It’s a Book! It’s a Bookstore!
Theories of Reading in the Worlds of Childhood and Adolescence

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Our Bookshop Manifesto

WE BELIEVE IN THE BOOK. We believe in quieting the noise and listening to the stories. We believe in traveling far and wide between paper pages. We believe in touching the words, scribbling in the margins, and dogging the ears. We believe in surrounding ourselves with books long finished and books not yet read; in revisiting our young selves each time we pull old favorites off the shelf.

We believe in five-year-olds inking their names in big letters on the flyleaf. We believe in becoming someone else for four hundred pages. We believe in turning off the screens and unplugging the networks once in a while. We believe in meeting the author, reading the footnotes, looking up the words and checking the references. We believe in holding our children on our laps and turning the pages together.

We believe in standing shoulder to shoulder in comfortable silence with our fellow citizens before a good shelf of books; we believe in talking face to face with friends and strangers in the aisles of a good bookstore. We believe that together, readers, writers, books and bookstores can work magic. (Day, 2010)

As the first decade of the 21st century drew to a close, everyone (or so it seemed) jumped in to declare the death of the book and, by implication, of reading, writing, and bookstores as well. From cognitive theorists to devotees of books, this theme stirred either outright rebellion fed by nostalgia or acquiescence moderated by positive projections for the future role of technology in the learning lives of former booklovers. This chapter sets out several perspectives that permit insight into the threads of thinking that run between those in rebellion and those who have agreed to let books live alongside other technological inventions. In five sections, the chapter draws from the epigraph with the hope of leading education researchers, teachers, and parents to bring into balance new and old ways of learning to read and of reading to learn along the life span.

All sections of the chapter bear the influence of social scientists who focus their research on what happens to those who read with different kinds of technologies. Representing primarily the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics, the social scientists whose work is discussed here have been heavily influenced by ideas from cognitive neuroscience and the information sciences. In general,
these scholars have given an unprecedented amount of attention to advances in understanding both the brain and the ways in which socialization processes and environmental contexts influence neurological development.

The first section takes a look at the ways in which researchers have considered the value of reading books with young children. The following section considers how overly simplistic ideas about what happens in these reading interactions have had an undeserved influence on educators’ ideas about early reading and its relationship to family life, socioeconomic class, and language development. The next section offers a brief summation of a longitudinal ethnographic study of how 300 working-class families in the United States used reading in their lives as they navigated the tumultuous economic twists and turns of the final two decades of the 20th century and the opening decade of the next. The fourth section carries on from the prior discussion of extended talk, especially deliberative discourse and its relationship to academic language. The final section speaks of the magic of words in all media and modes with cautions. No magic ever fully reveals itself to those beyond the wizard’s curtain. Hence, we must never believe that magic brings us full goodness and light or that it will lead us into pure evil.

“Traveling Far and Wide Between Paper Pages”

I begin this section with a personal story from my experiences as a writer and scholar. In 2009, the editors of the *Handbook of Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature* (S.A. Wolf, Coats, Enciso, & Jenkins, 2011) asked me to write a chapter for the volume under the title “The Book as Home.” The editors quickly rejected the chapter I wrote by saying that they wanted something personal. As a model for me to follow, they sent several other chapters that they had already approved for the volume. After I read those, I knew exactly what the editors had expected from me: a quiet, soothing piece about how much I had, as a child, found solace, peace, and a home in books. If I were diligent in following the model of other chapters, I would even point out how I had found, in my early experiences with children’s literature, the power of literacy that had guided me to become a well-known scholar.

The only problem was that the biographical portrayals of the other chapters did not fit me. Moreover, I was uneasy with the implications that I saw in those chapters, suggesting that rich early literacy experiences were somehow critical to fostering oral language development and habituating key mental traits. As an anthropologist who has worked in communities around the world in which children have no early access to books, I knew that (a) these children learned to talk, often in several languages; (b) many of them learned to read later in life after only the barest early foundation of literacy learning in their primitive impoverished schools; and (c) these children did not lack imagination, analytical skills, or playful wit. Thus, not only did the biographical portrayals of other chapters of the handbook not match my own, but they also bore little relationship to the lives of most of the world’s children living either in developing nations or in under-resourced neighborhoods and communities of modern economies.
I decided to write a chapter, goaded not only by my discomfort with the aforementioned points but also by findings from my own longitudinal study of working-class families in the United States (summarized in the third section herein). The chapter’s eventual title carried only a portion of the original title assigned to me by the editors. My chosen title, which the editors let stand, was “The Book as Home? It All Depends” (Heath, 2011).

I did not grow up with books or, indeed, surrounded by many people who could or did read at all. I never saw a room with bookshelves until I was in secondary school, and that was the school library. My response to these books? I was not impressed, only puzzled. The point of the chapter that finally evolved for the handbook reminded readers that if we look around the world, the majority of children never have the opportunity to think of books as instruments or ladders of power for them. Most have little incentive to think that learning to read will bring them power. They have little evidence in their everyday worlds to convince them that reading will give them something in exchange for the time and effort it takes to learn to read well enough to travel “far and wide between paper pages.” Indeed, most of these children would fear the idea of such travel, and they have never met anyone who learned a significant amount of what they know through reading “paper pages.”

My intention in the chapter that I wrote for the handbook was not to berate or diminish the experiences of those fortunate enough to grow up with books and adults who spend time reading and talking about books with children. Instead, I thought it important then, just as I do now in this chapter, to remind readers of two basic sets of facts.

The first is that for decades, research has shown that although individuals do not grow up with books or reading, they can and often do learn to read later in life. If and when the need arises and discretionary money and time become available, individuals have for centuries shown that they can readily (and often quite suddenly) learn to love and cherish books in adulthood (as I did). They can even become authors (as I did). Only when I became a mother did I become aware of the role of children’s books in the lives of my peers who were also parents. They bought and read books to their children on a regular basis and expected their children to know stories found in books.

I, however, followed the pattern that I had known in my own childhood of hearing and telling oral stories; we quieted the house and listened to stories. My children and I shared stories not only at bedtime but also on other occasions, when we did chores together, rode in the car, or waited in the offices of dentists and doctors. Once I began buying and reading books to my children, they and I, in fact, came to enjoy, even relish, not only reading books but also talking about them and using them as springboards for generating our own stories as sequels or counter-narratives. However, the powers of literacy that my children gained from having books introduced to them carried no particular benefits over those I was able to achieve as an adult in spite of my not having books as “home” when I was a child.
As researchers around the world look at how and when literacy is acquired and what people do with it, they recognize that individuals do not learn to read with sufficient competence to be able to read to learn until both the practice of reading and the artifact of the scroll, manuscript, or book carry meaning for the role that they are playing in life. Moreover, readers across the ages have had to have not only a place for reading in their lives but also dedicated time and space. The initial cost is not the only investment that artifacts of reading require. They must be kept in safe, dry spaces. Reading requires sufficient light, as well as relative quiet. For individuals or families who change their location often, reading materials are heavy burdens (literally). Moreover, reading is one of the few activities that almost entirely rules out any simultaneous activity. One cannot ride a horse, peel potatoes, drive a car, help a child with homework, or hoe a garden while reading a book. The intense demand for full attention that reading requires may account for the fact that throughout the history of literacy, those who take up books have often been portrayed as lazy, secretive, and even dangerous. Many children’s books feature the reading child as the naughty one in a family. In the history of fine arts, women reading books or letters have often been interpreted as up to no good, subject to the temptations of nature, and likely to be led into transgressions (cf. Bollmann, 2008; Updike, 2005; B.J. Wolf, 2001).

The second set of facts behind my wanting the handbook chapter to depart from the usual biographical script expected by advocates and authors of children’s literature relates to what we know about oral language competencies (Duranti, Ochs, & Schieffelin, 2012; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). As children mature, what is usually called for in school-based teaching of reading has little or no influence on the development of facility and fluency with oral language(s). Instructional modes that surround the teaching of reading in schools around the world give much less attention to how readers talk and think about what they are reading than they do to the oral performance of reading. Teacher requests that pupils read aloud dominate over their queries about visual details of illustrations, interpretive and comparative analyses surrounding the content of what has been read, or speculations about the intentions of the author. When the key focus is on teaching the young to show that they can read by doing so aloud, the free-flowing language interactions, mental images, and hand-drawn sketches that make books live in the memory of readers receive little time or focus. Yet, neuroscience research on how the brain processes and stores words of printed texts has pointed to the vital importance of surrounding the physical act of reading with oral language and other creative forms of representation, such as dramatic action, drawing, and extending textual ideas.²

**“Holding Our Children on Our Laps and Turning the Pages Together”**

During the second half of the 20th century, cycles of attention from researchers featured arguments that pointed to social class differences in reading achievement. Many of these arguments remain in place in textbooks, in reports on the
declining health and welfare of families living in poverty, and in the minds of teachers and education policymakers. These arguments highlight ways that lower class families lack features of middle class families that are often equated with successful trajectories of learning to read (Blanchard & Moore, 2010). These features include aspects of home life that range from leisure time preferences to extent of lexical input and quantity and type of reading materials. This contrastive view often seeks justification for arguments that point to deficits in the language input and adult–child reading materials, time, and values of families either oriented to working-class values or caught in the spiral of cross-generational poverty. These deficits are often made to stand in sharp contrast to pictures of middle class families, many of whom include one or both parents who have higher education credentials and identities as professionals. Within these families, both the quantity and quality of language input, especially during reading time with children, can often be viewed as providing children with strong preparation for success in school. The quantitative bases of much of this research come from morpheme counts per stretches of time as well as frequency counts of certain types of vocabulary. Counts of literacy artifacts in the home that are available to children and also used by parents are also often seen as contributing to the sense of a literacy environment in which children grow up.3

The socioeconomic status of families quickly becomes linked to readiness for learning to read and to work hard for school success. Many studies have focused on children’s opportunities in their family life to build their spoken vocabulary and be familiar with book reading. These opportunities have often been seen as essential to children’s ability to respond positively to the school’s instruction in learning to read and to succeeding in primary schooling. Decontextualized quantitative factors of families’ available time, artifacts, and habits of conversation around books have sometimes been characterized as cultural values. Populist versions of the culture of poverty have led many educators to think of impoverished families as having little to offer their children and as uncaring and irresponsible with regard to their children’s schooling.

Few studies have considered the interdependence of home language habits with the extent and type of parental employment, access to transportation and community resources, and established age- and gender-related roles within families from different ethnic, religious, and cultural contexts. Moreover, research since the explosion of new technologies in the 1990s that points to extended work hours, higher work demands, and reduced labor forces has generally been ignored by educators who insist that families must do more to support their children’s work at school (Hochschild, 1997; Robinson & Godbey, 1999; Schor, 1991). The squeezing of family time and the increase of overlapping demands make more time a mounting impossibility. Yet, many educators persist in making judgmental assessments about families living in or near the poverty line and claim that certain cultural traits are ineffective conduits for young children who enter formal schooling.4
In the 1980s, some studies began to point to specific differences between home values and habits of literacy of lower class families and those of the school (Heath, 1983/1996; Philips, 1983; Schieffelin & Gilmore, 1986). By the next decade, however, several researchers of child language development began to caution against viewing this contrast as accounting for all the critical factors that contribute to literacy and academic achievement. Indeed, these studies argued that the matter is much more complex than studies of either socioeconomic class or cultural norms of home and school have attested. Multiple bundles of factors must be taken into account, and how these factors are bundled shifts not only as children age but also continuously across the life span for both children and parents. Moreover, intensity and reach of literacy habits link to developmental maturation, physical and mental health, felt need, and other motivational incentives, as well as the extent to which facility with different types of reading and writing supports the maintenance of economic status and positioning within key social niches of family members (Heath, 2012).

By the opening of the 21st century, researchers from across a variety of disciplines agreed in general on the following key supports for children’s successful experiences with oral language development as well as reading and writing. For neurologically normal children to reach young adulthood with oral language fluency, competency, and confidence in reading and writing, they must have the following:

• Within and beyond formal education, supportive intimate models of readers, widely varying types and modes of reading materials, and meaningful incentives to draw, write, act, and talk before, during, and after reading
• Mentors and teachers who are well trained and motivated to keep their own learning attuned to ongoing research on language development of monolingual and bilingual or multilingual children
• Teachers and parents who are oriented to different modes and media of presentation for young children and adolescents and open to talking with and learning from young people about reading and writing with recent technologies
• Safe and reliable access by children and their families to libraries staffed by personnel who are familiar with and fond of a host of technologies that make books and magazines available
• After-school and summer opportunities that are rich in time for adults and young learners to plan, create, and evaluate projects together using a range of art forms and various types of scientific experimentation
• Regular access of parents, teachers, and young learners from preschool into young adulthood to museums, zoos, environmental centers, parks, and playgrounds and the multiple forms of literature in pamphlets, children’s literature, science and art books, and on the Internet that complement visits to such places
Cutting across these conclusions is the common thread of meaningful interactions of adults, children, and adolescents working and learning together within a variety of contexts and times and through different combinations of modes and media for different purposes and audiences.

These conclusions regarding key supports render moot past assertions that literacy learning relies on a small bundle of factors, such as the nature and extent of language input from parents to children, the quantity and nature of literacy artifacts in the home, and characteristics of conversational routines between children and adults. Research in the first decade of the 21st century has made clear the vital importance of sustaining as long as possible joint parent–child interests, activities, informational and entertainment sources, and projects of work and play. Middle childhood and adolescence are periods of development in which critical jumps in powers of judgment, understanding of responsibility, and deliberative conversational skills take place. During these years, young learners critically need conversational time and project development with caring adults and opportunities for exploring sports, arts, and science activities together. With startling regularity, since the turn of the 21st century, neuroscience research has pointed to the impact of quality time spent by young and old in joint pursuits during the years of middle childhood and adolescence. Regardless of cultural or religious background or economic standing, adults who surround children as they grow up need to acknowledge their responsibilities to talking, playing, and working with the young and to being alert to how the young so often guide and instruct those elders who are willing listeners and observers open to new understandings (Bell, Lewenstein, Shouse, & Feder, 2009).7

“Turning Off the Screens and Unplugging the Networks Once in a While”

This section follows on the key supports noted in the preceding section by providing a summation of an ethnographic study of three decades of family and community life.8 The cross-generational analysis lays out the extent to which habits and values of oral and written language changed in relation to times, spaces, and interactants of the play and work of daily life. Critical to questions of values and behaviors surrounding literacy are changes in housing and consumerism patterns that do not show up as significant in short-term studies of life in families and communities. However, longitudinal examination of everyday habits surrounding child socialization has revealed the significant influence of economic pressures, employment, family structure, and household location shifts. Looking across the years at the pathways of change for habits and values means appreciating the extent to which factors previously unacknowledged as influential have risen in significance. Such is especially the case with family practices around meal preparation and clean-up, homework and other after-dinner pursuits, and technologies of communication, especially hand-held devices.

Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms (Heath, 1983/1996) documented the lifeways of two communities of working-class
families living near each other in the Piedmont Carolinas in the first decade after the Civil Rights era. One of these communities, Trackton, was black; the other, Roadville, was white. In both communities, parents worked, often on alternating shifts, in the local textile mills. In addition, young and old family members planted backyard gardens, helped during harvest times on nearby tobacco farms, and bought their meat in the fall when farmers butchered calves and pigs. Hard work, church attendance, and entertainment at home with friends and family filled their days.

Following the legislative changes brought by the Civil Rights movement, schools in their region were desegregated, and teachers in elementary schools immediately perceived differences in how children from different communities used language. Middle-class children, black and white, came to school familiar with the questioning habits of formal schooling and the key role of learning to read for success in school. However, children from working-class communities, black and white, came to school using language in different ways.

White working-class communities, such as Roadville, were closely tied to agrarian life, local churches, and wage labor in manufacturing. Their homes were set apart from one another, and mothers and their young children walked to the homes of neighbors for visits and play time after school or on summer days when chores at home were completed. In good weather, children played outside while their mothers visited on the porch or in the house. On rainy days, children played quietly in the kitchen or a bedroom while adults talked together in an adjacent room. When adults and children read together at home or in church, they closely attended to the texts and their meanings. In the presence of their elders, children spoke when they were addressed by an adult; otherwise, they listened and played quietly. Adults asked straightforward questions; children answered as directly and fully as possible. Book reading between adults and young children at home was a time of naming pictures, talking about events portrayed in illustrations, and memorizing titles of books and stories, many of which carried a moral or lesson. In church services, the pastor and Sunday School superintendent did most of the talking, while the congregation listened and responded in recitation of prayers and scriptural readings. Using hymnals, the congregation sang under the direction of the choir leader.

Children from black working-class communities, such as Trackton, lived in houses in close proximity to one another. In the open plaza that ran in front of their homes, children played in cross-age groups, subject to the watchful eye of any adults who were around. Children incorporated numerous language games in their play. Adults and children teased one another openly. Children entered into adult conversations frequently, often overlapping and interrupting the talk of adults. Multiparty talk surrounded babies from birth, and oral storytelling and repetition of jump-rop e rhymes and taunts matched the pace of play activities on the open plaza. Questions directed to children sought new information, not affirmation, and written texts entered family life primarily in the form of documents from bureaucracies, landlords, and utility companies. Church services
emphasized performance over literal reading of texts, and members participated freely in the raising of hymns, a practice in which words sung often bore relatively little relation to the words printed in hymnals. Members, young and old, also took part in scriptural readings, choral recitations, and oral affirmations of the words of the preacher.

Ways With Words (Heath, 1983/1996) documents how these community ways of using language played out for Roadville and Trackton children in classrooms. Roadville children tended to do very well in their early elementary years, finding familiarity in teachers' questions designed to test children's comprehension of their reading texts. The children learned the alphabet quickly and had relatively little difficulty understanding the concept of grapheme–phoneme correspondence. As they reached the upper grades, however, questions in their texts and from their teachers sought interpretations and actions from their reading of texts. These tasks stumped many of the Roadville children, especially those with little experience in hearing conversations that debated ways in which the same text could carry different meanings.

Trackton children, however, faced immediate difficulties in desegregated schools in which most of their teachers were from white or black middle class neighborhoods. Trackton children did not know how to respond to teachers' questions that asked children to repeat information the teachers already knew. Having grown up as conversationalists and information creators, Trackton children often responded to teachers' questions in ways that could be interpreted as insolent and disrespectful. Well before they reached the upper grades of their primary schools, where questions asked for interpretations, many Trackton children opted out of trying to learn school ways. Instead, they settled in to just getting by until they were old enough to drop out of school.

However, in the early 1980s, just over a decade after the Civil Rights era, drastic economic changes for their parents jolted Trackton and Roadville children into new lifeways. Foreign takeover led to the closure of textile mills, and tobacco subsidies that had been in place since the Great Depression were severely reduced. Along with these local economic setbacks, the nation suffered a double-dip recession in the early 1980s. Factory workers and farmworkers from the Southeastern states had to scatter to find new kinds of employment. Leaving their rural homes and small communities, they settled their families in new types of neighborhoods and schools. Residents of Roadville and Trackton relocated initially to towns in the Southeast with populations of 50,000 to 250,000. There, male family members had some chance of finding work that capitalized on their handyman mechanical skills. Some men took advantage of their do-it-yourself competencies and started their own small businesses, often in automotive, television, or small-engine repair work.

However, the costs of rent, food, and other goods needed in their new lives soon led mothers to seek work outside the home. Some took advantage of their caregiving skills and entered programs leading to certificates as nursing or teacher aides. Some chose to stay at home and take in washing, ironing, mending, and
dressmaking for more well-to-do families. With these changes in times, places, and means of earning a living came an increasing number of shifts in patterns of time and space surrounding cooking and eating, spending family time at home, playing and reading with young children, and worshipping. During the 1980s, these and other changes in daily life marked the start of a roller coaster of changes that accelerated during the 1990s and through the first decade of the 21st century.

The generation that moved away from Roadville and Trackton when they were parents of young children increasingly adopted the attitude that only education could ensure their children’s achievement of a better future or the American Dream. These parents insisted that their children work hard in school, be involved in as many extracurricular activities as possible, and look ahead to further education. Most parents did all they could to keep their children from having to do work in the house or yard or to seek employment that might curtail participation in after-school and weekend activities that they now saw as critical to building social capital. As the 1990s opened, young people old enough to enter the military service, nursing school, colleges, or apprenticeship programs did so, while encouraging their younger siblings to stay in school and plan to move on to a college or university.

With the dot-com era came further impetus to understanding the power of learning by doing while also undertaking specialized advanced study. Four years of higher education needed to be supplemented by internships and apprenticeships, work experience, or self-start projects that held promise as start-up companies. Reading of all types and through multiple media came to be accepted as the norm for young adults who wanted to get away from home and explore possibilities in new parts of the country, especially urban centers known for their technology companies. The generation that was too young when their parents left to remember Roadville and Trackton grew up never looking back. They accepted their futures as full of opportunities, good jobs, big homes, and faraway vacations. They had time for reading and writing, primarily as means to an end and as supplements to learning by doing, talking with and watching others, and keeping up on the Internet with key personalities, companies, and trends in the fast-moving global economy. Their literacies had exchange value, giving them something they wanted in return for their time, effort, and dedication.

Along with the rapid economic changes of the 1990s came changes in definitions of family and family life. The extensive and rapid inclusion of women in the labor force and professional life meant that children and adolescents were growing up primarily in the care of intimate strangers. Paid by parents, these individuals watched over, guided, entertained, and fed the children of parents whose hours of work outside the home meant that they themselves could not fulfill these responsibilities. Day care centers for infants and preschool children extended their hours, sometimes operating around the clock, to accommodate parents who worked two shifts or long, unpredictable hours. Regardless of the level of material goods and other resources of these venues, children engaged face
to face in extended sessions of play and talk with caregivers far less than the prior
generation’s children had in their own homes and communities.

Families who started the decade of the 1980s with working-class identities
moved through the 1990s with growing confidence that they could live in middle
class neighborhoods and join the mainstream of modern economic life. As those
who had been children when their parents left Roadville and Trackton entered
adulthood, went off to seek further education, married, and started their own
families during the 1990s, they acquired more material goods, larger homes, and
greater familiarity with commercial entertainers than their parents ever thought
possible. Often created through loans and sustained with mounting credit card
debt, their fairy tale worlds meant that their children filled their out-of-school
hours as avid soccer, baseball, and football players; videogame experts; and bud-
ding pianists and dancers. Complementing achievement in school, these pursuits,
along with volunteer hours in community service, meant to the young that the
promise of college entry would be fulfilled for them.

Meanwhile, parents and children spent fewer hours playing and working to-
gether, undertaking joint responsibilities for maintaining household and meal
chores, and exploring the outdoors or taking vacations as families. Once they
reached their final years of primary school, children saw more interest in their
friends than in their parents. Through the tween and teen years, they moved
primarily in the company of their peers, often within activities, including travel,
that were organized and supervised by intimate strangers. By 2000, the majority
of the children of the children of Trackton and Roadville had never planned and
cooked a meal, mowed a lawn, repaired anything around the house, seen a family
member change a tire, or helped the family plant a tulip bed, fruit tree, or garden.

In place of not only these activities with their elders but also many other types
of undertakings dependent on joint decision making, verbal negotiation, and trial
and error, the young spent the majority of their time with their friends. They cre-
ated among themselves conversational forms of entertainment that reflected their
updated information about entertainment figures, forms of music, developments
in technology, gossip surrounding boy–girl relationships, and short-term plans
for getting together at one another’s homes. As they moved through middle school
and into secondary school, a few found after-school work on some days of the
week, primarily to earn money to pay for their own clothes or special equipment
that they wanted for particular sports activities, such as tennis, soccer, baseball,
hockey, and golf.

In these adolescents’ talk, they reflected features listed in Table 1 in contrast
with features called for in academic written discourse, such as research papers,
laboratory reports, and honors papers. The interactional talk of young people
was cut through with multiple forms of enactment, ranging from voice modula-
tion to gestural exaggeration. These enactments often carried introductions, such
as, “And we’re, like, really, yeah, like...” In conversations, like plus the use of the
present tense to report past actions brought listeners into a sense of reality sur-
rounding the events being narrated. When they talked in groups of more than
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layering of symbol systems including gestural, musical, and body decorative</td>
<td>Required: Extended written texts; images (e.g., charts, tables, figures, and photographs), if included, must be labeled and their contents referenced within the written text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repetition of layered collaborative narratives based on shared experiences</td>
<td>Proscribed: Repetition of content, other than in limited uses (such as transitions or summations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive commentary on the same range of topics</td>
<td>Required: Attribution to original retrievable reference of any content repeated (cited) from a source other than current author</td>
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<td>Strong preference for narrative genre over explanation or description</td>
<td>Required: Expository, reportative, and persuasive texts including an argument of key points with limited use of narratives to illustrate points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sequencing of events within narratives marked by coordinating conjunctions</td>
<td>Required: Clauses linked primarily through causal and temporal conjunctions; introduction of additive points permitted with the use of furthermore, in addition (etc.) and summative points with the use of thus, therefore, as a consequence (etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequent use of judgment in absolute terms</td>
<td>Proscribed: Author's value judgments and adverbs leading the reader to assess judgments of content (e.g., unfortunately, even, obviously)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redundant use of “shallow” syntactic constructions and familiar vocabulary</td>
<td>Required: Technical or specialized lexical items and dependent and independent clauses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominance of present tense with narrow range of past or future tense</td>
<td>Required: Fluency with range of tenses needed to indicate relationships among ideas and events</td>
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<td>Frequent use of if-then propositions as threats or challenges</td>
<td>Proscribed: Use of second person pronoun (implied or stated), thereby precluding use of hypotheticals as threats or challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preference for use of hypotheticals for recast events rather than future projections</td>
<td>Required: If-then propositions ranging across past, present, and future</td>
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<td>Preference for unbalanced if-then propositions with one variable on one side of the proposition and several on the other side</td>
<td>Preferred: Balanced hypotheticals with variables on either side of the if-then proposition relatively equal in number and semantic weight</td>
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two or three, young speakers entertained one another with collaborative narratives that replayed their shared experiences. They punctuated their talk with repetition, narratives, and chains of actions linked by coordinating conjunctions, such as and. Statements using if-then often came as warnings or threats issued with only one or two variables on either side of the if-then proposition (e.g., “’n he’s goin’ right up to the door, and, like, he don’t look right or left or nutn’. If’n the cops come by, he better be a fast runner right then”).

By the time they enter middle school, young people in conversational groups learn the importance of understanding rap lyrics, crossover musical styles, and advertisements that adults often find puzzling. The young communicate through multiple media at the same time: text messaging while talking on the phone, watching videos, doing their homework, or talking with friends on the way to the bus. They layer their speech genres in multiple ways, embedding song lyrics and jokes in what appear to be serious treatises on local shopping centers or new car models.

Close study of the language, work, and play of descendant families from Roadville and Trackton living in the commodified world that came with the 1990s reveals several key patterns:

- Times of dedicated play, planning, and project time between adult family members and their children across ages dropped dramatically, whereas participation of the young within community organizational and peer activities increased significantly.

- With each year, young people increased the number of hours they spent in one another’s homes or engaged in rule-governed sports and community service activities directed by intimate strangers. Before entering secondary school, the norm was between 12 and 15 hours each week. For most students in secondary school, this number surpassed 20 hours each week.

- Models of dress, talk, and choices of entertainment forms favored by the young grew more distant and commercialized throughout the 1990s. Peers were monitors and judges of fashion for children as young as 8 years of age.

- Voluntary pursuits of expertise among the young depended increasingly on intent participation or learning a role through observing (Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, and Angelillo, 2003). Such learning brought vertical and horizontal gains. Learners zeroed in on what they wanted to learn and why, and they sought advice from peers in both face-to-face and online consultations.

- During the first decade of the 21st century, interactional talk time between adults and children in households dropped to less than an hour each week for children under the age of 12. Young people between the ages of 12 and 18 spent about seven minutes each week engaged in extended talk on the same topic with adults at home.
During the 1980s, family members planned and scripted activities, such as cleaning out the attic or garage, planning the summer vacation, or making a cake and card for a favorite relative’s birthday. By the 1990s, adults purchased or paid others to undertake these tasks. As separate bedrooms with isolated entertainment stations came to characterize households, “turning off the screens and unplugging the networks” became more and more difficult. Young people learning on their own time increasingly mixed and layered texts, music, images, and interactive technologies to build strong performative frameworks for communications that they transmitted to their peers via the Internet. Only in relatively rare instances did parents join in these productions and share space, time, entertainment, or informational sources with the young.

Throughout secondary school and beyond, young people engaged in collaborative peer work using electronic media and creating opportunities to learn how to use new software for mixing, editing, and producing materials, often for niche or highly selected audiences among their friends at school or within their special interest niches online. As they entered universities, they continued this pattern of connecting through writing whenever possible. Between 2007 and 2010, secondary school students of descendant Roadville and Trackton families could claim some level of expertise with an average of 60 different genres. When their older siblings in college reviewed the list, they claimed that they created twice as many genres in the course of their academic year. They reported to their younger siblings that writing figured in everything they did and certainly exceeded in frequency, variation, and quantity the amount of writing they did for their course assignments. For both groups, functions and audience generated and influenced experimentation with style, length, layering of media, and follow-up genres.

The developmental trajectory of talk among teenagers engaged in video games, communicating, and creating multimedia performances for their online exchanges showed some surprising results. Only young people who spent hours and hours developing their technical expertise, especially their programming expertise and understanding of writing code in various programs, moved much beyond a level that most of their friends regarded as OK or mediocre. Standards were high for those who became recognized experts among their peers. These were readers who consulted an array of online sources (and occasionally print materials) about computers, programming, and animation techniques and creators. Some hung out in bookstores in the computer and graphic novel sections (Heath & Wolf, forthcoming). On some occasions, they talked with their friends about specific books or other sources. Those who read graphic novels or had been early fans of comic book artists during elementary school had select friends with whom they shared resources and opinions. Certain authors and artists and their styles were frequent topics of conversation. Often, these young people were known as geeks beyond their immediate circle of friends. It was not uncommon for the most resourceful geeks to set up informal consulting businesses for their parents’ friends who needed computer help or for their own classmates who wanted term papers embellished with computer art.
Many of the geeks, female and male, increased their hours of searching digital space each year. As they did so, they spent more and more time balancing occasions of involvement in brief bits of interaction with extended hours of checking out the Internet, perfecting projects that they had created on the Internet to their satisfaction, and exploring new video games and types of animation, along with breaking news about specific technology industries. These learners mastered a substantial corpus of specialized vocabulary, meta-awareness about their own learning strategies, and for some, a readiness to explain the pros and cons of specific programs, games, and new technology products. Those who worked long hours to reach the expert level tended, however, not to talk extensively with friends who were outside their relatively closed worlds of adult clients and peer geekdom.

The written language that teenagers produced in their interactions with electronic media featured a preponderance of short (often incomplete) sentences, with highly redundant chunks of material. Only rarely did they write and arrange multiparagraph extended texts on one topic. Their writing reflected a mix of given or previously scripted texts, and their inclusion of written language with other media showed substantial borrowing of special effects from their more creative counterparts whose work they found online. Many resisted attempts by teachers to involve them in sustained engagement with extended printed or oral language. Outside of their participation in activities of their own interest, they were often characterized as having short attention spans and inadequate comprehension as measured by standard classroom means. Yet, many geeks did well on standardized tests and engaged with enthusiasm in projects of mathematics or science at school. Only occasionally would they argue with teachers and academic texts, even when their group project work proved the text to be incorrect. In effect, they did not involve themselves sufficiently in the substance of issues raised in their academic schoolwork to bring their own knowledge and skills to bear in oral or written argument (cf. Kuipers & Viechnicki, 2008).

“We Believe in Talking Face to Face With Friends”

The matter of extended talk, particularly on topics for which numerous sources and forms of information, including books, are available, merits thoughtful consideration in any discussion of reading. Extended talk can take place only when interlocutors want to learn from one another. This situation usually occurs only when speakers feel the need to talk about something that is, to some extent, within the same frame of reference for all participants. Within extended talk, speakers engage in not only explication and evaluation but also movement across time frames of past, present, and future. Such talk takes time and involves narratives, clarifying questions, requests for justification of claims, and deliberation of ideas, values, and behaviors.

The deliberation behind scientific, religious, political, and social decisions becomes implanted in the minds of the young primarily through times of listening to and taking part in extended talk from someone whom young speakers feel
they trust. Even more vital to such talk by younger speakers is their conviction that they have the respect of their interlocutors.

An examination of the right-hand column of Table 1 indicates features of written academic discourse, many of which also characterize extended talk. Here, speakers must be able to indicate the source of information that they reference; otherwise, listeners tend to regard this information as merely opinion. Causal and temporal conjunctions are needed to support additive points, as are a range of tenses to indicate relationships among ideas and events. Finally, in both oral and written extended discourse, individuals engage in hypothetical reasoning, juxtaposing the here and now as well as the future against past or universal happenings and postulates.

Since the time of Aristotle and Socrates, Western traditions of oratory and written exposition have prized deliberative language as the major carrier of moral and ethical codes. Those who engage in deliberation reason “if X, then Y,” or “better yet, if A, B, and C, then D, and E; what might happen if...?” The power of deliberative discourse is its valuation of the strength of the argument over the status of the individual putting forth the argument. The capacity for reasoned judgment must prevail so different positions and views can be asserted, and self-interest will give way to the common good.11 To gain the fluency of language that is necessary to take part in written and oral deliberative discourse, individuals need extensive experience in situations where they observe and work in thinking collectives with others of different ages and levels and types of knowledge, skills, and experience. Literature, film, dramatic productions, and other art forms have long been accepted as providing vicarious means of safe observation and participation with the lives of others. Authors and scholars of young adult literature have pointed to this value as especially important for adolescents.12

To learn to make ethical decisions, the young need to see the values and skills involved when individuals interpret and create analogies, contrast one situation to another, and consider responses or outcomes that result from similar and different circumstances. Young people need the intimacy of extended times of talk and reading (which involves talking with the text) if they are to learn to empathize and perceive the intentions and needs of others. To recognize, as well as to deliberate, possible actions and consequences of playing out moral obligations, children need years of moral discourse—everyday interactions along with written and performed texts that extend beyond the immediate desires of those observing or taking part. The development of autonomy of the child derives from practices embedded in learning how to talk and think about topics beyond the child’s own self-interests and the here and now. All of these dimensions of human development come within children’s theater, Readers Theatre, and participation in the literary and visual life of art and science museums and the musical life of ensemble performance.13

Anthropologists who have studied language development in cultures around the world in the past three decades have looked closely at situations within socialization that foster the concept of responsibility among children. Social awareness,
empathy, and self-monitoring are key properties, and social scientists argue that only through participation in joint tasks are these human features developed. The young must gain a sense of interdependence with others, simultaneously feeling the importance of empathy, consequential thinking, and “a generative cross-situational awareness of and responsiveness to others’ needs and desires” (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009, p. 391). If we consider literature and its many instances of deliberation and examination of personhood, we recognize deeply why the reading of literature has been a mainstay of formal schooling. Here, the academy attempts to reinforce what teachers have long expected children to learn from both exposure to children’s literature and direct participation in work and play with adults.

Yet, educators increasingly point out that readers in middle and secondary school have difficulty with and little patience for interpreting passages from literary writers of the past. The right-hand column of Table 1 makes clear some of the grounds for young readers’ impatience and frustration. If readers have neither taken part in nor witnessed deliberative discourse around them, they will lack the oral language fluency necessary to interpret not only literary texts but also other texts that are central to academic life. Without experience in the decision making of partnered work, play, and talk with adults, the level of receptive and productive competency that is necessary to grasp how extended texts work eludes them. The young need some degree of immersion in language that goes beyond the here and now of everyday talk and action to reflection and retrospection about human feelings. Consider, for example, the distance of everyday language centered on current self-interests from the following sentence in Robert Frost’s statement on poetry from the preface to his Collected Poems (1939):

> It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. (n.p.)

Here, Frost (1939) draws parallels between the shape of love and “the figure a poem makes” (n.p.). As in so many passages of English literature, the interior mind moves back and forth across time and experience, with backdrop and foreshadowing, and consternation over life’s contradictions. Such texts rest on a deep grasp of temporality and causality, metaphor and analogy. The hypothetical underlies literature, enabling readers to practice the mental and linguistic performances necessary to support what could be their own actions to come.

“Together, Readers, Writers, Books and Bookstores Can Work Magic”

The irony is that the falling away during the 1990s of deliberative interactions between adults and the young and between the young and extended written texts, including literary works, preceded a decade of unprecedented life-altering and world-changing events for families living in modern economies. Descendants of
Roadville and Trackton experienced these changes and were forced to assess the nature and extent of their emotional and intellectual resources for handling the shifts in daily life that hit them hard as the first decade of the 21st century moved to its end.

Following the attack on New York City in September of 2001 through the end of the decade, the economic stability for families who had held on to their fragile middle class lives in the prior decade turned shaky. By 2007–2008, many had seen their pensions, benefits, salaries, and bonuses either decline or disappear entirely. Some saw the loss of their homes through foreclosure followed in short succession by alterations in family relationships that came with lifestyle shifts and dwindling hopes of college education for their children. Separation, divorce, remarriage, or partnering in new arrangements altered habits surrounding homework, dinner-time, after-school activities, and allegiances to one or the other parent and adaptation to new siblings.

These changes intensified the appeal of the flood of new technologies that fed the desires of the young for isolation from their immediate world and for unceasing connections with peers near and far. For many children, familial disruptions shut down any opportunities to objectively weigh positions or sides. Children now increasingly found themselves sent to counselors and child psychologists—intimate strangers hired to listen to children and ask questions that might help them gain the emotional maturity to empathize with others, take on moral responsibility, and manage their own feelings of abandonment, disillusion, and exclusion. Lacking, in many cases, extensive positive experiences in playing, planning, and working alongside caring adults before family breakups, many young people had no guidelines or habits to lead them to plan and act responsibly toward their own futures as young adults. Moreover, in 2012, barely half of U.S. citizens were married, and children were increasingly being raised in households that did not include either or both of their biological parents. More and more children grew up living under separation and divorce agreements of joint custody. Their own parents had, in many cases, disconnected themselves to a great extent from their own mothers and fathers. Often relocated far from extended family members, children and parents preferred family vacations that did not include visits to grandparents or other relatives.

By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, questions asked in the prior century about literacy seemed quaint, simplistic, and decidedly removed from realities in the contemporary world. By this time, most young people who managed to get their hands on several different types of technologies had no difficulty identifying what was needed not only to make these devices work but also to figure out how they worked.

Increasingly, the greater the facility young people had with technology, the more they read and wrote. However, this more refers to genres of text, almost all multimodal and directed to and received from a widening array of other writers and readers across an expanding span of topics. Self-directed and peer-influenced young people felt the need to learn and be “on top of what’s happenin'
leading them to multitudes of sources on the Internet. Those with access to transport and discretionary income also congregated in commercial and other venues where they talked with experts who shared their special interests. Many young people in troubled families turned their attention more and more away from family issues toward engagement with activities and interests that had no evident role to play in helping them ground plans for the future.

The young in families trying to adjust to both new economic and interpersonal arrangements found themselves mired in option stress and multitasking. All around them came directives to “go to college,” “start your own company,” and “explore the world.” Start-up and established corporations dedicated to social networking recognized the special learning qualities of these young people, many of them just out of secondary school. By 2012, many of these companies made a point of recruiting young, fresh employees who had little or no higher education, only inventive skills and techniques learned through their own voluntary pursuits. The young accepted the achievements of robots and avatars and were willing to set aside ethical considerations.

Meanwhile, as manufacturing continued to take place in newly developing nations, the United States and other advanced economies struggled to recruit secondary-level students to the study of sciences to support advanced manufacturing that would go beyond production of short-lived products built for consumer consumption. Examples of advanced manufacturing included development of alternative energy sources, medical equipment and pharmaceutical drugs to extend independence of the aging population, and synthetic materials to take the place of rare metals critical to technologies, such as that of smartphones. These technological needs came along with an increasing rate of growth of the proportion of families living in poverty and a jump in the national sense of sharp class divisions between the rich and the poor.

These major societal changes and their effects on family life and child development in the first decades of the 21st century explain to a great extent why it is that in the next generation, when people speak of education, they will not be referring primarily to sites of formal instruction. The dramatic transformations of the social and economic circumstances of family life mean that levels of toxic stress, particularly for young children, are likely to keep increasing year by year. Scientists, educators, and the general public will be unable to escape the enlarging institutional gap between families and schools. Together they are not strong enough to overcome the pressures on normal child development brought about by the radical and rapidly changing situations of child and adolescent development. New strategies and agents need to emerge.

In many ways, young people began to take the lead in this charge during the years following 1990. Youth-based community organizations, often spurred by small groups of young people, came into being, particularly in urban areas where public transport made it possible for young people to move about their city and know what was happening in neighborhoods other than their own. In these sites, since the 1990s, young leaders and supportive adults have created learning
organizations for after-school and summer hours that help young people negotiate their changing demands and possibilities. Creativity, play, collaborative work, and shoulder-to-shoulder interactions of professionals, mentors, and novice learners take place in these organizations. Flexibility and adaptability characterize these organizations so they keep pace with shifting demographics, interests of the young, job and further education possibilities, and small business developments. Here, reading, writing, financial literacy, reflective talk, and public critique take place within high-pressure contexts that demand on-time high performance from the young. These organizations range from social entrepreneurship dedicated to both local and international causes to arts and science organizations that create products and services for the public and for private sector businesses.17

Quietly and largely outside the notice of educational institutions, community organizations such as those described here work in collaboration with parental groups, businesses, and social service agencies dedicated to health, environmental sustainability, and civic learning. The wide range of resources, agents, and environments available in different communities means that standardization of ways of teaching and learning and ideas about the monolinearity of learning pathways have given way to creativity and creative industries. Learning for individuals and small groups in these sites takes place voluntarily and is linked with motivations and visions of the future for the organization and those within. Horizontal connections that include learners of different ages, persuasions, and levels of knowledge and skill characterize these learning environments, as does recognition of different kinds of talents.18

Variously termed pro-ams (professional amateurs), citizen scientists and artists, and participants in the knowledge society, individuals within these organizations are likely to see themselves as linked to the collective interests of local communities.19 Voluntarily formed and maintained, these playful learning environments emphasize integrity and the exercise of judgment in ways that integrate intellectual and technical knowledge, on the one hand, and moral and civic responsibility, on the other. Playful learning in the relentless work that it takes to keep these organizations going calls on a myriad of interconnections rather than just a few power relationships. In their playful work, learning and teaching, trying and failing, and imagining and dreaming become community properties.

A robust understanding of how humans learn requires simultaneous emphases on widely varying types of learning environments. Such understanding grows increasingly vital for the design and sustenance of learning environments that enable learners to develop adaptive habits that are imperative for lifelong learning. As new sources, types, and formats of information emerge with the accelerating pace of innovative technologies, previously unimagined problems and possibilities inevitably follow. The health of the planet will increasingly be interrelated with how humans identify and respond with flexible thinking grounded in commitment not to individual interests but to communal well-being. Young and old together have to recognize the imperative of action over apathy, agency over nostalgia, and caring creativity over care-less passivity.20
Heath

Watson (2003) tells the story of the makers of illuminated manuscripts who came to their tasks with little or no familiarity with what it meant to have meanings conveyed through letters and vignettes (sidebar drawings). Drawing on long-term fieldwork among indigenous learners, Walker (1981) portrays the development of scripts, written texts, and reading habits of adults who had known little or nothing about written languages as children.

By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, research from neuroscientists increased in frequency and complexity as well as interdisciplinarity. Two summary sources for reading researchers are Hruby and Goswami (2011) and Strauss, Goodman, and Paulson (2009). An equally active and fast-moving topic for research by cognitive neuroscientists relates to spatial understanding that results from drawing and sketching, as well as reading and interpreting illustrations. Embedded within this work has been the growing focus on the direct use of the digits and full hand in creating meaning through visual art forms, such as sketching, sculpting, and modeling (see Ramadas, 2009; Wilson, 1998).

In spite of extensive scholarly writing on this topic, the most comprehensive and balanced perspective comes from Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) and Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998). Works often cited to prove the deleterious effects of growing up in homes of families living in poverty include Hart and Risley (1995, 1999) and Lareau (2003). These studies emphasize lexical deficiencies, in particular, that result in families whose parents have neither discretionary time nor financial resources to put toward experiences such as those offered by libraries, museums, zoos, city park programs, and youth organizations.

Messages related to these topics package easily and draw interest from school administrators. Tracing the career of enterprising individuals eager to meet this market demand during the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century is readily done (see, e.g., aha! Process [www.ahaprocess.com], the website of Ruby Payne).

Those issuing such cautions speak on the basis of studies that are highly interdisciplinary and often involve research seeking to understand reading problems of children diagnosed as being dyslexic, hyperactive, language delayed, or on the autism disorder spectrum (see, e.g., M. Wolf, 2007, especially ch. 4 and 6).

Chapter 8 of Snow et al. (1991) lays out many of the underpinnings of these premises. Since the early 1990s, nonprofits dedicated to learning during the after-school hours have intensified attention to these premises (see, e.g., the website of the After-School Corporation [www.tascorp.org] in New York).

Ironically, anthropologist Margaret Mead (1970) predicted this need more than half a century before the introduction of the Internet and technologies through which the young so often teach their elders. She referred to the phenomenon as prefigurative socialization,
interactional relationships that differed from those of postfigurative learning in which elders passed on their knowledge to the young. Within prefigurative learning, elders learn from the young.

8 No claim is made here or in the full study (Heath, 2012) that the families followed for three decades represent average or typical families. Those whose lives are reported in the full study would be the first to assert the uniqueness of their characteristics, situations, and ways of coping. In fact, they would argue that every family has its own stories to tell in its own way.

9 Methods used to collect data on interactive talk among young people are laid out in Heath (2012, App. B) and Heath and Street (2008).

10 For a survey of university students' writing during their college years, in and out of their classrooms, visit the Stanford Study of Writing website (ssw.stanford.edu). Numerous other modes worked alongside and often led their writing, and their lives beyond the classroom demanded more writing of them than their classrooms did (see also Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, & Otuteye, 2005).

11 Since the 1990s, the concept of deliberative democracy has been broadly considered on university campuses and in think tanks of different political persuasions (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

12 In a time of mounting attention to technology and science, philosophers and other humanists increasingly feel compelled to argue for the benefits of the humanities (see, e.g., Nussbaum, 1997, 2010).

13 Materials advocating the value of the arts for children flooded the world of after-school providers from the 1990s forward. It is surprising, therefore, that relatively little long-term research has looked at the human development dimensions of participation in the arts. Winner and Hetland (2000) have made this point to the consternation of arts advocates.

14 In contemporary advanced economies, families of the middle class experience difficulty in providing the young with opportunities to make mistakes and learn from them and to take responsibility in the family context (see Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009).

15 Blascovich and Bailenson (2011) examine the edginess of virtual worlds, especially the reading powers of avatars that discern and reflect facial expressions, for example, well beyond the abilities of humans to do so. Avatars read symbol systems and situations, and they can take action based on their interpretations of what they read. The capacities of their virtual worlds, however, are not neutral.

16 In a National Research Council report, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) point to many of the same factors indicated in Heath's (2012) study of three decades in family and community life. The council and numerous policy reports strongly argue the impact on children of sensing threats all around them to both their present and their future. Advances in technologies and long-term record keeping show that children who grow up with toxic stress suffer long-lasting biological effects, as well as a greater likelihood of social struggles throughout adolescence.

17 To a great extent, the changing nature of community youth-led organizations means that written accounts and extensive websites are scarce. Workers within these sites have no time to write their own social histories or do much by way of “getting our story out there.” Grants, donations, and occasional funds from local civic organizations and governments constitute their primary means of financial support, along with sales from their products and services (see Bornstein, 2004; Elizabeth & Young, 2006; Heath & Smyth, 1999; and the Artists for Humanity website [www.afhboston.com]).

18 These sites of youth play and work illustrate horizontal learning that reflects expanding interests and niche seeking and complements vertical learning (see Engestrom, 1987, for more on the critical context of work for such learning).
The idea of professional amateurs holds considerable prominence in the worlds of both the humanities and political policy (see Finnegan, 2005; Garber, 2001; Leadbetter & Miller, 2004).

In 1995, McKnight wrote The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits, expressing many of the views of the final section of this chapter. His advice in that volume is likely to remain as needed in the future as it was in the mid-1990s.

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