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Front Matter and Introduction: The Other 17 Hours - Valuing Out-of-School Time

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Occasional Papers 30

The Other 17 Hours: Valuing Out-of-School Time

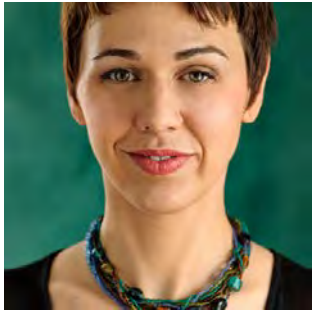


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Introduction by Jennifer Teitle, Guest Editor

At 14, hanging out in a public library, I was an amateur philosopher, poet, and artist. As part of a misanthropic group of teenagers, I spent my afternoons digging through subversive texts, tracing calligraphy, and discovering secrets. I walked, black skirt dragging, from my high school to the hangout spot. Then, making a slow circle through the stacks, I would search for friends among the books. I remember lowering my chin so that my hair would fall into my face; with my thick black eyeliner, I imagined myself to be a younger version of Johnette Napolitano of Concrete Blonde. I carried a sketchbook. I wrote poetry on my fingertips. I was dramatic.



Twenty years later, as a teacher, researcher, and parent, I'm still amazed at the persistence of these hangout memories. I remember little of my life at school during adolescence; teachers and classmates' faces are a blur. In contrast, I remember dozens of moments from hanging out: designing elaborate book covers, debating morality and religion, hearing a friend explain that his dad had been sent to prison. Intense and filled with sensation, time spent hanging out—in libraries, parking lots, friends' basements, an old donut shop—made my mind jump and my pulse race. It seemed as though anything could happen in the span of an afternoon.

In this issue of the Bank Street Occasional Papers, we wanted to explore the value of these pockets of time outside of school. Current wisdom does not support this kind of unstructured, autonomous hanging out, and places that welcome or even tolerate young people are getting harder to find. While some libraries continue to create teen spaces, others have moved to lock their doors in the immediate after-school hours (Kelley, 2007). Malls increase the number of security guards and eject teens from storefronts and food courts. Some shopping centers have turned to even more controversial measures, such as the installation of “mosquito” devices, which emit high-pitched sounds, to repel teens (Crawford, 2009).

Meanwhile, after-school programs, many of which once contained an element of “drop-in” culture, are undergoing a shift toward offering formalized activities and documented learning outcomes. This change has been celebrated as a move from “babysitting to educationally enriched youth development programs” (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010, p. 10). However, it might be better understood as part of the larger neoliberal shift toward “value-added” and “outcomes-based” measurements in young people's lives. Even home spaces, the least understood nonschool geographies, are now regularly described in terms of their contribution to school achievement.

Educators have given relatively little scholarly attention to young people's nonschool lives. Ignored or valorized, nonschool spaces show up in educational research only as a backdrop, implying that school learning is the yardstick by which to measure the young people's lives. Even scholars who focus primarily on nonschool spaces are limited by their inability to theorize

nonschool learning without framing it in terms of school learning (Sefton-Green, 2012; Teitle, 2012).

Yet this myopic view of school outcomes only serves to narrow the purpose and possibilities of nonschool time. For this reason, we asked authors to expand the conversation about young people's lives outside of school. Contributing authors both engage with current literature on nonschool spaces and offer new and exciting ways to conceptualize nonschool activity and learning. Put simply, we asked our contributors, "What do nonschool spaces have to offer, other than more school?"

In answer to that question, we are proud to present a range of articles exploring young people's out-of-school activities. Skateboarding, drawing comics, engaging in Justin Bieber fandom, and participating in a library "Wrestling Club," to name a few of these pursuits, provide the context for deeper studies exploring non-school activities and learning. Our authors describe youth activities happening in homes, programs, and public spaces, from a variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives. We believe that there are many generative ways of reading these essays in combination with one another, and that they open up new conversations on young people's out-of-school lives.