” (Callahan, 1962: 97). Efficiency initiatives included the adoption of standardized achievement tests to monitor students' progress, rating systems for teachers, and policies that would ensure that time was not wasted (i.e. minimizing transition time between classes; limiting the time students spent at the blackboard). Contemporary secondary schools with class periods and lecture-style spaces were established. These practices have become normalized and generally accepted based on the belief that more efficient uses of time translate into increased learning.

In 1994, the National Educational Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL) released *Prisoners of Time*, a critique of the ways time was allocated in schools. Specifically, *Prisoners of Time* advocated “not only more learning time, but for all time to be used in new and better ways” (NECTL, 1994: 2). Its authors argued that to become internationally competitive, American schools must conduct assessments to ensure that all students demonstrate a firm grasp of material at particular points in their school trajectories, provide more instructional time (i.e. longer school days and school years), and use technology to make the best use of time.

Other scholars have challenged these reductive conceptualizations of time. In his response to *Prisoners of Time* (NECTL, 1994), Slattery provides examples of what he calls the “exaggerated emphasis on manipulation of time” (Slattery, 1995: 612): “time management, timed tests, wait time, time

on task, quantifiable results over time, time schedules, time-out discipline centers, allocation of instructional days on annual school calendars, core academic time, Carnegie units, time between classes, year-round schooling, and the like” (Slattery, 1995: 612–613).

While *Prisoners of Time* (NECTL, 1994) explicitly addresses time, time also operates covertly in policy documents that do not directly reference time. For example, the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) are based on a backward design model in which expectations related to what it means to be college and career ready are tracked backwards through time to identify what kindergartens should be able to do in relation to reading, writing, and math (Calkins et al., 2012). This has led Calkins et al. (2012) to ask, “Whatever happened to the idea that curriculum reflects children’s development?” These standards identify instructional targets for all children that defy both what we know about the diversity of human learning and documented findings related to child development.

Time is not merely a resource that can be divided up, allocated, and manipulated. Time is not like money; it cannot be invested, accumulated, or saved (Adam, 2003b). Time encompasses all that people have lived and understood as well as the ways they make sense of themselves, their experiences, and their relationships. Slattery argued that educators must focus on “allowing the process of becoming, rather than the artificial demands of clocks and linear sequences, to dominate” personal and professional lives (Slattery, 1995: 616).

Lewis and Weigert argued that the official timetables of schooling created schedules that force an individual to “construct a biography by passing through statuses partly determined by nature but more importantly by the conventional structures of social life” (Lewis and Weigert, 2001: 443). As they explained, the educational options available to students were influenced by a myriad of factors including age, race, class, and gender. Specifically, they argued that temporal upsets had serious consequences when disruptions involved institutional and social expectations:

Properly meeting the expectations of timing stratified into a society warrants a person’s moral character and displays his or her normalcy. To fail one’s life according to the stratification of social times elicits labels of laziness, shiftlessness, untrustworthiness, and clearly inferior selfhood. (Lewis and Weigert, 2001: 451)

These critiques reveal the importance of educators and researchers gaining a more nuanced and sophisticated notion of how time operates in students’ lives.

## A note on method

As a conceptual article focused on the affordances of theories for making sense of time in education, the methodological details of this longitudinal study are not articulated here. In brief, I use qualitative data to illustrate a set of theoretical constructs. Specifically, I draw upon a longitudinal case study of one student, Marvin, who was one of seven students and their families that I followed over a 10-year period. I collected interviews with children, parents, and teachers; classroom observations; teacher/researcher reflections; literacy assessments; and writing samples in phases that were three and four years apart. Analysis involved four separate and lengthy processes of transcription, coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and analysis spanning four research phases. Codes related to time were identified during the third and fourth phases of analysis (i.e. “now and then,” “future,” “change”). For a complete discussion of the methodology for this study, I refer the reader to other publications (Compton-Lilly, 2003, 2007, 2012).

In preschool, Marvin and his older sister moved among his parents’ home, foster care, and his grandparents’ home. By the time Marvin arrived in my first grade class, he had been living with Mr Sherwood, his step-grandfather, and his grandmother for a year. The school served a low-socioeconomic community in the Northeastern United States. In the 1960s, this community had been the site of race riots. Since then, the largely White immigrant population moved to the suburbs and housing projects were built for the remaining African American and Puerto Rican families. Rosa Parks Elementary School served over 1200 children from the lowest socioeconomic community of what was then the 11th poorest city in the United States; 97% of the children who attended my school qualified for free and reduced lunch. While this description may seem bleak, the community was also the home of thousands of families who worked diligently to feed, clothe, and educate their children. Marvin and Mr Sherwood participated in interviews across the 10-year project. Marvin’s grandmother occasionally participated, interjecting insights as she felt necessary.

## Temporal dimensions of three theories

In order to explore the complex nature of being within time, I present three highly influential theoretical constructs that have informed our understandings and interpretations of actors in educational contexts; each references a dimension of time: timescales (Lemke, 2000), chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), and habitus (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). While I present the three theories separately, I recognize and will later examine the ways in which the experiences of time captured by these

three theories overlap and intertwine for Marvin. Specifically, I explore the temporal affordances of each theory and highlight its potential to inform current understandings of how students craft possible selves and make sense of their worlds, including school.

### *Lemke's timescales*

To explain long-term fundamental processes, including literacy development and schooling, Lemke (2000) proposed an ecological model that locates people within multiple, continuous, and simultaneous timescales ranging from the quick-moving microscopic changes to macro shifts of the universe. To Lemke, these timescales are dimensions of an ecological system in which the lower levels are constituent of the higher levels with the higher levels involving conceptualizations and interpretations of lower level processes. Human semiosis, meaning making based on experience, involves interpretations of meanings that have been constructed and revisited over time.

Long-term processes, such as literacy learning and school affiliation, involve "fundamental changes in attitude or habits of reasoning" (Lemke, 2000: 282) that cannot occur within short timescales. Lemke's notion of timescales challenges conventional models that conceptualize time as linear and cumulative, by arguing that people experience time in recursive and nonlinear ways as they draw on lived events and various texts across multiple timescales to make sense of their worlds. Individual voices are fashioned out of available social resources from across time as people appropriate various discourses to serve their own purposes. As Lemke noted, "the language others speak to us, from childhood, shapes the attitudes and beliefs that ground how we use all our powers of action" (Lemke, 1995: 1).

In accordance with Lemke's theory, I argue that students draw upon multiple timescales to make sense of themselves and school. Specifically, Marvin draws upon familial timescales that reference the experiences of family members and his own past alongside ongoing timescales that capture his lived experiences. Marvin and the people around him draw recursively and selectively on these multiple timescales. It is within this temporally charged context that Marvin understands the world and his role within that world. In the following analysis, Marvin drew upon discourses voiced over time to make sense of his experiences and to solve the challenges that he faced as a recently incarcerated youth.

### *The library as an icon of possibility*

When I spoke with Marvin at age 18, he had been released from incarceration four months earlier and was attending a vocational high school.

Coming from an 18-year-old former high school dropout, his comments about the library were intriguing. Marvin explained, "Sometimes I might go to the library, me and a couple of my home buddies and a couple of my home girls." He continued, "Like the other day, we all went downtown because we had this big essay . . . and I looked up [information] on the computer" (Grade 11).

While a researcher conducting a short-term study might interpret Marvin's enthusiasm for the library as a simple example of his renewed dedication to getting his life back on track, data from this longitudinal study locate the library as an icon of possibility extending back four generations. The accounts presented below draw upon multiple timescales and include memories of family members, accounts from Marvin's past, Marvin's ongoing experiences, and accounts that reference the future. Across Marvin's experiences, literacy, computers, the Internet, employment, and the future are all associated with the library.

At one of our early interviews when Marvin was in first grade, his grandfather, Mr Sherwood, told a story that I originally interpreted as merely an account of the challenges he had faced in learning to read. Learning to read in elementary school had been difficult for Mr Sherwood and his teachers were doing little to help. He later explained,

I was just mumbling through the whole thing [when I read in class] . . . that's when I told my mother about it . . . She said "It's time for you to get a library card." Every Saturday morning . . . we [Mr. Sherwood and his twin brother] had to go to the library and we stayed at the library until we picked up on our reading. (Grade 1)

Over the course of the 10-year project, the library recurred as a motif of possibilities:

Mr. Sherwood: I had to take her [Marvin's sister] to the library and he [Marvin] mentioned [that] his mind [was] really focused on the computers . . . Cause we was playing around on the [computers]. I just started learning on them about four years ago. I know how to do it. I went to the library and learned myself. (Grade 1)

Mr. Sherwood: I used to take him to the library all the time. All the time, they love the library. It's a great place . . . He's learned a lot about the Internet. (Grade 5)

Mr. Sherwood: Me and [Marvin's Grandmother] been trying to get him started going to the library you know. He [be] on [his] own [in] the neighborhood and stuff like that they [other family members] don't want him to go. But I want him [to] be responsible for himself so he can go and go to the library and get something and come on back. (Grade 8)

Mr. Sherwood: I used to take him to the library, you know, get on the computers and stuff like that, but he got one upstairs now. (Grade 11)

The library not only helped Mr Sherwood learn to read and offered similar opportunities to Marvin and his sister, it also provided Marvin and Mr Sherwood with access to computers and thus possibilities for Marvin's future.

Mr. Sherwood: A computer is awesome. It's right now. It's the space age. You can't get around it. You just got to look in the paper, they want a computer programmer all that you know. (Grade 1)

Mr. Sherwood: He's trying, he's learned a lot about the Internet . . .but I want him to get involved with [it] mainly like learn it [the computer]. (Grade 5)

Mr Sherwood described the computers as "awesome," "right now," and "space age." He highlighted the importance of learning about computers by repeating the phrase "got to" and emphasized the connection between employment and learning to use computers.

Thus, the library carried meanings—related to literacy, computers, the Internet, employment, and the future—that were uniquely intertwined with and drew upon experiences at multiple timescales. Mr Sherwood drew on his past when he recounted his own childhood experiences at the library and his hopes for Marvin's future. For a young man with a record of incarceration, visiting the library with friends was an agential act grounded in the past while simultaneously evoking future possibilities related to reading, books, computers, high school graduation, employment, and new friends that shared these interests and dreams. While timescales analysis reveals how meanings are grounded in past experiences of family members, personal pasts, ongoing experiences, and perceived futures, this is only one dimension of a lived experience of time (Schatzki, 2006). Time is also experienced against the backdrop of institutions, the enacted mores of society, and the historical contexts that privilege particular ways of being and acting, as well as the embodied ways of being that people assume as a result of positionings and expectations.

### *Bakhtin's chronotope*

Marvin also operated within institutions, including schools that imposed temporal expectations. Bakhtin (1981, 1986) drew from philosophy, literary analysis, and linguistics, to explain how meanings are understood within complex social fields involving dialogic negotiations and unequal power dynamics. Bakhtin applied the construct of *chronotope*, which literally



means *timespace*, to refer to “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” (Bakhtin, 1981: 84). Bakhtin explained that when authors create worlds they are obliged to draw upon the organizing categories of the real world—specifically recognizable time/space relationships. Bakhtin identified and described literary genres based on how characters operated in time and space. He argued that these genres, or chronotopes, were constituted by the chronotopic motifs, or narrative tropes, that authors use and readers understand. These tropes might involve characters traveling along roads or paths as they move through narratives, unexpected encounters that change the directions of the stories, and nature as a symbol of pastoral and simpler worlds. These chronotopic motifs are meaningful because of the past literate and life experiences that readers bring to novels. As Bakhtin explained, conceptualizing possible meanings from stories requires passing through the “gates of the chronotope” (Bakhtin, 1981: 258) and drawing on preexisting meanings to make sense of new experiences.

Chronotopic motifs also operate in schools, carry meaning, and have real-life significance (see Figure 1). Promotion and retention carry meanings related to students’ abilities. Being in third grade is embedded with the temporal expectations for being eight years old. Compensatory education and special education services suggest that some students require more time to learn (Heshusius, 1989; Hocutt, 1996). In recent years, grade level standards, standardized testing at particular grade levels, and being able to read texts at particular levels have increasingly defined students relative to temporal expectations. Essentially, failure in school is not merely about

Motifs in Literacy and Schooling	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, literate
• Meeting criteria on standardized writing rubric	Proficient writer, college-bound, literate
• 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, proficiency, successful
• Special education	Failure in regular programs, needs extra help and additional time, slower pace, diminished potential
• Vocational education	Salvageable, potentially worthy, academically challenged

**Figure 1.** A sampling of chronotopic motifs in literacy and schooling.

what students can and cannot do; it is about what skills and strategies they display or do not display at particular points in time.

Just as chronotopes in literature shape the meanings of stories, chronotopes in school shape the meanings people construct about their lives and the lives of others. Failing to meet chronotopic expectations has real meanings and consequences for students in terms of their options (i.e. honors classes, special education placement, summer school) and their futures (i.e. college, employment, income). Students are aware of the meanings associated with chronotopes of schooling and these meanings sediment, contributing to the ways in which students construct themselves and others as successful or unsuccessful.

Despite these shared chronotopic meanings, Burton (1996) described chronotopes as interwoven, contradictory, and existing within complex interrelationships. Official chronotopes may suggest a particular reading of experience; however, alternative meanings grounded in marginalized perspectives can challenge dominant chronotopic readings (Brown and Renshaw, 2006). In other words, failing the fourth grade might carry implicit meanings related to underachievement for school officials, yet these meanings are always open to multiple interpretations (i.e. failing fourth grade as attributed to incompetent teaching).

In the following section, I examine the construct of chronotope as a means to explore how Marvin's failure to meet the expected chronotopes of schooling carried meanings that affected his sense of self and his school trajectory.

### *The construction of failure*

Marvin was retained in kindergarten. He failed both the fourth grade and the eighth grade State English Language Arts test. In eighth grade, he read at the fifth grade level. When he was in fifth grade, Marvin was identified as a "behavior problem". Marvin was caught bringing a spray bottle of bleach to school. Marvin explained, "I brought the bleach to school to protect myself because he [another student] said he was going to get his brother and his other brother to jump me" (Grade 5). Marvin was suspended for several weeks. Later that same school year, Marvin described a fight in which he broke a classmate's nose. Also in fifth grade, Marvin was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and was placed on medication. His grandmother, Ms Sherwood, hoped that medication would help, "Cause he's a slow learner and he got this medication and that'll make him focus better" (Grade 5); however, she was remained unconvinced.

By eighth grade, Marvin was placed in a special education class. Marvin was distraught and blamed his grandmother for allowing him to be placed

in that class. Marvin noted that in special education classes the expectations were low, the pace of instruction was slow, and less work was assigned. His grandmother came to share Marvin's concerns. However, when she asked to have him placed back in the regular program, she was told that "he [would] have to work himself out" (Grade 8).

Ms Sherwood viewed this situation as highly problematic and offered her own critique of the school's policy, "I've been reading up on it and they mostly put Black kids in them kind of classes and then they sunk them. And that's how you all [gesturing at Marvin who is sitting nearby] get behind" (Grade 8). While special education was presented as an opportunity for Marvin to catch up, Ms Sherwood blamed special education for leaving Marvin behind.

At our final interview, Marvin was 18 years old and entering the 10th grade. Despite a problematic school trajectory that resulted in Marvin being 18 and faced with three more years of high school, Marvin's grandfather continued to challenge chronotopic meanings that characterized Marvin as incapable, unintelligent, and bad. Marvin's grandfather challenged these accounts across the 10-year study:

[If he goes back to his parents] he'll be just like one of the lost statistics out there... I hope we can do something about it... if we can get to him by fifth grade or sixth, I know he can go somewhere. I know he can do it (Grade 1).

Mr. Sherwood: It's up to him... He's got to make that move... If he feel like he gonna do it... *I know* he can do it! (Grade 8).

Mr. Sherwood: He had to make a difference hisself. And that's the secret (Grade 11)

Bakhtin's construct of chronotope explains how people draw upon meanings that are embedded in chronotopic motifs. Being retained in school, failing high stakes tests, falling behind with reading, being placed into special education, and incarceration are all temporal disruptions that defined Marvin as unsuccessful and resulted in his being three years behind at age 18. While these disruptions are interpreted in particular ways and eventually coalesce to define an educational trajectory, Mr and Ms Sherwood challenge these meanings. They recognize possibilities and potential. Not only were these alternative accounts repeated over time, but Mr Sherwood also appealed to me, a researcher who had known Marvin for over 10 years, saying "*you* know Marvin." While chronotopes carry meanings, those meanings are neither singular nor universal; they are open to interpretation grounded in people's beliefs and experiences.

Together timescales (Lemke, 2000) and chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) contribute to how we might understand the timescapes that

accompany school. While timescale analysis (Lemke, 2000) highlights how meanings are constructed with and through the past, the present, and perceived possible futures and chronotopes, Bakhtin (1981, 1986) highlights the expectations that accompany those experiences, neither construct explains how ways of being are internalized and embodied over time which suggests yet another critical dimension of time.

### *Bourdieu's habitus*

Throughout his life, Bourdieu (1971, 1980/1990, 1986, 1991) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) attempted to explain complex interactions between culture, social structures, and individual agency. His work focused on how social systems of domination persist and recreate themselves across time (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu identified the construct of “habitus,” a “system of lasting transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, apperceptions, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (italics in the original; Bourdieu, 1971: 83). Habitus references how people's pasts are embodied in ways of being and knowing that accompany experience.

Habitus is linked to the accumulation of cultural capital—ways of talking, acting, interacting, and believing that privilege people in particular contexts. People who are able to accumulate large amounts of capital prior to seeking their place in the social/economic system have an advantage. Accumulation “depends on the length of time for which the family can provide him [the child] with free time, i.e., time free from economic necessity” (Bourdieu, 1986: 246). In addition, cultural capital is dependent “on the usable time (particularly in the form of mother's free time) available to it (by virtue of its economic capital, which enables it to purchase the time of others) to ensure the transmission of this capital” (Bourdieu, 1986: 253, parentheses in the original).

Bourdieu highlighted labor, patterns of consumption, and parent-child relations as conditions that inform habitus and in turn become the basis for the “perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences” (Bourdieu, 1980/1990: 54). The factors that most significantly affect the development of habitus are subtle, involving nonverbal and unconscious ways of being, acting, and interacting including ways of looking, physical positioning, silences, and movements that are acquired unknowingly in the course of everyday activity (Bourdieu, 1991). While people can adapt their habitus to accommodate new situations, these changes are incorporated slowly and unconsciously as elaborations rather than drastic changes to existing dispositions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

While habitus is grounded in the past and involves limits and norms, it also acts “as an acquired system of generative schemes, the *habitus* makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular condition of its production” (Bourdieu, 1980/1990: 55). Habitus does not determine ways of being, acting, knowing, or believing, rather it evolves out of experiences and contributes to options made available within historical, social, and physical contexts. Habitus explains how individuals become whom they are—not through simple processes of reproduction—but through long-term participation in social structures and institutions that provide both affordances and limits for agency and identity.

Swartz drew on the work of Bourdieu to remind scholars that “not all social worlds are equally available to everyone” (Swartz, 1997: 107) and it is through habitus that prior life experiences teach people what may or may not be possible; agency is intertwined with past experiences.

### *Possibilities of being and becoming*

Habitus denotes the embodiment of dispositions across time; in the following account, we witness Marvin not only stating his desire to become a police officer, but also embodying ways of being that are consonant with this aspiration. For Marvin, being a police officer was grounded in a habitus that featured a commitment to fighting injustice, interest in helping people, fascination with the job and the uniform, and his relationship with his grandfather. However, these dispositions were eventually challenged as Marvin negotiated multiple life experiences including interactions with police officers while incarcerated. Marvin’s interest in becoming a police officer was reiterated across the study:

Mr. Sherwood: He want to be a policeman (Grade 1).

Marvin: [To be a policeman, I need to] Go up in college and stuff [and read] the back of number cars [license plates] and when they have got crashed [and] the people get hurt and they [the police] try to figure out their names and stuff (Grade 1).

Mr. Sherwood: I can speak for Marvin because I know what he want to do... He wants to help people... he always says he wants to be a police officer. He keeps on saying that all the time and stuff. I mean especially to help people. (Grade 5)

Mr. Sherwood: He wanted to protect and serve (Grade 11)

Marvin’s commitment to police work was not only consistently reflected in the words Mr Sherwood used to describe Marvin’s interest (i.e. “always,”

“keeps on saying) but it was also reflected in Marvin’s actions. When Marvin was in first grade, Mr Sherwood described Marvin’s interest in watching “police stories” on TV. “He always [watches]... the highway patrol... He always talk about patrolmen. ‘Cause I used to be a security guy he used to see me in my uniform and stuff like that so... his personality that’s what he’s gonna be” (Grade 1). When Marvin returned to school following the bleach incident in fifth grade, the school principal tried to encourage Marvin by making him the school’s “public safety”—a role that resonated with his interest in police work. Each morning Marvin opened the parking lot gate for the teachers when they arrived in the morning.

Marvin’s interest in being a police officer was also grounded in his sense of injustice. In first grade, he listed things at school that bothered him, “fighting, big bullies, taking pencils away from people, pushing people in line, hit-slapping people in the back of the heads” (Grade 1). In middle school Marvin described the “bad kids” at his school:

They be cursing me. They be running around in the halls, fighting in the bathroom. And try to, pushing each other to get at the lockers. And with rubber bands they try to [Marvin snapped an invisible rubber band in my direction]. (Grade 8)

However, after being released from incarceration, Marvin was no longer sure that he wanted to be a policeman. Marvin explained, “I seen too many of them policemen.” Despite his reservations about the police, he reported that law enforcement was “[still] kind of on my mind.” At that time, he was applying for a job as a security guard, “If I get that security job, Grandpa, I’m telling you it’s a wrap... I be having a flashlight. Yeahhhhh, yeah. I have a badge” (Grade 11). Ten years after Mr Sherwood described Marvin as a six-year-old admiring his security guard uniform, Marvin ventriloquates those words referencing the badge and the flashlight.

Bourdieu (1986) maintained that a person’s habitus is deeply rooted in a person’s past and changed slowly over long periods of time. As evident in the accounts presented earlier, helping people and being a police officer reflected strong dispositions that were deeply rooted in Marvin’s beliefs about himself and the world. While Marvin retained his dreams of becoming a police officer, these dreams were complicated by his arrest record.

While neither complete nor comprehensive, together timescales (Lemke, 2000), chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), and habitus (Bourdieu, 1971, 1980/1990, 1986, 1991) illustrate the multidimensional nature of time. Time is not a simple linear sequence. It is not a resource that can be invested and translated into learning. It is not simply a gauge against which student learning can be measured. As Adam (1989) explains, time’s significance is

multidimensional. "Time enters into every tiniest aspect of that moment. It is implicit in waiting, in planning, in contemplating, and in guilt; just as it is central to memories, the language structure, and to the speech as it was happening" (p. 468). As Marvin's experiences illustrate, it involves ways of making sense of the world, the expectations that accompany our experiences, and the ways of being that contribute to who we are and who we become.

## **What do theoretical understandings about time offer educators?**

Educators have treated time as a resource that directly translates into student learning. In this article, I have presented three theoretical frameworks. Timescale analysis calls attention to events and the construction of meaning across multiple timescales as Marvin makes sense of himself and his experiences. This analysis revealed visiting the library as a recurring icon loaded with meanings grounded not only in Marvin's experiences but also in experiences and stories that could be traced back to his step-great-grandmother. These experiences relate not only to literacy but also to technology and visions of the future. Marvin chooses to visit the library following his release from incarceration; his actions are neither random nor arbitrary.

Chronotopic motifs related to literacy and schooling draw attention to how official definitions of school success relate to time. Marvin's teachers interpreted temporal disjunctures as characterizing Marvin as slow, ADHD, learning disabled, and as a vocational student. Despite these positionings being repeatedly challenged by Marvin and his grandparents, over time, official disjunctures accumulated and limited Marvin's future school options. As Adam (2003a) argued, "embodied time is lived and experienced alongside, despite of, and in conflict with the culturally constituted social relations of time" (p. 61). Temporal expectations, as embodied in the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) and other school policies, measure school success relative to temporal benchmarks.

Finally, Bourdieu's construct of habitus highlights the process of becoming and how early experiences and beliefs are deeply engrained, embodied, and slow to change. Despite experiences in school and with the legal system that could be interpreted as evidence that police work was not a viable possibility, Marvin did not abandon his interest in and attraction to the badge, helping people, and addressing injustice. Habitus draws attention to the process of becoming and the ways goals and possibilities are deeply infused with dispositions learned early in life.



While each of these theories highlight a particular dimension of time, together they provide a rich understanding of how time operates in people's lives: timescales as layered experiences that people draw upon to make sense of their worlds; chronotopes as involving official temporal expectations; and habitus as embodied ways of being. These frameworks invite researchers to recognize the various manifestations of time and to recognize the role time plays in long-term processes such as literacy learning, identity construction, school trajectories, school achievement, and occupational aspirations.

While I presented Marvin's experiences in relation to each of the three dimensions of time that I highlight in this paper, these dimensions of time overlap and intersect. If we revisit Marvin and his dream to become a police officer, as illustrated earlier, we witness an embedded habitus that supports this disposition. However, we also witness a school system filled with expectations and tracked instructional experiences that have been described as a school to prison pipeline (Wald and Losen, 2003; Winn, 2011). Thus, expectations related to school contributed to the ways Marvin came to define himself. The instructional experiences he experienced—heavy-handed discipline, low expectations, special education placement, retention, and racism—informed his sense of self and the dispositions related to habitus that he brought forward. In addition, Marvin drew on past timescales (watching police shows with his grandfather, seeing his grandfather in his security uniform) and future possibilities (suggested by the public library) as he made sense of himself (a recently incarcerated youth). Thus, the three dimensions of time that I isolated for the purpose of analysis are intricately intertwined and reciprocally informing.

In order to recognize how students, educators, and researchers exist within time, we must move beyond simple equations that associate more time with increased learning. If we accept the premise that people make sense of their lives within and across time, we begin to acknowledge the importance of not just the here and now, but of considering children's longitudinal experiences in school in terms of educational policies, practices, and research. We recognize communities and families as bringing rich histories, sets of experiences, and understandings that are grounded in long-term relationships with schools and literacy. We begin to understand that these experiences and the meanings that are constructed around them are contextualized within chains of events, experiences within institutions, and embodied ways of being. Almost 20 years ago, Nesper (1997) identified a critical mismatch between how families and teachers made sense of schooling over time. She wrote that "teachers' acquaintance with kids generally begins and ends within a "single school year" and the "histories of students



in earlier grades are generally hidden from view” (p. 32); meanwhile, parents viewed schools as “accounts of how kids matured and took their places in society” (pp. 31–32). These conceptions of time and schooling are antithetical to each other with teachers’ short-term conceptions of time generally trumping the long-term embodied experiences of time lived by children and families. Lived dimensions of time are generally silenced relative to dominant conceptions of time as a resource to be invested and as a linear course that can be evaluated via standards and benchmarks (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010; NECTL, 1994).

Significantly, expanded notions of time invite educators and scholars to think about inequity “because time is largely taken for granted and therefore invisible, the social relations of time can continue to maintain existing inequalities and create new one in the globally constituted world” (Adam, 2003b: 119). As Lemke maintained, “We construct meaning of our lives... across multiple timescales of action and activity, from the blink of an eye to the work of a lifetime” (Lemke, 2005: 110). Our challenge as researchers and educators is to recognize and attend to temporal complexity to support teachers and their students across time and as they move through school.

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