

Sparking and Sustaining Adolescent Learning:  
Embodied Values, Contextualized Literacies, and Developing Identities  
at the Public Library

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**Abstract**

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Any given day, thousands of teenagers enter the nearly 17,000 United States public libraries dotting the nation. With this dissertation, I ask, “How does the public library spark and sustain the voluntary learning of adolescents with the affordances of space, resources, and people?” I answer this through an ethnographic case study of public library services for teens in a community with a high percentage of immigrant residents. Over 18 months, I observed library activities involving youth, interviewed library staff and adolescent patrons, and led teen volunteers in a participatory research project. Data was analyzed in a constant comparative method within a sociocultural-historical framework. Through attention to practices of the youth

and library staff within the space, I saw how the physical layout, guiding policies, and activities offered, the public library embodied the values of access, intellectual freedom, and service. The librarian's professional questioning skills served to scaffold youth's experiences with resources. Through one-to-one interactions and a variety of library programs, librarian and adolescents established trust and engaged in deliberative discourse, preparing youth for collaborative work in future contexts. The legitimate peripheral participation of the most engaged adolescents pulled them further into the situated learning context of the public library. In ways that matched her individual needs and preferences, each girl took up identities related to the public good, education and lifelong learning, and social responsibility that goes with them across contexts as well into their future. This is how the public library's affordances of space, resources, and people operate interdependently to enact the values of diversity and democracy. Within the public library space, diverse adolescents, many of whom struggle in more formal contexts, find a multitude of ways to learn through resources and in relationship with people. Such experiences prepare them for participation in democratic processes with cultural capital as well as resilience for difficult times in the future. In summary, the public library sparks and sustains the voluntary learning of adolescents through embodied values, contextualized literacies, and developing identities.

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## **Dedication**

To my grandparents:

John Stanley Brewer and Cora “Babe” Farnsworth,

Two Kansas farm kids who left for the opportunities of the city;

Leo Ernest Thomas and Valda Alice Weigel,

Two Seattle kids who left for the adventures of the world.

Because you believed in the American dream and because you believed in me.

## **Introduction: Welcome to the Library**

*How would I describe adolescent learning in public libraries? We provide a venue to expose teens to different tools and follow their whim. We [foster development] and have adults who care. I'm not a teacher. My job is to break the illusion that libraries are just for English majors, to show there's something here for everyone...making the library approachable so they will use it for life. We offer tools to change lives.*

Interview response from a teen services librarian (Evans, 2016)

What goes on inside a library? What elements make it distinct from other societal organizations? Think of the average American public library. Like a museum, it houses a collection of artifacts. But the scope of content in a public library crosses an almost infinite number of topics, always directed by community needs. Like in a school, knowledge is available. Yet the curriculum in a library is flexible, the learning process individually driven, and age is irrelevant. Like at a coffee shop, you can while away hours alone or with friends. But at the library admission is always free and no payment for services is required. The American public library is both unique and yet commonplace, with nearly 17,000 public libraries dotting the nation today.

Any given day, thousands of teenagers enter public libraries. Often they come to get specific answers to questions they fear asking others. Sometimes they come to feed their curiosity about a hobby or new interest. At other times they come for safety, seclusion, and respite away from adult directives that tell them what they are not doing or doing wrong. What do adolescents find in public libraries? Three things: space, resources, and people. Public libraries offer teens physical space to inhabit, places where they are welcome to study, to relax and to socialize, with the same privileges as adult library patrons. They also offer teens intellectual space to explore, places where they can freely pursue interests across multiple media, without the restrictive requirements of school. Serving as guardian for and guide to these spaces

are specially trained teen services librarians. Focused on the developmental needs of adolescents, these librarians advocate for equitable access, create enticing activities, foster literacies, and collaborate within the community.

My dissertation explores how the public library sparks and sustains the voluntary learning of adolescents with the affordances of space, resources, and people. Guided by sociocultural-historical theory, I trace the practices of youth and library staff within one community public library through an ethnographic case study.

### **Problem Statement**

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, libraries in many modern economies recognized that they were facing numerous challenges. More and more nations, such as England, chose to take the position that libraries as book repositories had lost their primary purpose. The argument claimed that books no longer held their former place of pride in the imposing buildings created at the turn of the twentieth century or earlier. Moreover, the growing decrease of regular book-readers had already spelled doom for libraries.

Yet in the United States, libraries continued and indeed began to thrive in new ways. Credit for this continued vitality in libraries goes to the rapid adaptation by librarians who recognized by the turn of the twenty-first century that needs of their patrons had shifted. Thus libraries had to move ahead and listen to their patrons in order to meet the multiple and differing roles of communities, urban, suburban, and rural. Information, available through technologies of all kinds, including printed materials, came to ensure the sustained dedication of patrons. Individuals across classes, but most particularly the vulnerable and economically-stressed who had little or no internet access in their homes, faced confusion in understanding health insurance choices, tax forms, counter indications on their medicine bottles, or newly imposed community

regulations on pet control, parking spaces, etc. Librarians became increasingly service-oriented, out-stripping banking and retail clerks in courtesy and heart-felt welcomes, often at the door of the library.

Libraries enhanced their role as social centers in some locations. Local councils saw the need to renovate library buildings to allow for a coffee shop as well as extensive spaces where Wi-Fi was available to those who came with their own technologies. Librarians rededicated themselves to increased awareness of sectors of their local populations, and they adapted to meet the needs of those who needed large-print books, audio-books, and help with interpreting directives from city or county governments. Bargain-level book sales, held at regular intervals, drew book-lovers who still relished the physicality of holding books and owning their favorites from childhood or their school days. Younger patrons, a focus for public library services since their establishment in the United States (Stone, 1977), became recognized as in need of expanded types of service as well. Children's literature librarians planned puppet shows, reader's theater programs, and special displays of audiobooks along with linked print books. Parent programs promoted ways of reading with young children and talking about and through texts (Mills, Ghoting, & Campana, 2016), including those of specialized television programs or digital tablet apps that targeted certain age groups.

Adolescents as readers, thinkers, and, above all, seekers of wide-ranging types of information through all types of technologies have in many libraries their very own librarian and spaces for talking, lounging with books, and seeking information via the internet. This dissertation focuses on the challenges of sorting out populations, purposes, and activities of adolescents who attend on a semi-regular basis their local public library. In addition to activities for socialization, learning, and entertainment, numerous special projects, rising from service

organizations and charities national and local, entered the life of adolescents in their libraries. In such projects, young people created solutions to problems, made objects needed by certain groups, and heard from national and local representatives about the reach of the creative contributions of the young people. In addition, librarians recognized the potential of adolescents as advisors, critics, researchers, and promoters of books and other materials. Youth boards, review groups, and clusters of young people taking part in fanfiction and fanzines populated adolescent programs in libraries across the United States. As of 2012, 82% of the public libraries spread across the United States included a dedicated program for adolescents, reaching almost three million teens annually, and 97% of libraries housed materials for adolescents in a dedicated space (Agosto, 2013).

In a fast-moving digitized adolescent world, opinions swirl around concerns such as decline in reading scores as well as the act of reading and the desire of this population to own or even to handle books. Yet at its annual meetings and in its publications, the American Library Association regularly hosts information about programs that draw students across socioeconomic classes, background languages, and ethnic identities into local public libraries (Gibrich, 2016). Public schools, while giving occasional nods and even recommendations to the value of public libraries, rarely join hands with librarians in concrete ways to build communication skills, deepen research interests, and encourage leisure-time reading by adolescent learners. Thus libraries with programs for adolescents have often had to operate solo, aside from the promotion and occasional volunteering by some parents who encourage their youngsters to head to the library in their spare time. Simultaneously needing a way to reach more patrons in diverse communities and seeking to build on existing local expertise, many public libraries seek partnerships with community based organizations in order to bring relevant programs into the

library space and, vice versa, bring library events into the community. Unfortunately, the success of these partnerships fluctuate due to frequent shifts in personnel and budgets common to smaller non-profits. Meanwhile, the increased American emphasis on after-school sports as pathway to higher education and development of collaborative skills created through sports teams has also meant that, intentional or not, middle-school and secondary-level educators convey a message that spending time in a local library may be a waste of their time for adolescents.

Certain segments of the youth population in the United States have special needs for libraries. Immigrant students, documented and undocumented, increasingly find their way to library programs, as do homeless youth. Adolescents often come to their libraries primarily for deeply personal reasons. These include safety from gang violence in their neighborhoods, security in knowing that adults who run library programs for adolescents actually enjoy conversation, and also that in libraries they can find pleasurable public association with peers around safe interests, such as favorite authors, books, and related videos and online sites. The crux of the matter for libraries is development of programs that offer what adolescents want and need, while steering away from an identity as didactic, pedagogically driven, and pressure-filled, like contemporary schools. How then can libraries develop programs to enable voluntary learning by young readers, transitioning into the fast-growing world of young adult books as well as special interests for which non-fiction books and other media, such as video games or gaming in general, may be a real draw?

The best answer to this question will come through strong case studies of exemplary programs—defined as such by dedicated attendance and readiness for participation that adolescents demonstrate in these programs. Such case studies must, however, include two critical components: i) detailed analysis of critical features of these programs to enable

comparative analysis across sites, and ii) a theoretical framework that links with the research literature on “voluntary learning.” The latter grows out of studies that describe after-school programs, sports, arts learning, and other voluntary engagements that individuals or small groups seek out in order to gain information and skills they choose to learn. Rarely treated seriously in research on learning, voluntary learning has accumulated labels such as “auto-didactic” learning, “informal learning,” “leisure-time learning,” hobby development, or even “play.” However, as the field of the learning sciences has grown, researchers who have been studying voluntary learning situations across cultures and ages have increasingly seen their work find its way into not only theories surrounding memory, skill enhancement, and expertise development, but also medical studies examining the health-enhancing role of activities related to the arts, exercise, games, and reading and talking about books.

In this dissertation, one public library centers the case study. This library has a teen services agenda designed with adolescents as voluntary co-learners, enabling the librarian to learn as the young people read, talk, and express their views about books and their multiple on-screen representations. In addition, this library, as well as other exemplary library services for adolescents, welcomes young people into roles of advisors, council members, reviewers, and project participants. The young do research on projects available to them from various sources, and they decide which projects to undertake.

The message, always subtle and shying away from obvious announcement, is that libraries need young people to ensure relevance, richness of experiences, and rapid adaptation and adoption of new books, approaches, and ways of displaying innovative acquisitions across technologies (Young Adult Library Services Association, 2014). This

dissertation recognizes the design decisions of librarians in details ranging from furniture choice and arrangement to hours of operation, to the balance of open-ended library time and organized meetings by adolescent regulars. The analysis offered in my dissertation stresses all features of context as well as staff interactions with youth and the librarian's philosophies.

Numerous historical studies both of book-reading as an activity and of individual readers and writers demonstrate repeatedly that early learning with and from books in one's own pursuits and on one's own time will embed deep habits of memory, comparative analysis, and curiosity (Sayers, 1965; Schwartz, 1996; Spencer, 1982; Spufford, 2002). Although the notion of the book is expanding beyond the physical codex, the experience of extended text is still critical to developing the complex storage of information into long-term memory (Heath, 2012c). Youth experiences in our public libraries offer these life-long benefits and more. This dissertation reflects on key gaps in research on adolescents in libraries. Primary among these gaps is the failure of scholars to take up library engagement as a key aspect of voluntary learning across the life span, often begun during the sometimes troubling years of adolescence.

Public libraries have in recent years simply slipped into oblivion in the minds of the general public. The intense focus on schools and school reforms since negative assessments of public schools hit the airwaves during the administration of President Clinton has nearly erased all other learning environments save those related to higher education. Sports, extracurricular "good works," and travel experiences have come to be celebrated as boosts needed to enhance successful applications to colleges and universities. Every student would be quick to conclude that writing a college entry essay on "my time reading in the local public library" would be a

certain downer in terms of winning acceptance to a chosen higher education institution. As noted previously, teachers have also seemed to give up on promoting public libraries as partners in the learning lives of young people. Parents may seem to remain the last strong friend of libraries, but increasingly, as two-parent working households and single-parent households dominate the landscape of young lives, the public library can well recede into the background. Too often, preference for adults as well as youth in the after-school hours goes to sports and other team activities that have little or no reliance on reading extended texts or spending time talking through these texts in relation to authors, style, science fiction films, author websites, or fanfiction.

This study carries the intention of convincing researchers and practitioners, including librarians, reading teachers, and members of professional organizations linked to literacy and the learning sciences, that public libraries deserve a much closer look. Moreover, an additional aspect of the dissertation's importance is a regeneration of interest in the voluntary learning involved in adolescents learning on their own time and in their own way in libraries. Equally important is the gap in understanding of what it takes to link information sources and content across technologies, document references as verifiable retrievable sources, and hold that information in memory well enough to write or create related project work. Holding attention, following character development, managing metaphors and idioms, handling contradictions and ironies, as well as comparing ideas and styles across texts constitute skills essential to mature reading habits. Just as early reading patterns and habits require extensive practice and then more and more practice in groups and individually, so must mature reading patterns and habits have extended and repeated meaningful opportunities for reading, learning across technologies, and

thinking and talking about what has been learned and what all of the sources taken together mean.

Given the multiple demands at the secondary school level, long periods of sustained reading during the school hours occur with relative infrequency. Thus development of awareness of habits in need of practice is about all even the best teachers can manage to hope for among their general range of students. Yet these teachers have no control over home conditions of lighting, space, noise, and chore demands. The public library is the best possible friend that good secondary teachers have in today's world. This dissertation has the hope of instilling in the public mind recognition that public libraries constitute the best friend teachers and adolescents (and their parents) can have in sustaining the vital literacy skills required by 21<sup>st</sup> century texts.

Moreover, dangerous as any terrain related to transfer of learning may be, this dissertation's importance rests in convincing readers that adolescent reading, researching, thinking, and conversing for and with public librarians' colleagues/supporters/mentors will help build imminently transferable cognitive skills, habits of mind, and sought-after forms of relaxation that continue throughout life.

A key purpose and thus importance of this research is to reveal both the simplicity and the readiness of features that ensure an environment suitable for voluntary learning. Mysteries have seemed to cluster around notions related to terms that preceded "voluntary learning." For years, "informal learning" has seemed to stimulate either yawns of dismissal or cries of its impossible complexities. Researchers shy away from the unpredictable and numerous ways that voluntary learning seems to pop up here and there. Tough to document, and harder yet to evaluate, such learning therefore falls off the screen of most scholars. Thus, as noted previously, the body of literature around voluntary learning needs to be brought to attention

not only for what is revealed in this work about memory and motivation (as well as such pop favorites as “grit” and “growth mindset”) but also about what it takes to ensure suitable contexts of such learning.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review on Adolescent Voluntary Learning**

With my study, I turn the holistic lens of a learning scientist onto the public library to examine the real-world learning adolescents experience. To provide context for this work and its significance, I first review theories of and research on learning developed outside of school settings. I call special attention to findings on identities and literacies - two concepts inextricably bound to learning processes. Although my study focuses on youth learning in a single context, it is critical to situate this work within the learning sciences research conducted across settings in which youth live and learn. The theories derived from such research inform our understanding of how learning works broadly, thus supporting the holistic viewpoint with which I approach my work.

Learning is life-long, life-wide, and life-deep, meaning that it occurs across times, activities and spaces, and within value systems (Bell, 2012). Little of our life experience takes place in “school” and humans do most of their learning in settings with little formal instruction or curriculum. Early and continuing research around learning outside of school comes from anthropologists, with a few historians and psychologists who study the practices of communities, families, and youth. In recent decades, many learning scientists have examined learning by individuals across settings and/or learning in non-school settings such as homes or museums. Learning scientists and anthropologists share a focus on learning in real-world settings. Found infrequently in previous accounts of learning, libraries have recently garnered researcher’s interests as community access sites to technology as well as a part of citywide efforts at supporting youth learning beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, in the library and information science field, only a smattering of research relates to youth learning and libraries, but the scope is narrow, limited to one portion of library youth behaviors. Often, insight into learning from this

literature must be gleaned tangentially, as the research question is about a related topic, such as “information seeking” or “technology use.” Placing these lines of research next to each other illuminates the powerful potential of their interrelationship and thus the need for my study.

### **Voluntary Learning**

**Learning in situ.** The holistic lens I and many other scholars use to examine learning in real-world settings is sociocultural-historical theory. Sociocultural-historical theory (also called sociocultural or cultural-historical, in addition to other derivatives) is most commonly associated with Russian intellectuals from the early 1900's, particularly Lev Vygotsky. Michael Cole, who helped bring Vygotsky's work to English speaking audiences, wrote that the central thesis of sociocultural-historical theory is that "the structure and development of human psychological processes emerge through culturally mediated, historically developing, practical activity." (Cole, 1996, p. 198) What follows are some of the basic sociocultural-historical principles described by Cole (Cole, 1998, pp. 291-292) and their application to adolescent learning in public library spaces.

First, human interaction is mediated through culture and it is in mediated activity that humans develop and learn. Therefore, the focus of analysis is people acting in a context through mediational means, the primary medium being language. Every form of interaction is "multivoiced," containing "many different selves, arranged in multiple, overlapping, and often-contradictory ways" (Cole, 1998).

Adolescents transition between childhood and adulthood while interacting with a world of ideas through the people and practices they encounter. By viewing them through a sociocultural-historical lens, we can see them within the context of their experiences and history and consider the multiple voices they bring with them. It also means that to more fully

understand adolescents we need to observe their interactions with people and objects in context. Therefore, research should be conducted in situ as much as possible. To understand adolescent engagement with the library, I needed to observe interactions between youth and the people and objects in a library.

Second culture is embodied in "artifacts" that are both material and ideal/symbolic. Materially, artifacts are objects, words, rituals and other cultural practices. Symbolically, the artifacts have evolved through time as means to particular goals. Culture and human thought are intertwined. "Culture is exteriorized mind; mind is interiorized culture" (Cole, 1998).

Libraries have been created throughout the centuries for the preservation and proliferation of culture. Although libraries have dealt primarily with material objects, these objects carry with them the minds of those whose thoughts created them. These works carry not just the thoughts of the named author, but all those who influenced the work and who have been influenced by the work. When a teenager enters a library and checks out a book, there is contact with minds across time and space. Additionally, the library and its practices also represent artifacts of the culture that have created them. While we tend to think of the library as a culturally neutral container, a sociocultural-historical view forces us to acknowledge library practices as cultural transmissions.

Third, cultural mediation occurs over four domains of time: "phylogenesis, the history of our species; cultural-history, the history of the cultural group into which we are born; ontogeny, the history of the individual human being; and microgenesis, moment to moment interactions that are the proximal locus of experience." While attending to time and change we also consider "the social/spatial ecology of the activities" (Cole, 1998).

As we move through our daily lives we are typically focused on the moment-to-moment experience. As a researcher I captured only a slice of what happens in the lives of youth in a public library. Maintaining a sociocultural-historical outlook reminds me that histories are attached to the moments experienced. Thus I account for and attend to the timelines influencing phenomena. Structural factors such as social institutions and the valuation of physical space affect the interactions I observe. When I see a group of teenagers gathered around a public access computer in the library, I must contemplate more about that moment than their immediate behavior.

***Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation.*** A sociocultural-historical approach to learning recognizes participation in social practices as central to developing knowledge. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's book, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (1991), moved the field forward by shifting the analytic focus to learning as social practice. Legitimate peripheral participation "refers both to the development of knowledgeable skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice." (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 55) Using apprenticeship situations as examples, these authors defined learning as increasing participation in communities of practice. Unlike the stereotyped master-apprentice dyad, these settings have a number of apprentices who are progressing through series of skill-based tasks of increasing difficulty and importance to the enterprise. Peer circulation of information plays a major role in helping learners move along the continuum towards becoming a master. There is no center in the community, but the "centripetal development of full participants" as newcomers eventually become and replace "old-timers" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 57). Identity is significant in this theory, in which learning "implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of

relations" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The power of situated learning as analytical perspective is that it enables us to see that learning does not occur in the abstract, but learning is situated in a context with sociocultural-historical practices that shape individual cognition. Applied to the library, this theory calls our attention to the practices shaping the youth who frequent the space. Such an application pushes at the boundaries of a theory that has mostly been used to account for career focused learning around a limited set of shared practices. The public library focus on voluntary learning around various domains of knowledge creates a unique sort of community of practice, as evidenced in the following chapters.

**Identities.** Lave, Wenger, and many other researchers (Nasir, 2011; Wortham, 2006; Romaine, 2009) view identity as “a critical mediator of learning” (Nasir & Hand, 2006, pp. 467-468). In the popular sense, people think of identity as a singular concept, likely from the long-time influence of the work of psychologist Erik Erikson. Erickson particularly focused on adolescence as the main time period for individual identity formation (Moje & Luke, 2009). Penuel and Wertsch (1995) blended Erickson's work with Vygotsky's idea of cultural tools to demonstrate that in order to understand the work of adolescent identity formation, the researcher must account for sociocultural processes. While Penuel and Wertsch discussed identity as a single concept, most sociocultural-historical researchers have focused on the concept of multiple selves or identities that are performed in interactions. These identities are flexible yet become stabilized through social and cultural experiences.

Elizabeth Moje and Alan Luke (2009) reviewed sociocultural literacy research to find that scholars generally used five metaphors for identity; identity as difference, as sense of self/subjectivity, as mind or consciousness, as narrative, and as position. Identity as difference is the most commonly understood metaphor in popular culture and refers to how the individual

engages with and is shaped by group membership. Identity as self is a metaphor researchers use to explore how selves are created and how they differ across moments and moods for an individual. Identity as mind/consciousness uses the concept of tools to explore how our mediated activity creates consciousness. This view overlaps with the identity as narrative metaphor in which identity is constructed "in and through the stories people tell about themselves and their experiences" (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 427). Finally, identity as position calls attention to how people are "cast in or called to" positions through their interactions that become part of a person's identity that they accept or reject. Again, these are not discrete categories, with some researchers leaning on two or more views of identity. In fact, Moje and Luke considered the identity-as-position metaphor to encompass the other four metaphors.

***Positioning.*** Dorothy Holland and Kevin Leander (2004) expound on the theory of identity and positioning in their introduction to an *Ethos* journal issue dedicated to the topic. They define positionings as "pivotal moments in which social and psychological phenomena come to interanimate and interpret one another" (Holland & Leander, 2004, p. 127) which "involves socially producing particular individuals and groups as culturally imagined types such that others and, even the person herself, at least temporarily, treat her as though she were such a person" (Holland & Leander, 2004, p. 130). For example, a child is positioned as a particular kind of student, such as "smart" or "slow," by the various ways in which her teacher and her peers interact with her each day. Through experiences, thoughts, and repeated positioning moments occurs a "thickening" of identity, as first described by Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave (2001) and expanded on in the work of others, most notably Stanton Wortham in his school-based research (Wortham, 2004, 2006). Holland and Leander use the metaphor of "lamination" to describe the identity created through mediated activity, pointing to how each layer in the

lamination process may maintain visible characteristics. Our past identities don't leave us, but become part of an evolving "social/psychological" entity. Since the public library is a distinct context from schools and other youth settings, it is important to consider positioning of adolescents and the adults who serve them in the space. Teens bring "laminations" of their school, home, and community positioning experiences with them into the library. Yet how the library staff positions these teens can offer different experiences that open up new potential for their identities.

**Discourses.** James Paul Gee describes four ways to view the multiple identities that individuals experience; *nature identity*, a state developed from forces in nature, *institution identity*, a position authorized by authorities within institutions, *discourse identity*, an individual trait recognized in the discourse/dialogue of/with individuals, and *affinity identity*, experiences shared in the practice of "affinity groups" (Gee, 2000/2001, p. 100). What gives identities power is that they are recognized by others as a "kind of person" we are in a given context. These four types of identity are not discrete categories but aspects of identities that interact in complex ways. For example, he states that natural identities only gain power through the forces that shape the other identities and that each of the types sustain each other. It is notable that institutional identities and discursive identities exist for individuals on continua depending on how actively or passively they fulfill or seek the label. Therefore an I-ID could be an imposition (i.e. Prisoner) or a calling (i.e. Minister) and a D-ID could be an ascription (friends label you bossy) or an achievement (colleagues recognize you as a leader). Gee posits:

almost any identity trait can be understood in terms of any of these different interpretive systems. People can actively construe the same identity trait in different ways, and they

can negotiate and contest how their traits are to be seen (by themselves and others) in terms of the different perspectives on identity. (2000/2001, p. 108)

Individuals engage in "a combination" of speaking/writing, acting and interacting, facial expressions and body movements, dressing, feeling/believing/valuing, and/or using objects/tools/technologies in a certain way that gets one recognized as a certain "kind of person". This is what Gee has labeled "Discourse" with a capital "D." Different professions, disciplines, or other cultural groupings form Discourse Communities. Your knowledge of their Discourse impacts your ability to successfully move within, or remain barred from participation in different settings. Everywhere people interact, including the public library, there are Discourses in operation that affect the learning of the participants. Additionally, the public library provides access to resources from multiple Discourse Communities, offering knowledge patrons can use to enter another community.

**Literacies.** As Gee highlights, our communication with the world marks our identities and thus impacts our learning. Literacies are "socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses (or, as members of Discourse)" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 4). Being literate represents much more than the cognitive skills of reading and writing words but being fluent in multiple Discourses, untangling the multiple strands of meaning hidden within the presentation of information. To be clear, when I use the word "texts," I am referring to any presentation of a structured symbol system. A novel is a text, but so is a poster, a movie, a dance, and a conversation between construction workers. The number of texts available to any given individual continues to increase in the digital age, with the average person receiving at least five times more information than an individual living in 1986 (Hilbert, 2012; Hilbert &

López, 2011). Therefore, it is increasingly important to understand the nature of our interactions with texts.

*Language and texts.* Early 20th century Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin focused on the dialogic nature of language. He wrote:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder of it - it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 276-277)

Bakhtin created the term "heteroglossia" to describe how the genre of the novel allowed multiple "languages" (we could also apply the more modern term Discourses) to speak through the characters and narration, presenting various perspectives and ideologies. Australian scholar Robyn McCallum (1999) applied these and other Bakhtinian concepts in analyzing the "ideologies of identity" in fiction for adolescents and how this particular genre positions readers. She found that adolescent fiction is "a particularly eclectic and heteroglottic novelistic genre which borrows pervasively from other cultural genres and discourses, and in doing so appropriates a range of cultural and intellectual ideas and narrative and discursive forms" (McCallum, 1999, p. 258). These features encourage readers of adolescent fiction, who are positioned as "actively involved in the production of meaning," to question "conventional notions of selfhood, meaning and history." (McCallum, 1999, p. 259).

Other scholars use heteroglossia, as well as the term "intertextuality", to describe the dialogic nature of language in a variety of text genres and, increasingly, formats. Today, a novel

could not only contain textual allusions to other content, but could have videos or music embedded, if in digital format, or ask readers to find additional pieces of the narrative in various locations, such as different genres of websites (H. Jenkins, 2006, 2007; Mackey, 2011b; McDonald & Parker, 2013; Schmit, 2013). New Literacies scholars argue that in "the emerging digital media space" there is no longer a text paradigm such as "the book" because "text types are subject to wholesale experimentation, hybridization, and rule breaking" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 14). Without a paradigm, the dialogic nature of language becomes even more significant in reading texts. An example of this is the proliferation of "memes" shared by teenagers (as well as people of all ages) across message boards, social networking sites, email, and text message services. According to "Know Your Meme," a website dedicated to researching and documenting the history and popularity of Internet memes and viral content, an Internet meme "is a piece of content or an idea that's passed from person to person, changing and evolving along the way" and is contrasted to viral content which is shared but not changed (Cheezburger Inc., 2013). Often an image or quote from traditionally produced media is pulled into the meme, layering the participating voices.

While there may or may not be a reigning text paradigm today, narrative still matters. Popular texts today are more than engaging; they are immersive in nature and offer readers a sense of embodiment. Margaret Mackey (2011a) investigated how 18 to 21 year olds experienced narrative across formats, asking them in small groups to read a heteroglossic young adult novel, watch a subtitled European film with a plot that jumped back and forth in time, and play a new video game with mythic allusions. She found that the readers flexibly used their knowledge of narrative to fully understand and experience multimodal texts. Kevin Leander and Gail Boldt (2013), while revisiting the principles of "multiliteracies" (The New London Group, 1996),

examine a day in the life of a 10-year-old boy reading and playing with text from a Japanese manga. They demonstrate how the sensations and movement of the body as well as affect and emotion are a part of the immersive reading experience. Christine Woodcock (Woodcock, 2010) found evidence of "embodied knowing" in the diverse literacy experiences of 18 to 21 year old women.

Contemporary young adult literature is particularly designed to foster not only embodiment, but also envisionment and empathy. Shirley Brice Heath and Jennifer Wolf (2012) combined insights from neurosciences, textual features, and adolescent reader responses to illustrate this point. Envisionment, "our ability to look and see and our capacity to perceive cognitively and to predict or envision - see in our heads - what can happen" (Heath & Wolf, 2012, p. 143), is essential for language fluency, memory, problem solving and predicting consequences. This skill is supported by engagement with the multimodal features such as maps and other graphic elements found in much of contemporary young adult literature. Additionally, when we envision the actions as we read, we literally embody it through mirror neurons that register the actions in our motor neurons. To understand a text, we have to see it and sense it in our body. Young adult literature "relies on words showing the movements of bodies" (Heath & Wolf, 2012, p. 146) and readers report memories of the spatial experience of texts. Emotions are also recruited during the reading process and create "joint attention" between reader and character, thus giving a feeling of identification and allowing the adolescent to experience the choices and consequences of a proxy. The authors observe, "Young Adult literature, as much or more than most resources upon which adolescents call in their leisure time, facilitates much needed practice in fundamental cognitive behaviours: envisioning and embodying for positive

emotional fuelling.” (p. 146). The promotion, distribution, and discussion of young adult fiction remains a valued component of the work of teen services librarians.

***Language and learning.*** To fully engage with heteroglossic texts and parse out the information, youth need to experience them in dialogue with other people. While most schools do this to a degree, adolescents simply need more time to practice, especially as the volume of information available continues to increase. Thus, it is important to consider the kind of skill development occurring beyond classroom walls. Anthropologists have given us numerous studies of early work on voluntary learning from around the globe. These anthropologists have shown how everyday living and learning works between adults and children in communities of Third World nations. Previously referred to as “undeveloped” or “under-developed,” many of the sites studied by anthropologists had long been unknown to outsiders, and the ways of individuals, including very young children, fascinated anthropologists who became caught up in the highly complex tasks accomplished by very young children (Cole & Scribner, 1981; Coppens et al., 2014; Mead, 1928; Rogoff, 2003). These studies emphasize the role of close observation, attentive mentoring, and a sense of need on the part of all learners involved. Other anthropologists (Heath, 1983; Henze, 1992) have examined the very effective but often disregarded voluntary learning that occurs in non-dominant communities in Western countries. Even while the formal model of education took hold in Western society, with an over-focus on text-centered learning and segregation by biological age, participatory voluntary learning continues in many fields, including arts, crafts, and technology. This kind of learning, often multiage in nature, allows for the skill improvement needed for both employment opportunities and recreational needs (Heath, 2012a).

Since the late 1980s, a substantial body of work on voluntary learning has come from the decade-long Spencer Foundation sponsorship of Milbrey McLaughlin (public policy analyst) and Shirley Brice Heath (linguistic anthropologist) on non-school-related activities of disenfranchised youth in rural, mid-sized, and urban settings. These scholars set out to identify features of access in these communities that might help explain how some youth living in the most difficult of circumstances (and often with rapid growth in gang and drug violence) “made it” into mainstream adulthood. Their findings made clear that critical to these youth were organizations ranging from religious groups to libraries to Boys and Girls Clubs and Little League baseball teams. In these groupings, young people gathered voluntarily, practiced, organized projects, and learned organizational skills, ways to plan into the future, and strong communication skills (Heath, 1991, 1996; Heath & Langman, 1994; Heath & McLaughlin, 1994; Irby, Langman, & McLaughlin, 1994).

Since the first decade of the joint work noted above, Heath has continued to follow ways that mainstream families as well as working-class groups have adapted in their fundamental interactions. With two-working-parent households on the increase, young people spend less and less time in their own homes and with family members. In observing the family activities of the adults she had studied 30 years earlier (focusing on the children of these families), Heath (2012c) found a considerable decrease in the amount of talk in the families created by these children when they reached adulthood. The features of family talk had shifted as well. Contemporary dialogues involve much less back and forth around information, opinion, clarification, and confirmation. Today, parents most frequently request schedule details and personal preferences instead of delving into conversations on topics known to both partners, but having nothing to do with the behavior of either members of the dyad. Such a finding is significant considering the

importance of deliberative dialogue skills in many situations, including higher level academics (Hyland, 2009; Morita, 2009; White & Lowenthal, 2011) and democratic processes (Dryzek, 2000; Thompson & Gutmann, 2004; Mutz, 2006).

Peer associations and groupings that operate in homes, parking lots, and fast-food restaurants as well as community organizations have taken over much of the socialization for adolescents in much of the United States (Heath, 2012c). Yet some of these young people find their way into concerted involvement in organizations that require intensive practice and strong associations with adults who coach, guide, reprimand, and direct the ways in which young people practice skills and think in meta-cognitive ways about what they do voluntarily (Heath & Langman, 1994). Central in these settings is the refusal to categorize young people, a feature that applies in exemplary programs of libraries as well as sports and arts programs. Adult leaders in these contexts have little desire to peg young people according to their rank in school class or achievement in particular school subjects (Irby et al., 1994; Heath, 1996).

In addition to general studies of youth involved in activities of their own choosing, a considerable amount of research looks at young people involved in particular kinds of activities ranging from sports to arts (Heath & Smyth, 1999). Others consider the role of youth in special programs, such as Youth Radio (Chávez & Soep, 2005, 2010) or el Sistema youth orchestras in the United States (Heath, 2016). Some examine ways in which young people both work and learn in museums and their special programs (Heath & Gilbert, 2015). Many of these articles consider the role of voluntary learning that comes as young people have opportunities in such settings to learn to play and to take part in extended conversations with adults who share their interests. Essential across programs of arts, science, and sports is the presence of someone who is seen by the youth as a professional. As one young person noted: “I’ve never known an expert

before.” This young man, a new member of a theater program involving cross-generational participants, relished watching the behaviors of individuals he knew to be “experts.” In addition to the experts present, voluntary learning environments need to “call in the chips,” or demand that participants collaborate toward performance. Whether youth orchestra, cross-generational theater on a large urban stage, or member of a museum’s team of youth docents, these individual youths have to read, learn, and think in order to learn to act with professionalism and to know and be able to explain their current context, its purpose, and its philosophy (Heath, 2014). Such learning pushes youth to a level of professionalism many have previously thought unrelated to who they are or could be. In turn, this learning inspires adolescents to reach beyond the immediate in their lives, seeking deeper knowledge via resources, including information, tools, and people. Since a public library can offer all three, and it is a prime location for adolescents to follow the call of their interests and to learn voluntarily.

**The public library difference.** Although there is a growing body of work focused on learning in museums and after-school programs (e.g., Bevan, Bell, Stevens, & Razfar, 2013), it is often difficult to draw strong correlations to the public library setting, where the learning clearly occurs voluntarily and is often self-initiated. The information and resources in each museum are highly curated and directed around a narrow range of topics. While library collections are curated (or selected, in library parlance), a public library’s scope of content for which they can provide material is wide, and has become nearly limitless since the addition of public access computers connected to the internet. Additionally, there is a much smaller frequency of adult-directed “curriculum” than may generally be seen in after-school activities in other contexts. Adolescents typically enter the library of their own free will and pursue activities driven by personal needs, whether these be academic, entertainment, or social. Even when a librarian offers a program such

as a coding class or knitting club, rarely are teen participants enlisted to attend by parents or other adults. Not infrequently, young people may attend a program simply because they happened to be in the building when the librarian announced it was starting. Within the program activities, there is almost always a high degree of participant input and choice.

Also complicating the application of learning sciences research in informal settings to libraries is the fact that much of the learning sciences research focuses almost entirely on science learning. Science is just one discipline that can be touched upon in a public library. If there is a single content area to describe learning in libraries, it would be literacy, though quite broadly defined, as discussed previously. Here learning goes beyond alphabetical literacy to include interpreting various structured symbol systems as well as skills and knowledge related to computer literacy, visual literacy, health literacy, etc. The library continues to be a place where a person can become literate in multiple ways.

Research findings in situations of voluntary learning are marked by persistence across a self-selected period of time, learning through repeated trial and error, and plenty of envisioning time when individuals ponder, imagine, and project ideas surrounding such learning. Along with these studies has come increasing attention to creation of learning environments that enable and promote voluntary learning for individuals and groups often left aside or generally ignored by institutions of formal learning. What characterizes sites designed for voluntary learners? How do certain features of such sites cut across different types of voluntary learning? Before considering the library as a learning setting, it is useful to compare features within and across other settings.

**Learning across settings.** An individual's learning experiences have never been contained within one space, be that school or any other location. Some researchers follow youth across settings and/or over time to deepen our understanding of how they build knowledge. From

this work, four different metaphors illuminate how learners utilize a variety of spaces, resources, and people in pursuing voluntary learning. Because this research accounts for a diversity of learning contexts, we can extrapolate that the findings offer insight into the library as learning context as well.

***Lines of practice.*** Flávio S. Azevedo (2011) conducted a three-year-ethnography of model rocketry hobbyists to deepen our understanding of persistent engagement in individual interests. He defines a "line of practice" as "a distinctive, recurrent pattern of long-term engagement in a person's practice participation." (Azevedo, 2011, p. 147) Within the line of practice are two structural elements that define an individual's activities; preferences, which are "deep, longterm goals, values, and beliefs that a person develops in the practice", and conditions of practice, which are "the constraints and affordances impinging on the person's practice", such as access to required resources or relationships with fellow practitioners (Azevedo, 2011, p. 147). Previous theories about interest pursuits centered on the individual's relationship to the content of the activity. While connection to this domain does play a role in persistent engagement, Azevedo found that "a person's extended participation in a practice follows from the continuous satisfaction of various parallel and interacting motives that he/she develops in the practice" (Azevedo, 2011, p. 179), such as spending time with friends and family members or enacting a particular identity.

***Learning ecology.*** Focused on how students learn technology, Brigid Barron (Barron, 2006) created the "learning ecology framework" to describe how interested students continue to develop technological fluency across life spaces. She defines a learning ecology as "a set of contexts found in physical or virtual space that provide opportunities for learning. Each context is comprised of a unique configuration of activities, material resources, relationships, and the

interactions that emerge from them.” (Barron, 2006, p. 195) The framework rests on three "conjectures." These include 1) "Within Any Life Space, a Variety of Ideational Resources Can Spark and Sustain Interest in Learning", 2) "People Not Only Choose but Also Develop and Create Learning Opportunities for Themselves once They Are Interested, Assuming They Have Time, Freedom and Resources to Learn", and 3) "Interest-Driven Learning Activities Are Boundary-Crossing and Self-Sustaining" (Barron, 2006, pp. 200-201). To study the framework in action, Barron applied a life narrative approach to gather a "technobiography" from each learner. Across the narratives, learners demonstrated five strategies for self-initiated learning: seeking out of text-based informational sources, creating new interactive activity contexts, the pursuit of structured learning opportunities, exploring media, and developing mentoring or knowledge-sharing relationships (Barron, 2006, p. 193).

***Cultural learning pathways.*** Philip Bell and colleagues (Bell, Tzou, Bricker, & Baines, 2012) developed the theory of "cultural learning pathways" to account for the ways in which extended learning occurs, based on eight years of ethnographic study on learners across settings. Cultural learning pathways are defined as “connected chains of personally consequential activity and sense-making – that are temporally extended, spatially variable, and culturally diverse with respect to value systems and social practices” (Bell et al., 2012, p. 270). Within this framework, learning is defined "as constellations of multimodal, discursive actions made in the midst of situational circumstances." (Bell et al., 2012, p. 275) Identities are both part of the events of learning, during which positioning occurs, and become part of the outcomes. Literacy practices as well shape both the actions and the sociomaterial practices a learner experiences. Texts belong to the sociomaterial arrangements that learners encounter in various spaces and places and

contribute to the scope of possibility. Learning continues to be situated in sociocultural-historical experience.

***Connected Learning.*** Mimi Ito's ethnographic research into youth media engagement across settings uncovered three levels of participation. Also known as "HOMAGO," each represents an increased level of involvement: 1) "hanging out" and using media for social reasons, 2) "messing around" with media to develop skills based on interests, and 3) "geeking out" by developing expert digital skills in an area of specialization (Ito, 2010). Ito and other researchers with a sociocultural lens and commitment to equity built upon this research to create the "connected learning" framework for education research and design (Ito et al., 2013). This framework aims to address gaps between in- and out-of-school learning, particularly broadening participation for non-dominant youth in rich extended learning spaces. Connected learning contexts feature interest-powered learning, peer-supported experiences, and an academically oriented outlook. Connected learning experiences should be openly networked beyond the immediate venue, production/creation centered, and offer a shared purpose within cross-cultural and cross-generational groups.

Within each of these four metaphors that account for learning across settings, we can glimpse the role of the public library in the voluntary learning of individuals. When a teen is developing a line of practice, the library can be a "condition of practice" by affording access to resources such as information and experienced practitioners. Libraries, with their vast set of materials and opportunities for interaction, serve as a potential context in the learning ecologies of adolescents as well as a place for "personally consequential activity and sense-making" along cultural learning pathways. Lastly, the public library continues to be a connected learning space

for youth as defined in this new framework. In fact, the public library has long been the premier spot for connecting learning since its earliest efforts to support youth.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review on Public Library Services for Teens

In this chapter, I define my chosen learning setting, the public library, by illustrating its role in society and its relationship to adolescents. To understand public libraries as a learning context today, scholars must understand some of their history and role in American society. Within this dissertation, three reasons for this proposition guide the need and structuring of this study. First, this dissertation is an ethnography framed by sociocultural-historical theory, an approach requiring historical insight into the development of practices observed in the present (Cole, 1996; Wolcott, 1997). Second, the public library context entails features distinct from other similar organizations (community centers, bookstores, internet cafés) and even other libraries that are situated within schools, universities, and businesses<sup>1</sup>. Even if my readers have spent time in libraries, these particular features may never have been salient to them before. Third, while public libraries do evolve in response to societal changes (Agosto, 2016; Shera, 1949; Ptacek, 2016), librarians also maintain conscious connections to their origins and history when looking forward (Carroll & Reynolds, 2014; Godin, 2016; Wiegand, 2015b), perhaps more so than is the case in other professions. In fact, this very habit of reflecting back on their nature and purposes drives the public libraries' reciprocal relationship with society. Libraries successfully transitioned from places to preserve rare texts in the pre-Gutenberg era to the citizen's primary access point for information to a space "where the community finds ideas, inspiration and others on a similar journey" (Godin, 2016). Librarians' twenty-first century solutions to community needs often echo the activities of their predecessors, particularly in responsive reconfigurations of space and programming (Carroll & Reynolds, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> The most important distinction being that in every other library context, the library and its staff serve a larger organizational mission (educating students, winning law cases, etc.). In the public library, the patrons' needs and the public mission for the space is dominant.

**Education for democracy.** Thomas Jefferson and other early American leaders viewed “the diffusion of knowledge among the people” (Jefferson, 1786) as critical to the future endurance of the young nation. Among his many statements on the subject, Jefferson wrote, “...no one more sincerely wishes the spread of information among mankind than I do, and none has greater confidence in its effect towards supporting free & good government” (Jefferson, 1810). Since colonial times, library services existed in the United States in the form of subscription libraries, trade/professional libraries, church libraries, and school libraries. The free public libraries we know today arose in parallel to the establishment of public schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The library was seen as the schools’ counterpart in the pursuit of universal literacy: “the people’s university” that would educate those not captured by the emerging school systems (Shera, 1949). Immigrants and laborers were particularly seen to be in need of the education available to them within books and other materials, and the public library was the way to get these materials into their hands and to educate their minds. Libraries, like schools, were responsible for the development of capable citizens who could actively participate in political life to ensure good government of the nation (Critcher Lyons, 2016). This idea is what scholars call “the library faith,” essentially that libraries contribute to the public good, through “a variety of outcomes, causes, and social aims” depending on who is asked about the purpose of the library and in which era or civic situation current in the nation or local region (Barniskis, 2017).

While the specific outcomes continue to evolve, the features of the public library remain consistent. According to government and professional organizations, the definition of a public library is:

an entity that is established under state enabling laws or regulators to serve a community, district, or region, and provides at least the following: 1) an organized

collection of printed or other library *materials*, or a combination thereof; 2) paid *staff*; 3) an established schedule in which *services* of the staff are available to the public; 4) the *facilities* necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule; and 5) is supported in whole or in part with *public* funds [emphases added]

(Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015).

In other words, public libraries exist as an organization legally bound to offer everyone in the community not just materials, but staff, services, and facilities. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, librarians developed moral codes to guide the provision of these elements, found in documents such as the Library Bill of Rights, originally adopted in 1939 (American Library Association, 1996), and the Freedom to Read Statement, originally adopted in 1953<sup>2</sup> (American Library Association & Association of American Publishers, 2004). In 2004, the American Library Association culled from their policy statements eleven “Core Values of Librarianship” that “define, inform, and guide our professional practice” (American Library Association, 2004). Table 1 lists these values and their definitions, as quoted from the ALA Policy Manual.

Table 1

*Core Values of Librarianship*

<u>Value</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Access	All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users.
Confidentiality/Privacy	Protecting user privacy and confidentiality is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship.
Democracy	A democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community the library serves.
Diversity	We value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve.

<sup>2</sup> Each of these documents has been updated in subsequent years. More information can be found on the American Library Association website under “Issues.”

Education and Lifelong Learning	ALA promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all.
Intellectual Freedom	We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
Preservation	The Association supports the preservation of information published in all media and formats. The association affirms that the preservation of information resources is central to libraries and librarianship.
Professionalism	The American Library Association supports the provision of library services by professionally qualified personnel who have been educated in graduate programs within institutions of higher education. It is of vital importance that there be professional education available to meet the social needs and goals of library services.
The Public Good	ALA reaffirms the following fundamental values of libraries in the context of discussing outsourcing and privatization of library services. These values include that libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies.
Service	We provide the highest level of service to all library users ...We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.
Social Responsibility	ALA recognizes its broad social responsibilities. The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement.

While some scholars criticize these documents and their values as “unrealistic” for the daily practice of librarianship, Oltmann (2016) found the public library directors’ own language will echo the guidance offered in these documents. Librarian and researcher Shannon Crawford Barniskis (Barniskis, 2016a, 2016b) found in two separate studies that access remains a top value for public library mission statements as well as the roles related to education and lifelong learning. The public library interprets and implements these moral codes in relationship to their specific communities. But how do these values operate together?

In a 2013 opinion piece, academic librarian<sup>3</sup> Rick Anderson divided these values into three categories: fundamental principles, subordinate principles, and values he questions as actually core to librarianship. Libraries in their “deepest and most basic” purposes must offer *access, intellectual freedom, and service to their patrons*. The second group of principles function as supports to the fundamental three; *preservation* ensures continued access, *confidentiality/privacy* protects intellectual freedom; *professionalism* characterizes services; and *diversity* enhances access, intellectual freedom, and services. Anderson explains that the remaining four values, *democracy, education and lifelong learning, the public good, and social responsibility*, are “troublesome in that their real-world application...seems unclear, or that they may conflict with other values” (R. Anderson, 2013).

While this researcher concurs about the roles of the three fundamental principles and a subordinating principle for each, disagreement with Anderson’s assessment of the four “troublesome” values is in order for the current study. Working and researching in the public library space, this researcher found that those values are the checks-and-balances that guide library policy and librarian decision making. For a worked example, consider the situation in which the librarian puts the non-fiction written for children entirely in the children’s room of the library. This positioning will *serve* as easiest *access* for the target audience. But it will also possibly restrict access by adult readers developing their literacy skills with children’s literature. Yet the librarian has a *social responsibility* to parents and grandparents, for example, from cultures that have no written children’s literature and now want to learn to read these materials with the young of the household. Ultimately, the responsible librarian decides to interfile older children’s non-fiction in with the adult non-fiction with the additional goal that children become

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<sup>3</sup> An academic librarian works in a college or university library. This position differs from that of a “school librarian” who works in the K-12 setting.

comfortable in this part of the library, thus developing habits for their future *education and lifelong learning*<sup>4</sup>. Through a process of weighing of these values, libraries shape their contribution to society. The very act of establishing a public library, with its broad collection of materials available to all classes of society, enacts the values of *democracy* and *diversity*.

***What citizens get back.*** In return, most Americans have and continue to value their public libraries for three reasons, as explained by library historian Wayne A. Wiegand:

for the useful information they make accessible; for the public spaces they provide that help construct community; and for the transformative potential that reading, viewing, and listening to the commonplace stories that public libraries provide in a variety of textual forms. (Wiegand, 2015c)

Although public libraries have long defined themselves as more than book warehouses, the widespread information access of the digital age causes many people to question their role in modern society. In response, librarians reemphasize their civic role to connect people with information and with each other, particularly for the most vulnerable in society (Cricher Lyons, 2016; Gorichanaz & Turner, 2017; Rasmussen, 2016). Those of low-income with few resources, senior citizens, economically-stressed families with children and extended work schedules, the homeless, and immigrant newcomers seem to find their way to the library door in any era. To continue to meet their needs, larger libraries add staff and services such as social workers and health information specialists (Friedman et al., 2016; Reardon, 2016). This focus on current community needs increases social capital (Khoir, Du, Davison, & Koronios, 2017; Vårheim, 2014) and overall community resilience (Dan & Barbara, 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> I did not invent this scenario. It is an issue commonly discussed in public library circles, at conferences and on professional listservs. The outcome varies depending on the size of the library and which value is prioritized.

Many public libraries in the United States today seek to rebrand themselves as learning centers when in historical and contemporary fact, they have always been spaces – even absolute centers – of learning. It is within the interactions of knowledgeable staff providing services in the library space that learning occurs. Moreover, materials provided have never really been just books. Puzzles, toys, and games have long been a part of libraries (Nicholson, 2013; Pierce, 2016) as well as other collections related to stated and perceived needs of local communities (Wiegand, 2015a). Now, with so much more information available, librarians strive for a facilitated collection, “a coordinated mix of local, external and collaborative services assembled around user needs” (Dempsey, 2016). Patrons can find in libraries resources they may not otherwise encounter. Most public libraries aim to offer its patrons makerspaces full of new technologies to explore and websites that offer guidance to the tsunami of information available online. Some scholars note that these moves shift “the library faith” towards more individualistic aims such as marketable skills (Barniskis, 2017), perhaps in an effort to recapture the attention of the less-vulnerable patrons with more choice in their pursuits (Godin, 2016). Other scholars insist that political engagement continues to be integral to public library work (Jaeger & Sarin, 2016) and call for increased emphasis on civic efforts (Critchler Lyons, 2016). How the “library faith” manifests in practice is best seen by examining services for young patrons.

**Librarian connections with youth.** As these libraries in the United States were being established, thought was taken to provide special resources for the young. The earliest library established with public funds is considered to be the Bingham Library for Youth in 1803 intended for youth ages 9 to 16 (Stone, 1977) and later Carnegie libraries were designed to have children’s rooms offering a unique space with furniture for smaller bodies (Kimball, 2014). A children’s room meant a need for children’s books, and the earliest youth librarians worked in

partnership with publishers to create children's publishing departments and establish genres to fill the shelves with books meant for youth (Bernier, Chelton, & Jenkins, 2005; Hearne & Jenkins, 1999). Even today publishers busily court librarians at every meeting of the American Library Association because librarians operate in between what scholars have called "book people" and "child people" (S. A. Wolf, Coats, Enciso, & Jenkins, 2011). Librarians connect the "book people" (authors, publishers, and critics) to the "child people" (parents and teachers), as well as to the children and adolescents themselves. While authors and readers can now connect directly through internet technologies, librarians are still seen as a trusted link by both sides.

*Teen library services.* Additionally, the version of "library faith" professed by librarians who work with youth has long been grounded in the power of reading. Betsy Hearne and Christine Jenkins (1999) analyzed the writings of the earliest youth services librarians, "the foremothers," and found:

Their grail was not just information or even knowledge, but the enrichment of experience through whole reading, the kind of reading that engulfs the heart as well as engaging the head..[T]hey crusaded not for the useful but for the playful and ultimately the aesthetic... They believed, simply, that children's literature could save not only childhood but also the world. (Hearne & Jenkins, 1999, p. 538)

Note here the emphasis beyond utilitarian purposes of gaining knowledge for school or work. Youth librarians have, and still do consider the "magic" of reading to be in its capacity for transportation, emotional engagement, and the formation of identity. Even as the format of stories and our means of accessing them has expanded to include video games and mobile phones, librarians still believe in this magic and their own role in connecting youth to such

experiences (Agosto, 2016). The hoped for outcomes of youth librarians' faith are more holistic than youth workers in other contexts.

Young children appear most visibly in library work, from 19<sup>th</sup> century story hours in the children's rooms (Kimball, 2014) to 21<sup>st</sup> century storytimes with iPads (Sung, 2017). But librarians are also concerned with adolescent needs in their communities. Progressive era librarians sought to create safe spaces for young female laborers (Pierce, 2007) and the formidable children's librarian Anne Carol Moore of the New York Public Library hired Mabel Williams as a "Superintendent of Work with Schools" in 1917 to work with older youth, so as not to lose all the effort librarians put into establishing reading habits in younger children (Campbell, 1998). World War II librarians argued for "A Youth Library in Every Community" by creating at least a shelf of books of interest to teenagers culled from both the children's and adult collections. They encouraged libraries to host activities such as music appreciation via records to bring youth together in the space ("A youth library in every community," 1947). This tradition of diverse events to engage adolescents with each other and library staff continues with at least 81.8% of public libraries offering programs targeted at young adults (American Library Association, 2013).

The 1950's and 1960's are seen as a golden age of young adult services, full of active youth programming around preparing youth for the transition to adulthood from librarians passionate about the life and world saving potential of books (Braverman, 1979; Campbell, 1998). Ironically, literature written specifically for young adults was not readily available until after 1967, beginning with the breakthrough publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (Cart, 2010). This golden age reached its peak at the turn of the twenty-first century. Yet no matter the material, librarians serving youth then and now express in a similar manner. Arguably the most

influential teen services librarian, Margaret “Alex” Edwards stated a formula for effective teen services that, with a substitution of the inclusive term “materials” for “books,” still applies today:

All there is to it is: (a) a sympathetic understanding of all adolescents; (b) first-hand knowledge of all the books that would interest them; and (c) mastery of the technique of getting these books into the hands of the adolescents. (Edwards, 2002, p. 12)

To practice this formula, the best teen services librarians know the importance of not only connecting teens to books but also connecting to the teens themselves. Rachel Randall (2013) set out to discover how teens select fiction to read in their local public library. The most prominent theme that emerged from the youth focus groups was the value they placed on personal relationships with library staff. Teens repeatedly emphasized that “it is the little details that count like remembering names, where they go to school, what courses they take, what books they took out the last time” which influenced not only the decision to pick up a book but to continue to read (Randall, 2013, p. 21). In documents produced by the Young Adult Library Services Association, the professional organization for library staff that work with teens, librarians are encouraged to develop real relationships with youth because they need connection with “compassionate,” “non-supervisory” adults (Takahashi, 2015). These relationships in turn support the work of the librarian.

***Research with adolescents in public libraries.*** Despite their long history in serving youth, there are relatively few empirical studies directly related to libraries and adolescents, particularly compared to school settings, but there is even more attention to youth learning in museums, community centers, and homes than in libraries. The few we do have focus on teenagers use of library space, interaction with library materials, and relationships with library

staff and other library patrons. Both Joanna Sei-ching Sin (2008; 2011, 2012) and Denise Agosto (2007; 2015) and their colleagues have evaluated the patterns and purposes of library use by teenagers, using quantitative and qualitative techniques, respectively. Sin found that students used the public library more over all when there were higher levels of service at the library (i.e. more materials and qualified staff), even when controlling for personal difference such as socioeconomic status and achievement motivation. Among the top factors affecting teen public library use was race/ethnicity, with ethnic minority students using the public library more often for all purposes than students described as Caucasian, when all other factors were held constant (Sin, 2012). Since many minority students in America have less affordances than white children, this fits with the public library's service to society's most vulnerable. Agosto's earlier survey found that youth utilized the library for three distinct purposes; as information gateway, as social interaction/entertainment space, and as beneficial physical environment (Agosto, 2007). Her later survey and follow-up qualitative work (Agosto et al., 2015) found that both librarians and teens value public library spaces that support (in priority order); physical comfort, leisure activity and information needs, academic activity and information needs, teen space ownership, and effective library policy display and marketing. From these surveys, it is evident that teens value the combination of elements brought together in the public library space (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015) for achieving their goals, which align with library values.

Another group of studies focuses on the effects of library programs developed for and often in conjunction with teenagers. The role of library book discussions, a hallmark of library services for teenagers, was explored by both Donna Alvermann and Jennifer Wolf. Alvermann and colleagues (1999) set out to study how adolescent after-school "talk" in public library Read and Talk Clubs were shaped by institutional and societal pressures. Teenagers participated

because it served as a major social outlet, offering a safe place to authentically talk about what they read and to enjoy their identity as avid readers. Additionally, an analysis of the discursive practices of club members revealed a growing awareness of how literacy, gender, adolescence and adulthood position individuals differently. Yet these readers still chose to use gender and social class status as tools to shape their positions relative to other group members. Such awareness fits the public library values of diversity and social responsibility.

To understand how adolescents engaged with contemporary young adult literature, Wolf (J. L. Wolf, 2006) spent just under two years observing and interacting with a teen review group in a large urban library and conducted 18 interviews with 13 young adults. Although these teens came from diverse backgrounds and experiences, she found that they all interacted dynamically with worlds of stories and invited her to do the same, which became an ongoing challenge as a researcher to keep up with the books, movies, and self-created texts the teens offered. Wolf observed five ways the teens engaged with young adult literature, which she framed as metaphors; reading as navigation, reading as sleuthing, reading as writing, reading as belonging, and reading as pleasure.

These empirical studies confirm two important aspects of library services for adolescents. First, youth not only seek the materials libraries provide, but the opportunities for discourse around these texts with both peers and knowledgeable adults. Second, their reading of texts serve multiple aims, including personal and communal, just as the public library itself strives to serve diverse goals.

In addition to engagement with books and other materials, libraries frequently offer adolescents service opportunities for their community. Teen volunteers have been involved in a wide variety of tasks, such as giving library tours, creating informational bulletin boards, reading

with younger buddies, or organizing materials for children's programs (Gallo, 2010). To support ongoing volunteer involvement, many teen service librarians operate a Teen Advisory Board, also called Teen Advisory Group, Young Adult Advisory Council, or Teen Library Council. Activities range from giving opinions to actively planning and implementing a variety of library programs (Fesko, 2012), while some include financial and organizational roles for teens (Kendrick-Samuel, 2012). Despite the number of teens serving in, with, and for public libraries, related empirical research remains thin, with two examples standing out. Shannon Crawford Barniskis (2012a, 2012b) engaged fourteen teens as participant researchers to answer the research question "How does art programming in public libraries affect civic engagement in teens?" with a grounded theory approach. Teens reflected on their experiences during and after a series of six arts programs hosted at a public library through surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. Themes that emerged from the data included the teens' desire to connect and create community without being pushed or made powerless by adults, highlighting adolescents' sincere desires to contribute to the public good. In another study, Virginia A. Walter (2009) examined a grant-funded teen employment program in which adolescents were both mentors to younger kids and mentees for college students while planning and executing educational and cultural activities. The project was guided by six developmental outcomes synthesized from research and action agendas and considered "necessary for a successful transition from childhood to adulthood" (Walter, 2009). In post-program focus groups conversations with TLAs, Walter found that the teens gave evidence of all six desired developmental outcomes taking place as a result of their library employment. Through participation in library volunteer programs, youth were developing important skills for their education and lifelong learning as well as future civic participation.

Recently there has been a movement to make better use of the teen spaces in libraries as learning labs. Many researchers focus on libraries' efforts to establish makerspaces, highlighting subsequent positive outcomes for community engagement and improved library image (Brady, Salas, Nuriddin, Rodgers, & Subramaniam, 2014; Kyungwon & Abbas, 2015; Sheridan et al., 2014; Slatter & Howard, 2013). The first and most well-known example of a teen learning lab is the YOUmedia digital learning initiative for teens implemented by the Digital Youth Network and the Chicago Public Library with funding from the MacArthur Foundation. The project exists both physically, at a public library in downtown Chicago, and virtually, with a website for participants to interact and share their work. The physical space, staffing, and programs are organized around "HOMAGO," the levels of digital media participation uncovered in Mimi Ito's work (2010) and discussed previously in this dissertation. To facilitate this initiative, the library space was filled with furniture and technology intended to support all three levels of participation, as well as staffed with adult mentors. In the first-year report, the research describes relationships, particularly with adult mentors, as key to fruitful teen engagement (Austin, Ehrlich, Puckett, & Singleton, 2011). The researchers also found learning occurred most effectively through a combination of formal instruction on topics and in a style desired by teens along with purposeful informal interactions. Since reporting of that finding, with the support of funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a number of libraries have implemented similar changes in their spaces to take full advantage of the principles of Connected Learning (Dresang, Eschleman, Mills, & Bayo Urban, 2014; Ahn et al., 2014; Martin, 2015). In a research project entitled *ConnectedLib* (Hoffman, Subramaniam, Kawas, Scaff, & Davis, 2016), researchers canvassed the nation's teen services librarians to identify the different types of learning already happening in public libraries. They found five trends - 1) the application of

HOMAGO to spaces and activities, 2) the positioning of teen volunteers as valuable colleagues, 3) the development of various technical and professional skills, 4) the promotion of diversity, equality, and social justice, and 5) connections across community organizations and locations. The *ConnectedLib* project and additional teams connected to IMLS and YALSA are now moving forward to further research in connected learning principles as well as plans to develop tools and resources for implementation of the program in more libraries.

***Tensions.*** Although this chapter has emphasized the great strengths of public library services generally and for adolescents, points of tension and issues in need of more critical attention exist both now and throughout the history of libraries. While there is plenty of historical evidence of youth-friendly libraries and librarians, in many places early public library leaders were either disinclined or uninterested in pursuing services for the young (Walter, 2003). Even today, teens can be seen in many communities as a kind of “problem patron” because their habits and needs may clash with adult models of library behavior (Chelton, 2002). While librarians strive to live the model of “equal access for all,” the need to serve the majority of its community members can lead to decisions that are based more in utility than their ideals of equity (Dadlani, 2016). Early youth services librarians also struggled to define where they stood in relation to “sensational” materials and young readers (Dilevko, 2007; Ross, 2011). Before the middle of the 20th century, most youth services librarians working in public libraries already tended towards providing whatever was of interest to adolescents (C. A. Jenkins, 2011), and contemporary librarians continue this trend. More difficult to unravel is the historical role of white women as a “civilizing” force in public organizations and the continued dominance of whiteness in librarianship (Pawley, 2006; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016). While academic librarians are exploring this issue through critical theory, public youth services librarians, always more focused

on practical applications, have taken up a “cultural competence” framework (Overall, 2009) to examine their relationships with community members. Lastly, some librarians resist embracing the trends of makerspaces, STEM programming, and connected learning for fear of overemphasizing career-preparation in comparison to personal, social, and civic learning or even losing sight of the public libraries’ key purposes (Barniskis, 2017; Fourie & Meyer, 2015; Willett, 2016).

### **Moving Forward**

Regardless of concerns, public library services for teens continue to evolve in response to patrons needs, focusing on what the library can do for youth (Agosto, 2016). Scholars in recent years have found that when libraries are well-resourced, both in materials and with well-trained adult staff and mentors, use of libraries by teenagers increases. Their purposes for using the library relate, in many instances, to home work, school research projects, and other “education” demands or processes. But the reasons adolescents have for coming to their local libraries also spring from personal needs plus the urge to have a space and time to play, meet friends, and enter into good conversations with adults and peers joining together to explore issues and topics of interest to all. Teens are social, wanting to learn in concert with peers and with guidance from near-peers and adults. They value having space and staff dedicated to serving them. They want the freedom to explore topics of interest through a variety of media that are increasingly interactive and connected across disciplinary domains. Such experiences contribute to their personal development in terms of identity and knowledge construction.

These facts, drawn from the library related studies discussed in this chapter, help identify components of the public library’s role in adolescent learning. Yet questions remain, and a key question is explored in this dissertation to discover the kinds of understanding achieved by a

holistic approach to public libraries and teen services that encompasses many aspects of voluntary learning revealed in studies of other sites frequented by adolescents.

### **Chapter 3: Methods of Studying Adolescent Learning in Libraries**

In the previous two chapters, we considered not only theories of learning but also aspects of research carried out within libraries. A host of research methods applied in the studies of both these chapters: ethnographic, survey, interviews, interactive observational, and autobiographical (through the individual histories of major librarians across the decades). This chapter provides an overview of the research methods this scholar used. In addition, the research design that effectively uncovered the key elements to adolescent learning situated in a public library is central to this chapter. Further, the chapter explains the conceptual framework that emerged as the researcher moved between theories and concepts in the literature, data collected, and understandings developed through the constant comparative perspective of an ethnographer working in a single site (Heath & Street, 2008). Procedures used to identify and contextualize this single case of a public library follow, along with explanation of the iterative process of collecting and analyzing data. In this chapter, I have chosen to speak directly to the reader, using the first person pronoun. I do so, in large part because the layers of my professional identity include being a librarian, learning scientist, and educator simultaneously, and this layered identity created me as “the research instrument” in the terminology of cultural anthropologists who created research methods termed today as “ethnographic.” My past learning has crafted me as the tool or instrument that makes this research possible.

#### **Research Design and Questions**

Because I wanted to understand how the public library functions within the learning lives of the adolescents who frequent these spaces, I conducted an ethnographic case study. Qualitative methods, particularly ethnographic analysis, explore the multiple meanings and features of a complex context. By implementing a case study, I focused my attention on how

participants construct meaning and view themselves as gaining in understanding what it was that brought them to the library (Merriam, 2009, p. 14).

Ethnographic observations allowed me to grasp “how things are and how they got that way” (Wolcott, 1997) and the role of the culture of the public library. Here I take “culture” to be “unbounded, kaleidoscopic, and dynamic” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 7). In nearly two centuries of operation, United States public libraries have developed practices and beliefs that shape visitor and staff interactions, creating a unique culture worthy of study. Scholars’ increasing use of ethnographic techniques in research related to libraries indicate in numerous ways the need to acknowledge the position of libraries as “engaged in the production, dissemination, and consumption of American culture, which are shaped by and shape individual and collective social lives” (Khoo, Rozaklis, & Hall, 2012, p. 82). There are a small number of library ethnographies (e.g., Gillespie, Partridge, Bruce, & Howlett, 2016), but almost all focus on higher education academic libraries (Goodman, 2011). Therefore, my work contributes to a more holistic understanding of public libraries in addition to the learning of adolescents who spend time there.

As described in the preceding literature review, learning scientists and anthropologists study learning across settings while library and information scientists study specific aspects of libraries. Yet by viewing the public library in its entirety as a social construct, including the values and practices of the participants, scholars can recognize components of the library as learning environment that can benefit from the perspective of the anthropological view. In this dissertation, therefore, the public library is taken to be a site of adolescent learning needing examination through several lenses provided through theories laid out in the literature review. For example, theories that emphasize the sociocultural-historical viewpoint provide a research

lens that guides documentation of "the structure and development of human psychological processes emerg[ing] through culturally mediated, historically developing, practical activity" (Cole, 1996, p. 108). Taking this approach calls for attention to the following: means and contexts of communication and information transfer, historical developments, and adapted practices and activities as young people interact with librarians and others within public libraries. Congruent with a sociocultural-historical perspective is the need to focus on social interactions as they occurred in combination with participants' narratives of their practices. In addition to observing activities and practices generally, I attended particularly to the use of language in the setting and the achievement of meaning gained through communication among the participants. In this study, language is taken as being key within the sociocultural-historical perspective (Cole, 1996).

Seeking to understand learning within the context of the public library, I drew upon theories of learning across settings (Barron, 2006; Bell et al., 2012) as well as definitions across the decades of a public library and its purposes (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015). Doing so gave rise to my primary research question:

How does the public library spark and sustain the voluntary learning of adolescents with the affordances of space, resources, and people?

Stemming from this question, I identified three secondary questions to guide data collection and analysis:

- What are the primary features of the public library space and what do these features offer adolescent patrons?
- How do all the resources of the library, including textual materials and personal interactions, contribute to the learning of adolescents?

- In what ways do the relationships among patrons in the public library spark and sustain adolescent learning?

Table 2 summarizes the research questions, data analysis questions, data sources, evidence to support the given questions, and the resultant claims.

Table 2

*Research and Analysis Questions, Data Sources, Evidence and Claims*

<b>Primary Research Question:</b> How does the public library spark and sustain the voluntary learning of adolescents with the affordances of <i>space, resources, and people</i> ?				
<b><u>Secondary Question</u></b>	<b><u>Data Analysis Questions</u></b>	<b><u>Data Sources</u></b>	<b><u>Evidence</u></b>	<b><u>Claim</u></b>
What are the primary features of the public library space and what do these features offer adolescent patrons?	<p>What practices are entailed in “services” to teens in public libraries?</p> <p>How are teens, other patrons, and staff positioned in their interactions in the library?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fieldnotes from observations of adolescents and staff interactions in the library space</li> <li>• Fieldnotes from observations of the physical arrangement of library space</li> <li>• Review of library policies</li> <li>• Transcripts of interviews with library staff</li> <li>• Transcripts of interviews with adolescents</li> <li>• Fieldnotes from observations of programs offered to adolescent participants</li> <li>• Informal conversations with adolescents, library staff, and regional librarians</li> </ul>	<p>Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teens are positioned as having equal rights to access and the capability to use library space and resources, just like adults</li> <li>• Low-levels of noise and activity are accepted as a normal part of learning</li> <li>• Rules are enforced to support the maximum level of access for all, with the support of teens and community members</li> </ul> <p>Intellectual Freedom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teens prize the library for a sense of freedom in the pursuit of interests, including topics they cannot learn in school</li> <li>• In this space, teens are free to choose activities related to educational,</li> </ul>	The public library fosters adolescent learning because the space embodies librarianship’s values of access, intellectual freedom, and service.

<p>How do all the resources of the library, including textual materials and personal interactions, contribute to the learning of adolescents?</p>	<p>What do teens and librarians talk about and how do they talk about it?</p> <p>How does the librarian use discourse to build upon and extend youth knowledge?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fieldnotes from observations of programs offered to adolescent participants which included details of conversations</li> <li>• Fieldnotes from observations of adolescents and staff interactions in the library space</li> <li>• Transcripts of interviews with adolescents</li> <li>• Transcript of interview with teen services librarian</li> </ul>	<p>personal, or social needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teens can form relationships with peers and other community members within the space</li> </ul>	<p>Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All library staff aim to welcome and assist teenagers, no matter the topic of the request</li> <li>• Librarian hours are dedicated to building relationships with local adolescents and creating activities that match personal and educational needs and interests</li> <li>• Diversity in language, culture, and thought are valued and supported within the library</li> </ul>	<p>The public library contributes to adolescent learning by enacting library values that contextualizes connections, thus scaffolding youths' heteroglossic encounters</p>
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In what ways do the relationships among patrons in the public library spark and sustain adolescent learning?	What skills or knowledge can and do adolescents gain in the library through activities over time?  What shifts in identity can occur for adolescents who actively participates in library activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fieldnotes from observations of programs offered to adolescent participants</li> <li>• Fieldnotes from observations of adolescents and staff interactions in the library space</li> <li>• Transcripts of interviews with adolescents</li> <li>• Fieldnotes from picture book analysis meeting</li> <li>• Picture book reviews written by teen volunteers</li> <li>• Written reflections on the picture book analysis process by teen volunteers</li> </ul>	referential, and extensional talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth who frequently participate in activities and dialogues within the library take up new practices over time, displaying shifts in identity, including:</li> <li>• Cultivating leadership skills to contribute to <i>the public good</i></li> <li>• Expanding personal habits and skills related to <i>education and lifelong learning</i></li> <li>• Developing critical awareness to take up roles of <i>social responsibility</i></li> </ul>	The public library sparks and sustains adolescent learning by relating to youth as whole persons capable of taking up identities reflecting the core values of the public library.
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**Finding:** The public library sparks and sustains the voluntary learning of adolescents through *embodied values, contextualized literacies, and developing identities*.

## Conceptual Framework

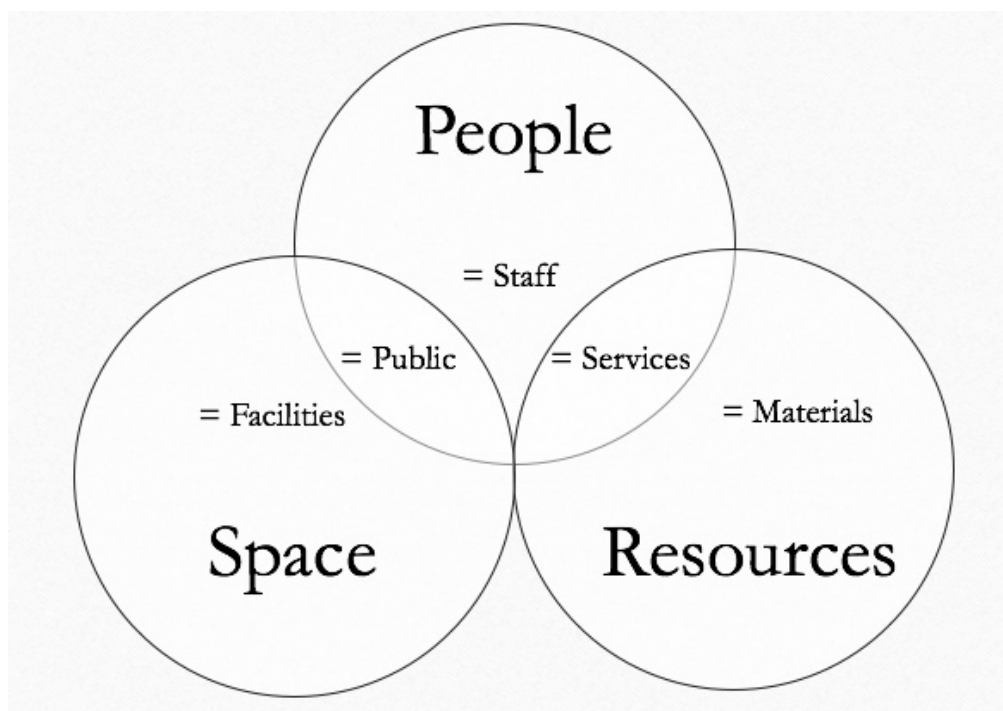
Sociocultural-historical theories offer a powerful approach for understanding the relationship between multiple levels of phenomenon. Barbara Rogoff describes three different ways to view processes analytically that are actually “ongoing, mutually constituted” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 52). Any activity is made of *cultural-institutional, personal, and interpersonal* aspects, but to understand a situation, ethnographers focus on one of these aspects at a time by foregrounding certain pieces. Rogoff writes, “It is usually necessary to foreground some aspects of phenomena and background others simply because no one can study everything at once.

However, the distinctions between what is in the foreground and what is in the background lie in our analysis and are not assumed to be separate entities in reality." (Rogoff, 2003, p. 58)

Taking empirical techniques from ethnography, I used the constant comparative perspective (Heath & Street, 2008), which includes iterative reviews of the research literature, examination of theoretical constructs, and analysis of the data collected, to construct a conceptual framework that explains the nature of adolescent learning enacted within the public library setting. It begins with the definition of public libraries given previously. According to definitions by government and professional organizations, a public library is:

an entity that is established under state enabling laws or regulators to serve a community, district, or region, and provides at least the following: 1) an organized collection of printed or other library *materials*, or a combination thereof; 2) paid *staff*; 3) an established schedule in which *services* of the staff are available to the public; 4) the *facilities* necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule; and 5) is supported in whole or in part with *public* funds [emphases added] (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015).

These five highlighted elements combine into the three core provisions seen in any public library. The facilities provided with an open invitation to the public at large define the library's provision of *space*. Materials provided by the library, both physically and virtually, combined with participatory programs on a variety of topics and the services to help young patrons access items provided through library's *resources*. Services provided by staff to the public constitute the library's *people*.

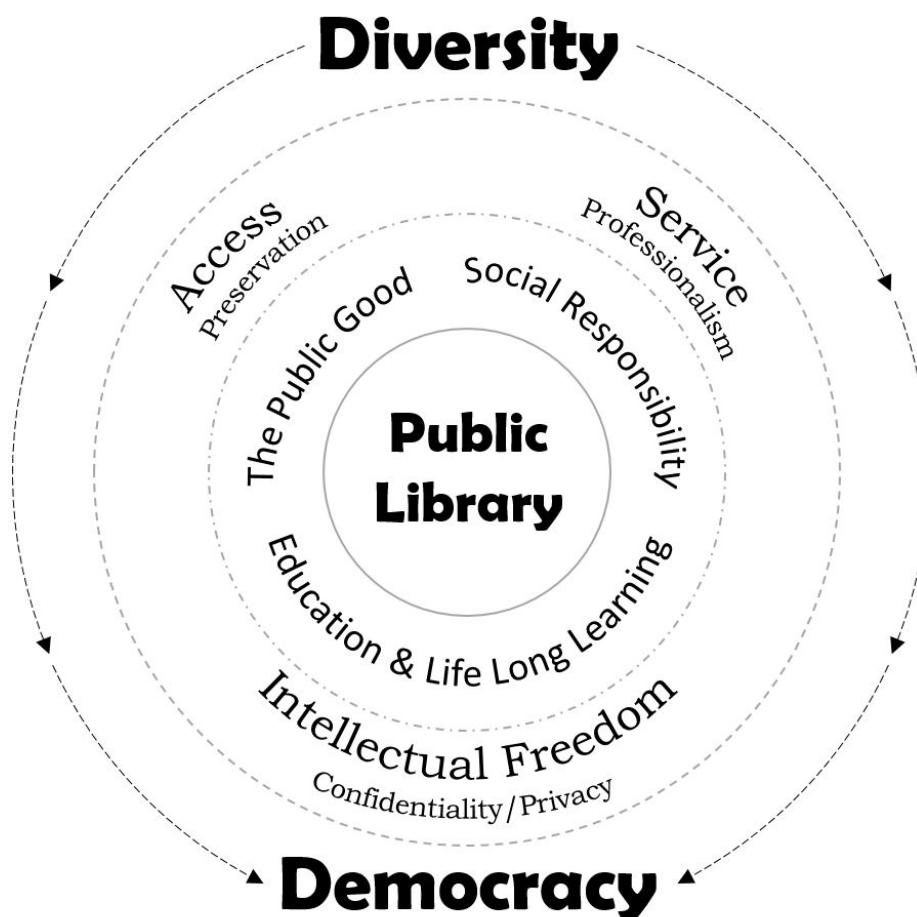


*Figure 1.* Space, resources, and people as provisions of public libraries. This figure illustrates how the five elements in the definition of public libraries fit into the three concepts of space, resources, and people.

Of course, these three provisions are “ongoing, mutually constituted” as Rogoff’s cultural-institutional, personal, and interpersonal layers of analysis (Rogoff, 2003). But in the same way, to understand the multiple levels of a phenomena, it is useful to alternate what is pulled into the foreground of our attention.

By attending to each of these three provisions in turn, the embedded values of librarianship (American Library Association, 2004) come into sharper focus. Socially constructed and shaped by history, the American public library is not a neutral container for ideas behind democracy (Jaeger & Sarin, 2016). The public library operates on certain values that are transmitted to patrons within both provisions of the library and personnel interactions with patrons. It is the eleven core values enumerated by the American Library Association (American Library Association, 2004) that provide the “curriculum” or “disciplinary practices” experienced within the public library. The enactment of these values takes place within the

Discourse (Gee, 2012) that young patrons learn as they spend time in the library and the social practices that differentiate the public library as a site of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Figure 2 demonstrates how these values are situated in adolescent learning.



*Figure 2.* Situated learning in the public library. This figure illustrates how the core values of librarianship create the Discourse that patrons learn through legitimate peripheral participation in public library activities.

*Diversity* and *democracy* are the values enacted by the presence of a public library within a community. Even if a citizen never crosses the threshold of the building, the fact that the library exists and offers a diverse range of voices strengthens the democracy in which they live. As discussed previously, American democracy has long equated its success and longevity with a knowledgeable public with access to information needed to make informed decisions (Jefferson, 1810; Mutz, 2006; Thompson & Gutmann, 2004; Wiegand, 2015a).

Patrons who do enter the public library space participate in social practices that embody the values of *access*, *intellectual freedom*, and *service*, each of which is sustained through the librarian's commitment to the related values of *preservation*, *confidentiality/privacy*, and *professionalism*. Those former three values shape the positioning (Holland & Leander, 2004; Wortham, 2006) of adolescents and library staff towards each other. Teens have full access to the space and all its materials, regardless of age, background, or capabilities. They are free to pursue any intellectual interest or activity, without censorship. And librarians serve teens with both individual assistance and group activities designed to meet their needs in both educational and personal matters. Practices such as the ways that people use the space, access resources, and interact with each other reflect the library values. In turn, these values impact the learning of adolescent patrons. At the public library, teens have access to a range of materials to learn from, the intellectual freedom to pursue learning in any domain in a variety of ways, and are served and guided by peers and librarians in their voluntary learning pursuits. Every teen who enters the library for any purpose is participating in practices related to the values of access, intellectual freedom, and service, thus bringing them into part of the library's Discourse.

The adolescents more fully involved in library activities experience the "centripetal development of full participants" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 57) and learn practices related to the values of *the public good*, *education and lifelong learning*, and *social responsibility*. They adopt Discourses (Gee, 2000/2001) reflecting one or more of these values such that the value(s) become part of their self- and social identities. It is not that these teens develop identities as "librarians," a point that Lave and Wenger provide in their treatment of tailor apprentices<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, this outcome can and does happen. In my interviews and personal encounters, many librarians describe spending time in a library throughout their youth and engaging regularly with the librarian. I am a counter example: I followed my mom to the public library occasionally as a child, but I spent more time at bookstores and most of my time in the dance studio.

Instead, young library patrons develop identities as individuals who contribute to the public good, with skills to sustain their own lifelong learning, and with cognizance of social responsibility. These identities develop through increasing participation in library practices, particularly engagement in the deliberative dialogue (Heath, 2012b) made available by the librarian.

### **Selection of Case**

Initial fieldwork to see the “lay of the land” is essential to all studies of voluntary learning, for without this broader perspective, the case in point has no “company to keep.” In other words, scholars working in voluntary learning should know the company or other contexts in which their specific site is likely to be compared. The selection of the case for this study was achieved through purposeful sampling, specifically network sampling (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). In the spring of 2014, I first interviewed librarians who hold administrative positions over teen services in three separate library systems. Together these systems cover three counties and operate 96 public libraries in the northwest region of the United States. Each administrator was asked to suggest teen services librarians with active teen programs whom I could interview.

Before I focused on a single site, I interviewed 17 teen services librarians in 15 different public libraries about the services they provide to adolescents. These interviews provided important background for both my short term and long term research plans. They also afforded me 1) a stronger sense of the criteria by which I could select the single case and 2) a broader backdrop for my case study<sup>6</sup>. All the interviewees were white women, as are 84% of librarians nationally (DPE Research Department, 2016), and their career experience ranged from 3 to 30 years, with work locations including urban, suburban, and rural libraries of varying sizes. After

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<sup>6</sup> To read the findings of these interviews, please see my paper on the subject (Evans, 2016).

interviewing these librarians in the field, I identified two sites of interest that met certain criteria (Patton, 2002, p. 243). The criteria included having a dedicated teen services librarian for at least 20 hours a week, a steady clientele of adolescents in the library space, regular offerings of programs for young adults, and a core group of teens that function as a teen advisory board. Requiring such criteria for my case study ensured a rich set of activities and interactions for analysis. Additionally, I sought a library with a diverse patron base so I could observe a range of interactional styles in the setting, a requirement this site also meets. Because of these criteria, my case selection could be considered a purposeful “unique sample” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). Not all public libraries contain all the elements together as described in my criteria, though some of the features I sought have been called out as needed by professional organizations (Young Adult Library Services Association, 2014). Yet the combination of these criteria offers both rich data as well as a possible model for teen services in other public libraries.

Upon identification of two qualifying sites, I contacted the three librarians who worked with teens at these locations and met with each individually to discuss the research project. One librarian agreed to participate and share her work at the Brewer Library in the city of Goldash, one of the Eastrose County Libraries<sup>7</sup>. Chapter 4 contains a description of the case setting within the community and how elements of my personal background positioned me while conducting this study.

### **Data Collection**

After the selected teen services librarian agreed to participate, I secured permission to conduct the study in the Foster Library from Eastrose County Libraries administration. I asked to audio record the teen programs I attended for precise dialogue transcription, but my request was

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<sup>7</sup> All names of places and persons in this work have been replaced with pseudonyms.

denied out of concern for maintaining the confidentiality of the library's teen patrons. Recording interviews with individuals was fine, since the interviewee could individually agree or disagree, but recording group programs was not allowed. At first, channeling early anthropologists, I tried furiously scribbling my observations by hand in a notebook. Before the end of my first month, the teen participants pointed out that this behavior made me seem "creepy." They informed me that because so few people made written notes nowadays, it seemed obvious that I was writing about them. The teens suggested I use my computer to type my notes since "you could be doing anything on your computer." I obliged them happily, since my faster typing speed made capturing dialogue easier.

In April 2015, I began collecting data as a participant observer (Merriam, 2009) in the public library space and at planned events for teen patrons<sup>8</sup>. When attending programs, the teen services librarian introduced me alternately as "a student at the university doing a project" and "another librarian interested in teen services." My identity and research were fully explained each fall to the Teen Library Council, the teen volunteer group for the library. Many teens assumed I was another librarian in the space, occasionally asking me library-related questions which I deflected back to the teen services librarian. If teens asked me questions about myself, I answered them honestly and simply. Over time, I developed friendly relationships with the teen volunteers and some of the other regular teen patrons. Many asked about the progress of my work and my own teen sons, while I asked them about events in their lives. Of course, the teen book lovers were quick to figure out my reading preferences and always traded recommendations with me when we met.

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<sup>8</sup> A brief description of each of the planned events can be found in Table 3 in Chapter 5.

Throughout data collection, I wrote conceptual memos about discoveries, created analytic questions to further investigate the data, and built metaphors and concepts (Merriam, 2009, pp. 170-173). My doctoral curriculum and research experiences outside of libraries assisted me in developing a critical eye to balance my insider stance as a former public librarian. Knowing the research around learning in other settings created questions about library practices that I previously had not thought to ask. To be sure, during the actual term of the research reported here, I made certain during data collection to see with a fresh perspective, trying always to blind myself as much as possible to any prior perceptions about what “should” or even what “could” happen under certain circumstances. Additionally, a series of members checks, described below in the data analysis section, helped identify ideas I missed or those that I overemphasized in my collection and analysis.

**Observations.** By the end of my 18-month observation period in October 2016, I had spent 101 hours at the library over the course of 68 visits. During each visit, I typed detailed fieldnotes about arrangements of the space, movements of patrons and staff, and dialogues between the teen services librarian and youth patrons. In my fieldnotes, I created a “thick description” of these activities and practices to illuminate the “webs of significance” that are the culture of adolescence and of public libraries (Geertz, 1973). Informal visits to the site continued from October to March of the following year as I volunteered at the library while a staff member was on leave<sup>9</sup>. Throughout both time periods, I engaged in close observations of the environment, interactions, and activities in the library as well as participated in numerous informal conversations with adult and teen participants. My sociocultural-historical stance,

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<sup>9</sup> The teen services librarian took a three-month leave as both a self-care move and to serve in Latin America with Librarians Without Borders. Since I was familiar with both the community and the programs, I was asked to step in and supervise the teens from time to time.

which emphasizes the role of language as a tool of cultural mediation (Cole, 1996), led me to focus on the nature of conversations between adolescents and librarians, noting the kind of questions, the words used in the dialogue, the length of exchanges, and the opportunities for decision making. I also recorded references to media (books, web series, etc.) during teen programs to confirm the diverse, heteroglossic nature of texts that adolescents experience in today's media landscape. Throughout the project, I could access the private social media page for the Teen Library Council. Although there was little dialogue on the page, it gave me notification of upcoming events for teens and an additional place to call on for participation in specific research activities.

**Interviews.** From December 2016 to March 2016, I conducted a series of follow up interviews with three members of the library staff and five adolescent library patrons. Staff participation was solicited via an email announcement from upper management. Teen participation was solicited in Teen Library Council meetings and via the private social media page. My long presence in the library community as a participant observer prior to asking for interviews established a relationship of trust between myself and participants. In the interviews, I requested participants narrate their literacy and library experiences from early life to now (Linde, 1993; Wortham, 2001) to create literacy biographies similar to Barron's technobiographies (Barron, 2006). This work afforded me a contextualized view of their previously observed interactions. I also invited them to imagine responding to a person who asks either a) why do teens belong in public libraries (for the adults) or b) what does the library offer a teen today (for the adolescents). This hypothetical question helped participants clarify their most valued elements of the public library experience. Appendix A contains the semi-structured interview protocol for these conversations.

**Participatory research.** Also included in the data corpus for this dissertation are the written reflections and book reviews of teen volunteers. These documents were analyzed and coded in the same manner as the observations and interviews. For context, I briefly describe the origin of these documents here.

It was important that my study of the library include a participatory research opportunity for the teens (Barniskis, 2013; Wissman, Staples, Vasudevan, & Nichols, 2015). This need aligned with the teen services librarian's focus on career exploration for her volunteers, as well as my own desire and that of the professional community to include more youth voices in research (Young Adult Library Services Association, 2011). Participation was open to interested members of the Teen Library Council, announced to them at meetings and on the group's social media page. In December 2016, six teen volunteers and I began a project to critically analyze diverse picture books. At an initial two-hour meeting, we discussed identities and issues of representation in children's literature, particularly the lack of diversity. We then explored the assumptions of critical literacy and developed a series of questions to use when approaching a text. Together, we critical analyzed two picture books together, then each volunteer searched the catalog for children's picture books that represented one or more facets of her identity. Following the meeting, the group continued their work online via shared documents, then came together in person for another two-hour meeting to discuss findings. The teens reviewed 20 picture books and their responses have been distributed as a booklist within the library system catalog. While the project was temporarily paused in 2017, the volunteers intend to review a minimum of 50 books and co-write an article summarizing their work in the future. Documents related to this project have been included in Appendices B, C, and D.

## **Data Analysis**

Triangulating the various types of data ensured I had evidence related to the cultural-institutional, personal, and interpersonal aspects (Rogoff, 2003) of the multileveled phenomenon that is adolescent learning in public libraries. As indicated, data collection, data analysis, and development of the conceptual framework went forward concurrently because I used the “constant comparative perspective” which “cuts to the past and to the future of the topic or area under study.” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 32) This recursive process of constant comparison is part of what makes the work ethnographic. I searched within my data corpus to find patterns of co-occurrence, a method “at the heart of the constant comparative ethos and approach of ethnographers.” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 41) Analysis of these patterns happened through an iterative process of writing memos, coding, categorizing codes by theme, and reviewing literature.

**Coding.** My coding was grounded in sociocultural-historical research and the previously discussed theories around learning, identity, and discourse, which directed my attention to interactions with evidence of these concepts (Merriam, 2009, pp. 178-180). For example, attention to positioning (Holland & Leander, 2004; Wortham, 2006) gave insight into how librarians and youth view the role of information and the library in their daily lives. Coding categories included conversation topics, references to verifiable resources, types of questions, and direction of speech (i.e. librarian to teen, teen to teen). I also developed a list of descriptive or open codes to capture unforeseen patterns (Merriam, 2009, pp. 178-179). While examining the patterns of discourse within the data, I recognized similarities to “deliberative discourse” (Heath, 2012c, 2012b). This connection revealed a purpose I had previously described in a memo as “any librarian always asks a lot of questions.” As I continued to analyze data and refine my coding, categories emerged based on the practices I had observed and the narratives that participants

shared with me. Library staff and teen patrons spoke and acted in patterns that manifest the core values of librarianship (American Library Association, 2004). This insight clarified the function of public library space, resources, and people in the learning lives of adolescents. Both literature-based and descriptive codes were refined into analytic codes and categories (Merriam, 2009, pp. 179-180) through the iterative process of reviewing conceptual memos and research literature.

To strengthen validity of qualitative research, it is crucial to include member checks for reviewing the data and the preliminary conclusions the researcher finds (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). These steps took place throughout the research process via informal conversations with the teen services librarian, other library staff, and adolescent participants. Additionally, I was able to share and get feedback on my emergent ideas and concepts with local teen services librarians after our regional quarterly meetings<sup>10</sup>. The timing of the interviews after regular field observations had ceased allowed me time to reflect on any questions or ideas that my interviewees could confirm. After I composed an outline of my findings, I met formally with the teen services librarian to review these findings and receive feedback. She shared these results with the Teen Library Council<sup>11</sup> who provided me with written feedback. I also met individually to share findings with and receive feedback from three long-time public librarians who have spent most of their career in teen services, including professional work with librarians across the nation. Together, these conversations tested the soundness of my findings and increased my confidence in the validity or authenticity of my results.

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<sup>10</sup> Basically, I interrupted our social lunch hour with serious questions about the nature of teen services. I am grateful for their patient and insightful responses.

<sup>11</sup> The plan had been for me to meet with the TLC myself, but the library lost power on the meeting day and had to close. Since I could not attend the rescheduled meeting, the library shared the findings with the teens. This may have been advantageous, since the teen's politeness might have resulted in less critical responses.

## Chapter 4: Description of Case and Researcher

In this chapter, I describe the community and organizational context surrounding my specific case. I also offer a brief biographical sketch of myself, the researcher, as the primary tool for data collection in an ethnography. Each of these descriptions provide the reader with a richer background from which to read the following three chapters of findings.

### The Case

The Brewer Library is located in the city of Goldash which is in Eastrose County. It is part of a large county library system.<sup>12</sup>

**The community.** Goldash, an intersection where residential, commercial, and industrial spaces meet, brings longtime residents and newly arrived immigrants into coexistence. Goldash is home to 19,107 residents who speak 59 languages and live in 7,157 households. Yet the number of city residents can swell each day to 150,000. Raygate, a large shopping mall complex on one edge of Goldash, draws from far and wide. This situation contributes to a misleading trend that frustrates locals: while Goldash has one of the highest crime rates in the state, more than 80% of those arrested in the city do not live in Goldash. The small city consists of nine neighborhoods with a mix of suburban, urban, and industrial layouts and incomes ranging from lower to upper-middle. Bordered by a major city, Fairbay, on the north and an international airport to the south, Goldash sits in a true hub. Public transportation primarily focuses on moving people between jobs in the north and flights in the south and does not reliably connect Goldash's neighborhoods. Thus, car traffic is dominant, and adolescents depend on family and friends for mobility beyond their home and school neighborhoods.

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<sup>12</sup> Statistics for this chapter come from reports about the community and library system gathered by library administration.

Fairbay, once a working-class city dominated by a single manufacturing employer, has evolved over the last 25 years through establishment of technology companies. While newfound wealth remains centralized in Fairbay, Goldash maintains its status as a home for middle to low-income residents that now includes mostly minority families, pushed out of the housing market in the larger city. As of 2017, Fairbay is officially one of the least diverse cities of the United States, while several other cities in Eastrose County, including Goldash, are among the most racially diverse of the nation. Proximity to the airport, along with increased job opportunities of Fairbay, has made Goldash a preferred landing place for new immigrants to the country since the 1990's. Several refugee resettlement agencies and social support services were established locally to assist their transition, including a branch of the International Rescue Committee. According to U.S. Census figures, Goldash's foreign-born population has evolved from 834 residents in 1990 to almost 8,000, approximately 40% of its current population in 2016. Over the years, immigrants from different regions have come in waves to the area: Bosnians, Serbs, Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians were followed by Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans. The most recent arrivals have come from Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Iran, and Iraq. Many arrivals since 2010 come with Islamic dedication, and a range of community and commercial operations have developed to meet commercial and religious needs.

After the 2010 census, the city's zip code was declared one of the most diverse in the nation, with less than 44% of the population listed as white, a drop of 15 points compared to the 2000 census. In 2010, just over half the households reflected a population speaking a language other than English at home. Such dramatic shifts over such a short span of years raise numerous questions. Where and what are tensions and collaborations between longtime, primarily white, residents and immigrants and/or among the various immigrant groups? Three factors keep

culture clashes to a minimum. First, major highways crisscross Goldash. These include an interstate high that effectively separates the city into four geographic areas, none of which is easily accessible to any other. As mentioned previously, mass transit does not connect Goldash's neighborhoods. Walking across highways is a pedestrian hazard. Therefore, residents in the less populated, more affluent neighborhood of Thomburg, which lies to the east, could potentially never interact with people from the bustling multicultural population center of the International Marketplace neighborhood. The public library, the middle school, and high school, all located within two blocks of each other and alongside the International Marketplace, create the city's best opportunities to mix cultures and classes.

Second, as is the case for the ethos of newly settled immigrant communities, transience comes as an expected step into the future. Goldash, a temporary stop, offers a place to orient to the United States and gather resources before settling somewhere else, likely further south in Eastrose County. Therefore, any problems or concerns with immigrants are viewed by long term residents as temporary. Third, property owners in Goldash have a much lower tax rate than their neighbors in the surrounding county, giving an initial financial break. The city of Goldash relies more on business and sales taxes that flow steadily from a section of light industrial manufacturers and the regional popularity of the Raygate shopping center. Thus, earlier long-term residents do not view their tax dollars as being used to provide services needed by the steady stream of newcomers.

***Schools.*** The Goldash School District has been called small but mighty. Three elementary schools, one middle school, and Brewer High School educate approximately 3000 students. A third of Goldash households include children under the age of eighteen, and more than a quarter of Goldash households live below the poverty line. A national newspaper declared

this school district the most diverse in the US in 2011, with a diversity index<sup>13</sup> of 75%. The district proudly proclaims this statistic. After 2012, the high school made a remarkable turnaround, raising both test scores and morale through culturally relevant changes to both the curriculum and discipline policy. What followed was a vastly improved graduation rate as well as a sense of community-belonging amongst adolescents with wildly divergent backgrounds. The public library, along with the outlook and practices of local businesses and organizations, sustains this perspective for the youth.

**The library system.** Like most public libraries, the Brewer Library staff takes seriously the demographic facts in their community and the realities they create. Their mission to meet the needs of the citizens of Goldash is supported by the fact they do not have to rely on administrative and financial support from the city itself. The Brewer Library is one of the Eastrose County Libraries (ECL), a system with 49 library branches over 2,165 square miles. The library system includes all of Eastrose County, excluding the metropolitan city of Fairbay, which maintains its own library system as a part of the city's budget. In contrast, ECL, like many similar library systems, is funded directly through county property taxes. This situation provides a stable source of funding, especially in relation to the up-and-down nature of city budgets. What makes ECL unique is that the property values have grown exponentially in recent decades as part of the greater Fairbay metropolitan area. Therefore, other local library systems joke with envy that libraries within ECL can accomplish anything they want since they have so much money. But this reputation belies the economic diversity of Eastrose County, which includes major cities, bedroom communities, small towns, and acres of farmland. As stated previously, parts of Eastrose County have recently become some of the most diverse places in the country. Library

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<sup>13</sup> This number represents the percent chance that two students selected at random would be members of a different ethnic group.

system administration in concert with local staff must therefore balance the local needs of individual communities with the resources and opportunities presented as part of a library system. The libraries' collective mission is "to provide free, open, and equal access to ideas and information to all members of the community, without regard to race, citizenship, age, religion, economic status, or any other condition or qualification." Libraries accomplish this mission through the traditional public library services of answering information queries, lending materials, and hosting education and entertainment programs and activities that are free to the public. Like all public libraries in recent decades, ECL has embraced information technologies, striving to ameliorate the digital divide by providing free access to the internet through desktop computers, laptops, tablets, and, recently, Wi-Fi hotspots that can be checked out and brought into the home. For a city such as Goldash, with residents in the lower half of the economic spectrum, this arrangement generally works to their advantage in terms of materials, staff, and even facilities. The arrangement with ECL also keeps general library services at a maximum, including expansive open hours<sup>14</sup> with trained library staff and access to 4.1 million items as of 2016, both physical and digital (eBooks, eMusic, etc.) collected and housed throughout the county and online.

**A case in context.** After reading about the Brewer Library and the Goldash community, it would be easy to think of it as a singular case, not generalizable to public libraries at large. Every library and every community is indeed unique, but the Brewer Library experience has facets that overlap with libraries throughout the United States. As one librarian pointed out to me, no matter the demographics of a library's community on paper, immigrants and people of lower-socioeconomic means find their way into the public library to access free resources. While

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<sup>14</sup> The Brewer Library is open seven days a week for a total of 66 hours. Libraries of similar size in the Fairbay system, reliant on the city budget, are open for about a third fewer hours and often only five days a week.

Brewer has a remarkable concentration of immigrants, the immigrant story has been a piece of the public library story for nearly two centuries; in their early days, U.S. public libraries were seen as the way to educate those immigrants outside the reach of K-12 schooling. Many places in America, like Goldash and other Eastrose County cities, are currently undergoing demographic shifts towards increased diversity and fewer citizens defined as white, especially amongst children. Many towns have public libraries that are part of a library district and in these locations, there is always a tension between administrative consistency and meeting local needs. Most teen services librarians do not feel they have enough time or money to serve their community in the manner it needs and deserves, a source of frustration in this case as well<sup>15</sup>. You might say that the Brewer Library has an exceptional number of teen patrons, but there are many public libraries located in close proximity to local schools that can make similar claims.

Perhaps the most unique feature in this case is the staff's open acceptance of both the teenagers and their multicultural community. More than one staff member described their work team as having "a social justice bent." This was evident from both the types of programs offered (e.g. how to test your garden for soil safety; how to access financial aid for college) and the interactions of the staff with their patrons. A librarian in another city told me that many libraries will welcome teenagers in on a policy level but not at a practical level. In other words, libraries do not provide solid levels of funding and staffing for teen services because in reality neither staff nor adult patrons want to deal with teenagers in the library space. While I have observed library situations that contain some of this resistance to teens, I have witnessed more libraries striving to operate as Brewer does, finding ways to meet the needs of all community members, including adolescents and patrons from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The

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<sup>15</sup> In my 17+ years of working with libraries, I have yet to meet a teen services librarian happy with their hours or their budget.

mission of the American public library does indeed have “a social justice bent” as they strive to provide open and equal access to information resources to every citizen. It is this mission that makes public libraries both a vital support to democracy and a valued place to me personally.

### **Researcher**

In qualitative work, the researcher is the primary research instrument and therefore it is important to decide “who I am with respect to these individuals, the groups, or the sites” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 46). Our identities impact our interpretation of interactions with people and places as well as how we position/are positioned as researchers. Here are the ways I see my identities, and the values and practices they reify, impacting this research.

I am the only child of two middle class white Americans who each, I later realized, would have been excellent librarians themselves. My mother was an information hound. From her I learned to value knowledge and to enjoy connecting people with the information they need. My father is a bookaholic. From him I learned to talk with others about books and, most significantly, to take up the book recommendations of a child. It wasn't until my own adulthood I learned that not every grown-up willingly reads children's literature or even listens seriously when a little one says “This is the best book! You should read it!”

Since I demonstrated energy, loquaciousness, and a taste for learning early, my academic and professional success was prophesied by my family. As a child, I did not mind this, since I met most K-12 demands easily and, in turn, teachers liberally rewarded me with praise and high grades. But in my college years, I hit an academic wall. Much later I learned that the pitfalls into which I stumbled are not uncommon to first-generation college students. Because of my difficulties, I saw for the first time that “learning” was not as simple of a task as I had previously believed. Still, I managed to pull through university and finish my bachelors. After marrying and

giving birth to my first son, my husband and I decided that he would be primary caretaker. To fulfill my new role as primary wage earner, I found a position in a local public library, presenting preschool storytime and checking out books to patrons.

For me, becoming a public library employee was like finding a home I did not know I was missing. Not only had my parent's habits taught me to love and share information, but their values, heavily influenced by the social issues of the 1960's and 70's, had prepared me to accept and act upon the values of librarianship. In this setting, my natural enthusiasm, my faith in learning, and my desire to make the world a better place all became assets. My affinity for library work caught the attention of the professional librarians, giving me a team of mentors eager to see me join their ranks. In less than six months, I became the manager of a small library branch in a suburban-rural community. Working there for eight years, I learned every aspect of public librarianship by implementing it in my own little laboratory of a library. My employer offered frequent professional development and many librarians generously gave insights. After the birth of a second son, I returned to higher education, more skillfully this time, and earned a teaching certificate, then my masters of library and information science.

Finally, officially certified to work under the professional title "librarian" in either public or school libraries, I felt proud but also curiously unsatisfied. I had enjoyed a remarkable learning experience during those eight years, but it left me with questions about both the nature of learning and the role of libraries. During this time, it also became clear that our exceptionally intelligent sons are not "neurotypical." The school experiences which had been so rewarding for me were much thornier for them. As diagnoses started coming in for each child, our new realities forced me to reconsider the meaning of "success" and measures of "achievement." As they

continue through adolescence, I frequently face personal questions about learning pathways and the various ways youth can access what is necessary to their future.

I started work after earning my master's degree as a middle school librarian in a minority majority middle school and simultaneously begin teaching courses for future librarians at my alma mater. For two years, this combination created in my mind more questions about learning, literacies, identities, and the role of librarians relating to adolescents. My principal, a thoughtful educator of African-American descent, hired me because my public library experience made me qualitatively different than other school library job candidates. But what exactly was different about my interactions with youth? This job was my first experience in a setting where whites and Asians were not the majority, a fact which excited me. It allowed me to test my comfort with differences, work out some misguided notions around race relations, and increase my ability to make personal connections. Yet I observed other white teachers and preservice librarians enter similar situations and come away frustrated. All these questions inspired me to pursue a doctoral degree to research issues of learning, especially for adolescents and in libraries.

Throughout graduate school, I had to reestablish my identity, eventually settling on “a librarian, who is not actively working in a library, but still serving the library community through teaching and research.” This sounds like a convoluted way to think of one's self, but I needed to clarify this for continued credibility and maintenance of relationships in the professional librarian community. Similar to the stance of many teachers, there is a sense that you cannot understand librarianship, especially the often-unpredictable happenings in public libraries, without having worked a service desk. To avoid becoming a complete outsider, I have continuously served in library professional organizations, attended library conferences and events, participated in

librarian social media, and read up on emergent issues related to libraries. This keeps me relevant in the eyes of my librarian peers and continues to provide context to my research.

## **Chapter 5: “Teens Live Here”: Library Space for Learning**

To illustrate how adolescent learning occurs in public libraries, I will focus in turn on the space, resources, and people in this particular case of a public library. While discussed separately, these three key affordances interoperate to foster youth voluntary learning through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in library practices. These practices reflect library values (American Library Association, 2004) that in turn contribute to adolescent learning and development. In the following three chapters, I offer “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the evidence listed in Chapter 3, Table 2 to answer each secondary research question. The evidence and subsequent claim of each chapter together answers the primary research question with this finding:

The public library sparks and sustains the voluntary learning of adolescents through embodied values, contextualized literacies, and developing identities.

### **A Valued Space**

The Brewer Library, a one-story concrete white rectangle, sits on the corner of a block that includes commercial businesses, residential homes, and apartment houses. The 5,250-square foot building, built in an era of municipal efficiency, does not present itself as the palace of books many think of as a library. Yet if libraries could feel the love surrounding them, this building would sense how vital it is to the surrounding community of Goldash. As venerated as any Carnegie construction or modern architectural masterpiece, this building offers entry to the hopes and dreams of the surrounding families.

Space, in the form of facilities made open to the public, is definitional for a public library (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015). Within this space, the values of librarianship come to life, embodied in the policies, practices, and positionings of both library staff and

patrons. As previously described, in the core values of librarianship (American Library Association, 2004), the fundamental concepts of access, intellectual freedom, and service are infused with a commitment to diversity. The enactment of these fundamental values is how the library maintains integrity to their additional values of democracy, education and lifelong learning, the public good, and social responsibility. Socially constructed around these values (Cole, 1998), patrons entering the public library space participate in a Discourse defined not by a specific discipline but by the values themselves (Gee, 2012). The resources accessed and activities offered in the public library do offer knowledge relevant to other Discourse Communities the patron may wish to enter. But even in the act of entering the public library and using its resources and services involves the participant in practices related to the values of access, intellectual freedom, and service. Additionally, librarians position patrons of all backgrounds as agents capable of enacting such values (Wortham, 2006). This is particularly important for teen patrons who are often positioned as lacking in ability or knowledge due to their age and stage of development. In most schools, adolescents are positioned as a body to control and a mind to shape and many communities hold teens at arms lengths due to their reputation for impulsivity. In the public library, youth are typically positioned as equal in status and as deserving of attention as a person of any other age.

It is within the library space that these ideals meet the reality of human behavior, sometimes creating tension between utility and value-driven choices (Dadlani, 2016). Throughout the research period, the Brewer Library space regularly embodied principles of access, intellectual freedom, and service within its diverse environment. Even in times of tension, staff and patrons actions favored public library values. Because of this, adolescents

valued the library as a space of learning. This chapter describes the various activities and attitudes of the library staff and patrons that contribute to its value.

**Access.** The building opens into a small lobby whose walls are plastered with 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper flyers announcing library events and local programs. Restrooms are to the right, and a small door ahead leads to a 300-square foot “program” or multipurpose room. On the left, double glass doors lead into the central library space. During the morning hours, adults quietly drop in to pick up books on hold or spend time on computers sorting out government forms and fiscal responsibilities.

Around 2:30pm on any weekday afternoon, teenagers pour in to fill the space and push the energy level to the ceiling. They come first from the high school across the street, then the middle school a block further along. They fill a row of 11 public access computers, huddle in groups at tables, lounge on the few stuffed chairs and couches, sit on diminutive chairs in the children’s area, and even squat on step stools at the end of book stacks. Under the gaze of library staff, the teens play video games, chat, study, and move between solitary activities and socializing, often with an eye on the only entrance to this primary area. They want to see who comes and who leaves.

Within a couple of hours, the frenetic pace slows. Teens leave to be replaced by families with elementary school children. Throughout the remainder of the evening, a mix of families and individuals keep the space bustling with activity. Families of five or six with children ranging from pre-school to high school often arrive together and separate to pursue different learning or entertainment needs. A small section of shelving dedicated to young adult fiction, teen-oriented graphic novels, and paperback copies of books deemed “classics” draws students following assignments from their teachers. With one comfortable chair and several posters promoting

reading or learning, this area, just left of the service desks, is what staff officially thinks of as “the teen area.” Yet teens make the entire Brewer Library theirs at all times, including waiting and chatting on the covered porch outside the building and regularly peering into the adjacent program room to see if something is happening there that they might join.

Sitting next to the high school and a block away from the middle school makes the Brewer Library an accessible after-school stop for the approximately 1600 teenagers in the vicinity. Both the high school and middle school are comprehensives that offer traditional as well as culturally relevant sports and clubs in the afternoons. But many teens make it to the library regularly for a variety of purposes. Youth learn about the library and its offerings through both their peers’ and family members’ invitations as well as the public library’s community outreach efforts. The librarians regularly visit not only the local schools, but community organizations and service centers, where they talk about available resources and activities, leaving printed information behind to advertise and remind.

When I asked a staff member to describe the activities of teens who visit this library, she laughed and said, “Teens live here!” going on to explain that many adolescents spend five hours a day in the space and some spend more time there weekly than at school. On weekday late afternoons, the library staff are often the only people over the age of 18 in the space. But teens also come with family members later in the day and on weekends. A typical teen will stroll in, doing a quick stop by the program room in the lobby to see if the teen services librarian is offering an activity today and, if so, who might be there and will there be food provided. Youth demonstrated awareness of the library’s affordances as well as a sense of expectation for resources and services. Teens in this community rely on consistent access to materials, activities, and people.

In the central library space, teens spend their time in multiple ways. Some browse books or other library materials. In fact, the librarians are cautious about removing books from the collection solely based on how often an item is checked out, going against a standard library practice. Library staff observed that many teens utilize library materials in house instead of taking them home, for a variety of reasons, such as not having a library card, owing fines from past due books, or not wanting to share with their siblings. Keeping these “low-circulation” materials on the library shelves maintains youth access to such items. Some teens do homework while at the library, occasionally on library computers, though most teen computer users seem to be playing games or watching videos to decompress immediately after the school day. Other teens wait for their turn with technology, or for a friend to appear, or for a family member to retrieve them. And many are there long enough that they do a mix of all these activities.

Library staff allow a level of noise and activity that permits teens to do homework together or just socialize as well. One manager explained to me that at Brewer, “We are not about shushing. We are a next-generation library, here to serve the whole community.” During my research in the library, I saw staff take stereotypical teen behaviors in stride. They confront teens when their action can be considered as disturbing other library patrons accessing the space, typically excessive noise or chasing a friend around the space. The staff have a clear set of steps that youth visitors quickly understand, a protocol called “Instruct, Warn, Ban.” The first intervention is considered an instruction, giving the youth the benefit of the doubt that they either did not know about a particular rule of the space, such as using headphones when playing audio on a device, or they forgot the rule momentarily in their excitement. For example, sometimes teen couples try to occupy the same seat, violating the one person per chair rule. If a staff member must remind the same young patron for any additional disruption during the same day, it

is considered a warning that the patron can be asked to leave. The third intervention results in the youth being asked to leave for the day. The majority of the time, the teens accept this decision with little protest. One day, I watched a manager tell two boys to go home for the day. When they began arguing back, in a whining tone, the manager laughed and responded, “Come on, you’ve been here for hours and you’ll be back tomorrow.” Both boys ruefully grinned and sauntered out to the lobby. They had confidence in their continued access to one of their favorite spaces.

From management on down, the belief holds that teens have just as much right to use the library as any other patron. Adult patrons are most likely to complain about the teenagers if their numbers impact the adult’s access to resources, such as trying to use a computer during the late-afternoon weekday rush. In response, staff acknowledge the frustration and offer solutions, such as teaching the adult how to reserve time for a computer, but they never disparage their faithful adolescent visitors. Library staff have few problems with the teens here, a fact they attribute to staff acceptance and relationships with patrons as well as a sense of being watched. This latter statement is actually less authoritarian and more community-orientated than it sounds. Within any library, staff maintain sight lines in the space for both safety and service, keeping aware of patron needs. In such a small library, adolescents know they can always be seen by the staff, and thus unacceptable behaviors are kept to a minimum. Teens also have a sense of being watched by their peers. As is the case in any space occupied by teens, they strive both to see and be seen while at the library. I observed teens using the library rules to good-naturedly keep each other in check. As I watched two teens race-walk around the study tables, a friend called out (quietly), “Dude, you know the library people already talked to you...” Being obnoxious in the Brewer Library will not go unnoticed by peers, and the news will spread, quite possibly back to your

family and community leaders. Most teens avoid this outcome not only because of the “hassle” but because their family could put a limit on the hours of public library access if the youth is viewed as not handling themselves appropriately.

Occasionally, a young patron will go too far or push the boundaries too often, such as a young man who started a fistfight in the library. Initially, library administration applied a one-year ban from the property. But his family and a community leader reached out to library staff, concerned about this boy losing total access to the library space from which they saw him benefit. The young man, his family, and staff met together to talk through what happened and understand events swirling about him in his current world. The result was a significantly shorter ban and deeper ties between community members and library staff. Ultimately, the goal of library staff is to maintain and even increase access to the library for all people. A manager summarized it this way, “We're library folk. We don't want to kick people out. We want to bring them in and help them.”

**Intellectual Freedom.** Even with the sense of being watched and the enforcement of rules, the teens I observed and spoke with during my research valued the public library space for the sense of freedom it offered them, particularly the freedom to pursue their own interests. As described above, teens can be seen pursuing a range of activities within the library space, both on their own or in concert with peers or family members. While library staff do not allow two patrons to share a single seat, two or three teens with chairs pulled up to the same computer is a common sight. It does not matter if the group is researching for a homework assignment or watching a music video; unlike other spaces such as school no hierarchy of purposes holds here, meaning one patron's use of a computer or book is never evaluated against another's. In the

library space, entertainment and educational interests have equal weight, just as one subject matter is not judged more important than another.

Teen patrons are aware of this freedom and use library space (both physical and virtual through the library's online offerings) to pursue intellectual interests not supported elsewhere. A high school freshman explained to me, "I like looking through the nonfiction sections of the libraries a lot, 'cause they have a lot of topics that are interesting I don't learn in school." Her older sister added, "I look on the library website to find other resources. Like, when I'm trying to polish up some Mandarin, because it's a dialect I don't know, there's a language learning app I found that I can access through the library." Many teens (and librarians) define the public library in contrast to school and other places they spend their time. A teen described the library to me as "a place where you can go to read things that you don't necessarily have to read because of school, that it's kind of interesting and fun to read. Things that you actually desire to look at." This comment points to another freedom teens value in their library space; the freedom to participate in their own way at their own pace. Unlike school, which rewards time on task as a signal of engagement, library patrons have the freedom to choose their own level of activity, including simply remaining still and thinking. Many teens praised this freedom. Even during activities designed for teens, the librarians encourage but do not require participation. Often a teen will join a program in the meeting room during a program, but remain silent on the side for at least a short while, getting their bearings or deciding whether to jump in. Such flexibility encourages connection in ways that meet the individual needs of each youth.

Although the library offers a range of devices for patrons to try, some teens also defined the library in contrast to technology, or at least in contrast to the mobile phones now ever present in the hands of the majority of teens. Asked how she describes the contemporary library to her

friends, a girl responded, “I say a magical land where you can actually learn and read with your eyes not on a visual screen. Where you look up from your phone.” These teens who scoffed at their peers as a “generation just about technology” were typically the same ones who proudly self-identified as “book nerds.” Many teens voiced a preference for paper books even if they occasionally use library ebooks for convenience, a stance that fits with recent publishing statistics and related research on youth reading trends (Rutherford et al., 2017). Teens in this group felt “different” from their peers and mentioned a freedom to be themselves within the library space.

It may be this freedom “to be yourself” that contributes to remarkable open sociability amongst the young people in the Brewer Library space. As an adult who rarely interacts with strangers beyond the casual smile and nod, I became curious early in my fieldwork about the seemingly spontaneous conversations occurring between teens, even across racial and religious divides. It happened often enough with different youth that I realized these interactions could not be attributed entirely to previous introductions occurring elsewhere. I followed up on this point with my adolescent informants, and they confirmed that starting a conversation with an unknown teen is an acceptable social practice here. In fact, interacting within the library and at library programs leveled the social playing field for some youth separated by age and skills within the school setting. Again, we see how identity and positioning function differently in the library space, opening unforeseen opportunities. While explaining how friendships can form here, one teen came to the surprising realization that library interactions formed the base of her social network:

*Teen: Like, you would just see them at the library, like talking to your friends, and someone just comes up and be like, "Hey, what's up?" And I'm like, "Hey." Just like start talking out of nowhere and starting a conversation. I don't know, it's just simple like that.*

*Researcher: Oh, okay. So you can start a friendship or whatever at the library?*

*Teen: Yeah, even though it's just a library. You know, you can start playing games and stuff. And be like, okay, so what's your phone number, what's your Facebook, what's your Snapchat? Let me hit you, let me snap you up. And then we'll just be like yeah, let's hang out. And it just, immediately link. (Pause) That's how actually most of my friendships are. They start from the library.*

For adolescents such as my informant above, the library is a highly social experience. Yet she and many other teens find the freedom to think and work without interference within the library space. I both witnessed and heard about teens who prized the library as a place to “just chill” before going home or to do homework without the close proximity of family members. But families also frequently use the library together or in tandem. One pattern of library use I enjoyed watching multiple times was that of families with four or more members present. They typically arrived in the evenings, when the after-school rush had ended and early dinners and clean-up were completed. The families usually consisted of one or two adults and at least three children ranging in age from elementary to high school. Walking into the library together, they would immediately disperse, each to their own purposes. Over the next hour, I would see members check in with each other, often sharing a resource discovered. It seemed to me in these times that the library had become an extension of the home, one that afforded each family member a place to feel both connected and yet apart. Even with all the bodies and activities that can be packed into the 5,250 square feet, individuals in the space can experience a sense of

personal quiet. This is made available by practices that promote access for all and prohibit disturbing another's library experience. Another freedom offered to youth in the library space is the freedom to try. This was often exemplified in the services and programs offered in the public library.

**Service.** It is important to acknowledge that, unlike a classroom teacher assigned to a specific grade level, a public librarian or staff member works with all ages of library patrons when at the service desk or at a community event.<sup>16</sup> Public library staff will occasionally say, "every librarian is a teen (or children's) services librarian" to drive home the point. The Brewer Library staff models this attitude well. Each staff member I observed interacting with teens during my research treated teens with as much energy and courtesy as they showed in serving patrons of any age. In 2017, the library staff consists of two full-time managers (one for services and one for operations), one library associate to handle brief patron reference questions, two public services assistants whose primary job is to assist patrons with using and borrowing library materials, three pages (shelving staff) for shelving materials, and three certified librarians. These last are each assigned responsibility for outreach, programs, and collection maintenance related to a particular age group.

**Services for Youth.** Two of the Brewer librarians' duties are focused on youth. The Children's Librarian, Fawn, spends 32 hours a week in the library and community serving children ages 0 to 12 and their families. The Teen Services Librarian, Elaine, does the same work in 24 hours for teens age 13 to 18 and a bit beyond.<sup>17</sup> Both are full-time employees, but because

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<sup>16</sup> The exception to this rule is in the largest public libraries that require the collection and staff to be divided into discreet physical locations for practicality.

<sup>17</sup> The exact age range under "teen services" shifted during the latter 20<sup>th</sup> Century and remains a source of debate in professional librarian circles. Who serves what age group in which library varies based on demographics, staffing, and personal preference.

of the “cluster” management model of Eastrose County Libraries, each must work at additional library branches. While the library administration uses a variety of measures to determine how many librarian hours are needed at each branch, neither Elaine nor Fawn feels the resultant assignments meet the ongoing needs of the Goldash community. Elaine feels this most keenly given the volume of teenagers regularly visiting the Brewer Library. Fawn takes up some of the slack by offering programs for “tweens” to target late elementary and early middle school students. Library staff consider these programs, typically held in the program room off the lobby, both an important service for teens and a way to free up space in the main section of the library for additional patrons.

Just as public schools tend to have inequalities based on their neighborhood, so do public libraries in terms of “programs,” the free activities offered in the library for different age groups. Library programs range widely in topic, including everything from artist performances to console gaming competitions to crafting activities. ECL provides a small programming budget for each librarian and funds some system-wide programs each year, though the amount provided varies from year to year based on the annual budget and organizational priorities at the time. The library administration also purchases and manages “kits” with supplies for tech-based programming like robotics that can be rotated between library branches. But ECL does not expect their budget and resources to cover all programming needs. Communities provide resources for themselves through a volunteer fundraising group, typically called the Friends of the Library. This results in the ironic inequalities similar to schools with more and less affluent Parent Teacher Associations. In well-resourced communities, the Friends of the Library can fund more, and often more experienced, presenters to visit the library, extra kits (there are never enough for the number of patrons interested in a given activity), and even supply refreshments

for every event. Yet the children and adolescents in these more affluent communities typically already have a wealth of activities and resources in their homes and other community locations. In communities like Goldash, there are fewer volunteers and fewer funds to raise despite a much greater need for frequent programs, regular snacks, and experiences in a range of subjects, especially for youth. During eighteen months that I spent at the Brewer Library, Elaine's budget for teen programming ranged between \$0 to \$500 dollars, depending on the year. ECL has tried to assist libraries like Brewer through small grants from a systemwide philanthropic foundation but these are awarded irregularly. Elaine and Fawn address the funding challenge with scrappy resolve and creative collaboration. Each keeps an eye out for successful activities done in other libraries at little or no-cost and work their local networks to find opportunities to piggyback on other organizations grants. Through their extra efforts, they provide two or more programs for youth ages 0 to 18 every week of the year. Youth and their families have come to expect and rely on the library's consistent provision of activities, especially in the afterschool hours.

*"Our" Librarian.* Teens at the Brewer Library know that they have their "own" librarian. While willing to talk to other staff members, many teens will hang back with a question and wait until they spot Elaine, a person they have seen around town. A member of the Brewer staff since 2013, she spends approximately half her work hours out in the community at schools and other organizations. She also commits personal hours to volunteering with the local teen bicycling club, although she herself lives in neighboring Fairbay. Starting in high school as a volunteer page (shelver), Elaine worked in libraries through her school years, culminating in a Masters of Library Science in 2006. She began work as a certified public librarian at ECL upon graduation. Elaine has made use of the professional development opportunities available through her employer and through the American Library Association's Young Adult Library Services

Association (YALSA). For several years, she served on award selection committees and task forces focused on improving services to teens through libraries. Now she focuses on attending conferences provided by other youth-serving organizations to broaden her understanding of how best to work with teens. Elaine seeks out such opportunities to improve her skills with the express goal of better serving the youth community.

A petite middle-aged white woman with dark brown hair cut in an edgy style, Elaine exudes a warm, calming, friendly demeanor with quiet energy as she walks through the library. She spots teens or other patrons she knows of any age and stops to chat with them. Indeed, she measures her impact by relationships. “I feel so much work that we do is relational,” Elaine told me, “and we really have to be good advocate for teens, because they are going to tell you things that they want or need, and you need to be able to figure out the way to do everything of that and follow up or we lose our credibility.” She aims to provide programs that met educational, recreational, and social needs for adolescents, presenting or hosting 5 to 6 programs a month (see Table 3 for the range of programs I observed during my field work).

Table 3

*Programs for Adolescent Patrons at the Brewer Library, April 2015 to October 2016*

<u>Program Title</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Teen Library Council	The council advises the librarian on library programs and volunteers to serve in the library and community (see following table for list of volunteer projects).	High school age volunteers	Monthly meeting during academic year; additional volunteer opportunities weekly
Teen Book Club	Teens describe to peers a book they have read including the plot (with no spoilers), why they read it, and what kind of reader would enjoy the book. Each participant receives a book galley to take home for every book reviewed.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	Monthly during academic year
Knitting Circle	An experienced adult volunteer brings supplies and guides	Open to all ages (though primarily	Weekly during the academic year

	interested attendees in working on knitting projects while engaged in conversation.	attended by middle and high school students)	
Game On! And/or Board Games	Youth are invited to play cooperatively with peers on library supplied gaming systems and/or with board games.	Open to late elementary through high school aged youth	Monthly during the academic year
Stuff I Love	Teens describe to peers a media source (book, movie, YouTube channel, app, etc) including why they read/watched/played it and who else would enjoy it. Each participant receives a book galley or other prize to take home for every item discussed.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	Weekly during the summer
Banned Books Week	Teens participate in games and craft projects directly related to discussing why books are challenged in U.S. libraries.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	Yearly event
Valentine's Program	Teens learn about books that feature relationships and compose poetry.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	Yearly event
Teen Tech Week	Teens experiment with "makey makey" components to create a computer controller from everyday objects.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	Yearly event
Girl Rising Film Showing and Discussion	Participants view a brief documentary about obstacles for girls receiving education worldwide and engage in discussion of the film.	Open to all ages	One-time
Paper Towns Party	Teens participate in trivia and arts and crafts related to an upcoming film based on a popular young adult novel.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	One-time
Minecraft Camp	Teens learn to build objects within the online world of Minecraft and, in a follow up session, learn to apply mods (modifications) in the software.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	Twice
Teen Coding Camp	Teens learn basic coding strategies through Scratch and create their own games.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	One-time
Author Visit	Local author discusses the writing process with teens.	Open to middle and high school aged youth	One-time (although other authors brought directly to the middle and/or high school for presentation)
Learn to Draw	Local artist demonstrates techniques for creating characters to put in comics or graphic novels	Open to late elementary through high school aged youth	One-time

\*Note: a few additional teen programs were offered during the study period, but the researcher was not present; researcher sampled the weekly and monthly events, with the exception of the Teen Library Council, Teen Book Club, and Stuff I Love, in which she attended nearly all instances during the research study period

Elaine gets her ideas for programs directly from the teens as well as from other librarians via professional email list serves and Facebook groups. She also follows some of the YALSA annual events, such as Teen Read Week in the fall and Teen Tech Week in the spring. Always, Elaine weighs program ideas against the needs, interests, and actual habits of local teens. For example, Elaine modified the traditional book club model after coming to Brewer and realizing that different kids pop into the program each month. “I realized that if you don’t have that continuity, having everybody read the same book is kind a recipe for a disaster,” she said. “We just started doing it as a genre based book club at the library, and eventually that morphed into just come in and book talk to us. So it’s kind of actually pretty simple. I encourage them to give a short plot synopsis and then say what you like about it, review the book and recommend it and why. I give away my advanced reader copies [of new teen books] when they finish book talking.”

It is significant to understand that these program and services are driven almost entirely by the needs and interests of the community. There is no curricular goals or content theme in the public library because its mission covers all experience and knowledge areas: “to provide free, open, and equal access to ideas and information.”<sup>18</sup> ECL administration and librarians do take note of broader societal education concerns, such as the push for increased early literacy and experiences in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). But library implementation of these trends is always examined through the lens of local community needs. Additionally, as discussed previously in relation to intellectual freedom, youth choose their level of participation in activities. While teens who take up more activities benefit from more

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<sup>18</sup> These words are taken from the Eastrose County Libraries official mission statement.

experience, there continues to be a positive effect for all teens. In this community, adolescents know there is a safe, free place where they can learn from and with others, including an adult who views them positively and wants to serve their individual interests and needs.

### **Sustained by Diversity**

Access, intellectual freedom, and service are empowered by diversity: diversity of ideas, materials, activities, and people. In the Brewer Library, the great diversity of the surrounding community contributes to a rich library experience for all. Similar to a lack of culture clash in the larger community, a general equanimity prevails between staff and patrons despite cultural and linguistic differences. In 2017, nine of the eleven staff members, are white and, like the majority of libraries, most staff are female with English as their primary language. Yet the library collection housed at Brewer includes materials of various formats in several popular local languages, and library signage is often written in one or more secondary languages. Library patrons, including teenagers, codeswitch comfortably between English and native languages everywhere in the library space. Whenever a language barrier arises between staff and patron, the staff use any resources available, including the patron's friends, to translate and ensure that the patron's needs are met. Instead of creating confusion, the many layers of diversity within the Brewer Library space strengthens their support of learning for adolescents and all patrons. These practices create reciprocity between the library space and the community. Unlike some settings, entering the public library does not require significant changes to a person's Discourses, language or otherwise. Instead, the library offers resources that reflect those Discourses and invite the patrons to utilize them. Patrons are also invited to explore additional Discourses that reflect the diverse community and world they live in. The public library connects to community members and connects community members to each other.

## Chapter 6: More than Books: Learning Resources in the Library

In this chapter, I explore how the public librarian's actions spark and sustain adolescent learning. Just as space is definitional to a public library, so are the resources they provide in the form of materials and services (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015). The successful embodiment of values within the library space (American Library Association, 2004) hinges on the availability of a diversity of resources. The youth who use the Brewer Library encounter a wide range of people, materials, and activities circulating within the space. But access to such resources is not enough. A key component to learning within the public library is the librarian's ability to forge relationships between and across people and ideas through sustained dialogue. The library's greatest resource is the librarian. Librarians provide the scaffolding to contextualize the heteroglossic experiences of an adolescent's world (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). Consider the following description of an optional activity possible within the library space, especially the nature of the conversation it creates:

On a Friday afternoon in the summer, Elaine rushes into her library building and quickly puts away the resources she used for her outreach visit at a local community center. As we move to the library conference room, two young teen boys are at her heels. "Are we going to have popcorn today?" asks Aziz. "No, but we have cracker sandwiches and Starburst," the Teen Services Librarian responds, "We are doing a party for the new *Paper Towns* movie based on the book. Have you read it?" Neither boy has, but Elaine assures them that's alright and invites them in as we set up chairs and tables. Another young teen boy joins us, followed by a regular older teen patron, Yusef. Although Aziz was hoping for a movie and popcorn event, he and the other boys contentedly construct the map art project

Elaine has planned and readily give answers to the trivia questions she tosses out for a chance at candy.

Conversation flows smoothly across topics such as paper maps (and their uses before smart phones), effective Google image searches, summer activities, geographical features around the world, and the animals Yusef saw in the refugee camp before coming to the U.S. Woven within the dialogue are questions that prompt deliberation and references to a variety of resources for further exploration, such as websites to visit, books to check out, and local activities to try. At the end of an hour, Elaine announces the end of the program and the boys, a bit disappointedly, clean up the materials, each deciding to leave their finished art with her. After they've gone, Elaine's previously friendly and relaxed demeanor is bemused when she turns to me and says, "Well, that was wasn't what I expected." She's referring to the activity's target audience: the author John Green's immense, and largely female, readership<sup>19</sup>, members of which she concludes are likely to be employed or in summer school.

While Elaine had been surprised by the attendees in this situation, she was still pleased by the event and the opportunity to spend time with these boys. The hour had been exactly what I have come to expect from her and the thousands of librarians like her across the United States. It was an hour of conversations and connections across times and spaces between curious youth and a supportive adult. At a glance, these few moments may seem insignificant, but it is the

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<sup>19</sup> John Green is the author of several popular young adult novels, including *Looking for Alaska* and *The Fault in Our Stars*. Although his novels are mostly written from the perspective of a teenage boy, his popularity is driven by young women. He and his brother Hank are also popular YouTube celebrities for their Vlog Brothers series.

accumulation of thousands of such moments that craft a young person's developmental skills with conversation, moving across topics with a knowledgeable and caring adult.

### **Connections with Context**

Many libraries and library science schools use the word “connection” to describe the function of libraries and librarians quickly recognized their work within the theoretical and practical framework of Connected Learning (Ito et al., 2013). Yet connection alone cannot fully capture the multiple and overlapping ways in which librarians connect the young to one another, to resources, to conversation and its norms, and to on-going curiosities. Youth services librarians understand that simply giving a teenager the name of a book or website is unlikely to scaffold that patron into an effective lifelong learner or democratic citizen. Through their relationships with young people and knowledge of a wide range of resources, librarians provide *connections with context* through specific kinds of talk. It is this skill that turns the act of providing information into a sustaining support for continued learning. Librarians achieve this through the art of questioning embedded in discourse.

### **“Tell Me More...”**

Librarians serve their community by making accessible the dizzying array of information available to any individual. Asking questions is the go-to-tool in a librarian’s toolkit of service. Future librarians and new library staff train for the quintessential library service, the “reference interview,” a term for assisting patrons beyond giving simple directions (Bopp, Smith, & Bopp, 2011). Skilled library staff do not respond to the seemingly simple questions of “Where are the books on poetry?” or “How do I access your databases?” with only directional gestures<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> While this certainly does happen on occasion, such an action is viewed as unprofessional and not most helpful for a patron. Every library worker has stories of bungled interactions caused by mishearing a request, jumping to conclusions, and/or failing to ask follow up questions.

Effectively responding to a patron's inquiry involves probing with a series of open-ended questions to ascertain the need or interest that prompted the initial request. Librarians want to ensure they understand the request before offering possible resources. With the intention of confirming that the patron's query was resolved, library staff will typically follow-up at a later time, asking questions such as, "Were you able to find what you need?" or "Did you enjoy that book?" These questions are not meant to invade the patron's privacy and, in fact, librarians consider any information obtained in these interactions as confidential. But, in the name of continued good service, they usually remember these experiences and use them to forge trust relationships with community members.

Linguists who study the conversational lifeways of teenagers noted that with the coming of technologies of rapid and brief communication, in-depth conversations for many teenagers came to a halt (Heath, 2012c). Those families that include a child with special needs, an ailing elder, or one or both parents who work two jobs and travel long distances for their work have little time for sustained conversations. Direction-giving, instrumental questions, and simple requests constitute much of the talk within such homes. Even in middle-income families, times for conversation have fallen away with the volume and variety of technologies and means of individual entertainment in other spaces of the household beyond the kitchen or family room.<sup>21</sup> For teens from such homes, Elaine matters in their lives. When they have curiosity about topics, special interests or needs, and seek the after-school company of peers and supportive adults, the types of conversational openers that Elaine offers, as well as her genuine interest in what teens think, want, and do, opens the teens to back-and-forth talking and topic continuation. Such times often lead Elaine and other librarians to walk casually to a book shelf and pull out just the right

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<sup>21</sup> For more on the changes in family conversation patterns, see *Words at Work and Play* (Heath, 2012c).

book or DVD or magazine. Thus the conversation continues in another mode. The dialogue extends even further when Elaine and the youth next meet and she asks follow up questions to elicit their thoughts. Teen answer willingly because they know this is not a test or a trick question, as possible with other adults. Elaine has positioned the youth as individuals with valuable ideas worthy of her attention.

### **Deliberative Discourse**

The librarian's use of questions plus references to resources form the underpinnings of deliberative discourse in the library space. Deliberative talk, theorized by linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath (Heath, 2012b, 2012c), supports the work occurring in many collaborative situations, such as science laboratories, family projects, and youth-focused environments. This talk brings participants into joint attention and creates a group cohesion. Three types of language, *relational*, *referential*, and *extensional*, operate together in group discourse to move members "toward making the work of the future possible" (Heath, 2012b, p. 259). Practice in deliberative discourse prepares youth for participation in higher level academics (Hyland, 2009; Morita, 2009; White & Lowenthal, 2011) and democratic processes (Dryzek, 2000; Mutz, 2006; Thompson & Gutmann, 2004). Throughout my research, I witnessed the librarians and patrons engage in deliberative talk during both one-to-one interactions such as reference interviews and during library sponsored programs. Note that although the examples may be listed under one type of language, there is often overlap in the purposes of utterances. Table 4 defines deliberative talk and offers examples observed across a variety of library activities.

Table 4

#### *Deliberative Talk Types*

<u>Language Type</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Example from Data</u>
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Relational	Recall and clarification of shared information, acknowledgement of members' participation	Establishes sense of shared identity and responsibility	<i>We have these five VR sets because Faith and Hirah made a video about our pinwheel challenge and won!</i>
Referential	Citation of verifiable and retrievable resources	Establishes shared platform of information	<i>Have you heard of Students Rebuild? Let me show you their website. We did the literacy challenge last year, but this year...</i>
Extensional	Calls attention to the future through variables with possible outcomes, imperatives, hypotheticals, and compare and contrast analysis	Extends current deliberation toward achievements to come	<i>So what I'd love is someone to write a letter to the editor... It's not open to just one person... I think this is a valuable life skill...a way for people to talk about the issues they care about.</i>

**Relational Language.** Relational language “brings members of the group together and relies on joint oral recall of information known to everyone” (Heath, 2012c, p. 144). In conversations with young people and their families, Elaine often calls up previous shared information or experiences to sustain relationships:

*Elaine (to a girl who has entered the program space): Oh hey! Last time I saw you, you were working on applying for financial aid. How's that going?*

*Elaine (to a boy sitting in a Teen Book Club meeting): Were you there the last time I did book talks at the middle school? Do you remember that book I talked about with all the phobias?*

In these two examples, both taken from individual conversations, Elaine refers to a previous interaction, one on the personal level and the other at the group level. Such references remind the young person of the ongoing connections they have with Elaine, thus encouraging them to maintain the connection in the future. Recalling incidents from the past also provides evidence that Elaine has heard and remembers something that the teen experienced, adding to the level of trust between adult and child.

Elaine also uses multiple forms of relational language in group situations, often for distinct purposes:

*Elaine (calling attention to the start of a Teen Library Council meeting): Hi guys, we'll start with kudos. Kudos to Fawzia, Hirah, and Hani for helping in the Teen Tech Week program with makey-makey kits. How was it?*

In the beginning of Teen Library Council meetings, Elaine, or one of the TLC officers covering the agenda, will praise and thank the teens who volunteered at a previous activity. This language, an example of a *vocative call-up*, encourages the volunteers and rewards their efforts. It also informs members about activities accomplished by their group, giving them both a stronger sense of group identity and ideas for possible future experiences for which they can volunteer. Elaine also uses vocative call-ups to track events and bring them forward in the teens' minds (e.g. "Let's talk about the 10<sup>th</sup>, about the types of things we want to do").

Elaine also uses the *attributional call-in*, asking another member to confirm and expand on a topic to which the group is now bringing their joint attention:

*Elaine (to a girl at the Teen Library Council meeting): Hey Brigid, we have some new members here. Do you want to talk about the Read-a-Thon from two years ago, since you participated?*

*Elaine (calling over to a boy at the coding camp program): Kunwar, do you know how to help Anshul out with this timing problem (in his coding)? (Boy nods) Great, you're a lifesaver!*

In the first example, from another TLC meeting, Elaine is purposely turning the floor over to a member in an effort to build youth ownership of the TLC. She often uses this technique with the second of the three TLC groups I saw her working with. Perhaps the quiet demeanor of this group led to her use of this technique. The second example comes from a computer coding

program Elaine ran with the assistance of two teen volunteers. In most making or skill-based programs (e.g. coding, knitting, etc), Elaine positioned herself as co-learner, announcing early on that she was “not an expert” and that she felt she was “learning with” the teens. She kept a keen eye on the progress of the participants and often used attributional call-ins to encourage youth in sharing successes and teaching each other. This move typically opened up the space so that by the end of a program the youth spontaneously coached each other, thus engaging in the relational talk themselves.

Elaine also models for the young people how her own thinking works. She will then call on a young person, directly or indirectly, to confirm, contradict, or expand her description of making a choice or taking steps to complete an action:

*Elaine (to boy trying to fix a game modification): Well, huh, how do I describe it? Lilly, can you help me describe this? (Lilly comes to stand beside her) It's like if your mom tells you and your brother to go to the store for milk, then you tell your brother to go to the milk aisle, then your brother tells his hand to open the door to the milk area. (turns to Lilly) Does that make sense?*

*Lilly: Yes, but actually...(Lilly corrects Elaine by making changes to the analogy)*

This example of requesting contributions from others in response to her dialogue represents the *accountability call-in*. Elaine also uses accountability call-ins to solicit feedback from the group (e.g. “What do people think would be good stuff to do with the middle schoolers?”) as well as to connect teens with each other. For example, in the popular monthly Teen Book Club meeting, she requested that each teen participant give a summary of a book they have read and offer their opinion. After the teen speaks, she probes further with such questions as “What did you think of the book?” or “What did you like about it?” Often she would follow up the teen’s response by

asking to the group, “Anyone else read [this book]? What did you think?” If she knew another teen present had also read the book, Elaine used an attributional call-in to get their opinion (e.g. “Hirah, I remember you were reading this book last year. What do you think?”) If a book being discussed has been made into a movie or series, she almost always used the accountability call-in to find out who had in the room had seen it, what they all thought of the filmed version, and which format of the story each participant found more enjoyable. These call-ins increased youth voices during Teen Book Club and other programs as well contributed to relationship building between teens and with Elaine.

**Referential Language.** Librarians, by training and professional habit, consistently make reference to verifiable retrievable sources whenever they see a connection within a conversation<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, every type of encounter between librarian and adolescents offers examples of *referential language*, which establishes “an information platform from which the work under way can move forward.” (Heath, 2012c, p. 147) Elaine’s references serve variety of purposes. For example, when a teen expresses an opinion about a resource, Elaine provides a suggestion for another text to try:

*Elaine (looking up from a quick search on her smart phone when a girl said she likes Rapunzel.): I want to recommend something to you that you might like. It’s a comic called Princeless (Elaine shows the picture of the cover of the book on her phone.) So it’s different from Cinderella and Rapunzel, which it’s based on....*

Similarly, Elaine builds upon the youth’s expressed interests to connect them with community outside the library:

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<sup>22</sup> This makes librarians your best or your worst party guests, depending on your personal preference. It also explains the analogy of the internet as “a drunk librarian who won’t shut up” (Gambrell, 2002).

*Elaine (addressing the Teen Library Council): Do you guys know about [local service organization]? I will give you volunteer credit if you go to their next meeting since you guys are interested in homelessness in Goldash. Their meeting will help us by providing background.*

She also uses referential talk to invite patrons to library events, thus offering a personalized motivation for participation:

*Elaine (addressing youth gathered for free food distribution): Aashrit reminded me of a couple programs happening in the library....One is tonight and it's called "The Science of Soccer." Who likes soccer? Who likes to play it? Who likes to watch it? Tonight there's a teenager who's gonna come and talk about how science helps them play better and he's going to do an experiment.*

Not only did Elaine speak referentially, but she expended great energy engaging youth in referential language. Two series of programs I observed during my fieldwork were designed specifically to elicit resource recommendations from young patrons. During the school year, Elaine hosted a monthly Teen Book Club during which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, each teen participant is encouraged to talk about a book they have read. After everyone present has had a turn sharing, participants can share information about another title. Surprisingly, teens almost always seek more turns to speak, even if they have no interest in taking another prize (an advanced reading copy of a teen book). Even less active readers will strain their memory to talk about another book. Elaine never reacts negatively to any book brought up, even if it was obviously from the distant past. She continues the same dialogue with every reader, positioning each contribution as useful recommendations for herself and the other youth. As a result of their positive experiences, several teens asked if Elaine would add a second monthly book club meeting, but her busy schedule would not allow it.

The other program focused on youth recommendations involved a summer experiment. The Brewer Library had, after much negotiation between various organizations, arranged to be a distribution site of free meals for children aged 18 years old and under. The agreement included Monday through Friday afternoon distribution times and youth were required to remain on the library premises and eat the meal. To both accommodate this innovation and try to attract participants, Elaine and her fellow staff took turns running a program during the meal time. Elaine established a weekly “Stuff I Love (represented by an emoji with hearts for eyes)” activity. Like the book club, young participants summarized and gave opinions, but the “stuff” could be any media format. Due to the timing of the program (when many adolescents were working), the majority of participants were children rather than teens. This age difference resulted in the items shared becoming even broader, since the youngest children usually associated questions about their preferences with food or activities. Regardless, Elaine gamely maintained a deliberative dialogue with children and, often, their parents as well. Over nine weeks, young people discussed 158 “things” they love, including 43 references to books.

Across her interactions with teens, Elaine regularly asked about various resources they mentioned, including how they found out about this or that particular resource:

*Keisha: I read something, not as a book but an ebook*

*Elaine: That’s okay. Tell us about it.*

*(Keisha describes and Elaine asks follow up questions about the plot and her opinion.)*

*Elaine: How did you read it?*

*Keisha: On my Chromebook.*

*Elaine: How did you find the book?*

*Keisha: Just typed in “No More Drama” cause I’d heard it was good.*

She often followed this type of interaction up with grateful expressions such as, “Thanks for telling me about that” or “Great! I will look for that one.” Her gratitude was sincere because Elaine, like many Teen Services Librarians, relies on input from their teen patrons to keep abreast of trends in books and other media. While she has multiple ways in which to keep track of publishing and popular culture, recommendations from local teens carry special weight as these help Elaine recognize community interests and gives her data for planning relevant future activities. In this way, adolescents and librarians enjoy a reciprocal relationship. Through her professional connections, Elaine knows many authors, particularly the ones who live nearby, and can share information about coming releases with eager teen readers. In turn, the teens share their recommendations and help Elaine stay relevant instead of becoming “too out of it.” The reciprocity also contributes to the relational bonds between the librarian and her young patrons.

A favorite moment in the field occurred following a book club meeting. Three middle school girls chatted merrily about an upcoming school dance as they helped Elaine put away tables and chairs. Elaine furthered the conversation by asking questions about the most popular music of the moment and dance moves. “Oh my gosh, here, I’ll show you!” exclaimed one girl. A smart phone was used to find a music video and soon the five of us (researcher included) were trying out the various hip hop dance moves called out in the song. While Elaine may not have mastered the moves at the end, she did display a willingness to learn from the teens. Such willingness reinforces the youths’ position as knowledgeable contributors to the library community. This episode was certainly one for them to remember and to report to friends and their family members.

An additional way Elaine used referential language, often in combination with relational language, was checking for understanding and providing context for vocabulary unfamiliar to her young patrons:

*Elaine (training a new teen volunteer): The addition to the library is going to be called the Community Mosaic. (Pauses) Do you know what a mosaic is?*

Elaine also does this as needed during her own speaking and as an insertion into the comments of other speakers, usually the teens but also adult guests:

*Elaine (to a guest speaker): You mentioned working with the Global Nomads program. Could you explain that for us?*

Many adults speaking to children, especially in instructional settings, use an accountability call in to check for group understanding. What caught my attention in Elaine's case was how frequently she paired such call-ins with referential language. Instead of simply checking for understanding and giving an explanation or definition, Elaine often went a step further by mentioning a related resource that the adolescent listening can turn to for more information. Again, librarians habitually enrich even the seemingly simplest conversations with verifiable retrievable sources.

**Extensional Language.** Relational and referential talk makes possible the third kind of language needed in collaborative work. Extensional language “intentionally calls attention to the future...and extends current deliberation” (Heath, 2012c, p. 147). A good portion of the talk in Teen Library Council meetings involves extensional language:

*Elaine (wondering aloud in a Teen Library Council meeting): What if we combine the [housing stability] survey with another activity, like get an author in the library?*

*Elaine (requesting assistance during a Teen Library Council meeting): Are there people who'd be comfortable talking in front of adults about what our group accomplished? I need at least four volunteers.*

These two examples demonstrate the two main roles of such councils in public libraries (Gallo, 2010). Most commonly, these groups serve an advisory capacity, becoming the youth services “tastemakers” by offering their opinions on activities appealing to local teens. Additionally, many public libraries use the teen library council as a service corps, engaging the teens in volunteer experiences within the library and, on behalf of the library, within the wider community. Elaine’s TLC members indeed fulfilled both of these roles and further description of their work is documented in the following chapter. In addition to these roles, Elaine personally committed herself to bringing potential career and college pathways to the attention of her teen library council members. This is reflected in the amount of dialogue in TLC meetings over the course of the study period around different career and college options. Within that dialogue is extensional talk that asks the teens to imagine themselves in the future, such as in these two examples:

*Elaine (commenting on a guest’s career): If you like art, you can design cover art for books. It is a job that you can have.*

*Elaine (commenting on a guest’s description of her employer): So, with this program, you can qualify for a college loan payback. Something to think about in the future.*

Maker and skill-based programs, such as computer coding, also involved extensional talk. These dialogues contributed to an environment of experimentation as teens tried out new activities:

*Elaine (to the group during coding camp): Take a few minutes for exploring. Make the Scratch cat (in the game) do something. Anything surprising.*

When Elaine uses extensional language in these programs, it supported her position as a co-learner and opened the possibility that a teen with more experience could offer the adult assistance, thus positioning youth as capable co-teachers:

*(Elaine and Dakota are watching as Akif plays Minecraft (video game) for the first time.)*

*Elaine: First thing you want to do is find wood for torches, so look for wood. Oh look, there's stuff over there.*

*Akif: Is that a building?*

*Dakota: It's a village*

*(Akif's character in the game starts whacking at a building with its hands.)*

*Elaine: I wonder. Can you break that piece without any tools?*

*Dakota: You can, but it would take awhile.*

*Elaine: Is that why something's making that strange noise?*

*Dakota: That's from a villager (computer controlled character).*

*Elaine: Ah, I didn't see. Thanks. (To Akif) Now you don't have to build a building but you might want trees to make torches.*

Teen Book Club meetings contained a surprising amount of extensional talk. To guide participants in their book summaries, Elaine would offer this hypothetical at the beginning of each session:

*When you talk about your book, tell us what you think would make a friend want to read it. But no spoilers! It's just like when you want your friend to see a certain movie. You don't tell them the ending, right?*

After the teen describes a book, Elaine asks questions that will push the participant's thinking and bring out more information for peer listeners, including:

*What did you like most about this book?*

*What type of book is it?*

*Who would you recommend this book to? What kind of reader?*

These questions, coupled with Elaine's use of accountability call-ins described above, engaged the teens in analysis tasks, giving them opportunities to practice on-their-feet compare and contrast skills in a supportive environment.

### **Scaffolding Today's Heteroglossic Landscape**

Conversing well is not merely a social grace. Experiences with deliberative discourse support a learner's ability to make meaning while reading. Practice with relational, referential, and extensional language teaches a youth how to blend information across sources and identify cross-connecting ideas. The amount of information we encounter continues to expand, exposing us to more ideas than our ancestors would have imagined. Because of this abundance, young people today often express confidence that they can access the information they will need. Case in point: in follow up interviews with my teen participants, I asked each to tell me what they do when they want to learn about something. Despite asking this question *after* talking about their memories and experiences with books and libraries, every respondent said they first search online to learn about something new<sup>23</sup>. But such searches often end with the searcher holding disparate pieces of information. The ability to bring together discreet ideas and make meaningful conclusions must be taught through example and learned through practice. The deliberative

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<sup>23</sup> Each teen responded with either "I use Google" or "I google it." Specifying the Google brand could be due to their local school's reliance on Google Classroom as a learning management system. Or the site's continued popularity.

discourse these teens regularly encountered at the Brewer Library will enable them to make connections and create pathways through information as well as move them forward toward future action. Such experiences will benefit youth in education, employment, and community participation. Here, the librarian uses her training and experience to scaffold her young patrons' moves towards agency as lifelong learners and socially responsible democratic citizens who support the public good.

It is significant to realize that these enriched learning experiences are openly and freely available to all youth. The only requirement of entry to participate in almost any library program is a willingness to show up. Even membership in the Teen Library Council is open to anyone of high school age committed to volunteering. In the library, there is no segregation of young people by grade and never by their ability. The teen services librarian does not give teens a test to see how well they will participate in the dialogues. In fact, in this particular library, many English Language Learners regularly attended these activities and every effort is made to encourage full participation, including codeswitching between English and home languages. This coexistence of diversity contributes to impactful learning in the public library as youth engage in deliberative discourse. The benefit of such diversity increases with the librarian's skillful connecting of youth and resources in relationships.

## **Chapter 7: All Kinds of Readers are Leaders: Adolescent Learners in the Library**

In this chapter, I focus on adolescent participation in Brewer Library activities as a catalyst to personal growth and shifts in identity. While all youth who enter a public library receive the benefits of access, intellectual freedom, and service, teens that regularly engage in the deliberative discourse available demonstrate related changes over time. The examples of six teen library council members reveal different pathways towards the valued outcomes of the public good, lifelong learning, and social responsibility, all of which contribute to a strong democracy. The following vignette brings together ideas discussed in the last two chapters and points towards the findings described in this chapter.

Walking into the library program room one February afternoon, I spy extra chairs placed around a larger cluster of tables than I expected for the Teen Library Council's monthly meeting. Elaine greets me, explaining that, "Today's a big day." Her press release about the TLC's goal of making 2000 pinwheels for the Student Rebuild challenge<sup>24</sup> has garnered the attention of a local television news station and local news website, both of whom are sending reporters. In addition, representatives from the local offices of Students Rebuild and of the International Rescue Committee plan to come share how the money raised by their pinwheels will be put to work for Syrian refugees as well as what more the teens can do for the refugees. As the TLC members enter, they express excitement about the visitors and a bit of nervousness about the reporters. Elaine asks the students to

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<sup>24</sup> Students Rebuild is a program partnered with the Bezos Foundation. They issue challenges to students such as creating bookmarks or pinwheels to raise money for other students in need. For each item made the Bezos Foundation donates money to an international effort, such as literacy boost programs in Asia and Africa or establishing "healing classrooms" for war refugees.

spread all their pinwheels out on the table while counting them. They currently have 1210 made with two months left to the goal. “Anyone want to practice answering questions?” Elaine offers. In response, the teens murmur and shuffle their feet, until one girl asks, “Is Hirah coming?” Everyone laughs, spotting the humor because they all know that Hirah, the most outspoken council member, will likely jump in first when the reporters ask questions. Elaine smiles and responds, “But if she’s not here...” With the joke, the tension has broken, thus helping the teens respond to Elaine’s practice questions and look forward to sharing their achievement.

This chapter explores how the public library sparks and sustains adolescent learning by positioning youth as whole persons capable of taking up dynamic roles in their lives and in their communities. In the previous chapters, I examined the concepts of space and resources as part of the definition of a public library. Now I turn to what many consider the most important element of public libraries, the staff and services, which I conceptualize as “people.” Two librarians cautioned me to make “people” the first concept presented in this work. They argued while space and resources in the form of media are important, a public library’s community impact depends on the staff who serve and the public who visit. But just as relational and referential language makes possible the work of extensional language in deliberative discourse (Heath, 2012b), so too the affordances of space and resources make possible a set of personal interactions that shape a learner’s identity. The values embodied in the space and the dialogues around resources in the public library contribute to people’s continued patronage of the Brewer Library. The last chapter focused on a person, the teen librarian, for the purpose of demonstrating how she functions both as a resource to youth and an enrichment of library resources through her context-laden

connections. Now the focus turns towards the people served by the librarian, the teens themselves.

### **The Tender Loving Care of a Teen Library Council**

In our pre-fieldwork interview, Elaine explained that she titled her program for teen volunteers a TLC (Teen Library Council), versus a TAB (Teen Advisory Board) or a TAG (Teen Advisory Group), because she liked that the acronym can also mean Tender Loving Care, something every teen needs. While teen public library groups can vary widely in their functions, she commits to developing youth leadership, not merely polling for opinions in trade for snacks. Membership in this TLC requires service hours and exposes teens to potential career pathways, making it a more active and purposeful group than others. Elaine schedules a variety of guest speakers for the council's monthly meetings. These speakers include library staff with unique responsibilities, such as the buyer of teen materials or the interior designer for the new library, as well as employees of local government and community service organizations that work in areas of interest to the teens (homeless shelters, refugee resettlement, etc.). Elaine requires that each visitor not just describe their current employment, but also outline the education and experiences that led to its attainment. Each TLC member must be in high school and commit to attend at least 5 monthly TLC meetings plus volunteer in the library for 20 hours during the school year (see Table 5 for the volunteer activities that counted towards service hours during my fieldwork). Elaine notes that training and supervising up to 24 teen volunteers is not the timesaver that some librarians assume it will be, but she relishes offering youth opportunities to develop their skills as well as becoming better acquainted with each teen and their families. When TLC members apply to college, they first approach Elaine for a letter of reference. Many middle school students impatiently wait their turn to participate in the Teen Library Council.

Table 5

*Teen Library Council Projects, April 2015 to January 2017*

<b><u>Project Title</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Time Commitment</u></b>
Book Buddies	Teens listen and provide feedback as younger children or any English language learner reads aloud	One hour training, two hours a week per person throughout the school year
Read-a-thon Fundraising	Teens ask community members to donate money or sponsor their reading per hour in order to raise funds for a section of the new public library	One hour training, variable hours requesting and retrieving donations, variable hours reading at the library
One Book Discussions	Teens lead discussions at the annual “One Book, One Community” programs for adults and teens	One hour training, two hours leading book discussion sessions
Teen Area Feedback	Teens provide feedback on potential furniture for the teen section of the new public library	One hour looking at furniture and sharing opinions
Children’s Programs	Teens assist with set up, clean up, and children’s needs during events planned by the children’s librarian	Two hours per person, most months
Students Rebuild Projects	Council members lead other youth in creating bookmarks and then pinwheels for the international Students Rebuild organization, each item made resulted in a monetary donation to children in need and the items are either given to the children or become part of an art piece	Approximately 400 hours as a group
Count Us In Survey	Teens hand out and explain surveys to library patrons during the national homeless count event	One hour training, three hours surveying patrons
Tech Programs	Teens work with software and/or hardware, then serve as peer mentors during technology focused programs for youth, also helping to set up and clean up	One hour preparation per program, three hours setting up, assisting peer learners, and cleaning up per program
Picture Book Analysis	Teens critically analyze children’s picture books that reflect components of the reader’s identity	Two hour training, five to ten hours individually reviewing books, four hours discussing results

**Six Girls, Three Case Studies**

The timing of my 18 months of participant observations at Brewer allowed me to witness three different configurations of the TLC with approximately 50 unique participants. The group disbands at the end of each school year and reforms each September, choosing new officers each time. The self-identified gender balance shifted each year, moving from approximately 80% female to about 60% in the last group observed. The overwhelming majority of council members were the children of immigrants, a few were immigrants themselves, and most were bilingual or trilingual, with skills ranging from basic spoken understanding of their heritage language or

moderate English knowledge to high competency in two or more languages. Code-switching between English and another language in conversations between friends was a frequent and accepted practice. Most of the teens self-identified as of Asian or African ancestry, either in the recent or distant past, and about a quarter of the participants were practicing Muslims. In all three groups, the immigrant families maintained a strong tie to their home culture, but the children felt equally tied to their identity as typical American teens, as evidenced by statements from both conversations and interviews. For example, when a visitor to a TLC meeting expressed admiration for the group's efforts on behalf of refugees "considering your own backgrounds," she was met with blank stares. Elaine smoothed it over by asking the teens, "A lot of your parents immigrated here, right?" They responded with much nodding and many voices saying, "oh yeah." I suspect the youths' strongest identities did not match with their understanding of the word "refugee" as displayed in the media, contrary to how their white, middle-class guest viewed them. Within the library, these teens were consistently positioned as capable contributors, not disadvantaged youth, thus emphasizing what the teens could do instead of what they did not possess.

Once a teen becomes a member of the TLC, they may remain on the council throughout the remainder of their high school career, which most teens choose to do. Because I watched some participants across two or three academic years, I was able to document shifts in practices over time. Through the recursive process of the constant comparative perspective (Heath & Street, 2008), patterns of youth participation emerged that aligned with core values evident in the practices of the space and the Discourse of the librarian. Yet each teen enacted these values in different ways that represented their personal histories and potential futures. To illuminate this, I

have written about six teen participants in pairs around the value outcome they most represent - the public good, lifelong learning, and social responsibility.

**Lilly and Sonia: Pathways to Leadership.** If looking for teens with dynamic leadership potential, neither Lilly nor Sonia were likely choices when they began attending the Teen Library Council, though for different reasons. Yet years later, each became a successful leader to their peers.

*Lilly.* Extremely quiet in both speech and manners, Lilly took on her volunteer tasks with timidity and awkwardness at first. In her first year on the council, she rarely spoke during meetings. The following summer, Lilly served as one of Elaine’s assistants at a three-day computer coding camp for older children and teens. Despite being both interested in and knowledgeable of coding herself, she stayed on the sidelines, silently observing until Elaine assigned her a specific task. Elaine encouraged Lilly to “float around and look at people’s projects” which resulted in Lilly walking once around the room and returning to her previous out of the way spot. After that, Elaine used relational and extensional language to pull Lilly into the action, for example, “Do you want to try this with me Lilly?” “Should we make them do something after the joke?”

The dynamics in Lilly’s second year on the council made for an overall more reserved group. Perhaps it was this that led to Lilly’s increased voicing of her opinion in meetings that year. Motivated by her own love of reading since early childhood, she also trained with Elaine to be a Book Buddy, a person who listens while another, typically a child<sup>25</sup>, practice reading aloud. In this role, she seats herself in the children’s area of the library for an hour every week, next to a

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<sup>25</sup> Due to the number of immigrants and other English language learners in the community, adults would occasionally ask if they could practice reading aloud with the teen. Elaine informed the teen volunteers that it was up to them if they granted the request and encouraged them to do so only if they felt comfortable.

sign that advertises the service. For several weeks, no children took Lilly up on her services, but Elaine praised her faithful attendance each week and encouraged her to talk to families visiting the library during her hour. To increase participation, Lilly started sharing small snacks with children willing to practice reading, resulting in regular visitors. Later that year, I observed Lilly again assisting Elaine in a computer coding camp. This time she walked around to participant's computers and made suggestions for debugging code, with less prompting from Elaine.

By the autumn of her third year, Lilly enters council meetings with quiet confidence. She successfully campaigned to become Vice-President of the TLC. Now Lilly also brings her sister, a freshman, to join the council and the two take on volunteer projects as a team. Both joined the picture book analysis project and reviewed children's books that represented their Chinese heritage. Lilly was the first to speak up during project meetings and the first to complete her book reviews. On my last day in the field, I observed Lilly during her Book Buddies service. Happening simultaneously was a craft program on paper piercing, so Lilly sat at a table with books and craft supplies. No longer timid, Lilly asked a young girl if she would like to read aloud for a little bit, then try piercing the tissue paper into pretty patterns. Throughout the period, Lilly asked questions and praised the girl's efforts in a dialogue that mirrored Elaine's conversations with youth in library programs. This included relational and referential talk, such as "I remember you read and liked that book last time. This one here is similar." and extensional talk, such as "That's a nice shape you made. What do you think it will look like when you unfold the paper?...Do want to take some paper home to make more?"

**Sonia.** Sonia joined the Teen Library Council to "do something productive" instead of "running around the library doing nothing." Library staff knew Sonia previously because she was often in the most active gatherings of teens, with a voice and attitude that could complicate

library policy enforcement. Suspecting she had much to offer, Elaine mentioned the TLC in hopes that Sonia would participate, allowing staff to see another side to the strong-minded young woman. Her initiatory attendance at a meeting, during the second TLC configuration I observed, became memorable for me in two ways. One, she was the only council member I ever saw with friends repeatedly sticking their head in and trying to get her to leave the meeting to be with them. Her resistance to their pleas impressed me. Sonia later explained to me that she likes to use the library as a “chill” space between school and home for socializing, for some “time alone,” and to find “a lot of interesting books.” But she cannot complete homework there because her many friends will approach her with “Why don’t you hang out with me?” Second, her appearance helpfully caused me to step back and reevaluate my assumptions as a researcher. She was the second white adolescent I had seen on the TLC and the first white teen I saw interacting regularly throughout the space. In the back of my mind, I assumed she differed in all kinds of ways from the Brewer Library teen crowd and wondered about potential social fit. When her mother arrived to pick her up, the two rapidly exchanged words in Russian, forcing me to realize she was also bilingual. I learned that both Sonia’s parents had immigrated from Eastern Europe before her birth, giving her much in common with her local peers.

Through TLC meetings and activities, Sonia connected with a community need in a way that shaped her future plans. In November 2015, at Sonia’s second council meeting, Elaine brought up an idea that the previous year’s council had only considered - conducting within the library the annual county youth survey on housing stability. The group responded positively, several teens thinking of ways to get the word out about the survey. Elaine jumped in with a question, “What about combining the survey with another activity in the library...to get people in, then have them take the survey?” Sonia immediately replied, “Yeah, most people don’t want

to just take a survey, so let's do something. I'm in!" She and two other teens volunteer to administer the survey while others will run an activity on the official count day in January. In preparation, representatives from a local young adult organization that serves the homeless visited the December TLC meeting. Sonia remained engaged throughout the meeting, asking the most questions with her body leaning forward towards the visitors. The guests explained that the city of Goldash does not have much in the way of services for the homeless, despite having a great need, because almost all the organizations are centered in neighboring Fairbay. Sonia was visibly surprised by this information, giving auditory expressions of disappointment. She remained after the meeting ended to talk more with the visitors about this issue. In January 2016, the TLC hosted a gaming tournament for youth during which Sonia, Faith, and Hirah administer the housing survey throughout the library. Sonia challenges her partners to make it a competitive game for who can get the most surveys completed. In the following TLC meeting, the three girls report both how much fun they had and how many surveys they completed, which Elaine points out set a record amongst libraries.

When the TLC reformed in September 2016, Elaine asked continuing members to talk about last year's programs so everyone new will get an idea of the group's activities. Sonia's hand shoots into the air first. She proudly states, "We got to learn about the homeless in the area" and describes the experience of administering the survey. Elaine praises Sonia and the other members involved and says she would love to do it again this year. That could have been the extent of Sonia's service towards the homeless, but the story continues, a result of Elaine's connections and Sonia's self-determination. For the next monthly meeting, Elaine invited a local Americorps volunteer working at the Goldash Food Pantry. As the woman described some of the difficulties of the small organization, Sonia asked questions and offered suggestions about ways

to go deeper into the community. Again, I observe her conversing with the guest after the meeting.

In March 2017, I followed up with Sonia in an interview, where she eagerly told me about the homeless service club she is starting with Caius and Medardo, two freshman boys who joined the TLC that year. She followed up with the community contacts she met at TLC meetings about homelessness to help her establish an independent service group of teens and young adults. Their mission is to fill in the missing homeless services for Goldash. In her pragmatic way, she explains that the group will operate outside of the schools “because if we do it on school property we're not allowed to do most things. And we're gonna have to wait for their like, approval for things. It's a waste of time, you know.” As we discuss her childhood literacy and library experiences, Sonia reveals that her own family was unstably housed during most of her elementary school years, due to the death of her father and her mother’s struggles with English at the time. She described not really learning to read in school because of absences and having “so much things going” that there “wasn’t really time to focus.” By fifth grade she decided to change that with the resources in her local library.

*Sonia: I was told that I can't read well. So I was like, "Oh no, this is a big deal for me. I need to know how to read." Because everyone knows how to read and write. It's like if you don't know how to read it's embarrassing. Because you can't live your life. And so, in the summer, I think it was fifth or sixth grade, I taught myself how to read...I was just reading. I was constantly reading...I focused on...adult books. Because like, when you challenge yourself, you're actually building yourself. So, I decided to just read higher level books.*

Just as Sonia decided to do something about her reading abilities, so too she challenged herself to a higher level in addressing community homelessness with assistance from library connections.

***Contributing to the Public Good.*** For each of these young women, participation in library activities let them turn their interests into leadership skills. Lilly, who enjoys both computer coding and reading books, can help younger children develop these same skills through her volunteer work in the library. By mirroring the practices she saw in Elaine, such as offering snacks to bring in participants and engaging in deliberative talk, Lilly gained confidence overtime and increased her capacity to contribute to the public good. Sonia’s sociability and headstrong attitude could have led her to further foster conflict within the library and the larger community. But through participation in library service, she could redirect these attributes in a positive way. As a member of the TLC, Sonia discovered a need in the community to which she deeply connected and contacted people who could assist her in contributing back to the community.

***Brigid and Faith: “Book Nerds” United.*** While putting away chairs after a TLC meeting, I heard squeals of delight burst out behind me. I turned around to see Brigid, Faith, and Hirah standing together, bouncing on their toes with excitement while discussing a book series. While the rest of us filed out, I heard the continued exclamations - “Oh my gosh, yes!” “I couldn’t believe it when he did that!” “Didn’t you just love it?” Seeing Hirah this way was typical; she infuses most situations with energetic chatter. I knew the other two girls to be more reserved, though always cheerful and friendly. It was clear that each girl reveled in this moment with an affinity group of book lovers. As I came to better know Brigid and Faith, I could see how the public library offered them space to be themselves as well as expand the scope of their learning.

***A Tale of Two Readers.*** In follow-up interviews with each girl, I was struck by their similarities, starting with the fact both declared themselves a “book nerd” within moments of

speaking. Therefore, it makes sense to discuss these parallels in their literacies, their learning, and how the library interacts with their identities.

Both girls fit a typology I observed after working with various youth readers that I call “story consumers.” They love good stories, grabbing them in any form offered. Early experiences with books often tied into their favorite preschool television programs on Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, and Public Broadcasting System (e.g. *Disney Fairies*, *Disney Princesses*, *Curious George*, *Charlie & Lola*). Each latched onto reading interests inspired by a parent. Faith found the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* in her father’s daily newspaper, leading her to read and eventually gather book collections of the strip. Brigid inherited her father’s *Serendipity* books for young readers and added to the collection through scouring used bookstores. Now, they both watch television series popular with teens, especially ones based on or related to books, such as *Vampire Diaries* and *Riverside*. Each reads a range of fiction, tending toward popular young adult series, but each has one series they hold dear, return to regularly, and seek extensions of through other media and fan-created writings and art. For Brigid, this is the mythology fueled modern world created by Rick Riordan and Faith savored all things related to J.K. Rowling’s wizarding world. The girls use their identity with and knowledge of these storyworlds to connect with other people. For example, as I was finishing up fieldnotes at the end of an observation, I was startled to find Faith by my side, shooting rapid fire questions in my direction. “What’s your favorite Harry Potter book?” “How many times have you read them?” “What did you think when Sirius died?” “Do you know what your patronus would look like?” As I answered her questions<sup>26</sup>, I realized that during the previous event I mentioned loving the Harry Potter series

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<sup>26</sup> “The fifth one.” “At least four times for each volume, maybe five.” “I was shocked. It was like a gut punch.” “I thought it would be a large mammal, but according to the quiz on Pottermore, it’s a basset hound.”

myself, thus inspiring Faith's interest in confirming my fan-identity and connecting with me further.

The girls described parental support for their avid reading, even if both sets of parents push them to read something more than young adult fiction. But they also described close relatives, cousins of Brigid and siblings of Faith, who “don’t get the reading thing” and require the girls to extol the virtues of being readers and defend collecting books in their spaces. Each described their bedroom as “covered in books” and Faith's sister drew a line down the shared room over which she is not allowed to let a book slide. Both expressed a preference for paperbound books, describing the joy of a book’s smell and feel, yet both regularly read e-books as well for ease of use while in transit. The girls also good-naturedly describe their peers’ addiction to mobile phones, though both make use of technology themselves, and lamented the friends who do not regularly visit the library. When I asked them to hypothetically talk with one of those friends about the value of the library, each girl emphasized that the library is more than a space for books, offering examples of activities, and described how the library allows you to connect with personal interests and learn about self-selected topics:

*Faith: A library is where you can do, where you can get many kind of books that interest you. Like, I know you don't like reading books, but something will catch your eye and you can go to many different many fun activity there too. Like, what do you like? I'd ask her what she likes, da-da-da. They probably have a good app or have a class or might help you check out books on that or events. Like that.*

An important question to ask yourself now as a reader - how do you envision Brigid and Faith in person? This is a critical point to consider in relation to assumptions, identities and how enacted values open up a space for participation. Brigid looks like the stereotype of a future

English major. Pale white skin and brown hair usually pulled up in a ponytail, she wears dark-rimmed “librarian” glasses<sup>27</sup>, t-shirts bearing pop culture icons, jeans, and tennis shoes. Faith also prefers tennis shoes, but these do not often stand out under her typical long dark dress. What you likely notice first is her hijab and the medium brown face peering out from it. In another setting with a less self-aware adult than Elaine, Brigid could easily become the favored participant. She appears to be “one of us,” a monolingual white girl with a passion for reading who likes to hang around anyone, especially an adult, who will talk about books. She is the kid you expect to find hanging out in the teen section of an American public library or bookstore. And yet Faith, a Muslim child of Somali immigrants, is just as passionate for books and eager to connect with other readers. Her English may be accented, but she gabbles on about books, movies, and television shows like every avid story consumer I have met. Within the Brewer Library, both girls find a place to be themselves, to meet others like them, and to have their interests equally respected, supported, and even expanded by a caring adult.

Brigid and Faith each spoke of the library as a “hideout” from the pressures of home and school, a space to relax and read. Drawn to the library space by their interests, it also levels their social playing field for different reasons. Brigid lives nearby but goes to school in a neighboring town, where her family lived previously. Therefore, she does not go to school with neighborhood teens but can build relationships with them in the library. Faith’s English vocabulary remains behind her peers with similar family histories, impacting her school experiences. Yet, as described in the previous chapter, limited language skills do not bar youth from consistent participation in the library. Faith gamely joins dialogues around texts, occasionally pausing to search for vocabulary or rephrase herself to get her message across. In this way, the library

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<sup>27</sup> Also called “barista” or “hipster” glasses, these have dark thick frames.

provides the girls a venue for building their social skills through shared dialogues and experiences.

Both girls attend the monthly Teen Book Club as often as they can as well as any other teen program happening while they are present (which is often). They use every opportunity to chat with Elaine about books and often open the conversation to other areas of their lives. Elaine responds with the rich talk seen in the previous chapter, offering resources and ideas for both entertainment and education needs. Reading may pull them into the library, but their desire for connection and learning pushes them to action in the space. Their description of the library to a hypothetical friend as a place of interesting and fun activities highlights their own participation pathway. Each joined the Teen Library Council because they saw other teens participating in the council and followed their curiosity. When Elaine asks for volunteers to assist at teen programs, Brigid and Faith raise their hand if it fits their schedule, regardless of the topic of the activity. The result has been to push at each girl's knowledge base, skill set, and even understanding of the world. Faith co-led discussions with teen and adult patrons for the One Book, One Community program and, later, following a library showing of a documentary film on girls' rights globally. She reported her favorite TLC activity was conducting the youth housing survey because the teen volunteers made it into a competition, something she finds motivating. Brigid joined the Book Buddies program as well as the picture book analysis project and during the latter she confronted different aspects of her identity. While white female characters abound in children's literature, she realized another element of her experience, her family's practice of Wiccan<sup>28</sup> traditions, rarely showed up. When it did appear in books, Brigid often found the practices distorted into a form of fantasy or associated with evil. Bringing this issue forth in

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<sup>28</sup> Wicca is a form of modern paganism that practitioners link to pre-Christian folk traditions.

project team discussions enabled the whole team to reflect on additional examples of other religions being misrepresented to further a fictional plot line.

***Developing Habits for Lifelong Learning.*** Finding two self-proclaimed book nerds hanging out in a public library is not surprising, but how these youth benefit from library activities remains revelatory and worthy of consideration. Each girl equated their fervent reading with their learning and exhibited a strong sense of curiosity. They talked about discovering new facts or understandings from reading various books. On the surface, this is laudable. But such habits can create a rather self-contained learner, one contented to explore the rest of the world through text. By spending time in the Brewer Library, these girls became connected to each other, Elaine, and other book lovers, but also to a diverse set of learners through interactive library programs. These experiences and the dialogues created give further context to each girl's individual reading pursuits. In the library, an open learning space, the girls can continue to follow their curiosity into expanded learning opportunities. Each girl now moves forward having gained practice in valuable lifelong learning skills that will carry them beyond isolated reading experiences into community-based connections.

**Hirah and Zavi: Developing Critical Awareness.** Hirah and Zavi exemplify transitioning from the concerns of adolescence to the duties of young adulthood. Each girl engages differently with the outer world, yet both show signs of a growing critical awareness for which they find support in library activities.

***Hirah.*** Given her proclivity to involvement, it is fitting that Hirah's name has already appeared in previously shared examples of dialogue in the library. Imagine her as a modern version of the All-American Sweetheart. Bubbly, friendly, and talkative, Hirah uses contemporary teenage slang with hip-hop inflections (e.g. "*Girl*, you did not just say that!" "Oh

my gosh, that series is my *jam!*”). She also speaks fluent English, Arabic, and Cham, the language of her family from “a country that no longer exists” between Cambodia and Vietnam. Not satisfied with trilingualism, Hirah asks about her peers’ home languages and wants to know useful phrases from each. A dedicated student, she attends classes at a local community college through a program to earn an associate’s degree simultaneous to her high school diploma. A dedicated Muslim, she wears the hijab proudly, dresses modestly, and will ask to borrow a quiet corner of the library if an activity overlaps with regular prayer time. Hirah even reminds her Muslim friends about dietary laws and holidays, when they might prefer to forget (i.e. when non-halal ingredients are discovered in a snack<sup>29</sup>). But Hirah’s caring nature and good humor keeps this from annoying her peers for long. She seems to volunteer everywhere she goes; within her religious community, in a student group at the college, and at the public library.

Within the Teen Library Council, Hirah often serves as a catalyst for conversation and action. She joined the council in the spring of 2015, quickly becoming one of the most popular book buddies for young readers. Her success stemmed from a willingness to invite any family at the library to participate, especially the many Muslim parents and children. Using her cultural capital, she approaches them with an appropriate greeting and if a language barrier arises with the adult, Hirah switches into Arabic to explain the activity. She did this consciously, aware that her identity as a Muslim young woman representing the library could deepen the connection these families had with a place she herself values.

Hirah describes herself as “socially justice focused,” therefore her energy is highest around TLC activities connected to social issues. She embraces these activities as learning opportunities to deepen her knowledge of problems in the community and beyond. Following the

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<sup>29</sup> Elaine is very conscientious about offering snacks that the Muslim teens can eat, but occasionally something slips by even her inspection of the ingredients list.

guest presentations on regional homelessness during TLC, Hirah stated she had not realized how support for the homeless is so inadequately distributed. She personally thanked each visitor for telling her about the situation. Naturally, she volunteered to distribute surveys at the library event, relishing the competition for most surveys completed.

Hirah became excited when Elaine announced the beneficiaries of 2015-2016 Students Rebuild challenge would be refugee children. She, like many of us at the time, had just begun to understand the enormity of the Syrian refugee crisis. Delighted with a concrete way to contribute, Hirah encouraged the council towards the high goal of completing 2000 pinwheels. She pulled additional teens and even young book buddies into the construction effort whenever she spent time in the library space. Her growing understanding of and concern about the refugees' difficulties led her to become the Teen Library Council's primary voice on the project. When Elaine requested that a member draft an article about the TLC's participation, Hirah volunteered, taking time to capture the thoughts of her peers before writing. Following that, Hirah enlisted Faith to help her make a video essay about their experiences for a contest. In the video, Hirah explains that the project brought community members of all ages together into the library to contribute. She also describes her personal decision to learn more about the crisis, discovering the impact globally as well as on the individual:

*Hirah: I ended up meeting a Syrian family and talking to them and learning from them...When they came over here, they felt a need to justify their being here by, you know, volunteering themselves and stuff like that. And I just felt like that was kind of sad for them because they felt like they had to change the American mindset and make us think that they weren't terrorists. Even though they were just average civilians, just like everybody else.*

Through Hirah's participation in library programs, she not only increases her knowledge of societal problems, but solidifies her determination to keep learning and find ways to make a difference. Like Leah and Bridgid, Hirah volunteered for the picture book analysis project and used her Islamic experiences to evaluate texts. When reporting back to the TLC at large about the work, Hirah stated that her participation "opened [her] eyes" and "creates awareness of something that even a diverse...group didn't know about," convincing her "we need people to be woken up and see this."

**Zavi.** Much less talkative but just as confident in herself, I first noticed Zavi at library programs in the fall of 2016. She piqued my interest during a monthly Teen Book Club session. Middle schoolers make up most of the regular attendees, with older readers like Brigid, Faith, and Hirah popping in as much as their schedules allow. Regardless of the age differences, the teens usually bring up young adult novels, graphic novels, or books assigned in school. When it was Zavi's turn, she said she was reading Maya Angelou's *Why the Caged Bird Sings* but could not understand why she found it in a list of poetry books since it seemed like a memoir<sup>30</sup>. Through Elaine's expert questioning, Zavi explained that she recently discovered an affinity for poetry, especially written from the perspective of people of color. This could have become an awkward social moment, since the rest of the teens currently had neither knowledge of nor interest in similar books, thus interrupting the usual flow of dialogue between book club participants. Instead, Elaine's skills, acquired over years of public library service, enabled her to respond easily on the topic. She brought up poets who had spoken locally and made a recommendation for Zavi's next read. Zavi appeared sincerely pleased at finding a conversational partner for her interest. Over the next hour, as each teen took a turn talking about

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<sup>30</sup> Because Maya Angelou was a poet, her autobiographies and essay collections are often listed informally with poetry.

a book, two parallel dialogues emerged. Elaine deftly moved between discussing the usual genres with the rest of the teens and discussing diverse poets with Zavi. After the meeting, Zavi remained to further the conversation with Elaine. In turn, Elaine shared that her own desire to better understand the realities of African-Americans led her to create a personal book club which reads the work of Black activists. Delighted to hear about Elaine's efforts, Zavi even made a reading recommendation for the group. Elaine continues to follow up on Zavi's reading choices and they exchange book titles.

At the beginning of each school year, Elaine asks the Teen Library Council to consider what the group could accomplish this year. Zavi suggested creating a book display about authors of color and finding other ways to promote their work. Elaine and I shared a smile at that moment, knowing that Zavi would appreciate our planned diversity picture book analysis, which would finally launch in the following months. Zavi did indeed join the project, selecting books that reflected her North African heritage or Muslim faith. Because Zavi was already pondering issues of representation in writing, her thoughtful comments and written reflections helped move the group forward in their thinking. In the document where the team shared insights from searching for and reading picture books, she wrote:

*The books written whose setting was somewhere in the continent of Africa were not written by people from Africa. They were mostly White authors which makes me wonder: would the books that take place in Africa be as highly accredited and successfully published if they were written by Black authors?*

In a post-reading reflections document, Zavi articulated a dilemma that thousands of adults in the book industry are still wrestling with today:

*I learned that literature can be culturally appropriating too...I recognized that I was very critical when I was reading the books and I asked myself a couple times would I rather have a perfectly compiled story with culturally accurate details and have a few of them or would I rather have lots of picture books with lacking a little bit of cultural accuracy? Then I realized in the realm of children's picture books there's an iota of books that take the African narrative and within the iota there are lots of mistakes or the stories written are bland. I think there is lots of room for growth in children's literature and hopefully it gets better.*

As Zavi matures, so does her literary life. Her reading has become a tool for exploring and celebrating underrepresented narratives. Through conversations with Elaine, she found someone to help expand her reading life in the direction she desires. Participation in additional library activities bring Zavi greater contextualization of her reading as well as opportunities for self-reflection.

***Taking Up Social Responsibilities.*** For many, adolescence is a time of increasing consciousness of societal ills and their own abilities to address them. Such an awakening is played up beautifully in the fourth Harry Potter novel (Rowling, 2002), where his friend Hermione launches a one-girl campaign for elvish welfare. Unfortunately, Hermione's efforts fail due to lack of peer interest combined with her own failure to properly grasp the complexities of the situation. But what if an adult like Elaine or a place like the Brewer Library had been in her world<sup>31</sup>? Fortunately, Hirah and Zavi do have the support needed to take their budding interest in social issues and create opportunities for action that fit the personality of each girl. For Hirah, this involves community involvement and public statements. For Zavi, increased

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<sup>31</sup> Yes, there is a school library in the Harry Potter series, but it is managed by Madame Pince, whose character is the unfortunate stereotype of librarians often found in children's literature (i.e. always cross, always shushing, and cares more for books than people).

dialogue, new reading directions, and time for reflection better suite her style. The flexibility of the public library can sustain both. Each girl also builds upon their identities as Muslim women of color to create connections and critically respond to the world, work that is made possible in such a diverse space as the Brewer Library.

### **Finding What They Need**

Each girl described above is, in her own unique way, an amazing person. In other learning contexts, institutional practices and prescribed outcomes could constrain these individuals in a variety of ways. Lilly's quiet and Sonia's attitude could keep them out of leadership roles, thus preventing their contributing to the public good. Brigid and Faith might struggle to connect with the world beyond their favorite books, thus depriving themselves of an education that only happens in relationship with others. And Hirah's and Zavi's growing critical awareness would turn to frustration and anger without opportunities to share in social responsibilities. But within the public library, each girl can find what she personally needs to spark and sustain her own learning. Their library is not merely a "building with books." It embodies the values of access, intellectual freedom, and service in diverse ways. Through engagement in deliberative discourse with the librarian and their peers, the girls' diverse literacies are contextualized and connected. Through connected practices, the girls build skills that enable them to contribute to the public good, pursue lifelong learning, and take up social responsibilities. It is these practices that position the teens as whole persons capable of taking up dynamic roles for themselves, in their communities, and, eventually, as adult citizens in a democracy.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion: “Last Call at the Information Bar”

With this final chapter, I discuss my findings in light of the previously reviewed literature on voluntary learning and public libraries in the lives of adolescents. Then, I turn to the limitations of this particular study, followed by my work’s implications for the field and future research directions.

### Discussion

The Brewer Library is, like many public libraries, an important component of the learning that happens across times and settings in the lives of teenagers. We accept this intuitively and through the vignettes of library supporters, but we know little about the process empirically. Previous research offers insight into adolescent learning beyond library contexts (e.g. Bell, 2012; Bevan et al., 2013; Irby et al., 1994) or a limited slice of activity youth pursue while at the library (e.g. Agosto et al., 2015; Walter, 2009). With this work, I ask, “How does the public library spark and sustain the voluntary learning of adolescents with the affordances of space, resources, and people?” I examine how the public library operates as a context for adolescent learning from a sociocultural-historical perspective (Cole, 1996). To identify the layers of this phenomena (Rogoff, 2003), I focused, in turn, on the library’s affordances of *space*, *resources*, and *people* (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015), three interdependent elements of public libraries.

Through attention to practices of the youth and library staff within the space, I saw how the stance of library staff towards adolescents, their *positioning*, (Holland & Leander, 2004; Wortham, 2006) shaped the learning experiences available. Specifically, through the physical layout, guiding policies, and activities offered, library staff position teens as welcome patrons with equal rights to materials and services designed to meet individual interests and needs.

Through these practices, the public library embodied the core librarianship values of *access*, *intellectual freedom*, and *service* (American Library Association, 2004). In turn, teens valued the space and made great use of it to meet academic, social, and personal needs. In variable ways, youth pursued voluntary learning experiences in the many *Discourses* (Gee, 2012) available within the library. Additionally, adolescents' use of the library space enacted the library Discourse of core values, in which all library learning is *situated*. Youth take up these values through *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in different library activities.

Next, I analyzed the talk happening around resources, texts of all kinds, between youth and with the teen services librarian. The librarian's professional questioning skills served to *scaffold* (Vygotsky, 1978) youth's experiences with the *heteroglossic* (Bakhtin, 1986) media landscape of today. It also confirms past and present librarians' insistence on the foundational role of relationships in services for teen (Edwards, 2002; Randall, 2013). Through one-to-one interactions and a variety of library programs, librarian and adolescents established trust and engaged in *deliberative discourse* (Heath, 2012b), a critical skill for higher level academics and democratic processes. By giving them experience in *relational*, *referential*, and *extensional* talk, librarians helped prepare for collaborative work in future contexts. Experience in these dialogues over time also move adolescents in a centripetal path deeper into the situated library Discourse.

Lastly, I focused on the people of the public library, especially those adolescents who are most engaged through volunteer work and regular attendance. Highlighting the legitimate peripheral participation of six girls demonstrated potential outcomes from the situated learning context of the public library. Each pair of girls showed evidence of taking up the public library's deeper Discourses, but each individual girl did so in ways that matched her individual needs and preferences. Lilly and Sonia coopted practices they encountered within the library to pursue

activities related to *the public good*. Although reserved by nature, Lilly became a peer leader and mentor to younger children by applying practices modeled by Elaine to activities of personal interest, namely computer coding and book reading. Through the personal connections offered in the library space, Sonia developed a plan to address the community issue of homelessness that had significantly shaped her own life history. Brigid's and Faith's affiliation with the library as an essential part of their "book nerd" identity expanded their opportunities for *education and lifelong learning*. By participating in library activities, each girl encountered people, ideas, and experiences that pushed them just beyond their current knowledge and into new ways of thinking. Hirah and Zavi built upon their emergent sense of *social responsibility* to co-construct meaningful experiences with the librarian's guidance. Hirah extended the activities of the Teen Library Council to tap into her social justice interests. Zavi found mentorship for her journey into culturally relevant literature by authors of color.

Each of these six girls took up identities that will go with them across contexts as well into their future. This is how the public library's affordances of space, resources, and people operate interdependently to enact the values of *diversity* and *democracy*. Within the public library space, diverse adolescents, many of whom struggle in more formal contexts, find a multitude of ways to learn through resources and in relationship with people. Such experiences prepare them for participation in democratic process with cultural capital as well as resilience for difficult times in the future. In summary, the public library sparks and sustains the voluntary learning of adolescents through embodied values, contextualized literacies, and developing identities.

**Pushing at the boundaries of learning theory.** This study contributes to the growing body of literature on learning in public libraries, as well as expands our conceptual

understanding of voluntary learning. The existing set of learning theories contain important elements relevant to the practices of young learners in the library. Yet none adequately depict the interactions between public libraries and adolescents. By taking the findings of this study and applying them to existing theories in novel ways, we can account for the role of the library in teen learners' lives.

***Positioning.*** Although originating in anthropologists' work beyond the classroom, positioning has primarily been used in education research to explain how teacher-student interactions shape the identity of learners and their future opportunities. In applying this theory to the public library, we can recognize the distinct differences in adult-youth interactions afforded by a different context. Here, teens are positioned as capable individuals with valuable ideas, while librarians offer them the freedom and the support to go in any direction desired. Such a relationship opens learning opportunities on both sides that were unavailable in other settings. This not only pushes on theory, but expands our view of librarians, who have been seen by some as ultimately interchangeable with teachers and other youth workers.

***Discourses.*** This study also pushes at the concept of Discourses in relation to learning. Education research usually focuses on the disciplinary-specific Discourses practiced within a learning setting. We look at youths' opportunity to experience ways of thinking and being used by more experienced practitioners of a domain. We can see this happening in the public library too, such as when a group of teens compete to build the best bridge out of food and craft materials. But there is another layer of Discourse happening as well. Just as schools have a hidden curriculum, so too the public library offers implicit lessons based in its core values which form a Discourse adolescent patrons experience. As teens become aware of the library and its affordances, they are introduced to a place that embodies democracy and diversity. When youth

enter the library to use the space and materials, interact with library staff and patrons, and attend programs, they benefit from the values of access, intellectual freedom, and service. Adolescents becoming more deeply involved in library practices soon enact the values of the public good, education and lifelong learning, and social responsibility.

*Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation.* This work most significantly pushes at the popular theory of situated learning. Within the public library, we see what legitimate peripheral participation looks like in an expansive voluntary learning setting. As described previously, situated learning was first observed within the context of workplaces where masters and apprentices shared skills and it has since been applied to many settings with shared disciplinary practices. The public library differs fundamentally from these locales because there is no single set of disciplinary practices or skills that youth aim to acquire. But the core values of librarianship are intended for transmission to all public library patrons. Through the library, young people are invited into practices that will sharpen their skills related to these values. Specifically, the library offers experience with deliberative discourse, training youth to engage in the type of talk necessary to successful group achievements. These shared practices will carry value across disciplines and domains. While a teen services librarian wants to leave choices about career paths up to the teens, they do want all adolescents to become lifelong learners, socially responsible citizens who contribute to the public good, and supporters of democracy and diversity.

### **Limitations**

As in the case of any individual study, limitations for the work must be considered. Obviously, this is the case of a single library. While any individual case can provide strong insights and bases for comparative work, the limits on generalizability stand out as obvious.

However, individual cases across disciplines allow scholars to grasp the importance of context, developmental differences, and ways the ecology of learning for individuals matters as much as other aspect of a single case.

For any single case study, the a priori work behind selection of this case can add depth and bases for next-step comparative work. As described in my methods, I partially addressed the matter of selection of this case by carrying out a pilot set of regional interviews with seventeen services librarians and three teen services librarians as well as the use of the constant comparative method to provide broad context for my emergent findings. I also stand by my earlier statement about the individual case. Each and every library and community will indeed be unique, but the Brewer Library experience has facets that overlap with libraries throughout the United States. The extensive literature on libraries, including their architecture, renovations, adaptations to electronic support for patrons, and training and recruitment of librarians indicates that much of the layout, policies, and programs described for this single case is likely to appear also in other libraries. Additionally, the deliberative discourse seen here is derivative of the reference interview protocols practiced by librarians the world over.

Two facets of this case do stand out as having potential outlier characteristics. First, the Eastrose County Libraries as a system is known to be one of the best resourced in the nation. Yet such a reputation does not mean that this system has abundant materials for programs or expert presenters, since the local community is expected to fund those themselves. The community of this study struggles to raise resources. But this does mean that even a poverty-stricken community such as Goldash cannot manage to have a well-staffed and well-stocked library building that is open frequently. In future research, therefore, it would be useful to compare the

operations of a public library in a similar community that runs independently and is not part of a larger library system.

Another outlying facet of this study sits in the perhaps unique complex of features that surround the ways that Elaine, the teen services librarian, interacts with the young patrons. My selection of an exemplary case was indeed intentional. I wanted to see how library services for youth operated in a “best-case scenario” with features recommended by the Young Adult Library Services Association. This meant that I needed to include a minimum of 20 teen service hours assigned to that library and its community, a teen volunteer group with more purpose than simple opinion-giving, a variety of topics for teen programs, and a librarian who pursues ongoing professional development. I reason that such a selection offers excellent comparative ground for future studies. Yet I also admit that Elaine fits a stereotype common in hiring for teen services - she looks cool. Petite with an edgy haircut, she doesn’t wear hip librarian glasses. She dresses in business casual wear but with a punk fashion flair. That being said, I firmly believe the reasons for her success and the strong relationships she has with youth stem from her sincere efforts to get to know individuals and serve them to the best of her ability. Elaine also pushes herself hard to facilitate the number of programs documented here, in addition to the programs she runs within the community (which I did not observe). In addition, she provides service hours at two other community libraries. How sustainable this level of work can be depends on both institutional and personal factors. Elaine herself is careful to schedule regular vacations, including a three-month leave that took place soon the period of my research and intensive involvement in her work. Additionally, unlike classroom teachers, public librarians are not required to take continuing professional development courses to maintain their state certification. Therefore, Elaine’s consistent pursuit of additional training, especially in the greater informal

learning realm, goes well beyond the average. It is the case that most librarians, especially those who work with youth, do seek extra-learning opportunities whenever possible, and in doing so, they bring back direct benefits to their young patrons.

Lastly, the six focus youth discussed in the previous chapters are examples of positive outcomes from regular participation in public library activities. It is a given that not every youth who enters the doors of the Brewer Library will end up with a life-changing story. In reality, I am not sure these six girls would say the library has been “life-changing” as much as something that they are just glad to have around. It was only through close observation over time, reflection, and analysis that their unique learning experiences could come to light. Due to the limits of time and space, I was not able to fully investigate those youth who remain peripheral to the library’s activities, but engage in legitimate participation in a host of library services. In my fieldwork, they appear in between the lines of my fieldnotes and along the edges of this ethnography. Their presence also contributes to revealing the importance of this library in their community.

### **Implications**

My research opens a window into the public library as a unique setting for adolescent learning. Looking within, I see at least three points both practitioners and researchers should consider further.

**Connections with Context within Community.** A lot of people, some enrolled in library school, happily tell me that they dream of being a librarian because they love young adult literature. My consistent and concerned response is, “That’s great! I enjoy reading teen lit too. But how do you feel about actual, live teenagers?” The importance of relationship building to impactful teen library services can never be underestimated. The Brewer Library is a success story because all of the staff members are committed to knowing and serving the community

around them. Elaine never sits and waits behind a service desk. She spends time in the schools and other community locations with adolescents. When in the library, Elaine moves through the space to engage in conversations with youth and their families. This movement lays the ground work for reference interviews that make a difference because the patrons know and trust her and know she is happy to engage in conversation. Staff members know their patrons and build context around resources that match the individual. Relationship-building also contributes to better programs because librarians can plan for what their teens either want or need experience learning. Librarians who want to succeed cannot in a vacuum create activities that the librarian likes or that some teens in a few locations across the nation might consider to be “cool.” Librarians must ground their work in “their” real people and the local needs. This emphasis has to start in training offered in library schools, both in admissions and course work. Librarians need to find ways of establishing community and personal connections that work for them. Additionally, researchers who collaborate with or examine library settings need to take account of the practices that staff members use to forge connections when evaluating youth learning.

**Multiliteracies Matter.** Two of my invited reviewers said the list of programs Elaine provided made them “sad” because they were so “text-based” (going back to the traditional use meaning word-based) and did not seem forward-facing. This surprised me enough to wonder if I had made some mistake in my reporting, since I did not view the activity menu that way at all. Video games, computer coding, and knitting all occur regularly at the Brewer Library alongside programs related to books. And even the “text-based” programs typically involve using additional kinds of literacies such as math or geography. Knowing each of these reviewers works at the national level to effect positive changes in teen services, I imagine they have encountered resistance. There are certainly librarians currently working who center themselves in young adult

literature and make its promotion their main mission<sup>32</sup>. But when I read about or listen to exhortations for libraries to be “not about books,” it strikes me as a classic case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Text-based literacy demands are not going away. If anything, the fake news crisis of the 2016 United States presidential campaigns pointed out in stark relief the need for more information literacy education, something librarians take pride in providing. Health literacy, financial literacy, and most secondary education paths are still based primarily in text. Besides, teenagers still engage voluntarily with text, likely even more so if when researchers count up social media posts and text messages. Even Brigid and Faith, with their tactile love of books, used digital resources as did most of their peers. At the Brewer Library, teens requested more frequent programs of all kinds, but especially the Teen Book Club. The key for libraries is to look beyond formats and topics in programming and scrutinize the practices youth can experience at the library which will serve them into adulthood. One of the most important practices libraries can offer, and to which teens respond positively, is conversing with peers and adults around topics of interest. Technology affords many things, but it has also decreased youth’s opportunities to develop communication skills with people who may be different from them and their parents or much more like them than teens might think. Public libraries provide a safe and secure arena or context in which youth learn and practice talking, thinking aloud, and exploring all types of resources for their concerns.

**Be Different.** “I don’t know what to do with the public librarians. What is it that they do? How do they fit?” A researcher working in city-wide learning initiatives approached me with these questions at an academic conference. Not surprised, I realized these same questions had

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<sup>32</sup> I always relish the terrible irony of this stance, since Margaret Edwards, the figurehead of teen librarianship, did her work before the first era of teen literature was available. These books began emerging during her retirement and when asked about them, she said they were inadequate for educating teen minds.

pursued me throughout my doctoral studies, as a librarian studying in an education college. This dissertation is in part a response to such questions. After spending time observing in other after-school settings as well as in public and private schools, it becomes clearer to me that public librarians have unique skills to be employed in the service of youth. But what are those skills and how aware of them are librarians, let alone anyone else? Observing activities in professional circles, it strikes me that librarians love to get ideas from other organizations and then try to replicate them in their own context. While I love the spirit of innovation, we need more reflection on not only the needs of each community, as described above, but also the unique contributions libraries offer. Researchers can assist with this, offering tools and time for reflection and evaluation. A primary reason Elaine agreed to participate in my research was the opportunity to reflect on her own practices and consider ideas for the future. Public teen services librarians need to examine themselves and their purposes, find their strengths, and articulate those widely to their communities. This will improve the library's partnership potential to other organizations when their contributions are clear.

Recommendations given here also mean acknowledging that "true" teen librarians differ in significant ways from other types of librarians who may work with young people. For the purposes of the professional associations, "teen services" is spoken of generally, and ideas typically flow between school and public librarians. That sharing should continue, to be sure, but every teen librarian needs to recognize and take account of the local context and nature of life outside the school for the youth of those communities. Contexts are unique and call for adapted and professionally responsive provisions and relationships with teens. "True" teen librarians will, in general, need to develop relationships with youth that lie in the local as well as the unique and varied interests of young people. The best of teen librarians can do this since they do

not have the time, curricular, or other institutional constraints found in school settings. But the schools of local areas served by the library have to be taken into account in terms of specialized curricula, locale of the majority of students, mix of neighborhoods reflected in the school, etc.

By taking into account as much as possible, including the schools and its students and teachers, teen librarians can most effectively tap into teen interests and respond individually as well as flexibly to student needs and interests. The ability of librarians to build relationships around books, interests, community projects, etc. should not be interpreted to demean or lessen the importance of schools and teachers. The complementarity of contexts that care about the learning and interests of young people will always be the ideal. A key implication of this study is that teachers and librarians need to build upon their differences and their powers to supplement the resources of both schools and libraries, as well as other community organizations and institutions, such as religious, civic, environmental, and arts groups. As librarians work with teens, they know they will find youth coming through library doors who may have never previously thought of the library as a place of extended learning, a site to explore voluntarily interests, ways to extend school knowledge, and situations where conversations with adults come naturally.

### **Future Research**

As with every research work, this study ends with a call for more research. Such is the case, in particular, for knowledge regarding the changing nature of how young people learn. Adolescent learning that takes place voluntarily has been almost entirely ignored as a positive. To be sure, studies of gangs, sexual behavior, and deviance dominate studies of how teens learn and what they do with that learning. Libraries, community organizations, religious groups, and arts organizations provide, however, substantial sites of voluntary learning of teens.

Thus this study calls for more case studies of teen services librarians in action, in different types of communities and with different types of librarians. A special need is that surrounding the practices of teen services librarians beyond the statistical “norm” for librarians. This norm tends to exclude males, people over 40, and people of color. The values of the public libraries and how they operate on a daily basis should be a rich research area for exploration of the very patrons most citizens may believe never visit libraries: teens. Such work will illuminate the unspoken and often unrecognized influences that impact library services and youth experiences in library spaces and community outreach projects. Once a better understanding of public library affordances is established, such work could be combined with principles from learning sciences research to establish design-based research collaborations aimed at improving adolescent learning. The most promising and exciting research frontier is participatory research with teenagers themselves. Youth carry vast insights and can enrich the academic conversation in unexpected ways.

### **Last Call**

Public library services continue to offer many potential benefits to adolescent learners. And unlike other institutions and organizations in which they participate, they will belong to the public library throughout their life. The public library can be with a person through every stage, offering space, resources, and people to meet their needs. This may be the most important reason that public libraries need to offer quality services to teenagers - they need to know they will always be welcome. In closing, consider these words from Fawn, the children’s librarian at Brewer Library:

*They say it takes a village. That does not end when you're a teenager. They're...great big giant children who are really close to being grownups. It's last call, last call at the*

*information bar and so when they graduate from high school, they will not come back to a public library for a long, long time, till they have children themselves probably. This is last call and this is an opportunity to engage them and show them the benefit but also to know that this is a place that they can get access to stuff that they don't even know exists yet and part of that is being that welcoming environment because if we are not open and welcoming to these teenagers, if they feel like they don't belong here, they will not come back even with their kids...*

*Again, this is last call, because they will be adults so we want these children as a society to be prepared to be functional members of society and so that may mean going to school. It may mean all kinds of things but what it does mean for all of them is learning how to engage in a public place in a socially acceptable way. Facilitating that learning is important for us as a society in addition to providing access to resources. That's an opportunity there, too.*

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## **Appendix A: Sample Semi-Structured Interview Protocols**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Library Staff**

Ask for name, number of years working in the library, race/ethnicity identity, birthplace, preferred language, language(s) spoken at home

#### Questions

- Tell me about your job here at the library. What are your duties?
- Talk me through a typical shift at the library. What kinds of things happen?
- What do you think is the philosophy of service at the library? How does this apply to the teens who use the library?
- Describe the teens who visit this library. What kinds of activities do they tend to do?
- Please tell me about one positive interaction and one frustrating interaction you remember with teens at the library.

What do you think people should know about teens and public libraries?

### **Semi-Structured Conversation Protocol for Teen Participants**

Ask for name, age, school, race/ethnicity identity, birthplace, preferred language, language(s) spoken at home

Explain that we are going to talk about stories and use the terms “texts” [“media”] to describe all kinds of things, including examples of books, magazines, newspapers, Internet sites, album cover, TV show, movie, computer game, etc.

#### Questions

- What types of stories do you remember from your earliest childhood?
  - From people, books, tv, music, etc
  - What were your favorites?
  - Who shared the stories/where did you learn the stories?
- Did you have books in your home? What kinds?
- Where there magazines and newspapers?
- Did you have a television?
- Did you have a computer?
- What do you remember about learning to read?

- Do you remember the first book you really loved? Tell me about it.
- Did you share stories and texts with friends and family?
- What are your favorite kinds of texts now? How has that changed?
- How do you find out about different kinds of texts?
- What are your earliest memories of libraries? How did you use them when you were younger?
- How do you use libraries now? How do they fit into your life?
- Tell me about the last time you visited the library before today. Walk me through your activities.
  - (If they do not mention a library program) Have you attended a library program in the event room recently? What was it like?
- When you need to find out about a topic, how do you go about it?
- When you need to learn something, what steps do you take?

If you were talking to a friend who doesn't use libraries often, how would you describe libraries today?

## Appendix B: Participatory Research: Initial Meeting Outline

### Outline of Initial Project Meeting

#### Intro and activity - 15 minutes

- Have kids stand in concentric circles and walk until I say stop. Then have them talk with the person across from them about a favorite book from elementary school.

#### Identity/diversity review - 10 minutes

- Sarah briefly summarizes the previous readings and issues, showing Google Folder
- Show Iceberg model of identity to expand student thinking

#### Critical literacy questions exercise - 15 minutes

- Explain critical assumptions (poststructuralist understanding) and discuss for clarity
  - all language is socially contextualized
  - texts are inherently ideological
  - texts are fundamental to the construction of our identity
- Dimensions of critical literacy - Post these on sheets around the room/table, share examples from literature review
  - disrupting the commonplace
  - interrogating multiple viewpoints
  - focusing on sociopolitical issues
  - taking action and promoting social justice
- Point out example questions of crit lit and have them brainstorm their own questions via post-its
  - What's missing from this account?
  - How could it be told differently?

#### Picture book analysis - Whole group - 15 minutes

- Read a book through once just for the story
- Read a second time with some of their questions or
  - What do you observe on this page?
  - Why do those parts of the image/text stand out to you? What do they make you think?

#### BREAK - 10 minutes

- “During the break, write down your Google email address so Sarah can add you to the Google Folder” - put out pad of paper

#### Picture book analysis - Pairs - 15 minutes

- Pair up students and have them read a book together and ask some questions of the text/pictures

- Have group come back together and talk about things they noticed

**Google tools** - 15 minutes

- Show them the instruction sheet with the link to the form

**Catalog searching** - 15 minutes

- Get them started on searching
- Ask them to review at least 5 books, so put that many on hold/find on the shelves.

**Questions, wrap-up** - 5 minutes

- Questions
- Next meeting agenda
- Thank you's!

## Appendix C: Participatory Research: Analysis Questions Developed by Teens

Possible questions to ask of the text and pictures:

### Disrupting the Commonplace

- Are the characters of the story/show normal/average characters or stereotypical ones?
- How can you make this different from common stereotypes?
- What's missing from this account?
- How would the main character act differently if placed/grew up in a different social environment?
- Are any of the characters portrayed unfairly positively or negatively?

### Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

- How could it be told differently?
- Is the text cliché?
- How can someone else's view change this?
- What can a different perspective add to plot of the story?
- How is the narrator biased?
- How does a certain point of view allow us to see significant in a story's plot? How would this viewpoint compare to others?

### Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

- Does it fairly represent the culture it's claiming to represent?
- What ideology does the text fit into?
- What can make this more accurate?
- Does the text stereotype a marginalized group?
- How can a social issue play a role in developing a character or theme?
- How does the society the character lives in reflect a real-world society?

### Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

- Why is the story told the way it is?
- What's the message of the text?

## Appendix D: Participatory Research: Book Review Collection Form

5/1/2017

Picture Book Analysis

### Picture Book Analysis

Volunteer research project by the [REDACTED] Library Council into diversity and representation in children's picture books

\* Required

1. **Reviewer name \***

*Mark only one oval.*

[REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]

2. **Book Title \***

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3. **ISBN \***

---

4. **Year published \***

---

5. **How did you find the book? \***

*Check all that apply.*

Library catalog  
 Recommended to me  
 Found at home/school/bookstore  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. **If you used the library catalog, what search terms did you use?**

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7. **Author name \***

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5/1/2017

Picture Book Analysis

**8. Author background (Check all that apply. If background is not clear, check "unknown.") \****Check all that apply.*

- African / African American (ex: Somalian, Ethiopian)
- American Indian / First Nation (ex: Sioux, Cherokee)
- Asian Pacific / Asian Pacific American (ex: Chinese, Hawaiian)
- European / European American (ex: Russian, Irish)
- Latinx / Hispanic (ex: Mexican, Columbian)
- Disability / Mental Health (ex: wheelchair bound, anxiety disorder)
- Immigrant Experience
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, or Queer
- Religion (ex: Muslim, Christian)
- Unknown
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Illustrator name \***

\_\_\_\_\_

**10. Illustrator background (Check all that apply. If background is not clear, check "unknown.") \****Check all that apply.*

- African / African American (ex: Somalian, Ethiopian)
- American Indian / First Nation (ex: Sioux, Cherokee)
- Asian Pacific / Asian Pacific American (ex: Chinese, Hawaiian)
- European / European American (ex: Russian, Irish)
- Latinx / Hispanic (ex: Mexican, Columbian)
- Disability / Mental Health
- Immigrant Experience
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, or Queer
- Religion (ex: Muslim, Christian)
- Unknown
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Diversity represented in this book (Check all that apply.) \***

*Check all that apply.*

- African / African American (ex: Somalian, Ethiopian)
- American Indian / First Nation (ex: Sioux, Cherokee)
- Asian Pacific / Asian Pacific American (ex: Chinese, Hawaiian)
- European / European American (ex: Russian, Irish)
- Latinx / Hispanic (ex: Mexican, Columbian)
- Disability / Mental Health
- Immigrant Experience
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, or Queer
- Religion (ex: Muslim, Christian)
- Unknown
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. When do most of the events in the book happen? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Present day
- In the historical past

**13. What stands out in the text? (short phrases) \***

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**14. What stands out in the pictures? (short phrases) \***

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**15. Culturally accurate highlights? (short phrases) \***

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5/1/2017

Picture Book Analysis

**16. Cultural details missing? (short phrases) \***

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**17. Your review (paragraph form) \***

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**18. Should people read this book? \****Mark only one oval.*

- Recommended
- Shrug (neither recommend nor not recommend)
- Not Recommended

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