CHAPTER 1

Adolescent Literacies and Identities Inside and Outside of School

To understand just one life you have to swallow the world.
—SALMAN RUSHDIE

As you read Chapter 1, reflect on the following questions:

- How do popular stereotypes about today's adolescents influence your thinking about and instructional approaches with youth?

- In what ways does the "mediasphere" affect you and your students' attitudes toward and perceptions of literacy?

- What literacy challenges do youth from diverse backgrounds and their teachers face today?

- How have the Common Core State Standards changed the way literacy activities and assignments are structured for adolescent students?

- How can teachers of youth balance content and disciplinary literacy practices?

- What can be learned from international reading literacy assessments for making instructional literacy practices more responsive to the needs of youth?

- Which approaches to literacy instruction help foster healthy literate identities for adolescents?

Understanding today's youth requires an attitude of openness to their unique and diverse nature. As the opening quote to this chapter implies, it is perhaps only through an appreciation of the lifeworlds of adolescents, and how they shape and are shaped by their worlds, that we can ever really come to know them. Popular

stereotypes about adolescents are conveniences that belie the multidimensionality and complexity of this stage in human development (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Moje & Luke, 2009; Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005). As some would have it, adolescents, at best, are merely imperfect adults in transition (Serafini, Bean, & Readence, 2004); at worst, they are a bundle of raging hormones, callow and self-centered, and even menacing (Lesko, 2012).

> ## Case Study
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> Bridging her students' culture and personal interests with the content of her high school business classes is the only way Marta knows how to teach. Some topics, however, have been more difficult to link to students' lifeworlds than others. One such topic, writing business contracts, created unique challenges for Marta because most of her students were from financially strapped homes and had parents who were employed part time. Few, if any, had ever seen an actual business contract before or had any experience at all with the work world.
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> **To the reader:** In this chapter we raise several important issues about adolescent literacies and identities. One overarching theme is that adolescents are more likely to remain engaged readers and learners if their everyday experiences and discourses are honored and made to enrich the classroom culture. As you read, consider how a teacher like Marta might capitalize on what her students bring to the business class as a link to understanding the topic of business contracts.

Stoking these stereotypes are media that sensationalize teen violence and sexual promiscuity (Rivers & Barnett, 2011), as well as myths about young adults' poor reading habits (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) and academic shortcomings. Males (2002) responds to these characterizations of teenagers by insisting that adults raise a mirror to themselves when passing harsh judgment on youth behavior:

> Adolescents behave like the adult society that raises them. They did not land on a meteorite. We raised them. They share our values. They act like us. . . . If teenagers behave like the adult society that raises them, their evil is the same as ours, and it is not curable by aiming increasingly absurd, cosmetic panaceas at the young. (p. 40)

A growing body of research into youth culture has expanded our understanding of what it means to be an adolescent while challenging our traditional constructions of adolescence (Alvermann, 2009; Gee, 2012; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). It is fruitful, then, for all of us to evaluate our own opinions about adolescents. Using the *Opinionnaire about American Teens* in Figure 1.1, decide where you stand relative to each statement about America's teens. Afterward, read the statements in the box "Facts about Adolescents" and compare them with your own opinions.

Directions: Consider carefully each of the following 10 statements and then write a sentence stating your own opinion about each statement. Afterward, look at the *Facts about Adolescents* in the box that follows and compare your opinions with the facts.

1. **Teenagers are uniquely violent and crime-prone.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

2. **The worst danger to youth is children killing children.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

3. **Youth violent crime is skyrocketing while adult violence is declining.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

4. **Teenagers are innately prone to reckless behavior and are stimulated to violence primarily by media images, impulsiveness, and gun availability.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

5. **Today's schools are cauldrons of violence.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

6. **Teenage birth rates are out of control.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

7. **Teenagers are the most at risk for AIDS.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

8. **Teenagers are at high risk for suicide.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

9. **Teenagers are the group most at risk of drug abuse.**

   Your opinion: _____

   _____

10. **Teenagers smoke because of immaturity, peer pressure, and tobacco ads.**

    Your opinion: _____

    _____

FIGURE 1.1. An opinionnaire about American teens.

FACTS ABOUT ADOLESCENTS

1. Youth and adults commit crimes at roughly equal rates.

2. The great majority of homicide victims 17 years and younger are killed by adults.

3. Violent crimes committed by youth and adults have increased at similar rates.

4. U.S. society as a whole has a violence problem. Senior citizens in the United States are more likely to kill someone than is a European teenager.

5. Risks of murder or being victim to other crimes of violence are extremely low in schools as compared with neighborhoods and homes.

6. Teenage birth rates are identical to those of the adults around them. Three-quarters of babies born to teenagers are fathered by adult men.

7. Teens rank third by age at which HIV infection was acquired. Nearly all HIV transmission is from adults.

8. Suicide rates for high-school-age youth are half those of adults.

9. Teens are the age group least likely to abuse drugs, whereas there have been record levels of drug abuse among middle-aged adults.

10. Youth from homes where parents smoke or who are from social groups with high proportions of adults who smoke are three times more likely to smoke than others.

I believe it is productive to deconstruct stereotypes about American teens by exposing the worst myths that have built up around them. The 10 statements in the opinionnaire come from prominent myths about adolescents identified by sociologist and youth advocate Mike Males (2002, 2010). This exercise highlights the need among those of us involved in the care and education of youth to reject the glib and largely groundless accusations about their behavior. Instead, we should recognize that teens are more likely than not to mimic the adults around them. Thus, as we come to appreciate how adult and teen behaviors are interconnected, the chances grow for improving dialogue, understanding, cooperation, and learning.

I suggest, therefore, that the search for tidy all-inclusive definitions of youth is doomed to failure, because of the complex nature of adolescent life. Due in large part to persistent stereotypes and rigid perceptions of adolescence, it is only relatively recently that youth culture has been the focus of scholarship. New perspectives on youth offer a more complete and nuanced view of the shared experiences and values of adolescents that can lead to insights for teaching and reaching adolescents (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012).

This chapter is devoted to discussing various facets of youth culture and the part literacy plays in adolescent identity formation. By opening the lens wide to view the ever-shifting and multifarious nature of adolescence, as well as current and enduring influences on this stage of development, I hope to make clear just how important it is to increase our understanding of the individuals for whom all the instructional attention contained in this book is intended. I believe that it is only

with a disposition of openness toward newer conceptions of today's youth and the literacies they use and need can we become better teachers of subject matter, as well as more responsive teachers of students.

ADOLESCENT LITERACIES AND IDENTITIES

On a recent work trip to Germany, I found myself with an unexpected free day and decided to make an excursion to Mainz, which was only 30 minutes by train. There are certain highly revered places in the world that attract devotees for reasons of religious or historical significance, such as St. Peter's Basilica, Mecca, the pyramids of Giza, the Taj Mahal, and the Parthenon. For literacy scholars, however, none can be more important than the birthplace of Johannes Gutenberg. A short walk from the station, a monument to the vaunted inventor of movable type looms over the many beer- and coffee-drinking tourists in the large *platz* named in his honor. Further down through the old city is the remarkable Gutenberg museum, home of original and replica 15th-century presses that permitted the circulation of texts on a scale unimaginable previous to that time. And, of course, the numerous period books produced on these and future printing machines, including the Gutenberg Bible, are everywhere to peruse.

Later, sitting in a café next to the river, I ruminated, as only someone who has made reading and literacy his life's project could, on the significance of Gutenberg's invention for those of us living in the 21st century. The most salient impression I was left with was that printing made it possible for individual readers to have access to larger numbers of books, which changed the relationship they could have with text. When books were rare, expensive, and sacred in nature, the task of reading was principally one of preservation and memory. After mechanical printing, as books on an ever-expanding range of topics were made available, the reading process took on a greater degree of serious "intellectual labor" (Cavallo & Chartier, 1999, p. 24). This shift would seem to presage challenges in the field today, as teachers continue to seek ways of moving their students beyond the memorization phase of reading to thinking about text in more meaningful and critical ways.

Gutenberg's revolutionary invention evolved to become more technologically efficient over the intervening centuries, though the basic process of printing remained largely unchanged right up to just a few decades ago. Yet, within my lifetime, the printing industry experienced another revolution that has forever altered the way texts are produced and how we encounter and interact with text itself. We live in a digital age surrounded by electronic print and media. Books, newspapers, articles, and every imaginable text form are no longer "typeset" but are created and formatted digitally, including the paper version of *The Washington Post* that arrives at my door predawn and that I read every morning at breakfast. Virtually all print

media are made available on the Internet and delivered directly to any variety of e-readers, smartphones, and even smartwatches.

Today's adolescents have only experienced life as so-called digital natives (Prensky, 2009). And a growing number of teachers, especially those new to the ranks, are steeped in digital and social media, as well (Boyd, 2014). Thus instructional methods are reflecting these new times. On a near daily basis, messages arrive in my email box touting the advantages of new technologies for teaching and learning. "Learn how to use video games as a tool for increasing reading skill and motivation," says one ad; "6 tactics for using e-mail to improve student writing," says another; and "Media literacy lesson plan guides for the Language Arts class," proclaims a third. Developing facility with these ever-evolving information and communication technology (ICT) tools and thinking about them in terms of curriculum, as well as understanding their value to today's adolescents, is becoming as important a part of the skill set of secondary teachers as possessing expert knowledge on the topic of instruction and interpersonal competencies (Burke & Hammett, 2009; Coiro, 2015).

YOUTH CULTURE: A MULTIPLE-LITERACIES PERSPECTIVE

Calls for secondary schools to honor the literacies and discourses of youth derive from the realization that we live in a "mediasphere" (O'Brien, 2001), "a world saturated by inescapable, ever-evolving, and competing media that both flow through us and are altered and created by us" (Brozo, 2005a, p. 534). O'Brien further describes this concept and what it means to youth in these terms:

> I use the adapted term mediasphere to refer to the mediacentric world of young people. Within youth culture, we have been concerned that this massive, continual media absorption would render our young people as passive consumers, manipulated by the bombardment. In fact, life in the mediasphere has turned our kids into keen interactors (rather than passive receptors) who understand media . . . [and have] become increasingly powerful and adept at using [media] to define themselves.

The ubiquitous nature of new media in the lives of today's youth was confirmed in a recent report suggesting that teens in America are spending nearly 9 hours a day using media such as online video and music (Common Sense Media, 2015). After undertaking multiyear case studies of adolescents and their digital media, Boyd (2014) discovered that to teens "these technologies—and the properties that go with them—are just an obvious part of life" (p. 42). She further maintains that adolescents "don't try to analyze how things are different because of technology; they simply try to relate to a public world in which technology is a given" (p. 41). Furthermore, Plester, Wood, and Bell's research (2008) suggests that concerns

about whether texting and other abbreviated digital messaging adversely affect student writing may be unwarranted.

Fears that new media would bring with them moral and intellectual decline and would turn young people into passive consumers—an idea O'Brien rejected—echo similar cries of angst about the latest technologies and texts since at least the time of ancient Greece. Socrates, for example, warned that print would be the end of memory for his students. In *Phaedrus*, a Socratic dialogue by Plato (2007) from about 370 B.C.E., Socrates laments about print:

> For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them . . . you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise. (274c–275b)

In early colonial America, certain Puritanical rectors advocated the abolition of printing of all books other than the Bible, because secular texts were believed to contaminate the minds and souls of Christians, but especially of young Christians (Carden, 1983). More recently, dime novels and comic books were thought to surely turn youth into dull-witted wastrels (Springhall, 1999).

Regarding technology and memory, Sparrow and her colleagues (Sparrow, Liu, & Wegner, 2011) have learned through a series of experiments that transactive memory, or the process of social information sharing, is being rapidly replaced by computers and the Internet. The researchers assert that the:

> processes of human memory are adapting to the advent of new computing and communication technology. Just as we learn through transactive memory who knows what in our families and offices, we are learning what the computer "knows" and when we should attend to where we have stored information in our computer-based memories. We are becoming symbiotic with our computer tools, growing into interconnected systems that remember less by knowing information than by knowing where the information can be found. This gives us the advantage of access to a vast range of information. (p. 778)

From this perspective, instead of a hindrance to memory, ICT tools, such as Google and other search engines and electronic databases, are helping to transform memory processes by making them more efficient. A 21st-century cognitive skill, then, doesn't necessarily include the capacity to memorize a vast amount of information but the ability to remember where and how to access needed information stored in digital spaces. Nostalgia may impel some of us living in the mediasphere to wish we were less dependent on our computers, tablets, and smartphones, but we have come to rely on them in essentially the same way we have relied on any source

of information and knowledge. Thus, we can argue whether it is good for youth to be constantly "plugged in," but they, like all of us, must stay connected to have efficient access to the vast memory banks available in cyberspace (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2012).

An important caveat must be given here as regards computer use and online activity in school. At least for some reading tasks, such as those found on PISA (described below), for both traditionally and digitally formatted texts, an excessive amount of computer time in school may actually depress achievement (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015a). Not too often and for deliberately chosen activities were found to be the conditions of optimal school use with computers. This does not imply that browsing the Internet for assignments is harmful, except that this kind of online activity, when performed daily without appropriate teacher guidance and not commensurate with challenging and higher-level reading and navigation tasks, may fail to benefit adolescent learners. At the same time, little or no school-based computer activity also appears to be related to lower reading performance.

It might be the case that 20th-century schools do not become 21st-century learning environments merely by retrofitting them with computers and Internet access. This hard lesson was learned in Los Angeles, where over 1 billion U.S. dollars were spent to put iPads in the hands of every student in the district. Instead of bringing about quick and significant achievement gains, the strategy has been deemed unworkable due to a general lack of digital infrastructure in the school district, the absence of an overall instructional technology strategic plan, and, perhaps more critically, an insurmountable shortage of teachers skilled in ICT pedagogy (*http://laschoolreport.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Federal-Ipad-MiSiS-report.pdf*). This reminds us that availability of ICT tools and their indiscriminate use do not necessarily lead to improved student learning nor guarantee students will land decent-paying jobs after graduation (David & Cuban, 2010). Secondary school teachers must have support for and employ practices that use new ICTs responsively.

Despite potential overuse of computers in school settings, a notable consequence of the spread of ICTs in the general public, reading is massively shifting from print to digital texts. For example, computers have become the second source of news for American citizens, after TV and before radio and printed newspapers and magazines (American Press Institute, 2014). Similarly, British children and teenagers prefer to read digital texts over printed texts (Clark, 2014), and a recent UNESCO report showed that two-thirds of users of phone-based readers across five nations indicated that their interest in reading and time spent reading increased once it was possible to read on their phones (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014). This shift has important consequences for the definition of reading as a skill.

Acquiring and expanding competence with the new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs will require youth to engage in practices that stretch beyond

foundational literacies that may be sufficient for past forms of reading and writing (Hartman, Morsink, & Zheng, 2010; International Reading Association, 2009). Communicative competence in the 21st century involves negotiating and creating new forms of text found in evolving combinations of traditional offline environments with new online media within complex information networks (Dalton & Proctor, 2008; Wyatt-Smith & Elkins, 2008).

The realization that adolescents are the most active participants in the mediasphere means that these new forms of discourse they experience and create should be acknowledged and appreciated in school settings, as competency in these new forms of communication serve youth well in the ever-evolving global reach of the digital age (Alvermann, 2010; Squire, 2011). I believe the digital discourse worlds most teens inhabit, if validated in the public sphere of schools and classrooms, could narrow achievement gaps (Leu et al., 2015) and increase engagement in literacy and content learning (Walsh, 2010). Secondary school is the setting in which youths' multiple literacies—digital, graphic, aural—could find expression in the understanding, critical analysis, and reinterpretation of concepts and content (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013; O'Brien & Scharber, 2008).

YOUTH CULTURE: A DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

So who are the individuals and groups that comprise youth culture in the United States? From the perspective of the most recent census data available (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., 2013), the adolescent population today ages 10–19 totals nearly 42 million and is growing. This represents 14% of the total U.S. population and is more racially/ethnically diverse than the adult U.S. population. Recent data from the *Digest of Education Statistics* (*http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_203.50.asp*) show that the number of White students has been declining steadily over the past two decades, from 65% in 2001 to, at present and for the first time, just under 50% of the total share of public school enrollment. Meanwhile, Hispanic student enrollment has increased from 17 to 24% of the overall student population in prekindergarten through 12th grade. During this same period, Black students' share of public school enrollment has decreased from 17 to 16%, and the number of Asian/Pacific Islanders has increased by 1%, from 4 to 5%.

It is clear from demographic trends that this diversity among adolescents will only continue to increase over the coming years and decades (Colby & Ortman, 2015). In fact, before the end of this decade, children and adolescents of color, age 18 and under, will be the majority youth population and by 2060 are expected to comprise 64% of the overall youth population (Ortman, 2013). This growth among young, non-White populations is occurring largely in suburbs and small cities.

As of 2014, 24% of all children (ages 0–17) were first- or second-generation immigrants (defined as living in the United States with at least one foreign-born

parent), and 22% of those between the ages of 5 and 17 in 2012 did not speak English at home (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015). Meanwhile, the percentage of English learners in the 2012–2013 school year had risen to 9.2%, as compared with 9.1% a year earlier (Kena et al., 2015).

The expected increase in the numbers of Hispanics, Asians, and other youth of color comes as a result of an unprecedented wave of immigration the United States is experiencing nationwide. The past two decades saw immigration population growth that has rivaled any period in the nation's history (Colby & Ortman, 2015). This unparalleled level of transnational migration has introduced into U.S. middle and secondary schools ever-growing numbers of students with limited English skills. The number of public school students in the United States who are English learners is approaching 5 million, an increase of nearly 1 million students since 2003 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015b).

While the growing number of immigrants has enriched the racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity within the United States, the increased diversity in population challenges long-held beliefs about what it means to be "American" (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). At the same time, data point to a shortage of teachers across the nation, especially general education and content-area teachers, who are qualified or trained to teach these new immigrant children, many of whom are English learners (Sampson & Collins, 2012). Furthermore, across the United States there is an overall lack of quality and consistency in the preparation of teachers to work with these students in their classes (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015; Lucas, 2011).

Another adolescent demographic that demands our attention is the increasing numbers of youth coming from low-income families, up from 35% in 2007 to 41% in 2013 (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015). Nearly 20% of the 12- to 17-year-old age group lives below the poverty line (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015). This equates to one in five school-age youth living in poverty, as compared with one in seven in 2000. Black and Hispanic youth, at 61%, comprise the largest share of those from low-income families, over twice as large as the percentage of their White counterparts from low-income backgrounds. Furthermore, over half (53%) of children of immigrant parents have low incomes (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2015). Taken together, the challenges of meeting the language and learning needs of immigrant students and the growing number of those in poverty will require our most creative and responsive literacy practices.

One demographic trend that shows signs of improvement is the level of national school dropouts. Since 2000, when the overall rate of dropouts among 16- to 24-year-olds was at 12%, there has been a decline, to about 7% today. These numbers are staggering, nonetheless, when put into perspective. For instance, 7% represents 2,215,000 annual dropouts, or more than 6,000 students per day leaving our schools (U.S. Census Bureau; see *www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/historical/index.html*).

Furthermore, economic background influences these rates. Lower-income students have always had lower high school graduation rates. In 2009, for example, students from families in low-income brackets ran a risk of dropping out that was five times higher than their high-income peers (NCES, 2015a). Poor academic performance and grade retention, more common among students from low-socioeconomic-status backgrounds, are strong predictors of early school leaving (Bowers, 2010; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007).

About dropouts we can say very little, other than that these youth are not enrolled in school and do not have a high school credential. What is certain, however, is that dropping out of high school has long-term social and economic consequences. Without even a high school diploma, it is difficult to obtain many minimum-wage jobs and virtually impossible to enroll in postsecondary schools.

High school completion, therefore, is even more crucial today as we face the demands of rapidly changing and expanding global markets. Consider that from 1997 to 2012, the U.S. population of working-age citizens increased from 203 million to 243 million, while shedding close to 5 million manufacturing jobs. This equates to a decline of 33%; only the United Kingdom among industrialized nations had a greater loss as a percentage of the total workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013b). With fewer and fewer well-paying manufacturing jobs available to them, youth who leave high school before graduating may find themselves competing for low-skilled and extremely low-paying jobs in the expanding service sector (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

With scant opportunities for advancement, high school dropouts are more likely to live in poverty as adults. As compared to those with higher educational attainment, they have a greater likelihood of committing criminal acts and of becoming dependent on welfare and government programs. They also exhibit higher levels of alcohol consumption, as well as poorer mental and physical health (Glennie, Bonneau, Vandellen, & Dodge, 2012).

YOUTH CULTURE: A COMMON CORE PERSPECTIVE

An interesting influence on youth and the ways they practice literacy in middle and high school is the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI; 2010) (see *www.corestandards.org*). Although questions remain about whether all states will adopt the standards or how long they will remain in force in states that have already adopted them, the Common Core has had a significant impact on how reading is taught in the middle and upper grades, and it appears inevitable that it will continue to do so in the coming years (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012; Rothman, 2011; Walker, 2013).

For me, what was unexpected about these new standards is that they situate literacy and language development squarely within the content areas. For three

decades I have been a staunch advocate of literacy across the curriculum, so it was particularly gratifying to know the federal government was finally endorsing this approach to literacy. Citing the failure of traditional reading schemes to leaven achievement of children and youth in the United States—as evidenced by flat trend lines on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and a slipping in rank on international assessments—Common Core proponents assert that prevailing literacy curricula need to shift from a focus on developing reading skills and building fluency with simple narratives toward reading and writing to gain knowledge and express new understandings with a variety of texts.

Even the title of the Common Core English language arts standards for grades 6–12 makes clear this significant shift in emphasis: "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects" (CCSSI, 2010). This new focus on literacy in the service of content learning is defended on the grounds that building "a foundation of knowledge in these fields [will give students] the background to be better readers in all content areas" (CCSSI, 2010, p. 10). This is an extremely important assertion that might serve as one of the overarching themes of this book. The fact is that highly capable readers at the secondary level possess more than skills and strategies; they also possess knowledge. And, more critically, this knowledge derives primarily from reading. Thus a virtuous cycle develops for successful readers—the more they read, the more they know, and the more they know, the more efficient reading becomes for them (Brozo, 2010b; Mol & Bus, 2011; Pfost, Dörfler, & Artelt, 2013).

At least four decades of research in reading comprehension support the primacy of relevant prior knowledge (Duke & Carlisle, 2011). As the so-called fourth-grade slump (Brozo, 2005b) demonstrates, children who acquire good reading skills may not be able to transfer those abilities to comprehending content text if they lack relevant prior knowledge for that content. In other words, reading is domain specific (Chiesi, Spilich, & Voss, 1979; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; McNamara & Magliano, 2009).

The force of domain-specific knowledge on comprehension cannot be dismissed. This phenomenon became vivid for me once again when I was jarred from sleep by my alarm clock early one morning at a recent literacy convention in Chicago, Illinois. While I slowly sat up in bed, the local newscaster calmly uttered these words: "Live hogs found July unchanged." What an odd expression, I thought, as I hastily wrote the words out on the small hotel notepad. A few days later in a graduate practicum I was directing, I presented this sentence to one of our third-grade tutees. He was able to read it flawlessly and fluently but had no idea what it meant. Indeed, when I shared the sentence with my graduate tutors, only one, who had grown up on a farm with livestock, got the gist. The point is that to comprehend this expression, reading skill alone is not enough; one must also possess the needed background knowledge, in this case, of trading in commodities. As I was to discover, Chicago is the home of the Mercantile Exchange, where trades in live hog futures take place daily.

My episode in domain-specific reading comprehension should remind all of us that knowledge about life and all manner of things (even trading in commodities) is necessary to have successful meaning-making experiences with texts that inform. This knowledge can be gained by exploring content topics through reading. Secondary teachers skillful in content and disciplinary literacy practices can increase students' reading capacity, vocabulary, and knowledge with texts focused on real content.

After all, learning is inherent in every act of reading. Whether about the structure of language or the structure of a molecule, about what motivates a main character or what motivates a political leader, about places in the heart or places in Africa where French is spoken, all text encounters involve some type of learning. Children should be brought to see this as the purpose of reading right from the start. Approaching instruction around text in this way may hold a key to engaging curiosity, as well as expanding ideas and content knowledge (Brozo, 2010b). If texts are properly selected and appropriate instructional support is provided, students' innate curiosities about the world around them can be ignited through reading, helping them gain knowledge and build cognition even as they build vital reading and thinking skills (Duke, Caughlan, Juzwik, & Martin, 2012). The Common Core proponents argue that proficiency in reading and writing can only be achieved through a curriculum that is "coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades" (CCSSI, 2010, p. 10).

One unintended consequence of the Common Core is that as standards increase, dropout rates increase as well, disproportionately affecting youth from the lower ends of the socioeconomic scale (Glennie et al., 2012). It is imperative, therefore, that teachers of adolescents possess the instructional expertise to ensure that students at all ability levels expand their literacy skills and continually use these expanding skills to grow their knowledge, too (Paris & Block, 2007).

YOUTH CULTURE: A CONTENT-AREA AND DISCIPLINARY LITERACY PERSPECTIVE

This is a book about content-area and disciplinary literacy. Both are advocated and exemplified. In the preface, I referred to the ways in which these approaches to literacy are similar and the ways in which they are unique. In brief, content literacy focuses on skills and strategies that are generalizable across disciplinary boundaries and subject-area domains, whereas disciplinary literacy is concerned with the unique language and communication processes of each subject area (Gillis, 2014). As calls increase to better prepare youth for the demands of learning in the 21st century, it is essential that we consider how these approaches affect adolescents' literacy and identity.

When I entered high school, I knew I was a good reader. Up to that time, for virtually any text, meaning seemed to leap into consciousness as my eyes tracked

across the pages. English, history, science, and even math texts rarely posed any problems for me. My strong reading ability, along with an efficient memory, translated into high grades and overall academic success.

I came to assume that this pattern of success would continue, and it did, until I took chemistry in the 11th grade. I remember being staggered by the density of concepts, the new and specific vocabulary, the descriptions of chemical processes, and explanations about how to balance chemical equations that seemed written for those who already possessed an extensive background in the field. Furthermore, my struggles were cumulative, as I failed to absorb critical content early on and fell further and further behind with each new assigned textbook section and chapter. When I finally reached a point of utter despair, I made an appointment with the chemistry teacher and threw myself at his mercy. He was kind of a geeky scientist type, whose empathic side was underdeveloped; however, he said something to me then that only now, more than 40 years later, I realize was the key: "You gotta read like a chemist, Bill." In addition to this exhortation, he also showed me a few ways that he, who was trained as a chemist, approached the chapters in the textbook and, especially, how he read and analyzed problems related to balancing chemical equations. After a couple of more meetings with him, I was beginning to catch on, and what I realized was that there really was a kind of insider's way of reading, thinking about, and solving problems in chemistry.

I never became an aficionado of chemistry, but I did manage to eke out a B+ in the course, which I regarded as a major academic triumph. And the foundational knowledge I developed through that experience so many years ago continues to serve me, as I recently read a book called *The Upright Thinkers* (Mlodinow, 2015) that included a long section about 19th-century Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev, who discovered the periodic table, and I understood most of it. Moreover, what did stick with me was the idea that my generally effective reading skills may not always be enough when it comes to negotiating complex, domain-specific texts. In other words, to maximize understanding in chemistry or math or history, readers need not only general content-area skills and strategies but also specialized ones tailored to the literacy demands unique to each.

My experience might be thought of as a kind of case of one challenging a generally accepted premise that basic literacy skills learned in the primary grades provide the essential foundation for reading and writing more complex texts as students advance through school. Although foundational skills are important, I discovered firsthand what a long-standing and growing body of evidence attests (Sturtevant et al., 2006; Conley, Freidhoff, Gritter, & Vriend Van Duinen, 2008; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007): When youth move into the intermediate grades, middle school, and beyond, they need to develop advanced and, even more, specialized literacy skills and strategies necessary to negotiate and compose increasingly complex text in the disciplines (Langer, 2011; Lee & Spratley, 2010).

Despite these accepted understandings, questions continue to be raised about the most efficacious literacy skills and strategies youth should possess. Some, for

example, suggest that generic content literacy strategies fade in importance as students progress through the grades, arguing instead that students need to engage in sophisticated discipline-specific literacy practices (Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia 2011; Moje, 2008; Draper, 2008). Proponents of disciplinary literacy approaches assert that each discipline requires a specialized set of heuristics and mental dispositions (Greenleaf, Cribb, Howlett, & Moore, 2010). Thus, in history, youth need deep knowledge to be able to challenge texts with critical questions, such as, Who wrote this text? What is the writer's background? What are the writer's positions and perspectives? and Whose knowledge is being privileged? (Nokes, 2010; Reisman, 2012; Schleppegrell, Greer, & Taylor, 2008). Similarly, other disciplines have their own unique discursive practices (Brock, Goatley, Raphael, Trost-Shahata, & Weber, 2014; Siebert & Draper, 2008; Fang, 2012; Pearson, Moje, & Greenleaf, 2010).

In math, disciplinary literacy is highly specialized, requiring forms of reading and writing not routinely found in word-rich text environments. For this reason, typical content-area literacy strategies are generally not applicable to the actual problem-solving processes inherent in genuine math-related tasks. For example, reading strategies such as KWL or SQ3R are composed of steps that may have little resemblance to the thinking needed to read, understand, model, and execute a problem-solving strategy in math. In fact, it may be true that generic strategies actually hinder effective problem solving by drawing students' attention away from the required mental operations needed for specific math tasks (Draper, 2008).

What all of this means for today's middle and high school teachers is that they need to know the content, practices, and discourse of their disciplines, as well as to have knowledge about the language, culture, cognition, motivation, and social/emotional realities of their students (Lee, 2007). This may be particularly critical for struggling adolescent readers, if one accepts Lee's contention that the achievement gap is attributable in large part to a limited knowledge base. What is being suggested here is that reading in the disciplines builds knowledge, and, as knowledge expands, reading and learning ability expand, also (Brozo, 2010b). While I make a strong case in this book for youth pursuing their interests by reading about who they are and who they aspire to become, when it comes to disciplinary literacy, youth are what they read.

YOUTH CULTURE: AN INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSESSMENT PERSPECTIVE

Another picture of American youth comes from results they have achieved on important literacy assessments. To capture this perspective, I focus this section on the performance of U.S. adolescents on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). I do so because the results of this assessment position American youth and their literacy abilities within a global context. Moreover, media-grabbing

pronouncements from policy makers and others that the United States is losing the race for global economic competitiveness often highlight international assessment results (Gates, 2009; Obama, 2010). Some, to rally support for their initiatives, use these results to characterize American education as in a state of "crisis" (Ravitch, 2010). Meanwhile, broad economic indicators show that the U.S. economy, which remains by far the largest in the world, is not falling behind its competitors, including those with superior achievement levels on PISA, such as Russia and Japan (Reich, 2011). Furthermore, worker productivity in America has risen substantially since the 1990s (Chang, 2011), and the United States actually has a surplus of highly skilled workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013b).

PISA data are helpful in that they paint a highly complex picture of American adolescents' reading abilities, motivation, and schooling. For example, Asian American and White students in the United States have scores that rival the best in the world, but Black and Hispanic students score at levels that are comparable to those in some of the lowest-performing countries. With respect to gender, girls significantly outperform boys in reading literacy (OECD, 2015b). PISA findings also reinforce a vexing and persistent pattern of consistent underachievement by youth from low-income families and communities, leaving some to assert that where students live and go to school in the United States determines whether they receive a world-class education or one that is second rate (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013; Berliner, 2009).

When analyzed critically, findings from international assessments such as PISA can provide a reflection on the context and quality of American schooling for its youth. First and foremost, because large numbers of U.S. 15-year-olds participate, key findings for American adolescents have relevance to literacy policy, curriculum, and instruction, especially when those findings are parsed by race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other key variables. Second, we hear much in the rhetoric of national leaders that raising reading achievement will ensure that youth possess needed 21st-century literacy skills to better prepare them for the new global economy (Resmovits, 2013). This assumption appears to be supported by the results of the other OECD-sponsored global assessment, the Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Adults in the survey who were skilled in reading were more successful in their personal and professional lives as compared with their less skilled peers (OECD, 2013a). Thus it would be prudent to learn what we can from PISA about how to prepare youth for these new global challenges, which will surely require sophisticated and adaptive literacy abilities (Learning Metrics Task Force, 2013; OECD, 2010a).

What Is PISA?

Before exploring important trends and patterns in reading literacy achievement on PISA for American youth, here is a brief description of the assessment. The

Program for International Student Assessment is a study of the achievement of 15-year-olds in reading, math, and science literacy from participating countries around the world. PISA occurs in 3-year cycles, with one of the three domains of literacy emphasized. Under the auspices of the OECD, the first PISA cycle emphasizing reading literacy was launched in 2000; math literacy in 2003; scientific literacy in 2006; then reading was once again the focus in 2009 and math in 2012. When a particular domain is the focus in a PISA cycle, it is assessed with greater emphasis. Thus PISA 2009 has yielded very rich databases of reading literacy achievement, as well as of demographic, instructional, and attitudinal variables related to reading habits and practices.

PISA seeks to measure how well young adults approaching the end of compulsory schooling are prepared to meet the challenges of today's knowledge societies. The assessment targets youths' ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges, rather than sampling learnings they have mastered based on specific school curricula.

The PISA test of print reading comprises both continuous (articles, essays, etc.) and noncontinuous (graphs, data tables, etc.) texts. Questions are categorized as Access and Retrieve, Integrate and Interpret, and Reflect and Evaluate. Texts and questions are distributed over four reading situations—Personal, Public, Occupational, and Educational. The digital reading test also comprises continuous and noncontinuous texts, though most electronic texts are categorized as multiple texts, which are defined as discrete texts that are juxtaposed for a particular occasion or purpose (e.g., a job advertisement and a follow-up email). Similarly, digital texts include the three question types referred to above, as well as "complex" questions, which involve multiple demands (OECD, 2009).

I want to unpack the specific findings from PISA related to race, socioeconomic status, engagement, and skills and strategies. A closer look at these important variables offers a more nuanced perspective on the performance of U.S. adolescents and can suggest potential directions we might take to further explore these correlates to reading literacy competence, as well as programs and practices that might address particular areas of need.

Race

As was noted, classrooms in elementary and secondary schools in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse. With this diversity has come a pattern of starkly contrasting scores for Asian and White American students on the one hand and Hispanic and Black American youth on the other, as Table 1.1 reveals. Instantly noticeable is the full 100-point difference in favor of Asian students (541) as compared with Black students (441). This gap is equal to a span of 2–3 years of achievement. Furthermore, Asian and White students have average scores in the upper ranges of PISA proficiency level 3 on a 6-level reading literacy scale. Level 3 ability

TABLE 1.1. Average 2009 PISA Reading Literacy Scores of U.S. 15-Year-Old Students by Race/Ethnicity

Race/ethnicity	Score
Asian	541*
White	525*
Hispanic	466*
Black	441*
U.S. average	500
OECD average	493

*Significantly different from U.S. and OECD averages at the .05 level.

means that students are successful at "reading tasks of moderate complexity, such as locating multiple pieces of information, making links between different parts of a text, and relating it to familiar everyday knowledge" (OECD, 2010b, p. 51). Hispanic and Black students, on the other hand, have average scores at level 2, which is "considered a baseline level of proficiency" (OECD, 2010b, p. 52).

The contrast among these groups is brought into sharper focus when juxtaposing average scores by race with other countries. Asian American youth, for instance, have an average that rivals the top-performing jurisdiction in the world, Shanghai-China (556), and ranks them second among all 65 participating countries and jurisdictions in PISA 2009. American White 15-year-olds also fare exceptionally well in comparison with top-performing countries, ranking sixth, just 1 point below Singapore's average score of 526. At the same time, Hispanic youths' score (466) looks more like those of Lithuania (468) or Turkey (464), and Black students' score of 441 is similar to those of Serbia (442) and Chile (449).

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a metric that combines economic and sociological factors to gauge a person's social position in relation to others. For individuals and families, factors typically included in SES are household or combined income, education attainment, and occupation (Marmot, 2004). Individual and family economic well-being has been linked to a variety of benefits for children and youth, including overall academic achievement (Ladd, 2012), early word learning and language development (Farrant & Zubrick, 2012; Schiff & Lotem, 2011), reading achievement and growth (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Benson & Borman, 2010) and even physical and psychological health (Marmot, 2004).

Although state, district, and individual information related to SES is not available in the PISA databases, analysis of SES can be achieved using proxy variables.

For instance, reading scores can be correlated with free and reduced-price lunch rates, which represent students' family income. Table 1.2 confirms the linear relationship between these two variables. American students from the most privileged backgrounds, attending schools with a subsidized-meal rate of 10% or less, have an average PISA score (551) that is second in the world, just shy of the top performing jurisdiction, Shanghai-China (556). The score achieved by students who fall in the next category (attending schools with 10–29.9% of enrolled students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch) would rank them fifth in the world, just ahead of Singapore (526) and a few score points below Hong Kong-China (533).

A very different outcome is evident for groups of students attending schools with high eligibility rates for free and reduced-price lunches. At 50–74.9%, a score of 471 is comparable to a rank of about 31st among the 34 OECD countries participating in the 2009 assessment. The lowest score, 446, associated with students who are enrolled in schools with at least 75% of the student body eligible for subsidized meals, ranks 33rd among the OECD countries, higher only than Mexico at 425.

We also learn from the PISA 2009 database that nearly a quarter of the U.S. students who completed the assessment were from single-parent families. This is representative of the population of youth as a whole. Additionally, households with a single parent, especially if the parent is the mother, are much more likely than two-parent families to have low incomes (Ladd, 2012). Students living with one parent achieved scores that averaged 45–50 points lower than those of their peers from families other than with a single parent. A further telling indicator of achievement related to SES is immigrant status. This variable often links closely to family income, as well as the level of academic support and preparation for school that students are provided at home. For instance, immigrant children in the United States are nearly twice as likely to be living in poverty (21%) as compared with their native peers (14%; Hernandez, 2004). As a consequence, low-income immigrant families lack resources to purchase material goods, services, and experiences that

TABLE 1.2. Relationship between Eligibility Categories for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch and 2009 PISA scores for U.S. Students

School-subsidized meal rate as percentage of eligible students	PISA score
Less than 10%	551*
10–29.9%	527*
25–49.9%	502
50–74.9%	471**
75% or more	446**

*Significantly higher than U.S. average of 500.

**Significantly lower than U.S. average of 500.

promote children's educational development (Mistry, Biesanz, Chien, Howes, & Benner, 2008). The point is that the greater socioeconomic risks experienced by children of immigrants undoubtedly exacerbate the linguistic challenges they face. Whereas about 16% of all U.S. students from nonimmigrant backgrounds scored below proficiency level 2, close to 20% of second-generation immigrants and nearly 25% of first-generation students scored below this level.

Engagement

Nobel Prize–winning economist James Heckman argues in favor of what he refers to as "soft skills"—those personality traits that may be even more essential than cognitive abilities to successful learning and achievement inside and outside the classroom (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). According to Heckman and his colleagues (Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006), traits such as curiosity and perseverance might have greater predictive power for success in life than cognitive skills.

Engagement for learning, like perseverance, is one of the soft skills that has been shown to be a potent predictor of academic success (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Generally speaking, learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, inspired, or otherwise "engaged." Engagement is the variable above all others that has the greatest shared variance with performance on PISA (OECD, 2013b).

Reading engagement is a multidimensional factor in PISA indexed to overall attitude toward reading, time spent reading, and breadth of reading preferences. To derive composite indices comparable to achievement and other variables, the reading literacy tasks of PISA 2009 were accompanied by a student questionnaire that gathered data on these three aspects of reading engagement.

The pattern for U.S. 15-year-olds is similar to the pattern for all students on PISA. Higher reading engagement, as indicated by reading enjoyment, extensive daily and weekly reading time, and reading a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction texts, is related to higher achievement (Brozo, Sulkunen, et al., 2014). American students who read 1, 2, or more hours per day had scores from 541–544, whereas those who do not read for enjoyment at all had a score of 467. Similarly, students who strongly agree with the statement "I read only if I have to" had a score of 459, while those who strongly disagree had a score of 552. Students who view reading as a favorite hobby scored 562 on average, whereas those who do not had an average score of 466. The difference in performance in each of these cases ranges from near 80 to 100 score points, or the equivalent of nearly 2 years of schooling between highly engaged and unengaged readers.

As might be expected, given their overall superior performance on PISA, girls from the United States had significantly higher indices of reading engagement as compared with boys. Girls enjoyed reading more, spent a greater amount of time reading, and had a wider range of reading preferences as compared with their male peers (Brozo, Sulkunen, et al., 2014).

Skills and Strategies

All demanding cognitive processes require sophisticated skills and strategies. We know that proficient readers enhance comprehension and elaborate understandings by using their prior knowledge as they interact with text (Best, Rowe, Ozuru, & McNamara, 2005). Good readers also construct meaningful summaries of text (Pressley & Hilden, 2004), actively monitor comprehension (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005), and employ a host of other possible actions to ensure retention and recall of important information (Caccamise & Snyder, 2005).

Fifteen-year-olds in the United States who reported using reading strategies and processes regarded as effective ways of aiding comprehension had higher scores on PISA 2009 than those who did not. Executive control strategies such as monitoring comprehension, determining importance, connecting new information with prior knowledge, summarizing, and questioning were all associated with higher achievement.

A closer analysis of the PISA results related to skills and strategies for U.S. students (see Table 1.3) reveals that those who almost always check their understanding after reading had a significantly higher score (521) than those who almost never do this (465). Similarly, those who almost always try to identify the important points while reading had a score nearly 100 points higher (532) than those who almost never do (436). This same pattern is evident for students who relate new information to what they've already learned (526) versus those who almost never do this (480); for students who summarize what they read (519) compared to those who rarely do this (460); and for students who always ask their own questions while reading (519) compared with those who almost never do this (445).

Since PISA is intended for adolescents who are approaching the end of compulsory education, it offers one way to gauge the impact of schooling by considering its cumulative effects on American youth. What we learned is that, overall, the American educational system has proven that it can endow many of its future citizens with the critical 21st-century skills necessary to compete in the global economy and to actively participate as citizens of the world. And yet, this same system

TABLE 1.3. Comparison of 2009 PISA Scores between U.S. Students Who Use Reading Comprehension Strategies and Those Who Do Not

Reading comprehension strategy	Frequently/always	Rarely/never
Check understanding after reading	521	465
Identify important points while reading	532	436
Relate new information to prior knowledge	526	480
Summarize what has been read	519	460
Ask questions while reading	519	445

has also revealed its limitations in addressing through education the needs of a large segment of youth. As was pointed out, any system that elevates the reading literacy achievement of its students on such measures as PISA stands to reap economic and societal benefits for decades to come. And the United States may be one of the biggest beneficiaries of that kind of systemic effort, due in large part to its particularly large divide between the economic haves and have-nots, but also because of the economic potential to be realized through higher achievement in the unquestionably richest of all OECD countries. Thus those students coming from the lower rungs of the economic ladder are likely to advance the highest and claim a larger share of the nation's vast wealth as their cognitive abilities expand.

Some, such as Rueben and Murray (2008), argue that the United States runs separate and unequal schools and neighborhoods. The conditions of the schools and neighborhoods for poor, African American, and Hispanic youth, they assert, are not designed to develop high levels of literacy. Furthermore, they contend that if poverty, violence, drugs, unequal school funding, uncertified teachers, and de facto segregation are allowed to exist in the schools that serve these children and in the neighborhoods in which they live, then the United States will continue to fall short in international comparisons when the scores of ill-educated youth are combined with those of youth who enjoy better resources.

However, this gap in educational achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged students is more than an issue of social justice; it may also carry significance for the economic well-being of the nation. Raising PISA scores of Black and Hispanic youth could have a positive impact on the U.S. economy, according to Lynch and Oakford (2014). They found that if this racial achievement gap were closed, the United States could see a cumulative increase in gross domestic product (GDP) of $20.4 trillion by the year 2050.

Eliminating racial achievement disparities and bringing all students, regardless of color, up to the level of the highest-performing racial groups, then, may be one of the most pressing social and economic goals of 21st-century American schooling, especially because, in the coming decades, expansion of the nation's population of color is expected to continue.

YOUTH CULTURE: AN IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

If there is one safe assertion we might make about this period of development, it's that adolescence is marked by an active and self-conscious process of identity construction. Indeed, shaping one's sense of self is considered by many to be the primary developmental task for adolescents (Erikson, 1980; Gee, 2008; Steinberg, 2008). Most adolescents tie their identities to their interests and desires, such as athletics, music, hobbies, nonconformity, and pop culture. And any of these and more might be facets of a single youth's sense of herself. Teen and preteen youth struggle with

concerns and questions about how they're perceived by others, how they define themselves, and what they are to become. At the same time, adolescents develop a growing awareness of their membership in various discourse communities, both in face-to-face and virtual spaces, which they help define and which serve as funds of knowledge in their burgeoning awareness of the world and of themselves (Moje et al., 2004; Thomas, 2007). Family, friends, school, work, and virtual worlds contribute to a multifaceted self that defies stereotypes and simple categories. My own daughter, Hannah, when she was a 15-year-old 10th grader, offered these insights into the complex nature of adolescent identity during this crucial period in her life:

> It's difficult fitting-in. It's difficult to be your own person and be accepted. There's a lot of pressure to conform and become someone you may not be or do something you don't normally do or feel. It's like personalities going everywhere. . . . (Brozo, 2003, p. 7)

Identities structure the way adolescents understand themselves and their world. In the course of young people's biological and social development, their identities will change according to circumstance and preference, resulting in complex, often contradictory understanding of the nature of themselves and others, as 10th-grader Hannah observed. In this way, identity negotiation is a dynamic process.

Culturally specific assumptions related to a diverse range of interrelated practices, such as language, gender, and ethnicity, mean that a youth's identity is always a multidimensional composite of many identities (Tong & Cheung, 2011). Cultural diversity further compounds the complexity of identity insofar as it opens up gaps and discontinuities between the way in which a particular youth might perceive herself and the way she is perceived by others (Hermann & Lucas, 2008).

Language is an especially powerful identity marker and tool for identity construction (Gee, 2008; Moje, 2007). In schools and communities across the United States, language functions as a social tool for helping individuals understand themselves, each other, and their world and plays an important role in how individuals develop their identities, accomplish social action, and become positioned inside and outside of school (Orellana, 2007). Through written and spoken language, individuals can send and receive messages, develop or end relationships, provide feedback, and attempt to influence each other (Johnston, 2004). As many studies in the United States have documented, language use serves as a way for people to learn what is or is not valued within a community, to establish social identities for themselves and others, to develop understandings about texts, and to gain access to tools that can facilitate their reading comprehension or production of written texts (Agha, 2007).

Who we are is inextricably tied to the ways we express ourselves. Dat, a senior in high school whose second language is English, explains how the full breadth of his personality goes unrecognized for those who only know his English persona: "Even though my English is pretty good, I don't feel like myself unless I'm speaking

Vietnamese." Indeed, Dat's awareness of the connection between language and identity must be shared by countless numbers of immigrant youth in schools and communities across the land struggling daily to meet the linguistic expectations of school and the dominant culture (Goldenberg, 2008; Smith & Kumi-Yeboah, 2015).

As you can see, for most language-minority students like Dat who are entering our secondary schools in larger and larger numbers, many issues of identity are at stake. Although most English-learner (EL) students acquire English language proficiency at varying levels, many of them have problems with adjustment and identity that may go unaddressed in school. It's critical to point out that immigration issues for people of color have been unfairly and inappropriately compared to those of previous waves of immigrants of European descent. Unlike earlier largely White immigration, immigrant youth of color are confronted by unfounded social stereotypes and generalizations about achievement and behavior that act as barriers to personal and academic advancement (Jiménez, Eley, Leander, & Smith, 2015). Some argue that that the vast majority of students of color who fail to live out the "American Dream" begin to fix blame for their failure on themselves, their parents, and their racial or cultural group (Hill & Torres, 2010; Hones, 2002). Our secondary schools could be sites of critical self-exploration for these students, where identity construction, language development, and academic success occur within supportive and caring learning environments.

Linked closely to the process of identity construction is what it means for young adults to be competent and literate learners in both academic and out-of-school contexts (Alvermann & Eakle, 2007; Skerrett, 2012). A body of evidence (Alvermann, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2010; Sturtevant et al., 2006; Tatum, 2006) makes clear that youth are more likely to succeed academically and go on to be successful in adulthood when their literate practices are valued and when they see themselves as able and authorized members of learning communities. Yet many adolescents who possess talent, energy, and intelligence find themselves in school settings in which these competencies may go untapped (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2003–2004; Stewart, 2013).

The results of failing to align school curricula with students' interests and outside-of-school competencies are not inconsequential. The reason is that the process of literacy learning itself leads to changes in identity that are either empowering and transformative or demotivating and, worse, demeaning (Moje, 2007). For example, how Dat's teachers engage him in literacy activities and make decisions about the ways he should read and write influences how Dat thinks about himself and how others regard him as a literate learner. Moreover, as Dat learns to read and write, these practices change not just what he knows but also who he is (Alvermann, 2010).

Thus we are reminded that youths' identities are social constructions that mediate and are mediated by the adults in their lives, such as parents, relatives, and teachers; the discourse communities to which they belong and transect, such

as family, neighborhood, gamers, or rappers; and the texts they read, write, and talk about (Moje & Luke, 2009). Literate identity also goes to the heart of students' motivation and aspirations for what they want to be (Alvermann, 2010).

Even gender appears to be linked to adolescent literacy identities. Recall from the PISA findings presented in this chapter that boys were universally and significantly poorer achievers in reading and had lower levels of reading engagement than girls. Although these findings are based on overall averages, they suggest important patterns that merit scrutiny. Beyond the broad results of PISA and other large national and state assessments, there is ample evidence that too many boys in the United States do not possess positive literate identities (Brozo, 2010a). This is especially true of boys who come to school as struggling readers and of many boys from low-SES backgrounds (Tatum, 2009). Male youth, like all adolescents, increase their chances of developing the literate abilities and dispositions necessary for full participation as global citizens if they're exposed to and have meaningful and enjoyable literacy and learning experiences centered on texts of interest. In this book, I make repeated calls for schools to know and learn to value adolescents' interests and literate practices beyond the school walls. The texts and the literate practices boys already engage in outside of school can be honored in school to capture their unique imaginations, sustain their attention, and lead to more thoughtful reading and writing.

As young adolescents become more cognitively astute and self-aware, they seek contexts that support their growing sense of autonomy, desire for social networking, and identity development (Alvermann et al., 2012; Lesko, 2012). If they encounter traditional, teacher-centered instructional practices in middle and secondary schools, positive affect for learning diminishes, and a psychological distance from school-related activities increases (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Legault, Green-Demers, & Pelletier, 2006; Serafini et al., 2004). On the other hand, when offered a curriculum that is responsive to the interests and abilities they bring to school and that pays attention to who they are as individuals, young people will sustain their engagement in learning (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Brozo, 2011; Heron, 2003).

Case Study Revisited

Remember Marta, the business teacher? She was trying to generate ways of linking classroom topics to the real-world interests and cultural values of her students. Now that you have read Chapter 1, write your suggestions for how Marta might accomplish this goal.

As Marta observed her business students enter the classroom one day, she became inspired by an obvious way the topic of writing business contracts could be linked to their real-world interests and desires. Many had Tejano music pulsing from their headsets, which led Marta to consider how her students' love of this Mexican American musical hybrid could form the basis of a fun and meaningful lesson.

She began by inviting students to play their favorite Tejano music CDs for the class. With the music playing quietly in the background, Marta initiated a discussion about Tejano music artists and their recording companies. She asked questions about the agreements and contracts that need to be signed and formalized in order that the musicians get paid for the sale of their CDs. She described the familiar life story of the late Selena and what business contracts meant to her short but illustrious career. Marta then went on to inform the class that the topic for the day was business contracts and that by studying recording agreements and then negotiating and writing their own agreements, the class would have a much better appreciation for the importance of these business instruments.

With her students' interest piqued, Marta asked them to form pairs so that one could represent a recording artist and another a record company. She then handed each group a set of directions to complete their in-class assignment. First, they had to write out on a formatted sheet a fictitious name for both the company and the artist. Next, groups were asked to access helpful Internet sites from a list provided to obtain background on the language and format of contracts in the music recording business. Sylvia, representing a recording artist she called "Baby Sister," and Juan, representing a recording company he called "Sanchez Records," went to the computer lab and acquired information on music industry contracts from websites such as Mo's Music Management Recording Agreement (*www.planmagic.com/mmm/recdeal.htm*), Record Contract Basics (*www.music-law/contractbasics.html*), and Recording Agreements (*www.musicianunion.org.uk/files/recording.html*). Sylvia and Juan took notes on relevant pages printed from the sites as they answered key questions given each group: What are the most important issues addressed in a music recording contract? and How can the rights of both the record company and the recording artist be protected in a contract?

When students returned to the classroom after completing the Internet research, Marta engaged them in a discussion over the answers to the key questions. As comments were made, Marta wrote important points on the board. She then posed a couple of typical problems in contract disputes: (1) a band is wrongfully denied payment for services and (2) a band is in breach of contract. Groups were asked to explore these issues in a short passage Marta gave them entitled "When Someone Refuses to Pay the Band" (*www.music-law.com/payrefusal.html*). Lively discussion emerged out of this exercise, particularly between students representing the two parties in such an agreement.

Juan wondered whether his partner's Tejano singer, "Baby Sister," could claim "lack of creativity" as a legitimate reason for failing to record a certain number of original songs for an upcoming CD. Marta explained that such an excuse could be acceptable if provided for in the record contract and that these provisions are not uncommon.

Johnny, who represented a Tejano band, suggested that a "sickness and injury clause" be included in a contract to protect his musicians from ill-timed health problems or accidents that might occur just before a recording date. This comment led to a variety of exaggerations and jokes from both sides. Marta allowed the class

its fun because she knew they were beginning to develop critical understandings of contract law by connecting it to their interest in music and by role-playing the principal parties in a Tejano music recording agreement.

In the last phase of the lesson, Marta asked her student pairs to reflect on the important points that emerged from their research and class discussion and, based on these points, to write an actual recording contract. To guide their negotiations, the groups used standard clauses from authentic music industry contracts (*http://banradio.com/law/samples.html*). So others could observe the role plays, Marta employed a fishbowl discussion strategy (see Chapter 3). While one pair of students hammered out a contract, other pairs of students looked on; then the roles were switched. At regular intervals, student observers were given the opportunity to share reactions to and ask questions of the pair of negotiators they were observing.

When Sylvia and Juan finally hashed out the fine points of an agreement, they signed their contract and shook hands. Marta then urged comments and questions from the observers. Manolo asked Sylvia why she didn't include a clause that would protect "Baby Sister" from liability if she was irresponsible and missed a recording deadline. While some snickered, Marta assured the class that if such a provision could be agreed upon by both parties, it and numerous other "wild" protections could be written into a record contract.

Marta requested that when students finished they place the final drafts of their contracts on the class website, which was linked to the school site. In this way, other students could refer to them as examples for help in completing a similar assignment.

Her students accumulated many such products at the site as source material to select from when compiling a professional portfolio.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

The goal of this chapter has been to dispel myths and deconstruct stereotypes of adolescents while stressing the need for middle and secondary school teachers to embrace youth in all their dimensions as a valued resource in content-area learning and literacy. When youth are taken up by popular cultural media and education systems as "irresponsible" and "out of control" because of hormones or some other nonspecific developmental etiology, attention is drawn away from the role of instruction and texts in promoting and sustaining engaged learning and community. Like the adults who influence them, adolescents are never one way, either in behavior or discourse. Instead, as youth studies have revealed, they are individuals in search of agency and autonomy with multiple identities formed within the various worlds they inhabit, as well as by the different texts they encounter and create, both in and beyond school. To throw off rigid constructions of adolescence is to see youths as constantly creating and recreating new selves that are hybrids drawn from all the text experiences and funds of knowledge in their daily lives.

As you progress through this book, I hope you will come to appreciate the exciting possibilities for crafting and supporting responsive literacy experiences for youth. In the next chapter, I describe the ever-expanding population of diverse learners in our middle and high schools. I argue, as I do in this first chapter, for attitudes and practices that position these culturally and linguistically diverse youth as assets who will grow as literacy and language learners even while they enrich the cultural competencies of their peers and teachers. By honoring adolescents' identities, engaging them as learners, and expanding their range of literate competencies, the potential and resourcefulness of all youth are given expression in the classroom.