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“IF WE WANT AN EDUCATION, WE WANT AN EDUCATION. IT’S OUR
CHOICE:” HOW FOUR YOUTH AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL
EXPERIENCED SOCIAL CAPITAL

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

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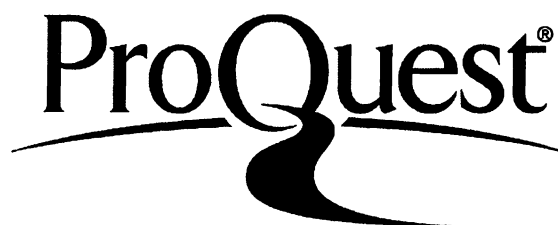
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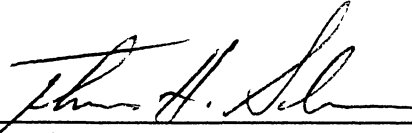


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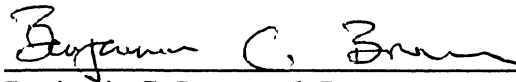
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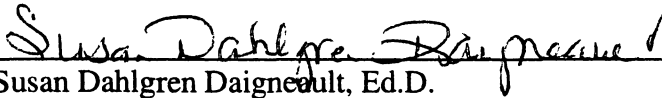
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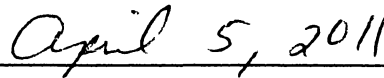
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doubts or regrets about our abilities to be effective helpers. They also reminded me of the importance of humor, support, and self-acceptance.

If I was looking for heroes, I found them in the youth, their parents, and caregivers who worked hard just to survive the daily challenges of dealing with hostile environments, bad breaks, and limited personal and social resources. I was and continue to be amazed and humbled by the honesty of the youth about their personal frustrations, worries, and failures. I was also amazed by the strengths shown by each youth, who shared with us their dreams and hopes for their futures. When challenged to step up and take responsibility, the youth were often up to the task. I am humbled to have been part of their lives. These youth allowed me to enter the most personal parts of their lives, and I feel responsibility to treat that privilege with the greatest respect. So too, each parent I encountered in this study shared openly about their concerns and hopes for their child, and I am deeply grateful for the time they spent with me talking about their own histories and fears. These families and youth have given me insight into how any person can prevail and feel triumph, despite terrible odds and social isolation, and I am most grateful for this.

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ABSTRACT

“IF WE WANT AN EDUCATION, WE WANT AN EDUCATION. IT’S OUR CHOICE:” HOW FOUR YOUTH AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCED SOCIAL CAPITAL

By

JoAnne McFarland Malloy
University of New Hampshire, May, 2011

Youth who are at risk of dropping out of high school are often challenged by significant emotional and behavioral support needs, and are typically disengaged from the educational process and the social networks that can help them succeed in their homes, in school, and in their communities. This research project investigated the experiences of four youth, two females and two males, who were at significant risk of dropping out of high school as they were engaged in a supportive intervention designed to build skills in self-determination, school-to-adult life transition planning, and leveraging social resources. Using social capital as a sensitizing concept, the researcher spent 18 months in the field using an ethnographic methodology to collect and analyze narratives from the four youth. Through an iterative process of coding, grouping, re-coding, categorizing and contextualizing the data, the analysis identified four social processes that were critical to the meaning-in-context perceptions of the youth as they engaged in the intervention: positive reciprocity, negative reciprocity, agency, and control of social goods. These social processes occurred within contexts or situational elements that converged across

youth and across events. The analysis culminates with a description of four critical purposes of the youth's responses and social actions: to attain success, to avoid harm, to maintain relationships, and to increase control. The researcher found that each youth wanted to be successful in the traditional academic and vocational senses, however, multiple environmental, contextual, and relationship factors worked to thwart their social inclusion and hampered their abilities to access social goods. The researcher also found that attempts by adults to control the actions or outcomes for each youth were unsuccessful. In effect, each youth accepted help and guidance only in the context of what they perceived as a caring relation. The analysis concludes with recommendations for additional research and for practice in schools.

CHAPTER I

FOCUS OF THE INQUIRY

This dissertation is about the experiences of four high school students who were struggling with the academic, social, and behavioral demands of schooling. The study examines the dynamics of each student's experiences and social interactions as they participated in a supportive intervention designed to assist them to define and pursue their personal career and adult life goals. The intervention included career-related planning and problem solving using tools designed to build self-determination skills, create a strong sense of self-direction, and build positive social connections. These research aims were best suited for a research design and methodology that focused on the perspectives of each youth within socially driven contexts. In order to reach these research aims, I decided to use an ethnographic approach with an analytic framework informed by the principles and practices of discourse analysis.

Origins

I first became interested the experiences of disadvantaged youth in the late 1970s, when I worked in a group home for adolescents who had been adjudicated, abused or neglected, or who could not live at home nor had no home. Not more than three or four years older than many of the group home residents, I was interested in how they negotiated the difficult task of growing into adulthood and independence while isolated from their families and the other social supports that are available to most young people. In many ways, the youth with whom I worked were just like any other—they wanted

romantic relationships, they wanted to be successful in school, they wanted to pursue their passions, and they wanted to be independent while having reliable and safe relationships with trusted adults. I just could not imagine growing up with paid helpers instead of parents around me, and I wondered how these young people survived, developed and eventually moved on.

After I finished graduate school, I developed an interest in community integration and inclusion of people with disabilities. As I began to work with high school students with disabilities, I developed an interest in youth with emotional and behavioral disorders, a broad term that is used to characterize children and youth who have difficulty functioning in typical settings due to a neuro-biological disorder (such as a mental illness or autism), exposure to trauma (such as abuse or neglect or extreme poverty), a life/family crisis, or other factors that result in emotional dysfunction. As I worked with adolescents who were having difficulty in high school, and given many influences from my work at the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire, I began to believe that school-to-career supports, individualized education services and differentiated instruction, and positive experiences to build competence were effective approaches for youth who were otherwise at high risk of failing in school. My experiences as a participant in several Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings with youth who were struggling behaviorally in school influenced my thinking to use a more student-driven approach. Every IEP meeting was characterized by negative and judgmental discussions and virtually few offers of solutions beyond ultimatums set in negative consequences should the student not conform to the expectations. I saw by their

responses that the youth had no interest in conforming to the demands of the school and that they were not invested enough to care.

In the mid-1990s I developed, with several colleagues from UNH and Keene State College, a model of services and supports designed to help youth with emotional or behavioral disorders to set a course for post-high school life by developing and pursuing plans for high school completion and employment. This model included strategies based upon principles of self-determination including facilitation techniques and tools designed to help each youth articulate and develop a set of career and adult life goals and plans, to follow through with his or her plans, and to develop socially based/resource connections so that each youth could have the support he or she needed to succeed. This model, which we call RENEW (Rehabilitation for Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education and Work) has been implemented in New Hampshire in various grant- and agency-funded contexts since 1996. I continue to believe that the facilitated conversations that take place when this model is implemented, and the support and trust that can be built through such conversations and follow-through can help each young person to create a more positive self-view and set of valued social resources that would otherwise be missing.

I have facilitated and observed many meetings using the RENEW model with youths who are not doing well in school, and I have been struck by the way each youth describes his or her needs, how open most youths are about painfully difficult experiences, how most youths will engage in problem-solving, and how many youths can describe, with clarity and precision, what works for them, what is problematic for them, and what types of support they need. I began to believe that the lack of reliable and

positive relationships and supports—a hallmark of the isolation that youth with emotional or behavioral disorders experience—was an important contributing factor to their difficulties in the high school environment. Many of the youth I have talked with are disengaged from adults and peers in school, and as a result, do not have access to the critical school-based resources that can help them to succeed. These resources include the knowledge of teachers, counseling and guidance, friendships, encouragement from adults, connections to community resources (such as connections to jobs and community programs) and connections to post-high school activities. I observed that once a young person had “burned her bridges” with the people in her high school, there seemed to be less help available to her even when she wanted to re-engage. I felt that some of this was personal, based upon a judgment by the adults that some youth are worth the investment of their time and effort, and others less so. This notion that social goods are a commodity, based upon the presence of socio-cultural variables such as trust and reciprocity, are at the core of social capital theory, and seemed to be at play for many of the at-risk youth with whom I worked. Yet we know little about the dynamics of how this disengagement and social goods exchange happens, how trust and reciprocity are developed or destroyed, and how each youth experiences the reciprocity or allocation of supports that happens in school.

The research on youth who are at risk of dropping out of school often points to personal, family, contextual, and community-based factors that contribute to their disengagement from the educational process and may relate to their social isolation and marginalization (Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Rumberger, 1987). These factors include issues of class (poorer children and youth are at higher risk of dropping

out of school), issues of disability and learning difficulties, emotional or behavioral issues, and issues of culture and school organization. While I participated in planning meetings with youth who were having difficulty in school, they described feelings of alienation, they felt “singled out” by teachers and peers, and yet many persisted and continued to believe that they could achieve life and career goals not unlike those of other students. As a helper in the process, I would see the power of social connections, including the development of connections with employers, mentors, and teachers who were valued by each youth and contributed to their persistence in school. I began to wonder about how the experiences and dynamics that contribute to building or destroying valued social capital unfold for these youth. I wondered how valuable social connections for youth who are at risk of dropping out of school might be developed, valued, and reciprocated. This notion of “social capital” became the center of my interest in how social goods are made available to or withheld from high risk youth, and how the youth constructed meaning from their experiences and responded to others who were trying to help and support them,

The work presented here is an attempt to understand how students who were at risk of dropping out of high school and who were struggling with disabilities, poverty, and ethnic differences experienced and perceived attempts to help them in school. The focus on the youths’ perspectives and on social processes from a socio-cultural perspective required a qualitative research design. I used social capital as a sensitizing concept (Bowen, 2006), allowing me to focus on how the youth responded to certain types of interactions given the context. The analysis is concerned with issues such as reciprocity, self-efficacy, engagement, and power as the youth responded to others in the

context of an intervention designed to be supportive and in which many of the adults play out their traditional as well as personal roles. The existence of the achievement gap in education is well documented (Lee & Burkam, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002; Viadero, 2006), but there remains a need for research that uncovers the relational dynamics and social processes that lead to the reproduction of social inequality among disadvantaged youth, family members, and schools (Lareau, 2003; Rogers, 2000, 2002).

Foundations of a Qualitative Approach

Social researchers and theorists have used a variety of definitions, frameworks, and methodologies to measure social capital. At the community or macro-level, for example, Putnam (2000) has used rates of membership or affiliation in socially valued clubs, civic organizations, and recreational groups, among others, to measure the presence or absence of social capital against the health of those communities. Other researchers have developed sophisticated network analyses to quantify social capital. Still others have used proxy variables to measure help seeking and help attained among students in schools to quantify teacher-based social capital and correlate social capital with positive educational outcomes (Croninger & Lee, 2001). What is less prevalent in the literature are ethnographic studies that create an in-depth understanding of how individuals attribute value to social capital, how it is created, how social capital appears in a social network or relationship, how people use social capital, and what it means to them. The social capital literature offers little insight into how the concept relates to emotional ties, how personal ties are related to personal gain, and the personal consequences of accessing social capital. The literature has not explored how a

relationship indicates social capital if it does not directly lead to personal gain or productivity.

In the tradition of qualitative research that has looked at characteristics of social and cultural capital differences based on class and race (Lareau, 2003; MacLeod, 1987; Rogers, 2002), there is a need for an in-depth understanding of how at-risk youth attribute value to social capital, how it is created, how social capital appears within their social networks or relationships, how youth use social capital, and what it means to them. The literature has not explored how a relationship indicates social capital if it does not directly lead to personal gain or productivity. It is my hope that this study will contribute to our knowledge of how youth who are at risk of failure in high school experience social interactions in the context of offers of help, and how the students can engage and utilize their social networks in ways that help them to be more successful.

Context

This study used the RENEW intervention as the setting, or locus, that allowed for “conversations” to take place with the youth, encouraging them to talk about educational and life goals, and about the help they may need to achieve their goals, including what they may need from people in school, from family, and in the community. These conversations also allowed the youth to talk about their personal social networks, and provided the opportunity to see the relationship between the social capital at their disposal and their perceptions of the social resources that were meaningful and instrumental to the accomplishment of their self-stated goals. This context also provided an opportunity for me to identify how the youth perceived the social capital that is available from relationships inside and outside of school, such as social capital based in

the family (relatives), and the community (friends, employers, mentors). This study is not an evaluation of the RENEW intervention, but the intervention provided a context for the development of evidence of how students perceive their social networks, allowing evidence for the focus of this study to unfold.

Research Questions

This research project is focused on how at risk youth make meaning of social connectedness in school, at home, and in their communities. Social capital is the sensitizing concept for this task, and the RENEW intervention provides a context or locus for the development of evidence of how students perceive their social networks. The search for evidence is guided by two research questions:

- How do at-risk youth perceive, experience, and access social capital as they receive a supportive intervention designed to help them develop and pursue their career and education goals?
- What are the conditions and processes that make social capital more or less accessible to at-risk youth as they plan and pursue their career and education goals?

My research questions lead to an inquiry focused on meaning making and perceptions of students who were at risk of school failure as they define and access social capital, within the context of a planning process that helped them to articulate their personal career and adult life goals. The research questions focus on how social capital is constructed in the setting, with particular emphasis on each student's perceptions as they reflected upon and re-directed their high school experience. The first research question focuses on how the youth attribute meaning to social capital as they reflect upon and take

action within their relationships. The second question focuses on the “processes and conditions” that may enable and/or exclude the at-risk youth from creating, accessing, and obtaining social capital. The language used in context by the student and others will indicate the construction of more or less accessible social capital. I used topical questions (Schram, 2006) to lend more specificity to my search for evidence of how the youth perceived and constructed meaning within the context of the supportive intervention. (See Appendix A for the list of topical questions.).

I was not focused on institutional barriers or disconnects in my search for evidence of individual social capital; however, institutional issues became evident as I worked through the data. As I searched for evidence, I focused on how the students characterized their beliefs, behaviors, expectations and perceptions as they sought to exercise agency or, as Bruner (1996) notes, “to act on their own.” I also focused on how the youth drew upon class-based cultural differences when talking about and accessing social capital. To date such a peek into the world of the school-based social capital of at-risk youth has not been undertaken.

The dissertation is organized in several sections. Chapter II describes the larger theoretical constructs within which this research is situated, including the literature on youth disengagement, social capital theory, the sociocultural framework, and social reproduction theory. Chapter III focuses on the research methodology, including the choice and conduct of an ethnographic methodology, discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis. Chapters IV through VII present the analysis of the data within the four social processes that became prominent from the iterative process of coding the texts, categorizing the codes, and the writing process. Chapter IV concentrates on the

social process of positive reciprocity, which surfaced as a prominent feature that influenced the quality of the interactions between the youth and the adults. Chapter V focuses on negative reciprocity, and the contexts within which the youth displayed behaviors and expressed intentions to avoid interactions and situations that were aversive to them. Chapter VI analyzes acts and expressions of youth agency, including the contexts within which each youth indicated self-efficacy beliefs. Chapter VII focuses on contexts where control and imbalances of power were evident, and the responses and interpretations of those situations from the youths' perspectives. Chapter VIII includes a summary of the analyses, explaining how the youth in the study were isolated socially, arguing that the youth have socially-valued aspirations but were in need of supports given with a certain intentionality of shared work and decision-making. I also offer recommendations for additional research and school-based approaches for youth who are at great risk of high school failure.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

This dissertation sought to identify and characterize the social processes and meaning-making that played a prominent role as social goods were being offered to and accessed by youth who were at risk of high school failure. The study design began with social capital as the primary theoretical construct. The research concern was steeped in the assumption that social capital exists, and that the social capital framework helps to illuminate how each youth experienced attempts to help them to reach socially- and personally-valued goals such as high school completion, academic success, affirmation by family, school staffs, and peers, and other generally-recognized social goods. Looking at social processes that take place within an intervention designed to foster the youth's self-determination and to build a network of social resources allowed me to observe and interpret how and why the youth accepted or rejected help and offers to access socially situated resources. In addition to outlining the particular version of social capital theory that served as a sensitizing concept, I incorporate social reproduction theory to frame the analysis for how individuals are defined, in part, by their relative positions and roles, by their cultural and social resources, and by the contexts within which they interact. I have also incorporated two additional theoretical concepts that became important as I analyzed the data: sociocultural theory to frame the search for meaning-in-context and to characterize the social processes affecting the responses of the youth, and critical

sociocultural theory to explain how institutional processes and power affect relationships and the construction of meaning.

To begin the explanation of how the study was designed and how the analysis developed, I describe student disengagement from school, and how youth at risk of school failure lack the social resources that other youth have. I then describe social capital theory and how it can be used to explain social action and social processes, such as acts of reciprocity, and how resources are made available and accessed by individuals through social connections and community membership. I then also describe the relationship between social capital and social reproduction theory, including how institutional norms are enforced with individuals and groups through the control of social and cultural resources. I then describe the importance of a sociocultural framework and how it allows for an in-depth exploration of the helping process as a socially constructed practice based upon the situated identities and roles of the actors in the setting, the meaning they construct in context, and the social processes that are influencing their social actions. Observing discourses in the context of the intervention reveals the dynamics of the phenomenon. Further, I relate to theories of agency and self-efficacy to help explain the helping process, influenced by cultural and psychological processes that are put to use by the individual to preserve, develop, and enhance his or her self-identity. Theories of agency help to explain the meaning of acts such as choice and control, actual and perceived differences in power, and the exercise of power. The sociocultural framework provides a rationale for the development of a qualitative methodology that I used to focus on describing, analyzing, and interpreting the meaning of the social actions,

contexts, and social processes in play as the youth received and accessed assistance with their career goals.

Exclusion and Disengagement

The social nature of learning and the importance of connectedness to school have long been studied and debated in education. Students who indicate a strong affiliation with school tend to have better educational outcomes (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002). The literature on high school dropouts clearly indicates that dropping out of school is the culmination of a long period of disengagement (Alexander, Entwistel, & Horsey, 1997; Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004), and that students who eventually drop out have ceased to “commit” to their relationships within school. Further, disengagement from school, marked by behavioral problems and disciplinary actions, seems to affect some groups of students more than others. Studies have shown that students with emotional or behavioral disorders and students of color are subject to punitive discipline actions at significantly higher rates than students who do not possess those characteristics (Cooley, 1995; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). In effect, at-risk students, defined in part by their lack of socially-valued social capital, are thus separated from school-based resources that could help them to be successful in school, at home, or in the community.

School-based social capital is gained through membership in the school community, and young people who drop out of high school do not benefit from the opportunities that accrue from the attainment of a high school diploma (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). In addition to significantly greater lifetime earning potential, a high school graduate is more likely to have access to post-secondary education and

training programs, certain higher paying jobs, various financial opportunities (loans for example), and other opportunities that are not available to people who do not finish high school.

There is a tendency to attribute the failures of students with emotional and behavioral challenges to faulty individual characteristics and, many times, those of their families (Crone & Horner, 2000; Lane & Carter, 2006). Studies have shown that the parents of high school students with emotional disabilities have poorer relationships with and are more critical of their children's schools than are other parents, and that families of children with emotional and behavioral disorders are far more likely to be poor and experience other types of family stressors (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). Students who move frequently and have higher-than-average absences from school are also more likely to fall behind and eventually drop out (Rumberger, 2001; Finn, 1993; Lan & Lanthier, 2003). Disengagement from school is also associated with learning challenges, grade retention, and negative school experiences (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2003). In addition, Rumberger (2001) points to the importance of parental investment to school success, citing human and social capital theorists to confirm the conclusions of "empirical studies {that} have found that students whose parents monitor their regular activities, provide emotional support, encourage independent decision-making...and are generally more supportive in their schooling are less likely to drop out of school" (p. 13).

Students with emotional and behavioral challenges tend to have difficulty forming and maintaining social relationships (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006), and their educational outcomes are poor, including significant learning

problems and high dropout rates (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). The individual impact on these youth can be devastating. Of course, knowledge of these “at risk” factors create a certain profile and set of expectations for these students as soon as they enter school but may not present a complete picture to inform the development of programs and supports that can potentially assist more students to graduate. As Lan and Lanthier (2003) indicate, “Although the(se)...variables are very useful to depict a profile of dropout students, it doesn’t help much toward understanding and solving the problem of dropping out” (p. 312). Given that I am looking for how youth who are disengaged from school experience the helping process, I have situated this research in the theoretical arena of how youth access resources through social networks and interactions, using sociocultural and critical sociocultural lenses.

Social Capital

Social capital is a broad and evolving concept, characterized by numerous definitions and applications based upon the notion that social networks have value. Social capital has been used as a framework to explain productivity in the fields of community economic development, health, education, social stratification, and community civic development, among others. Although the conceptual features of social capital have been recently expanded, its basic tenets, including the power of collective action, the value of social networks and affiliation, and the importance of social goods to a democratic society are rooted in historical concepts from ethics, philosophy, education, politics, health, and economics (Dewey, 1899; de Tocqueville, 1835). The World Bank is using social capital as a primary framework for thinking about economic and societal development and social capital has been used as an organizational development tool

(Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones, & Woolcock, 2006; The World Bank, 1999). Further, professional learning communities or communities of practice in education are based upon the notion that affiliation in social networks benefit the members and increase resources, including knowledge resources, and improve the outcomes of the group (Lave & Wenger, 1991). I describe here the history and development of the concept of social capital, the common features among various definitions of social capital, settling on a simple definition for this study. Finally, I focus on the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his detailed description of social capital, its relationship to the sociocultural approach, and how social capital can explain institutionalized practices of exclusion and social reproduction.

Social capital theorists identify two main types of social capital (Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Putnam, 2000). First, there is bonding social capital that functions to enhance the strength of trust and reciprocity between homogeneous groups of individuals. This can be seen as a positive process, as in the strengthening of a church community, or a harmful one, as with the activities undertaken by gang leaders to strengthen the obligations felt by its members. The second dimension is bridging social capital, referring to linkages to external social networks in order to increase the assets and resources available to members or each group. The concepts of bridging and bonding social capital become important in the analysis of how some individuals may be excluded from certain social networks, and to illustrate how individuals may break free from their resources limitations by accessing different and new social networks.

Primarily employed to explain community-level productivity, resources, and characteristics, the application of social capital theory to explain educational outcomes

has been sparse, and its application to understanding the dynamics of disadvantaged individuals and small groups has been equally limited. There are macro-level definitions and applications of social capital that have been used to explain the importance of social networks in the attainment of positive community development and group social life (Gittel & Vidal, 1998; Putnam, 2000) and there are micro-level applications of social capital, with an emphasis on how certain individuals gain access to resources via their social affiliations and relationships (Bookman, 2004; Lareau, 2003).

One of the first references to social capital was by made in 1916 by Lyda Judson Hanifan, the state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia, describing the importance of school and community engagement in social and civic life:

...those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit....The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself....If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbors. (p. 130)

This was one of the first modern affirmations that social and civic affiliation is important to the health and productivity of a group or community or individual and how social ties are critical for all. The tangible social goods such as “good will, fellowship, sympathy,” valued by society’s majority, serve as a basis for norms in civic societies, and, we might argue, as the foundation for teaching and learning social norms and acceptability in families and schools.

Robert Putnam popularized the notion of social capital as it applies to the institutional processes that contribute to the health of society and civic life. Putnam

(2000) describes the decline of modern civic participation and warned of the perils of the current apathy in American society. Despite the fact that he is often criticized for his simplistic conclusions (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000), Putnam's work called attention to the notion of the importance of associational life in society, and he offered a simple construct of the features of social capital, characterized by social networks, social norms, and trust that enable participants to act more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Putnam (2000) depicted social capital as a positive concept, used "to call attention to the ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties" (p. 19).

Through the mid-twentieth century, social capital emerged as a one of several types of "capitals" put forth in sociological theory designed to explain how political and social resources may be distributed and controlled. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) offered an extensive definition of the characteristics of social capital, including the importance of the economic metaphor, while stressing the sociocultural nature of social ties that characterize the nature and benefits of social capital. Bourdieu stressed that while the individual possesses social capital, it must be viewed within the individual's social networks, the characteristics of the individual's relationships within those networks, and resources in those networks (Sobel, 2002). This places social capital in the sociocultural realm; in other words, the analysis of social capital requires attention to social processes.

The concept of social capital continues to evolve and diversify. Lin (2000) describes a changing notion of capital theory from one that is a "class-based perspective," to an "actor-based perspective." Lin labeled these new models "neo-capital" theories, comprised of multiple types of "capitals" that provide value and enhance the life chances

of the individual or group that has access to and possesses them. These theories include human, cultural, and social capital.

There are common elements used to describe social capital, despite the diversity of its research and theoretical applications. These common elements include the use of an economic or transactional metaphor, the focus on achievement or some aim or instrumental quality, and the nature of social networks or connections that connote social capital, including the presence of reciprocity and trust. Social capital is a commodity available to a person as a result of his or her affiliation with another person or group (identified as “social organization”), and reciprocity, levels of obligation, knowledge, and trust mediate the value within the relationship (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995). Wright and Fitzpatrick (2006) offer a description of social capital in the context of outcomes for at-risk youth that reflects these elements:

. . . there is agreement that social capital is a resource within social structures and relationships. Social capital is external to the individual, residing in features of social organization such as interpersonal trust and social control resources. Thus, social capital is generated through connections and ties with others. Returns on social capital are realized when individuals commit to relationships with significant others. . . These webs of social ties provide a normative frame of reference for behaviors, providing standards of expectation that include approval or disapproval for certain actions or activities. The result is effective and reciprocal trust and social control among those who are connected. (p. 1439)

This definition serves to explain the relationship between engagement in social networks and individual outcomes such as wealth, upward career and class mobility, educational achievement, among other socially valued outcomes. This definition also suggests that social capital has the potential to exert “social control,” to maintain group cohesion, a dimension that has been identified with behavior such as gang affiliation in

certain communities and among ethnic groups where youth feel more or less engaged (McNulty & Bellair, 2003).

The literature distinguishes social capital from other theories of social action by its potential utility, or value, to the individuals associated in the social network or relationship. In other words, social capital is only that if it is of potential value to the attainment of an individual's goal or the goals of a group or community. In his introductory chapter to his book on social capital, Flap (2004) promotes a social capital research agenda explaining that:

...people better equipped with social resources—in the sense of their social network and resources of others they can call upon—will succeed better in attaining their goals. Second, people will invest in relations with others in view of the perceived future value of the social resources made available by these relations. (p. 6)

James Coleman (1988) was the first to link the concept of social capital to educational attainment, describing social capital as a “resource for action” in the context of his analysis of high school dropouts. Based upon family-based social capital as a primary factor in a child's educational success, Coleman states that social capital “is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (p. 98). Social capital can also be a factor in the successful transition of students who move into a new school community (Marjoribanks & Kwok, 1998).

It is social capital at the micro-level that I have used in this study as the sensitizing concept. Social capital theory provides a focal point for the study of the social processes that influence educational engagement and disengagement. Croninger and Lee (2001) describe how the concept of social capital may contribute to the study of students at risk of dropping out of high school:

From the perspective of social capital, differences in the probability of dropping out can be explained by differences in the quality of the social networks that comprise a student's interactions with teachers. Such networks can provide students with valuable resources including emotional support, information, guidance, or assistance in accomplishing school tasks. (p. 554)

The research on social capital and education has established a link between increased access to and utilization of positive family- and school-based social capital and better outcomes for at-risk youth (Coleman, 1988; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1998). Research has shown that the intentional development of social capital by teachers is associated with stronger, positive student educational outcomes (Marks, 1999). In addition, positive family- and community-based social capital can help improve the educational outcomes and upward class mobility of youth who are members of high risk groups, such as Latinos and students in low socio-economic neighborhoods (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

More recently there has been criticism of the premise, application, and interpretations of the social capital concept. First, there is criticism that the general presence of greater social capital always results in positive outcomes. Rather than always being beneficial, critics indicate that social capital happens in local, informal arrangements, and that there are institutional restrictions that come into play that can harm the development of trust and reciprocity (Sobel, 2002). There is also concern that using the term "capital" has the potential to put a dollar value or trivialize human relationships and social goods such as acts of caring, empathy, or kindness, among others (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Smith, 2009). There is also criticism that the research on social capital lacks depth and "contextualization" of the concept (Smith, 2009).

Using social capital as a sensitizing concept with youth at risk of school failure is logical on several fronts. First, it is known that youth at risk of high school failure are from disadvantaged circumstances and may therefore not have access to social networks that can result in stable employment or positive educational attainment. Second, disengaged students will have less access to the numerous social networks and places in the school where interpersonal trust and social norms can be created and maintained or thwarted and destroyed. Third, disengaged students will have less access to the teachers who possess valuable resources that students need to achieve success. Finally, youth who are disengaged often have difficulty cultivating the positive relationships required for membership in a social network, and, in terms of social capital, they are more likely to be disconnected from accessing the socially-based resources that can lead to better outcomes.

Given the many definitions of social capital in the literature, I used the one put forth by Van der Gaag and Snijders (2004) when starting this research project, that social capital is “The collection of resources owned by the members of an individual’s personal social network, which may become available to the individual as a result of the history of these relationships” (p. 200). I chose this definition because it offers guidance in the search for evidence of how youth experience the helping process.

Unpacking this definition offers guidance on how I used the concept of social capital to design and conduct the study. First, “the collection of resources owned” indicates that the goods available through the social network are the sum of the resources that can be accessed by individuals in that network, and can be identified by the potential value of the resources to the members. The term “owned” indicates that the actors have

control over the resources; in other words, they have the ability to activate, use, or withhold use of the resource. The transactional metaphor noted in the term “capital” indicates that a resource has some potential value. Indications that a resource is of value may be seen in the language used and the behavior of the actors. Value may also be present when the resource relates to the goals of the actors in the setting and context. When looking for evidence that a social resource has value, I found contexts where the youth were engaged and reciprocated when offered help, and other situations where the youth avoided, disengaged, or mitigated their need for help. These social responses were an indication that the offers of help were or were not valued.

The second section of the definition, “by the members of an individual’s personal social network,” indicates that social capital comes from voluntary and reciprocal relationships that exist beyond those which are forced by circumstance. In other words, the resources become available because there is a personal association beyond the actors’ formal duties and paid responsibilities. The individuals will indicate that they are part of a relationship characterized by trust and reciprocity. The construct of trust is grounded in relationship: “Trust is the willingness to permit the decisions of others to influence your welfare” (Sobel, 2002, p. 148). Indicators of trust can be seen, then, in discourse and behavior that indicate shared problem-solving, shared decision-making, compromise, deference, reciprocation, as well as direct reference using the word “trust.” Part of the focus of my search for evidence included how the youth characterized these elements of trust when working with or talking about the people in their personal social network.

The third part of the definition, “which may become available to the individual,” refers to the fact that the resources within the social network are available to members,

but may not always be activated and may not always be consistently reciprocated. The social processes that involve activation and utilization of social capital are a major part of this dissertation. This part of the definition relates to the social processes that impact how, when, and in what contexts individuals access resources from their social networks. The reasons why resources may be made accessible to one member and not another is also a part of the investigation. Variable accessibility is an important factor in understanding the “conditions and processes” that regulate social capital.

Finally, the last part of the definition, “as a result of the history of these relationships” refers to how the members perceive and are shaped by their past experiences with one another and how this knowledge informs their willingness to activate or utilize social capital. Previous experiences contribute to or thwart the development of the trust and reciprocity needed to activate social capital. This has important implications for youth at risk, who are more likely to have histories of damaged or broken relationships. For example, a student may have a history of having made a teacher very angry and now that teacher is a person who can provide important assistance to the student. The teacher may indicate that she wants to help the student, but is reluctant to do so because she is not sure the student will respond positively to her help. The student may not feel he can ask that teacher for the tutoring he needs because of their previous negative interactions, and so the potential social capital available to the student from that teacher is not accessible. Often these perspectives were played out by the youth or adults with behaviors such as labeling, blaming, or avoiding when, in fact, the actors were afraid to try because the relationship was not a positive one.

While this definition of social capital provides a sensitizing focus for the study, I am not seeking to validate or evaluate the efficacy of the social capital concept. Instead, this definition of social capital allows me to focus on investigating the dimensions, qualities and meanings of the helping process as experienced by youth who are at risk of educational failure.

This discussion of social capital warrants a description of what social goods are. While social capital refers to the social network that offers potential benefits to its members, social goods are the engine that drives the network. Hanifan (1916) identified social goods as positive attributes in his early description of social capital, including “goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse” (p. 19). Gee (2005) defines social goods as “things such as power, status, or valued knowledge, positions, or possessions” (p. 84), individual qualities and actions such as a person’s reputation as trustworthy or responsible, and deference to or solidarity with another. According to Gee, language is used to indicate a person’s perspective on the distribution of social goods, with value-laden terms that signal “ what is to be taken as ‘normal,’ ‘right,’ ‘good,’ ‘correct,’ ‘proper,’ ‘appropriate,’ ‘valuable,’ ‘the way things are,’ ‘the way things ought to be,’ ‘high status or low status,’ ‘like me or not like me,’ and so forth” (2005, p. 13). Gee sees the distribution of social goods as a political enterprise, where people are denied or given access to social goods based upon power and status. While Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) define social capital according to the features such as networks, norms and trust, social goods are a critical aspect of social capital and relate to network affiliation, are normative as Gee indicates, and trust is built or destroyed by how one is viewed by others relative to possessing the desired social goods. Clearly, social goods,

including the social goods of status, position, or the possession or perceived possession of desired behaviors and attributes, mediate the characteristics of an individual's social capital. These social goods are relevant to the analysis of who has control over membership in the social network and who is given access to the network's social capital.

Social Reproduction

The notion that individuals can succeed with hard work and self-reliance, regardless of circumstance or disadvantage, persists in American culture, despite the empirical evidence to the contrary. Clearly there are subgroups in our society who are more likely to remain poor and disadvantaged generation after generation, driven by the process of social reproduction. Social capital theory is one of the tools used by scholars to identify the processes of social reproduction. While the concept of social capital is often characterized by its positive, normative qualities, several sociologists have argued that institutional systems and structures inhibit access to valued social capital by people in certain groups and communities. They further argue that the institutional processes that identify one type of social capital as more valued than another type contributes to social reproduction, or the reproduction of social inequality.

Bourdieu (1989) argues that social reproduction plays out in education. He states that education often serves as a process of "enculturation," providing the vital skills, experiences and knowledge to children and adults so that they will be known as "one of us." Cultural capital is one of the primary ways that students experience advantage or disadvantage in the context of a school's culture and climate; in other words, in the context of the individual's social skills and attributes that are valued in the school. Bourdieu's (1984) cultural reproduction theory defines cultural capital as the general

background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next. In the context of schools, he argues that children who have the linguistic and cultural skills valued by the dominant group will find acceptance and support, and those who do not possess the ideal characteristics will be at a disadvantage. Bourdieu explains that resources or capitals are distributed and accessed according to certain social rules, including rules about who possesses and who receives access to economic, cultural, and social resources. From the sociological perspective, the individuals who control the development and policing of norms in a community will pre-determine, in many ways, who gets what. Bourdieu further argues that the discourse community or “field” is filled with potential investments that can be made by individuals as well as by the other members on behalf of the individual, and that there is a profit or benefit to be had by these investments. Although we may prefer to believe that help and belonging know no condition, I observed several instances during my meetings with students and teachers where individuals used economic metaphors to describe their work together, including terms such as “investment” and “worth the effort.” Individuals think about whether or not to allocate their time and effort based upon the potential for success and reciprocation. The social calculation of effort is further complicated by the history of the relationship.

Several sociologists have also used social capital theory to explain the reproduction of inequality (Lin, 2000; Portes, 1998; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Lin (2000) describes the tendency for disadvantaged individuals to be restricted in their access to certain types of beneficial social capital because they are thwarted in efforts to cross socially rigid lines marked by class, culture, geography, opportunity, and

socio-economic status. Portes (1998) indicates that social capital can function as a source of social control, a source of family support, or a source of advantage or exclusion through social networks.

Hickey (2003) depicts the alienation of at risk youth as socially constructed, arguing that school organizational and learning practices are antithetical to what we know about the development of intrinsic motivation, as he notes, “that...students’ nonparticipation in the knowledge practices of the domain is entirely legitimized by the prevailing curricular practices” (p. 414).

We know that many at-risk students feel and are perceived as different from students who are successful and who participate in the programs, social networks, and environments of their high schools (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Mirsky, 2007). At-risk students and dropouts express alienation from the school environment; they indicate that the school resources cannot help them to achieve their goals, and talk about a hostile and unforgiving social environment (Kortering & Braziel, 1999). Researchers who embrace a sociocultural view of education argue that student outcomes are linked, in part, to the school’s environmental “dysfunction” that finds its home in “process of social reproduction in the anthropology of disability” (Rogers, 2002; p. 213). This view indicates that the structures, tasks, assumptions and approaches that are played out in the setting have a significant impact on whether a student appears to be more or less able to function in that setting.

In her book, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*, Annette Lareau (2003) highlighted the social and cultural differences between middle-class and working/lower-class families and how those differences produced different levels of

access to highly-valued educational resources for their children. The behaviors and skills put into play by middle-class parents on behalf of their children were viewed favorably and accepted by their children's teachers; in other words, these parents were successful as they used their social capital on behalf of their children in the schools. The parents of children from lower-class families, however, had the same socially valued hopes for their children and they had access to and have created social capital. The social capital in these families was of a different quality and had different characteristics than that of middle class families. Lareau demonstrated that when the lower-class families encountered institutions such as the school, they were less able to make positive social connections with the teachers, were viewed negatively by educational staff, and the educational experiences of their children often suffered as a result. Lareau's work illustrates the critical role that context and cultural difference plays in the potential for building or thwarting access to social capital available in the schools and thus in the life chances of their children.

Lareau (2003) argues for in-depth study of how individuals draw upon their unique social and cultural capital and of what happens when individuals bump up against the institutional structures and norms:

Overall, these moments of interaction between parents and key actors in institutions are the lifeblood of the stratification process and need to be examined more in the future. Bourdieu does not show empirically how individuals draw on class-based cultural differences in their moments of interaction with institutions (p. 278).

In his ethnography *Ain't No Makin It*, Jay MacLeod (1987) demonstrates that schools reward students who possess the valued cultural capital of the "dominant" classes by giving them higher grades, increased access to supports and information, and

increased opportunities for educational enhancement. He writes, "...the school serves as the trading post where socially valued cultural capital is parleyed into superior academic performance" (p. 12). MacLeod demonstrates how social capital is constructed by the setting and context. Students who do not possess the "right kind" of social capital are at a disadvantage and will often behave in opposition to the norm, become labeled as "behavior problems," "difficult," "learning disabled," and "unmotivated." This process of disengagement, manifest in behavior difficulties and poor performance may explain, in part, the higher dropout rates among low-income children, children of color, and youth with emotional and behavioral challenges. The view that these youth do not possess the acceptable social capital is socially constructed. In other words, these children and youth appear as less acceptable within the social networks of the school.

Rebecca Rogers (2000) in her dissertation, "Literate Subjectivities, Discourse Practices, and Social Structures: An Extended Case Study of Family Literacy Practices" placed her research locus within the "daily literacies" of an African American family in order to illustrate how the family's culture, context, and skills affect the family's access to institutional resources. For Rogers, culture, context and roles are key factors in the analysis of how people talk, write, and attribute meaning to their experiences and those of others:

The notions of cultural capital-or those resources leading to social profit-subjectivities-the embodiment of contradictions within social structures-and social reproduction-the continuation of social stratification are documented in the literature, theoretically, if not empirically. As Lareau (1989) points out, the processes through which cultural capital is activated in order to realize a social profit has not been demonstrated- an omission I will address in this dissertation. (p. 12)

Rogers found that the social processes at work between the family she studies and the school were culturally based and steeped in a mismatch of power. My dissertation is situated in the work of Lareau and Rogers, focused on the social processes at work as the youth interact with individuals and institutional structures in an attempt to reach their goals.

Sociocultural Theory

This research project takes place in a social context. The youth are interacting with other individuals within the social spaces created by the supportive intervention, and the roles and relationships of the participants are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. In order to answer my research questions, I needed to use an approach that focused on and allowed me to identify those social processes. Using Bourdieu's (1986) theory of economic, cultural, and social capitals as mediators of individual action and achievement to guide my search for evidence, I understand social capital to be a socially constructed resource, characterized by culture, history, setting, relationships, context, and meaning. I cannot "see" social processes or social construction without using a lens or approach that allows me to begin to understand the social actions and behaviors of the youth. The sociocultural theoretical framework offers just such a lens.

There are several interpretations of the theory that all human knowledge and meaning are constructed within and, in many ways, determined by social interaction and context. The sociocultural approach has influenced research and thinking in the fields of education, sociology, and psychology to explain how individuals develop knowledge and construct meaning. Sociocultural theory recognizes that knowledge development is not only a cognitive activity, but is mediated by human interaction with others, objects, and

in activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Bliss, Askew, and Macrae (1996) indicate that the American “sociocultural approach sees context and cultural practice as the fundamental unit within which cognition has to be analyzed. Human mental functioning is seen as emerging from and located in social practices” (p. 38). In effect, sociocultural theorists such as Pryor and Crossouard (2008) argue that:

...we become who we are through participating in the communities around us in ways that are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. Learning and identity are therefore inseparable. Identity is thus a concept which sits at the intersection of the individual and the social. It is constructed through narrative texts, shaped dialectically in an ongoing way. (p. 9)

Further, the notion that we can observe how knowledge and relationships are developed through the participation of individuals in a community of practice is supported by the sociocultural approach. As Hickey (2003) states, “a sociocultural view of learning supports a characterization of engagement as meaningful participation in a context where to-be-learned knowledge is valued and used (Wenger, 1998)” (p. 411).

This view that an individual expresses and shapes his or her identity through narratives allows for the validation of discourse analysis as a tool of inquiry for discovery of the purposes of human action. Narratives, texts, behaviors, and the social contexts within which these interactions take place produce the data that indicate how individuals construct their roles and identities.

Using the discourse analysis framework of Gee (2005), there are two kinds of discourses. First, there are bits of language, or what is spoken in the setting, that Gee defines as discourse with a lower case *d*. These bits of language, analyzed in the framework of the belief systems, values, characteristics, and relative and perceived positions of the actors in the setting, identify what individuals are trying to accomplish

and why. The larger and often hidden setting or context that is influencing what the individuals say and do is what Gee labels the operating Discourses with a capital D. Gee describes Discourses as the “language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places,” (p.27) represented by “interacting-thinking-valuing-talking-...in the ‘appropriate’ way, with the ‘appropriate’ props, at the ‘appropriate’ times in the ‘appropriate’ places” (p. 26). Gee argues that Discourses are important operations that influence and determine the context in which people interact and, in part, how they respond. He indicates that Discourses are always comprised of values and social norms that signal membership, exclusion, and power. Gee (2005) explains that Discourse models are theories that individuals hold in order to “make sense of the world and their experiences in it” (p. 61), and provide a framework for individuals to reveal and construct their identities in relation to their experiences. This view is important to reveal the social processes but downplays the role of individual choice and agency.

Moje and Lewis (2007) have put forth a similar conceptualization of the meaning of narratives and human interaction, that certain contexts shape the behavior of each actor– that the learning process is one of membership–that people congregate by ideational groupings- discourse communities–that “share ways of knowing, thinking, believing, acting, and communicating” (p. 18). Not unlike Moje and Lewis’ concept of discourse communities or Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice, Gee’s notion of Discourses allows us to see individual identities and recognize individual actions within a social context, and not just when an individual acts “appropriately,” but, as is sometimes the case of youth with emotional and behavioral challenges, when they

do not accept and do not act as if they are a member of the dominant Discourse community.

The sociocultural approach tends to downplay the importance of the constructed self, the characteristics of the individual that come from history, disposition, psychology, and individual skills and self-perceptions. Sociocultural theorists tend to argue that individual agency exists only in a social context, and that most learning happens in a social space, a space created in interaction. I believe that my search for representations of human knowledge and meaning development among youth who are not successful in school must include a consideration of individual psychology and development, including how the youth are situated in the social context. As Charles (2009) indicates in her dissertation on subjective literacies, the sociocultural argument that all learning and meaning are created in social spaces becomes problematic when we seek to look at agency and “power within situated communities” (p. 17).

Agency, Identity, and Sociocultural Theory

Jerome Bruner (1996) offers an individualistic view of human development and how individual knowledge and sense of self are developed in the context of individual agency:

What characterizes human selfhood is the construction of a conceptual system that organizes, as it were, a ‘record’ of agentive encounters with the world, a record related to the past... but that is also extrapolated into the future-self with history and possibility. It is a ‘possible self’ that regulates aspiration, confidence, optimism, and their opportunities. While this ‘constructed’ self system is inner, private, and suffused with affect, it also extends outward to things and activities and places where we become ‘ego-involved’...schools and school learning are among the earliest of those places and activities. (p. 36)

Bruner’s view of social and cultural influences on human development stresses individual agency and lays greater control at the hands of the individual than does the

strict sociocultural view of knowledge development. Bruner indicates that motivation and self-efficacy, including development of the ‘possible self’ that is the focus of adolescent development, is a “private” enterprise, with recognition that the school is an important influence in the development of the individual’s perceptions of possibilities of the self. This view of the psychology of human development has been criticized for ignoring the power of social forces in the development of self and knowledge, including the norms and sanctions that can constrain individual development (Ratner, 2000).

There is a need to recognize individual agency as an element of the sociocultural ontology. Lewis and Moje (2003) offer a framework for sociocultural analysis that takes into account the processes of agency, identity, and power, stating that “(a)gency may be thought of as the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories, as embedded in relations of power” (p. 1985). The marker of agency is individual social action as it is recognized by the discourse community; in other words, the individual acts in a way to signal his or her identity in relation to the discourse community.

From a sociological perspective, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of how individuals gain or are denied social advantage because of the influence of cultural and social capital operates at the intersection of individual action and the structures of community and social practices. At this intersection, Bourdieu (1977) identified the construct of habitus, “a set of durable, transposable, dispositions” (p. 72) that influence how individual beliefs, and how they learn, behave, respond, and emote is influenced by history, culture, and circumstance. According to Bourdieu, the habitus is a combination of learned strategies, personal characteristics, and practices, often unconsciously applied in social situations,

much like the construct of self-schemas, developed in interaction with the environment and mediated by social interactions. Described by O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005), "the habitus concept is a way of explaining how social and cultural messages (both actual and symbolic) shape individuals' thoughts and action" (p. 7), and is the social process that mediates individual agency within social structures. This reflects the view that identity is formed from prior experience and individuals behave in certain ways because they know, subconsciously, how they are situated within those social structures. The importance of Bourdieu's perspective is that it accounts for the subjectivity of individual action, identifies how feedback from one's environment becomes internalized, and describes how the environment/individual/environment feedback cycle contributes to the formation of an individuals' expectations:

Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimized through an interplay of agency and structure. The main way this happens is through what he calls 'habitus' or socialized norms or tendencies that guide behavior and thinking. Habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them. (Wacquant, 2005, p. 316)

Important to Bourdieu's theory of how individual action is influenced by social factors is the notion of "field" (1984). The field is a system of social expectations and positions played out in a profession such as education, with norms and requirements that influence the individual's actions and choices. A field is a bounded social space with its own rules, schemes of domination, and legitimated opinions. Fields are not institutions but are socially constructed spaces where people interact to negotiate the rules and norms. Education and a school's social spaces constitute, in this case, a field.

In addition to noting the importance of the context, Bourdieu's notion of habitus indicates that people are in many ways bound by their history, their experiences, and their

positions in the social setting, and that individual agency is enacted in part to assert one's position relative to the socially-determined constraints and possible membership of the community and, at times, in an attempt to break free from those constraints. I found that the youth in this study were very aware of where they fit in the social context of the school, and that many of their "inappropriate" behaviors were in reaction to their isolation from and in reaction to the constraints of the school community. The strength of Bourdieu's notion of habitus is that it takes into account the interrelationship between experience, cultural and social capital, between the values and skills a person possess, her ability to use her social networks to achieve her goals, between how an individual's aspirations are formed and changed in the context of the community and relationships, and how individuals who lack cultural and social capital tend to curb or lower their aspirations. For example, MacLeod (1987) writes of the concept of habitus:

...the structure of schooling, with its high regard for the cultural capital of the upper classes, promotes a belief among working-class students that they are unlikely to achieve academic success. Thus, there is a correlation between objective probabilities and subjective aspirations, between institutional structures and cultural practices" (p.13)

Human beings do not segment their experiences, and so the notion of habitus helps us to appreciate the complexities of experience, psychological functioning, social networks and contexts, and their interactions.

The habitus or self-schemas of students who are disengaged from school are often manifest in behavior problems to avoid tasks and situations where they may be embarrassed, and this may affect the way teachers perceive those students and their motivational qualities and academic capabilities. Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Hybl (1993) identify the social processes that are in play when a student misbehaves:

Disruptive behavior in school harms both the misbehaving individual and the school community ...school misconduct may play a part in producing negative outcomes. Suspension, a common response to school misconduct, limits students' opportunities to learn. Teachers may lower their expectations for troublesome students and limit these students' opportunities for learning by asking fewer questions, for example. Conventional peers may avoid misbehaving students, pushing them toward more deviant peer groups. (p. 180)

If we view this passage through a sociocultural lens, we see that misbehavior or misconduct happens in the social context of the classroom where several Discourse models are at work. It is unlikely that the student's misbehavior is random or without purpose but is instead, a response to what is happening in the culture and context of the classroom and school. Students who misbehave will likely suffer a consequence (such as a suspension), especially if they misbehave more than a few times, which may confirm the teacher's ideological model that the student cannot perform the work or chooses not to do so. In the framework of Gee's (2005) Discourse models, what is being described above is the social action of students who do not feel they belong in the prominent Discourse model of traditional schooling, and the misbehavior is a recognition that the youth behaves in such a way as to disengage from the dominant discourse community. While the teacher's view that the student does not belong is reinforced by such behavior, we could interpret the misbehaving student's actions as acts of agency, ways of establishing his or her identity as different from that of other students who sit in class, do their work, and receive reinforcement such as good grades, praise, and other responses that indicate acceptance. All this happens even when everyone is harmed in some way.

If students at risk have been exposed to negative school and community experiences over a period of time, and if those students present qualities which are challenging to the teacher's expectations or norms, then it is clear why students begin to

withdraw effort and why teachers develop lowered expectations of and different perceptions about many at risk students when compared to their views of students who respond to the work and show effort consistent with expectations (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006). Within the sociocultural context, students develop their expectations and self-schemas based upon their perceived status relative to or membership within the major ideologies or Discourses that dominate our education system, such as individual hard work leads to achievement and success, and that “schooling literacy” is more valuable than other types of literacies (Rogers, 2002).

If the student does not expect to be successful and, in fact has had negative experiences when attempting certain academic tasks in the past, the student will develop a self-schema that incorporates that negativity into his or her behavioral repertoire. Research clearly shows that students who drop out of high school possess lowered scores on self-esteem scales (reflected as an element of a student’s self-schema) and have negative perceptions of school, of their relationships in school, and their ability to perform academic tasks (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). Lowered self-esteem ratings seem to indicate that youth at risk have difficulty seeing themselves as efficacious in school and in academic pursuits. As noted by Alfassi (2003) in her review of students at risk:

...perceived self-efficacy influences students’ learning through cognitive as well as motivational mechanisms...students who believe they are capable of performing academic tasks use more cognitive strategies, persist longer and undertake difficult and more challenging assignments than students who doubt their capabilities. (p. 28)

Hickey (2003), in his work on the relationship between achievement motivation and the sociocultural perspective, writes “...from a sociocultural perspective, engagement

is a function of the degree to which participants in knowledgeable activities are attuned to the constraints and affordances of social practices and identity” (p. 411). According to Hickey, engaged participation is about “negotiating one’s identity with different and potentially conflicting and competing communities of practice” (p. 412) and that individuals, as they develop their own “trajectories,” negotiate their participation or reject participation in the community. Social practices, social goods, communities of practice, and social participation are important mediators in how school, family, and community-based social capital are perceived and experienced by individuals, including by at-risk youth. We know that many at-risk students feel and are perceived as different from other students who participate “successfully” in the programs, social networks, and environments of their high schools (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Mirsky, 2007).

By the time a student has reached adolescence, if his or her expectation is that more effort will result in greater gains (positive outcomes) such as good grades (attainment value), popularity (subjective value), confirmation of one’s abilities (subjective value), and achievement of longer term goals such as going to college (utility value), then the student can make the link between the performance of academic tasks and remaining in good standing. If, conversely, the student perceives that he or she will likely not obtain good grades, be respected and valued within the school norms, and gain from his or her efforts, then the student’s investment or engagement will wane, and the student will create an alternative self-schema.

Moje and Lewis (2007) outline the dynamic of how power and agency function to influence the learning process, indicating that if the resources of a community of practice or Discourse community are of value, then members will struggle over control of those

resources, steeping social relations in a context that depicts attempts to gain advantage or control. They go on to explain how learning is more than just the acquisition of knowledge, but it may also involve the reconceptualization or resistance to concepts and skills, “and the acts of taking up, disrupting, and transforming discourses have implications for how one conceptualizes the constructs of identity and agency” (p. 18). In other words, the individual’s need to develop and reshape the self is constantly influenced by participation in discourse communities.

I was a bit surprised to see the prominence of student behaviors and dialogue that indicated their resistance to what was happening and their attempts to negotiate with teachers, family members, and other helpers. There are multiple instances of these acts of student agency in my field notes and analysis of the transcripts, and so the notion of agency, situated within a sociocultural framework, becomes critical to identify how the youth negotiate the social networks and relationships related to school.

Conclusion to Chapter II

This dissertation has been built upon three primary theoretical constructs. First, social capital theory has been used as a sensitizing concept, thus focusing the search for evidence on the social actions and contexts that reflect the development and utilization of resources through the youth’s personal social networks. In a related way, social reproduction theory is used to explain how some groups receive privileged access to social resources while other groups do not. Social capital theory allowed me to explore how the youth attempted to relate to and access resources in an environment and system that required certain types of cultural and social skills. Finally, the research project uses a sociocultural approach to the collection, analysis and synthesis of the data. In order to

identify and explain how and in which contexts the youth access and experience social capital, an approach must be used that looks at human interaction as a social process. In this way, the research looks at the interplay and drive for human agency and identity development, constructed through the narratives of the youth in situ. The theoretical approach also relies on sociocultural theory, individual agency, and a critical approach to how narratives and discourses signal attempts to exert social control.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The ability to access social capital differs by individual, context, and roles, and is shaped by the individual's cultural identity. Further, the characteristics of the helping process are influenced by the interactions of the primary individuals in the setting. Behaviors such as rejection, negotiation, reciprocity, or engagement among the youth and adults involved in the helping process reflect how the actors experience the process and influences what types of and how social capital is offered and accessed. For these many reasons, this study was designed to allow for observation and analysis of socially constructed processes, using theories of social capital within a sociocultural framework to guide the search for the meaning of the social actions taking place as several adults attempted to engage and work with the youth.

In this chapter I describe the analytic framework and methodology used for this study, including the ethnographic research approach and discourse analysis method. The chapter includes a description of the research setting, the locus of the study, the participants, my stance and role as participant observer, the data collection and storage procedures, data preparation and coding, the analytic process informed by the principles and practices of discourse analysis, and ethical issues and concerns that arose during my time in the field. I end with identification of themes and a rationale for the choice of themes.

Sociocultural Framework

Qualitative research is concerned with “understanding the social world through direct personal experiences in natural settings” (Schram, 2006, p. 8). As such, I was concerned with meaning making in context as I designed and implemented the research project; in other words, a sociocultural framework is the theoretical home for this inquiry. Consistent with qualitative research, I conducted this exploration and analysis on three levels as described by Schram (2006). First, my research focused on describing what was happening to the youth in the setting. Second, I focused on interpreting the meaning and context of the actions and narratives from the perspective of the youth. Third, I sought to explain what was happening, using theories that explain social transactions and my experience to identify patterns in interactions and relationships in the setting. During my months in the field, I engaged in a continuous process of data collection, reflection, analysis, and so forth, guided but not constrained by the sensitizing concept of social capital. As Bowen (2006) indicates, “Sensitizing concepts draw attention to important features of social interaction and provide guidelines for research in specific settings” (p. 3). As such, I was not bound by the search for evidence of social capital and was I was not trying to prove or disprove its existence. Instead, I kept the following questions in the forefront as I engaged in the research analysis process:

- What are social actions and experiences of the youth in the context of the supportive intervention and interactions? What are the youth saying and doing? What is happening as the youth and others interact in the setting?

- What are the youth and others trying to accomplish? What do the social actions and dialogue indicate? What are the social processes that enable and thwart the engagement of youth in the supportive intervention?
- How do the youth and others construct meaning in the context of the setting and intervention? What might the social processes mean relative to what we know about youth at risk and youth in general?

These three types of questions, at the descriptive, interpretive, and theorizing levels, allowed me to make sense of the many codes and themes that emerged from the data and, as I will describe next, provided a larger framework for using coding and discourse analysis techniques.

Analytic Framework

This project is primarily concerned with meaning making in context. I needed to gather sufficient evidence to construct the meanings of social actions from the perspectives of the youth in the setting if I were to reach that objective. As such, an ethnographic method was most appropriate as it gave me sufficient opportunity to observe, interact with, and co-construct dialogues with youth as they worked with the adults in the school. Ethnography, distinguished by significant time spent in the field, participant observation, and cultural interpretation, has its foundations in anthropology and is now used in sociology, nursing, education, social work, among other disciplines. Although there is much debate about what constitutes a true ethnography, most ethnographic scholars describe ethnography as a method for understanding the experiences or cultures of persons of a certain group, common experience, or community (Agar, 2006a, 2006b; Shweder, 1999; Van Maanen, 1988). I understand this view of

ethnography to be consistent with the tenets of sociocultural theory—that social action is informed by values, beliefs, dispositions, knowledge, actions, psychology, and membership of individuals in the context of a discourse community.

Agar (2006a) indicates that ethnography is distinguished, in part, by its use of abductive logic and analysis designed to discover new concepts, carried out over multiple iterations. Abductive logic contrasts with the deductive, linear process of hypothesis testing so often used in quantitative research. The ethnographic method typically involves spending time in the field with individuals who experience the phenomena to be studied, and requires an analytic methodology that facilitates the cultural translation of those experiences from the perspective of the “natives,” that is a different point of view from the researcher’s point of view, described as the emic perspective (Agar 2006a). As Schram (2006) indicates, the interpretive perspective seeks to “understand this complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live in it” (p. 44). The ethnographic methodology is also characterized by data collected through observation, interviews, field notes, audio or videotapes, and surveys (Emmerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Wolcott, 1999). Social action in the setting is observed and translated by the researcher in order to explain what individuals are trying to accomplish and in which contexts particular actions and meanings take place.

The ethnographic approach is focused on explaining “meaning problems in terms of contexts” (Agar, 2006b) in other words, the ethnographer conducts a translation between his or her working assumptions or working frame, and patterns or problems that arise from what he or she observes in context. My analysis has involved a search for emerging understandings and patterns and meaning of interaction, consistent with Agar’s

criteria of an acceptable ethnography. I was open to understanding what was happening with the youth as we worked together. I was in the field as participant observer for 18 months, spending hundreds of hours taping interactions and taking field notes about these experiences with the four youth.

I was interested in the ecology or contextual issues that affect these youth and I knew I would be looking for patterns and surprises in the student narratives relative to how systems or structures in schools influence their perceptions and beliefs. We already know that social connections and school connectedness are elements in the success or failure of students at risk, and so I knew I would be looking for indications of how school connectedness was created or thwarted among the youth being studied. I looked for how at risk students experienced “social reality... constructed by and through symbolic and cultural interpretations,” (Rogers, 2002) within the context of social relationships and social capital. I was not looking for a correlation between social capital and student educational outcomes. I was not looking to assess the outcomes of the intervention. I was not looking at how the supportive intervention affected student behavior in school. Instead, I was looking at here and now social processes and interaction, using an iterative process to abduct the potential meaning of those interactions, and I sought to identify patterns that could explain what might otherwise seem foreign or non-understandable behavior.

Discourse Analysis

In many instances, qualitative research focuses on “symbolic interactionism, a theoretical perspective that assumes society, reality, and self are constructed through interaction and thus rely on language and communication. This perspective assumes that

interaction is inherently dynamic and interpretive and addresses how people create, enact, and change meanings and actions” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 13). The ethnographer looks to observe and translate what is observed in interaction and with narratives, or what the individual actors do as they attempt to accomplish personal, psychological, and social goals (Agar, 2006a; Shweder, 1999). Consistent with the notion that the ethnographic method is a translation of the meanings of narratives and discourses, I have used discourse analysis as the primary method for analyzing the data. I was looking to understand how students talked about and constructed meaning from their participation in social networks in the context of trying to attain their goals.

There are various frameworks used by qualitative researchers that provide a coherent process for analyzing texts. My data included nearly 1,200 pages of text, and I needed a framework that would allow me to work with that volume of data at the descriptive, interpretive, and analytical levels. At the “micro” level, with bits of language, I conducted line-by-line coding first using social action descriptors often used by grounded theorists and ethnographers (Charmaz, 2006; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Gee, 2005). I used the discourse analysis framework provided by Gee (2005) that includes seven building tasks of language that serve as “tools of inquiry” (p. 110), used to query the text. Gee has designed these building tasks and tools, including situated meanings, Discourse models, and social languages, to allow for discovery of the meaning of the language and interactions of the participants in context, indicating that “...the primary function of language (is)...to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (2005, p. 1). The seven building tasks of language in Gee’s model are those

that build significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. Gee suggests questions for data analysis within each building task for the researcher to use to query the data and label the possible functions and meaning of the discourse. I eventually focused on five of these building tasks to develop my initial codes and create themes as I analyzed the data—the building tasks that signaled significance, identity, relationships, connections, and politics.

Individuals construct their identities and meaning through social action, including the language they use as they interact in particular contexts. For example this brief passage from one of the youth, Julie, illustrates how language expresses meaning and sense-making in context: “She’s (the teacher) the one who told the class that people who work in the city are lowlifes, and all they do is sit on their ass” (Transcripts, December 9, 2009). Julie’s parents worked for the city. The word “lowlife” has significant symbolic meaning. It connotes “lesser than,” or lower class. Further, Julie used the derogatory term, “sit on their ass,” a term for laziness, which is anathema to our American Discourse of hard work and individual achievement. Julie indicated that the teacher said this publicly (“told the class”). Julie’s choice of words shows that Julie was deliberately embarrassed by the teacher. The words Julie used, the way this was stated, and the tone she used indicate that Julie was offended and embarrassed by how the teacher talked about her and people like her. In context, Julie was making the case for why she did not want to continue to go to school, how she felt isolated and different, and why her plan to finish school somewhere else made sense. All of this meaning in context is gleaned from one simple, brief “language bit.”

According to Gee, Discourse models with a capital *D* are the “‘theories’ that people hold...and use to make sense of the world and their experiences in it” (p. 61). Gee states that language signals “situated meanings...flexibly transformable patterns that come out of experience and, in turn, construct experience as meaningful in certain ways and not others” (p. 67). This search for patterns is an analytic tool that I used to sort out what was important relative to my search for the meanings within the interactions and narratives from the youth perspective. As I coded over time, I would begin to see patterns of social action or behaviors that signaled a particular, larger purpose. For example, one young person was openly hostile and aggressive in response to his mother’s criticism of his behavior. I thought that his aggressive manner and language was designed to stop the conversation and thus avoid a potential embarrassment or disappointment. In another case, one of the young women in the study used language to minimize the challenges, health problems and conflicts with certain family members after describing, at length, how these events were important to her. I interpreted her attempts to minimize the problems as a way to avoid appearing in need of help and to avoid emotional pain. These are both significantly different types of behaviors designed to accomplish the same social goal—to avoid the appearance of needing help, or to avoid the appearance of incompetence. The Discourse of self-reliance and individual accomplishment was consistently present and represented a pattern that made it difficult for the youth to seek help and admit to their mistakes or weaknesses.

Critical Discourse Analysis

This dissertation is situated, in part, within the dynamics of competing and overlapping discourses. The youth in this study are working from certain subjectivities

that are quite different from the subjectivities that give schooling and education legitimacy and power. There are times, therefore, where the youth attempt to retain control and assert beliefs that were in direct conflict with the tenets of the school, and I have sought to identify the contexts in which that happens and the possible reasons for stances that the actors took in those contexts. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework for understanding the interplay between agency and context. As Rogers (2002) indicates, “Instead of an overly deterministic view of social life or an overly optimistic view of human agency, critical discourse theory and analysis hold the potential for movement back and forth between structure and agency” (p. 145).

The sociocultural approach provides a construct for looking at the overt and hidden meanings suggested by discourse. Discourses are used in everyday contexts to reflect the voices, values, knowledge and experiences of the actors in the setting, and are often ways of enacting power or an actor’s resistance to attempts to exert power. The tools offered by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) allow researchers to identify attempts to build and exert power in the social context, taking into account the relative positions, belief systems, values, dispositions, and knowledge of the actors (Fairclough, 2000). In schools, students are typically in a subservient position to teachers, school staff members, and administrators. In the context of this study, through the processes afforded by the intervention with the youth, we attempted to put students in a greater position of control, using tools that promote self-directed planning and shared decision-making. The intervention process often resulted in discomfort and created tensions between the adults, who were operating within certain and dominant ideologies dictated by the educational system, their jobs as educators, and the operating discourses that require students to

conform to the norms of the schools, and the students who struggled to fit into and who often resisted these ideologies. The narratives captured during these interactions reflected the tensions between the adults and the agentic actions of the youth, operating with the values that shaped the discourses of the individuals in more powerful positions (usually the adults), the responses of the youth, and the reflections of the actors outside of the intervention meetings.

Critical Discourse Analysis provides tools that allow the researcher to identify how power is being enacted at the local, community, and societal levels (Lewis & Moje, 2003), and provides a rich explanation of how individuals negotiate social spaces where they have more or less control over the outcome. I used CDA to identify and explain the social actions of the youth, in other words, to explain the contextual influences that caused the youth to, at some times avoid, sometimes engage, sometimes reciprocate, and so forth. The young woman's description of her teacher's remarks about "people who work for the city" is an example of how language is just one of many examples of language that reflects how the youth interpreted disparities of power and control.

Setting

Emmerton (pseudonym) is a small city of approximately 12,000 residents sitting on the border with Maine in eastern New Hampshire. Like many areas of the state, Emmerton has experienced a rapidly changing population over the past decade, including a growing number of low-income and ethnically diverse families. Like many northern New England cities and towns, Emmerton was settled in the late 17th Century and was incorporated in the mid 1700s. It was one of the many small Northern New England towns that grew with the advent of manufacturing in the early 1800s as textile mills

sprang up along the river that runs through the city. Now the mills have been converted for mixed-use purposes (business and residential). Emmerton has a small downtown area, a large electronic manufacturing plant that has been there since the 1950s, and many retail shopping areas. The 2000 census indicates that over 10% of children in the city lived below the poverty level, and the average median income of a family in Emmerton is 7% below the state average. Near the center of town there are small blocks with tenant housing and multiple family rental homes for low-income and working class families.

Emmerton High School had an enrollment of 606 students and a staff of 43 teachers during the 2009-10 school year. The two-story brick school building, first built in 1956, was later expanded to include a vocational technical high school and additional classrooms. The high school is attached to the district's middle school by a long hallway and separated by the school cafeterias. The front entrance to the high school is unlocked during school hours, with the Guidance offices on the right and the Administration offices on the left after one walks through the double doors. In 2006 the high school began participating in a federally funded dropout prevention project that was managed by the New Hampshire Department of Education. Emmerton High School's dropout rate in 2004-05 was 8.2%, one of the highest in the state, motivating the district to encourage the high school's participation in the dropout prevention project. The Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire was the primary provider of training and technical assistance to schools in the project, and I, as the Institute on Disability project coordinator, was responsible for managing all aspects of the project including supervision of University staff members and collaborative activities with the participating schools.

The research for this dissertation took place within the context of the interventions as part of the grant-funded project.

Context: The RENEW Intervention

My work with the school included consultation, planning, and training for teams and individuals to implement the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model in the school with the aim of improving school culture, creating greater consistency in discipline and classroom management, and improving relationships between the adults and the students and among students (Horner & Sugai, 2005). As part of the PBIS framework, I and the other University staff members worked with identified guidance and special education teachers in the school to implement an intensive level intervention for students who were far behind in credits and who demonstrated significant needs for emotional and behavioral support. A University staff member who worked for me had been, since early 2007, working directly with individual Emmerton High School students who were identified as at risk of high school dropout or failure, using a model of individualized supports and services that we call “RENEW” (Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work). We also trained school staff members who volunteered to use the model to mentor at risk students.

The RENEW intervention is a model for assisting high-risk students to successfully transition from high school to post high-school life. I was part of team that developed and piloted the RENEW model in New Hampshire in 1996, and it has since been the focus of several grant-funded projects. I have been involved in studies that have documented the outcomes of RENEW, an efficacious model for assisting students with emotional and behavioral disorders with self-determination, planning, and problem

solving (Bullis & Cheney, 1999; Hagner, Cheney, & Malloy, 1999; Malloy, Drake, Abate, & Cormier, 2010; Malloy, Sundar, Hagner, Pierias, & Veit, 2010). I felt that this supportive intervention offered an opportunity and context for a qualitative study of social capital and youth at risk of high school failure. I understood that I was not conducting research on the RENEW model but was, instead, using the intervention as a context and setting for conducting this dissertation project. As such, I understand that the setting has been manipulated by the presence of the RENEW intervention and that this intervention creates a context that is not present in most high schools. The intervention did, however, provide a context for the development of rich discourses among youth who have experienced significant failures in many aspects of their development.

The RENEW intervention is designed to be delivered by individuals who embrace the principles of self-determination, unconditional care, flexible resource provision, and community inclusion. The goals of the intervention are to help participants successfully finish high school, obtain employment (when indicated), transition to post-secondary activities such as work, post-secondary education, training, among others, successful transition to adult life in the community (obtaining a driver's license, getting an apartment are some examples), and an emphasis on and supports designed to build upon the youth's strengths. The intervention also includes several strategies or tools, including personal futures planning, alternative education planning and educational supports, connections to in-school and community-based resources, individualized school-to-career services including work-based learning, building relationships and linkages in the community (natural supports), flexible resource development and funding, wraparound team development, and workplace or career-related mentoring.

The model requires a trained facilitator to work with each youth to develop a personal futures plan, where the facilitator captures the ideas and descriptions put forth by the young person on flip chart paper. Futures planning and person-centered planning include a family of tools that have been used primarily to help children and adults with developmental disabilities to create plans that reflect the needs and goals of the individual (Cotton, 2003; Mount, 1992; O'Brien & Forrest, 1987; Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1992). Key features of personal futures planning include the use of graphic facilitation or visual diagrams in an attempt to depict the individual's desires, interests, preferences, needs, and resource network in the individual's own words, and input from key helpers in the individual's life. The process involves the person's responses to a series of questions about his or her history, personal relationships and networks, current situation, preferences, accomplishments, dreams and goals, concerns or barriers, and short term goals that are recorded on flip chart paper. The narratives represent "maps," or visual and textual representations of the person's reflections and aspirations, described as visual diagrams in the research literature (Kesby, 2004). Once the maps are completed, the facilitator helps the person to develop action items and connections with community and school resources that are critical to the attainment of goals as outlined by the youth. (For a more detailed description of the RENEW model, see Malloy, Drake, Abate, & Cormier, 2010).

Much like the semi-structured interview process developed by Seidman (1998), the personal futures planning process helps to construct individual narratives and allows for self reflection. (The questions used for the mapping process appear in Appendix B.) The futures planning meetings and the meetings that followed as I, the facilitators, and

youth worked together served as the locus or context for the collection of data. The facilitators were trained to ask open-ended questions, guide the process towards the desired outcomes, adjust the process and sequence according to the participant's responses, and develop and manage the engagement of people who can help the youth achieve his or her goals. Although there is a certain order to the process, we had to adjust to the needs of the students and more pressing issues as they arose in school or the community. As a result, some youth in the study completed their futures plan in four to five meetings and in two months, while others took longer.

Given the context and the reasons why youth are referred for the RENEW intervention, many of our meetings were focused on the pathway to high school completion, including pressing issue such as how to bring up a failing grade, or how to finish assignments on time, how to ask for help in class, how to negotiate an alternative schedule, and other activities related to short- and long-term success toward graduation. The participants showed various levels of engagement in these types of activities and the conversations provided a rich context for gauging the youth's view towards teachers, peers, success in school, strategies for success in class, social aspects of classroom, and other types of interactions.

Recruitment, Enrollment, and Field Work

My work in the field began in April 2008, when I introduced the dissertation project to the principal, Mrs. Stavros, and the at-risk guidance counselor, Mrs. Fairchild. (I am using pseudonyms for all participants.) Mrs. Fairchild had been trained in and was a proponent of RENEW model, and she had the responsibility of screening youth for risk of dropping out of school and the referral to the RENEW intervention. In late April

2008, Mrs. Fairchild and I generated a list of 13 youth who were appropriate for referral, and a list of possible adult facilitators who had been trained to provide RENEW services. We narrowed the list down to eight youth, and developed a schedule for Mrs. Fairchild to introduce the RENEW model to the students and to meet me. It was extremely helpful to have Mrs. Fairchild work with me to introduce this process, as she was trusted and highly regarded by many of these youth, who she often counseled individually and in her social skills group. Between April 28 and May 18, 2008, Mrs. Fairchild and I met with eight students. Jonathon Drake, who worked with me on this dropout prevention project, introduced the RENEW process to a ninth student, who opted to meet with me in September 2008. I eventually obtained consent to conduct the research with four youth, two young women and two young men. The other students decided not to participate, or their parents decided they did not want their children to participate, and one young woman ran away shortly after we began to meet. I obtained approval to conduct the research from the University of New Hampshire's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in May 2008. (See Appendix C for IRB Approval and Consent forms.)

I began meeting with two of the youth in May of 2008. I worked in the field for 18 months, through October, 2009. I spent six to eight hours in the school almost every Tuesday during the school year, and I set up individual and team meetings with students over the summer. I began working with the third youth in September 2008, and the fourth youth in November 2008. I participated in over 85 meetings over the 18 months, audio taping most of the meetings, producing field notes, saving email correspondence, collecting the futures planning flip charts and action planning sheets, and collecting additional artifacts including copies of student records and transcripts. I also conducted

semi-structured interviews with the parents or guardians of three of the four youth in July of 2009 (the fourth parent was not available for an interview). I spent approximately 250 hours in the field, meeting with the students, observing interactions in the office, consulting with teachers or counselors, and interviewing parents or guardians. I was uncomfortable with using a tape recorder for the first few meetings with the students, but I quickly learned that I missed much of the detail of the conversations and began taping in September 2008. A list of all of my meetings with the youth or consultation meetings about the youth appears in Appendix D.

I used a notebook for scratch notes, writing down my impressions and important phrases, events, or insights within three to four days of my return from the field. I used these notes to develop more detailed field notes on my laptop. I also generated memos in order to keep my ideas and impressions of what was happening and what I was seeing fresh and current. Like a diary of my personal and analytical reflections as I worked in the field, these memos took several forms including initial memos that reflected my emotional reactions to being in the field and my concern about possible conflicts between my multiple roles in the school including that of as consultant, trainer, supervisor, facilitator, outsider, researcher, and colleagues. After about six months in the field I began to resolve these conflicts and content of my memos shifted to focus on patterns of interaction across students and contexts, speculation about the meanings of certain interactions, and integrating ideas that were emerging from the data and field work (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2006). These memos also concentrated on surprises or “rich points” that were emerging from my observations (Agar, 2006b). The memos became

important pieces of the text that I inserted in the final documents I used for coding and data analysis.

The Youth

Each of the youth enrolled in the study had unique and distinctive qualities, histories, and personal characteristics. All were referred for the RENEW intervention because they were behind their same age peers in credits needed for graduation, and all had been cited for numerous behavior violations and course failures. They were, however, individuals with clear preferences and strong insights about themselves and people around them.

Shelly

The first student I met was Shelly, who looked to be 13 or 14 years old despite the fact that she was 17. She was just finishing up her third year in high school. We met in Mrs. Fairchild's office in the Guidance Department during the last block of the day on April 29, 2008. She was slumped in her chair and was dwarfed by her oversized book sack. I thought that she probably weighed 100 pounds and her shoulder-length brown hair that lay dull and greasy on her head. She wore "gothic" type of wristbands and a belt for her pants that had studs and spikes. She said little as Mrs. Fairchild explained how the RENEW process works and what my role would be. Shelly spoke with a nasal tone and a weak voice. I found out later that she had just been diagnosed with a rare degenerative neurological disorder that causes an unpredictable but certain deterioration of the brain, often resulting in seizures, coma, and an early death. One of the symptoms is uncontrolled secretions, such as excess secretions on the head, skin, and in the throat.

Shelly lived with her mother, her maternal grandmother, and her four siblings including three sisters and a brother, all younger than her. Mrs. Fairchild told me that Shelly's mother left her father because he was physically abusing her. At one point he was incarcerated for stalking her mother. Shelly's family suffered significant financial losses as well, and her mother described the devastation of her family, now living on welfare benefits (Transcripts, July 7, 2009).

During our first meeting Shelly described her home life as "chaotic" (Transcripts, May 27, 2008). She described, with tones of resentment, how her mother's boyfriend and his children lived with them, and how they crashed the family computer. The first time I took Shelly home there was a policeman outside of her house interviewing some younger girls. There were no adults there. The house was a neat two-story New Englander, with a large truck and boat in the side yard and trash spilling out of the side porch. The house was in a dense but well kept neighborhood within a half mile of the school. During the year and half that I was there, Shelly's family moved three times. In the late winter of 2009, Mrs. Fairchild said there was a rumor Shelly's mother was pregnant with her newest boyfriend, a rumor that was soon confirmed to be true.

Shelly was receiving special education services. She had been found eligible for special education in 2008, before she received her formal diagnosis but in response to concerns about her deteriorating physical condition and loss of cognitive functioning. Shelly's mother reported that Shelly was popular, happy, and had many friends up until seventh grade, when she began to show signs of her illness. Shelly's special education case manager at the school was Mrs. Catano, a woman with an imposing presence and a wry sense of humor, spoke in direct terms about Shelly, critical of her mother's lifestyle

and her relationship with her boyfriend, and protective of Shelly's condition. Shelly's tumultuous relationship with her boyfriend, Alex, was constantly on again/off again during the time I knew her. Alex was the second youth who enrolled in the study.

Shelly evoked a protective sort of empathy from individuals around her. Mrs. Fairchild was very concerned about Shelly's condition and about her relationship with her boyfriend, who she noted, "is so controlling" (Field Notes, June 5, 2008). This concern was confirmed during one of the first futures planning meetings when her boyfriend paced back and forth outside of our meeting room door, eventually bursting in and yelling at her that her mother was upset that she had not come home yet. Shelly quickly got up from the table, shaking, and promptly left the room without looking at us or saying goodbye. This relationship was always in the background and a prominent issue for Shelly and for those around her.

Shelly's teacher/mentor was Mrs. Pennington, a diminutive woman who was the English Language Learner teacher in the middle school and who had volunteered for the RENEW training in the fall of 2007. Mrs. Pennington, born and raised in China, came to the United States and married an American. At the time she mentored Shelly Mrs. Pennington was raising an 11-year-old son by herself and attending graduate school in addition to working full time. She became an important member of Shelly's circle of support, provided math tutoring to Shelly during her free block, and she continued to see Shelly after Shelly finished school.

Alex

Alex was the second youth to participate in the study. He was 16, due to turn 17 in July when we meet him in late April 2008. He was called down to the Guidance office

by Mrs. Fairchild right after we met with Shelly. He insisted that Shelly stay in the room while we met, stating that “she is my rock, she’s the only one I trust” (Field Notes, April 28, 2008). Alex had a strong physical presence. He was quite overweight but of average height, with blond short hair, and he wore chains and baggy shorts hanging down below his backside, and a T-shirt with skulls and bones on the front. He played with a large safety pin in the door keyhole while we spoke about the RENEW process and the research project. He didn’t look at Mrs. Fairchild or me as he spoke. “I hate the kids in my class.” He spoke in a quick, often stuttering manner and he was sometimes difficult to understand. My field notes indicate that I wondered if he had a disability, as he changed the subject often. We talked about career planning and he interrupted, switching to the subject of how he hates the kids in his graphic arts class. Mrs. Fairchild talked about how talented he was with poetry and drawing. He agreed to think about being in the project. The next time we meet, ten days later, Mrs. Fairchild called him down to her office and his left arm was in a sling, “I got stabbed by a kid on my way home. I don’t want to walk home, these kids scare me” (Field Notes, May 8, 2008). He agreed to participate in the project, and told me we will have to go to his mother’s house to get her consent. “She’s blind,” he said.

That very afternoon, Mrs. Fairchild suggested we go to Alex’s house to obtain his mother’s consent for the study. We parked in the driveway of a two-story Victorian era farmhouse, and as we walked in the back door we were greeted by a man with a medium build and dark beard, who let Alex’s mom know that some people from the school were there. Alex’s mom was standing in the kitchen with her handbag on her shoulder, as if she was getting ready to go out. She was thin, of average height with dyed blond hair, and

she squinted and looked vaguely in our direction. I believe that she is legally blind. She was happy to sit down with us at the small plastic kitchen table. The fixtures and structure were old but it was clean and uncluttered. The room was thick with the smell of stale cigarette smoke. We talked about the research project, and Alex's mom and her friend spoke openly about their hopes that Alex would be able to succeed in school and about his artistic abilities. His mother signed the consent (with my help) and hugged me with gratitude that perhaps we could "help Alex."

Alex and his mother moved twice while he was in the research project, and the man who first greeted us in Alex's house was gone by the fall of 2008. Alex told us that he was his mother's boyfriend, and that he was in the hospital dying from alcoholism. Alex's mom subsisted on Supplemental Security Income—a Social Security disability benefit that is typically no more than \$674 per month—and housing subsidies, food stamps, and Medicaid health insurance. Alex's dad left when he was young, and Alex had an older brother who dropped out of school. Alex often had health-related problems. He stated on several occasions "I am bipolar," referring to bipolar mental illness. He told us that he had been in and out of mental health services, having been discharged for disruptive behavior just before we began to work with him. He was also receiving special education services, with a label of "Specific Learning Disability." His special education case manager at the school was also Mrs. Catano. He had earned 13 credits when we met him, but was on the way to earning no credits during this third year in school. He had numerous disciplinary infractions and was being suspended frequently for skipping or leaving class and for disrespectful or disruptive behavior.

I assigned our most skilled facilitator on the University team, Jonathon, to work with Alex, because I knew Alex and his mother had significant support needs and I felt that a man would be a better fit for Alex. Mrs. Fairchild also worked closely with us. When we first met, Alex was under the juvenile court's jurisdiction because his mother and the school filed a "Child in Need of Supervision," or CHINS petition. These petitions are designed to provide supervision and force accountability of the student and parent to attend school when a parent or caregiver is unsuccessful, with the threat of removal from the home if the youth does not comply.

In our first meetings with Alex, he would tell elaborate stories about his family, his friends, and his activities after school and on weekends. It was difficult for him to stay on topic. He, by his own admission, hung out with freshmen and younger boys in his neighborhood. It seemed like he was in constant conflict with others. Despite his difficulties or perhaps because of them, Alex engendered contradictory responses from adults in the school. We interviewed two of his teachers as part of the dropout project, and both indicated that they felt sorry for Alex, noting his upbringing and family situation. Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano were frustrated by Alex's behavior, stating that, "He likes the drama," and wondering if he would be able to succeed in the school social context. Mrs. Fairchild said, "He didn't get any credits last year (2007-08). I don't know what happened, he would start off ok, and he says he wants to do it, but then he can't..." (Field Notes, August 26, 2008). Teachers and administrators also expressed different views about whether Alex could conform and do the work or whether he simply chose not to. For example, one of his teachers described at length how she tried to engage Alex and spoke with empathy about his difficult home situation, stating, "You've got an

enigma there (referring to Alex), that's for sure. If I can wave a wand, I'd get him out of that house, but I...it isn't going to happen" (Field Notes, September 17, 2008). In contrast, the assistant principal took a hard line with Alex, having suspended him at least four times during the 2008-09 school year. After going to court about Alex's CHINs petition, the assistant principal used a common phrase laced with expletives to state that Alex needed to shape up (Field Notes, October 28, 2008).

In October 2008, Alex stormed out of school when a female student said something accusatory to him in his culinary arts class, and his mother signed the papers withdrawing him from school. She reversed this decision when she learned that her state and federal benefits would be cut, and we worked with Alex and his mother to re-enroll him in school. This situation was just one example of the many disruptive incidents we noted with Alex while he was in the study. During the 17 months that we worked with him, he had gone to court for charges brought against him after an altercation with a neighbor, was suspended for walking out of school for a confrontation with a girl in his culinary arts class, charged with breaking and entering into the snack stand at the high school football field (all the other youth were much younger than he), charged with selling stolen goods on line, was suspended for ten days for an ugly conflict with the assistant principal over using his cell phone in the cafeteria, and he was suspended for arguing with another student on the bus. He was put into the county jail for a weekend when he did not report to court, an event that seemed to have an impact on him as he began to comply with court requirements that he attend mental health counseling and refrain from school conflicts. His compliance did not last any longer than the court's order, however. Given his status with special education services, the school was obligated

to keep trying to develop educational solutions for Alex, but his responses eventually indicated to everyone involved that their efforts were not going to result in success.

Julie

Although she and her mother signed the consent to participate in the study in June of 2008, Julie did not start working with us until September 2008, because she wanted to “take the summer off.” Julie was, by classic American standards, a beautiful young woman, with shoulder-length, dark blond hair, blue eyes, about 5 feet 6 inches tall, thin but with curves. Her dress, makeup, and demeanor indicated that she was meticulous and careful about her appearance. She always had a trendy handbag, and unlike the other participants, she had her own cell phone, use of a family car, and she lived with her biological mother and father in an intact family. She had one older brother who was out of the home but lived nearby, and a grandmother who she visited often. Julie would speak with disdain about her brother’s girlfriend who she said took poor care of her nephew. She once said of her nephew: “He thinks I’m his mom.”

She was 16 when we first began to meet. She spoke in a low, breathy monotone, and Mrs. Fairchild, who had been counseling Julie for various issues said, “She’s very guarded and private. Don’t talk about her history as it brings up too many issues for her.” This advice proved unnecessary, however, as Julie opened up about her family history and problems during the second meeting, and she became more and more animated and engaged as the RENEW planning process unfolded. She was clearly worried about her own health issues. She said she was being given uterine “pre-cancerous” treatments, and she described several family deaths, the death of a boyfriend, and numerous family conflicts.

Julie was quite clear that she wanted to graduate early, but when we first started meeting she had half the credits she needed to graduate in four years. Julie inflated the number of credits she had, however, and tried to skirt the issue on several occasions. The RENEW process took on real relevance for Julie when she found out she could possibly graduate with an adult education diploma by completing only 20 credits instead of the 26 required by the school. Julie became focused and engaged in problem solving when this became a possibility for her, despite the misgivings and concerns of several people around her, including her father. Early in our meetings Julie characterized her father as an evil, critical individual, a feeling that dissipated as time went on.

Julie's teacher/mentor was Ms. McGurk, a relatively young, single English teacher who, like Julie, was blond, blue-eyed, athletic, and tall. Ms. McGurk told us that she worked during the summers at a therapeutic riding camp for children with disabilities and that she really wanted to help students like Julie to be successful. Ms. McGurk was a bit reserved with Julie but she moved the personal futures planning process along and offered her teacher planning time to tutor Julie in English when she fell behind.

Before we started meeting, Julie was often sent to the office or suspended for cyber-bullying other students (usually other girls), or engaging in disrespectful behavior with teachers or other students. She was allowed to eat in the guidance office because she would engage in altercations with other students in the cafeteria. When I asked Mrs. Fairchild why she thought Julie engaged in bullying, she said, "because she feels so bad about herself." (Field Notes, May 19, 2009). Once Julie began to take charge of her schedule and was going to adult education her bullying behavior stopped, and it did not

resume in the fall of 2009 when she began taking more classes back at Emmerton High School.

Julie's mother was very involved in the process, beginning in the fall of 2008 when the adult education option first surfaced. Her mother worked for the City of Emmerton in the Tax Collection office, and her father worked for a nearby city maintenance department. Both parents were articulate and frank about their hopes for Julie. As her father said during my interview with both parents, "We just... we try to do... I want her to succeed, that's all I have ever wanted for her. I just wanted her, you know I just wanted ...my father he tried so hard to just get me to finish school and at her age I just couldn't hear him you know" (Field Notes, July 16, 2009)

Manny

Manny was 15, almost 16 years old when we first started meeting in November of 2008. He was a relatively short and stocky young man of color and was living in a group home for boys. I later learned that his mother was from Puerto Rico and his father was African American. Ms. West, a para-educator who worked primarily with the students who have emotional or behavioral support needs, had convinced Manny to try this process. In our first meeting he sat down, gripped the chair rests and did not look at us. He wore chains, a fancy New York Yankees ball cap, and had cuts on his hands. (I later learned this was a sign of being in a gang.) As Ms. West gingerly asked him about his history during our first meeting, Manny told a horrific tale in a monotone voice about his childhood in a poor neighborhood in a northern Massachusetts city. Manny described how his only sibling, an older brother, was stabbed to death in a gang-related fight and how after that he began to steal cars, break into homes, and use drugs. Manny was 12

years old at the time. He described an altercation with his biological father: “Me and him got into a fistfight last Thanksgiving, he called me an ungrateful kid, told me I shouldn’t have been born,” (Transcripts, November 25, 2008). Manny left his father’s home when he was 12 to live with his biological mother and stepfather in New Hampshire. Manny continued to steal, and ended up incarcerated in the Sununu Center (New Hampshire’s juvenile detention center). Once discharged from the Sununu Center, he went back to live with his mother and stepfather in the community but he was there less than three months when he violated his probation, and he was sent to a group home in Emmerton where he had been for almost two years when we met him.

This is a young man who had “grown up” by himself or in institutional settings. He was placed by the courts in the Sununu Center when he was 13, and he described his days there- therapy, two hours a day of classroom instruction, and daily substance abuse and anger management counseling (which he says was very helpful). Manny indicated that the group home provided structure for him. He described, with some affection, one of the group home staff, Jenny, as his “nag” and a surrogate mom. The group home director, Mike, provided a trusted ear, and was someone who listened.

As I asked about his family it was clear that Manny did not know much about them and when I asked him to describe his biological mom, he changed the subject. Later in 2009 his guardian ad litem told us that his mom was severely disabled, disfigured from a car accident, and how his mom “denies him food claiming he eats too much” and that his step-father was “very limited, I would say borderline intelligence” (Field Notes, September 3, 2009). Manny himself did not offer any of this about his parents, and de did

not know much of other half-siblings, or of his natural father. When talking about his stepfather he said, “I call him dad” (Transcripts, November 25, 2008).

Manny was struggling in school. He had accumulated 1 and ½ credits in his first year in high school, and, although he had fewer behavior problems than in the past, he was accomplishing little in school. As it turned out, he had received special education services when he was younger but he was found ineligible through subsequent re-testing. Ms. West and Mrs. Fairchild chafed when I suggested he be evaluated for a learning disability again.

The meetings progressed with the facilitator, Ms. W, taking the lead. She worked on issues that Manny was facing immediately—flunking all of his classes, not cooperating with teachers—while talking with him about longer range planning issues using the RENEW planning process. Manny was always cooperative and gracious, but it was like he was tolerating what we were doing—he did not take the initiative. Manny had learned good manners along the way, saying “thank you” to us at several points, which surprised me given his history. He was an attractive young man and people in the school and the group home wanted to help him and bring him along. I didn’t know how other students viewed Manny, but Alex, who had significant anxiety and who had difficulty with explosive outbursts, indicated at one point that some kids were making fun of him and he said, “That kid Manny told them to knock it off.” Manny seemed to have has a sense of justice and caring towards others.

In the fall of 2009, Manny was approaching his 17th birthday and a time when, if he was compliant with his placement order, he would be free from his placement in the group home. The teachers in school, the principal, and his guardian ad litem wanted

Manny to stay in the group home and in Emmerton High School rather than move home with his parents. It became clear, though, that Manny really wanted to go home. I thought at first it was to be with his parents, but later it became evident that he wanted out from under the rules and confinement he felt in the group home, and he wanted to connect with friends at his old school. People at Emmerton High School and group home felt bad, hurt, rejected. . . . I saw it as understandable. I thought he might want to help his parents but there was evidence that he wanted to be part of a gang in his hometown.

Manny's responses and behavior indicated a lack of emotion- he would not get angry or happy most of the time, but he was clearly under stress. He would crush a can to the point it was flat as we talked in our meetings, and there was one day he did not want to meet because he had a bad day. For the most part, though, he cooperated and said to his group home manager that he liked the meetings because people "don't nag me." He clearly did not like people telling him what to do.

Data Collection, Data Management, and Analysis

I began collecting field notes, audiotapes of meetings, and other documents in April 2008, and stopped collecting data in September 2009. I transferred the audiotapes onto my laptop every week, using a software program called Voice Studio. I kept scratch notes in my field notebook, translating those into field notes on my laptop at least once a week, stored in password protected files (by youth or by date) on my computer. I first attempted to transcribe the audiotapes using a voice recognition program, but that quickly proved futile, so, beginning in January 2009, I engaged the services of a professional transcriptionist to transcribe approximately half of the audiotaped meetings, and I

transcribed the remainder as I continued to collect data in the field. All first drafts of the transcriptions were completed in January 2010.

In January 2010, I began to arrange the data on my computer (transcripts, field notes, memos, digital pictures of flip charts, and emails), in chronological order, one document per youth. These full documents allowed me to begin line-by-line open coding in January 2010 as I listened to the audiotapes, so I could correct any errors and obtain better detail. I highlighted lines or passages (bits of discourse) that were significant, specifically in relation to the exchange of social goods. I completed the first reading of the texts in May 2010, and created seven to nine categories or themes, writing several memos throughout the process. I conducted a second reading of the documents between May and August 2010, recoding the lines within the major categories I had identified. I refined the categories of action, and conducted a third reading of the texts in August and September 2010, noting specific contexts or situational elements that were common across the texts (such as “being criticized,” or “lacking agency”). I was then ready to write the first draft of the analysis, choosing excerpts from the texts to illustrate meaning, from the perspectives of the youth, within each contextual element.

In order to undertake the process of working back and forth between the bits of language and the larger themes that emerged, I used a framework described by Eaves (2001). This process began with line-by-line open coding on a descriptive level, using Gee’s (2005) building task questions and using action words to formulate the codes. I then created a set of categories for patterns of the social actions that appeared to converge across all the texts. I returned to line-by-line axial or focused coding within these categories. I then created separate WORD files, one for each category, such as

“Avoiding,” “Reciprocating,” “Unfair Treatment,” “Lack of Belonging,” “Control,” among others. I selected certain excerpts from the texts that illustrated the categories and inserted them into the corresponding WORD file. I continued to refine the categories, taking into account major contextual factors and events, reducing them to four prominent categories of action within the social capital conceptual framework that represented the primary social processes at work. These four categories are positive reciprocity, negative reciprocity, agency, and control of social resources. I then developed a storyline that focused on the settings and contextual elements that were present within these categories, when the particular social actions occurred and influenced the social processes. Towards the end of my construction of the social processes, four major themes emerged, reflecting the four primary purposes of the social actions of the youth. These four major purposes are to achieve success, to avoid harm, to maintain valued relationships, and to obtain control. (A graphic depiction of this analytic model appears in Chapter VIII.)

Gee’s questions, nestled in the framework of building tasks and tools of inquiry, and the process of moving back and forth between the specific and the general, allowed me to construct the hidden meanings and significances of how at risk students defined and “worked” their social networks. I needed to work hard to keep my focus on the perspective of the youth, given the complexities of the interactions and contexts throughout the data. There are instances when I point to the perspectives of the teachers, parents, and other adults; however, I tried to keep my focus on the points of view of the youth and how they made sense of what was happening to them.

I also found the process described by Rogers (2000) in her dissertation instructive; specifically Rogers explains that she used three analytic constructs,

“literacy/events, d/Discourse and order of discourse” (p. 40), to identify important interactions, meaning making in context, and interactions signaling the use of power influenced by institutional factors. I used a similar approach working on multiple levels as I analyzed the texts. While I conducted line-by-line coding to describe what was happening and the social actions being undertaken by the actors, I also highlighted discourses that related to the exchange of social goods or that I found interesting or surprising. This first stage of the d/Discourse analysis allowed me to identify the set of categories within which the social actions seemed to converge. In addition to line by line coding, I looked for social capital events, searching for evidence of interactions that represented some or all the elements of social capital according to the definition I have chosen as a sensitizing concept, “The collection of resources owned by the members of an individual’s personal social network, which may become available to the individual as a result of the history of these relationships” (Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2004, p. 200). As I found text that reflected one or more of the elements of this definition, I cut and pasted it into a separate file for further examination, looking at the language, possible situated meanings, and possible motivations of the actors related to the major themes. Finally, within each theme I looked at the order of the discourse to identify how the responses of the individuals and the social processes developed, with a particular focus on who was in control, indications of youth agency, and how the actors attempted to take control of the situation.

Convergence and Validity

Qualitative research has been criticized by the positivist community for lacking rigor and validity, or lacking what is described as knowledge claims that are “true and

certain” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 267). In fact, many in the qualitative research community have eschewed the argument, instead indicating that meaning making and socio-cultural processes are construed by the actors in the setting and are, for those individuals (or natives) at that time, true and certain but not generalizable to be true and certain for all people at all times (Maxwell, 1992; Winter, 2000).

Qualitative researchers must also account for the subjectivity of the researcher’s role. In an ethnographic type of study, the researcher is in the setting, influencing the experiences and the context of the natives in the setting. The subjectivity of the researcher and analyst is acknowledged by qualitative researchers, and the remedy is found in how the researcher represents, as closely as possible, the experiences and meaning-making as presented by the natives. As noted by Winter (2000): “Contrary to the assumptions governing quantitative research, qualitative methodologies have come to recognize that research into the lives, personalities and experiences of people involves the inevitability of contradiction and the existence of parallel and opposing truths within accounts.”

I have been very aware, with good counsel from my advisors, that I bring biases and subjectivity into this research project, and I wrote several reflective memos expressing my doubts and concerns. (See Appendix E for an example of one of these memos.) I can only hope that self-knowledge, awareness, and reflection provide evidence that what I am presenting here is an honest and rigorous account of what the youth have presented.

Instead of trying to compete with quantitative research criteria for validity, many qualitative researchers have developed frameworks for validity in qualitative studies

(Gee, 2005; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). One of the common features of these frameworks is how the analysis of the data identifies convergence, or how the social actions point to patterns that support common purposes or themes. A second feature is that of verification, or the process described by Morse et al. (2002), that:

...a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis. Data are systematically checked, focus is maintained, and the fit of data and the conceptual work of analysis and interpretation are monitored and confirmed constantly. (p. 17)

In Gee's (2005) framework for validity, he includes the feature, "linguistic details," (p. 114), where the discourse is interpreted and analyzed in such a way that it shows a link between the bits of language of the native speakers and an interpretation of what may be their social purposes. The strength of the argument that makes this link is central to the credibility or rigor of the analysis.

Research Limitations

The ethnographic researcher makes a significant investment of time, as well as emotional and cognitive resources, by "being out in the field" for an extended period to learn from "the natives." This was certainly true of my research experience, as I spent over a year at Emmerton High School, interacting and working with Shelly, Julie, Manny, and Alex, their parents, and the adults at the school. As one would expect, I became and remain very attached to and concerned about all four youth, and I am interested in their progress far beyond the research. As is also common among ethnographic studies, the personal investment and involvement of the researcher is an accepted part of the practice but I managed with techniques such as using my collegial support network, consulting my dissertation advisors, reading about method, and writing

(Kleinman & Copp, 1993). In fact, I found it comforting to learn from my colleagues and the writings of noted fieldworkers that it was normal to feel conflicted, angry, and filled with self-doubt as one works in the field.

Consistent with what Rogers (2000) identified in her dissertation, my interactions with all four youth resulted in a type of “reflexivity—or the examination of the relationship between the researcher and participants” (p. 240). I was an active participant in the meetings with each youth, and I influenced their responses and the trajectories of each encounter with my responses and questions. Like Rogers, I was seeking to gain the perspectives of the youth, or the emic perspective. As such, I learned from each youth and each learned from me. Additionally, I was involved as a helper. I asked questions designed to help the youth discover and problem-solve, and I brought personal resources to the table when I could and when it seemed it would be helpful.

It is also important to note that the ethnographic methodology and analysis of the texts is highly influenced by the history and point of view of the researcher. I understand that a different researcher would have likely chosen different excerpts, categories, and themes than I have chosen. I also understand that I have left out many excerpts and examples of social actions. The choices that I have made were based upon my goal to illustrate the many diverse and complex areas of social life. I have used examples and non-examples, and I have often left out some of the more dramatic encounters. In the end, however, the sensitizing concept of social capital came to the fore and guided my search for evidence. I understand, then, that the analysis stands from a biased perspective.

I was aware that I had multiple roles and responsibilities while I was in the field, and that occasionally these roles conflicted. I was the director of the project that brought

the RENEW supportive intervention to the high school, I was the trainer and mentor for many of the Emmerton staff, occasionally I facilitated the youth's meetings, I occasionally advocated for the youth, I was from the University and had some stature, I was the supervisor for the other University staff on the project, and I was conducting research for my dissertation. I agonized over the different positions I held vis a vis the school staffs, the youth, my staff members, and my research. Again, I worked intentionally to be transparent about my feelings of conflict through memos, consultation with my dissertation advisors, and conversations about the intervention process and my research with my staff. There is no doubt, however, that my personal investment in the subjects of the research combined with my multiple hats has influenced how I have approached the analysis and interpretation of the data. The act of reading and coding the texts, categorizing, re-reading and re-coding, and writing and re-writing the analysis took me further and further away from my personal attachment to the youth's stories, and allowed me to concentrate on the social processes. It is my hope that such an analytic process stands up to the scrutiny of my colleagues.

It was very clear to me that the presence of the University project and our staff influenced the actions of people in the school in both positive and negative ways. Some of the teachers felt pressured and, at times, irritated by our presence and our advocacy. Our presence was a major reason why one teacher became caught in a power struggle with her supervisors. This teacher wanted to help one of the youth, but we did not do our homework and we failed to involve the teacher's superior in the process of working with the youth. The youth ended up suffering as a result. At the same time, we were trying to provide information and tools that would be of value to the teachers who worked with the

youth involved in the project. I offered instruction about community resources, tools to help develop stronger Individualized Education Plans, and guidance on counseling techniques. My many hats did not seem confusing to the school staff, but it was clear that my presence caused individuals to do things for each youth that they may not otherwise have done.

The opportunity for interchanges and dialogues between the youth and others was created by the implementation of the RENEW intervention. In that sense the exchanges between the youth and others and the meaning made of their experiences were unique and would not have happened without the intervention. As a result, the outcomes of the analysis are not transferrable to typical high school settings where there is no RENEW intervention. I believe, however, that the interchanges allowed for dialogues and interactions to take place that illuminated the youth's perspectives on relationships, community, self-views and prospects. These insights took place in the "natural setting," lending greater complexity to the responses of the youth. I am also sensitive to the fact that I developed the RENEW intervention and have worked with it for over 16 years. It would be reasonable for an observer to think I have a bias towards the type of approach that fosters youth voice and choice and supports youth with emotional and behavioral disorders to become more socially included. Knowing this, I was careful to avoid an analysis that might be perceived as advocating for the RENEW model. Instead, I have been deliberate about analyzing and interpreting the data on a contextual level that transcends the specific experiences of the youth with the RENEW model. As such, the contexts that existed as the youth interacted with others could exist in other high schools. Finally, it is widely acknowledged that "the qualitative paradigm aims to understand the

social world from the viewpoint of respondents, through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions, and through the richness of meaning associated with observable behavior” (Meyers, 2000). In other words, the results of a qualitative research study are not designed to be generalized to other settings, contexts, or people. I have tried to increase the utility of my analysis by grounding the analysis of each social process in the literature. For example, I used some of the theory and research on the dynamics of power and control to “ground” my observations and interpretations of how the youth and adults interacted in relation to imbalances and exercises of power. As such, I hope that this work contributes to the literature on at-risk youth, social capital, and educational engagement, and that these findings and conceptualizations will continue to evolve.

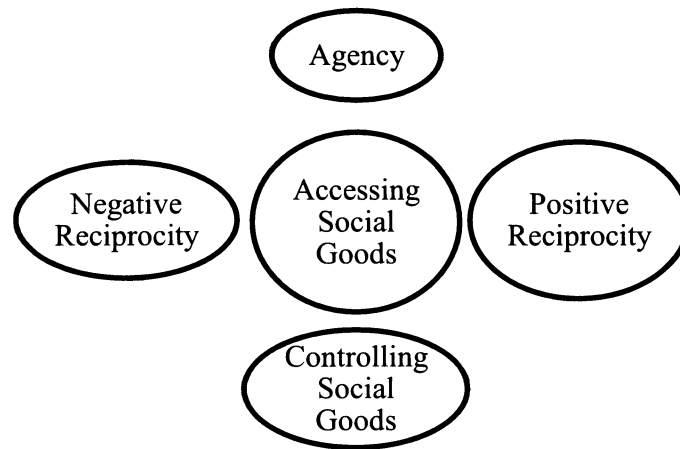
Prominent Social Processes

As I present these data I have attempted to show how discourses among the four participants and across contexts represent patterns of social processes and purposes. I also attempt to identify areas of contradiction. Consistent with Agar’s (2006b) characterization of ethnography as a cultural translation, I have used discourse analysis to understand and interpret what the youth were doing and why, what their social actions may have represented, and how the youth interpreted and responded to what was happening. This analytic process resulted in several major categories of action, or social processes, all of which overlap, interact, and interrelate with one another (Figure 1). I chose these four particular categories- positive reciprocity, negative reciprocity, agency, and control- for several reasons. First, the actions of the youth converged within these categories. Second, these social processes appeared as instrumental factors in the development or utilization of socially based resources. Finally, these social processes

were significant as all four youth described and attempted to understand what was happening. I present these categories as continua, with clear-cut examples on one end of the continuum and clear-cut non-examples at the other end.

Figure 1

Categories: Social Processes



The categories fit within a social capital framework, demonstrating whether, how, and when the youth were part of a social network and how social goods were or were not accessed. While I could have chosen a different analytic framework centered on events or contexts, I instead found these social processes to be prominent across the four youth and illustrative of social processes across contexts. The processes of positive and negative reciprocity were prominent in the interpretations and responses across the experiences of all four youth within the helping process. I chose agency because I was surprised at when and how the youth expressed pride in their work and identified the values and hopes consistent with the Discourse of individual achievement. This discovery indicates that teachers' perceptions of the capabilities of youth with emotional or behavioral issues may be inaccurate. I was surprised at how often and when the youth

expressed their preferences, engaged in joint problem solving, made decisions, engaged in deep reflection, took stances, and bristled at the attempts of others to exert influence. These expressions of agency and attempts to assert control were rich points (Agar, 2006b) that surfaced as important to our understanding of how youth who are disengaged from schooling, peers, and adults, may continue to strive to develop and protect their sense of self, especially in situations that were being controlled by institutional processes, structures, and other people in their lives. Finally, interactions when the youth were reacting to attempts by others to exert control, the nature of those interactions, and the contexts within which individuals around the youth exerted control over social goods were prominent in the experiences of all four youth. Routine acts of punishment or negative reciprocity were often interpreted by the youth as threats to their potentials for goal attainment and potential success.

Conclusion to Chapter III

This research project applies an ethnographic method informed by discourse analysis, including an extended period of time in the field observing four youth and their helpers in the natural setting. The primary data sources were transcripts from taped meetings, field notes, flip chart pictures from the meetings with the youth, email correspondence, and additional artifacts. These data were analyzed using an interactive process of open coding, categorizing, axial coding, re-categorizing, and writing that culminated in the identification of four major categories of action. These categories are social processes that were at play throughout the texts and across youth, influencing how each youth made sense of what was happening. The data analysis was conducted to portray the meaning-making from the perspective of the youth, or the emic perspective.

The search for meaning and the cultural translation is subjective and unique to my own experiences, influenced by my theoretical orientation and my world view. Each of the four analytic chapters that follow is devoted to one of the four social processes, organized by contextual elements that influenced the social interactions and perspectives of each youth.

CHAPTER IV

POSITIVE RECIPROCITY, ENGAGEMENT, AND TRUST

“...we try to help or assist other people we would have helped ourselves...”

Mrs. Pennington, December 8, 2009

The concept of reciprocity, as a social process and as a social norm, provides one way to explain behavior in relationships and communities and is a critical component of social capital and social exchange theories (Emerson, 1976; Fehr & Gächter, 2000; Gergen, Greenberg, & Willis, 1980; Homans, 1958; Keysar, Converse, Wang, & Epley, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The social processes that defined the interactions between each youth in this study and the others who entered the youth's resource network were laden with discourses that signaled the broad theme of reciprocity, including actions that reflected the mutual giving, receiving, or rejection of social resources.

The data collected from the meetings with the youth in this study demonstrate that there was a prevalence of both positive and negative forms of reciprocity and reciprocal acts, and that the individuals involved had different understandings of when positive or negative reciprocity was present, influenced by roles, situations, relative power, values, congruity of goals, individual mood, context, and personal characteristics. The analysis in this chapter focuses on the contexts in which the youth indicated, through their responses, that positive reciprocity was evident and how they constructed meaning from positive reciprocal acts. The contexts identified here include interactions when the youth felt they

were being heard, interactions that were focused on personally relevant issues or problems, efforts that were perceived by the youth as having the potential for positive outcomes, interactions that signaled the presence of trust and support, interactions that were focused on problem solving, and interactions that included shared work and shared decision making.

This chapter begins with a description of the concept of reciprocity at the level of individual social action and as a social norm or expectation. A model for how certain behaviors signaled engagement or avoiding social actions is then proposed. The discussion then proceeds to an analysis of six contextual features of the social spaces, actions, and meanings the youth ascribed to positive social interactions and exchanges. The discussion ends with an analysis of the meaning that the youth and adults ascribed to the norm of reciprocity and their expectations of themselves and others in the context of exchanging social goods and the helping relationship.

Reciprocity

The notion that individuals in a relationship or community will help one another – including the expectation that a favor will be returned with a favor—is a long-standing civic, moral, and individual virtue. As the philosopher Michael Taylor (1982) has written:

The third and final characteristic of community is that of reciprocity. I shall use this term to cover a range of arrangements and relations and exchanges, including mutual aid, some forms of cooperation and some forms of sharing. Each individual act in a system of reciprocity is usually characterized by a combination of what one might call short-term altruism and long-term self-interest: I help you out in the (possibly vague, uncertain, and uncalculating) expectation that you will help me out in the future. (p. 28-29)

Social exchange theory introduced the notion that social interactions carry potential value and risks, and that social behavior is influenced by an individual's

calculation of cost and benefit through reciprocal action (Homans, 1958). The idea that social relationships are constructed as valuable or costly has been further developed within social capital theories, including norms that govern the development of trust and reciprocity as critical elements of the construct. Reciprocity is not simply defined by positive or negative behaviors in response to another's actions, however. Reciprocity is defined as an important social process imbued with the expectation that positively perceived assistance will receive a positive response, and that negative actions will be met with retribution (Becker, 2005; Keysar, Converse, Wang, & Epley, 2008). As Andre' (2010) indicates:

Every individual receives specific benefits and pays specific costs in each social interaction (see Boyd 1992; Leimar 1997*a*, 1997*b*). The reciprocal exchange of help may convey a net benefit for certain individuals in certain social interactions and a net cost for other individuals or for the same individuals in other social interactions.
(p. 206)

Reciprocity has also been characterized as a generalized norm, where a kind act may not be returned immediately or with the same symmetry or the same "value" as the original act (Putnam, 2000). There is a need to understand the social processes that influence how reciprocity is constructed and perceived by the actors in the setting, described by Keysar, Converse, Wang, and Epley (2008):

...resources traded in a social exchange are imbued with value by the social meaning of the action itself (Brown, 1986). How people reciprocate one another's actions will therefore depend critically on how those actions are interpreted, rather than simply on their objective features. Much is known about the power of the norm of reciprocity to elicit behavior in social exchanges (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). But much less is known about how subjective interpretations can influence how much people choose to reciprocate for another person's action. (p. 1280)

The social exchanges observed during the RENEW planning and support process reflected how the youth constructed meaning from and engaged in acts of positive

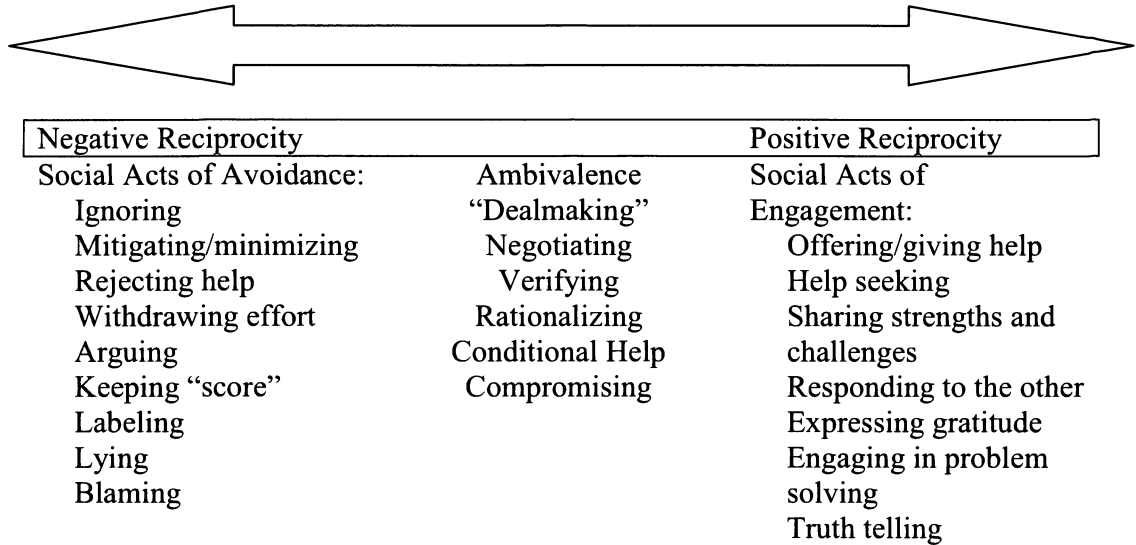
reciprocity. These social constructions were evident when the youth responded to a problem or situation by sharing important information that could be valuable to the task at hand, when the youth sought or accepted help, when the youth thanked or responded positively to the other, when the youth actively participated in problem solving activities, and when the youth told the truth.

A Model for Reciprocity

The model in Figure 2 represents the social actions found in the data across youth and contexts, beginning with the open coding of texts that identified multiple and repeated acts of engagement and positive responses by the youth, then proceeding to the identification of contexts where these actions tended to converge. On the right side below the arrow are the social actions that reflected positive reciprocity, identified as acts of engagement, such as giving and receiving help, sharing strengths and challenges, problem solving, or responding positively to others. Additionally, there was a convergence of the data around negative acts in response to perceived slights, identified primarily as actions to avoid situations that the youth perceived as costly or a “waste of time.” These negative social actions are the focus of Chapter V, seen across youth and contexts and identified by lack of response, rejection of the other’s ideas, arguing, blaming, withdrawing effort, and labeling, among others. In the center of the arrow are behaviors that were reflected in contexts that were interpreted as part of the norm or expectation of reciprocity. These actions were present in situations when individuals were being required or coerced towards certain expectations. The social actions included negotiating or rationalizing in response to acts designed to force or constrain the youth’s choices. The notion of agency or choice is the focus of Chapter VI.

Figure 2

Model for Acts of Reciprocity



Norms and acts of reciprocity are expected in educational settings. Active student participation, student-teacher reciprocity, and mutual respect are expected to be promoted in classrooms and in the school community if education is to be a truly democratic and successful enterprise (Elmore, 2005; Hutchinson, 1999). Emmerton High School developed four stated behavioral expectations: “Be Safe,” “Be Respectful,” “Be Responsible,” and “Be Cooperative.” These expectations were developed as part of the school’s Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports initiative, and were reinforced in the school’s handbook, in posters throughout the building, and in the school’s discipline policies. This section of the analysis will show that reciprocity was a prevalent expectation of the adults in Emmerton High School, and understood in varying degrees by the youth as they worked to be more successful in school. The idea that individuals in a relationship will help one another and exchange favors became an important social dynamic in this study as each youth participated in meetings with their teachers/mentors,

counselors, the school administrators, parents, University staff, and at times key individuals from outside of the school. The study data indicate that there was a proliferation of acts of reciprocation as well as acts of non-reciprocation or avoiding, occurring within the context of the RENEW intervention.

Engagement as Positive Reciprocity

The notion of engaged participation is an important feature in theories of knowledge development, communities of practice, and motivational theory (Hickey, 2003; Hickey and Zuiker, 2005; Wenger 1998). During the meetings with each of the youth in this study, the individuals present were tasked with working together with the common goal of helping the youth to be more successful. These interactions required engaged participation from the youth and others if the group was to succeed. What the data show is that there was clear convergence of situations when the youth reciprocated in a positive manner, evidenced by engaged participation. As Hickey (2003) indicates, we can look at “engagement in terms of the individual's sense-making activity. This can entail direct observation of whether individuals choose to engage in problematic tasks, the tasks in which individuals choose to engage, or the individual's effort and persistence once he or she is engaged” (p. 407). Hickey explains that engaged participation happens when the individual wishes to maintain the relationship in the community, and where “the individual has a significant personal investment” (p. 411). This notion that individuals engage in social meaning-making and put effort into tasks that are of value to them is consistent with the idea that reciprocity is a key feature of social capital.

Contextual Analysis

The youth were more engaged at certain times than others because they were interested in having success, felt they were being cared for, and they perceived that their efforts would have potential value. The six contextual features that were present when engaged behaviors were most prominent include:

- **Being Heard, Feeling Understood**—The youth responded positively when they felt that their personal and school-related challenges were understood and accepted by the adults. Already highly disengaged from school, the school culture, and the learning process, each of the youth needed to feel accepted if he or she were to participate in strategies designed to help them succeed in school.
- **Trust and Support**—The youth and their family members openly talked about personal successes, failures, strengths, and challenges when they felt the environment and context was safe and when they felt they would not be criticized or judged. The information they shared offered insight into how they viewed their chances of success and the obstacles they faced in school and in other social settings. The presence of a relationship where the individuals followed through and did what they said they were going to do created an atmosphere where the youth were more willing to reciprocate and continue to invest in the relationship. The opposite was also true (as will be shown in Chapter V).
- **Personal Relevance**—There was greater engagement and reciprocity when the exchange of social resources or interactions had personal importance and value to the youth. Shelly needed to feel accepted and loved, and she needed help to pass her math class. Julie needed to avoid the social situation in the high school while

still complying with her parents' expectation that she graduate. Manny wanted to have some personal success in school, and Alex needed to get out of trouble.

- Potential for Positive Outcomes—The economic metaphors for the value of time, help, and other types of giving depend, in part, on the belief of the actors involved that a positive outcome will result. Each of the youth indicated at various times why certain strategies would or would not work based upon previous attempts, the relative power of the individuals in the situation, or their own willingness to participate.
- Problem-solving—The youth in this study were often faced with challenges that seemed insurmountable, especially when the goal was successful completion of their requirements for graduation. When the youth received support and guidance to create a step-by-step pathway with objectives that seemed attainable, the youth often began to actively engage in the problem solving process and they often accepted help and took positive steps to achieve their goals.
- Shared work and decision making—The youth were more willing to engage and reciprocate when they were given choice and decision-making power. Shelly, Manny, Julie, and, at times, Alex, responded quite positively to the opportunity to have more control over their schooling and the help they needed to achieve their goals.

Being Heard, Feeling Understood

The introduction of the research project to each youth included an explanation of the purpose, stages, and philosophy behind the RENEW intervention. The introduction also included a description of how the process is designed to be youth-driven, beginning

with an information gathering stage that we call “future’s planning” that allows the youth and the adult helpers to develop a dialogue about the youth’s story, resources, preferences, aspirations, and needs. The purpose and philosophy of the intervention was also outlined in the research Consent Form (Appendix C). With this backdrop, it is reasonable to conclude that the youth entered the intervention with a perception that the process might be beneficial to them. Additionally, Mrs. Fairchild, a trusted counselor, introduced the research project to each youth. What the data show is that as all four youth were engaged in the planning and information sharing process, they provided highly personal and sensitive information and insights even when the youth were meeting the University staff or their teacher/mentors for the first time. The intervention planning process began with questions about the youth’s history, current situation, what works/what doesn’t work, accomplishments, dreams, barriers, and goals, typically in that order. The youth’s parent was not at these first meetings, and the facilitator was trained to explain the purpose of each part of the process, including that the youth is at the center of the intervention. In general, each youth responded to these questions openly, despite the fact that they had met me and their facilitators only two or three times before we started working together.

The evidence shows that the introduction of the process as student-driven, along with adult facilitation that was focused and reflected on what the youth were saying allowed each youth to respond freely and openly about themselves and their situations. The first meeting with Shelly demonstrates how initial hesitation can develop into greater openness from the youth:

Mrs. Pennington: how are you doing? Is everything OK? {Shelly nods}
This process is about you. You're the boss, you're in charge. We're here to support you... I was thinking about you last week and I made a couple of bookmarks for you. The words are in Chinese- what we do to translate names in Chinese is try to translate the sounds, since your name is Shelly, I have written "Shelly" here in Chinese on this one {she hands it to Shelly who puts it into her composition book}. You can keep these if you want or you don't have to if you don't want to. This next one means "love" in Chinese so I will give you this one. And this last one means strength, or strong {Mrs. P gives Shelly the handmade bookmarks}

Malloy: Oh, that is so kind of you!
(Field Notes, May 27, 2008)

Shelly appeared overwhelmed by the gift of the bookmarks, as she barely acknowledged them and quickly put them into her agenda book. As we began to talk about what she needed and wants, however, Shelly became more responsive. I modeled the process for Mrs. Pennington, who was reticent to take the lead and use the facilitation tools. The following exchange took place later in the same meeting

Malloy: OK, Shelly, let's start with your story, your history. What are the most important events that have taken place for you? You can start anywhere you want

Shelly: {without hesitation} my boyfriend {little smile}

Malloy: what has that meant to you?

Shelly: having someone I can trust and who I can talk to. He's the only person who accepts me for who I am and doesn't judge me

Malloy: so that's important to you

Shelly: yes, he cares and he listens

Malloy: what else?

Shelly: when I was told I had a degenerative brain disease {*She was quite serious and direct about this event. For the first time she looked me right in the eye*}

Malloy: how old were you?

Shelly: 7th grade

Malloy: what did you think?

Shelly: it's scary because I don't know what's wrong with me

Malloy: what's it called?

{She states her diagnosis}

Malloy: what will happen?

Shelly: I have to go to the doctor at Dartmouth all the time to see if it changes

Malloy: they do MRIs?

Shelly: yeah

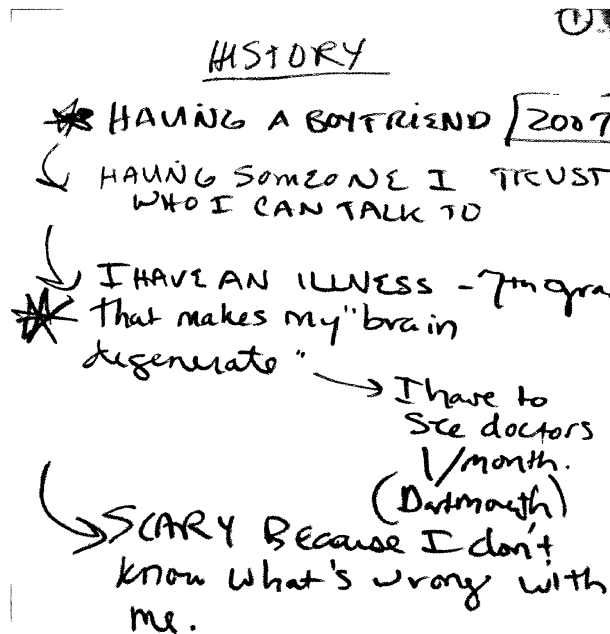
(Field Notes, May 27, 2008)

Shelly's responses to these questions were captured on the flip charts, shown

below:

Figure 3

Shelly's History MAP



Shelly responded to a question about her history by telling us that her story revolved around two very personal issues, her boyfriend and her illness, and Shelly expressed a concern: "I don't know what's wrong with me." Our response was subdued but we continue to show interest in her story, and she responded by continuing to share. She wanted us to know that these were problems that she needed help with and that these factors dominated her life. During this meeting, she continued to share information about her concerns, her preferences, and her strengths:

Malloy : Ok, let's talk about today, then. How would you describe your life today?

Shelly: Chaotic {quite clear and definite on this}

Malloy: in what way?

Shelly: Well, my dog attacked a neighbor's dog so he was put down

Mrs. Pennington: oh, that's sad to lose your dog

Malloy: plus you're moving and don't know why
Shelly: yeah
Malloy: What else
Shelly: passing bio {Biology}
Mrs. Pennington: that's great. That's an accomplishment
Malloy: what else?
Shelly: It's chaotic at home. Its loud, noisy, and I don't get along with my sister and her friend {for first time she is very animated and emotional} I am making potatoes, and they say, what is that, and I say 'potatoes' {disgusted look}
Malloy: how old is she?
Shelly: She's 14, sometimes she helps me. Keep my boyfriend"
Malloy: OK, let's talk about what you're good at
Shelly: I am good at voicing my opinion
Mrs. Pennington.: Oh, that's good
Malloy: like, making a case ?
Shelly: Yes, in class, I can debate
Malloy: like, making an argument, not in a bad way
Shelly: yeah
Malloy: what else
Shelly: Writing
Malloy: we were talking about books too
Shelly: yeah, reading too. And drawing
{we talk about her classes a bit}
Malloy: Ok, let's talk about accomplishments you are proud of, and challenges that you have. Tell us some of you accomplishments
Shelly: being able to stand up for myself
(Field Notes, May 27, 2008)

This conversation was focused on Shelly, and she continued to share very simple but personal insights, in part because she felt she was being heard and not judged. We responded with empathy, centered on her narrative, and we did not minimize or attempt to interpret her feelings, allowing Shelly to participate and engage.

Mrs. Fairchild asked us not to talk with Julie about her history at our first meeting, fearing that it would be too difficult for her to recall events that were so painful for her. During this meeting Julie was reticent to share at first, but eventually opened up and brought up experiences in her past, especially in response to the empathy shown by

Mrs. Fairchild and her teacher/mentor, Ms. McGurk. This is an example of how Julie opened up during our first meeting with her:

Mrs. Fairchild: You know last week, how I showed you what we did, a little bit, and I showed you an example of what it was like? It's going to be that. You just tell us, it's more for you to see maybe your goals

Julie: So, I just, like, turn on the same thing I told you and then they write it down?

Ms. McGurk: Yeah. And then, what we can do is, we'll pull this back, with us, maybe the next time, like, OK, we've got all of these strengths down. What challenges can we work on, in the next couple of weeks? So, we kind of, instead of looking at the whole thing, all at once, we kind of narrow it down.

Julie: All right. If you want to know... So, how do I start it?

Ms. McGurk: So, OK, what do you see as some of your strengths? Just... the things that you see as people you rely on, that you're good at...

Julie: Hum. I don't know.

Mrs. Fairchild: What would some, like your friends, say about you, as strengths?

Julie: Dealing with stress. Like it not being a bad thing, always push it aside, and don't worry about it. I really don't know. I don't know. That one's (doing this today FLIP CHART) harder than the other thing.

Ms. McGurk: Do you want to start on some of these, and then go back? Let's take one of these, and then we can go back.

Julie: All right. I don't know. This is so challenging. Like, it's never been like this before. Like, last time, it was wicked easy, and now it's, I don't know.

Dealing with death? My ex-boyfriend just died, and he was 18. And another one all set to go to the army.

Mrs. Fairchild: How did that happen?

Julie: Car accident. He was in a car accident, and then his friend, Josh, [they were both named?] Josh, and then his friend, Josh, was on life support, and they took him off, and the organs shut down. They put him back on it, and now he's fine, but he doesn't remember my ex-boyfriend being in the car. And my ex-boyfriend was paralyzed from the waist down. Went to have surgery to amputate his leg. And then, he went to physical therapy. And when they propped him up, because he was laying down the whole time. They propped him up, and there was some kind of blood clot in his brain, and it killed him.

Mrs. Fairchild: Wow. That was this weekend?

Julie: No, that was like a month ago. But that day, that he got into the car accident, I blew him off, because he didn't know I had a boyfriend, and he wanted to hang out that day. And if he was in my car, then nothing would have happened. So, that's kind of hard. Everything that happens in my life, I just push aside, and try not to think about it.

Mrs. Fairchild: And you're saying, sometimes that's a good thing, but sometimes that's a bad thing?

Julie: Yeah cause like everything piles on top, and then it gets to the point where I'll just break down, and think about everything, and actually made that [huge?]

worse, and everything is going through my head, I'm like, ohhh my God. You know? I'm sorry....

Mrs. Fairchild: But sharing is really important, in learning about you, and everything you're dealing with, and just take it a step at a time. Break it up into little things. So, that's a strength
(Transcripts, September 10, 2008)

Figure 4

Julie's Strengths MAP

Strengths	Challenges
Dealing w/ stress	Dealing w/ death
Nurturing (Caring)	Doing HW
Classwork	Dealing w/ Doctors (Medic)
Jacob's	H story
John-boyfriend (spending time)	
Reality Check	
Writing	
Art	
Make	

Although this is the first time she has met many of us, Julie quickly revealed that she hid from events that were painful for her, and she provided several examples of this trait. As we learned by working with her, her tendency to push painful incidents aside was indeed a basic characteristic of how Julie dealt with her problems. Julie felt she was being heard, indicated by how she opened up and shared at length about problems at home and in her family. Julie was engaged as we continued to encourage her to talk. She wanted us to know what was most important to her, how she was often dealing with stress, and why she was not doing well in school, in the expectation that perhaps she would receive some help. The responses of the adults indicated empathy and concern,

and so Julie continued to share, sensing that she would not be judged or criticized for her story and her feelings.

Manny, who we were told was quite reluctant to meet with us, opened up quickly during the first meeting, describing a horrific story of death, abuse, incarceration, and loss. It was as if he needed to tell his story and wanted us to know what had happened to him:

Ms. West: Here we are, at high school. How far back do you want to start your history...do you want to start with your earliest learned memory, or an early foster care placement or the first time you were taken from your home or living at home before your were taken from your home-

Manny: Living at home

Ms. West: Ok and old can you go back , how old would you be

Manny: UM (laughs) um 13

Ms. West: OK, you were 13 and still living at home

Manny: Yeah.

Ms. West: And so you were living at home from birth to 13

Manny: Yeah

Ms. West: Ok (doesn't seem to believe him). And why were you taken from the home?

Manny: I violated probation

Ms. West: And what was the probation for?

Manny: UH, for shooting a kid with a BB gun

Ms. West: Was the kid hurt?

Manny: No, No {mumbles}

Ms. West: What?

Manny: He was peeked out

Ms. West: Why were you on probation to begin with?

Manny: (Um I was getting into trouble and getting arrested) like

Ms. West: So was it like that one last thing that sent you over the edge that set you up on probation- how did you end up on probation to begin with.

Manny: Yeah, I just was getting into trouble for

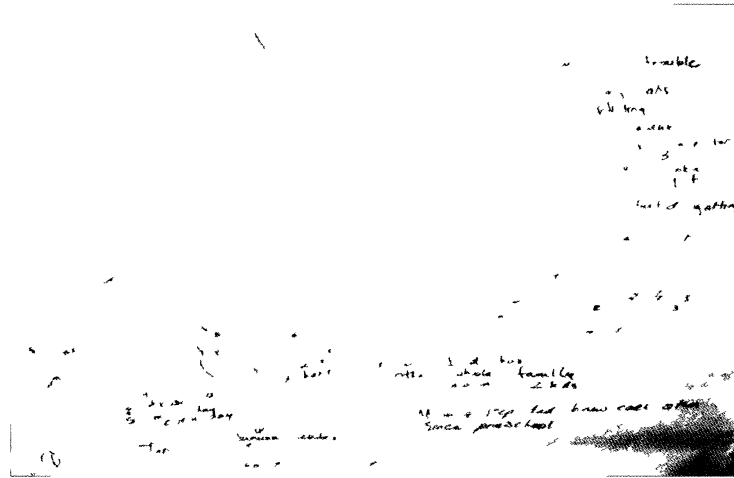
Ms. West: What other kinds of trouble, Manny?

Manny: Robbery

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Figure 5

Manny's History MAP



Manny, who had met me only once before this meeting, described very personal and difficult events including how he was placed in the state juvenile detention facility for almost a year, how he went back with his mother and stepfather and quickly violated probation requiring him to be placed in a group home in the middle of the night with no explanation, and how he had tried to improve his behavior during the previous year. He told this story to us, in part, to help us understand who he was and why he behaved the way he did.

The process of developing the planning conversations were inconsistent with Alex, whose day-to-day engagement in school was often disrupted by his many suspensions and other problems outside of school. During the 2008-09 school year, Alex was suspended at least four times (not including in school suspension), he was arrested and incarcerated twice for criminal threatening and breaking into the high school snack stand on the football field, and he dropped out of school with his mother's support in October 2008, missing six weeks of school as a result. We often needed to adjust much of

our project support to address his school re-entry plans and re-entry meetings, fitting the RENEW future's planning meetings in between these disruptions.

Early in the 2008-09 school year, Alex stated to Mrs. Fairchild that he wanted help after apparently having heard from Shelly, his girlfriend, that the process was worthwhile. During the first formal meeting with Alex, Jonathon, his facilitator, explained the helping process and how we would like to hear about what works and what does not work for him in school and at home. During the second meeting, Alex responded to our questions by talking freely about multiple issues he was currently facing, including how he was not living at home because he had a verbal altercation with a neighbor who criticized his mother, how another student wanted to beat him up, how he hated his older brother, how he was part of a gang, how he had a daughter with an ex-girlfriend, and how he hated school. Like a dam that had suddenly broken, Alex poured out information on multiple fronts and issues. Following is an excerpt from one of our first conversations:

Jon: What do you like least about school?

Alex: Teachers. B-tching teachers.

Jon: Can you give me an example of why you don't like teachers?

Alex: Because they're turning the school into hell, like, your last year. Miss Stavros is turning this school into, like, jail. And it should be like the same place as last year.

Jon: So, could you give an example of why it's like jail?

Alex: The dumb agenda books. Last year, we didn't have that. We didn't have to, like, piece of paper to grab. It's just stupid.

Jon: OK. What about things that affect you directly, that you don't like?

Alex: What do you mean?

Jon: What I mean is, like, in class, when, for an example, some students don't like it when teachers yell at them.

Alex: I don't want teachers yelling at me, either.

Jon: [LAUGHTER] I guess not. But, other things like that?

Alex: No. Teachers don't... I just don't like them.

Jon: What about the work?

Alex: Well, work, I don't do the work, so I don't know.

(Transcripts, September 23, 2008)

Jonathon's non-judgmental responses allowed Alex to talk freely. Alex was testing out the relationship, as he switched from topic to topic, trying to project a tough persona, blaming teachers, dismissing the importance of doing his work, and offering very personal information that would be inappropriate to share in other social situations. It seemed to Jonathon and me that some of Alex's claims were not true or that they were elaborations, designed to make an impression on us and to portray a picture of his life that was somewhat more glamorous than it really was. We did not respond by criticizing or questioning him, however, since that is not important to the process. Alex was feeling heard, which allowed him to talk and respond freely, as he tested our responses.

These initial conversations with the youth set a tone for the relationship. It appears that the techniques used by the facilitator or mentor, including open-ended questions, non-judgmental responses, questions that indicated a genuine interest in what the youth had to say, and documenting what each young person talked about on the flip chart paper validated their voices and stories and they seemed to respond with honesty and openness. For example, Jonathon did not try to correct or question anything that Alex said, which is the response that Alex would typically have expected to receive as he criticized the teachers, talked about having a baby, or talked about breaking the rules. The opportunity to share one's story in a non-judgmental atmosphere also revealed the significant insight that each youth had about their own abilities, characteristics, preferences, and limitations, insights that were often not evident to teachers and others who came in contact with the youth.

Trust and Support

The youth talked about personal successes, failures, strengths, and challenges when they felt the environment and context was safe, when they felt heard, and when they felt they would not be criticized or judged. Clearly relationships that included trust were valued by the youth and contributed to their engaged participation in the planning process. The presence of a relationship where the individuals listened to them, supported them, and followed through created an atmosphere where the youth were more willing to reciprocate and continue to invest in the relationship. The opposite was also true (as will be shown in Chapter V).

As we continued to work with each youth in the initial planning conversations, they shared more and more information that gave us insight into how they maneuvered and managed the demands of the school setting and at home. As stated in Chapter II, trust relates to reliance on and mutually acknowledges relationship with others: “Trust is the willingness to permit the decisions of others to influence your welfare” (Sobel, 2002, p. 148). Trust is socially constructed and marked by positive reciprocal relationships. The social actions that indicated that trust was present and that signaled the social action of trust building included help seeking, truth telling, and responding positively to the needs of the other. Trust is also an element of interactions of mutual problem solving and shared decision-making, discussed later in this chapter. As we see in these data, the youth understood the value of trust and of being trusted, and they showed that trust is person and situation specific.

Shelly described what trust meant to her in our very first meeting, equating trust with caring and listening: “Having someone I can trust and who I can talk to... He’s (her

boyfriend) the only person who accepts me for who I am and doesn't judge me" (Field Notes, May 27, 2008). Shelly had a very serious, degenerative disease, and her mother described how Shelly had been deteriorating socially and physically since she was in sixth grade. In addition, Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild, and Shelly's mother disapproved of Shelly's relationship with Alex. Shelly had been skipping classes and getting into confrontations with her mother over the boyfriend issue. Mrs. Pennington and I witnessed firsthand an incident when Alex asserted his control, as he burst into one of our meetings with Shelly and yelled at her to go home because her mother did not know where she was. Mrs. Catano was most concerned about Shelly's physical and mental decline, and the typical approach for a student like Shelly would have been to plan around her illness and forget about her future. But this was not the process that Shelly wanted to follow. During our second meeting with Shelly, when she stated that her dream was to become a doctor or a nurse, we responded by offering a series of action steps around her goal to graduate on time and we developed ideas for her next steps after high school:

Malloy: you, know, we may want to step back a bit and look at the dreams and big goals...

Mrs. Fairchild: "Ok, just one more thing about babysitting, I can put your flyer out to a few of the teachers if you can get it to me this week... and there is the program here- Best Tots that we can look in to, OK?"

{Mrs. Pennington has the flip chart and markers but keeps it on the table top- it's a start. She writes dreams on the top, and asks Shelly about her goals or dream, WITHOUT HESITATION Shelly says... **"I want to be a doctor or a nurse."** We all get excited.....}

Mrs. Pennington: "oh, my goodness, that's great. Why do you think you want that?"

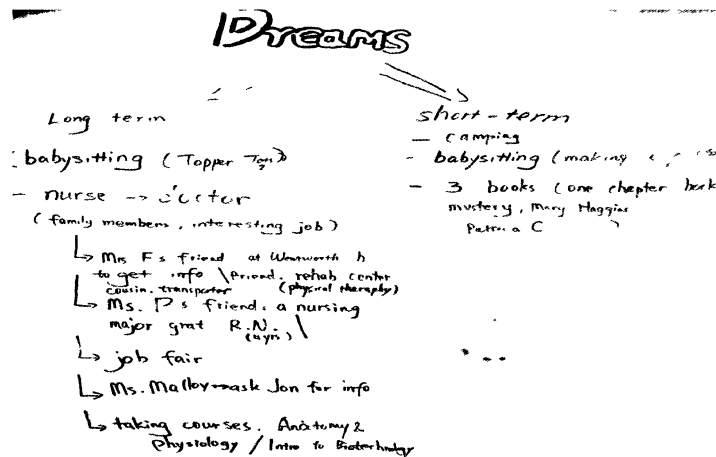
Shelly: "My aunt is a nurse, and I think it would be interesting"

Mrs. Fairchild: "OK, I have a friend who works at the Hospital and I can ask her to come in and talk with you about working at the hospital" {Shelly nods} "I also have a friend who works at that rehab center, what is the name? she does physical therapy so we can look at that"

Mrs. Pennington: "I also have a friend who just got her nursing degree, I can ask her"
 (Field Notes, June 17, 2008)

Figure 6

Shelly' Dream MAP



Although most people might think that the potential for Shelly to become a nurse or a doctor was unrealistic (and this did, in fact, become a source of disagreement among the adults), Shelly participated and was engaged in the process of working towards this goal throughout the year, despite her ups and downs with her health and her boyfriend issues. Shelly responded positively to the support she received around these goals. Shelly gave us information about the support she needed to pass her math class, and she worked hard to check in with Mrs. Fairchild on a weekly basis. Shelly also participated in Mrs. Fairchild's social skills group.

At one point Shelly was disengaging from her weekly check-ins, she was failing math, and she was spending more and more time with Alex and not spending as much time working on her academics. Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild pulled Shelly into a meeting and confronted her, making their displeasure known. In response, Shelly went to

Mrs. Fairchild privately and asked for more planning assistance and, in response, Mrs. Fairchild worked with Shelly to set up a system to support her in her math class. Mrs. Fairchild also counseled Shelly individually about her boyfriend and her social struggles in school. The desire to keep a positive reciprocal relationship with Mrs. Fairchild motivated Shelly to put effort into being successful in school and to try different strategies. Shelly gave Mrs. Fairchild a poem reflecting her value of their relationship:

“Mrs. Fairchild”
By Shelly
Lot’s to be said about leaving your behind in the dust.
You were one of the adults that I grew to trust.
We’d talk for a while.
You could get me to smile, when I didn’t want to.
When I leave this school I hope my dream of becoming the best continues to grow.
I hope the only tears that will fall will be the ones of joy and delight.
Not ones of regret sorrow and freight.
I hope I can continue to be a person who you can always believe in.
(Poem, February 2009)

The unconditional support that Mrs. Fairchild gave to Shelly, including her counsel about classes, her tumultuous relationship with Alex, and her concerns about her health served to build a relationship that Shelly valued and sought to maintain, indicated by Shelly’s intentional acts of positive reciprocity. Shelly’s mother described Shelly’s introversion and special connection to someone she can trust: “I think it’s definitely important for her to know that she has a person or people that she is comfortable with...she is (PAUSE) definitely in a more comfortable place where she feels safe and, ummm she knows if she has a problem she knows where she can bring it you know” (Transcripts, July 19, 2009).

There was a point, however, when the approach to help Shelly by following her stated goals for the future was criticized by Shelly’s mother and a public health nurse

who began working with her family. Shelly's mother wrote to Mrs. Fairchild, questioning the plan to help Shelly apply to the local community college, and the public health nurse, after reading Shelly's file, called Mrs. Catano and questioned the plan to help Shelly get an internship. Shelly's mother eventually agreed that it was the right approach and supported the work. The decision to trust Shelly and follow Shelly's lead allowed her to be successful in school and have accomplishments that she would not otherwise have had, and Shelly clearly valued the experience. The decision to trust her lead, however, was not without controversy. The toll that this approach took on Mrs. Fairchild and me was palpable, noted in my field notes:

I go past Mrs. Fairchild's room and Shelly is in there- she brings her out to tell me, Shelly is beaming: "I got into College... Mrs. Fairchild did it, she keeps going... never stops" I give Shelly a hug, and say, "you're going to be famous!" Mrs. Fairchild has tears in her eyes...." Can I talk to you?" We sit down and Mrs. Fairchild is heartbroken because of what the nurse had said, "She'll be Ok, right? I mean she suggested we haven't prepared her enough... and that could help, but we're doing the right thing, right?" She's crying now, I say, "what is the alternative? Should be stop helping her to dream? Should we prepare her to die?" Mrs. Fairchild : "I don't know why I'm so emotional, that's why I want you there....next time we meet. I can't do this"
(Field Notes, May 21, 2009)

In the same way as Shelly, Julie relied on Mrs. Fairchild for counseling and support, but unlike Shelly, Julie presented a preference for independence and self-reliance, she was assertive, and she would engage in confrontational dialogue to defend her positions. Julie did not like anyone else to have control, except occasionally her mother. Julie talked about trust early in our meetings, making it clear that the circle of people she trusted was small, similar to Shelly:

Malloy: And what do you like about him? {Her boyfriend} What's the best thing about him?
Julie: He's really caring.
Mrs. Fairchild: He's what?

Julie: He's really caring person. And I trust him. There are only a very few people in this world I actually trust.
(Transcripts, September 18, 2008)

Julie made it plain that she was not interested in attending classes at Emmerton High for the length of time it would take her to graduate, and she bristled at our attempts to look at three more years of high school as an option. When she began to see that the people around her were willing to meet her half way, when she felt heard and supported, however, Julie's obstinacy softened and she began to compromise. A turning point in Julie's planning process occurred in October of 2008, when the guidance counselor, Mr. Price, suggested that she could finish high school by attending the local adult education program and get an adult education diploma, which required fewer credits than an Emmerton diploma. Julie jumped at this option and began to take the initiative to work towards the transition, which required her to convince her parents to sign her dropout papers from Emmerton High School, negotiate with the principal, Mrs. Stavros, to transfer credits and obtain credits for her community service, and research and plan around the adult education requirements. Julie became highly engaged in the pursuit of this option, and expressed that she felt "supported," reflected in an email from Mrs. Fairchild:

This is what she wants, she expressed it, she's given it thought and even though it's not what all of us may want, she felt supported... she's working hard and still getting slammed..." What she is talking about is Julie was suspended again- she is having disputes with an English Teacher and swore at her. She has passed all of her classes thus far...this first quarter but she is having these discipline problems.
(Email, November 19, 2008)

I had misgivings about the option of adult education, as I felt Julie was avoiding personal issues and conflicts with others that she would encounter in any situation, but

Julie was clear that she wanted to transfer to adult education, “I want to leave {Emmerton}” Transcripts, December 2, 2008). Julie argued how she would be successful in adult education, and her mother said she would support Julie as long as there was a plan and accountability put into place. There were conditions put on Julie’s transfer, including that she pass all of her classes and check in with us regularly. Julie responded positively, organizing her schedule and assignments, keeping track of everything in her agenda book. As her supporters, we followed Julie’s lead and trusted her with her goals, but the trust was not without conditions. We met with her parents to outline the plan and set up accountability systems, frequent “action plans,” and other supports to make sure that Julie knew she needed to account for her actions. Julie responded positively to this approach by taking the initiative and moving forward. Her bullying of other girls stopped. Although Julie was not successful attending adult education, she took the initiative and worked with Mrs. Fairchild to take a combination of on-line courses, courses at Emmerton, and adult education courses, and she graduated in June, 2010.

Manny was very focused on getting off of probation when he turned 17, and he was well aware that he needed to comply with the orders of his placement if that were to happen. Compliance with probation meant he needed to build trust with his probation officer and group home staff. Within this context, trust had a unique meaning for Manny:

Manny: ...the overnight staff she’s really nice, she lets me stay downstairs if I need to so anyway...I have been getting drug tests but I haven’t been doing drugs, he was supposed to give me a drug test like every month, twice a month, but he {probation officer} hasn’t given me a drug test for a whole year now...
Ms. West: If he were to test you today, you would be clean? Good
Manny: Yeah, just the medicine I take would show up.
Malloy: So you feel some trust there, they trust you

Manny: Yeah. They you know they've got a lot of trust in me, because there have been 3 or 4 of us who have been there for a long time. One kid who has been there he's 18 now his birthday was a couple of months ago, he's been there 4 or 5 years
Malloy: They're letting him stay

Manny: Yeah, he's turning 19 he has to go but he has a car and stuff.

(Transcripts, November 27, 2008)

Manny understood that he was being trusted and he was proud of that fact, but he also saw the benefits of building trust, such as gaining additional privileges and responsibilities. Manny responded positively to the individualized, person-centered approach that we used, and he enjoyed the responsibility and success that he experienced. Manny also passed most of his classes, obtained most of his credits, attended summer school, and had only three discipline issues during the school year. As Manny looked ahead to being released from probation and going home, he described what caring and trust meant to him and how he responded when others trust him:

Malloy: Did it help for you having someone to check in with you regularly?

Manny: Uh mum

Malloy: That seemed to work

Manny: Keeps me on track...The math

Jenny (group home staff member): But at the same time you don't always love that either...do you

Manny: No....

Malloy: No but you know that long term it helps

Manny: yup

Jenny : Sort of like a nagging girlfriend, a little bit... yup... without the benefits... (we laugh)

Malloy: Right... ummm what kinds of other things, do you think, in terms of structure, behavior stuff anything?

Jenny : He's been really good as far as that goes for the most part, I mean every once in a while there's a little something but he's pretty much on track that way, I don't think it's anything in particular that...

Malloy: what about when you go home (to the town) what do you think, is the structure enough for you there for you (pause) what's gonna be different?

Manny: Nothing as much as support as I got here

Malloy: Yeah- you mean in terms of people right on you?

Manny: Yeah because like, they {his parents} didn't even ask me how school was, you like 'did you do your homework'... well first of all I never really came home so.

Malloy: OK, so you were out all the time?

Manny: Pretty much---Every day I was always out... like not one day I would go out even if it was raining, snowing... I wasn't there
(Transcripts, July 7, 2009)

This passage shows that Manny understood the value of social support from people who check in and help him stay on track, and there was some anticipation as he indicated that he did not feel that connection with his family. The last part of his statement, "I really never came home so..." shows that he understood that if there was no social connection, then there was no reason to expect help from the other and no reason to respond positively or put effort into that relationship.

In my field notes on September 3, 2009, about a school meeting with Manny, I noted how Manny had responded to the help of others: "On another note...this was such an upbeat meeting--Manny gained six credits this past year! He is happy and working towards his goals... he has support--I see the trust and reciprocity working." So, in addition to emotional support, the youth here responded positively to the adults when they felt that the adults would offer them additional freedom and responsibility based upon trust (as with Julie and Manny). Freedom, responsibility, caring relationships, and control are social resources that the youth valued and were willing to work for.

Alex found trust to be an elusive commodity. One of his teachers, when describing Alex's mother and boyfriend as unreliable, said "he doesn't have anybody he can trust" (September 16, 2008), and Alex himself often described his mother as unable to support him and provide him with the help he needed. Like Julie, Alex preferred to give an impression that he could do everything by himself, and that he did not need or want help from others. Clearly, Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano viewed Alex as unreliable and a difficult person to help, given Alex's unpredictable responses to the

assistance they provided to him. As Mrs. Fairchild said early in the school year when I proposed a certain set of accommodations for Alex, “I just worry about his follow through. Mrs. Catano did a lot for him last year and he didn’t follow through” (Field Notes, October 21, 2008).

The problem was that Alex made promises and agreed to certain plans of action, but he was often unable to meet the terms or conditions of the agreements. It is clear throughout the time that we worked with Alex that he did not expect people to follow through for him either, despite the fact that Alex would explain exactly what he needed for help and to be successful. Alex rarely asked for help, did not expect to get help, and he made agreements that he could not keep. For example, when Jon suggested that Alex ask Mrs. Catano for help in one of his classes, Alex responded, “I don’t tell her – it’s just hard to do my work I just {stuttering}. I did my homework last night I didn’t mind doing it” (February 3, 2009).

When we talked about the important people in his life, it became very clear that Alex did not have many close relationships. His mother was never mentioned, and Alex indicated that the person he most trusted was his girlfriend, Shelly, and a young man he had just recently met:

Jon: Ok, alright – so... anybody else who goes down there?

Alex: T--- my friend T----.

Jon: Is he like your best friend?

Alex: Not really but ---

Jon: Can you really count on this guy for everything?

Alex: Sometimes I tell him something that I can trust him with, yeah...kind of.
(Transcripts, February 3, 2009)

Over time, however, Alex began to develop trust with Jonathon and reached out for help, especially when he was worried about getting back into the good graces of the

adults in the school. Alex understood that Jon was not going to put conditions on Alex's relationship with him, but that Jon would be able to help him problem solve (a skill that Alex lacked). Like Shelly, Julie, and Manny, Alex responded positively to relationships in which the individuals did what they said they would do, showed mutual respect, and did not judge them. In those instances, the youth responded with mutual respect, truth-telling, and they (often) followed through on agreements.

Personal Relevance

Each youth engaged and participated in interactions that were relevant to their personal concerns, goals, and needs, including problem solving activities that followed the youth's agenda (as opposed to the adults' agendas). The positive responses of each youth and their active involvement in working towards a goal or an action step offered insights into the issues in which they were most interested. The process of identifying personally relevant issues and goals began with the mapping activities, which allow each youth to clarify his or her priorities. As we saw when Shelly identified her desire to be a doctor or a nurse, the adults responded by brainstorming ways to help her to begin to pursue that goal, centering on Shelly's goals, not what others thought was the best course of action for her, given her illness and academic barriers she faced. Over time, by using the techniques of listening, reflecting and "mapping" out a plan of action, the issues and goals that were of highest relevance to each youth were revealed, and, if the adults followed the youth's lead, the youth participated, took the initiative, and offered positive social responses.

Shelly had a stated goal to become a doctor or a nurse, but the issues of most personal concern to her were consistently the challenge of passing math, her chaotic

home life, being accepted by others, and handling her difficult relationship with her boyfriend. These issues most engaged Shelly when we met. While we left most of the work on her personal relationships to her counseling sessions with Mrs. Fairchild, Shelly was most animated when talking about Alex, the many people living in her house, or the kids in her neighborhood. After the initial planning was completed, we reserved most of our time for problem solving around how to help Shelly pass her courses, especially her math. For example, Shelly took the initiative to revisit her goals as she was not passing her math class, which is a required course, outlined in an email from Mrs. Fairchild:

I have meet with Shelly today and she would like to move her RENEW meeting ahead prior to second semester. She wants to talk about her concerns with her schedule, realign some of her goals, and make sure all supports are in place for her. I feel this is a big step as she is often not one to advocate for herself...
(Email, January 15, 2009)

What became clear, with evidence of her engagement with us in meetings, was that being accepted socially and being viewed as a “typical” youth or young adult was most personally relevant to Shelly. Shelly’s poem to Mrs. Fairchild showed how important it was for her to be accepted and for her dreams to be validated. During a meeting to celebrate the fact that Shelly passed all of her classes, Shelly was animated, making socially appropriate jokes with the adults and her friends. This was repeated in May, 2009, when it was clear she was on track to graduate and after Shelly had been to the senior prom, accompanied by a young man who the school staff had picked to escort her. The meeting is reflected in my field notes:

Shelly talks fast and furious, she makes jokes with all of us. It is festive and happy. Shelly gives Jon ribbing about how he was late when they went to see the EMT program, Jon ribs her back. It is a party ... The prom story is amazing—the truant officer’s wife gave her a makeover and Mrs. Fairchild gave her a dress. She had a date (“he was a complete gentleman, he was on time!”). Shelly teases Jon, “my date was on time but you were 10 minutes late!” I have never seen her

teasing and having fun with others.... Mrs. Stavros comes in (the principal) and she says some very kinds words to Shelly: “What I saw with you at the prom was something new that I had never seen in your before—a type of calmness... you glowed... you were at peace and you had a type of self assurance....don’t ever lose that...

(Field Notes, May 5, 2009)

Julie responded decisively when we reached the point in our conversations to talk about her dreams and goals for the future, although Julie’s pessimism and reluctance showed as we probed and encouraged her to talk more. We ignored her expressions of discouragement and prodded her along. Julie responded that she wanted to go to college, have her own home and family, and, eventually, she told us that she wanted to be a nurse:

Ms. McGurk: Everything goes right.

Julie: Well that ain’t going to happen. (chuckles...)

Malloy: OH, it's OK. This is a chance to dream.

Jon: Anything you want. Whether that's, like --

Julie: Being in college. Having my own place to live.

{Discussing college}

Malloy: Tell us about your house. What's it like? Who's in it?

Julie: My house, in the future, or?

Malloy: Well, your dream, where you’re living. Would you be in the dorm, or would you be in your own home?

Julie: In my own home. Basically, me and my boyfriend, but that ain’t gonna happen

{Later that same meeting....}

Malloy: Any sense of what you would be studying, yet?

Julie: Nursing?

Malloy: Nursing. Excellent. You'll never be out of work, *ever*.

(Transcripts, September 30, 2008)

Figure 7

Julie's Dream MAP



Julie's interest in becoming a nurse was an important revelation, and we later found out that Mrs. Fairchild, who had been counseling Julie for four years, did not know that this was Julie's goal until she revealed it in this meeting. Julie's mother had tears in her eyes when she heard of Julie's desire to go to college, saying: "It's the school 'drama' that is pushing Julie out the door...she talked a great deal about how miserable Julie is now, how 'when she was 7-8 years old, she talked about going to college, but then when she came here (to high school) she said she didn't care anymore'" (Field Notes, December 9, 2008). While the goal of going to college became a focal point for our work with Julie, she was most engaged when she found out that she could leave Emmerton High School early and obtain her diploma by going to adult education classes:

Mr. Price (Vocational Education Guidance Counselor): And just to clarify too, for personal (he hesitates) reasons, you're looking at an Emmerton High School diploma, right? So an Adult Ed diploma is not something you want ?

Julie: What do you mean?

Mr. Price: With Adult Ed, they also offer a night school program and you go to school at night and you get an Adult Ed diploma. When you're done there...It's an adult ed diploma, so the requirements are a bit different, but some like ours.

Julie: So instead of going to school during the day you go at night?

Mr. Price: Um huh?

Julie: AWESOME ...

Malloy: Are you sure ?
Julie: *Yeah*
(Transcripts, October 21, 2008)

This was a turning point in Julie's engagement with us. To this point, she participated in all of the mapping meetings, shared her positive and negative thoughts about her prospects and her involvement in school. The development of her goals was an important step as we helped her to track her progress in her classes, but Julie stepped up her involvement and took the initiative to transfer out of Emmerton and into adult education when that option became viable for her, signaling that getting out of the typical high school "social scene" and spending more time with her boyfriend were exceptionally relevant to her.

Manny was highly engaged and eager to share when he talked about his history, but he was less interested in talking about how he was doing in school. During our first meeting, Manny became quite excited to tell us about his interests and accomplishments, including his interest in writing and recording rap and hip-hop music, his interest in dance, and his kick boxing experience. He also indicated that he liked to read: "I like reading...I just... you know the Twilight books? I like there are four books and I read them all already... I saw the movie this weekend and it was excellent—it was really good..." (Transcripts, November 27, 2008). During a subsequent meeting, we began to talk with Manny about his goals for the future, and with prodding from Ms. West, he shared a very surprising interest, captured on his Dreams Map:

Malloy: You're 16 now so let's say you're 22, 21 or 22, what are you doing? If everything goes great the way you would want it to go what would you want to be doing?

Manny: I don't know

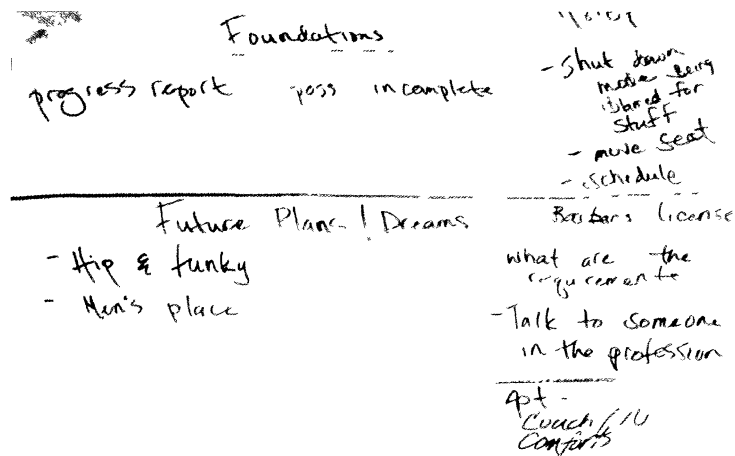
Malloy: Do you picture yourself in a particular job, or college?

Manny: No not really. I never actually thought it through (pause)

Ms. West: What about um... being a barber?
 Manny: That was... Yeah that's one of my things.
 Malloy: Oh, you wanted to be a barber, that's great
 Ms. West: Do you know anyone who is being that
 Manny: Yeah, I guess
 Ms. West: That's a worthy pursuit. So how would, if you were to envision yourself, say you had your own shop, Manny, what kind of place would you like to create, like what sort of environment like or ummmm
 Malloy: Yeah what would it look like?
 Ms. West: Yeah what yeah?
 Manny: If I had my own place?
 Ms. West: Yeah
 Manny: Alright, My own barber shop, like just change things up a bit like, um, more like styling like
 Ms. West: Like more hip... funky
 Manny: YEAH... YEAH
 Malloy: Like not a beauty salon,
 Manny: NAW definitely not
 Malloy: Like more of a men's place
 Manny: Yeah
 (Transcripts, January 8, 2009)

Figure 8

Manny's Dream MAP



Despite his reluctance to share his dreams in the beginning, Manny became quite animated and interested in describing what his own barber shop would look like. Jenny,

his group home manager, told us how Manny liked to cut people's hair at the group home, and he was clearly excited about the idea of having a "hip and funky" barber shop. As a result of this discussion, Ms. West used her social network to help Manny to get a job at the local barber shop that he loved to visit. Ms. West was clearly proud of and happy that she was able to help Manny, and he showed pride in this job as he described his work there. By following his interests and affirming his stated goals, Manny reciprocated in a positive manner. Manny, whom teachers and his group home described counselor as unmotivated and non-responsive often depicted, held this job for over six months (until he moved away).

Alex brought so many different issues or concerns to the table, many of which changed from meeting to meeting, and his behaviors were often inconsistent with his expressed interests or goals that it was difficult to sort out what activities would engage him. There were two priorities that Alex consistently expressed and acted upon, however, and those were maintaining his peer relationships and pursuing culinary arts. The idea of seeing friends or his girlfriend was a major motivator for Alex to stay in school. Alex expressed his interest in seeing his friends and his dislike for the adults during our first formal meeting:

Jon: So, if you do come to school, is there a reason why you like coming to school?

Alex: Seeing friends, for me. Friends, girlfriend, anything.

Jon: Anything else to do with, like, who you are, anything like that?

Alex: No.

Jon: What do you like least about school?

Alex: Teachers. B-tching teachers.

(Transcripts, September 23, 2008)

The need for affiliation with acceptance among peers was exceedingly strong with Alex. This is reflected in my field notes, "Alex talks about girlfriends, his 'gang' and his

need to belong. He talks about relationships ALL THE TIME. Everything is personal to him. He embellishes his stories to impress people (says shocking things, scratches his arms, etc.” (Field Notes, October 7, 2008). Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild and Alex’s teachers indicated that Alex often left or skipped classes to find his friends in the hallway or in the lunchroom:

Malloy: Had you tried any strategies for coming late to class?”

(English Teacher): No, I talked to him. He wanted to go to the nurse.....By the way, the medication thing should be worked out

Mrs. Fairchild: And he would go to the nurse to brag to his friend, for attention

Malloy: Was he trying to avoid the work?

Teacher: More of a social thing

Mrs. Fairchild: A social thing, to make him feel good. He would lend money to other kids, he thought they liked him. The older kids would get him going... they would laugh at Alex. He took it as “they liked me”

(Field Notes, September 3, 2008)

Alex was required to renegotiate his school program on several occasions during the school year. The first time was in late September 2008, when he was suspended for arguing with a teacher and walking out of school midday. The second time was in November 2008 after he had dropped out (after a conflict with a female student), again in January 2009 at the end of the term to review his progress, and again in March 2009 when he had missed several weeks of school because of illness and suspensions. For each of these meetings, the school assembled a large group that included the principal, Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild, the truancy officer, the school nurse, Jonathon and me, and other teachers or administrators as appropriate. Alex’s mother was invited and sometimes attended these meetings. Each time, a set of conditions was laid out for Alex if he was to remain in school and stay out of trouble, and each time, Alex engaged in the conversation and agreed to the conditions (with some caveats) because he wanted to get back into school and see his friends. (He also needed to comply with the conditions of his truancy

court order.) Alex stated his interests during the November 2008 meeting, stating why he wanted to come back into school:

Mrs. Catano: I know you've given it a lot of thought and I think maybe it would be a good opportunity for you to kind of tell us where you're at, what you're feeling, and what is your ultimate goal here, and what are you hoping?

Alex: You want me to start?

Mrs. Catano: Yeah.

Alex: Yeah. Well, I want to come back to school because finding a job is kind of hard for me, because I do not do good around, like, I get like nervous and shy and stuff around other people. I know a job would be hard for me to do, and going to that GED thing, I'm not really up to that right now because I won't understand, I probably won't understand the test and I was told that the test would be hard for me, with my difficulty learning, cuz I can't learn really good. So, I'd like, the best idea is to come back to school because I can learn a lot more. And I wanted to come back anyways, I've got my friends at school. It's hard...and well, I would come, I want to come back you know, and but, okay, I'll come back to my old schedule, and find out what the schedule would be, come back a full day, half day, and if I do better than I was doing last, the last part of the school year, I'll try to do better than I was doing. Like getting all my work done and just pay attention to one the classes more. And, but my then my ultimate goal is just to get high school diploma, at the school. I want to graduate, pretty much.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Alex was making promises based upon his needs. Unfortunately, the high school was not structured to meet Alex's need to see his friends and to socialize.

Alex did engage in another area of personal interest that was more aligned with what the adults expected of him, and that was his culinary arts class. Alex consistently expressed his desire to be a chef, "I want to be a chef, you know" (Field notes, September 18, 2008). Given his stated vocational goal, Jonathon, his University facilitator, brought up the idea of culinary arts frequently during the meetings, following Alex's lead. In the end, Alex received two credits for culinary arts for the 2008-09 school year, the only two credits he received that year. Despite all of his issues, Alex often expressed pride in his work in his culinary arts class, worked hard in that class despite all of the other issues

swirling around him, and his culinary arts teacher often gave him positive feedback: “He’s a pleasure to have in my class” (Transcripts, January 13, 2009).

Clearly all four youth were engaged, responded positively, and were participating when the relationship work centered on issues that were of personal importance to them. For Shelly and Alex, being accepted in the school social scene was very important. For Julie, it was to get out of school. For Manny, he wanted to pursue activities and interests where he could be successful, establish an identity, and show his talents, including cutting hair, dancing, and hip hop music.

Potential for Positive Outcomes

The calculus of what is “worth” engaging in and what is “not worth” the effort was evident in the social actions of all four youth and was highly related to the other contextual elements discussed here, such as personal relevance, the ability to see the outcome (problem solving), and the presence of trust and investment in interpersonal relationships. All four youth were experiencing failure in school, including not obtaining credits, multiple disciplinary actions, and social isolation when they were identified for the University project. Each youth expressed frustration and discouragement about not being successful in school despite the fact that each expressed a desire to graduate from high school and each was willing to continue to work on being successful. Within their multiple negative experiences, it is interesting to note that each student seemed well aware of what had worked and what had not worked for them in terms of learning and relationship building activities. The conversations about strategies that were likely to result in positive or negative outcomes first took place when we completed the “What

Works” MAP. Shelly identified successful strategies and the types of activities that were not helpful for her during our first meeting on May 27, 2008:

Figure 9

Shelly’s What Works MAP

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standing up for myself - - Responsible person - - History - - Communicating - Express yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Math - - Can't do athletics.
What works	What doesn't work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher describes and is clear about the assignments Knowing what's going on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Giving the work without explaining

Shelly knew that math was a problem for her and that math was a required course for graduation. Shelly also stated that she needed a bit of additional explanation about the assignments. Shelly indicated here some of the strategies that she felt would and would not help her. During the school year, Shelly worked hard to pass her math class and was assertive and proactive about changing the strategies when she was not being successful in math. Shelly needed to be able to see the possibility for success if she was to initiate these efforts.

The notion of investing in a strategy or certain course of action because it was likely to have positive results was a lesson that Julie had to learn over time. From our very first meetings, Julie was clear about why she was not successful at Emmerton High

School and why the classes and climate at adult education was a better place for her to learn:

Julie: They actually, like, they actually treat me like an adult there. And not a little sixth grader.

Jon: A different relationship. Yeah... You'll thrive in college, then. That's how it is in college.

Julie: Yeah, it's like, if you don't do your homework, at night school...if you don't do it here you get in trouble for it, but the people that are there, they're all going to do it because they want to be there...The people here are like, oh, I have to do this. What's the point of doing this? I don't even want to.

Malloy: It's very different. Yeah...

Julie: After you write a, really anything, you have to share something. But you don't even have to read it {at night school}. You could have the teacher read it. You could have someone else read it. And the first paper that I did, it was a three-page paper on who you most admire in your life. So, I was like, oh, Jacob, my nephew. And she gave me a 95 on it, I think.

Malloy: Wow. Wow. So, you are having success there.

Julie: Yeah. I love going there.

(Transcripts, October 7, 2008)

In this exchange, Julie presents a construct of why she was succeeding at adult education and why she engaged in conflicts and experienced conflict at Emmerton High School. As we began to develop a graduation plan with her, Julie learned that she was further behind in credits than she had thought (or hoped), and the potential for graduating early at Emmerton (which was her stated goal) became elusive. Once the option of possibly graduating with an adult education diploma became viable (which required 20 credits instead of 26 as required at Emmerton), Julie was very engaged in pursuing the strategy of dropping out of Emmerton and negotiating a plan for obtaining her credits primarily through adult education. Julie argued vigorously for the option to go to adult education because she felt it was the only way she was going to be able to obtain a diploma within her desired timeframe. Julie began to formulate her argument for going to adult education (or night school), and was actively engaged in working on this option,

following through on a request from Mrs. Stavros that she talk to the adult education director, and that she bring her mother in to develop a plan:

Mrs. Fairchild: ...I think today is more of a planning session to get back on track and see where we're all at and.. ??? (writing on flip charts) Do you want to update us with anything about adult ed? You know, I thought you might add.
Julie: Well I had that meeting with them... and she said I told her about how I wanted to do good in the school I wanted to go to school there because I???? and she said that it would be one of the best things for me {transferring to night school} because she looked at my grades and my effort in my night class and that I would do really good and... that they could transfer my transcript???.
(Transcripts, December 2, 2008)

Julie actively pursued this option and was fully engaged in working with the Emmerton school staff because she saw the potential for being successful by going to night school (adult education) where she could work independently and where she could escape the social and academic failures she was having at Emmerton High School. Although she did not succeed with this strategy, Julie worked with Mrs. Fairchild in September 2009 to cobble together a program of credits by taking courses at Emmerton (where she had no subsequent behavior problems), taking on-line courses, night courses, and performing community service, and she graduated with her peers with an adult education diploma in June of 2010.

There were other examples of how each youth engaged in an idea or strategy because he or she understood that it had a likelihood of bringing positive results. Manny put effort into finishing his English packet by working one-on-one with his group home tutor and Ms. West outside of class. Characterized as an unmotivated student, Ms. West praised Manny for his effort, and he responded with pride:

Ms. West: So Manny he just did he read Mice and Men in English class. He's doing alt school English with Ms N. and he wasn't doing anything in the class so um he agreed to read Mice and Men and I gave him a packet and he completed the packet which is awesome... so I have to make copies for Ms N.

Manny: I finished all the math that Mr. H gave me...

Ms. West: Where is that?

Manny: He has it

Ms. West: Good that's awesome, was he psyched?

Manny: Yeah he said wow, you actually finished a packet in a week that we gave you

Ms. West: They're cracking the whip on you at the group home I believe,

Manny: No, a little bit (we laugh)

Ms. West: So uhhh, I think he's actually I shouldn't speak for Manny what do you think about all of this?

Manny: I feel better than before I felt better....

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

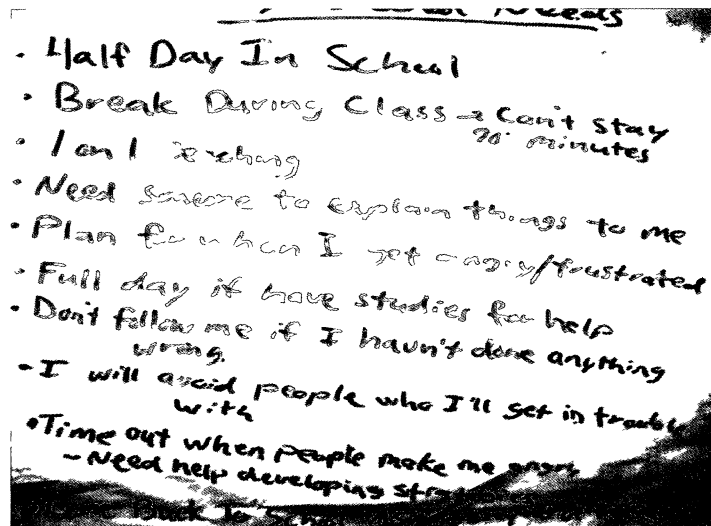
In previous conversations, Manny had made it clear that he could not complete schoolwork in a noisy or disorganized classroom environment. This time, however, Manny experienced academic success for perhaps the first time in several years by using a strategy to study with Ms. West and the group home staff in a quiet setting. He put effort into this strategy, in part because he trusted that it would provide him with a positive result. Manny expressed that he "felt better" about himself, feelings that he attributed to completing his school work.

Like Julie, Alex stated on many occasions that he preferred to do things himself, that he had his issues and problems "under control," and that he did not want or need help. Alex had an understanding about what would work and would not work for him, built from his unsuccessful experiences. Clearly the strategy to try to figure things out on his own was not working for Alex, and he began to actively engage in activities of accepting help when we talked about strategies that he viewed as having potential for success. For example, Alex needed to re-enroll in school after he had dropped out. In preparation for a large meeting at the school to talk about how this would happen, Jonathon counseled Alex to develop a list of his support needs, indicating that if Alex was proactive and spoke calmly about his needs, the school would likely give him much

of what he wanted. Alex bought into this strategy and responded by developing a list of social and academic support needs:

Figure 10

Alex's Support Needs MAP



Jon: So, when you go to that meeting Alex, you need to make sure that you let them know up front that we've talked, and that you want to share some things w/ them about what you want to happen when you're back in school. I'm sure that they'll be happy to listen to you.

Malloy: So, during the meeting, can you talk about some of these things? And we'll bring this list so you don't forget. Can you read that list okay?

Alex: Yeah

(Transcripts, November 19, 2008)

During the large school meeting that followed, Alex presented this list of needs, and received a positive response from individuals at the meeting:

Jon: Alex you and I had talked about some needs that you are pretty much aware of, that you need to while you're in school, some needs on your end that you need to do to do well in school, but also some needs that you need help with when you are in school too. What are some of the needs that you're going to need help with in school to be successful?

Alex: Well, I need like, well, I need help like to stay in classes. Like, I can't stay for the whole 90 minute classes. It's hard for me to stay in one place for like that amount of period time. I don't know.

Jon: So, do you need some extra help?

Alex: Extra help in classes, like I don't know if it's called one on one, one on one time, but I can't just like sit there and look at the teacher and like understand it. I need help understanding it, by the other person telling me. And then having one person like another teacher telling me?

Jon: Okay, is there anything else that you can think of?

Alex: And, oh, planning things before I get angry. Planning what I should do before I get angry and walk out of classes and stuff.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Discussing his needs was difficult for Alex, who liked to give the impression that he had everything under control. Alex agreed to use the strategy to develop and talk about his needs, however, because he believed it would result in positive outcomes and he knew that arguing with people or avoiding had not worked for him in the past.

Problem-solving

Each of the youth became overwhelmed and angry at certain points when they realized or felt that their problems were difficult or perhaps impossible to address. At those times, they expressed frustration, blamed others, or tried to avoid engaging in positive action. Each youth became more engaged, however, when the pathway to their goals was laid out in smaller “chunks” or steps, and when they experienced success at each stage. The process of solving a problem this way (combined with other elements such as trust or personal relevance) resulted in more positive and engaged social responses from the youth. While there are several models for problem solving, the basic elements we used included breaking down the pathway to a goal into smaller steps and constantly assessing and adjusting the progress towards the goal (Çalışkan, Selçuk, & Erol, 2010). One problem-solving strategy that was used with the youth was to write up an “Action Plan” at the end of a meeting in order to articulate what the youth and other helpers were to do before the next meeting, making achievement more immediate and therefore more reinforcing. An example of an Action Plan appears in Appendix F.

One of the potential symptoms of Shelly's illness was impairment of her short-term memory. Shelly's mother and Mrs. Catano noticed that Shelly seemed to have difficulty remembering her assignments and homework at various times during the school year. Although she did not comment on the strategy of breaking down larger problems into smaller steps, Shelly became very engaged in filling out her own action planning format at the end of our meetings. The action plans also allowed Shelly to see her accomplishments and was used to communicate what was happening with key people who could not be at every meeting. As an example, we reviewed her progress in the fall of 2008, after she had completed most of the small tasks she needed to start the school year:

Figure 11

Shelly's Action Plan



Shelly looked at the chart and smiled as we checked off action steps that had been accomplished. Clearly this strategy of breaking down complex problems into smaller steps was of value to Shelly.

The problem solving process seemed to work well with Julie, who was discouraged to learn that she had only 7.5 credits towards graduation as she entered her third year in high school. As we began to break down her credit needs by course, week, semester and year, however, she was engaged and eventually took over the planning work:

Mr. Price (Vocational Guidance Counselor: And probably when we meet next week we game plan then night school would be a possibility on the list?

Depending on when it's offered.

Julie: Because I only need biology and a science and that's all I need for credits for science right?

Mr. Price: You only need two, there's the physical science that you got a D+ in and then biology and those would be the only 2 you require, but if you're looking for nursing school you would need chemistry too...

Julie: Ok so if I could take biology at night school cause I do better at night school than I do during the day, only because they treat you so much different

Mr. Price: Ok so like I said it would be the freshman science that you took, and the biology that you would need to graduate...but if you want the nursing program, you would be looking for the chemistry...

Julie: And what would I gotta do for—two third block

Mr. Price: I would suggest let's get through this semester first, and worry about next semester...I would not drop biology yet unless its offered...and look at night school classes, I would prefer small steps first... let's get through quarter one and quarter two...

Julie: If biology, is two nights a week I would get it done in a quarter for full credit

Mr. Price: Let's take it first and drop it.

Julie: And I talked to the person there and what they said is when I'm done this class I can take biology. All I have to do is sign up

(Transcripts, October 21, 2008)

Julie was actively engaged in exploring all the options for her possible credit accumulation with Mr. Price, the Emmerton vocational counselor, towards her goal to graduate (on time or early). Julie valued the strategy to break down the larger problem of accumulating enough credits to graduate early or on time into small steps. Julie saw the utility of this approach and she continued to engage in the process of breaking down a larger goal into weekly steps throughout the semester.

Alex, as has been stated before, was constantly dealing with multiple and shifting problems, some of which needed immediate attention. In addition, Alex did not seem to understand how to divide a big problem into smaller steps, making it difficult for people to help him. Alex's mother also seemed to become frustrated when problems surfaced and she often responded impulsively. For instance, she berated the principal and signed the papers to drop Alex out of school when he was harassed by another student, only to learn that her welfare payments would be severely cut if Alex was a dropout. The result was that she had to go back to the school and re-enroll him. It was clear, then, that Alex and his mother were not accustomed to using a problem solving process. There were several instances, however, when Jonathon explained to Alex the purposes and benefits of parsing a big challenge into little steps, and Alex responded by listening and using the strategies. For example, when we first started meeting with Alex, Jon explained how we would be working together and showed Alex the action planning sheet:

Jon: OK. All right. So, also, another thing is, to help keep everything organized, is there somebody that you'd like to work with on that, in the school, on a regular basis? Like, somebody that you liked?

Alex: On what?

Jon: Being organized, with, like, what you're doing, every day, and how things are going. You know, the kind of questions --

Alex: Well, to keep me with my classes and stuff is Mrs. D--(paraprofessional). She's a, one of those helper teachers, for our class.

Jon: OK, so, she's a, they call them paraprofessional, I guess?...So, maybe we could talk to her a bit, is she a good person? She already sits there and does it with you, right?

Alex: Mmm-hmm, kind of, yeah.

Jon: So, if we talked to her about some of the, I'll show you. This is a thing, I want to give this to you, to do. This is a, kind of a list of what you guys talked about in that meeting last week, OK? And it outlines everything that was kind of figured out, what would help you. And what we want to do is make sure that all these things are working for you, so you're not just doing stuff that's not, that you don't [OVERLAPPING VOICES], and doesn't work for you. So, we want to make sure that these things work for you.

Alex: Yeah.

Jon: So, what we're going to do, we're going to meet with you weekly, and talk about that, and we're also going to talk about jobs.

Alex: Yeah.

Jon: OK? Does that sound good?

Alex: Uh-huh.

(Transcripts, September 30, 2008)

When Alex needed to meet with the school after he dropped out, he was very stressed by the prospect of negotiating his return to the school. He just wanted to get back into school and not have to talk about it. As Jonathon began to pick apart the challenge and explained a strategy for representing his needs, however, Alex calmed down and began to engage in problem solving:

Jon: The thing is, that you want to get back in school, right?

Alex: Yeah, but I'm not going to...for a gay meeting where I'm going to talk to all these people that I hate.

Malloy: Well, they are not going to let you in school any other way, so you're going to have to figure it out.

Alex: I just want to go back to my classes

Jon: Well, the meeting's purpose is to make sure everybody is on the same page with everything.

Alex: Why? Cuz you want me to just go to my classes...

Jon: So if that's what you are trying to do, then tell them that, and say what you want to do. And what they are going to do, the purpose of this meeting is to make sure that it happens.

Alex: I'm like, f--k that!

Malloy: I think that Jon is trying to prepare you for the meeting.

Alex: Yeah, but...

Jon: How about I write a list of what you want to happen at the school when you go back.

Alex: Okay.

Jon: Let's do that. That way we get all of your needs and wants met or at least brought to the attention of the school, and you can have a conversation around it and come to a compromise about what you want to happen. Does that sound okay?

Alex: Yup.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Jon explained to Alex what Jon was doing and why, giving Alex the opportunity to actively participate in solving his own problems, and Alex eventually bought into this

strategy. Problem solving is a learned skill, and since Alex had not learned it through the culture of his family, he needed to be taught the skill as he continued to negotiate his support needs with the school. Julie was also frustrated by her situation but instead of problem solving, she was skipping classes, getting into conflicts with adults and peers, and thus damaging her relationships with people at home and in school. Julie learned the alternative strategy of how to problem solve and negotiate with the school and her efforts were reinforced as she was able to finish high school while escaping the social scene at Emmerton.

Shared Work and Decision Making

The last but no less important contextual element that appeared to engage the youth was when decisions and work were shared between the youth and their helpers. The idea of sharing responsibility is a stated principle of schooling and education, but the adults viewed Shelly, Julie, Alex, and Manny, as somewhat unreliable and incapable of making appropriate decisions. There was a tendency, then, to remove decision-making responsibility from the youth, blame the youth, or to give up. A common perception among the adults was that each youth was intentionally making bad choices. For example, one of Manny's alternative education teachers said: "He chooses to not do work" (Field Notes, July 16, 2009). What was demonstrated through our meetings with each youth, however, is that the issues were more complex than simple refusals or making bad choices. The youth were frustrated and stuck in situations that they were convinced, based upon experience, would not result in successful outcomes. In addition to problem-solving, seeing the potential for success, being heard and trusting the people

and process, each youth responded positively when they were given some degree of choice and control over their program and support decisions.

In one of earliest meetings with Shelly, after she stated that she would like to explore becoming a doctor or a nurse, we began to strategize with her, and we gave her several choices. She responded by taking charge of the conversation:

Mrs. Fairchild: Yes, there are jobs and volunteer positions. There used to be Candy Stripers (laughs). There is a job at the hospital for a greeter. They hire kids to be at the front desk, they let you do homework and are very supportive. (To Shelly): Do you have a bike?

Shelly: The kids in the neighborhood slashed my tires.... They go around saying 'b--ch' and now I don't have a bike either. "{A boy} is going around the neighborhood stealing bikes and starting fights. The cops came to our house."

Mrs. Fairchild: "I know that boy. It's so sad that he does that. He's a good kid- I wonder what makes kids do that?"

Shelly- no response.

Malloy: OK, we talked about exploring jobs in nursing, and we talked about bringing people in to talk to you or going on visits. Shelly, which would you like to do first, what will help you the most? I don't mean to put you on the spot and you don't have to decide now but this will help us to be more efficient.

Mrs. Fairchild: Would you like to talk to people first or go on tours?

Shelly: I would like to talk to people first.

Malloy: Ok, well we can begin to plan on that and you will probably want to develop a list of questions that you want to ask people.

Mrs. Fairchild: I don't know, but I was very quiet as a kid, perhaps we can help develop a list of questions now to help you, (Shelly nods).

(I start a flip chart on questions to ask)

Shelly: How much education do you need?

(Mrs. Pennington comes in, she has her 9 year old son in tow. She sets him up with something to read and we take a minute to catch her up. I hand her the markers -I want her to facilitate.

Mrs. Fairchild: Shelly, can you summarize for Mrs. Pennington what we have done so far?

Shelly: We talked about whether I would do visits or talk to people, and I decided to talk to people and we are developing questions so I will be focused.

(Field Notes, July 22, 2008)

Shelly was able to state how she was running the meetings, making choices, and why we were developing a list ("so I will be focused"). She engaged actively in this process, and she responded positively and with decisiveness.

Julie made it clear that she wanted to be in control from the beginning, and she had in fact been taking control by arguing with teachers, skipping classes and bullying other students before we met her. When Julie had the opportunity to make decisions and share in the work, however, she reciprocated in ways that were much more socially acceptable. For example, in the late fall of 2008, Julie let us know that she was walking out of her 4th block class early nearly every day, and she was afraid that she was failing that class. She gave many reasons why she could not stay all day, why she did not want to try to recover the missed work, and why she was not able to drop the class. We talked about this for some time and she was eventually given the choice by the principal to drop the class, as long as she picked up additional after school work hours. Donna, the University staff member working with Julie, reflected on her honesty and complimented Julie for bringing the issue to the table:

Donna: That's the most important thing finding out where you stand for attendance, that's what you have to do, and then I gotta say I'm glad you brought it up here, you didn't have to. It sounds like you a pretty good thing going, you know, you'd leave and show up when you wanted to but I'm glad you brought it up because now you can sort of take a stance that 'I'm not just gonna let it happen, I'm actually gonna be proactive and I'm gonna say, I'm gonna stay in it and this is how I get through the next 3 weeks or have an alternative plan.'

Julie: uh huh

Donna: But you can't come up with that plan on your own, obviously we need to talk to other people, right? So I'm proud of you for bringing it up

(Transcripts, December 2, 2008)

Julie continued to talk this through and later during this meeting she presented her plan to Mrs. Stavros, the principal. This was a big step for Julie, who tended to deal with problems by avoiding them:

Mr. Price: What's the plan? You just told it to me, tell it to her

Julie: OK So, after the school day I want to get my adult diploma

Mrs. Stavros: OK

Julie: And I thought that I would go to night school (unintelligible) Tuesday, and Thursday for a full credit, and Wednesday is for a half credit and I don't want to be in 4th block any more because I am way behind in that class for being here a whole day, so I should drop that class, take that class on Wednesday night for night school for a half credit and leave early, and have 4th block off. (she is talking very fast, like she is nervous).

Mrs. Stavros: When does the night school for adult ed start?
(Transcripts, December 2, 2008)

Fortunately for Julie, Mrs. Stavros was willing to work with her to design a pathway to her diploma that was different from what is typical. By being given control and responsibility (with emotional support from the people around her), Julie responded by planning out her strategy, working to pass all of her classes, exploring the requirements for her to transfer to adult education, and taking the lead to talk with her parents to gain their support for her plan. Julie's plan was not successful, but the school continued to work with her so that she graduated on time. Giving control and responsibility to a youth who is not conforming requires the adults to take a leap of faith, as demonstrated in one of my memos:

...But when we followed Julie's lead to quit school and go to adult ed it scared me because I was afraid that she would ruin her future- her ability to get into college, etc. but she put us in a bind- she was dead set on skipping classes and would have quit anyway so we had no choice but to support her decision. It turned out OK, though, because her parents supported it and her mom was extremely grateful in the end. That made me feel happy, but I also felt angry because other kids don't have this....Her mom made the richest, thickest brownies we have ever had when we last met...

(Memo, February 17, 2009)

Manny also responded positively to the challenge of making his own decisions, although he was often passive and presented a laissez-faire attitude towards some of the plans and decisions made to support him in school. Manny's biggest decision was to go back to his parents' home and old high school when he was released by the judge in October of 2009, despite being given the option to stay at the group home and continue to

attend Emmerton, where he was having success. Several people at Emmerton High School were disappointed by this decision, as they had become attached to Manny during the year, and they were concerned because Manny had given signals that he was interested in joining a gang. Manny's decision was reflected in an email from Donna: "Manny seems very determined to leave Emmerton on December 13th when he turns 17. He no longer seems to be even willing to stay another month or even remain here if possible while living with his parents—a change from our large group meeting" (Email message, September 10, 2009). We decided to work this decision through with him, reflected in a new futures plan that he developed in the fall of 2009, and in conversations we had about the support he would lose if he moved back home. This type of collaborative approach between student and school was valued by Manny, as depicted by the director of Manny's group home in a conversation about his pending move back home: "...he seems to like that (the RENEW meetings), yeah—he says no one is nagging him or telling him what to do at those meetings" (Field Notes, October 14, 2009).

Alex, like Julie, was averse to having anyone else make decisions for him. That said, Alex was also engaging in negative and self-defeating behaviors because he did not feel he had the option to decide or take control in a pro-active way. Early in our work with him, in a meeting that took place after he had been suspended and his school day had been shortened, we tried to explain to Alex how he could learn to take greater control over his own decisions:

Malloy: So, Alex, let me go through this, because you didn't have a lot of say in this last week, right?

Alex: Mmm-hmm.

Jon: I typically like to see you have a lot, you know, a little more say in things, that's why we're here, to be working with you, to make sure you get a little more -

Alex: Mmm-hmm.

Malloy: Have you ever seen a plan, where you have goals and objectives, OK? This is set up the same way {Action Plan}. So, the first goal is to help you attend the classes and complete assignments, so you can --

Alex: I'm going to be doing that.

Malloy: -- get your credits, right. And we have to do that every week. As you know, your life can change every week, right?

Alex: Actually, not really, anymore... Because I've been like, I don't know, I've been more into myself, and stuff.

(Transcripts, September 30, 2008)

Alex was not willing to engage in shared work at this point, putting forward the façade that he had everything under control, but Alex came to be more and more honest and assertive with Jonathon as the year progressed and as his challenges began to mount. When Alex needed to work with Jon to prepare his plans for the second half of the school year, and when talking about the possibility of looking for a job, Alex made his preferences known:

Alex: I already told you what did I tell you about that thing- you're too pushy with that uh job thing

Jon: Yup. Yeah you did say that---

Alex: I told it right off right off right in the whole thing (he is stammering) I I you're too pushy about that

Jon: That's true you did that but you told MR Price later on you said

Alex: Maybe, I might be interested but (stammering again) but people if you go like in ummm that thing in am OK I think how the heck am I gonna take that bus, I'll get lost I don't know when I know what it's a long way on the bus all alone

Jon: So you're nervous about the bus—

Alex: Um I just yeah I get a full ride up there and ride back

Jon: that's why this is just an option right now and you don't have to... you can do anything you want and we can think about it. And I'm not – and I'm glad you told me I was being pushy about it and I know that you said that and that's why we're saying it's an option for you to choose--

Alex: Yeah

Jon: if you want to do it

Alex: How am... (he has calmed down) I get my classes, I just want to get my classes and that's pretty much it

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex wanted the responsibility, and would occasionally share the work with Jonathon, but his inconsistency and inability to follow through made it difficult for us to

know how to work with him. In fact, Mrs. Fairchild's characterization of Alex's behavior, "There is no follow through," was quite accurate.

Understanding the Norm of Reciprocity

The data show that there were certain types of help and social supports that were valued by each youth, indicated by their positive responses and engaged participation. While the nature of the problems and characteristics of relationships differed from youth to youth, there were common features in events when the youth responded positively to the help of others, and each of these features often overlapped and were interrelated.

Shelly was worried about her illness, she felt socially inadequate and "different," and she knew she needed help to cope with the effects of her illness if she were to graduate. Shelly responded positively to the unconditional support she received by attending all of her planning meetings, trying harder, checking in regularly with Mrs. Fairchild, and she took control of her own planning and problem solving. Julie was somewhat "stuck" when we first met her. She hated school, particularly the negative social interactions she was experiencing, she was acting out with peers and adults, and she had failed most of her classes the previous year. Her parents, however, did not approve of Julie quitting school or going to adult education for her diploma until we began working on an alternative plan that would allow Julie to finish her coursework, receive an adult education diploma, but "walk" with her class at the regular high school. This alternative offered an option for Julie to meet all of these competing needs, and so she began to work vigorously to make it happen. Julie attended all of her planning meetings, she problem solved together with the adults, and she responded positively to the assistance that was being given to her. What we saw, however, was how Julie

disengaged when she went to adult education. She failed her classes there because she refused the support and was more focused on her boyfriend than her classes. Julie finally learned how to use the resources in her social network, when in September 2009, she re-engaged with Mrs. Fairchild and eventually finished school with an adult education diploma by taking a combination of on-line courses, regular high school classes, and obtaining support for community service.

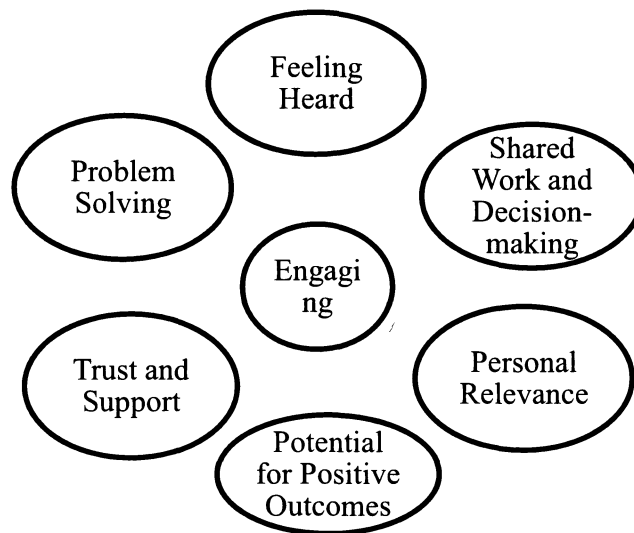
Manny's positive responses were far more subtle, given who he was and his "laid back" personality. The data show, however, that Manny was engaged when he felt heard around difficulties he was having in class, when he had the chance to talk about his accomplishments ("I felt better"), and when he was given support in areas that were of interest to him. Towards the end of the 2008-09 school year, Manny expressed, in a very appropriate way, his appreciation for the help that his teacher/mentor Ms. West had given him, especially for her help to pass some of his classes and for linking him to the barbershop job.

Finally, there is Alex, who was constantly in a crisis or situation repair mode. He would often bring issues to the table that we could not solve or that seemed implausible, but he did listen as Jonathon, his facilitator, redirected the conversations to try to move Alex to plans that would solve the immediate problem or lead to longer-range accomplishments. Alex frequently found himself in difficult circumstances relative to the school, and this robbed him of greater choice and of the trust of others. The data show, however, how Alex began to share his true concerns and needs with Jonathon and began to seek Jon's assistance. Reciprocity and true engagement for Alex was driven by his immediate needs.

All four youth began to engage and work with the adults in contexts that were driven by the potential for success, focused on the youth, and where trust was present. In addition, the youth appreciated and responded positively when their challenges were broken down into manageable steps, and when the youth felt as equal partners in the process. This type of “help” seemed to be valuable by the youth. Figure 12 depicts the six contexts or situational themes that were most present when the youth responded positively:

Figure 12

Contextual Model of Positive Reciprocity



There is evidence throughout the texts that the expectation of reciprocity was operating within and influencing the meaning made of the acts of giving or receiving help. There is the generalized norm of reciprocity described by Putnam (2000) as the “touchstone of social capital...I’ll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return....confident that down the road you or someone else will return the

favor” (p. 134). Additionally, there is the notion of direct reciprocity, described by André (2010) as “the repeated exchange of cooperative behaviors between two individuals” (p. 197). The norm of reciprocity can be recognized here as one of several Big “D” Discourses operating in this setting, ways of “acting-interacting,-thinking-valuing-talking” that identifies the individual as recognizing the expectation of reciprocity as part of the helping relationship (Gee, 2005, p. 26). Further, there is the notion of the expectation of reciprocity exercised through positions of power, characterized as coercion (described in Chapter VII). The operation of the norm of reciprocity appears in the data as informal social contracts, formal agreements (such as the contracts that Alex and his mother signed as he re-entered school), and the reflections of individuals about their expectations of others and themselves in the helping relationship.

In our first meeting, Shelly was quite clear about what she expected in a reciprocal relationship, “Having someone I can trust and who I can talk to” “He’s {Her boyfriend} the only person who accepts me for who I am and doesn’t judge me” (Transcripts, May 27, 2008). Clearly Shelly was expressing her expectation that trust in a relationship was meaningful to her. Her view of a trusting relationship was echoed in her poem to Mrs. Fairchild, and the last line expressed Shelly’s interpretation of her own obligation to respond positively to all the help she had received from Mrs. Fairchild: “I hope I can continue to be a person who you can always believe in” (Transcripts, February 3, 2009). Mrs. Fairchild noted the value of relationship to Shelly, writing in an email: “She {Shelly} mentioned at the conference that the biggest thing that she has gotten out of RENEW is how many people care about her. She never knew how many staff and community people would take time to help her” (April 28, 2009). Shelly’s statements

and her behavior indicate that she understood the mutual expectation of reciprocity in helping relationships along with the significant benefits of positive reciprocity, imbued with emotional attachments and obligations. Further, there was pride and happiness expressed by the individuals in Shelly's circle as she began to have success. For example, Mrs. Stavros offered touching sentiments at Shelly's meeting as Shelly celebrated her successes and as she prepared for graduation: "What I saw with you at the prom was something new that I had never seen in your before—a type of calmness... you glowed... you were at peace and you had a type of self-assurance....don't ever lose that...." (Transcripts, May 5, 2009). One of the teachers wrote about Shelly's prom experience in a local newspaper article, reflecting on the positive outcomes of helping students who are struggling and who have less than others: "She {Shelly} stopped watching the floor. She started seeing herself as someone of value" (Newspaper Article, May 19, 2009).

Mrs. Pennington, Shelly's teacher/mentor, demonstrated a selfless understanding of the power of social relationships and unconditional giving as she reflected on her relationship with Shelly:

I didn't realize probably was when we are trying to reach out things like we try to help or assist other people we would have helped ourselves, so that's probably one my biggest things... or um the growth that I have achieved which means that I have seen -what I could be doing as a like a better teacher.
(Transcripts, December 8, 2009)

Mrs. Pennington expressed the personal benefits of giving and receiving help and the value of generalized reciprocity that it described by social capital theorists. During her interview, Mrs. Pennington indicated that she did not expect any personal responses from

Shelly, but that maybe one day in the future Shelly would help someone else because she was herself given help.

For Julie, the understanding of the social contract inherent in a reciprocal relationship was a bit less evident and more difficult for her to express. Julie, from the beginning, indicated that she liked to do everything by herself, and that she didn't want the help of others. At one point when Julie wanted to drop her last block class, she found that Mrs. Stavros agreed, but only if Julie would pick up more hours at work. Julie agreed to this arrangement, but when Mrs. Stavros insisted Julie call her mother and get permission and that she would follow up with her employer, Julie became quite angry and expressed her frustration. Julie eventually complied, however, indicating that she understood that she needed to give something if she wanted to get something in return.

Julie's parents seemed to have a deeper understanding of the norm of reciprocity. Julie's mother said that if Julie expects others to help her that Julie has an obligation to give something back: "...well if you want to be treated like an adult you need to act like one and you can't be some little turd that's gonna mouth back to everybody... and you know we've with both kids... we won't tolerate them being disrespectful" (Transcripts, July 17, 2009).

During the spring of 2009, when Julie was going to adult education, she was non-responsive to efforts to help her. There was frustration on the part of people at the high school and the University facilitator. Julie also announced that she was pregnant and her helpers felt they had been used: "There is the lack of reciprocation that teachers have expressed on three separate and distinct occasions: Mrs. F. and Donna about Julie and her mom; 'Why do we do this when they don't do anything week after week?'" (Field

Notes, July 7, 2009). Although she did not understand or perhaps did not care about giving back to others, Julie did seem to have some curiosity about how people can have a positive social exchange as she describes an incident with a teacher:

Julie: He {the teacher} wanted to know something. I don't even know what it was. And I was telling him, I'm like, I don't know. He would not take that. He would, like, he wouldn't have ... anything like that. So when I asked him for help, he's like, oh, well, I'm busy. I'm busy. So, I freaked out at him. Like, I screamed at him, we got into a huge fight. And then, the next day, I came in, and I was standing next to the window, and I looked back, and his car is getting, he bought me a drawing pad... because I freaked out. This whole thing is like, he's like, wow, he said, you can be a royal b-tch. [LAUGHTER] I was like, I know. I don't mess around when I'm mad. He's like, I know that. He said, 'next time, just tell me you're mad, and I'll stay away.' I said, 'good. Tell the other teachers to do that, too.' So, he brought me flowers, back, and he read it, and, you know, 'we can get through the rest'
(Transcripts, December 9, 2008)

With her parents' support and Mrs. Fairchild's help, Julie pulled through and finished high school with an adult education diploma in June 2010. As Julie said to Mrs. Fairchild: "I have screwed up before but my parents were there for me and they are for me now" (Field Notes, October 26, 2009), indicating that Julie did, in fact, understand the importance of social supports.

Manny engaged in the meetings willingly but was not as reflective about the process or open with his feelings. As he told his group home director, he liked the meetings because "no one is nagging him." Like Julie, Manny liked to avoid conflict and carried a deep resentment about his lack of success and about feeling out of place. He described how some teachers treated him unfairly and singled him out but, unlike Julie, he expressed and seemed to understand that he was responsible for some of the problem with his performance in class:

Well actually ummm it's the effort part... because I don't get it whatsoever...and she {the teacher} hardly knows how to explain it...so I don't get it? Like some of the things we're doing now like I think I might get it but like I don't know...I'm like not going to blame it on her it's just that I don't...
(Transcripts, May 5, 2009)

Manny was talking about his work in an alternative math class, a class designed for struggling students, where there is a 1:8 teacher to student ratio. As we discussed what Manny needed for support in this class, he showed an understanding that there was a need for both teacher and student to put forth effort if the student was to be successful. He indicated that he should not "blame" the teacher, however, he understood that something was amiss because the teacher could explain the material to him in an acceptable manner. He described here an understanding of the reciprocal relationship required for him to put forth the effort as student.

Alex found himself in difficult situations and did not respond positively most of the time we worked with him. At several of his formal school planning meetings, he behaved with respect, and he expressed his understanding of and agreed to comply with most of what was being required of him. During several of our meetings with just his facilitator in school or at home, however, he was much more honest and forthcoming about his resentments, indicating on several occasions that he felt he had complied with what was being required of him, and indicating why he had not complied in other situations. From the perspective of the adults in the school, however, his impulsive and aggressive responses to incidents where he felt threatened or challenged was evidence that Alex could not or would not comply. From the beginning, Alex was in a position of lessened power, fueled by his behavior that appeared threatening to many of the adults and other students in the building. During one of his large school re-entry planning

meetings, Mrs. Stavros was able to get Alex to state what expectations were required of him “Mmhm. Well, you need me to stay out of trouble and like work hard on my work and not like be into like all the drama and issues and stay out of trouble and stay away from all that. And that you have to stay in classes to succeed” (Transcripts, November 25, 2008). While he understood the expectations, Alex was not able to follow through and comply and this dynamic eroded his relationships and trust among the adults in the school.

In a subsequent meeting at his home with Jonathon and me, Alex argued vigorously that he felt he was meeting the school’s expectations:

Alex: {I want them to} give me my full day back like we talked about. I told them about it. I told her I want a full day, she knows that I want a full day. Like tomorrow, I’m not gonna go there (to the group home) tomorrow, cuz I want to stay at school, because my Culinary class is having a test and I want to go there, so I have to miss my class” (Transcripts, January 8, 2009)

Alex felt he had a rational argument and that he was meeting the terms of the “deal.” In many ways his argument was rational. He was doing well in culinary class. Alex’s argument, however, was silenced when he was suspended not long after this conversation took place. He tried to make the case that he was meeting the requirements of the school but the school had a different set of expectations. Despite Alex’s expressed desire to meet the expectations of the school, his reflections on these expectations were generalized and vague, and while he tried to give us the impression that he could do what the school wanted of him, he expressed at other times a disinterest in trying to meet the expectations. Alex’s daily stresses and anxieties overwhelmed him, and he had little in the way of social resources that would allow him to ask for help or to try to give back to obtain the help of others.

While Alex had difficulty understanding and complying with daily responsibilities, his mother understood the norm of reciprocity. During the meeting where Alex's school re-entry program was being discussed, she stated:

Mom: And I know that it hasn't been easy on you, I know it hasn't been easy on the school, the school of dealing with Alex, but Alex, and there's things...and Alex's getting older, Alex's not always gonna be 17, he's gonna be 18 pretty soon. You know, in July he'll be 18 years old. Therefore he's considered an adult. Therefore, he needs, and he knows within his own self what he is expected from here in the school system and what's expected in society. So he knows, he's gonna know there's rules and boundaries and there's no exceptions. That this is what you have to do in order to succeed and to make it, and I know Alex can find that in him
(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Alex's mother was poor, raising her son by herself, she had a disability and a chronic illness, she did not work, and yet she offered a deep and eloquent understanding of the "social contract" operating in her son's situation, and a hope that her son would step up and comply. She did not blame the school as she knew that blaming would not result in more help for her son. She knew that she and her son were in a lesser position and she indicated that much of the responsibility for stepping up and putting in the effort rested with Alex. Alex's mom stated her understanding of the norm of reciprocity again in the following meeting when Alex's school program was finalized:

Mom: Alex can have more and be more and better than I ever could be. So, and that's what I want for him, you know, and I appreciate that this school is giving him another chance and that you've been here too. That you've been right by Alex too. You know, and the whole school, you too Ms. Catano. Alex's needed your support. He's needed support right along with you and the whole, regardless of the issues that are expelled in here because of the disciplinarian part, you know, I understand that too. I guess that I just want to thank you both for doing this and accepting Alex back and giving him another chance. I just want Alex to not, to make you proud, and for him to have that diploma one day.
(Transcripts, December 3, 2008)

There are complexities to this situation. Alex's mother needed Alex to be re-enrolled in school if she was to have her welfare benefits reinstated. It was a matter of her family's survival. Beyond that, however, she expressed her hopes that Alex would succeed and she wanted the school and Alex to know that she understood that Alex needed to reciprocate if he was to be successful, acknowledging his responsibility. As Locker (2007) indicates, individuals from disadvantaged circumstances must bargain to obtain support: "A poor person who lacks power or means of coercion must almost solely on norms of reciprocity or charity to assure that their investment in social capital with a person in a position of greater power brings some type of return" (p. 12). Alex's mom was clearly bargaining and asking for "charity" to convince the school to accept Alex back.

Despite the varied ways that each of the youth reflected upon the need for mutual responsibility and reciprocity, they each understood that reciprocity is a socially valued expectation within a relationship of trust, and that there is an obligation of some sort to respond positively to acts of help. When we first met her, Julie was so disengaged from people in the school that she did not care to reciprocate. Julie started to work hard, however, and responded to the requests of others when her goal was at stake. Alex felt he was reciprocating (and he was trying to the best of his capability), however, many in the school did not view his actions as positive reciprocation. As Stone (2001) indicates:

Reciprocity is the process of exchange within a social relationship whereby 'goods and services' (meaning exchange of any kind) given by one party are repaid to that party by the party who received the original 'goods and services'. Reciprocal relations are governed by norms, such that parties to the exchange understand the social contract they have entered into (p. 30)

Understanding the social contract was an important element of the social interactions between the youth and the adults who were trying to help them, demonstrating that even disengaged youth have the capacity to build productive relationships based upon reciprocity.

Conclusion to Chapter IV

This chapter seeks to demonstrate how the four youth in this study responded with engaged participation when they were involved in a problem-solving and planning process centered on their needs. The chapter also identifies the common features of their engagement and the contexts within which engagement happened. The analysis shows what types of helping efforts were valued by and meaningful to the youth, including social interactions where the youth had greater control and felt heard. The events that highlighted engagement of the youth were often the same events that signaled issues of negative reciprocity, agency and self-efficacy, and control, ideas at the center of the following chapters. The extent to which the youth understood that reciprocity is a social expectation, operating within and influencing the helping relationship, was also evident among the discourses of the youth and the adults. The idea that help provided through one's social networks is imbued with value is at the core of the theory of social capital and was demonstrated through the responses of the youth in this study. The next chapter focuses on the types of interactions that are not valued by the youth, shown by their responses to what they perceived as acts of negative reciprocity.

CHAPTER V

NEGATIVE RECIPROCITY, AVOIDANCE, AND EXCLUSION

“I just hate it when people blame me for something that I did not do...”

Manny, January 8, 2009

There is a dark side to reciprocity. The construct of reciprocity is neutral. In other words, it explains the dynamics of positive social interactions that build trusting relationships as well as negative social interactions characterized by behaviors such as rejecting, ignoring, avoiding, arguing, blaming, labeling, or punishing. Just like positive reciprocity, these interactions are influenced by context, by the perceptions of the givers and receivers, and the power relations that function in the context (Fehr & Gächter, 2000; Gergen, 1980; Keysar, Converse, Wang, & Epley, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, & Narayan, 2000). The experiences and perceptions of the four youth in the study include numerous instances when their social behaviors and their responses to others signaled the presence of negative reciprocity and the norm of reciprocity frequently operated to harm the engagement and participation of the youth in various activities and contexts.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the dynamics of negative reciprocity and moves into a discussion of the contextual elements that were found to be most prevalent when the youth displayed social actions that functioned to allow the youth to avoid (a demand, a situation, a task, among others). The discussion then moves to the contextual analysis, using evidence from the data to illustrate how each youth tried to avoid negative interactions that functioned to exclude or socially isolate the youth from the individuals

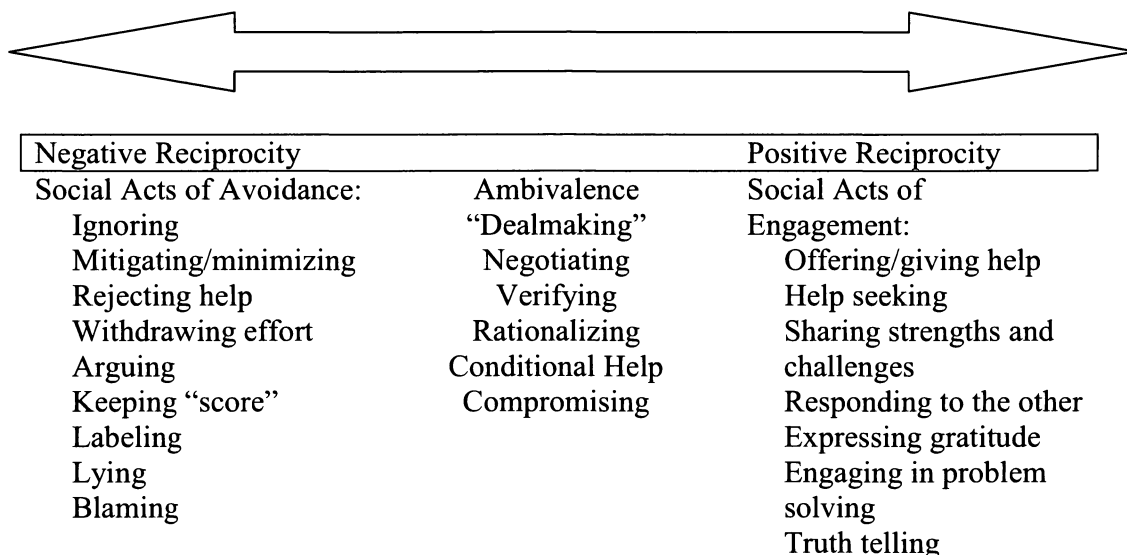
and other resources that could be helpful to them. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the various contexts are connected and ends with a brief discussion of how the adults experienced and constructed meaning regarding acts of negative reciprocity.

Negative Reciprocity

The Model in Figure 13, repeated from the previous chapter, illustrates the types of social actions demonstrated by the youth in the context of what they perceived to be positive or negative acts of reciprocity. The four youth responded with hostility or indifference to relationships and interactions that they felt had little or no value or that could be potentially harmful, threatening, or controlling. As shall be demonstrated, the responses of the youth to negative social processes tended to converge in contexts characterized by reprimands or punishment, criticism, intimidation, or control over their actions and decisions. The youth were also trying to avoid situations where they were being asked to put time and effort into strategies that were irrelevant to them or that they believed would fail, or when there was a demand that they would not or could not meet. The evidence presented in the previous chapter showed how the youth responded positively in social contexts where they saw potential value and support, but the focus of this chapter is on how the efforts of the youth to participate were impaired by contexts that the youth perceived as unsupportive, critical, insurmountable, or uncontrollable. Unfortunately, these negative social actions damaged relationships, created mistrust, and caused others to withdraw their support for the youth.

Figure 13

Model for Acts of Reciprocity



Social norms, ethical belief systems, and the psychology of individuals influence the development of negative social actions. The notion that it is acceptable to use punishment to enforce rules and to protect the majority emanates from consequentialist moral theories. Translated to educational discipline policies, this Discourse (with a capital “D”) of punishment translates into negative consequences for students such as detentions, suspensions, among others, designed to maintain social order and remove the offending student so that the students who are in compliance and who are demonstrating effort will not be disturbed. The rationale for the norm of reciprocity and its enforcement therefore becomes to protect the social good: “Reciprocity is therefore central to many areas of social life, and is crucial for maintaining social order by enabling cooperative exchanges and by punishing antisocial behavior” (Keysar, Converse, Wang, & Epley, 2008, p. 1280).

There is a related belief that school discipline systems are educative; in other words, punishment will act as a deterrent, teach young students how to behave, and will encourage the defecting students how to conform to social norms. This view is based upon the belief that the adults must teach the social norms through rewards and punishments and that the adults know what is best for the developing child or youth. The norms are enforced through discipline policies based upon criteria of behavior that is judged to be undesirable. The problem, however, is that several studies have shown that zero tolerance discipline systems and the associated negative consequences are often distributed unequally among children and youth of color, children with disabilities, and poor children (Brady, 2002; James & Freeze, 2006; Kajs, 2006). In other words, despite the fact that school discipline policies are supposed to be an objective enforcement of social norms, the enforcement of sanctions can be subjective, inconsistent, and unfair.

The subjectivity of negative reciprocity is based upon deontological ethics, that individuals who behave badly and commit wrongful acts towards others should be punished. Negative responses are constructed in the moment between individuals based upon personal slights and perceived insults. Individuals respond with “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” described as distributive justice or the golden rule of reciprocity: “treat others as you would like to be treated.” The intense personal nature of acts of negative reciprocity are reflected by Keysar, Converse, Wang, and Epley (2008): “...social exchange is based largely on the meaning of social actions, rather than on the objective value of those actions. Positive actions of giving are reciprocated in comparable measure, whereas negative actions of taking are reciprocated more selfishly, and may be followed by escalation” (p. 1285). In fact, individuals may respond negatively to the

point where they suffer as a result (André, 2010), and this is evident in many of the negative social responses displayed by the youth in this study.

There is a body of research that has examined teacher-student-teacher responses that influence behavior and effort, including how negative student behavior is met with negative teacher responses that may eventually spiral into an unworkable relationship. Identified as the Transactional Model of behavior (Sameroff, 2000), the idea is that “a complex web of factors contributes to the behaviors above and beyond the simple linear impact of teacher on student (and student on teacher)” (Sutherland & Morgan, 2003, p. 33), and that behaviors designed to avoid negative experiences and interactions can drive the process. The net effect can be unfair treatment of students, as Sutherland and Morgan (2003) indicate: “An unintentional consequence of reciprocal relations can be the differential treatment of students, with the students who in fact need the most attention being neglected by their teachers” (p. 36). All four youth in this study described instances of conflicts with teachers, and all four felt that the treatment they received was unfair.

Motivation and Avoiding

There are multiple theories of student motivation designed to explain why some individuals try harder than others in certain situations. Expectancy-value theories have been conceived and applied to explain how and why people may pursue and invest in certain activities more than others. Eccles and Wigfield (1995) developed a comprehensive theory of student motivation regarding students who have not historically experienced academic success. This model indicates that student effort will be influenced by the individual’s expectations for academic success, the perceived value of the academic tasks, and a general profile of the individual’s characteristics and tendencies.

Given that this model takes into account a student's previous affective experiences when looking at motivation, it is clear that students who have experienced repeated academic failure (such as poor grades, grade retention, poor feedback from teachers) will be likely to avoid the tasks that resulted in a negative experience for the student. Efforts to force or coerce the student to perform the task may result in student behaviors that are designed to avoid the task. Performance-avoidance behavior is consistently associated in the research with negative attitudinal and performance measures, and the students who need academic help the most are very likely to possess a performance-avoidance orientation and therefore, will not ask for help (Middleton & Midgely, 1997; Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001).

Contextual Analysis

The data show that the youth understood and reflected upon the transactional processes about the worth of their efforts, their deficits, why they sought to avoid situations that had historically been unsuccessful for them, why they withdrew effort because they saw little potential for success, and how they avoided work that would not result in proper recognition from or be supported by the teachers and others with whom they had conflicts. The negative responses of the youth in this study were often in reaction to what they perceived as threats or challenges to their selfhood. While the adults may have believed that it was important to try and put effort into certain tasks, the youth often responded with counter-arguments for why they should not extend such effort. There were other times of outright avoidance behavior, such as missed appointments or meetings, ignoring problem-solving discussions, changing the subject, arguing, and shutting down during a certain line of discourse.

The contextual elements that emerged most often when the youth engaged in avoidance behaviors and other types of negative responses include:

- **Histories of Failure**—Each of the four youth experienced difficulties brought on by disability, emotional disorders, histories of academic and personal failures, and these experiences influenced their self-views and perspectives on their prospects.
- **The Work: Not Worth the Effort**—Each youth describes difficulties with school work, and the evidence indicates that each youth withdrew effort when it was clear that they could not successfully perform the work.
- **Overwhelming Problems**— There were instances when the youth expressed frustration at the seemingly insurmountable level of their problems, and each youth refused or bristled at attempts to help them solve their problems.
- **Reprimands, Criticism, and Consequences**—The youth frequently responded to personal criticisms with anger and other avoidance behaviors such as rejecting help and minimizing the need for help. The youth also sought to avoid what they knew would be certain consequences for their actions.
- **Confrontation**—The youth in this study were often at odds with the adults and their peers, and it was difficult to avoid those individuals in school. The youth often reacted with behaviors such as withdrawing, ignoring, or aggression that resulted in discipline problems and further exclusion from school.
- **Lack of Control**—The data will show how the youth avoided putting effort into situations where he or she felt that the control of others or the institutional rules would thwart the success of their efforts.

The youth seemed to know what their difficulties were and shared them with us, particularly when they felt that we needed to know their challenges in order to help them. The problem is that certain events and contexts in the school setting often highlighted their social and academic difficulties and differences. Not unlike the “culture of disability” described by McDermott and Varenne (1996), the deficits of certain children with learning disabilities based upon the school’s structures, learning processes, social norms, recognition systems, and discipline were highlighted and exacerbated in the school setting: “People are only incidentally born or early enculturated into being different. It is more important to understand how they are put into positions for being treated differently” (p. 108). The identification of certain students with failure and lack of ability is amplified by the rigid school systems, rules, and pedagogy that are suited for students with certain capabilities but anathema to others, including the four youth in this study.

There were common and related characteristics of situations where conflict and negative youth responses arose during the planning and helping process. Each youth identified high school completion as a goal, along with other developmentally typical aspirations; however, the gap between the attainment of those goals and their current situations produced major challenges. From the perspective of calculating value and effort, each youth needed to see the connection between their efforts and potential success if he or she were to respond and reciprocate. For these youth, the helping relationship was seen as potentially beneficial when acted out on equal terms around positively-stated goals and provided in such a way as to create equality of control and empowerment. The calculus that reciprocating may result in positive outcomes was

demonstrated in Chapter IV, but the opposite was also true: that there were interpersonal and contextual barriers that made it difficult and at times, impossible for the youth to comply and meet the social, academic, and behavioral requirements of the setting and situation. This section illustrates how, within the six contexts, the youth rationalized their lack of success and avoided situations that they felt were not going to help them. The data show how the youth perceived that their efforts to positively reciprocate and participate were impaired by these contexts. Given that they are in subservient positions to the adults in the school, the youth often knew that they had few options but to engage in actions that were designed to avoid the demands of the adults or of the setting.

Histories of Failure

Although the youth and their parents had agreed to participate in the RENEW process designed to help them with school completion, career planning, and the transition to post-high school, each youth presented with multiple and complex problems that shaped who they were and how they felt about themselves and their prospects. Each youth came to the helping relationship with great ambivalence about being in need of help and support. Their histories of failure and trauma influenced how each youth approached the helping process.

The meaning-making gleaned from the texts in this study is highly influenced by the fact that Shelly, Alex, Julie and Manny had histories of emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD), characterized by Lane and Carter, 2006 as:

...social, behavioral, academic, and vocational skill deficits that ...characterize many youth with EBD {and} can hinder attainment of their post school goals. Socially, many students with EBD experience maladaptive relationships with peers and adults due to acquisition and performance deficits that include limited prosocial interactions, tendencies to misinterpret neutral social cues as hostile, and behavior patterns that impede teachers' abilities to conduct instruction effectively. (p. 66)

Emotional or behavioral disorders are a class or group of disorders that are defined in the educational and mental health communities as much by the functioning of the child as any particular diagnosis, but common diagnoses include Attention Deficit Disorder, anxiety disorders, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, eating disorders, Major Depressive Disorder, Oppositional-Defiant Disorder, among others. The hallmark of these challenges, from the point of view of the professionals, is a hampered ability to build or maintain satisfying relationships with others.

Given an assessment of risk factors for dropping out of high school, all four youth scored high for risk of high school dropout and emotional or behavioral disorders. (See Appendix G.) Shelly and Alex were living in low socio-economic households (both mothers were subsisting on welfare payments). Manny lived in a court-ordered group home placement. Shelly has a serious chronic illness. Alex, Manny and Julie were behind in the credits needed to graduate. All were experiencing school failure, and all were socially isolated. The stressors they faced on a daily basis were significant.

Shelly and Alex were receiving special education services (PL 94-142) which offer educational accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Shelly received special education services because of her recently diagnosed disease and Alex because of a “specific learning disability.” Manny was eligible for “504” educational accommodations (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended), given to students who have illnesses that may impair their ability to learn. Manny’s impairment was related to depression. Julie did not have any special disability-related services. Mrs. Fairchild stated that attempts to convince Julie’s mother to have her tested for a learning

disability in middle school were quickly rebuffed. Julie clearly had engaged in behaviors that indicated the presence of an emotional or behavioral issue.

Shelly, Julie, Alex and Manny had not been experiencing academic or social success in school, and each came to the RENEW planning process with histories of negative experiences and histories that influenced how they saw themselves and how others saw them. These negative self-views are reflected in the d/Discourses as they unfold, and the data will show how sensitive the youth are to certain situations and interactions, and how they often fashioned positions that were rational to them given their past experiences and current set of social resources. Table 1 depicts the discipline and credit histories of all four youth during the school year prior to the study and the year during the study:

Table 1
Youth Academic and Discipline Outcomes¹

School Years	Credits Earned		Office Discipline Incidents	
	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09
Shelly	5.5	9	0	1
Alex	1.0	2.0	34	3 ²
Julie	4.0	5.0	32	14
Manny	1.5	6.0	34	9

¹ Source: Student Transcripts and Discipline Data

²By their own admission, the administrators stopped “writing up” the incidents for Alex, who missed over 60 days of school during the 2008-09 school year.

When we met with them to do their initial “maps” and to establish our working relationship, all four youth told stories of family discord, lack of success in school,

struggles with illness, physical and emotional challenges, negative relationships with teachers and peers, and poor and unsupportive home environments. These experiences have clearly taken a toll on the youth, reflected in how they talk about relationships and future prospects. This section of the analysis focuses on the narratives from the first meetings with the youth to demonstrate how their negative self-views and behaviors were constructed and how each youth tried to deal with obvious hurt and insults.

Shelly talked about her concerns during our first meeting, including the fact that she had an illness that would eventually kill her and that rendered her exhausted most of the time. She also described the discord between her and her sister and the “chaotic” environment at home. She identified math as her weakest subject in school and her support needs in math became an important theme throughout the school year (three math credits are required to receive a high school diploma in New Hampshire). She often talked about the “on again/off again” relationship with her boyfriend and described him as the only person who understood her, and at other times a person who abused and swore at her. During one of our first meetings her boyfriend burst into the room and screamed at Shelly that she must leave immediately because her mom was looking for her. His was a bold act to prove his dominance over her. Asked later about her relationship with Alex, Shelly shrugged her shoulders, unwilling to talk. She was dominated by him much of the time. Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano alternately observed him as openly affectionate with her and at other times dismissive in front of other people. There was a dissonance in Shelly’s early statements. Shelly indicated that one of her strengths was that she could “stand up for myself,” and yet her boyfriend, who was seen as abusive and controlling by the school staff and her mother, seemed to be off limits for

criticism by Shelly. Mrs. Fairchild told us that she often counseled Shelly about the one-sided and abusive nature of their relationship; however, Shelly did not seem to want to see it as such. One exchange illustrates her avoidance of the issue:

Mrs. Fairchild: Are you seeing Alex again?

Shelly: yeah

Mrs. Fairchild: How is your relationship. Is it clear or unclear, or in the middle?

Shelly: Unclear

Mrs. Fairchild: How would you like it to be?

Shelly: {shrugs}

(Transcripts, July 22, 2008)

Relationships were a painful subject for Shelly. She indicated that she had few friends, that she did not get along with her sister, and that her mother was too busy to pay attention to her. Most noticeably absent from her self-described history as she presented it was the trauma her family suffered as the result of her father's abuse of her mother. Shelly clearly left this part of her history out of our initial conversations and never once mentioned it during our 14 months of meetings. It was never our purpose as helpers to counsel students about their personal issues, so we did not press the discussion. In a private interview, however, Shelly's mother described in great detail how her former husband had kept the family in fear for several years, how she escaped the abuse and moved out with the children, how he was imprisoned, stalked her, and threatened the children. This had all happened within the previous five years and was still very evident in the family dynamics. Shelly's family moved three times during the 14 months we worked with her. It is not evident why Shelly left this part of her story out of our conversations. Perhaps it was too painful for her or she did not see it as germane to our work together.

Julie openly discussed her history, many problems, ailments, and her perceived victimization at the hands of her family and adults in the school, despite the fact that Mrs. Fairchild asked us not to ask her about her history because would be “too painful” for her. Julie honed in on her father and brother’s girlfriend with particular venom. Like Shelly, Julie presented a contradiction. She indicated that she kept difficult things inside, but she quickly engaged in a long narrative about the awful things that had happened to her in the previous five years, all during our first meeting:

Julie: It’s just hard, because I don’t even talk about things that happen in my life, like, like I said, I just push everything aside and I don’t think about it until something really [weird?] big happens.

Ms. McGurk: Right. And then it all boils up, and --

Julie: Yeah. It all started when I was 14.

(Transcripts, September 10, 2008)

Despite her apparent self-knowledge about how she liked to hide difficult issues and figure out problems on her own (which explains much of her behavior and some of her conflicts with others), Julie opened up and spoke at length about her many losses and relationship difficulties. Most noticeably absent from her description of her life, however, was any mention of the bullying behavior she perpetrated on other students and she never talked about it in our subsequent meetings. She also did not talk about her discipline problems in school until we got to know her a bit better. Julie portrayed herself as the victim of many abuses, including her own illness (she had a gynecological problem that she worried would prevent her from having children), her conflicts with her father, deaths of relatives and boyfriends, and unfair treatment by teachers. Julie made it clear that the way she wanted to deal with all of her stresses was to avoid the control and demands of others. In one of our first meetings, Julie talked about her mother’s illness and, if her mother got sick or died, how she would escape her father’s control:

Julie: (If my mom dies) I'd be stuck with my dad. So, what I'm going to try to do is, I'm going to try to get emancipated, because if I can do that, then I'll be so much happier. I'm not myself, lately. I can feel, like, I'm not happy. And if I can get away from my dad and live on my own, I'd still, obviously, see my mom every night and everything like that, but it's also about, if anything happens to my mom, I would be forced to run away. I've thought about running away at least four times in my life.

(Transcripts, September 18, 2008)

Manny described a life filled with trouble since he was 11 or 12 years old. During our first meeting he described the murder of his brother, how his parents blamed and rejected him, how he began to get into trouble for drugs and theft, his arrests, how he was placed in juvenile detention, probation violation, and placement in the group home. His young life had been filled with moves from one place to another without the opportunities to form lasting relationships. He described how his parents blamed him for his brother's murder.

He was open about his history and relationships, despite how awful the story and he was also open about his own aggressive and negative behavioral responses. He had great insight into these behaviors, explaining that there were reasons why he got into trouble and why he fought back. For example, he said that a misunderstanding about his curfew caused him to violate probation and how he would shut down when confronted by teachers because he could not concentrate ("I have ADD"). He seemed to be marking time in school and in the group home, however. When asked what he had for credits he said, "I have no clue," and he did not seem too interested in finding out. He described his isolation at the group home and his desire to get out of "the system":

Manny: (Clears his throat) So I don't really know anybody but like half the time I'm like half a year I was there. You know like every October I have a court date for being there, and they tell me 'Oh just a couple of more months, you'll be out, a couple of more months,' they kept saying and now they're making a decision by

next year when I'm 17, the day I turn 17 I'm out on the front porch, I'm out of the courts, I'm out of the system--
(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Manny was cooperative and spoke at length about his history but there was no emotion in his voice. There was an anger and agitation seething underneath the surface, however, that he showed even in our first meeting:

Malloy: Do you have problems with math the subject or you just don't like it or
Manny: I don't, I don't know it's ...it's like *I'll do it*, just everybody has been putting stress on me and it's so much harder and stress on me... that's what's stress related that puts stress on me I don't know

Ms. West: Stress on you how, for schoolwork? Or....

Manny: Yeah, like schoolwork, like I'll bring it home, but they still put stress on me, 'you have to pass this now' and I'll say 'yeah, I know' but it still puts stress on me but you know....

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Manny used the word "stress" five times during this brief exchange, and, although his voice was even and he seemed calm, he was clearly feeling a great deal of pressure from others to stay out of trouble and to get his work done.

Alex also described a long history of broken relationships, and he described how he had been abused by his mother's boyfriends and his older brother, how he would leave his mother's house for days on end, and he described fights, conflicts, and arguments, including major violations for which he had been arrested or for or for which he was being charged. Before we had even had our first formal meeting with him on September 23, 2008, Alex had been suspended for leaving school after arguing with a teacher and, as a result, his school day was shortened from four blocks to two. He came to the table with a reputation as someone who did not follow through, indicated by how Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild talked about previous unsuccessful attempts to help him. Alex engaged in long and rambling descriptions about his poor living conditions, that he was a father and

soon to be a father again, and his need for family, satisfied through fantastic tales about gang membership. Alex blamed and labeled teachers and school administrators in explicitly negative terms. He also talked about how he was flunking his classes, how he was living at a friend's house to avoid conflicts with neighbors and how he had been suspended, all in the first two meetings. There were few social restraints on Alex's dialogue as he jumped from topic to topic, and he often minimized emotion-laden events. Alex wanted us to understand how difficult his life was but he also wanted us to think that he was in control and that he had figured out how to solve his own problems. He presented with inconsistencies, however, and he often provided reasons for why his behaviors were out of his control. For example, during one of our early conversations about fights with his mother's boyfriend, he said:

Alex: I don't care, really, about him. Because every time we, I see him, he, like, gets up and drinking, and gets up to fight me, and I punched him and knocked him out, one hit. I had to fight my stepdad every day. Because, all these people, when I was, like, 13, I was scared of them. I mean, I was scared to do anything. I started... when I was 15, got pissed, really pissed off, took all the anger, and just started, punched him, for the first time. Hit him right in the face. He fell. And I, so I beat him up. I started, I started blacking out. I've been blacking out a lot lately... Well, I'm bipolar. I'm diagnosed, I'll be diagnosed bipolar, I guess, because I got the bipolar. That's why I... when my mind is shook out, I black out...sometimes...I've been this stressed for a while. Everything in my life is so stressful. I live with it.
(September 23, 2008)

All four youth portrayed their lives as chaotic and filled with stress and it appeared they have been living with the stress for many years if not for their entire short lives. In addition to living with chaos and stress, all four youth identified only one or two close friends in school (Manny identified no friends in the school), and few trusted adults. Each youth described conflicts with family members, teachers and administrators. This stress and isolation was a clear signal that they were not part of the social scene at school

and felt alienated at home. Despite their difficult histories, each youth made it clear that they had learned how and were accustomed to dealing with their problems on their own.

As they described their painful memories and negative social experiences, all four youth used language that was designed to minimize the negative impact of those events. Phrases such as “I don’t care,” “I just deal with it,” “I have no clue,” or the lack of any verbal or physical response to empathetic prompts as we discussed their difficult histories, negative social interactions, relationship problems, and difficulties in class or with schoolwork indicated attempts to convince us (and perhaps themselves) that they could deal with the issues and that they were not important. Each youth was trying to normalize his or her experiences and each wanted to portray him or herself as strong, socially capable, and self-reliant. Shelly said that one of her greatest accomplishments was “being able to stand up for myself,” and Julie said one of her strengths was “Dealing with stress. Like its not being a bad thing, always push it aside, and don’t worry about it. I really don’t know. I don’t know.” Alex put forth a portrayal of his aggressive approach to dealing with negative social interactions: “Like, being, I, one of my strengths is being pissed off at people, getting... getting, yeah, getting my way, pretty much.” Manny explained in several different ways that he didn’t like people “getting on me,” for doing school work or work in the group home. There are two relational dimensions to these responses. First, the Discourse of self-reliance and emotional strength is a strong ethic in American culture and the data show that it is operating here. Second, the youth knew that these stories were important but they had made a calculation that we could not change or help them to change many of the social dynamics such as their disadvantaged histories, living with poverty and interpersonal discord and conflicts. The social exchange calculus

meant that, according to each youth, these difficult circumstances were present but it was not “worth it” to talk about them anymore.

Resistance to Being Viewed as Needing Help

Given their histories, all four youth indicated, in general, that the adults were not there to help them. The value of self-reliance, strong within Julie’s family, was demonstrated by her mother’s reluctance to have her tested for a learning disability and in Julie’s own expressed preference to do everything herself. Alex argued that his aggressive behavior was the way he defended himself, and he often talked about how he had his problems figured out.

Givers and receivers in the helping relationship may suffer costs as well as benefits (André 2010; Bracke, Christiaens, & Verhaeghe, 2008; Lu, 1997). Receivers of social supports may experience feelings of inadequacy or dependence, and it appears that the youth in this study felt ambivalent about needing help. Each youth was in trouble in school, at home and in some cases, in the community, and each needed help to function better in those situations. But they also wanted to be in control and argued that there were good reasons why they were in their current circumstances. Each youth expressed ambivalence and sometimes doubt about whether they could or even wanted to conform to the demands of school, making the need for help less relevant. Each youth talked about how certain teachers singled them out and set them up to fail, thus rendering the youth unable to succeed in the class. The youth provided reasons for their failures, often pointing to problems with the school setting, teacher relationships, and classroom environments.

The Work: Not Worth the Effort

During our meetings, Shelly, Julie, Alex, and Manny encountered situations when they said that the strategies offered to them would not work and were different from what they said they needed. For Shelly, this happened at the end of the semester when Shelly began to fall behind in her math after telling us that she probably would fail the class as she had already failed it twice. For Julie, it was the demand that she put more effort into her classes. For Manny, it was putting the effort into his classes when he felt that he was not being given the types of instructional strategies that would help him. And for Alex, it occurred during several instances including when his school day was shortened, when he was told he needed to go to the local group home for one class per day, when his mother told him he should go to bed earlier, or when he was put onto a daily tracking routine to make sure he did not miss school. In most cases the youth succeeded in showing the adults that the strategies being offered would eventually fail.

For example, Shelly consistently told us that passing math was one of her greatest concerns. In the early weeks of the 2008-09 school year, Shelly was experiencing success in math, but then she quickly began to fall behind. Despite their efforts to help her, Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild became discouraged and began to blame Shelly, interpreting Shelly's lack of success in her math class as lack of effort, even after Shelly told us she was likely not to succeed in that class. In a field note on November 19, 2008, I wrote: "Mrs. Catano says 'Shelly can do the math'...intimating that Shelly is refusing to do the work or, for whatever reason, does not do it....But can she?" In January 2009, Mrs. Catano developed for Shelly an individualized math program, including a mix of on-line and alternative class instruction. Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild were putting effort into

helping Shelly, but their own efficacy was tied to Shelly's success, driven in part by the sense that they were embarrassed with possible failure given the involvement of the University, they were frustrated at not being able to change the types of instruction Shelly received, and they had no control over the fact that some teachers would not provide modifications: "Mrs. Catano: Except, the math, she gets, I mean, she can have a modified test. She just, Mike {the math teacher} doesn't modify them at all" (Transcripts, September 10, 2008). By February 2009, one of my memos reflected the dynamic of how the adults were becoming frustrated because of the Shelly's lack of effort:

The evidence is there that she {Shelly} is on a different plane, in a different social space than making things work in her classes.....So we see the teachers who are goal-oriented trying to help this student problem-solve, and I don't see the student reciprocating: another aspect of social capital is reciprocity, and this is where the teachers may respond by pulling back, getting angry and frustrated (Mrs. Fairchild: "I really got mad at her and read her the riot act"). It's that lack of reciprocity- the 'chit' in the bank goes only one way- the students do not create capital for themselves because they do not reciprocate. (Memo, February 10, 2009).

It was clear that Shelly's effort would be greater at some points and less at others due to her illness and frail condition and Shelly told us she needed explanations of the assignments and specific additional instruction if she was to pass math. Shelly had a right to accommodations for her disability as well. The environment was deficient more than Shelly was deficient. Shelly stopped trying for a variety of reasons (including boyfriend concerns) but not because she did not want to succeed. Shelly eventually passed the math course with individualized instruction, modifications, and emotional support from Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano.

Manny also described having difficulty with the instruction and learning environment. At one point when we were problem solving around how to help him pass his math and English classes, Manny stated that he did not do his work, despite the fact that he was in small, alternative classes where he was supposed to receive individualized instruction:

Malloy: Well, how can we help you pass math and English... that's the question...

Jon: What do you need I guess ... that's the question....

Ms. West: What are you struggling with, homework?

Manny: I don't do homework in math.. like I hardly get it, and in English I don't get homework at all like at all....

Jon: Is that a problem ?

Manny: No not a problem..

Jon: It helps them memorize what they're working on

Manny: She just gives us like by default paperwork and just answer the book and do paperwork like here you go do this

Ms. West: Yup OK, so if that's true Manny when you get that packet do you keep it in ms N's room.

Manny: Yup, cause I can't bring the book home, and I need the book to do the paperwork...I brought it home once, and it just came badly

(Later the same meeting)

Ms. West: So she doesn't expect any work to do outside of class?

Manny: No

Ms. West: she gives you the packet at the beginning of every week and you are to and she gives you ample time in class to do it? Is that what I'm hearing?

Manny: You have all 90 minutes to do it. To do whatever – do as much as you can { *he is crushing a soda can to bits- he is tense*}

Jon: How is that working out for you?

Manny: I hate it and sometimes I drop off to sleep. Yup

Ms. West So you fall asleep sometimes.

Manny: Especially today (he is sick), but it was like 5 minutes of class 10 minutes left of class I didn't miss much of class.

Ms. West: Do you socialize too in class? Or is it all...

Manny: I don't socialize in class... I might a little bit

Jon: Is it the work like do you understand it when you read it to do the work?

Manny: Yeah I understand it

Jon: OK

Ms. West So you find it difficult to be motivated to do it in class?

Manny: Yeah

Ms. West: Will that be...

Manny: (interrupts) I was actually getting the worksheets done when I went home and brought it home I was actually doing the worksheets.

Ms. West: What is the study environment like at the group home as opposed to Ms N's class.. what are the restrictions and the guidelines,...

Manny: No talking uhh, I can actually listen to music so it helps me concentrate

Ms. West: What else works there that makes you want to that helps you concentrate?

Manny: like people not talking, that helps so there's no distractions around, you know there might be a little bit but, you know, there won't be that many

Ms. West: OK, so what sorts of distractions are in Ms N's class?

Manny: People talking, people throwing stuff at each other

Jon: Sounds pretty distracting

Ms. West: How many people are actually doing work in there?

Manny: Two, three, maybe four

Jon: Out of how many?

Manny: 10, maybe 12

(Transcripts, December 9, 2008)

Manny described how the instructional methods in this alternative class—getting worksheets that he was expected to do independently—did not work for him. He also described a classroom environment that was filled with distractions. He did not blame anyone, but he gave several reasons for his lack of effort: he did not understand the work and he could not concentrate in a chaotic learning environment. The work was aversive to him: “I hate it.” He also described how he no longer tried to do his English work because, when he tried to do the work by bringing the book home, he violated a rule and “it just came badly.” To Manny, it was not worth the effort to try to do the work, given the way it was assigned and what seemed to be a lack of direction and instruction in class. Although Manny was not diagnosed with a disability (although his records show that he qualified for special education services in elementary and middle school), he clearly had attention issues that were not being regarded by the alternative education teacher.

The math curriculum at Emmerton High School became a point of difficulty for Alex, Shelly, and Manny as we worked with them. Students in New Hampshire must

complete three math classes in order to graduate with a regular diploma. During a meeting with Manny, Ms. West, Jenny from his group home, and the University staff at the end of the 2008-09 school year, Manny continued to struggle with math, and Ms. West empathized with why Manny shuts down and stops trying:

Ms. West: and I do, you know, I do I do sympathize with not knowing math, and feeling like why bother... Why bother you just don't get it and you go into your shut down you know go into your shut down mode or socialize or whatever that looks like...
(Transcripts, May 5, 2008)

After the meeting, however, Ms. West pulled me aside and told me how she thought it was the math curriculum and instruction that was part of the problem: "After the meeting Ms. W tells me about how she thinks IM 1 {Integrate Math 1} is a big problem for a lot of kids. She intimates that it really isn't Manny's fault that he can't do the math..." (Field Notes, May 7, 2009).

During the same meeting, Ms. West and Jenny, Manny's group home support person (who helped him with his math homework and knew the curriculum), talked about how the math curriculum at Emmerton was difficult to teach and to learn:

Ms. West: I agree I mean that's the difficulty of the curriculum

Jenny: Yup

Ms. West: Because once you learn the concept it's not as though we... you...like typically in math classes like when we all went to school is was like, you know drill, drill drill drill drill you know once you learn the concept you practice, practice, practice you'd go home with like 20 problems with the same concept to practice out but that (the Emmerton math) homework isn't like that at all, it's more like... umm you might have a couple of problems that practice the concepts then it might be a word problem that practices the concept and then another old skill thrown in so its not like... its not really ... linear learning or practice learning so I think-

Jenny: And it changes from topic to topic where we used to have like algebra for a year and that's all we did, we didn't go from different concentrations to---
(Transcripts, May 5, 2008)

It is clear that the teachers recognized that the context, instruction, and pedagogy being used to teach this course were faulty, and yet Manny was blamed for lack of effort and ability. Again, it was the instructional environment that was deficient and Manny's learning needs were not addressed. He suffered great self-doubt and failure as a result of that deficient environment.

Alex had similar problems with math. Early in the school year, Mrs. Fairchild talked about Alex's insight into his own avoiding behavior around math:

Mrs. Fairchild: He just hates math, he doesn't get it, [finally?] he said, "I gave him {the teacher} a hard time, and I know I do, but it's just because I hate math." So, maybe in that class, he does it to avoid --he likes him, as a teacher, but he hates math. He said he's a good teacher...and that's Alex's, really, only goal right now, he doesn't know how he's going to do it, because he says the teacher is fair, I give him a hard time, and he's able to tell me, I give him a hard time because I don't want to be in math. But he's a fair teacher. He was honest (Transcripts, September 10, 2008)

Later in the year, Alex was supposed to complete his math credit by going to individualized tutoring at the local group home, which had been set up primarily to keep him out of school for most of the day. He argued that he should not continue to attend his alternative math class because he knew he was failing the class:

Alex: Mrs. Catano heard it, Ms. Stavros heard it, and he (math teacher) said I'm failing that class. I won't go if I've already failed it.

Jon: The {group home} said he {Alex} would get credit for it if he did the work

Alex: Yeah... it's the class it's where we do nothing—

(As we pressed Alex about continuing his alternative math class)...

Alex: My school stuff is fine- my school stuff is fine – I don't need your help anymore- good- done

Malloy: So you want to make it go away

Alex: Have I been to my school yes, ---- have I been to my classes- yes, is, if I don't go to the stupid {alternative class} it doesn't matter. That's after...Like 7 more days, I won't have to deal with that class any more

Jon: Yeah, I don't think you'll have to go with that to the {group home} and I think if you're doing really well with the culinary,

Alex: Yup you can't say I'm a failure at that

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex did not see the point of going to math class at the group home, he saw no reason to put effort into a class that he had already failed, and he was clearly having conflicts with the group home staff. Alex began to soften his position when we explained that he needed to show good faith by going to the class, but he still didn't see the utility of it. For Alex, he was making a cogent argument that he was not a failure in everything, but that there was no reason to continue to attend his math program if he had already failed it. He did not return to that class and did not receive a math credit for that semester.

The youth's responses to the high likelihood of failure included avoidance behaviors such as skipping the class, shutting down in the class or not doing the work. It is important to note then, that the students chose to withdraw effort and argued against putting effort into situations that lacked value for them or that they believed would end in failure. The youth knew that the problem was a mismatch between their needs and the instruction or social demands of the setting. Despite their desire to succeed there were points where, if the effort was met with constant failure, it was a rational choice to stop trying. Unfortunately, the adults often portrayed this dynamic as a failure of the youth.

Another example of how effort was withdrawn but with different characteristics was when Julie was "getting away with" leaving school early by leaving her last block painting class almost every day. Julie told us about this when she felt we might find out by looking at her progress report. Julie indicated that us that "I can't stay the whole day," and she rationalized that she could make up the lost credit for the class that she had been skipping. She indicated that it was only a half credit, that it was not a required course, and that she could make up the credit elsewhere:

Julie: I usually draw circles, I don't know I not have to stay in school and paint-would have to stay in school everyday,, I can't do that.

Donna: What was your ultimate hope? What were you thinking would happen?

Julie: I was hoping we would get a letter in the mail, that my report card lately... and that my mom would not see it... that was the letter that said I was doing good that's why I check the mail every day

Malloy: So you don't really care to work on trying to resurrect that class. (14:40)

Julie: Not really, not for a half credit if it was a full credit I would probably wouldn't have done it but it's a half credit and worse comes to worse I'll try to make it up.

Malloy: Do you get into any problems because you leave early? Leave the grounds?

Ms. McGurk: Well if you get caught you get in school suspension?

Julie: Yeah but I have not been caught. I do it every day (laughs)

Donna: So the night classes at adult ed...

Malloy: Yeah

Julie: That's why I am saying like I was talking to Mr. H about it and if I stay here I want to get suspended ...

(Transcripts, December 2, 2008)

Through this dialogue, Julie was beginning to form a rationalization for why it made sense for her to drop her painting class. She was making it clear that she wanted to avoid classes ("I want to get suspended"), that she was getting away with it, and that it was only half a credit so it was no major issue if she dropped the class. She also described how she intercepted the mail so her parents would not find out. She was making a decision about where to put her efforts, based upon her immediate desire to get out of school early each day. She was leaving class early anyway, and she made it clear that she could not be persuaded to keep going to the class since she had probably failed it.

There were other numerous examples of how the youth argued for different strategies than what the adults were offering or, at least, not to pursue a strategy that they believed would fail. Each youth told us how and why the strategies being offered would fail, especially when they wanted to pursue an alternative strategy and were gaining nothing of value (in their view) from continuing to put effort into a particular activity.

Further, given what they had experienced before and their powerless position to change the situations, the youth were frequently right about the outcomes.

Overwhelming Problems

The four youth were continuously dealing with significant challenges both in school and outside of school, and despite the fact that they were quite open about the issues in their lives, they often came to school overwhelmed by the barriers they faced and unable to pinpoint the causes or address them with specificity. During these times, the youth became defensive, withdrawn, labeled their problems as originating with the school or with other people, or lashed back. Mrs. Fairchild addressed this directly with Shelly when Shelly was putting little effort into her schoolwork and seemed to be disengaging:

Mrs. Fairchild: oh no, are we going to, you know, the grades kind of slipped a little bit, and that must've been pretty overwhelming for you, too, wondering. And sometimes, when those things happen in your life, what's your reaction? What do you do, sometimes, when things get overwhelming? ---

Shelly: Shut down.

Mrs. Fairchild: Do you tackle it, or do you avoid it?

Shelly: Avoid it.

(Transcripts, February 3, 2009)

During our fifth meeting with Julie, we began to talk about the actual number of credits she needed to graduate. Julie wanted to graduate early, but she only had 25% of the necessary credits and was well into her third year in school. During the conversation, we began to problem solve and it became clear to us that Julie would not be able to graduate early with her current schedule and missing credits. This is when Julie began to disengage and finally began to blame the school:

Malloy: When do you want to graduate, then?

Julie: As soon as I can.

Mrs. Fairchild: OK. Some students can graduate, if they have all their credits,

that first, after the first semester of their senior year. So, in January.

Malloy: So, she'd need another eight credits. At the very least, worst case scenario, if you were able to do all of this, you're going to graduate on time.

Mrs. Fairchild: [LAUGHTER] She's looking at, I want to graduate early. But you can graduate on time. Which is a great goal.

Malloy: Don't be too excited about getting out in the real world too early, anyway. [LAUGHTER]

Julie: Better than in here. It's like jail.

(Transcripts, October 7, 2008).

Julie wanted more than ever to get out of school but the problems seemed overwhelming to her, so she began to label, blame, and shut down. As the conversation continued, Julie gave one word answers and avoided our probing because she was angry about the revelation that she needed more credits than she thought and that she may not be able to graduate early. As the conversation progressed, she told us how she was overwhelmed with responsibilities at home and at work and as we continued to problem solve with her, she re-engaged with the conversation and talked about how she could gain more credits through adult education. Julie's self-advocacy eventually led to a compromise with the school district that allowed Julie to obtain an adult education diploma.

Alex was often reacting in a way that indicated that he was overwhelmed. He would generalize his anger, blame, label and dismiss suggestions and attempts to help him problem solve. During the third week September of 2008, Alex was suspended for leaving school early after a confrontation with his study hall teacher. And a large meeting was called to review his school day schedule and program. Mrs. Catano had already decided that Alex would have a shortened school day, and she called in the principal, truancy officer, Mrs. Fairchild, the director of a specialized program for at-risk students (Mrs. Black), the school nurse, me, and the University facilitator, Jonathon.

Alex's mother could not attend. Alex came into the room in a poor mood, and he began to talk to Mrs. Black:

Alex: {smiling}: "Oh, OK so I am going with you now?" {He knows about her program}
Mrs. Black: "We don't know yet. Is that OK?"
Alex: "I don't care"
{The truancy officer explains that we are waiting for his mom and Mrs. Catano}.
Alex: "I don't feel good. I have a headache and I feel sick" {He is calmer than usual. More subdued}
(Field Notes, September 23, 2008)

Alex did not want to be in this situation and so he openly feigned indifference. As the conversation progressed, Mrs. Catano wanted to find out if Alex was taking care of his mental health issues, counseling, and his mother's requests. He responded by using profanity to label his dislike for school and his teachers.

Mrs. Catano: "What about your meds- your Zoloft. Your mom said you decided to stop. And she wants to go to counseling"
Alex: "I don't give 2 sh-ts about school. School is hell. I don't care about being in school. I want to get My GED"
Mrs. Catano: "It's hot and cold with you. Last week you wanted to graduate."
{We talked that he has to stay in school according to his court order (CHINS petition)}
Alex: "F-ck, b-llsh-t"
Mrs. Catano: "Morning seems good for you" {Mrs. C talked about how his morning classes are OK. I ask about the math credits (he needs 3 math credits to graduate).
Alex: "I passed Foundations for Math. What about that North program? I want to try that?"
(Field Notes, September 23, 2008).

Alex was unable to concentrate or problem solve during this conversation, as the situation was laced with so many elements that overwhelmed him. He was not prepared for the meeting, he did not know what was going on, his mother was not there to support him, he had decided not to stay at home because of a dispute with a neighbor, he was being reprimanded, and he was not in a position of control. The various questions on

multiple fronts put Alex in a defensive position, and the only response he knew how to give was to swear, label, and avoid.

Later in the school year, Alex was suspended for ten days because of an altercation with the assistant principal that began when a teacher asked Alex to turn off his cell phone in the cafeteria. The situation escalated into a major, personal, and profanity-laden exchange. Jonathon went to Alex's house to talk about this and try to re-engage with Alex who had not been returning Jon's phone calls. I recorded my reflections about this incident in my field notes:

I don't think he {Alex} knows how to do anything but fight back when he is threatened....he does not know how to comply to a request like that like a reasonable person....he feels the rejection, he needs the control, the need to confront, etc. I feel bad, because he is using up more and more of any social "good will" that may be left in the school and I worry that they will give him an ultimatum

(Field Notes, February 23, 2009)

A few weeks later, Jon and I went to Alex's house again. Alex was dressed up in a dress shirt and pants, and he was lying in his bed with the shades drawn (it was 11:30 in the morning). He had just been to another school meeting to plan his re-entry after being suspended. There was another young man sitting next to Alex as he lay on the bed. Alex was unresponsive to Jonathon's questions about continuing to work together:

Jon: And I've been by and try to run into you here or in school and I'm really starting to get concerned cause you haven't been able to meet me for a while now and you need to talk us. Do you want to keep planning or are you, where are you at right now with this?

Alex: I don't know I just, I got back into school so (He speaks with a low tone, his voice has no energy)

Jon: You were suspended yeah I remember that yeah I came by the week you got suspended and I came back last week too – and I just really need to know on your part if you want to continue working with me or not {He is supposed to work with Jon as part of his plan}

Alex: Not really but I have to I guess

Jon: If you want to keep working I can work with you but I need you to commit to that because I haven't been able to see you for almost I think it's close to a month now

Alex: well I don't want to work with you anymore I'm good now, I'm working on it by myself.

(Transcripts, March 3, 2009)

Alex was avoiding working on his plan as the issues he was dealing with were beginning to pile up. He had received no credits for the first half of the year, he had been arrested twice, incarcerated, he had quit school and missed a month in the fall, and he had been suspended three times. He was completely overwhelmed by the issues and had shut down.

One final example of avoidance when overwhelmed was when I went with Manny to help him register in his new school after he was released from the group home and discharged from the court order. A staff member from the group home was there, along with the guidance counselor at the new high school. I recorded Manny's responses in my field notes:

I asked him to describe for the guidance counselor what he has been doing with us this past year- he shrugged and smiled and pointed to me- I talked about his planning and how he spoke at a couple of conferences.....the counselor then said "describe the old Manny" he said "getting into trouble, etc." and the new Manny: "I don't like people getting on my back- and I learned that if I'm good they stay off my back"

Manny was cold, unemotional- he doesn't want to take advantage of what the old school is willing to do for him- he seems unemotional, and I once again feel sad- signing up at a new school would normally be something a parent would do with a child but not for him- it's like he's alone.....

(Field Notes, November 5, 2009)

These data show that instances when the youth showed no emotion, did not respond, displayed a sense that they "don't care," generalized the problems, blamed others in vague ways, or were unable to problem solve, were often attributable to being overwhelmed by their challenges, interfering with their ability to engage with others in a

constructive manner. As a result of their feelings that the problems were too difficult or numerous, the youth often lashed out, sought to blame others or the situation, and did not participate in problem solving because they could not muster the energy or see the possibilities of success.

Reprimands, Criticism, and Consequences

Unfortunately, many youth with emotional or behavioral disorders have more disciplinary and academic problems in school than do typical students (Krezmein, Leone, & Achilles, 2006) and Shelly, Manny, Julie, and Alex often found themselves in situations that required disciplinary or academic interventions. The negative reaction of adults, combined with a potential negative response by the youth, led to a cycle of negative interpersonal interactions and punishment. The data here show how the youth often tried to avoid criticism, reprimands and lecturing, often by ignoring the adults or, at times, by being verbally aggressive and arguing in order to make the conversation stop. These situations and behaviors were often interwoven with avoidance of tasks that each youth found unproductive, uncontrollable, least desirable, or insurmountable.

Shelly was the recipient of a lecture from Mrs. Fairchild when she began to disengage and was failing her math class in January 2009. Shelly and Mrs. Fairchild had a close and trusting relationship, and so this encounter was particularly painful for Shelly, who hunched her shoulders and could not look at us as Mrs. Fairchild confronted her with an accusatory tone:

Mrs. Fairchild: Do you have an idea, Shelly, at all, how you made out?

Shelly: Kind of.

Mrs. Fairchild: Huh?

Shelly: Kind of, yeah.

Mrs. Fairchild: Kind of, could you update me, kind of? Because I really am not sure, I'm confused. [OVERLAPPING VOICES] Well, no, it's so we're not

disappointed, it's this some more, just so we know where we, what you think you're getting in math, you know?

Shelly: Yeah. C

Mrs. Catano: A C? No. An incomplete
(Transcripts, February 3, 2009)

Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano could have printed out Shelly's progress report and shared it with her, but instead they used an accusatory strategy that put Shelly on the spot and forced her to give an answer that was not true. Shelly did not want to disappoint Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano. In my field notes I document Mrs. Catano's angry response at what she viewed as Shelly's lack of cooperation with the plan to help her pass her math class:

Mrs. Catano says she {Shelly} has failed math: "she never brought in her math book- she lied to the teacher and the teacher is really angry with her." ***OK, so here's what bothers me about that- why does she use the word "lie"? I think that perhaps Shelly is powerless- she tells us what she thinks we want to hear but she cannot come through. It's not defiance but it is perceived that way.*** She wrote a poem to Mrs. Fairchild that was very brief with rhymes- "thank you for believing in me" There you go, this is what she wants. In facilitation, then, I will try to step back and revisit her goals. Let's see if she can tell us what she really wants.....

(Field Notes, February 10, 2009)

Shelly was not invested in or was avoiding the issue of what had happened with her math binder, and she "lied" to the teacher to avoid reprimands and the adult disappointment that would likely result. Additionally, Shelly did not feel she had the power to tell her teacher or Mrs. Catano that she did not have her math binder or did not finish it, so she avoided the confrontation by lying about it. If Shelly respected the teacher and felt safe she would have been more likely to tell the truth. Underlying the situation, Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild told us that Shelly was seeing Alex again and they were really worried about his negative influence on her. Mrs. Catano reacted to Shelly's disengagement with anger and she personalized Shelly's behavior, in part

because of her own investment of time and emotion in this situation. We don't know that Shelly what said was a "lie," but perhaps Shelly simply could not do the work the way it was given to her. What these exchanges show is that Shelly wanted to avoid this situation completely. Several weeks later, however, Shelly took a positive and proactive step and told Mrs. Fairchild that she wanted to meet and revisit her plan as it was not currently working for her.

Julie was quite clear that she did not like others to scrutinize what she was doing, that she liked to work by herself and that she did not like interaction with others, especially interactions designed to give her direction or critical feedback. Julie labeled her relationship with her father as particularly difficult, stating that he was critical of her actions. Julie was able to adjust her approach with her father, however, when she needed his help and consent to leave Emmerton High School and enroll in the adult education program. Julie knew that if her failures were exposed it would hurt her argument that she should be given this option. She strategized with her mother about how to approach her father to gain his support:

Malloy: {to mom} ... And then, we have to convince your husband, right?

[LAUGHTER]

Julie: Yeah, we can't hang up any posters {referring to the flip charts}, we can't say I screwed it up, we can't talk about credits --

(Transcripts, December 9, 2008)

Later in the year, when Julie transitioned to all adult education classes, she started to miss more of her meetings with us, and she was clearly avoiding all of us later in the term, behavior I observed in my field notes:

Donna {the University facilitator} told me that Julie was a half hour late for their meeting- the new counselor (Mary) talked about how Julie is lying to people, etc. The principal is upset...Julie is getting a 44 in Biology *I am sick, this isn't working and I know Julie is touchy about this...*

I talked with Donna about how I think Julie has a learning issue that she is avoiding... Donna totally agrees. ...We need a reality check with her...

Donna indicates that the principal and tutor are “angry” at Julie for manipulating them- they have put in a great deal of time and trusted Julie and they are feeling upset about her lack of response to them...

(Field Notes, May 15, 2009).

One week later, Julie sent a text message to Donna from her adult education class:

“Sent: May 21, 2009 7:09 PM Hey donna its julie, i need your help with biology..im in over my head :(Sent from my Verizon Wireless BlackBerry.” Julie was now in a crisis and was reaching out for help. Julie had been avoiding dealing with her failure in class and had not been forthcoming with the adults who were trying to help her because she wanted to avoid the reprimands that she knew she would receive. The adults responded with the perception that Julie was lying to them and they became angry and frustrated as a result.

Shortly after her problems in the adult education biology class surfaced, my field notes indicated how Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Stavros began to withdraw their support for Julie’s plan, how Julie began to blame her boyfriend for her failures, and how her mother rationalized Julie’s lack of success:

Mrs. Fairchild fills me in on her meeting with Julie and mom. Mom came in first and then called Julie to make sure she was coming. Mrs. Fairchild said Julie’s mom doesn’t think she has a learning issue but is just distracted and gets into relationship distractions....

Mrs. Fairchild said she told Julie that what was going on wasn’t working and that she could not support the current plan... the plan is to go back to school for part of the day in the fall and adult ed for electives.... Julie needs to find a job and has applied to a Pizza place- her mom knows the owner so she thinks she will get the job... Mom wants to be at every meeting- they want to meet over the summer- Julie started to blame her boyfriend for her lack of follow through....ME: “Well, you can always find someone to blame..”

(Field Notes, June 3, 2009)

Julie's mother knew that success of Julie's plan required support from Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Stavros, and so she wanted to be at the meetings. Julie could not admit her mistakes; she avoided the disapproval of her parents and the other adults, and avoided admitting she was in error by blaming her boyfriend for her distractions. (Julie broke up with her boyfriend in July 2009.)

As stated earlier, Alex had few filters on the content of or his emotional responses in conversations with us. During one of our first meetings with Alex, he was quite clear that he did not like being reprimanded or lectured: "Mr. Quinn got really mad, and Ms. Catano was really rude about it. I could have flipped out on Mr. Quinn, but I flipped out on Ms. Catano instead. I hate it when teachers run their mouth out on me." (Field Notes, May 22, 2008). For Alex, "running their mouth out" meant he was being criticized and he did not want to be singled out. Julie used the same term to describe how teachers lectured or criticized her.

It is important to note that Alex controlled his emotions in large school meetings, often showing cooperative behavior, remorse about his actions, and frequently explaining how he would try to do better the next time. In his meetings with us he was much more defiant, accusatory, and resistant to suggestions. He knew that he needed to be cooperative the large meetings with the principal if he were to gain the school's trust to keep him in school and to put fewer restrictions on his school program. He was trying to work within the system, knowing his only option was to cooperate if he was to get what he wanted from the school, much of which was to try to avoid confrontation and criticism. For example, at one of the larger school meetings to plan his re-entry after having been suspended, Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild suggested that Alex attend the

anger management group facilitated by Mrs. Fairchild. To illustrate their point, Mrs.

Catano noted an incident that had just happened that morning:

Mrs. Fairchild: how about this morning

Mrs. Catano: This morning, you're swearing...

Alex: (Mrs. C is still talking) Oh ohhhh yeahhhhh well

Mrs. Catano: this stuff in school but that was just but I'm talking about the stuff you've had in the past---

Alex: It was awkward, it was awkward what I had today (MRS C is talking at same time)It was

Malloy: What set you off ?

Alex: It was between Mrs. ummm R and the officer, that lady, I don't know her name I forget her name

Jon: Ms Penny?

Alex: yes Mrs. Penny. One said I did something wrong and the other said I didn't do something wrong, and then the other switched off and said I did something wrong and the other one didn't and I said,,,, 'whatever I like I'm not' like hash! So I'm like 'I'll call my mom' and my mom's boyfriend over the school and they talked to him

Mrs. Stavros: So who talked to him, Mrs. Penny or?

Alex: Mrs. Penny talked to him and then she was like 'Ok' and I went to class (Transcripts, March 24, 2009)

Although Alex was being put on the spot and was directly confronted about his behavior, he responded and explained his behavior in a reasonable manner without getting angry. At other times, however, and especially in interactions with his mother when she lectured or criticized him, Alex would react with extreme anger, shouting and using profanity. He wanted her to stop criticizing him. It is reasonable to assume that he was embarrassed that she was talking critically about him in front of us. An angry exchange between Alex and his mother after he had been suspended for the second time during the school year illustrates Alex's desire to avoid criticism:

Jon: Yeah, I don't think you'll have to go with that to (that class) and I think if you're doing really well with the culinary...

Alex: Yup you can't say I'm a failure at that

Jon: No I don't think we do

Alex: But you tell her (referring to his mother), she says I'm a failure at my classes

Mom: Alex, I'm not saying you're a failure at anything!

Alex: Yeah

Mom: I'm just afraid that you're gonna turn around and do exactly what you did before (Alex interrupts, he's yelling at her) and drop out again

Alex (yelling over her): You don't know what will happen, that ain't gonna happen OK? OK? Shut up,

Mom: Yeah OK

Alex: I'm gonna go to school and I've been going to classes, so

Jon: What she's just worried she just wants you to do well—

Alex: What – you know what's gonna happen- I'm gonna go back to my classes, so...

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex was deeply hurt by his mother's criticism, and, while he heard both negative and encouraging feedback, he wanted to stop the conversation about his mistakes because it added to his insecurity and doubt about his hopes to be successful. Alex wanted others to see him as capable and in control and he did not seem to like being out of control, and yet, that was how he often found himself. Alex would not participate in support that was designed to help him gain more control. He attended Mrs. Fairchild's anger management class for only 3 weeks, he attended her social skills class for only a few weeks, and he refused to go to the mental health center (until a judge made it a condition of his probation).

Manny also made it clear that he did not like the demands of others: "I don't like people getting on my back—and I learned that if I'm good they stay off my back" (Field Notes, November 5, 2009). What was most interesting were his insight into the fact that if he was "good" he would avoid the demands, and perhaps criticism, of others. Manny was also very clear that he would shut down when teachers were critical, indicating that this was better than what he used to do: "I'll like run into like I'll get mad at something, you know but I won't flip out and swear at teachers like I used to" (Transcript, January 8, 2009). According to Ms. West and his group home manager, Manny often avoided

putting effort into a task, and this frustrated the adults. Manny was rarely hostile or aggressive towards teachers during the year that we worked with him. Manny explained, however, how some of his resistance emanated from the low expectations of his teachers:

Manny: A few teachers, to me they make us sound like we know nothing at all, that I come to class and pay attention but I never do my work, so its treating me like I'm dumb, that what it feels like to me

Malloy: Talking down to you

Manny: Yeah, 'I know what you're doing you're dumb' like there were a couple of worksheets that we did and he said 'how did you know to do these, I bet these are wrong,' and I said 'I'm done' and he said 'they can't be right' and he checked them and every one was right

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

The youth clearly perceived the criticisms of teachers as an embarrassment, and they did not want to be portrayed in front of their peers or the other adults as “dumb,” from low-class families, or as somehow deficient or different from the other students. The youth sought to avoid or fight back from these embarrassments with behaviors such as covering up their mistakes (by “lying”), shouting, arguing, blaming, withdrawing effort, and shutting down to escape the criticism. These behaviors may also be seen as the only way the youth had to defend themselves and to get back at the offending other.

Confrontation

Each of the four youth talked about incidents with peers and adults that were humiliating, seemed unfair, and laden with conflict. Conflicts with adults and peers is not unusual among adolescents; however, youth with emotional and behavioral disorders find themselves in serious and continuous interpersonal conflicts more often than typically-developing youth (Sabornie, Cullinan, Osborne, & Brock, 2005). These conflicts created a cycle of events and interactions that worked to destroy the youth's relationships with adults and peers and led to greater social isolation and exclusion. This

section of the analysis demonstrates how these social processes developed for the youth and how the youth perceived these events.

Julie indicated that it was the school culture that was pushing her out the door, and during one our conversations about the climate at school, Mrs. Fairchild agreed:

Mrs. Fairchild: I don't want to use you, at all, for a wider-school issue. But I'm hearing, one of the things, one of the things that is pushing you out the door, is the sarcasm and the way teachers speak to kids. And your mom -

Julie: I don't think it's just teachers to kids.

Mrs. Fairchild: Well, and that's the other thing is, also, the way kids create drama and conflict. Those are the two things. It's not that you can't do the work. It's the attitudes in the building that exist. And that is a far larger plan, beyond just what we can provide, in the support. So, I, but I feel like it's affecting you, and probably so many others. And I really need to sit down, and I need to talk to Mrs. Stavros about that. But I don't want to do that unless I have your permission to do that, because I probably would like to use some things as an example.

Julie: You can tell her. I don't care.

(Transcripts, December 9, 2008).

This passage reflects how Julie had divested herself from school and wanted to avoid the school's social scene entirely by finishing school early or attending classes somewhere else. Julie's mother, who was at the meeting, agreed that the atmosphere in the school was filled with hostility and conflict. At the same time, however, Julie was engaging in bullying behavior against other girls. Research indicates that bullying behavior allows students to gain power and attention (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003), commodities that Julie did not feel that she possessed in the socially-dominant school culture. One of my research memos reflects the contentious dynamic between Julie and the school:

Julie's mother is as deeply hurt about and angry at the school as is Julie- the family is trying but there seems to be a message given to the family that they are not "as good" as other people are... I also see that Julie will not work for a person she doesn't like- she makes up her mind about people and seems to turn that person into the enemy.

(Field Notes, December 9, 2008)

Julie did not feel empowered to confront what she viewed as assaults on her family and herself, so she sought to assert her anger by victimizing other girls and being rude to teachers, whom Julie felt were treating her unfairly and singling her out. Julie was seeking to avoid these conflicts with others by leaving school altogether and by graduating early so she could prove people wrong. Her avoidance was her retribution for what she viewed as harm done to her by others.

Alex also had a strong aversion to consequences and confrontations with adults and with peers. One illustration was when Alex's English teacher explained how Alex tried to use her to get out of trouble. His teacher understood that Alex has a strong need to get out of trouble and avoid confrontation, and yet he gave the teacher a reasonable response when she refused to cover up for him:

Jon: He's gonna find the loopholes.

Malloy: Yeah.

English Teacher: And if he can't find it, he's gonna spend time when you think you're teaching him, he's spending the time trying to figure out the loopholes. Because I was actually amazed when he, you know, I got summoned to the office by 4 people. And there was actually, he actually got one adult to come up and come to my door and ask me, "Was Alex in your room yesterday, because he claims he was". I mean, you know, and it went on and on and on. And I said, "Well, he could have been, and that sounds true. Yes he did say hello to me when I was, but I don't remember this". Well, it's sort of like, give me a break you know?

Malloy: All that time spent.

English Teacher: All that time. But I mean, can you imagine? Getting another adult to go ask another adult. He knew enough not to come to me, I mean he had already figured it out.

Malloy: That's a skill.

English Teacher: And then we met, after that in here when I came in looking for something else. And I said, "Oh Alex," I said, "Funny I should see you here, because I just had a number of adults page me, talk to me, and ask me if I'd cover your you know what, third block, and I'm not going to." And I said, "Because, frankly, you know talk to me, talk to me, but I don't remember you being with me third block, cuz I was subbing for somebody who went to a funeral, so it's not coming to me Alex". And then he kind of laughed and he said, "Well, you know,

I was in the room, honest to God, I did go, I'll show you the notes, I took them from the board because I forgot to take them". And I said, "Okay, but was I there?" "You weren't there." I said, "So why would you think you could use me to cover yourself, you know, I'm not gonna do it Alex, I can't, it's not honest". So then, that's when he said, "Oh, well you can still be my teacher". Oh gee, thanks!

(Transcripts, September 18, 2008)

In another part of this interview, Alex's English teacher described how Alex went to great lengths to avoid confrontation. Unfortunately, Alex was often not successful and was in frequent conflict with others. Although Alex liked to present himself as the aggressor, the conflicts often began when an adult or peer confronted him. Alex quit school in October, 2008 because another student in his culinary arts class accused Alex of inappropriately approaching her younger sister and threatened him with retribution by her boyfriend. Mrs. Fairchild indicated that this other student "has problems of her own."

Alex's culinary arts teacher empathized with Alex about the incident:

He {Alex} is always on time when he is here. He pairs with D.J. and gets along with almost everyone. One of the girls said something and he blew up. Did not start a fight, but immediately came to me. Very angry, shaking, asking to go to guidance or he would not be responsible for his actions. He did the right thing because he knows his temper can get out of hand. For the rest of the details you should contact {the principal}.

(Email from culinary arts teacher, October 8, 2008)

Alex spoke of getting into fights and his fears of being beaten up at almost every one of our meetings. He talked about "exit" routes he would take on his way home to avoid other students. Alex was an easy target for ridicule by other students, and, by his own admission, he hung out with 13 and 14 year olds because he was less mature than others his age. He wanted to avoid confrontation, but he did not have the strategies to deal with attacks by others, and when he was reprimanded in front of other students he would react quickly with verbal and physical aggression and profanity.

One of Alex's teachers empathized with Alex, describing the conflicts and difficulties Alex was experiencing in school, using a particular incident with the principal as an example:

Teacher: I heard an administrator yelling at him- saying they were going to call the police – there was a screaming match. I sat down and talked with Alex afterward and he had the biggest cry I have ever seen, he was shaking. I almost cried with him. He said he hated school. I just tried to be nice to him, or whatever.

Malloy: Fights... you mean getting into fights in the cafeteria?

Teacher: He was mostly alone. He did his poetry but he couldn't do much... He really wasn't showing up for class, he would be in the nurse's room, in guidance, in study...

Malloy: Why do you think that was?

Teacher: He wanted to see his girlfriend.

Mrs. Fairchild: And he would go to the nurse to brag to his friend, for attention

Malloy: Was he trying to avoid the work?

Teacher: More of a social thing

Mrs. Fairchild: A social thing, to make him feel good.

(Field Notes, September 3, 2008).

In this conversation, Mrs. Fairchild and the teacher described the contradictions in Alex's behavior. Alex appeared at once to be quite sensitive to criticism and confrontation; however, they felt that Alex was primarily interested in wandering the hallways to socialize with his girlfriend and friends. Working in class did not "make him feel good."

Despite his setbacks, Alex continued to express an interest in being successful, and he continued to try to convince others that he would avoid confrontation if given another chance. During his large re-entry meeting after he dropped out of school, Alex articulated what he needed to do to try to avoid altercations with adults and peers:

Alex : So, you're saying, I need a plan for when I get angry and stuff, well, I would like to ask to talk to you about that, because you helped me last time a couple of times, but I'd like to have my own plan about, like before, like people start with me, and just not to pay attention to it and not let it bother me and just walk away from it. And so like in classes I want to try not to walk away from classes, like I'm going to classes, just like walk away from them and just go along

with what I'm supposed to be doing in classes, and getting in trouble, so I want to like make a plan so I don't have like walk out of class and get in trouble.

Mrs. Fairchild: Right, so, you want to learn skills of how not to walk out of class, but still ignore them and stay in class.

Alex: Mmhm. The other thing about the, what was the other thing again? Well, I can't really avoid the people because they're in the school with me and they're gonna see me, I know they're gonna see me. Well, I might be able to avoid them, but I'll try to talk to them a little bit, but just not like hang out with them and get in trouble with them. I'm gonna tell them, "Look man, I changed, so I'm not gonna get in trouble, so might as well keep me out of every trouble that you get into." Cuz I'm gonna tell them what... I'm just gonna say, "Look, I can't", before I get in trouble and plan to find other people to hang out with, that are not really the people that really get in trouble, or people that don't get in trouble that much. Like the people I used to hang out with.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Intellectually, Alex understood that he needed to avoid certain others if he was to stay out of trouble. Alex was trying to convince the adults at his meeting (including the principal) that he could be successful by avoiding peers who would get him into trouble, and he knew he had to say he would do this if he were to get back into school. There is a sense, though, that Alex knew he could not comply with this promise. He engaged in one very damaging incident with the assistant principal in February 2009, where a teacher asked Alex to put away his cell phone in the lunch room. This request was in front of other students, and Alex refused. When the teacher asked the assistant principal to intervene, a shouting match between the two ensued, and Alex called the assistant principal a profane and very derogatory term. Alex's perception of immediate threat, common for youth who have been victims of abuse and neglect, played out with his aggression in a very public manner. The assistant principal, visibly shaken, told Jonathon later "I can't let him talk like that" after suspending Alex for ten days. While Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild, and Mrs. Stavros understood the depth of Alex's disorder and they continued to try to work with him through the remainder of the school year, it

became evident that Alex was a mismatch for the setting and that he was a target for teachers and peers.

It is important to illustrate that social action is dependent upon context, beliefs, needs, and meaning made by those in interaction. Although Alex expressed concern about being victimized by others, there was one person he continuously abused verbally and mentally, and that was his girlfriend Shelly. Alex would at one point describe Shelly as his rock and a few weeks later berate her in front of other students. Shelly was vulnerable, fragile, trusting, and she cared about Alex. Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano spoke often of their concern about how Alex treated Shelly. Alex knew that Shelly would help him no matter what he did and it is clear that he abused her as a way of asserting his dominance and need for emotional control, despite his anxieties and victimization at the hands of others.

Lack of Control

In many of the situations, the youth engaged in avoidance behavior in order to wrest some control. For example, Julie's and Shelly's dishonesty about what they were up to (described as lying by the adults) were attempts to gain control over the situation and to avoid criticism. Their deceit can be viewed as acts of assertiveness and control. Students are not empowered over many of the decisions they make in a school day and the four youth in this study are under particular scrutiny because they had not had success, despite attempts to help them. Educators often feel responsible for the success or failure of their students. In this way, the adults began to clamp down, made more of the decisions, and exerted more control in response to youth resistance. The adults took over more control because, in their view, the youth were incapable of making the decisions,

they did not trust the youth to follow through, and they felt a need to exert more control in the likelihood that the youth would respond positively. What the adults did not anticipate, however, was how strong the will to have control was among these four youth who resisted, avoided, and resented the efforts of adults to control their decisions and choices. The illustration of youth agency is explored at length in Chapter VI and Control is explored in Chapter VII; however, this section focuses on instances here where negative responses by the youth were primarily designed to avoid the control of others.

Manny was in a particularly difficult position because he was under a court order to do well in school if he wanted to remain in his current placement and if he wanted to be released by the court when he turned 17. One of the conditions of his probation was that Manny pass all of his classes. Manny explained how he felt he was being treated unfairly, but there was nothing he could do except keep his resentment inside:

Jenny {Group home staff member}: Manny what would happen if she goes to talk to Mr. H and gets a list of 20 assignments you have to do in the next 2 and half weeks, and that's what needs to happen in order to get a passing grade, um, like you still need to be in class everyday and that sort of thing, if you got a list of assignments and decided that it was Ok to sleep in class like Mr. Q said you did on Monday I think or didn't take notes or what ever

Manny: yup

Jenny: What do you think would happen even if you got all your work done?

Manny: Like I don't know

Jenny: Like would he still pass you like what do you think

Manny: Well... I don't like, like I'm the person, I don't know like sometimes he bothers me sometimes like I get a bit in a mood, like I get mad, like I just try to keep it inside me

Malloy: Is this MR Q or MR H?

Manny: Mr. H...and you know

Ms. West: What does he do specifically that sets you off?

Manny: Like sometimes he'll say somebody else next to me, like Randy X., he'll do something stupid and he'll say 'Manny could you please calm down' and I say 'I'm not doing anything' and he'll say 'stop doing it' and 'I'm not doing it'... it just makes me mad. I just hate it when people blame me for something that I did not do....

Malloy: Ummmm. So you kind of shut down...
Manny: Yeah
(Transcripts, January 8, 2009)

This sense of unfair treatment, valid or not, makes it difficult for the youth to self-advocate and Manny was in a particularly vulnerable position because he wanted to stay at the group home and be free of probation when he turned 17. Manny's sentiment was quite understandable: "I just hate it when people blame me for something that I did not do." He felt victimized and that he was being treated unfairly, but because of his powerless position, there was little he felt he could do except keep the resentment inside.

The dynamic of increased adult control, paired with an aversion to increased control by others, was very evident with Alex. Alex was required by court order to attend school, and the school was enjoined by the order to report his absences. So too, Alex had an educational disability that required the school to find accommodations for his disability. None of these pressure points or supports seemed to keep Alex out of trouble, however, and his behavior problems escalated during the 2008-09 school year, beginning with the suspension he received in September, 2008. As a result of his repeated explosive behavior, Mrs. Catano decided his school day would be shortened from four blocks to two, and that Alex would be entered into a program for monitoring and supporting students with behavior problems and multiple class failures. Mrs. Catano set this up and received permission from Alex's mother (which is required by special education and court rules) before the meeting. Mrs. Catano was feeling pressure from the assistant principal, from our University project, and others in the building to "deal with" Alex's behaviors. She indicated that his behaviors were "spinning out of control" and her frustration was evident during the meeting and in an email message she sent after the

meeting. Alex, despite his expressed anger at the beginning of the meeting, did not push back or argue with the plan. He understood that he was in a powerless position. After the big meeting, however, in one of his planning meetings with Jonathon and me, Alex was much more defiant and expressed anger about the legal and social controls being exerted on him:

Alex: I don't want to come here every day. I get made to come here, because my mom, if I get lazy about it, I'm truant, so I have to come to school. I think that's a bulls--t thing. I think they should change that, if I have to come in.
(Transcripts, September 23, 2008).

As the school year progressed, Alex continued to lose control over what was happening with his school program. In October his mother signed the paperwork to drop him out of school, but she soon realized that she would lose some of her welfare payments if he dropped out of school so she and Alex needed take action to get him back into school. Two large meetings took place to plan his reentry program in November, 2008, and Alex was generally conciliatory and agreed to all of the conditions of his reentry as set by the school. In preparation for one of the meetings, however, Alex expressed his frustration about having little choice in the decisions:

Malloy: Alex, it's not completely up to you, unfortunately.

Alex: Well, it's supposed to be what I want! Not what I want the school to do. That's the damn school. If I can't just go back to school, then I'm still out. I'm not going back there, I'm not going back to school.

Malloy: So, what if they say, "Okay, you can't come back to school".

Alex: Then I say, "I won't go back to school then".

Malloy: And you'll be okay with that?

Alex: Pretty much.

{Later}

Jon: So, what we're trying to do, is when we go in there and we have to deal with people who are in positions of authority, we have to try and make compromises with them instead.

Mom: Right.

Alex: I'll be nice, I promise.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Alex responded positively to Jon’s calm explanation of how to work with the school, and the “people who are in positions of authority.” Alex knew that he had to get back into school so that his mother’s welfare payments would return to their higher levels and to remain in compliance with the court order. Their welfare payments were the difference between staying in their current apartment and homelessness. A deeper analysis of how each youth responded to the control of others is explored in depth in Chapter VII, but what this situation illustrates is that, on a personal level, Alex wanted to avoid the control of the school as well as disagreements about his plans and behavior. In an attempt to avoid conversations about what he really wanted to do (come to school to see his friends), knowing that he would be at odds with the school and his family, he agreed to do what the school was asking of him. He was also trapped by his obligations to help his mother, who was in a dire situation. Beneath it all, however, Alex was not certain that he could meet the academic, social, and behavioral expectations of the school community, and his fears were founded as he continued to receive suspensions, was arrested twice, and missed additional days because of illness. Overall, Alex missed over 60 days of school that year, and received only two credits for the year.

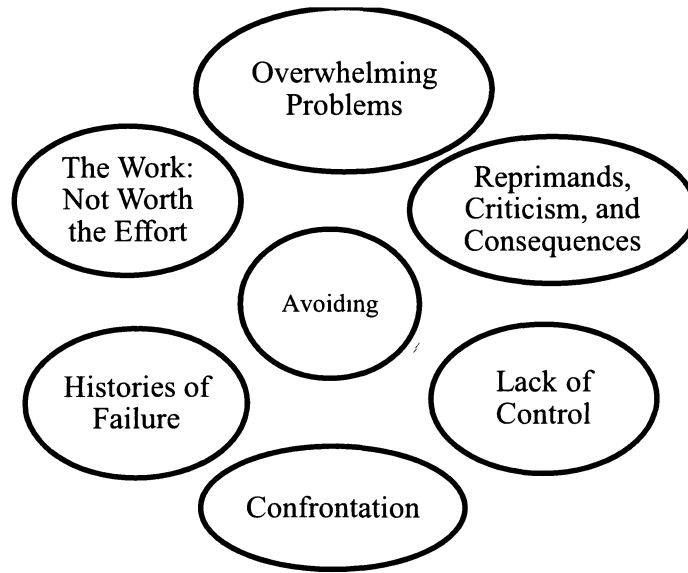
Model of Negative Reciprocity

This chapter has illustrated how and why each youth engaged in negative social behaviors in certain situations or contexts where dynamics of negative reciprocity were evident. Frequently, the youth were trying to avoid a complex set of social demands that were aversive to them. Any one social situation may have included several or all of the six situational elements described in this chapter, reflected in Figure 14. For example, in Alex’s large re-entry meeting he was confronted with a situation where he lacked control,

where he faced reprimands and criticism, and where he was overwhelmed by the problems and the potential solutions.

Figure 14

Contextual Model of Negative Reciprocity



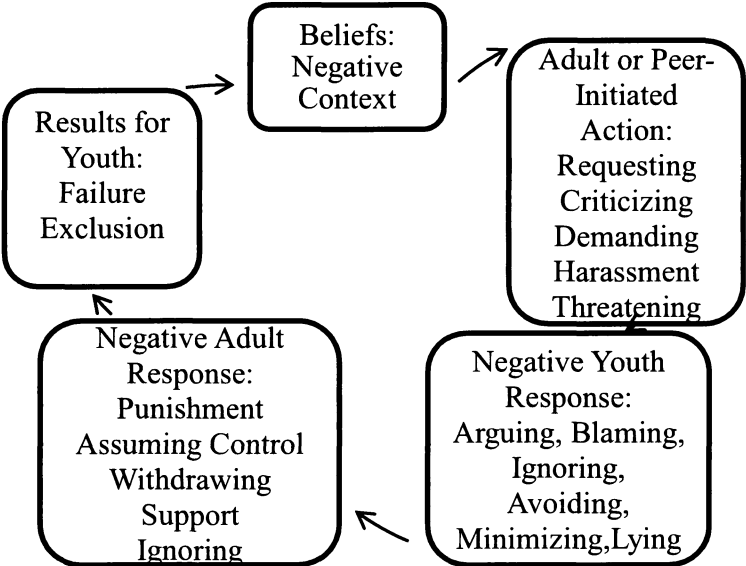
Acquiring Failure and Exclusion: How Disengagement is Created and Maintained

Having strong awareness of the potential for positive and negative social interactions, and given their need for support in order to be successful, each youth made calculated decisions about whether and where to put their efforts into the task of seeking or accepting help. In many cases, the youth were engaging in social actions in order to navigate an unsupportive environment with the least amount of controversy and personal cost, but the adults often perceived their actions as defiance, deceit, obstinacy, disrespect, or disinterest. Unfortunately, this misunderstanding created a vicious cycle that negatively influenced the adults' perceptions of the youth's motivation, and so the adults withdrew their effort, responded with reprimands, restricted their support, lectured the

youth, or exerted greater control. The youth responded in kind by avoiding or resisting, feeding the cycle. Even when adults made reasonable requests of the youth, there was often no follow through or there was a lack of interest in following through because the situation had little importance to the youth, the youth could not meet the requirements of the request, or the possibility of success was small. Figure 15 demonstrates how this cycle of negativity was constructed and maintained:

Figure 15

Cycle of Negative Interactions and Exclusion*



*Adapted from Augsburger, 1992

The processes represented in this cycle demonstrate how negative interpersonal responses are constructed and exacerbated, mediated by factors such as power, context, relative position, self-perceptions, personalities, and investment in the relationship. Additionally, the tendency of those with power to exert social control through sanctions is part of the norm of reciprocity. We have seen how the youth were trying to function in a large and complex social community (the school) with ever-changing social demands

from a constantly changing set of actors. Each youth came into high school with histories of failure and high needs for emotional and behavioral support, and these histories negatively influenced how the youth viewed school and their relationships with the adults and their peers. As individuals who were having difficulty meeting the normative requirements of the setting, the youth reacted with behaviors designed to protect themselves. These actions, however, were interpreted by the others in the school as acts of deviance. The adults, enforcing the community norms, exacted informal sanctions such as criticism, lecturing, mocking (as with bullying), restricting membership, and exclusion. These are the social processes that illustrate how the norm of reciprocity is enforced, understanding that the enforcement of norms is a powerful, albeit informal, influence on social action.

For Alex, the environment worked against his inclusion. Alex's English teacher described how the school processes and norms often thwarted Alex's need for stability and consistency in the classroom, including the frequent interruptions prompted by various factors, including the school's administration:

English Teacher (talking about Alex's Behavior problems): Mm hm... You know, and I know he gets called out every five minutes for something, or he comes in late to start off. Then he's got to go down to the office and then with Alex you've got to make a pit stop with the girlfriend, and you know, like I tell him, "Don't do that. Do it later..." And the only time he went off, I have to say it was genuinely because he got yanked out of the middle of a productive class to deal with a problem for something he did before, which was wrong, there's no question. He knew that, and then he went off the wall with that lady. With the truant officer and then somebody else, and then he went off the wall with me, not off the wall, but he said, "I have to leave, I have to leave, otherwise I'm going to say something to you". And I said, "Well, you know, why don't you stay, and then we can work this out". "No, I have to leave." And then later on, at lunch, I went down to see if he was still in the room and he was downstairs and he said, "I told you I had to leave, but I wasn't really angry". Hello, I've heard worse, people have done worse. Don't worry about it.
(Transcripts, September 16, 2008)

In addition to Alex's behavior to avoid the work, his English teacher described how his participation in class was frequently interrupted to go to the office for disciplinary actions, and how these encounters served to upset him to the extent that he could not resume his work in class. As such, the environment was too inconsistent for Alex and the teacher stated this directly later in the interview.

Manny had a different problem with the rules and disorganization of the classroom environment. Manny, who proclaimed that he had attention problems, described a chaotic, disorganized environment in his guided study class, despite the fact that this was an alternative class with a low teacher to student ratio. From Manny's perspective, the alternative study class, designed for students who were struggling with traditional subjects in larger classrooms, was interfering with his ability to concentrate and finish his work. Mrs. Fairchild corroborated Manny's description of this class. This environment, designed specifically for struggling students with attention and behavioral issues, was problematic and unproductive for Manny and he did not receive credit for any work he did in that class.

The school environment and the youth's experiences illustrate that the reciprocal actions of their teachers, administrators, and parents could be unpredictable and inconsistent, making the navigation of that environment even more difficult for Shelly, Alex, Julie and Manny. For example, Manny worked with his facilitator, Ms. West, to complete a reading packet by studying at home (his group home) and through tutoring session with Ms. West. Manny was proud of this accomplishment but Manny's alternative English teacher gave Manny a failing grade, explaining that Manny did not conform to her expectation that he do more work in the class. This was the same

classroom that Manny said was laden with distractions. The failure was a sanction that was given to Manny and it surprised us—it seemed capricious given that Manny was, for the first time at Emmerton, putting effort into completing his work and yet he was punished for it. There was a disconnect among Ms. West, Manny, and his alternative education teacher who apparently had different expectations of acceptable work than was understood by those of us who were helping Manny.

The idea that some teachers may be empathetic and offer modifications for some students at some times, and other teachers will single out and criticize other students at other times (as described by Manny and Julie) indicates that negative reciprocity can be highly personalized, capricious and influenced by emotions. The teachers and administrators applied sanctions such as failing grades, suspensions and criticism, designed to bring the youth into compliance with the school's social norms (putting effort into the work, attending classes, being respectful, positive reciprocation). What we see with these data, however, is that the sanctions were highly context-specific, distributed unevenly, inconsistently given, and the youth reacted with heightened negative responses, exacerbating their perceived status as non-responders and resisters.

Alex, even with his complex emotional needs, had an intellectual understanding of the demands of any given social situation but when he was confronted in the moment, he responded vehemently and negatively in an attempt to make the problem “go away.” Alex did not learn how to revise his behavior as a result of the reprimands and punishments he received. Alex's English teacher explained in the interview how Alex's need to avoid conflict was so pervasive that he would argue his innocence, even in the face of clear and convincing evidence to the contrary. She described how attempts to

reason with Alex, to lecture him, or to try to get him to reflect on his actions were a waste of time and in fact exacerbated Alex's agitation:

Teacher: ...he still is functioning on the level of, 'Maybe I can get out of it.' So, instead of thinking about the behavior, he's thinking more about, "How do I get out of it and what do I do?" ...'how am I gonna get out of trouble?' Just getting... avoidance of being caught, avoidance of you know, just avoidance period, is his key thing. And once he's into one of those situations, it think it wouldn't make any difference if you took you're clothes off in front of him, I don't think it would make a damn bit of difference because his theme right then is, 'Well, what did I do...?' And he'd walk right by you, I don't think he'd get it, you know, because his... and so consequently what are we doing? We're pulling him out because we need to talk to him right now. We're agitating him, we're telling him that there's a problem that we know about, okay? And then, bingo ...he's on another planet at that point and it's a waste of your time. So if you really know he's done something, I wouldn't do that little, you know, 'Come on Alex, fess up, be honest.' Alex is not gonna be honest okay? You're not gonna get that from him, so why would you push it? Don't make it an issue, because it's a waste of your time and it's certainly a waste of his. You know, he's still thinking, 'Ooh, there's a possibility here that I'm going to get out of this trouble.' (Field Notes, September 16, 2008)

The English teacher gave us significant insight into the dynamic of Alex's defenses and described why the traditional means of working with Alex to correct his behavior were ineffective. She understood Alex's need to escape and avoid. Ironically, Alex and this teacher had conflicts later in the semester and he failed her class.

Conclusion to Chapter V

The four youth in this study wanted to avoid looking different from other students in the school and they had socially-acceptable aspirations, including a desire to work, go to college, and have families of their own. Each youth was also very aware of his or her life chances when compared to other students and understood which relationships and situations were working against them. Elements of the environment, constructed within a context of behaviors and attributes that are academically, socially, and culturally valued by the school community, served to increasingly exclude the youth and enhanced their

perceptions of isolation, therefore contributing to their disengagement and avoidance of unpleasant, unworkable, and damaging relationships and interactions.

This chapter illustrates how the youth perceived and responded to situations that they calculated as socially toxic and of little value to them. Given their level of disengagement from the learning process and many of the individuals in the school, each youth expressed concern and discouragement at various times about the utility of trying to change their own behavior. The analysis offers a model for the relational contexts that are most prominent when the youth engage in social action such as arguing, ignoring, blaming, minimizing and other types of behaviors that were designed to help the youth avoid conflict, control by others, tasks that have a likelihood of failure, conflicts with peers and adults, and overwhelming problems. The discussion ends with an assertion of how the multiple social demands and inconsistencies in the setting made it difficult for the youth to successfully build positive relationships and, in fact, destroyed trust between the youth and others in the school through a cycle of repeated negative interactions. We have also seen, however, how the youth engaged in these actions to protect themselves from harmful interactions and from what they perceived would be wasted effort. We will see how each youth made calculated decisions to put effort into tasks that would be more likely to help them reach their goals. These displays of personal agency are the focus of Chapter VI.

CHAPTER VI

AGENCY

Shelly began to see that she was an important person. She didn't have to let other people define her, she could define herself. She began to feel a part of something. Her grades started going up and she began to feel better about herself

Newspaper Article, May 19, 2009

The adults at Emmerton High School began to notice that Shelly was asserting herself and was reshaping her identity, as reflected in the above quote from an article written by one of the Emmerton teachers. According to Erik Erikson (1950), the primary task of adolescence is to begin to develop one's adult identity and to become a more independent self. As a result of the adolescent's work, he or she will often engage in more assertive and independent social actions and, as a result, come into conflict with adults who attempt to exert control. So too, the adolescent is moving from childhood status through a process of identity formation, testing out ways to negotiate and develop more independence and egalitarian relationships with adults (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz, 2006). We now know, however, that this task of maturation proceeds at a slow pace and is complicated by the fact that the adolescent brain is still developing the capacity for planning and problem solving and is driven by pleasure-seeking and immediate gratification (Dahl, 2004).

Theories of human agency span a continuum from the socio-cognitive view that personal action is highly influenced by individual psychology, history and is internally controlled (Bandura, 1989), to the notion that individual action is dominated by and

primarily in response to the social and cultural demands of the environment (Ratner, 2000). As Moje and Lewis (2007) indicate, agency is the “making and remaking of the self,” within relationships characterized by power. Within this study, Shelly, Julie, Alex and Manny often engaged in social actions that signaled their interest in taking control, their self-efficacy beliefs and their need to establish self-protection in reaction to the social and cultural demands of the environment and context. This chapter focuses on social actions of the youth that signaled agency, fueled by a sense of self-efficacy, the contexts in which those actions were prominent and an analysis of what the youth were attempting to accomplish when they were working to assert themselves. The discussion proceeds to an analysis of how the successes of the youth related to helper self-efficacy and provides a model of agency given the data across all four youth.

Agency

The construct of personal agency has typically been characterized as a broad but critical aspect of human psychology, individual functioning, personal action in relation to context and to others and individual and collective social action. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) describe the challenge that the concept of human agency has posed for scholars and researchers:

...the term agency itself has maintained an elusive, albeit resonant, vagueness; it has all too seldom inspired systematic analysis, despite the long list of terms with which it has been associated: selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom, and creativity. (p. 962)

Attempts to operationalize the construct have linked included human agency with several characteristics including self-efficacy beliefs, or the belief that one can successfully attain a goal or accomplish a task, that one can overcome obstacles, and that one is in control of one’s life course, described as internal locus of control (Bandura,

1989). Human agency is also distinguished by individual intentionality when making decisions and taking action (Bandura, 1989; Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009). Several researchers have identified individual agency as a mediator for positive youth development and a critical factor in the successful transition from adolescence to adulthood (Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010; Cote 1997; Schwartz, 2006). Finally, human agency has been identified as the process of making deliberate and informed decisions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Nagin, 2007; Paternoster & Pogarsky, 2009). Nagin (2007), in particular, describes human agency as a rational decision making process that takes into account the calculus of various courses of action, much the same way social exchange theorists describe the motivation of human interaction: "By agency, I mean a decision making process, however crude or faulty, that reflects the benefits, costs, and risks of alternative courses of action" (p. 262).

Individual agency is also characterized by a sense of purpose, possession of life goals, and personal and social attributes that allow individuals to negotiate for valued social resources, skills and assets. This notion of agency is described as "identity capital" by Schwartz (2006):

The identity capital viewpoint posits that optimal identity development in post-industrial societies requires that individuals possess the necessary agency and self-directedness to acquire and utilize the resources necessary to "bargain" for social resources such as admission to graduate school, employment opportunities, club memberships, and the like (e.g. Cote, 2000). (p. 779)

According to Schwartz, the ability to work with others to attain valued resources is a social process that allows a person to achieve success and become more competent in the adult world. In this way, agency is consistent with the process of how individuals

access social capital, reflected in the social actions of appropriately asking for and accepting help.

A comprehensive construct of agency offered by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) defines human agency as a socially driven phenomena, highly influenced by past experiences, present contexts, views of future prospects, and one's "structural" position, in other words, where the individual sits within the prevailing power structures. Agency is characterized as the person's ability to influence what is happening around him or her, bringing past experiences to each new problem, taking into consideration the importance of the goal, the context, and the environment and using problem solving techniques to develop a solution:

The ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future, and present *make a difference* to their actions; changing conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structural contexts profoundly influence how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as more or less responsive to human imagination, purpose, and effort. (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973)

Although human agency is often portrayed as a positive set of social actions that are performed within social norms and geared towards socially acceptable and recognized outcomes, studies of socially deviant or resistant behavior indicate that human agency can be exerted in non-acceptable ways. In these instances, agentic acts of personal control, self-efficacy and rational decision making can be seen in contexts where the individual feels it is rational and beneficial to act against the prevalent norms. This is an important aspect to keep in mind for this research project, as Shelly, Julie, Alex and Manny had histories of deviant behavior in relation to the prevalent social and educational expectations of the school and community. Criminologists Paternoster and Pogarsky (2009) examine human agency in the context of deviant behavior, stating:

...we think persons are rational when they make choices that are consistent with their preferences and goals. When persons deliberately and intentionally seek to realize their preferences they are also acting with agency. In other words, persons acting with human agency make choices and enforce these choices on the world. (p.105)

So too, social reproduction is a function of structural repression of individual agency, forced upon individuals and groups who are thus denied access to social, cultural and financial capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

One of the difficulties associated with the identification of social action that represents human agency is the fact that agency is based upon individual perceptions and beliefs. As such, the researcher must look for certain behaviors and narratives that serve as markers of agency, such as statements of pride and self-confidence, plans that include specificity such as steps and specific resources that are connected to the outcomes, cogent arguments for certain courses of action and consistency between one's stated goals and one's behavior. In a world where one's ability to succeed is highly dependent upon one's position in the social structure, personal agency is reflected in the individual's belief systems, described by Schwartz, Cote, and Arnett (2005):

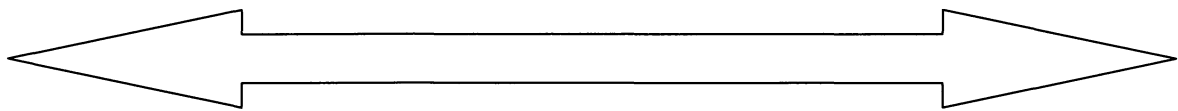
Although the term agency has been defined in a number of ways (e.g., Bandura, 1989; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), it is used here to refer to a sense of responsibility for one's life course, the belief that one is in control of one's decisions and is responsible for their outcomes, and the confidence that one will be able to overcome obstacles that impede one's progress along one's chosen life course (cf. Côté & Levine, 2002). (p. 206-207)

Through the iterative process of coding, grouping and re-coding the narratives, field notes, and artifacts in this study, individual agency became a prominent category of action across all four youth. The broad concept of agency became evident through the social actions of the youth, consistent with the literature, including setting goals and planning, taking positive action, expressing confidence, expressing pride, persisting,

seeking help, problem solving, expressing preferences and decision making. Conversely, the absence of agency was reflected in social actions that indicated subservience and isolation, including arguing, avoiding and blaming behaviors. Positive actions that signaled individual agency and the actions that indicate the absence of individual agency are depicted in Figure 16:

Figure 16

Model for Acts of Agency



Absence of Agency

- Avoiding
- Arguing
- Unilateral decision making
- Disengaging
- Blaming
- Threatening
- Being treated unfairly
- Withholding effort
- Withholding help

Presence of Agency

- Setting goals-planning
- Taking positive action
- Expressing confidence
- Persisting
- Seeking help
- Problem solving
- Expressing preferences
- Decision-making
- Expressing pride

Contextual Analysis

There were six prominent contexts or situations when the youth engaged in social actions that signaled agency. These contexts overlap and are related. The analysis is focused on how the elements of the environment or the actions of others triggered agentive behaviors of the youth as they attempt to accomplish their goals, meet their needs, or to protect their stances. There contexts included:

- A sense of purpose—A sense of confidence, optimism, and capability was often displayed by the youth when they were working toward a desired goal or preferred course of action.
- Intentionality and self-reflection—The youth often displayed a strong sense of self-knowledge and insight, and these are personal characteristics that are important for making informed decisions and cogent arguments.
- Important relationships—The youth would work, often with conviction and within a planned course of action, to develop and maintain a positive relationship with another because they understood the emotional or personal value of the relationship.
- Self-efficacy—A key characteristic of agency is one’s perceived ability to be successful, identified in actions when each youth expressed confidence in his or her ability to accomplish a personally-relevant task or goal. Self-efficacy was demonstrated at times when each youth was experiencing success.
- Positive experiences—The “success breeds success” paradigm operated here among the youth, who often responded to positive experiences and feedback with increased effort and expressions of self-efficacy.
- Belief in the strategy—The youth actively participated in and expressed confidence when there was a planning and action strategy that meant sense to them and that they believed would result in positive outcomes.

Several of the social actions and categories that signaled youth agency overlapped or interacted with the social actions and themes associated with reciprocity, including engaging in decision making, arguing, and asking for and accepting help. In fact,

socially-valued reciprocity can be thought of as an act of agency, especially when the individual is trying to build or maintain positive social relationships and respond to the context and environment, in anticipation that the resources will be there to support the individual's actions and achievement.

A Sense of Purpose

A major element of the RENEW intervention is the mapping process, designed to help the youth to reflect on his or her past, present, and future, thus gaining self-knowledge, insight to use for problem-solving, and supports to develop personally-relevant life goals. Shelly, Julie, Manny and Alex responded quite differently, albeit positively, to the mapping and goal setting process, through conversations about their accomplishments, preferences, and dreams. These discussions allowed each youth to publicly declare, often for the first time, his or her goals for career, family life, and independent living. These declarations often gave the youth the confidence and purpose they needed to take action.

Shelly's goal was to become a nurse or doctor, and later she revised that goal to include the possibility of becoming an early childhood teacher if the other options did not seem feasible. With encouragement from Mrs. Fairchild, Mrs. Pennington, and the other staff at the school, Shelly began to express and self-advocate for her needs in part because she was invested in her plan. At one point when Shelly seemed to be disengaging from her school work and was being influenced by Alex to avoid her work, Mrs. Fairchild and I set up a "check-in" meeting with Shelly. During that meeting Shelly reaffirmed her goals:

Malloy: What else would be in your dream, anything else?

Shelly: I could be a childcare teacher if I can't be a nurse...

Malloy: Oh, Ok so that's an option?
Shelly: Yup
Malloy: It's good to have options... OK... you're taking that class now?
Shelly: Yup
Malloy: How do you find working with the kids,
Shelly: Good
Malloy: do they respond to you?
Shelly: Yup
(Transcripts, February 17, 2009)

Figure 17

Shelly's Second Dreams MAP

During this same meeting, Shelly affirmed that Alex supported her to attain this goal: "He (Alex) supports me for wanting to be a nurse... he 100% supported me." Despite the fact that Shelly had a very serious disease and could have stopped working so hard to pass all of her classes, including her math class that was so difficult for her, she continued to put effort into working towards her goals because she had a purpose and she felt good about herself when she accomplished the steps towards her goal. Shelly displayed this sense of purpose for the remainder of the semester.

Although Shelly was often quiet and spoke little during meetings when we talked about her plans, she spoke right up during her first meeting with a counselor from the state Vocational Rehabilitation agency, sharing with pride her MAPS that displayed her goals and dreams:

Malloy: We've been meeting with Shelly for almost a year since last school year - would you like to talk a little bit for you. {Looking at Shelly's MAPS on the wall} I have on the right hand side the one Mrs. Pennington did for you and on the left the one I did for you it really doesn't matter but... your goal is...

Shelly: To become a nurse or an early childhood teacher
(Transcripts, March 17, 2009)

Shelly could have had a team of people working with her around her illness and disability but, instead, she received support directed towards helping her to achieve her goal to graduate from high school and attend a community college program. Although Shelly did not go to college, the focus on her goal seemed to energize and engage Shelly to work harder and helped her to assert her needs.

In contrast to the quiet way that Shelly advocated for herself, Julie was vocal and assertive about her needs, preferences, and criticisms of school, and she often engaged in deviant actions to make her displeasure known. When we met Julie she was not being successful; she was failing most of her classes and getting into trouble, harassing other female students, and engaging in behaviors that indicated that she was not invested in being successful in school and that she lacked agency. There were purposes behind Julie's actions to avoid traditional classes and to bring attention to her unhappiness. Julie did not feel respected at Emmerton, and she characterized the work as meaningless: "The people here {at Emmerton} are like, oh, I have to do this. What's the point of doing this? I don't even want to" (Transcripts, October 7, 2008). Julie was in bind, however. Julie's family placed a high value on finishing high school and so Julie was somewhat stuck and

she knew that she could not drop out without disappointing her parents. Julie's behaviors and engagement in the helping process were also driven by a strong sense of self-reliance, making it difficult for her to seek or accept help from others. One exchange with Mrs. Fairchild illustrates Julie's attitude about accepting help: "Mrs. Fairchild: What you think is the most effective way for you to get the diploma? Julie: get out of my way" (Transcripts, October 21, 2008).

As a result of her need to appear in control, Julie initially tried to give us the impression that she had a workable plan for completing school. She was already attending an English class at adult education when we began to meet and she had talked with her Emmerton High School guidance counselor about the possibility of gaining credit for those courses towards her high school diploma. We soon learned, however, that she did not have nearly as many credits as she told us, and so Julie began to accept the fact that she needed help to attain her goal to graduate. As Julie began to engage in conversations about her future and her dreams, her negativity and pessimism shifted and she began to work actively towards strategies that she felt would help her to get what she wanted. Over time, Julie's social actions indicated ownership of the problem-solving process and she began to deal openly and collaborate with us on how she would complete high school. For example, in the following excerpt Julie explained how she will make up a half credit if she dropped her painting class:

Julie: And I thought that I would go to night school... Tuesday, and Thursday for a full credit, and Wednesday is for a half credit and I don't want to be in 4th block any more because I am way behind in that class for being here a whole day, so I should drop that class, take that class on Wednesday night for night school for a half credit and leave early, and have 4th block off. (she is talking very fast, like she is nervous).

Mrs. Stavros (the principal): When the does the night school for adult ed start?

Malloy: We were planning on half way through the year if we can work out the logistics.

Julie: I took a class and I can sign up for another class.

Mrs. Stavros: Ok so you just finished a class there?

Julie: yeah.

(Transcripts, December 2, 2008)

Julie started to work toward the goal of dropping out of Emmerton High School and attending classes at adult education when she saw that the school and her parents would support her. Even though her plan to finish all of her classes at adult education did not succeed, Julie took the initiative and developed an alternative plan with Mrs. Fairchild that eventually resulted in her successful completion of high school. Julie learned how to engage in agentive interactions driven by her goals.

Manny's sensibilities included a more passive approach towards working with others and his goals were more difficult to determine. It was clear, however, that Manny wanted to become free from probation and the control of the court:

Manny: (Clears his throat) So I don't really know anybody but like half the time I'm like half a year I was there (at the group home). You know like every October I have a court date for being there, and they tell me 'Oh just a couple of more months, you'll be out, a couple of more months,' they kept saying and now they're making a decision by next year when I'm 17, the day I turn 17 I'm out on the front porch, I'm out of the courts, I'm out of the system, and-

Ms. West: If you stay out of trouble

Manny: Yeah, if I stay out of trouble, I'm off probation

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Manny was clearly driven by the goal to get off probation, but, surprisingly, some of the narrative that Manny shared with us indicated that he also wanted to create a "cool," "hip," "intelligent," and masculine persona, and it was very surprising when he said that he was interested in being a barber. When asked what his own barbershop would look like, he responded with enthusiasm: "Manny: If I had my own place?...Alright, My own

barber shop, like just change things up a bit like, um, more like styling like... Ms. West: Like more hip...funky Manny: YEAH....YEAH” (January 8, 2009).

The barbershop that Manny described was much like the one in Emmerton that Ms. West approached to set up an internship for him. Manny had some choices, and while he could have worked harder in his classes and take more interest in school, he clearly responded and put effort into his barbershop job and in completing more of his work because he saw, in part, how they were connected to his goals. In fact, we found that Manny did not take the initiative to do more schoolwork or to obtain a job, but once he began to experience success he maintained the effort.

The goal of becoming free from probation drove Manny’s behavior and many of his decisions, but it seemed a difficult situation for him. As we worked with Manny over the school year, however, and as he had positive experiences in school and in his internship, there was always the specter that Manny’s life was controlled by the court and by the possibility that the courts would release Manny when he turned 17. Manny’s commitment to certain strategies was thus tempered by the knowledge that he would eventually be moving to another community and school. In the summer of 2009, with Manny’s 17th birthday six months away, Manny expressed his desire to move back home with his mother and stepfather, even though he could choose to stay at the group home and finish the year at Emmerton High School:

Malloy: So if everything goes as planned would you stay here what would happen?

Manny: I have a choice to stay here or -

Malloy: Going back home

Manny:I’m gonna go back home

Malloy: Yup. So would it mean you change schools?

Manny: What do you mean?

Malloy: Would you start going to (home school district)

Manny: yeah
(Transcripts, July 7, 2009)

Manny's goal was to be free of all the control around him, a decision that his guardian ad litem, his group home counselor, and the adults at the high school thought was bad for him, but he had his reasons. As Manny's group home staff member, Jenny stated: "Manny writes in his Face Page 'Free Manny' and his girlfriend goes 'come on man is it that bad'" (Field Notes, October 30, 2009). An unfortunate consequence of his drive for freedom, however, was that his drive to do some work in school diminished and he transferred to his new high school in November 2009 having failures in the courses he had taken in the fall of 2009, after receiving 6 1/2 credits during the previous school year at Emmerton.

Then there is Alex who, like Julie, made his preferences, opinions, and interests known in no uncertain terms, but his behaviors seemed to belie his stated goals and preferences. In spite of his chaotic life, however, Alex's long-term and consistently expressed goal was to become a chef. He was also highly driven by the need to be accepted by his peers. Like Julie, Alex also wanted us to think that he had everything under control and thus avoid adult intervention. For example, early in the fall of 2008 Alex tried to convince us that he had a new outlook and that he would not get into trouble:

Malloy: Have you ever seen a plan, where you have goals and objectives, OK? This is set up the same way. So, the first goal is to help you attend the classes and complete assignments, so you can --

Alex: I'm going to be doing that.

Malloy: -- get your credits, right. And we have to do that every week. As you know, your life can change every week, right?

Alex: Actually, not really, anymore.... Because I've been like, I don't know, I've been more into myself, and stuff.

Malloy: Yeah. Well, you know, I think it, we want to help you. We don't want to be on your case. Some people, their lives change a lot, and they need that help, they need that checklist.

Alex: Yeah.

Malloy: And, we're looking for you to get four credits, right? OK.

Alex: Yeah, I'm going to still be getting two.

Malloy: Two, if you do the math, you'll get a third.

Alex: Right.

Malloy: And if we get you a job, for co-op, it'll be four. So, that's our goal, OK? We may not get all four, but we want to keep you --

Alex: I could probably get the math one, and those two, my two right now, but, you know, I don't, right now, something about, getting out of high school first, and get a job, because I'll be more, smarter about it, and stuff, and I won't have to deal with school, and then go and get a job at the same time.

Malloy: You think it might be too much --

Alex: Yeah, because, I'll be doing something better, if I'm out of school, to work...

(Transcripts, September 30, 2008)

Alex expressed ambivalence about his ability to be successful if he stayed in school for the entire day, agreeing with a plan to reduce his school day in September 2008 after he was suspended. During mid year, when he had just been suspended again and he had failed his English, math and social studies classes, Alex's expectations diminished. Despite all of the failures he was having, however, Alex continued to talk about his goal to become a chef, and he eventually narrowed his interest in school to working on his culinary arts class:

Alex: How am... (he has calmed down) I get my classes, I just want to get my classes and that's pretty much it (he chuckles)

Jon: And if you have an idea about thinking about wanting to work --

Alex: I'll have... I'll still go to... I still want to do good in culinary... I want to go to school, I just want to stay with what I'm doing, and after I get my diploma from school, I'm gonna, I I going to a culinary arts program. And they call it culinary arts -- free membership... That's my career for culinary arts I mean that's gonna be my career- Yeah

Jon: good so that's gonna help the school know is that you have plans, alright and they have to help you achieve those plans.

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex did receive two credits for the 2008-09 school year for his work in his culinary arts program and he was placed in an alternative education program in the fall of 2009, where he eventually dropped out because the program did not include a culinary arts class and his mother was diagnosed with cancer.

Intentionality and Self-reflection

In the process of helping each youth to develop realistic strategies designed around his or her goals, the RENEW process includes a deliberative planning process that provides tools for self-knowledge and self-discovery, along with counseling that allows the youth to weigh the risks and benefits of various options. Many times the youth in this study had gotten into trouble because they engaged in behavior that clashed with school requirements but met their needs, or they reacted to situations over which they had no control, or they were acting without thinking about the possible detrimental outcomes of their actions. These behaviors gave the adults the impression that each youth was not capable of thoughtful deliberation or intentionality. It is surprising how much Shelly, Julie, Manny, and Alex knew about themselves and their strengths and weaknesses, however, and what would and would not work for them. They used that information to varying degrees to craft strategies that they knew would have a greater likelihood for success.

Shelly displayed the capacity for self-reflection during our first meeting, when she was clear that she would have difficulty with math and that she needed the teacher to explain clearly the assignments and class expectations to her. She also indicated that she was worried about her illness, “because I don’t know what’s wrong with me” (Field Notes, May 27, 2008). Most of Shelly’s very personal conversations took place in private

with Mrs. Fairchild, who told us in mid-January of 2009 that Shelly knew she would not be able to pass the math class the way it was currently structured and that she needed help. Shelly engaged in problem solving with us because she knew the math credit was critical to completing her diploma requirements:

A meeting with Shelly and she went along, but I wanted to elicit more from her. I brought KFC again and she ate it up. She took one of her math quizzes and she doesn't know if she passed or not....

Mrs. Fairchild tells me that Shelly said, "OK, I have been in this math twice and failed it, why would you put me in there a third time?" It is something to think about and yet we seem to repeat this type of scheduling in schools.....She DID respond with enthusiasm about her goal to be a nurse or early childhood educator, she DID respond with enthusiasm that the reason is for making "good money," and she DID say she is conflicted about leaving people at high school and fear about graduating in June. She said her boyfriend is part of her dream....

(Field Notes, February 17, 2009)

Shelly reflected upon what she needed and how she would best receive help to be successful and she intentionally sought out Mrs. Fairchild because she understood that Mrs. Fairchild would not lecture or criticize her.

Julie was very forthcoming about what did and did not work for her and she understood her own preferences well, including her need for self-reliance and independence. During one of our first meetings, Julie made it plain that she did not need a teacher to tell her what she was doing was wrong:

Malloy: OK. Any learning or teaching styles, what's your learning style? How do you best learn? On your own? Yeah, figuring it out on my own.

Julie: I've learned a lot of things on my own. Like, I've learned how to ride a four-wheeler on my own. Pretty much learned how to drive a car by myself.

Malloy: Really? Wow. So, you like to figure it out yourself? Yeah.

Julie: I'd rather do it myself, rather than have someone standing over my shoulder saying, you're doing it wrong, you're doing it wrong. [Makes me always say?], I know I'm doing it wrong.

Malloy: That's not helpful feedback. OK.

(Transcripts, September 18, 2008)

Julie was staking out her position—that she did not want teachers to criticize her or correct her—and her insight here was absolutely consistent with her subsequent interactions with us. As such, her helpers needed to take a back seat and let Julie drive the process and complete many of the tasks herself. In a later encounter, Julie outlined her current plan for going to “night school” to gain additional credits and thus get her diploma earlier than her same age peers, and how her plan could be thwarted by the Emmerton School rules:

Julie: And I'm taking a night class right now, and when that one's done, taking another night class, and another one after that.

Malloy: OK, so, you'd have 18 ½ (credits), if that all goes well.

Ms. McGurk: Are those all in writing, or are they in other subjects, too?

Julie: I'm in a writing class right now, and I'm going to take an algebra class, and I might take biology if I don't have to take it here?.

Ms. McGurk: And that will count toward--

Julie: Mr. H. (Guidance Counselor) said whatever I take there is only going to be an elective, and I won't be able to substitute for here --If I take biology there, I don't understand why they won't count for here.

Ms. McGurk: It's a good question.

Mrs. Fairchild: I think that's something we have to raise for you, that question for you.

Julie: I don't want to do biology twice, but there's only like seven classes that I can choose from, that aren't like GED classes. So...

(Transcripts, October 7, 2008)

Although Julie was trying to solve her problem by herself and there were many parts of her strategy that could not succeed, her plan had many elements that were well thought out, and she was beginning to share barriers with us that related directly to her plan. Julie clearly had the skills and capacity for deliberation and planning. As Julie began to see that the adults were going to help her to reach her goal, she began to collaborate and share more and more information that she knew would be helpful. For example, in December 2008, Julie talked about how she was walking out of her last block class most days and how she didn't know if the teacher was documenting her skipped

classes. Julie talked about how she would do almost anything to shorten her school day. Julie was making it plain through her narrative and her behavior that she was not going to conform to the class attendance requirements as set forth by the school. As Julie saw that it was possible to leave the program at Emmerton and attend all of her classes at the adult education program, she made sure she was organized and that she met the principal's expectations, as documented in my field notes: "Julie is super organized...she has all of her classes and progress reports and she keeps track. Her agenda book is filled with items, timelines, highlighted by class, etc. She uses this as strategy to keep on track.... The progress report for history shows a comment by her teacher:... 'Julie is doing great this quarter'" (Field Notes, December 2, 2008).

In contrast to Julie, Manny was more passive about his situation and about planning out his strategies, but he had a strong sense of his strengths, challenges, and preferences, reflected in his What Works MAP:

Figure 18

Manny's What Works MAP

Manny: I like hand's on stuff-like I don't mind doing paperwork but things like copying notes and stuff like that I really don't like,

Ms. West: What about that is hard, or not hard but what's tedious about it?

Manny: When the teacher writes stuff down like he goes and erases it when I'm half way done with it

Malloy: Oh yeah, they don't give you enough time.

Manny: and then when I'm done or I do get it done, it's so messy, but I don't want to write it again....not one of my favorite things to do

(Later that same meeting)

Ms. West: OK, what doesn't work... let's get back to that, get back the negative (laughs) what doesn't work with teachers, like, you know, from what I hear from Mr. H that you like to sit and socialize instead of paying attention. What is it about that environment that keeps you from staying focused especially when you have so much riding on it?

Manny: I don't know its like if I am in a group of all people I know I talk but when I'm with a bunch of people I don't know I do better

Ms. West: So you're easily distracted by peers

Manny: Yeah

Ms. West: Would you do better if you were in a class where you knew no one, or would you quickly get to know people so you could socialize?

Manny: If I was in a class by myself I would do better

(laughter)

Ms. West: Unfortunately that's not gonna happen but I hear you.

Jon: So independent work works for you well? And in a quiet place with little distractions,

Ms. West: So music when you're studying,

Manny: Yeah, If I am in a place where I don't have to listen to anybody else, not talking, the music helps me focus.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Despite his capacity for self-reflection, Manny's teachers and his group home counselor indicated that he rarely took the initiative and rarely acted on his self-knowledge. Over time, however, Manny became more interested in how he was doing and he shared some of his accomplishments with us. Despite his progress in his classes, however, he seemed to be reserving all of his energy for "holding it together" when he felt frustrated, and he engaged in passive-aggressive behaviors that irritated his teachers instead of the type of intentional self-advocacy that could have helped him in class. During the fall of 2009, Manny made it quite plain that he wanted to move back home

when he was released by the courts. Some of his plan had to do with entering a gang and getting revenge:

Meeting with Manny, group home staff, alternative education teacher, Mrs. Fairchild, his Guardian ad litem, Donna, Bio teacher:

We confirmed that Manny wants to go home on his 17th birthday...

After he left, his guardian picked up the conversation about his parents where she left off...that his parents are very impaired, neither work, "mom drools," etc. and then people began to talk about how Manny is exploring gangs- "he's cutting articles about gangs out of the paper and cutting on his arms..." OK, he is looking to gangs for affiliation? To be cool? Is that why he wants to go home? He is private and withdrawn....

(Field Notes, October 1, 2009)

Although Manny's plan centered on a socially deviant activity, there was intentionality in his actions. In fact, Manny fell into gang-related activities shortly after returning to his parents' home and the high school in their town.

Alex liked to avoid discussions focused on trying to help him overcome issues and problems, especially during our initial conversations when he wanted us to think he had everything under control. Through all of the dialogue, however, Alex would reveal his true self-views, such as this exchange:

Jon: So, if people were also, we talked about, earlier, things that you're good at, you also

Alex: Being a complete dick to everyone. That's one, right there.

Jon: That's a strength?

Alex: Yeah, that's one of my strengths. To be a complete dick. And, it's true, it's true, so.

Jon: I guess, help me understand that.

Alex: Like, being, I, one of my strengths is being pissed off at people, getting-

Jon: You mean, as far as getting your way, or?

Alex: Getting, yeah, getting my way, pretty much. Have to have it my way.

Jon: So --

Alex: My way or...

Jon: Like, you said, caring for others is a challenge, sometimes, for you. How is getting your way, sometimes challenging for you?

Alex: People make it hard for me to get my way. Teachers, and all.

(Transcripts, October 7, 2008)

Alex's statement of his trait to be rude to others appears to be accurate given his behavior. Alex would get into confrontations and react with extreme anger when he felt threatened. Like Julie, Alex did not like being challenged or questioned by others and he found it difficult to engage with others in intentional deliberations about his options because he did not want to be judged. Over time, Alex began to use the strategies for self-advocacy that Jonathon gave him, especially when he was highly invested in the outcome. Time and time again, however, Alex demonstrated that he was unable to commit to a plan and to develop a plan with intentionality. The narratives indicate that Alex was driven more by his immediate circumstances, by crises such as being arrested, being on probation, school suspensions, illnesses that caused him to miss days in school or miss major tests and exams, and by his intense negative reaction to personal confrontation. Alex would often change the subject when planning a course of action that required his commitment. Despite Alex's genuine desire to do well, he seemed unable to engage in a thoughtful, reflective planning process.

Important Relationships

The significance of romantic relationships for any adolescent cannot be overstated, and such was the case with Shelly, Julie, Manny, and Alex. All four youth worked hard to maintain their romantic attachments. Shelly and Alex had a tumultuous relationship during the time we worked with them, and Shelly clearly was concerned about Alex's lack of success inside and outside of school. Alex expressed concern for Shelly on occasion, but Shelly's mother viewed Alex as a toxic influence on her daughter. So too, Julie seemed to work hard to spend more time with her boyfriend, who had dropped out of school and had no job, and Manny described his girlfriend as an

important source of emotional support. At the same time, it was clear that all four youth in this study had few, if any, close friends. It was clear from their actions that Shelly, Julie and Alex relied on their parents, while at the same time they criticized their parents for not supporting them enough. If agency is the intentional assessment and pursuit of a particular course of action, combined with a belief that one can impact the outcome through one's actions, then each youth displayed agency in his or her relationships when he or she intentionally put effort into maintaining a relationship that the youth felt had personal or emotional value.

For Shelly, one of her most important relationships was with Mrs. Fairchild. As shown in Chapter IV, Shelly worked hard to repair her relationship with Mrs. Fairchild when Shelly was failing her classes in February 2009. Shelly wrote a poem to Mrs. Fairchild expressing her gratitude, and she continued to seek out Mrs. Fairchild's counsel as she struggled with her schooling and her relationships. Mrs. Fairchild was also the first person Shelly would go to when she wanted to talk about her accomplishments:

I wanted to let you that a very special young women came to my office today with another huge smile (almost as big as when she told me about her prom) to tell me about her recent acceptance to Community College. Her picture was taken today at school and posted with all the other graduating seniors going to college!! We are so proud of all of Shelly's accomplishments! Another exciting thing is that Shelly is planning on doing an internship this summer right here at the high school. This girl has struck gold! I want to thank all of you for all your support behind this incredible young lady! (Mom's name) hats off to you as her Mom! You have done an incredible job!!!
(Email from Mrs. Fairchild to the people in Shelly's support network and her mom, May 21, 2009)

Shelly intentionally sought out Mrs. Fairchild for support, but also to share her successes. The relationship was important to Shelly and she knew she needed to be proactive in order to maintain their relationship.

Julie was a difficult person to get to know, as she would often be critical and short with others. Julie's relationship with her mother was extremely important to her, however, and at several meetings with Julie and her mother present we saw how her mother supported and defended Julie, and how Julie often deferred to her mother for help. For example, when Julie made an agreement with the principal that in order to drop her fourth block class she would need to work more hours at Dunkin' Donuts, the principal insisted that Julie have parental approval, and so Julie took the initiative and called her mother on the spot, connecting her mother with the principal. Julie clearly had the relationship with and belief that she could be successful with her mother's support. Julie also worked hard to obtain her father's support when she transferred to the adult education program, which required Julie to drop out of Emmerton High School.

Julie's plan to obtain the credits she needed through adult education did not succeed, however, and in late June 2009 Julie announced that she had become pregnant with her boyfriend, causing upheaval in her family and shocking the adults in the school who were trying to help her. Julie's parents stuck by Julie, but made it clear that they did not like her current boyfriend. Eventually Julie chose to mend her relationship with her parents and broke up with her boyfriend:

Went to school to see Mrs. Fairchild... asked about Julie- she is attending school and staying out of problems with other kids- Mrs. Fairchild said she talked with her for a long time: "Julie said that (her boyfriend) would be physically abusive- and that he was doing a lot of drugs which she had to get away from since she was now pregnant" "she said 'I have screwed up before but my parents are there for me and they are for me now'"

(Field Notes, October 26, 2009)

Julie had strong ideas about what she wanted to do, and she often expressed a desire to avoid the control of others. In our first few meetings, Julie talked about how her

father was dominating and how she wanted to “run away” or become “emancipated” to avoid her parents’ control. In our meetings about her program changes, Julie’s father presented himself as strong but caring and he did not criticize Julie. In the end, Julie intentionally chose to foster her relationship with her parents and not with her boyfriend.

Manny had lived almost entirely with surrogates since he was 13 years old, and so it appeared that he had developed a Discourse of self-reliance. Manny rarely took the initiative to look for a job or to ask for help in class. He did, however, accept certain types of help when it was offered to him, including one-on-one assistance from Ms. West and tutoring from the group home staff. Despite his circumstances, Manny mentioned that the group home director was a source of support for him, stating, “like he’ll talk to me about me getting into trouble, keep me out of it” (Transcripts, December 9, 2008). Manny worked with Ms. West to complete his work and he talked to her about his concerns and his moods, but Ms. West kept a certain distance with Manny because, as a para-educator, she was painfully aware of the limitations of her position. Eventually Ms. West was told by the special education department head, Mrs. Black, that it was inappropriate for her to help Manny, and so she met with him on her own time after school. When she announced that she would not be returning for the 2008-09 school year, Manny was gracious and genuine as he expressed gratitude to Ms. West for all of her help:

Malloy: So (to Ms. West) you might not be here next year ?

Ms. West: Well I don’t know I haven’t gotten a job yet and I don’t know that I will, and....I mean its obviously with mixed feelings that I leave here because I don’t want to leave some of these students, but ummm if I find a teaching position I have to take it- I would prefer to stay here but there are no openings and I don’t know if I would get hired so... anyway..

Malloy: Yeah

Ms. West: Anyway.....so um

Manny: Well we'll miss you a lot...
Ms. West: Thanks Manny
Manny: I won't but... (laughs, everyone laughs)
Malloy: Very funny....
Manny: I'll miss you
Malloy: Ms. West has really really helped you out this year....
Manny: Yup
(Transcripts, June 11, 2009)

Unfortunately, Ms. West felt unappreciated, stating, "I really understand this that like that my attachments to students is really different than their attachments to me and you know..." (Transcripts, June 11, 2009). I was worried that Manny would see Mrs. West's action as just another person leaving him behind, however, he seemed to understand that she needed to leave. He did not respond when she expressed her frustration. In effect, it was routine for Manny to have people come and go in his life.

As we began to talk about his planned transition to go back to live with his mother and stepfather, we talked about some of the relationships that Manny would lose:

Malloy: So, how do we help you get what you need... because when you go home there won't be anyone there to tell you what to do, you will be free to choose, so what is a support for you? Mrs. B. (guardian ad litem) told us about your mom, how she is disabled, and I know that you are dealing with a lot- it's not your fault- but most kids here don't deal with that- it's gotta be tough.... And do you have someone to talk to- if you come back from home and you're feeling like you're holding it all in- it must put you in a bad mood and make it hard to concentrate- do you have some support?

Manny: My girlfriend (he explains that she works in a nursing home and that she really helps him)

Malloy: How about M. (the group home director)?

Manny: Yeah he understands, he knows...

Malloy: Ok so let's look at this, if you move home you won't have him anymore-

Manny: (He) told me that he would be there and that I could talk to him at any time...I can go back there I've seen other kids do it.

(Field Notes, October 19, 2009)

Manny was quiet and reserved about his relationships and while his teachers found Manny to be polite, they were frustrated at what they described as his lack of effort in school and how he kept to himself.

As we have seen, building trusting relationships was a major weakness for Alex, who evoked sympathy from some of his teachers but who could not follow through on his promises. Even Shelly could not trust or rely on Alex. Despite Alex's declaration that his relationship with Shelly was important to him, Shelly described how he berated her on several occasions, and she was publicly humiliated when he told her at the last minute he would not take her to the prom. Mrs. Pennington and I witnessed how Alex yelled at Shelly in order to get her to leave one of our meetings with her.

Alex had conflicts with many of his teachers and administrators and he complained about nearly every adult he encountered in the school except his culinary arts teacher. Despite all of the disruptions happening to Alex inside and outside of school, Alex worked hard to maintain his work in the culinary arts class for the first half of the 2008-09 school year. He was proud of his work there and the culinary arts teacher described Alex as "a pleasure to have in my class" (Transcripts, January 13, 2009). In the spring of 2009, however, Alex had a dispute with that teacher as well, resulting in finger pointing between the staff, described in my field notes:

Jon tried to reach Alex but he is not home and doesn't appear to be in school. Jon says that Alex refused to do something for the (culinary arts) teacher, the teacher pursued it and Alex ended up yelling and walking out of class- classic behavior for Alex- seen it before- the behavior plan told the teachers not to respond when he is agitated- perhaps that's what went wrong.
(Field Notes April 30, 2009)

Despite his lack of social skills, Alex felt quite responsible for and to his mother and he worked hard to make things better for them at home. This was evident on many

occasions, such as when his mother needed him to re-enroll in school in order to obtain her welfare check, or when he and his mother negotiated with Jonathon to try to help out with the housework and keep his friends out of the house. Theirs was a volatile relationship, characterized by behaviors such as blaming and insulting one another, while at other times declaring their concern for one another and their interdependence. Alex and his mother were in survival mode, and they needed one another to keep their apartment, keep their basic benefits, and keep food on the table. Alex finally stopped going to school in October, 2009, because his mother had been diagnosed with cancer and he wanted to stay home and help her.

Self-efficacy

Considering the numerous challenges possessed and failures experienced by each youth, it is a bit surprising and important to note that they all expressed pride in the successful accomplishment of traditional academic tasks and displayed an optimistic attitude about their abilities to be successful, especially when they were supported, to develop a realistic plan. This is surprising because the adults in the school often portrayed each youth as lacking the capability or motivation to do the work. For example, during one of our first meetings to consult about Alex, Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano talked about Alex's lack of effort and inconsistent performance in school, his explosive outbursts, and the stories he would tell them, making it difficult to sort truth from fiction. Julie, Manny, and Shelly were portrayed similarly. The adults generalized the deficits of the youth with very little consideration given to context or each youth's specific strengths. The youth shared narratives, often with hurt and anger, of how they felt berated and criticized by teachers and, in some instances, by their parents. There is evidence,

presented in Chapter V, that the generalized sense on the part of the adults and the youth that the youth were not working towards the expectations adversely impacted their interactions and willingness to exert effort towards a goal (the cycle of negative reciprocity). There is also evidence, however, that when given the opportunity to be successful, each youth expressed pride and satisfaction in his or her accomplishments and each was given a new sense of confidence.

Self-efficacy beliefs are a critical element of individual agency and have been shown to influence student motivation and effort to perform particular tasks (Pajares, 2002; Bandura, 1989). As Pajares (2002) indicates, self-efficacy is a context-specific belief that the individual possess about his or her personal capability to perform given actions:

Students cannot accomplish tasks beyond their capabilities simply by believing that they can. Rather, beliefs are, as Peirce observed, "rules for action." As such, beliefs become the internal rules individuals follow as they determine the effort, persistence, and perseverance required to achieve optimally as well as the strategies they will use. (p.22)

Knowing that self-efficacy is a "rule for action" and that it is context-specific, there were several behaviors and social actions expressed by the youth that signaled their beliefs that they could accomplish a task successfully, including expressing pride or satisfaction, persisting in a task, and engaging in goal setting and problem solving.

Shelly beamed when, after we identified math as one of her greatest challenges, she received an "A" on her math test, stating that she accomplished something she did not think she could accomplish:

Malloy: Good. Good. And that A-plus was in math.
Mrs. Fairchild: Was in math.
Malloy: Do you believe that?
Mrs. Fairchild: Math. That's fantastic.

Shelly: You probably didn't believe me when I just told you.

Malloy: But you didn't believe it, right, when they showed it to you? Isn't that great?

Mrs. Fairchild: Isn't that great? That is great. I saw {one of your teachers}, and he said 'she's really been working hard.'

Shelly: I saw someone and I said, "you know how I can't pass math for 3 years in a row, well guess what: I did it"

(Transcripts, September 18, 2008)

Shelly was smiling and engaged as she made this statement, and she persisted, with some setbacks, to pass her math class. In January 2009, Mrs. Fairchild noted in an email that Shelly wanted to meet to change her strategy for passing math and I noted in my response, "Its great to see that Shelly is taking the lead!" (Email from Malloy to Mrs. Fairchild, January 15, 2009). Shelly had other positive experiences during the 2008-2009 school year, including her internships at the school district's early childhood program, attending the prom after Alex backed out at the last minute, obtaining her high school diploma, and getting into college. Mrs. Fairchild told me that Shelly wore her community college backpack every day for the last two weeks of school. Shelly's mother recounted what these experiences meant to her daughter:

Mom: ...so that she isn't – she doesn't need to be beat down any more than she already is

Malloy: Right right and she has had a good experience this spring yeah she really did know'

Mom: Right --- for her the best time of her life---

Malloy: That's good...it was nice everyone at school felt good about it

Mom: She was, she was (pause) a completely different person-and she definitely felt supported.

(Transcripts, July 16, 2009)

Julie often expressed confidence that she could be successful if only other people would cooperate, but there was a disconnect between Julie's stated actions and her follow through. At one point this researcher wondered if Julie had a learning disorder that she was trying to cover up, because she would claim to have the ability to successfully

complete and academic task but she refused academic help that was offered to her, hoping that she could be successful by herself, which proved to be false.

As the option to go to adult education (or “night school”) became more viable, Julie became more and more active and initiated more steps towards her goal, stating her belief that she could succeed there :

Julie: Well I had that meeting with them (night school)... and she said I told her about how I wanted to do good in the school I wanted to go to school there... and she said that it would be one of the best things for me because she looked at my grades and my effort in my night class and that I would do really good and... that they could transfer my transcript???.

JM: So, you basically applied there, is that right or...?

Julie: Kinda, I just gave her a little bit of information that she needed and the next step is my parents sign me in
(December 2, 2008)

During the transition to adult education, Julie was making greater efforts to pass her classes, she scheduled meetings with her parents and the school staff, negotiated with the principal to drop her fourth block class in exchange for working, found out the graduation requirements for an adult education (night school) diploma, and finalized her transcripts and other paperwork to make the transfer. In contrast to her previous avoiding behavior Julie was working hard and responding to the support, noted by her mother:

Mom: Yeah, it's not all the credits thing is, you know, she's got great potential, she's working hard, she doesn't have to do this. This would work for her. The positive things.

Malloy: Well, I think what we have to also do, and I think you're alluding to it, is, build in a support system.

Mrs. Fairchild: Looking ahead, yeah.

Malloy: You can't wiggle your way out of this, right? Which, your mother has a fear of. It sounds like you will, you might wiggle, you know, if you're getting irritated.

Julie: No, I'll have my graph (planning system)
(Transcripts, December 9, 2008)

In the end, Julie graduated and “walked” with her class, independently planning and following up on her course work with the help of Mrs. Fairchild, all while having a baby girl in January 2010.

Manny told us with great pride about his interests, talents, and accomplishments, including reading, dancing, hip hop, and wrestling. Of course, Manny had limited control over his decisions and choices, given that he was on probation and living in the group home. School teachers often portrayed Manny as unmotivated and Ms. West, who supported Manny in his classes, alluded to his lack of motivation to do schoolwork. During our first few meetings, Manny gave the impression that he did not care about doing his work, giving reasons, as we saw, for why he could not be successful, including the classroom disruptions, the way the teachers make him feel, and the type of instruction. In January 2009, however, Manny had an experience where he worked with Ms. West and the group home staff to successfully complete a packet for his English class and he handed in his math work. Manny expressed pride at what he had accomplished:

Manny: I finished all the math that Mr. H. gave me...

Ms. West: Where is that?

Manny: He has it

Ms. West: Good that’s awesome, was he psyched?

Manny: Yeah he said wow, you actually finished a packet in a week that we gave you

Ms. West: They’re cracking the whip on you at the group home I believe,

Manny: No... a little bit (we laugh)

Ms. West: So uhhh, I think he’s actually I shouldn’t speak for Manny what do you think about all of this?

Manny: I feel better than before, I felt better...

Ms. West: You do, that’s great

Manny: I don’t know why but I felt better...

Mrs. Fairchild: Manny that’s huge...

Manny: I don’t know why but I felt better...

Ms. West: What do you think can you put words to...

Manny: I go to school today, I pass in my work,
Malloy: Makes you feel like you accomplished something
Manny: Yeah
Ms. West: That's awesome.... I'm glad to hear that
(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Manny said "I felt better" four times during this exchange, an indication that he was proud and felt good about completing his work and turning it in. Although Manny had his setbacks, he was able to obtain 6 ½ credits for the 2008-09 school year and he went to summer school to recover his English credit. Despite Manny's apparent disinterest and laid back demeanor, he was clearly proud of his academic accomplishments and he was also proud of his work at the barber shop:

Donna (University staff person): I saw a much more defined outlook you know in the last couple of months
Manny: Uh huh
Donna: especially with the barber shop, and organizing that and you've actually taken a lot of initiative in that area so...that's pretty impressive
Malloy: Are you still working there?
Manny: Um huh
Malloy: That's an accomplishment-
Manny: Uh huh
(Transcripts June 11, 2009)

These experiences did not turn Manny into a self-starter or driven achiever overnight, but he did seem to thrive on the support he received, thanking Ms. West at the end of the school year when she said goodbye. Manny was able to be gracious and funny at the same time as he thanked Ms. West, and his demeanor showed that he was feeling more confident and more in control.

Alex often expressed confidence in his ability to successfully meet the expectations of his teachers and the school, but like Julie, his behavior was inconsistent with his claims. There were some adults who felt that Alex was making a choice to violate the rules, while others indicated that they felt he could not meet the demands of

the environment or respond appropriately to immediate threats, such as when another student threatened him or when the assistant principal confronted him about his cell phone. One of his previous teachers noted Alex's desire to do well, however, in an interview that was designed to determine the roots of Alex's behavior problems:

Malloy: How was he successful.... At poetry?

Mr. P (English Teacher): I have no idea, he had a chance to talk about love and fighting in his poems. I hardly saw him, he was constantly cutting...

Malloy: What are his strengths?

Mr. P: He's an interesting kid...

Malloy: What do you mean, educationally or socially?"

Mr. P: Both. I think it's interesting to hear about his life. He wants to do well, I find that appealing, he wants to do well but it's a lot to overcome"

(Field Notes, September 3, 2008)

In another interview with his current English teacher, she indicated a similar doubt in Alex's ability to meet the expectations, stating, "I would almost say that for him, I can't imagine he can sit for an hour and a half, okay? In a study. That just doesn't seem like he can do that" (Transcripts, September 16, 2008).

Despite his many negative experiences and disciplinary actions in school, Alex's repeated, stated optimism about his ability to be successful indicates that, at some level, he wanted to be successful and he persisted in trying to convince others that he could be successful. There was ambivalence evident in Alex's narratives, however, and he would at times express his concerns about his ability to be successful in school, illustrated in this exchange early in the 2008-09 school year:

Alex: And, I could do better in my classes. I didn't finish like two tests that I was in, with my teacher, so I'm not doing good in classes.

Jon: I hope you don't mind, but I did ask the teachers how you're doing. They said that you're doing really well. So --

Alex: Yeah, I do really good in Culinary, I'm doing really, really good. No, not as well, I'm up to a D-plus, now, so, I don't know. It was a B-plus, and then it went down to a D-plus. I'm not sure -

Jon: How did you find that out?

Alex: My progress report that I have.

Jon: Oh, it came out today?

Alex: It came out, it had, I had to write down. I wasn't, this is, this is for Culinary, the one I have. The other one's in my binder.

Jon: OK. That's OK.

Alex: Because, I want, I must have left that in the lunch room.

(Transcripts, September 30, 2008)

At each of his school meetings, Alex advocated for his ability to manage and improve his behavior, in spite of the fact that he was having disputes with others and being suspended repeatedly during the school year. Once again, though, Alex's ambivalence about his potential for success would surface, identified by his vague strategies and promises to do better the next time, illustrated in this exchange with the principal during one of his program review meetings:

Alex: Mmhm. Well, but I'm, well the thing is I'll just try not to take it to other people if I'm finished with my work myself, because I just want to ...the way that I was doing. Last year, kids that I hung out with last year, so, they want to help, like I just want to work on how I'm doing by myself, instead of paying attention to other people. Like drama and stuff, I don't want that anymore.

Mrs. Stavros: Now, I'd love to promise you it's not here, but regretfully, it still is. I think it's a little less than last year, but it's, there probably will be drama.

Alex: I know, but I ...mostly if I pay attention to other people. I'll pay attention to my work and stuff.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

As Alex's school year continued he had few positive experiences, but he persisted to work with Jon to define his goals and he continued to engage with Mrs. Stavros (the principal), Mrs. Fairchild, and Mrs. Catano to check in on his school program. In the spring of 2009, Alex was experiencing numerous stresses, including probation, yet he continued to find a bright spot and remained optimistic about his ability to succeed in culinary arts:

Malloy: And then when you start meeting with Jon you can talk a bit more about the culinary you want to do with the bigger things

Alex: I want to take those classes either way (stammering) I like those classes I told her I would take those classes either way and she says 'OK'...

Jon: Um if you really like culinary, would be interested in maybe looking into um community college courses?

Alex: I got called for a couple of colleges like they know me like they know I'm doing good in my class.

(Transcripts, March 24, 2009)

One of Alex's major characteristics, despite his expressed optimism, confidence, and continued search for success, was that he truly lacked self-efficacy. Alex lacked the true belief that he was going to be successful. At one of our first meetings, Alex defiantly expressed his belief that he was ultimately in control of his education, stating (in solidarity with all students), "Because, it's going to be our choice. We want to, if we want an education, we want an education. It's our choice." (Transcripts, September 23, 2008). Alex wanted to project a profile of control, strength, and capability and his statement here outlines that no matter what others try to do or say, he will be the person in control of whether or not he receives an education.

Alex repeatedly stated that he could do the work, that he would do better next time, and that he wanted to do well in culinary arts, but one had the sense that he was telling the adults what they wanted to hear to avoid their disappointment, to stay connected to school, and in part, to try to convince himself that he could do it. Perhaps his difficult circumstances, lack of viable strategies, and negative beliefs about his prospects were sources of his anger and frustration. As the next section shows, Alex had few positive experiences from which to build a positive self-view.

Positive Experiences

Research has shown that self-efficacy beliefs build from positive experiences and are highly influenced by the environment, context, and issues of power (Bandura, 1989; Juang & Silbereisen, 2002). Shelly, Julie, Manny, and Alex displayed social actions that signaled agency when they were having successful experiences, as defined by the school and the school community. In other words, the youth responded positively and felt accepted in the school community when they received positive feedback from their environment. There is evidence that, despite all of their difficulties and their ambivalence about their abilities, all four youth sought educational success and the approval of adults and peers, including the approval one receives for getting good grades, passing in assignments, praise and support from adults, and the acceptance of other youth. The pride and sense of accomplishment that all four youth expressed as they experienced some successes fueled their sense of self-efficacy and future agentive encounters.

Shelly clearly had a difficult year on several fronts. She was given the knowledge that she had a fatal disease that could take an unpredictable course: her family was in constant upheaval and its stability was constantly threatened, her boyfriend was treating her poorly, and she had few friends in school. In spite of all the bad things that were happening to her, Shelly appeared to gain strength from the support she was receiving from Mrs. Fairchild and others in the school. Shelly's developing feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy were documented in a local newspaper article written by a teacher who wrote about Shelly's tenacity and the kindness she received from people in the school that year: "Shelly began to see that she was an important person. She didn't have to let other people define her, she could define herself. She began to feel a part of something.

Her grades started going up and she began to feel better about herself” (Newspaper Article, May 19, 2009). Shelly’s mother also noticed that Shelly gained “self esteem” from the positive prom experience:

Mom: ...it’s one of those little things you know – I left school early I didn’t go to the prom, you know, I didn’t go to graduation so I understood why you know --- it it’s something obviously not something that’s going to impact the rest of my life and if anything I’ve got past that I don’t really think about it but when you’re in the middle of it and included and she I... I don’t know it was very nice to see her at you know she ... had some self esteem and it all happened at the right time cause her ex-boyfriend wasn’t around and which is it was so nice to see that change in her because I could almost kind of see a little glimmer of the outgoing you know (PAUSE} very friendly happy person she used to be and...it it was very nice to see --- everybody--- commented about how different she looked -she was home and she was happy
(Transcripts, July 16, 2009)

These positive experiences, intentionally developed for Shelly by the adults around her, contributed to her beliefs that she could have success and these beliefs were reflected in her actions and narratives. It is apparent that without the intentional development of a community of support or social resource network, Shelly would not have developed this sense of hopefulness and self-efficacy.

Developing a social resource network for Julie took on a different quality and process than for Shelly, in part because of Julie’s preference to take action on her own and her reluctance to accept help from others. Despite these preferences for independence, Julie participated fully in the RENEW mapping meetings, in part because the meetings were focused on Julie and her needs. At first, Julie had difficulty describing any positive experiences that she was having, especially in school. After several meetings, however, Julie began to see that the people around her were trying to problem-solve so she could attain her goals to avoid Emmerton classes and graduate early. This

experience of participating in a helping process where she received unconditional support became a positive experience for Julie, described by an email from Mrs. Fairchild:

...In speaking with Julie she really wanted to meet with her Mom today. She doesn't want to wait and really does want to explore and discuss Adult Ed. She feels RENEW is important and wants to continue with this.... She is a private person but seems clear on her goals.
(Email, November 11, 2008)

According to Julie, her mother, and Mrs. Fairchild, Julie had been struggling with her schooling since 6th grade. Previous to middle school Julie was an average student, but in seventh grade she began to experience discipline problems and was receiving poor grades. Her educational experiences deteriorated in ninth grade. Julie had soured on school. As we began to develop a strategy for Julie to graduate, however, she described how adult education classes were different from the classes at Emmerton:

Julie: The people here (at Emmerton) are like, oh, I have to do this. What's the point of doing this? I don't even want to.

Malloy: It's very different. Yeah.

Mrs. Fairchild: I was just talking to a student, today, that had some questions about night school. Thought about it, but then, it's like, I'd be more embarrassed having a teacher ridicule my work in front of a class of people I don't know, and I said, that's not how, I don't think that's how it is at night school. You know, it shouldn't be that way anyway, but-

Julie: After you write a, really anything, you have to share something. But you don't even have to read it. You could have the teacher read it. You could have someone else read it. And the first paper that I did, it was a three-page paper on who you most admire in your life. So, I was like, oh, my nephew. And she gave me a 95 on it, I think.

Malloy: Wow. Wow. So, you are having success there.

Julie: Yeah. I love going there.

(Transcripts, October 7, 2008)

Part of Julie's desire to go to night classes was influenced by her belief that she would be more successful there. Unfortunately, Julie was wrong and she eventually needed to obtain her diploma through a combination of adult education, on line courses and classes at Emmerton. As time went on, Julie developed a different outlook once she

had the chance to try and fail, and she was able to tackle the problem anew. For Julie, success was only going to happen on her terms and she needed to be in control of the process. In one of our last planning meetings, Julie's mom reflected, "'She (Julie) has really matured this year'—I note that she no longer tries to do things and get away with it but has learned to negotiate with adults —mom agrees" (Field Notes, October 1, 2009).

For Manny, success meant staying out of trouble and keeping people "off my back." Since Manny had spent the previous five years in juvenile detention and then in a group home, it is likely to assume that Manny was not used to having a reliable social resource network that could be activated to support him. Like Julie, however, Manny participated fully in the RENEW meetings and seemed to enjoy interacting with Ms. West, me, and the other University staff members. Manny would participate in appropriate banter and make jokes during the meetings, and his group home manager said, "He seems to like (the RENEW meetings), yeah—he says no one is nagging him or telling him what to do at those meetings" (Field Notes, October 14, 2009).

Manny, like Julie, had not experienced academic success for several years. He moved from school to school until he landed at the group home where he was in his third consecutive year in Emmerton schools. His school records indicate that Manny got into numerous fights in middle school and he received only 1½ credits in his first year at the high school. Although his behavior problems had diminished, Manny was still failing most of his classes when we first met in November 2008, and he seemed disinterested in our conversations about pulling up his grades, getting his work done, and tracking his efforts. He did not know how many credits he had. Given this context, it is significant how Manny described his feelings when he passed in his math homework and his English

packet: “I feel better than before... I felt better... I go to school today, I pass in my work” (Transcripts, January 20, 2009). As stated earlier, he repeated the statement, “I felt better” four times during that exchange. As the conversation continued, Ms. West brought up the idea of an internship at a particular barber shop in town that Manny liked. The internship started in May 2009 and Manny spoke with pride about his job there:

Malloy: Have you already started working (at the barber shop)?

Manny: Yep

Malloy: Oh good.

Ms. West: He started on Sunday

Malloy: So what do they have you doing?

Manny: He gave me a list of stuff like I do the baseboards, like I’m cleaning the baseboards with oil soap, clean the TV, dust off the pool table, mop and sweep the floor and vacuum, pretty much that stuff yeah

Malloy: What’s he paying you an hour?

Dan: Uh \$8.50, I have 25 bucks

Jenny: You go back this Sunday?

Manny: Yeah every Sunday

Ms. West: I did run into (the barbershop owner) last night I seem him everywhere now (laughs)and he said he’ll see how it works out and he might have him and this week and so its one little step in that direction so...

Manny: Yeah

Ms West: Yeah, he’s very pleased you know I think if given the opportunity people out in the community like him are going to be happy to help kids that’s the way I see it...it’s the win-win situation you know that we have so I’m happy for you.

(Transcripts, May 5, 2009)

Manny spoke with pride about his job as he talked in detail about his specific job duties and his first paycheck. Ms. West expressed pride about helping Manny to get the job and how it made Manny happy. Ms. West had used her social network to develop the internship for Manny and he worked there through the fall, missing only one shift during that time. Manny was building an alternative self-view through his experiences that included the potential for academic and employment success.

As is evident, Alex had very few successful experiences, but throughout the 2008-09 school year, Alex pointed to his positive experiences in culinary arts as a bright spot in his schooling. Even as he had been suspended and Jonathon and I were trying to help him problem solve for re-entering school, Alex described with pride how he de-boned a chicken, doing much of the work himself:

Alex: I'll have I'll still go to me still want to do good in culinary

Malloy: You're doing great in culinary

Jon: Yeah you're I talk to Mrs. G---- today and she said you're such a pleasure to have you do such good work in there and you're really at home in the kitchen so

...

Alex : Yeah well I do everything I got with another kid...he didn't get everything, he's pointing at me to do everything and he pissed me off because I had to do it all and I made it myself 4 times, we had to debone the chicken a big a big chicken like you know, the bone you know...and I had to do it myself and I stuffed it-

Malloy: Well you should be proud of yourself for doing it

Alex: Now I know how to debone a chicken, French bone and chicken

Jon: That's really good so now you know how to do it and you have lots of practice

Alex: I hate that cause the stuffing ... {we laugh} anyway they had to throw the chicken out because the freezer was bad

Jon: That's right they do go bad. But because you did a lot of work today Mrs. G---- said you were amazing...

Alex: Yup yup but said 'why are you doing it by yourself, who's your partner' cause he told me how to do it' so and 'well you're doing so super good' and and...

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex portrayed this experience in his class as a success and achievement, and he carried his confidence about culinary arts through the rest of the school year. Like the other youth, Alex was not accustomed to having a social resource network that would support him in school. Alex knew that Mrs. Catano was his special education case manager, but he portrayed her intervention as a threat as much as a source of help and he often talked to her about personal and relationship issues rather than his academic support

needs. Unfortunately, Alex's successes in culinary arts were not enough to overcome his other challenges but he did receive a passing grade for that class.

Belief in the Strategy

Despite the attempts of the adults to lecture or advise the youth about certain strategies, it was clear from their responses when the youth believed that a certain course of action was likely to result in success (or failure). The actions of these "emerging adults" showed that they were learning to assert themselves and think critically about what would and would not work for them, and what they were or were not willing to do.

Shelly, for example, continued to date Alex even though she knew that her mother, Mrs. Catano, and Mrs. Fairchild opposed their relationship. Mrs. Fairchild counseled Shelly about the harm that of her relationship with Alex, about the imbalance of power and how Shelly was being abused by him. Despite this counsel, Shelly remained loyal to Alex until she learned, through her prom experience, that Alex was not treating her respectfully. On the academic front, Shelly also began to learn how to take charge, telling Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild that the strategy of putting her into a math class that she has failed twice before was not going to work and calling a meeting to redesign her program. They designed a program that included alternative math instruction combined with tutoring in which Shelly was engaged and eventually successful.

Julie was also very clear about what strategies she felt would work and what would not work, taking into consideration her situation and preferences. Julie made it plain, by her actions and her words, that she would not be successful if she was forced to complete all of her credits by going to Emmerton High School. Further, once the adult education (or "night school") option was offered, Julie became focused on working on

that option, knowing that her parents, the school staff and I had serious concerns. Julie gave several reasons why she felt she would be successful at night school, including her strong need to feel respected: “They (adult education teachers) actually, like, they actually treat me like an adult there. And not a little sixth grader” (Transcripts, October 7, 2008). She also felt that she was having academic success there, as she talked about getting an “A” in her writing class. Julie took control of the action steps and followed through with the requirements that she finish up her classes at Emmerton, as she researched the credit requirements for an adult education diploma, convinced her parents to support the plan, formally dropped out of Emmerton, and increased her work hours in exchange for dropping her fourth block class. Julie worked diligently on the plan because she felt it would get her what she wanted, which it did.

With support from Ms. West and his group home manager, Manny successfully completed his English packets and began to turn in his math homework. These two efforts represented major accomplishments. Manny outlined in his meetings what would work for him, including a quiet place to study, someone to gently prod him along, and respectful treatment by his teachers. When Manny had this support he engaged in the strategy as a way to achieve success. As Manny prepared to exit the court system and return to his home school district, and with Ms. West gone (she took another job), Manny stopped putting effort into his academic work. As he enrolled in his new school, Manny clearly identified what he had learned over time to get what he wanted, “I don’t like people getting on my back—and I learned that if I’m good they stay off my back” (Field Notes, November 5, 2009). Manny showed agency, despite the fact that he was under the control of the court, by doing what he needed to get off probation and he also showed

agency by working to complete his assignments when he had the support of others and he wanted to work for them.

In addition to showing agency in pursuing strategies that he knew would work, Manny showed through his behavior that he would not put effort into strategies that he felt would not work. Given his situation, Manny had to work hard to stay out of arguments and confrontations that would get him into trouble. Manny was passive and non-responsive to teachers whom he did not like and given his lack of power in the situation, Manny was able to get by without putting effort into his academic work and still stay out of trouble, a strategy that worked for him.

Alex began to learn that if he negotiated and expressed his needs he would have some success. Alex and Jon developed a list of Alex's support needs that Alex presented at his school meetings and he found that it was positively received by the principal and teachers. Alex also learned that he would have a greater likelihood of getting what he needed from the school with Jon's support and presence, and Alex reached out to Jon on several occasions for help. As an indicator of how he felt he had little power, however, Alex was openly critical of the school's offerings and services when he was with Jon, Mrs. Fairchild, and me, understanding that if he was openly hostile to or opposed the offerings from Mrs. Catano or the principal that he would likely be denied what he wanted. For example, at a meeting at Alex's home to prepare him for his school meeting, Jon explained how the school wanted Alex to attend his math instruction at the local group home and Alex's response was immediate: "No... I am not going to the (group home)!" (Transcripts, November 25, 2008). At the school meeting, however, Alex acquiesced, feeling that he could not refuse. Eventually Alex was not successful going to

the group home class. This indicates that, because Alex did not like or believe in the strategy from the beginning, he would eventually fail. For Alex and Manny, their inability to openly assert their needs and preferences was clear, but both eventually gained control by behaving as they wished. In some cases this strategy worked for them, but in Alex's case, this strategy damaged his relationship with the school staff and resulted in school failure.

Self-efficacy of the Helpers

Although this dissertation is focused on a cultural translation of meaning-making and social action through the eyes of the youth, it is important to note that the self-efficacy beliefs of Mrs. Fairchild, Mrs. Catano, Ms. West, Mrs. Pennington, the parents, me, and University staff were tied to the experiences of the youth. Simply stated, as the youth experienced success, the adults in their resource network expressed pride, joy, satisfaction, felt successful, and expressed greater confidence in the prospects of each youth to have future successes. One teacher was so moved by the story of Shelly's prom experience that he wrote the article for the local paper. Mrs. Pennington explained how her experience helping Shelly made her a better teacher:

...when we are trying to reach out... like we try to help or assist other people we would have helped ourselves, so that's probably one my biggest things (giggles a bit) or um the growth that I have achieved which means that I have seen -what I could be doing as a like a better teacher
(Transcripts, December 8, 2010)

Ms. West, who helped Manny to get obtain his internship and finish his English work, indicated that she was proud of and happy about Manny's accomplishments. Julie's parents expressed concern but hope that she would eventually succeed, tying Julie's positive turn-around directly to the intervention of Mrs. Fairchild and others at the

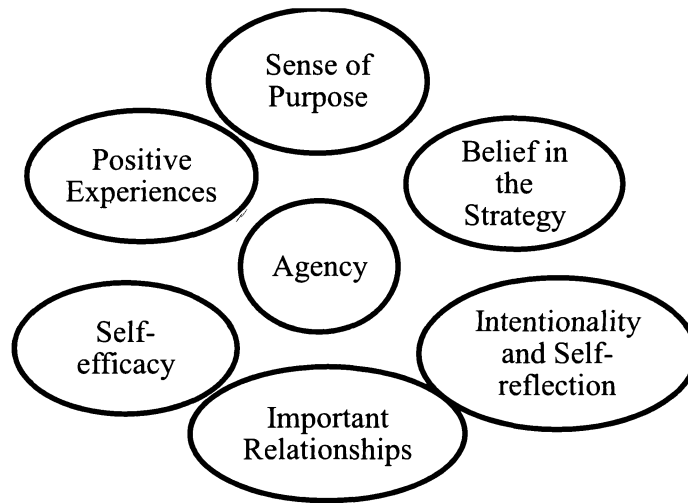
school. The adult self-efficacy was tied to the success of each youth, but when the youth were not successful, the adults also tended to react by taking more control (addressed in Chapter VII), labeled the youth as having insurmountable deficits, or otherwise blamed the youth or parent or system (and sometimes their colleagues), rationalizing the lack of success on a generalized sense that the problems were too pervasive.

Model of Agency

This analysis has focused on six contextual factors that tended to be present when contributed to expressions of agency across all four youth. As with the categories of positive reciprocity and negative reciprocity, the social actions of the youth that signaled agency converged around certain nested and interrelated concepts, shown in Figure 19:

Figure 19

Contextual Model of Agency



It is clear that Shelly, Julie, Manny and Alex accrued social resources through the process of working with adults at school and that the youth learned, to varying degrees, how to activate these resources, contributing to their self- efficacy beliefs. Further, each

youth began to build confidence, again in varying degrees, through positive experiences and positive feedback from the adults around him or her. In addition, the process of self-discovery and self-understanding allowed each youth to take an intentional approach to the problem solving process and to engage in pro-active planning when previously the youth took actions that were often self-defeating. In short, we see instances where the youth constructed an alternative self-view and their revised self-views influenced the perceptions of the adults around them.

It was unexpected to find that these four youth who were significantly off-track for graduation, who were faced with significant personal, social and learning challenges, who had few positive social ties, and who were considered highly at-risk by the adults whom they encountered would want to attain and feel good about attaining educational success as it is traditionally defined in our society. It is also surprising that each youth would have the capacity for agency and self-efficacy beliefs regarding schoolwork and careers. Shelly wanted to be valued as a healthy, capable, attractive and worthy person. Alex wanted to be successful as a chef. Manny wanted to complete his schoolwork, keep his job and get off probation. Julie wanted to graduate before her peers. The Discourse of achievement was meaningful and important to them. Instead of the typical notions that “those kids” do not want to do the work, do not want to succeed, do not deserve our time, cannot be successful, should not be or don’t want to be in school is a social creation, not a creation of the youth. Realization of their goals, however, did not come without intervention. Given their histories with relationships, all four youth at first described mistrust of and did not believe that they could rely on the help of others. As we see here, the beliefs of each youth about the utility of building a social resource network and about

activating the help and support of members in that network needed to be intentionally developed.

Conclusion to Chapter VI

While there are variations in the literature about what is human agency, this analysis has focused on the notions that agency is reflected in one's capacity for intentionality and reflection, includes purpose-driven planning and action, influenced by self-efficacy beliefs (the belief that one has the ability to achieve one's goals, have an impact on one's relationships and the world) and the ability to activate the resources in one's social network (social capital). As Schwartz (2006) indicates, identity development can be seen as "the use of agency to accrue 'capital' that can be used to negotiate for societal resources" (p. 779). This chapter has provided illustrations of acts of agency, outlined the contexts that facilitated agentic encounters and focused on the events where youth agency occurred. What the analysis here has shown is that all four youth had very distinct preferences and skills for interacting with others, all had insight about what worked and what would not work for them, and each had differing levels of need for control. Chapter VII concludes the analysis by focusing on the fourth major social process, that of control of social goods. While the issues of power have cropped up throughout this analysis, this research project would not be complete if it did not include a critical look at how power influences the opportunities and actions of the youth, the families, and the school personnel.

CHAPTER VII

CONTROL OF SOCIAL GOODS

Because, it's going to be our choice. We want to, if we want an education, we want an education. It's our choice.

Alex, Sept 23, 2008

Alex is stating what should be most obvious: that he will learn if he wants to learn and that attempts to convince, cajole, coerce, or otherwise manipulate him to go to school and engage in learning will fail if he is not invested in doing so. Through this assertion, Alex was stating that he and his peers have the ultimate control over their learning experiences and outcomes. The problem, however, is that Alex and his peers were in subservient positions relative to the adults in the school. Schools are guided by complex and multiple authorities vested in law, community responsibilities and expectations, knowledge, social resources, cultural resources, as well as locally constructed interpersonal authorities and expectations. For typically developing “emerging adults” or adolescents, the task is to learn how to navigate and respond to these many authoritative demands and remain connected to the people and other resources that the school provides. For many youth with learning, emotional, social and behavioral challenges, however, the complex and multiple demands of authority are difficult to understand and successfully navigate.

This chapter captures the social actions and contexts in which control over access by the youth to social resources or social capital was evident. The analysis begins with a

theoretical description of the social processes involved when control is evident and how power relations are enacted in terms of costs and benefits, including a description of the contextual elements and specific social actions that indicated control of social goods found across all four youth in this study. The analysis then uses the contextual framework to describe and interpret the social actions and behaviors of the youth found in the texts, in the context of control over social goods. The discussion ends with a synthesis across contexts, describing how the power imbalances and the responses of the actors contributed to the reproduction of the disadvantaged position of each youth and instances when the youth overcame their positions of disadvantage.

Power

While the notions of power and control are broad and all-encompassing, this chapter uses a critical sociocultural lens to identify the social processes that were evident to the youth in attempts to control or limit the youth's choices and access to resources. These social processes take place through the application of social goods, described by Gee (2005) as "things such as power, status, or valued knowledge, authority, positions, or possessions" (p. 84). These social goods are given force by legal authority, positional power, "correct" ways to behave, valued assets and notions of what is right or wrong. This dynamic of power and control played out in the contextually-specific relations as Shelly, Julie, Manny and Alex interacted with others in the helping process.

Discourses, discourse communities, or communities of practice help to identify group membership and cohesion and it is the group that determines the norms and rules regarding the distribution of social resources (Gee, 2005; Moje & Lewis, 2007). As Gee (2005) indicates, membership in a community is determined by the individual's

engagement in the “right” ways of “thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, and believing” (p. 21). Group cohesion is found in the recognition of certain cultural capitals that allow some individuals to access valuable social resources (Bourdieu, 1980). The distribution of social goods are controlled by individuals and groups, based upon influences such as the cohesion of the group, and how the group coalesces around shared values and ways of thinking, speaking, and interacting.

The dominant discourse community typically creates norms to protect the interest of the community and its members. As such the power and authority rests with the community to sanction and reward its members. Individuals who do not contribute to the efforts of the group but who may benefit from its resources and outcomes are typically subjected to punishments or sanctions by members of the dominant group (Fehr & Gächter, 2000). As Horne (2007) notes, “...people get angry when others free-ride. Their anger leads them to sanction free-riding behavior. The implication is that people are hard-wired to sanction anti-social behavior– behavior that is harmful to the group” (p. 163).

While the norms that control social goods are defined and enforced by discourse communities, the sociocultural approach indicates that power, agency and norm enforcement are context-specific and relational-dependent (André, 2010; Horne, 2007). In other words, individuals who are subservient or cast out from one context may be dominant or enjoy full membership in another context. Further, the agentic actions of the individual are not entirely dominated by group membership or politics. Individuals interpret, make, and remake their identities within various contexts. As Lewis and Moje (2003) state, “...power is produced and enacted in and through discourses, relationships,

activities, spaces, and times as people compete for access to and control of resources, tools, identities. Power can constrain, but does not necessarily prohibit agency” (p. 1986).

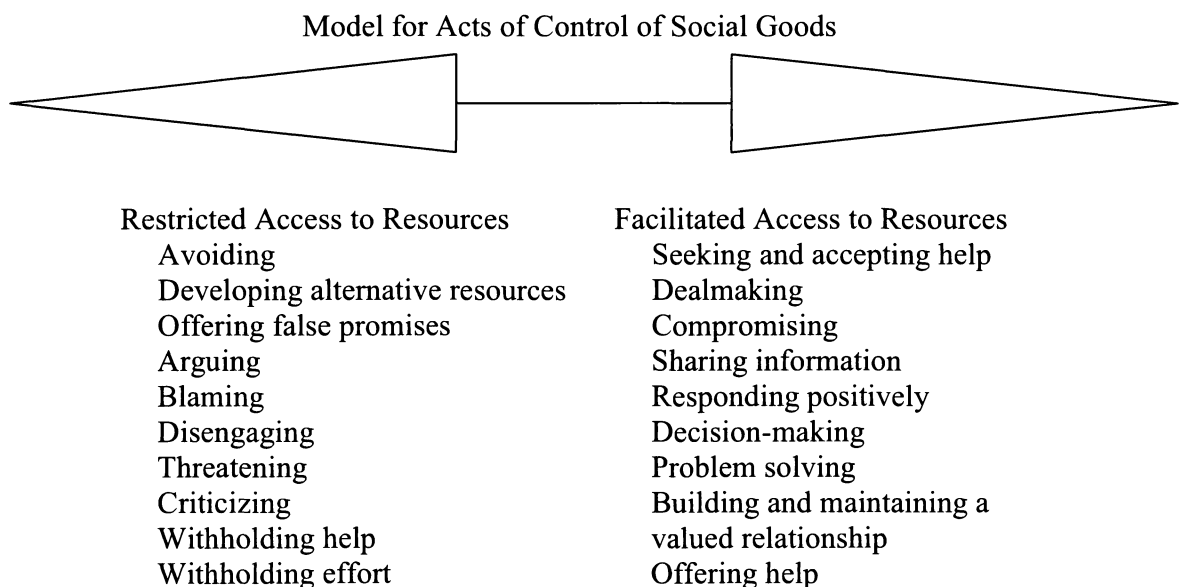
It is the notion that the youth and adults interacted in contexts where there was competition for social resources that guided, in part, the search in this analysis for social actions and contexts that signaled the presence of power and control. Further, the context-specific meaning-making of power and control as constructed by the youth were identified here through the search for discourses that signaled competition for, negotiation over or clashes regarding access to resources such as help provided by others.

The American Discourse of individual achievement and self-reliance, combined with the responsibility vested in the public schools to educate all children regardless of status, imbues the schools with the power and responsibility to enforce social norms and exact sanctions upon students who do not conform to the expectations. The consequentialist view supports the authority to protect the safety and well-being of the majority of students in order to maintain the social good. This social responsibility is the justification for punishments such as detentions, suspensions, and class failures. There are critics, however, of the “one size fits all” educational sanctions and policies that exercise control over students, arguing that repeated sanctions have the potential to significantly harm children from disadvantaged circumstances and do little to motivate students to learn (Hickey, 2003; Noddings, 2002a).

Power relations are characterized by the struggle over control of social goods and resources. As such, “power resides implicitly in the other's dependency” (Emerson, 1962, p. 32). In order to gain greater control over one’s access to social resources, subservient individuals will often engage in processes designed to reduce their dependence on the

dominant party. The strategies individuals use to gain more control include building alternative resources, bargaining, and reducing one’s investment in the relationship (Emerson, 1962). These behaviors are consistent with the social actions undertaken by the four youth in this study as they attempted to gain greater control and increase their access to social resources including actively seeking and accepting help, deal making, compromising, sharing information, responding positively, engaging in decision-making and building and maintaining valued relationships. The youth also displayed behaviors that indicated they were blocked from accessing social resources, seen through social actions such as avoiding, developing alternative resources, offering false promises, arguing, blaming, and disengaging. These are the same social behaviors we see the youth use in response to acts of positive and negative reciprocity; however, we are looking at the actions of the youth here through a different, critical lens. The behaviors that the youth displayed to gain access to social resources appeared along a continuum, depicted in Figure 20:

Figure 20



The analysis that follows is framed within six contexts when the need for social action in response to control over social resources was exerted by the adults and the institutional processes, focusing on how the youth respond to and constructed meaning from these situations. The contexts were characterized by:

- Expedience—There were instances when the adults made decisions or put strategies into place without full collaboration with the youth in order to take what the adults thought would be a quicker or easier route to solving a problem. In fact, these instances often resulted in failure.
- Setbacks and failures—When the youth experienced failures or setbacks there was a tendency for the adults to exert more control over the situation or withdraw their help and support. When the strategies failed there was also a tendency for the adults to blame someone else.
- Positions of authority—There is a hierarchy of teachers, specialists, and administrators in every school, and there were times that individuals used their positions to exert control over what was happening with each youth.
- Norm enforcement- The social norms and expectations, both formal and informal, were often used by the adults to put pressure on or to sanction each youth in order to motivate the youth to engage in certain types of behaviors.
- When seeking help—Individuals who are in positions of subservience undertake certain strategies in order to have their needs met, especially since the subservient individual has little to offer the dominant other. There were instances when the youth and their parents demonstrated an understanding of the mismatch between the “haves” and “have nots.”

- Criticism and exclusion—There were numerous instances when the youth described how adults publicly criticized them. These instances were often interpreted by the youth as personal affronts and abuses of power.

Contextual Analysis

The contextual analysis that follows will show how the four youth responded to the situations where control over social goods was at issue and how they tried to gain control over and make sense of situations where they were clearly in subservient positions to the adults. Through their narratives and behaviors, Shelly, Julie, Manny and Alex demonstrated how they calculated the risks and benefits of standing up to authority, their strategies for gaining more control without completely severing ties, and instances when they disengaged and developed alternative sources of support and means for accessing social goods.

Expedience

The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2010) defines the adjective “expedient” as actions that are “suitable for achieving a particular end in a given circumstance” and “characterized by concern with what is opportune; especially governed by self-interest.” There were several instances when the adults exerted or attempted to exert control over the youth because it would be the easiest way, in the adult’s view, to attain a desired end. The idea of moving forward with a decision without fully exploring with and engaging each youth was often seen as appropriate in circumstances when each youth was having little success or was viewed as being uncooperative. For example, Mrs. Catano, in her position of special education case manager, made decisions on behalf of Shelly and Alex without their agreement. Mrs. Catano frequently presented as being overwhelmed with

her caseload and the volume of her responsibilities. As such, she often said that she didn't have time to negotiate or wait until Shelly or Alex "came around." Further, Mrs. Catano said on several occasions that she had already tried, without success, several of the strategies we suggested. Generally, Mrs. Catano lacked the patience for or belief in the process designed to help each youth articulate his or her goals.

Shelly and Mrs. Catano had a distant relationship. Mrs. Fairchild was the person who Shelly most trusted and confided in at the school. As the following exchange in a meeting with Shelly, her mom, Mrs. Fairchild and me demonstrates, Mrs. Catano tried to assert her authority, indicating that she could "take care of" certain logistical issues for Shelly:

Mrs. Fairchild: So, we talked about trying to get courses lined up for the fall. Shelly, do you remember that we talked about changing one course for another and revising your schedule?"

Shelly: I don't get (doesn't understand) that (the schedule).

Mrs. Fairchild: Ok, well we need to look at the schedule for next year.

Mrs. Catano.: I looked at Shelly's transcript – should we talk about that now? (Nod our heads). Well, Shelly you have 17 credits and so it's (graduating) going to be difficult to make this happen."

Malloy : What does she need for credits?

Mrs. Catano: She'll need 8 credits this year

Malloy: What is she missing?

Mrs. Catano: Well., you need 2 maths and a senior English. That's 3 credits.

Malloy: How difficult can it be to get the other 5 credits?

Mrs. Catano: Oh, I can find credits, but... It's a matter of whether you can do it or not (looks at Shelly). You know, you were sick last year and getting your diagnosis and so we had to pull you out of one class.

{Mrs. C's voice is deep and loud and her tone starts us out on a negative note. I go out of the room for flip chart paper as I realize we may need to problem solve here. When I get back it is clear that Shelly has said she wants to finish school this coming year. I log the credits needed and those she has on the flip chart}

(Field Notes, August 12, 2008)

Mrs. Catano lays out the "deal" that she has for Shelly: that she, Mrs. Catano, can "find" the credits but that Shelly needs to meet the expectations. Shelly responded to Mrs.

Catano's challenge by reiterating her desire to graduate at the end of the upcoming school year. Mrs. Catano's desire to employ the easiest and most expeditious route was evident as she summarized what she would do for Shelly at that same meeting:

Mrs. Catano (looks at clock): Well I have to go in a minute but we can change those classes. It's a lot of work, Shelly (looks at her). You remember that we had to pull you out of that one math class but then you gave up on the class last year because you didn't like the teacher- You can't do that this year.

{Shelly nods}

Mrs. Catano: I'll work on the schedule, {To Shelly} Come and see me the first day of school, don't go to your classes, OK, and we'll get you new schedule set up (Shelly nods). OK, I have to go.

(Field Notes, August 12, 2008)

As she indicates, it will be "a lot of work" for Mrs. Catano if Shelly's plan falls through, but Mrs. Catano went along with the decision of the group because she knows that the group, including Shelly, wanted Shelly to obtain eight credits during the school year. My field notes reflect the feelings that Mrs. Catano's stance engendered: "I am upset and humiliated when Mrs. C. looks down at Shelly and lectures her. I see how the power is still in the hands of the adults" (Field Notes, August 27, 2008).

Alex sorely tested Mrs. Catano's preference for expedient solutions, as he rarely responded positively to the interventions that she developed for him. Mrs. Catano made it clear to us from our first meetings with her that she had spent much time and effort in attempts to help Alex succeed, to no avail. For example, as we planned to do a behavioral assessment in the beginning of the 2008-09 school year, Mrs. Catano said, "I've been dealing with him and that family so much and so long, like, that I don't even know what is ever true and what's... he lies to me so much. But he also gives me amazing information" (Field Notes, September 10, 2008). Her language indicates that his family needs to be "dealt with," a term that denotes a lesser position to her. She also

states that Alex does not tell her the truth or cooperate with her. Through this and other exchanges, Mrs. Catano is inferring that efforts to help Alex are not worth it.

The tendency to develop expedient solutions for Alex started quite early in the 2008-09 school year when Alex was suspended for two days in late September for arguing with his study hall teacher and walking out of school. In preparation for his return to school, Mrs. Catano talked to his mom and Alex about shortening his school day, knowing that he had some success before with a shortened day. Underneath the plan, however, Mrs. Catano told us that there was pressure from the assistant principal to get Alex out of the school as much as possible because of his disruptive outbursts and aggressive behaviors. The plan for a shortened day was laid out in a meeting with Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild, the principal, the alternative education teacher, the truancy officer, the school nurse, Jonathon and me. Alex's mother could not be at the meeting. Alex was disengaged and defiant at the beginning of the meeting, saying he felt sick and using curse words to describe his home, his life, and his views of school. Alex was, in fact, reacting to being in a situation where he felt he was being reprimanded and controlled. Mrs. Catano's email to the teachers, administrators and those of us on his University team following the meeting illustrated her frustration and laid out her argument for making this decision:

Hi everyone,

Just a quick update on our boy Alex after the team meeting today. Mom was not able to make it but I have already spoken with her. First and foremost thank you all for your time in this matter, as we can only hope that someday it will pay off.

Alex has made it very clear "that he hates this place and we wants to get out!!" Therefore the team has decided to put him on a shortened day. He has been successful in culinary and English (up to this week) so he will come in first and second, EAT LUNCH A- and then he will leave the premise immediately.

THERE IS NO EXCEPTION TO THIS RULE unless he is personally escorted by administration to address an issue etc.

Goals for Alex-

- 1.) Pass his two classes
- 2.) He will take Play do to earn a math credit
- 3.) He will obtain a job and getting a Co-op credit.

At this time his behaviors are dictating these choices. He does not make decisions until further notice.

The team is going to meet in the beginning of November to chart his progress. At this time we will revisit MSP and get a RENEW update.

Thank you all

(Email, September 24, 2008)

Mrs. Catano's language indicates that Alex has forced her into the position of taking control because this is what he says he wants and because of his behavior. She uses a derogatory term, "our boy," putting Alex in a subservient position. Her language also indicates that she is concerned that he will attempt to subvert the plan and so she takes a stance to remove his decision-making power. Alex and his mother agreed with the plan because they had no choice.

Shortly after the meeting where the plan was laid out, Jonathon and I met with Alex to continue to focus on his career planning. Alex's reaction to the plan to shorten his school day was filled with contradictions and we began to see him divest from the idea that he would spend the whole day in school and try to earn all the credits he needed:

Jon: So, basically, now that the classes have switched, and we have a new schedule, right?

Alex: I don't know if I, I have study hall class, and my second block class. Then, after lunch I, after lunch, I eat and go home. After lunch, I just go. Bye-bye.

Jon: So, how does that work out for you? What's --

Alex: What?

JON: What do you like about it?

Alex: That I go home. I don't have to be here the whole day.

Jon: OK. All right. Is there anything else about school that you like, about it? I mean, like, you know, a couple classes, or?

Alex: I don't really like school. I come here to hang out with my girlfriend. That's pretty much it.

Jon: OK.

Alex: And, I could do better in my classes. I didn't finish like two tests that I was in, with my teacher, so I'm not doing good in classes.

(Later that same meeting...)

Jon: What about after school? Is there anything you don't like about what happens after school, in your --

Alex: I'm kind of bored.

Jon: So, you're bored, a little bit?

Alex: Yeah, I don't want to... I don't have anyone to.... I'm just bored after school. We have, like, I'm on the computer at the chat room. I'm on, like....the chat room type thing.

Malloy: Would you like to try to work your way back into full school day, then?

Alex: No. No. No. No, no, I don't want to stay here for school, either way. I just --

Malloy: So, you wouldn't consider that a good thing.

Alex: No. Coming back for a whole day, not, I like it right now, because I can go home and go to sleep.

(Transcripts, September 30, 2008)

Alex indicated that he liked the shortened schedule, but he that he was also bored at home. The plan served the adult's need to get Alex out of school for more hours per day but the plan did not provide Alex with more educational services. Alex was not in a position to advocate that he stay in school more hours, so he accepted the plan and gave many reasons why the plan was fine for him. Alex's language indicated that he had divested himself from the outcome and that he did not care.

Throughout the school year, Alex posed problems for the school staff. There were numerous attempts to help him gain his credits in alternative ways, none of which worked. The only credits Alex obtained that year were two credits for culinary arts, the only class he said he enjoyed.

The people who worked with Julie and Manny offered much of their own time and effort to help them pursue their plans and be successful. In Julie's case, Mrs. Stavros spent time with Julie and the adult education principal crafting a plan so that credits from Emmerton could be transferred to the adult education program and to use Julie as a "test case" for recognition of the adult education diploma as an option for other students. Mrs.

Stavros soured on Julie's plan, however, when Julie failed to follow through and received no credits from adult education in the spring of 2009. As such, Mrs. Stavros put the responsibility back onto Julie and her mother, reflected in an entry in my field notes:

We develop a plan with several options.... Donna and Julie's mom assume that the principal is still willing to offer alternatives, but I know from talking to Mrs. Fairchild that the principal is upset at Julie- that she did not follow through- when it suggested to invite the principal to the next meeting, Donna asks who should do it and Mrs. Fairchild says, " I think you should do it- I don't think she wants to hear from me anymore" Julie's mom sense this and says, well, we still are working towards the goal...as we brainstorm many of the options mean coming back into the school which Julie does not want to do, I say "this is where the resources and programs are"

After Julie her mom and boyfriend leave, Donna expresses her frustration that they have not followed through on "anything they have said they would do for the past month"

Mrs. F says, the principal "is embarrassed and has stuck her neck out for Julie...I don't know if she'll do it again"

(Field Notes, July 7, 2009)

There was, in fact, a cost that each youth paid for leveraging his or her social resources and if there was no reciprocity shown by the youth for favors given, then the resources were not likely to be offered again. There is only so much social capital "in the bank" and when efforts fail, the most expedient solution was to take over complete control or put the responsibility back on the individual and withdraw any help.

Manny received help from Ms. West because Ms. West wanted to help him. Unfortunately, Mrs. West had to provide him that help without the support of her supervisors and colleagues, who did not approve of what she was providing Manny. As such, the help given to Manny was not expedient and when Manny, for the first time, successfully completed his English and math work, a professional power struggle ensued and Manny's alternative English teacher did not give him a credit for English. Manny

was also constantly aware of his subservient position as a result of his court-ordered commitment to the group home and his probation status.

Setbacks and Failures

There was a tendency for adults to take over and exert more control when the youth were not successful the first time an agreed-upon strategy was used. This tendency was related to expedience. All the adults in the high school were busy every day, all day, and the demands of the RENEW intervention, including time to spend on problem-solving, planning, and conversations with the youth were considered a luxury by many of the adults. For example, Mr. Prince, the vocational guidance counselor, said of Alex “I am working harder than he is” and the assistant principal, who was the primary disciplinarian at Emmerton High School, said of Alex: “He needs to s—t or get off the pot” (Field Notes, October 28, 2008). The tendency for the youth to divest themselves from failure and control by others was also true of the adults, and so Mr. Prince and the assistant principal engaged in blaming and placing responsibility on the student in order to explain the failure. This tendency to take over and blame the youth happened with all four youth.

For Shelly, a major issue arose at the end of the first half of the 2008-09 school year, when Shelly seemed disengaged. Shelly’s failure to respond to her math program and supports upset Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild, who called Shelly in and “read her the riot act” (Field Notes, February 2009). Mrs. Catano’s response to Shelly’s failures was documented in an email:

Hi everyone,
Just an update with Shelly. Met with Paula (a para educator) for awhile today. This is what we are going to do... She is going to work on making up the few “requirements” needed to pass the class with a D-. Shelly knows she is doing this

with Mrs. Partridge?? The bottom line- for a 2 year college, IM 2 is the highest needed. IM 3 will be too difficult and P. does not feel comfortable allowing this. I talked with Shelly and we are going to move her into a Playdo math so it will show up on her transcripts as an algebra class and not an alt math and that will be her third math requirement. I am taking care of the rest of her schedule as well. English she is currently failing and I already bugged out about it!!! I am in process of changing this as well.
(Email, January 21, 2009)

In an attempt to support Shelly's plan, Mrs. Catano stepped in and rearranged Shelly's program. The week after, however, Shelly met with Mrs. Fairchild and said that she, Shelly, wanted to revisit her plan as she felt what she was currently doing was not working for her. It is not clear if Mrs. Catano involved Shelly in making the decisions outlined in the email above, and if so, how much Shelly felt invested in the strategy. It is clear, however, that Mrs. Catano took control of the planning for expedience and because she felt she knew best what would work for Shelly.

In Julie's case, as Julie experienced failure with the adult education plan she had fought so vehemently for, the school staff withdrew their support and effort to help Julie. The only people who remained to help Julie were her mother and Mrs. Fairchild. The principal stated that it was now Julie's responsibility to solve her problem and develop her plan. The Discourse of taking responsibility for one's actions and the "golden rule" of reciprocity was operating here. Mrs. Fairchild talked with Julie about the expectation of reciprocity, knowing that Julie would often try to get people to do what she wanted: "If you try to manipulate the system in a short term way with the painting class... then people who have that authority will stop working for *you*" (Transcript, December 2, 2008). Julie was able to respond positively to that message, eventually developing and pursuing her own plan for finishing high school.

Alex lost more and more control over the decision about his school program as the school year progressed, and although he was frustrated by his lack of success and of others having control over him, he rarely expressed his objections in his school planning meetings, opting instead to express them with Jon, his mother, and me in the smaller planning meetings. This was particularly salient when Alex dropped out of school and needed to re-enroll. In preparation for Alex's return to school, Mrs. Catano was developing a plan and she told Jon and me that the assistant principal is "fed up with him—they are fed up with him and his mother" (Field Notes, November 24, 2008). The school proposed that Alex take culinary arts first block and then go to a nearby group home for one-on-one math tutoring. Jonathon went to Alex's house to prepare Alex and his mother for a large re-entry planning meeting at the school and Alex reacted with defiance to what was being proposed:

Jon: I just wanted to kind of get an idea as to where they're at and kind of what we're going into when we go into the meeting today. Umm...At first, they weren't quite sure what they wanted to do, they wanted to talk to Alex first, but they're leaning towards having Alex start off attending and getting tutoring at the {group home}.

Alex: No! I am not going to the {group home}!

Jon: Hold on one second Alex, okay.

Alex: Hell no!

Jon: I can tell you all the information first, okay? Um, they said that in addition to their discipline system at the {group home}, they also have tutoring services over there which are separate, okay? And I talked to them, I said that we'll have to come to some sort of a compromise between what Alex wants and what the school wants. Umm...and they said that they are willing to work on a compromise. So, I told them that we had talked earlier in the week last week about what you wanted when you go back to school and I shared some of the ideas that you had with them. And I said today that you are going to the meeting and we'll work towards a compromise between what you want and what the school is able to do for you.

{Later that same meeting}

Alex : ...If they are going to send me to the (group home), it's not, that's stupid. I could come back here...I told you I'd come back to school. I did not agree to back to the (group home). Hell no!

Mom: Hell no?!

Malloy: Alex, it's not completely up to you, unfortunately.

Alex: Well, it's supposed to be what I want! Not what I want the school to do. That's the damn school. If I can't just go back to school, then I'm still out. I'm not going back there, I'm not going back to school
(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Although Alex eventually acquiesced and agreed to go back to school and take math tutoring at the group home, he was clearly frustrated that he was in this powerless position. He knew that he needed to return to school or he and his mother would be in violation of the truancy laws and his mother would lose a large portion of her welfare payments. He knew that he would have to go to the group home because it was part of the "deal" for returning to school. As he experienced less and less success, he lost more and more control. Alex was, in fact, unsuccessful in the class at the group home and stopped going in January of 2009.

When we first started meeting with Manny and he told us of his history with the juvenile justice system, Manny was clearly concerned about and understood that possible punishments were hanging over his head. Manny explained how his probation officer "threatened" to send Manny "up north" if Manny continued to fail all of his classes:

Manny: Yeah, like they (the courts) told me if I don't pass my classes this year that they will send me to a Center up north where you have to walk a mile up to school, you have to walk a mile there, you have to build your own house, your own little cottage thing...

Malloy: Never heard of that have you (to Jon)?

Jon: No I never heard of that what's it called?

Manny: It's all the way up north. In the cold, You have to walk a half a mile to get your own wood and stuff.

Malloy: So is this a judge telling you this?

Manny: Yea.

Ms. West: Is this part of this school year to pass or is like still--

Manny: My probation officer comes up and checks on me, he's supposed to check on me this week.

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Manny was clearly worried that he would be sent to a new place where he would have to fend for himself if he did not pass his classes. It is quite possible that the court was using the threat to try to motivate Manny to do better in school; however, there was no thought to the supports that Manny needed to succeed in school given his limited academic skills and his emotional disorder. The action of the judge was based on the belief that Manny was choosing not to do better in school and that the threat would motivate him to do better. Manny's language clearly indicated that he was worried about being able to conform to the threat. The rush to take over greater control and exert greater sanctions when a youth was not doing well, given that the current strategies were not working, was a common response of the adults across all four youth.

Positions of Authority

As with any organization, school staffing structures are designed with formal positions of relative power and authority. There also exist informal positions of power based upon each individual's knowledge, skills and personal characteristics. In this regard, the data here show that certain faculty members and administrators asserted their formal and informal authority and control over what was happening with the youth in order to align their actions as adults with their personal and professional beliefs, to avoid responsibility for what they believed might be a failure, to take over and assert a strategy that they believed would succeed, or to establish dominance over their colleagues. This section depicts several examples of this behavior and the responses of the youth.

Shelly, as stated earlier, was faced with a debilitating disease that was likely to progress over the next few years. In addition, Shelly was defying the wishes and advice of her mother, Mrs. Fairchild, and Mrs. Catano by continuing to pursue her relationship

with Alex. In general, Mrs. Catano supported the futures planning work with Shelly, but on several occasions it was clear that Mrs. Catano did not understand why we would help Shelly to create an aggressive plan so that Shelly could graduate on time and pursue her post high school dreams when she was faced with certain disability. For example, when Mrs. Catano said she could help “find the credits” for Shelly (described previously), she was establishing her position of authority as Shelly’s special education case manager. Mrs. Catano sought to establish her position of power when Shelly indicated that she may not have enough credits to graduate as she had planned in June of 2009:

Shelly: Mrs. {Stavros, the principal} says I’m a credit short.

Mrs. Catano: When did she say that?

Shelly: At lunch Thursday or

Mrs. Catano: I remember what it is, yeah... well we’ll get you a credit for futures builders or...maybe all your RENEW work, you can get a half credit and you can get credit for social skills... there was one “AF” (failure) and there was no way I was gonna ... well any way you’re not going to be short...we’ll take care of it (Laughter)

Mrs. Fairchild: Also one of the things too... I have been trying to get Mr. Prince involved but what we’re hoping to do is next quarter on that block she might have off is some kind of internship nearby ...so she could get credit but something that and she wants some hands on experience- we talked about that.

Mrs. Catano: Right but I mean just all the RENEW stuff alone could be for credit.

Mrs. Fairchild: Right you’ve been doing this for over a year, every week.

Mrs. Catano: Sometimes twice a week. (laugh) So yeah trust me we’ll get the credits don’t worry...

(Transcripts, March 17, 2009)

Rather than explain to Shelly in detailed terms what she needed to do in order to complete the required work, Mrs. Catano wanted the others in the room to know that Shelly was on track and that she, Mrs. Catano, would “get the credits” that Shelly needed to graduate. In part to implement an expedient solution, Mrs. Catano was also asserting her position of power within the group in order to help Shelly to gain enough credits to graduate.

The clash of professional positions in Shelly's situation became painfully evident towards the end of the school year when we invited a nurse from the state Office of Special Medical Services in to help Shelly begin to learn about and take more control over the management of her illness. After meeting with Shelly, the nurse chastised Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Catano for working on career planning with Shelly, reflected in my field notes:

11 am: I go into the school to try to find Alex's flip charts and I see Mrs. C. in the hallway- she tells me that the nurse from the NH Office of Special Medical Services called and questioned what we are doing with Shelly, "She said, why are you doing all of this. She said she lost sleep all week because she read Shelly's file and she has a serious illness...."

Mrs. C:" You know, what do we do? She could go to Make a Wish and live it up...."

I am livid! The implication is that Shelly should not have dreams or a future because she has an illness.... I say to Mrs. C: "So what should we do, prepare Shelly to die.....???" Mrs. C agrees....

I go past Mrs. F's room and Shelly is in there- she brings her out to tell me, Shelly is beaming: "I got into College... Mrs. F. did it, she keeps going... never stops" I give Shelly a hug, and say, "you're going to be famous!"

Mrs. F. has tears in her eyes...." Can I talk to you?" We sit down and Mrs. F is heartbroken because of what the nurse had said, "She'll be Ok, right? I mean she suggested we haven't prepared her enough... and that could help, but we're doing the right thing, right?" She's crying now, I say, "what is the alternative? Should we stop helping her to dream? Should we prepare her to die?" Mrs. F:"I don't know why I'm so emotional, that's why I want you there....next time we meet. I can't do this."

(Field Notes, May 21, 2009)

Looking back on this situation, there was enough professional arrogance to go around among all the parties, including my own arrogance as the consultant. The nurse believed that Shelly should prepare for her eventual debilitation and death and she asserted her beliefs. Yet the process in which Shelly had invested was quite different from what the nurse recommended. Shelly was clearly happy and felt good about graduating. It was impossible for the parties to remain emotionally detached in this

situation. In the end, I drew comfort from what Mrs. Stavros said, “Shelly had a wonderful experience her last year here” (Field Notes, October 1, 2010).

As Julie worked with us to explore her problems and develop strategies so she could be more successful in school, she continued to be subjected to reprimands from her teachers and the assistant principal. It was impossible for Mrs. Fairchild to control everything that was happening with Julie in her classes or as she interacted with others in school and Julie admitted that she was violating the rules. At one point when Julie noted that she received another detention, Mrs. Fairchild explained how individuals in positions of authority view their responsibilities and how we could intervene on Julie’s behalf:

Julie: I have morning detention. I was late. Bysixminutes.

Mrs. Fairchild: Oh. You were late by six minutes? Well, I think sometimes, the problem is, like in (the assistant principal’s) position, he doesn't see all the hard work you're necessarily doing. All the good work you're doing. He gets called when there's a problem. So, maybe, in two weeks, if he comes in, he can see all of this that we have, here. All what your plans are, and what you're doing to work toward that plan. You know, he can just kind of, also, when things come up, and you are late, he can also see all the good stuff that you're doing, too, and not just that you came in late six minutes, you know...

Jon: Unless they know something is going on, or understands what's going on. Then that's what they're going to do. So, if you're six minutes late, just like any other kid who comes in six minutes late, you're going to get a morning detention.

Julie: Yeah, well, I'm late like every day.

(Transcripts, October 7, 2008)

Mrs. Fairchild explained how Julie could access her social resources by building communication with the assistant principal, explaining how Julie could possibly gain the assistant principal’s support. As Julie continued to meet with us and developed a plan for going to adult education, she became more organized and the feedback that we received from some of her teachers showed that Julie was making an effort to show positive, more socially-acceptable behaviors.

Manny was under the control of the courts, the group home, and people in the school and he knew it. What was one of the most blatant displays of positional power between professionals, however, had nothing to do with his probation. Ms. West wanted to implement the RENEW model and we mentored her as she worked with Manny, but she was a para-educator, not a teacher. In the spring of 2009, Manny was allowed back into the Emmerton program designed to support students with learning, emotional, or behavioral issues. (He was banned from that program the year before because of non-compliance problems.) Mrs. Black, the lead teacher in that program, made it quite clear that Ms. West was not to work to support Manny any more, but the rest of us did not learn of this until it was quite late in the spring. Ms. West, in an attempt to maintain a professional stance, tried to steer Manny towards sources of support other than herself for his struggles in his math and wellness classes rather than blame her colleagues. The effect, however, was to put the responsibility on Manny for events he could not control:

Malloy: So what I have put down here (the action plan) is getting progress reports for wellness and Math and maybe talking with the teacher and try to pinpoint what the issue is. And then, do you see Manny every week in study or?

Ms. West: I see Manny every day

Malloy: Oh OK, Really focusing in on those two classes----

Ms. West: Un... Unfortunately for me I don't, see him every day but I don't have time to support him during the day, so that's when when I... uh.... I don't.... in order.... rephrasing what I said earlier, I'm like I think that because you know the understanding of the concepts isn't there, that's where there's a breakdown...

Malloy: Right

Ms. West: And I can't help him because I'm not there and...I you know there are other resources, ummm and I do, you know, I do I do sympathize with not knowing math, and feeling like why bother.... so...

(Transcripts, May 5, 2009)

As the facilitator at this meeting, I was quite angry and shocked that Ms. West, who clearly cared about Manny and who had helped him pass some of his other classes, and set up his internship at the barbershop, was pulling her support away. She blamed

Manny for his lack of effort and used that as a rationale for the withdrawal of her support. Behind the scenes, however, Ms. West had been told not to interfere with Manny's program. As my field notes indicated, Ms. West felt that she was in a powerless position: "Talked with Ms F. about the situation—she feels Ms. West was mad because she is 'lowest on the totem pole' and feels unappreciated...she is putting in all this volunteer time and she doesn't feel she is appreciated" (Field Notes, May 18, 2009). Mrs. Black's opinion about what was best for Manny became clear when I interviewed her during summer school in preparation for the new school year with Manny:

I went into the school to start copying records and I saw Mrs. Black, who the guidance office said would have Manny's file. She is the director of the program that Manny was in 2007-08 and the last half of the 2008-09 school year. She indicated that (paraphrase) "I am the case manager as so I don't know why Ms. West didn't invite me to the meetings- I could have helped him get into another math and get a ½ credit (she) said, "Ms. West said he had a 26 in math- but that he could catch up- well, I could have put him into a different math and he could have passed. I am the case manager- I am the person with the files, and the decision-making ability." (Field Notes, July 16, 2009)

Mrs. Black was clearly angry that she had not been included in meetings with Manny, and yet Ms. West never once suggested that we include Mrs. Black in his meetings. Instead we learned that Ms. West was avoiding the entire issue by setting up our meetings with Manny on her own time, after school. It is interesting and important to note that Manny never once discussed or seemed interested in "taking on" the issue of who had power over his school program. When Ms. West said she could no longer support him, Manny was gracious and thanked her for her help. The struggle here seemed only to interest the adults.

There were several instances when the school or particular staff members in the school used his or her position to take actions designed to motivate or coerce Alex to

attend and participate in school. For example, when Alex left school suddenly and was thinking of dropping out of school, Mrs. Stavros asked Jonathon and me what she should do about Alex's Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition, a court-order that requires Alex to go to school or he and his mother will be prosecuted for his truancy:

We are going to court this week... what should I do? I want to keep the CHINS (Children in Need of Services) petition in place so we still have a way to keep him in school." She asks me what I think, and I say 'I think you're sending the right message- that you want to keep him in school and that you want him to get his education'

(Field Notes, October 17, 2008)

Given the volatility of his behavior and his strong personality, Alex generated power struggles around him. As indicated before, Mrs. Catano asserted her position as Alex's case manager early in the school year when she reduced the length of his school day and stated that Alex was not to have any decision-making power. In part, Mrs. Catano felt she needed to take this action because of what she described as pressure from the administrators to control Alex's behavior and his negative impact on others in the school. For example, as we began to develop a behavior support plan for Alex, Mrs. Catano said, "Oh, you'll have to deal with Mrs. Stavros and Mr. H (asst. principal)—they want him out" (Field Notes, October 16, 2008).

Alex's difficulties with those in power came to a crisis point when in February, 2009, Alex had a major confrontation with the assistant principal over Alex's refusal to shut off his cell phone. When confronted, Alex's anger escalated to the point where he yelled and swore at the assistant principal, who suspended Alex for ten days, telling Jonathon, "I can't have him talking to me like that." Jonathon explained the confrontation to Alex's mother during a visit to their home while Alex stayed in his room:

Jon: Before he goes back so I want to make sure he's ready for that and um we can work on school goals too and umm

Mom: Yeah I mean so it was over the telephone that's what started this whole incident?

Jon: It was but it was really a power struggle between he and the teachers and the one of the strategies we worked with the school is how to try to avoid power struggles unfortunately one did happen and that's when we know things are gonna be bad and so..

Mom: Right yeah and we kinda want to nip it in the bud before it even gets even bigger

Jon; Yup seriously---

(Later that meeting)....

Mom: That when he gets into that type of a situation that he'll you know that there can be a better outcome than him getting suspended or whatever there shouldn't be a power struggle on which one knows which one you know it's either you did something to give up your own and you know you should have just gave up and not said a word and just got at it at the end of the day and left it at that instead of now going to the forces of just getting kicked out or whatever and making the situation more extreme than what it should have been you know so Alex needs to learn you know

Jon: And—

Mom: More a little more self control, you know?

Jon: And in addition that the school can work on a couple of strategies too that can help

Mom: Yeah

(Transcripts, February 17, 2009)

Alex's mother, despite her own volatile behavior and stresses, showed a sophisticated understanding of Alex's anger problems, acknowledging that Alex needed "a technique or something" to prevent the escalation of his aggressive behavior. She understood that Alex's anger would escalate if he was confronted in the moment. Despite the fact that Alex had a behavior support plan that identified the issues that trigger his behavior and that he was to be sent to Mrs. Catano in those instances, the assistant principal, who had every right to be offended by Alex's behavior, summarily suspended Alex and ignored Alex's behavior support plan.

Alex understood and resented the position-based control that some people in the school exercised over him. For example, when we talked about negotiating his new

classes for the spring semester, Alex said he wanted to be in an early childhood class with Shelly, but that Mrs. Catano would block that option:

Jon: Alright? Then if you if you do it that way they're more likely to work with you and I think they will work with you

Alex: I know but the thing that pisses me off is they like they if that they want me to be with my girlfriend in the class they can be in a girlfriend boyfriend class right? Well when it comes to me they won't let me be in my girlfriend's class I won't pay attention to Shelly I'll do class work it will be easier for me and Shelly to work together on it you know cause we---

Jon: So what you want to do when you go in there, you want to give them suggestions as to what you want to do for classes

Alex: ... Well knowing Mrs. Catano she'll like she'll be like, 'oh, he can't be in class with her!' and knowing me I'll be like 'this... a b-tch'

Jon: Well Mrs. Catano----

(Mom, Alex talk at the same time,)

Mom: and that's where you don't want to start saying things like that Alex {he is again agitated trying to talk over others}

Alex: Do you remember the last meeting we were in, well a while ago, that school, she was not lenient and she's still not lenient she won't do that for me I have to be one of her (???) you know what she does? I mean that's why I feel she's a b-tch...

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex clearly resented the control that Mrs. Catano exercised over him in her position as his special education case manager. He understood the power she had to pick and choose options for him. On the other hand, Mrs. Catano was in the middle. She was trying to respond to the needs of her supervisors as well as to Alex's needs and she was often made to feel responsible for Alex's behavior. For example, at one point near the end of the 2008-09 school year, there was a clash between Mrs. Catano and Alex's culinary arts teacher, who was trying to wash her hands of responsibility for his performance in class:

I am surprised that Mrs. Catano is upset that the teacher didn't follow through- why would she be upset? In the past she has said that she has tried all these things with Alex and it doesn't work? This would just reinforce her feelings... but I think she really did want this to work and she is upset that her colleague did not contact her when she was supposed to (disrespect???). In fact, Mrs. Catano said

the culinary arts teacher said “this is not my problem, this is YOUR area...”
turf... finger pointing when things don’t go well.
(Field Notes, April 30, 2009)

The tensions between individuals who felt they had competing interests and positions of authority were evident both inside and outside the school. These clashes were noticeable and identified by the youth and by their parents or caregivers.

Norm Enforcement

Social norms, “most widely viewed as rules accompanied by social sanctions” (Horne, 2007, p. 140) and the enforcement of those norms, impose a strong influence on the behavior of members of any group (Coleman, 1990; Horne, 2001; Putnam, 2000). The reasons that certain behaviors are sanctioned by individuals or groups has several dimensions, including self-interest and protecting the welfare of the group (Horne, 2007). Schools develop rules or norms to protect the safety of all members, but there are also many school rules imposed by belief systems and there are informal norms and rules enforced by individuals. Adults in the school have beliefs about behavior and they use their positions as teachers or administrators to enforce their own beliefs in their classrooms. This section describes examples of how members of the school community used enforcement of social norms to exert power and control over the four youth in this study and how the youth responded.

Shelly rarely behaved in a way that offended the teachers or other adults in the school. She did, however, suffer social isolation from other students and because of her appearance and her continuing relationship with Alex who was highly visible and reviled by most of his peers. At the end of June, 2009, Shelly revealed that she was pregnant with Alex and that she was due in November 2009. Shelly told Mrs. Fairchild that “she did not

want to tell anyone because she was afraid of what people who are working so hard to help her would think...and...she was afraid that she would be mocked at school...” (Field Notes, June 24, 2009). Shelly understood that she would be criticized and mocked for her pregnancy and she was frequently isolated because of the way she looked and her disorder made it difficult for Shelly to be understood (she spoke in a hushed, nasal voice). So, although Shelly evoked empathy from many of the adults in the school, she understood quite well that she was not a member of the social scene among her peers at school.

Julie possessed the characteristics that would allow her to be accepted among her high school peers, including the “right” clothes, an attractive physical appearance and the “right” toys such as a cell phone and a car at her disposal. Despite her socially-accepted attributes, Julie described a social scene at school that was critical of her and her family. Julie felt that the Emmerton High School teachers treated her “different,” but at night school “like, they actually treat me like an adult there. And not a little sixth grader” (Transcripts, October 7, 2008).

Julie was often the subject of school sanctions including suspensions and detentions, which she used to blame the school. As she was working with Mrs. Fairchild, Ms. McGurk and the University staff to develop an alternative pathway for finishing high school, Mrs. Fairchild noted, with frustration, how Julie was still getting into trouble:

Mrs. Fairchild responds; “This is what she (Julie) wants, she expressed it, she’s given it thought and even though it’s not what all of us may want, she felt supported... she’s working hard and still getting slammed...” What she is talking about is Julie was suspended again- she is having disputes with an English teacher and swore at her. She has passed all of her classes thus far...this first quarter but she is having these discipline problems. (Field Notes, November 9, 2008)

Julie resented and blamed the people in the school for many of her difficulties, and Julie wanted to leave the school community because she no longer felt like she belonged there.

Manny was often characterized by the adults as being unmotivated and most of the sanctions he received centered on that perception. In middle school and during his first year in high school, Manny experienced numerous suspensions for fighting and other types of aggressive behavior. By the time we started meeting with him, however, both Manny and the adults around him noted that Manny was no longer getting into conflicts with teachers or other students. Instead, the problem noted by others was that Manny continued to fail in his classes, characterized, in part, as Manny's lack of effort on schoolwork. One prominent example of how Manny was punished for not responding in class was when Manny's alternative English teacher, Mrs. N., did not give him credit for the work he did in English because the work was not done in class. (This is the same class that Manny described as loud and lacking valuable instruction.) Mrs. N. said that she was struggling with how to grade Manny. Her rationale is explained in an email exchange between Jenny and Mrs. N.:

The email is the group home staff member's question to Mrs. N:

"I met yesterday with Ms. W, Joanne Malloy and Manny re his recent efforts. He had completed *Of Mice and Men* and the packet that (Ms. West) gave him. He is currently reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Ms. W. will provide some questions for him to work on... possibly today.

(Ms. West) was unclear whether this may allow Manny to earn a passing grade or whether he falls into the 'too little, too late' category? I know an awful lot of adult effort has gone into having Manny meet with some success.. and he has certainly put major effort in as well. How do his chances look for passing?"

Mrs. N's response:

Hi Jenny:

"I'm really struggling with Manny and how to grade him. After I had talked with Ms. West about Manny's English, I thought that part of the plan was for Manny to complete some work during class and unfortunately I have not seen Manny

complete, or try to complete, any work. It's really hard to justify passing a student when I have witnessed absolutely no effort on their part.

I know he has completed assignments on *Mice* which seems to be an improvement in effort-at least outside of school.

I know this hasn't answered your questions, but I just wanted you to understand my dilemma. I'll get back to you.

Thank you,"

(Email, January 21, 2009)

In addition to punishing Manny for lack of effort in class, even though he completed some work for the first time that semester, Mrs. N. was asserting her positional power as his primary teacher. Mrs. N believed that Manny should have completed some work in class to get a passing grade and so she did indeed fail him for that class. Jenny, the group home staff member, made note of Mrs. N.'s use of power when I asked her why Manny had not received credit in English after doing some of his packets: "I think its an ego thing or something....I know he did *some* work in that class" (Field Notes, July 16, 2009). Manny seemed uninterested in this conflict and did not comment on the outcome, although he did feel he had put some effort into the work and felt good about himself as we have seen. Manny ended up taking a summer school English class and obtained his credit, but because the expectation in Mrs. N's class was not clearly outlined, Manny was punished with a failing grade. Manny was sanctioned because he did not meet the norm that students exert effort in class.

During the beginning of the 2009-10 school year, in an attempt to send Manny off to his new school with as many credits as possible, Mrs. Fairchild, Manny and Mrs. Black (the teacher who said, "I am his case manager") and I met to being to plan his transition. During this meeting Mrs. Black stated that she expected to see more effort from Manny: "I am willing to help but I want to see Manny take some responsibility here. We agree to go back to a daily check in—he gets passing grades in math when he

takes the quizzes but it's the work and the effort..." (Field Notes, October 17, 2009).

Mrs. Black was making her expectations about "the deal" with Manny quite explicit: that she would support Manny, but only if he showed more effort. At this point, however, Manny was looking to leave Emmerton and had few reasons to invest in working harder for Mrs. Black. He transferred to his new high school in November 2009 with failing grades in every class he that he was taking at Emmerton.

Alex was subjected to numerous sanctions in school and in the community during the year and a half that we worked with him, including four suspensions from school and two arrests for breaking and entering and possession of stolen goods. He was also under the control of the courts under his Child in Needs of Services (CHINS) order. These sanctions served to continuously isolate Alex from the school community, particularly the adults who expressed their concerns that it was more costly, in the social capital vernacular, to keep him in the school rather than exclude him.

Alex did not like the truancy petition, stating at our first RENEW planning meeting, "I don't want to come here every day. I get made to come here, because my mom, if I get lazy about it, I'm truant, so I have to come to school. I think that's a bullsh-t thing. I think they should change that, if I have to come in" (Transcripts, September 23, 2008). In larger meetings with school administrators and teachers, however, Alex promised he would do what they asked in order to stay in school, understanding that he liked to see his friends, he liked culinary arts, he needed to comply with the truancy order, and he needed to stay enrolled in school so that his mother's welfare benefits would continue.

The University project team conducted a behavior analysis for Alex, determining that Alex needed clearly designated expectations and private confrontations when he was agitated. Alex's mother portrayed probation as a positive force to control Alex's behavior, stating "um yeah he hasn't gotten in no trouble I mean he's on probation so he hasn't gotten in no trouble or anything being out" (Transcripts, February 17, 2009). It was clear that one of the contexts that triggered Alex's angry responses was direct confrontation, especially if it was in front of other students. Jonathon stated, "The one thing that Alex will react to is being embarrassed in front of his friends." The cell phone incident was an example of how Alex responded viscerally to public confrontations. While the school staff members felt they must enforce the norms, Alex was in a completely different social space. Alex responded with uncontrollable anger when he felt threatened, thus violating the social and formal school expectations. He did not set out to break the rules but he found himself continuously in trouble because of his personal responses.

When Seeking Help

There is a cost and benefit calculus involved when an individual is in a position of seeking and needing help from others, as well as a cost/ benefit calculus made by individuals who give (André, 2010; Emerson, 1962; Lu, 1997; Robinson & Bell, 1978). In addition, assistance that one person may need and perceive as helpful may not be viewed as help by another person or by the institution or within the Discourse of the prominent community. The person who needs help is often in a difficult position of subservience and must find ways to encourage the other to provide that help while limiting the "costs" that may be associated with receiving that help. This help-seeking

cost dynamic plays out on individual and class levels, serving to reproduce class inequities. As Locker (2007) explains: “A poor person who lacks power or means of coercion must almost solely rely on norms of reciprocity or charity to assure that their investment in social capital with a person in a position of greater power brings some type of return” (p. 12). This dynamic of how power and control play out when seeking the help of others was observed among all four youth and, at times, among their parents. The administrative assistant in the Emmerton High School guidance office made a profound statement, perhaps without realizing it, about how social expectations and the cost/benefit dynamic play significant roles in help-seeking and help-receiving when she said to a student: “If you help yourself then others will help you” (Field Notes, November 28, 2008). What she captured here in her statement was the value behind the dominant Discourse regarding the helping relationship and the “cost” to those seeking help. The Discourse of reciprocity requires that there must be some repayment from the person who has been given help. In the absence of such a repayment, the help will not be offered again or will be offered with increasing conditions or costs to the recipient.

Shelly valued the support that Mrs. Fairchild had given her and Shelly showed her appreciation for the support she was receiving through various expressions of gratitude, including giving Mrs. Fairchild the poem. Shelly also understood that she could return the “favor” for all the help she was receiving by being successful. Shelly perceived Mrs. Fairchild as a source of counsel and support. When Shelly needed help she often went to Mrs. Fairchild and not to Mrs. Catano, because Shelly perceived Mrs. Catano as authoritative as and more controlling than Mrs. Fairchild, and so the “cost” of seeking help from Mrs. Catano was often too high for Shelly. For example, in January 2009,

when Shelly was trying to pass her math class and agreed to bring in her math binder, Mrs. Catano expressed her frustration that Shelly had not complied, reflected in one of my memos:

(Shelly) has a very serious degenerative disease. For some teachers, thus means lowered expectations (“she could be bedridden in a year!”) but I want to keep pushing to go with her aspirations....She is struggling with math, she has a boyfriend who is very impaired emotionally and follows her everywhere (to the disapproval of her teachers), and she is adjusting her goals. This upsets (Mrs. Catano), who says that the student “lied” about her math workbook and “just wants to make babies” with her boyfriend. I feel angry as she belittles the young **woman - why does she use the word “lie”? That upsets me- I think that perhaps the student feels powerless- this particular student tells people what she thinks they want to hear but she cannot come through. It’s not defiance but it is perceived that way.**
(Reflective Memo, February 22, 2009).

Mrs. Catano expressed her frustration with Shelly through comments that blamed and belittled Shelly, in part because Shelly was not responding positively to Mrs. Catano’s attempts to help her. In contrast to how she felt about Mrs. Catano’s help, Shelly valued and responded to the type of emotional support that was offered by Mrs. Fairchild. This is echoed by Shelly’s mother who stated that Shelly received the most support from Mrs. Fairchild:

Malloy: Now–In terms of the type of help, what do you think most helps Shelly, in terms of the people and things...what do you think is--

Mom: Ummm I think it’s definitely important for her to know that she has a person or people that she is comfortable with---because as much as she probably agrees with everything you guys say and whatever, she is (PAUSE) definitely in a more comfortable in a place where she feels safe and ummm she knows if she has a problem she knows where she can bring it you know --- poor Mrs. Fairchild you know (chuckles) how much she has had to deal with Shelly umm but it’s definitely ummm very important for her to have some sort of social help not social but help structure and I think the fact that we had when we did the IEP and stuff figuring out umm what kind of accommodations could be made (PAUSE) she—there was a big difference in her just with that because she knew if she

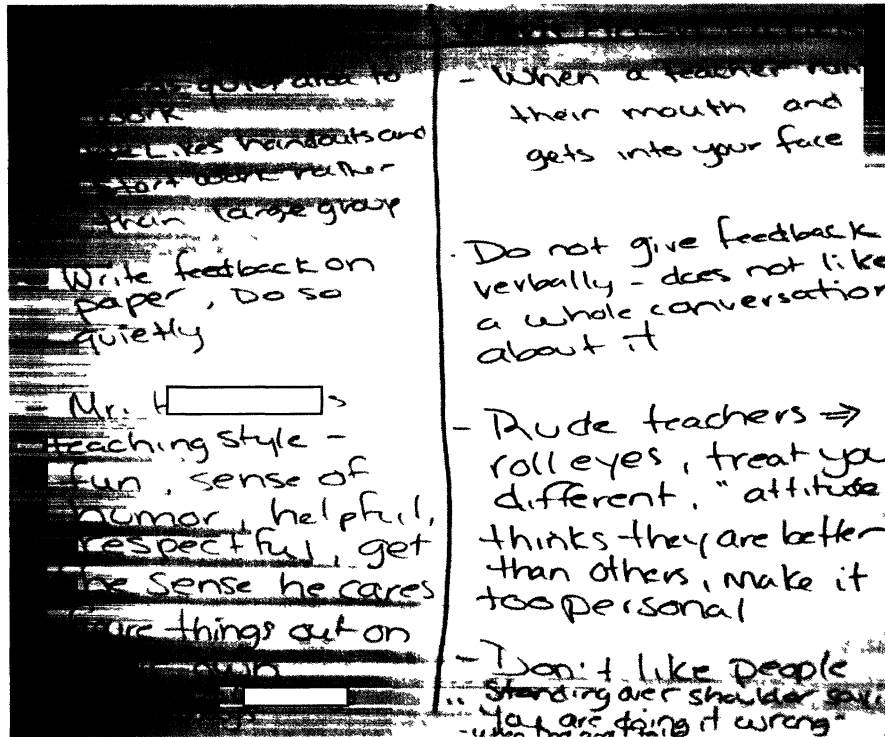
couldn't perform up to what she you know what was just a general normal day, she had certain little outs that she could is you know that we were gonna help her out – it took a lot of pressure off her –
(Transcripts, July 16, 2009)

Shelly's mother was quite clear that Shelly valued the emotional support she received from Mrs. Fairchild, along with the option to use her special education services. It is interesting to note that Shelly's mother understood that there was a price that Mrs. Fairchild expended to help Shelly, stating "poor Mrs. Fairchild you know (chuckles) how much she has had to deal with Shelly umm..." Shelly's mother acknowledged that Shelly needed a great deal of help and support, and that while there was a benefit to Shelly for Mrs. Fairchild's support, there was cost to Mrs. Fairchild for supporting Shelly.

Julie knew she needed to ask for a great deal of help if she were to reach her goal to get out of Emmerton and transfer to the adult education program. Julie's mother also understood their position as she became more and more involved in helping Julie to reach her goals. Julie made it clear, however, that only certain types of help would work with her, while other types of interventions irritated her. For example, Julie made it plain that she did not like verbal feedback from teachers, reflected in her "What Works" MAP:

Figure 21

Julie's What Works MAP



In contrast to the critical feedback, Julie, on several occasions said that she valued the problem-solving assistance she received. When we first began working with Julie, she was receiving suspensions and other reprimands for behavior problems such as arguing with teachers, skipping classes, and bullying peers. These behaviors were serving to help her get out of her classes and receive some individualized attention from the adults. The RENEW meetings offered Julie alternative strategies that were more acceptable and yet still served her needs to get out of Emmerton and gain attention. Julie was responding to the type of help she valued with positive behavior.

Despite the fact that she valued her self-reliance, Julie knew she needed to ask for more and more help as she began to make her plans to transfer to adult education. Julie negotiated with Mrs. Stavros to shorten her school day, but there was a "price" that Julie

was required to pay for this privilege, and that was to work more hours after school.

Although Julie did not like the process, she acquiesced:

We are holding her to the plan that she said she wanted. Julie wants to get out of her last class without a failure- she walks out of class anyway and says she will do it regardless.... Mrs. Stavros (principal) wants Julie to prove she is at work and then she will allow her to leave school early- Julie has to ask her mom, so she calls her mom while we are in the room and she gets mad at her mom because she has to explain herself, "no, that's not it" she is what you might call petulant... (Field Notes, December 3, 2009)

Mrs. Stavros, Mrs. Fairchild, her parents and the University staff members worked with Julie and her transfer into adult education, requiring Mrs. Stavros to take a risk and allow Julie to transfer her credits and receive an adult education diploma (which required six fewer credits than the Emmerton diploma) but attend graduation with her peers at Emmerton. Julie's parents also sacrificed their expectations in order to help and support Julie, reflected in one of my field notes:

Ends up that Julie needs about 8 more credits to finish and that she should be able to graduate from adult ed by December 2009. "She just wants to walk with the class- as long as she finished first"
Mom: "I know she can do this. It's a big deal for us (husband and her) to sign her out of school. *But I know she can do it'* Mom cried and thanked us several times. *Mom is supporting her tremendously. Julie has responded and is working hard for herself.*
(Field Notes, February 10, 2009)

Julie did not keep up her end of the bargain, however, from the perspective of her helpers. Julie did not take as many classes at adult education as she had promised and she failed the one class she did take there. When Julie announced that she was pregnant in late June 2009, it was an indication that Julie had been doing more than just going to school and working, and so Mrs. Stavros withdrew her help for Julie and her mother until Julie took more responsibility: "Donna (University staff member) and Julie's mom assume that the principal is still willing to offer alternatives, but I know from talking to

Mrs. Fairchild that the principal is upset at Julie that she did not follow through” (Field Notes, July 7, 2009). Julie and her mother understood that they “owed” Mrs. Stavros and Mrs. Fairchild greater effort in order to receive the continued help of the school.

As stated before, Manny did not like being under the control of the courts and he was dependent upon on the positive reports of others about his behavior, including the school personnel and the staff at his group home if he were to remain at the group home and stay out of trouble. In order to remain in his situation and keep people “off his back,” Manny would not ask for help, but he freely offered information about what was not working for him. This information allowed the helpers around him to figure out how to support Manny. The example of when Manny started to put effort into his schoolwork (in contrast to his typical behavior) demonstrates how the tutoring assistance that was being given to Manny was valued by him and his positive response spurred Ms. West to take the initiative and help Manny to set up a job at the barber shop that he so liked. So, while Manny rarely took the initiative to act on his own, he responded positively to actions taken by others to help him, which sent positive signals to his helpers. Manny and Jenny reflected on Manny’s responses to attempts to help him:

Malloy: Did it help for you having someone to check in with you regularly?
Manny: Uh mum
Malloy: That seemed to work
Manny: Keeps me on track
Malloy: Right, somebody reminding you---
Manny: The math
Jenny: But at the same time you don’t always love that either...do you
Manny: No....
Malloy: No but you know that long term it helps
Manny: yup
Jenny: Sort of like a nagging girlfriend, a little bit,, yup,, without the benefits...
(we laugh)

Malloy: Right... ummm....what about when you go home (to the town) what do you think, is the structure enough for you there for you (pause) what's gonna be different?

Manny: Nothing as much as support as I got here

Malloy: Yeah- you mean in terms of people right on you?

Manny: Yeah because like, they {his parents) didn't even ask me how school was, you like 'did you do your homework'... well first of all I never really came home so...

Malloy: OK, so you were out all the time?

Manny: Pretty much

(Transcript, July 7, 2009)

Manny reciprocated positively to those who helped him by behaving well and giving some effort but, as he says, he barely responded to and did not spend time with his parents because they did not care to ask him about his schoolwork.

Alex and his mother were continuously in a situation of needing help from the school, but there was only so much help "in the bank" available to Alex, especially as his failures to comply and respond positively continued to mount. From our first meetings with Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild regarding Alex, they were skeptical about Alex's sincerity and ability to respond to attempts to help him succeed in school. During a meeting where Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild and I gathered to meet with a student who didn't show up, they both described their attempts to help him and how he responded with aggressive behavior and foul language, how he failed at counseling and in several of his classes. They indicated that he was not appreciative and did not respond positively to the help they had offered him. The University project staff, through their advocacy and facilitation, influenced the amount of effort given to Alex during the 2008-09 school year, as Mrs. Catano and Mrs. Fairchild were clearly out of options, ideas, and energy. As Mrs. Fairchild stated "He needs everything" (Transcripts, September 10, 2008), meaning that he needed supports for his relationship with his mother, he needed mental

health care, he needed behavior supports in school, vocational programming, educational supports, and an internship or job.

During the first planning meeting with Alex, his general tone and his narrative presented a picture of a person who was experiencing stress on multiple fronts. Alex responded to our offers of help with indifference. He showed signs that he was divesting from school, stating that he wanted to go to an alternative school, “yeah, I can’t stay in school all day. “ He also said that he “didn’t care” if we approached his mother:

Malloy: I think this will be hard for you...we want to help you figure out what kind of supports you need. We also want to help your mom at home, talk to her and maybe get some help there.

Alex : She has a new boyfriend, they go the bars all the time...she’s never home... I go home and I’m by myself

Jon: Well, can we talk to her?

Alex: {He looks mostly at Mrs. Fairchild, not Jon or I} Sure, I don’t care, {He takes a big swig of his drink. ...} I left school early yesterday.... I was going up to study, and I wanted to study math and Mrs. N. told me I had to study English, and I said I wanted to do my math, and then she flipped out on me and I walked out of school. Mrs. R---- asked me ‘where do you think you’re going?’ , she was outside with her class, and I said I was leaving, the truant officer didn’t do anything, they didn’t stop me. I went over to {a friend’s} house and fell asleep (Field Notes, September 18, 2008)

Alex’s view of help was quite simple: he wanted out of school and, despite several attempts he made to be successful, his behaviors and declarations over the year were consistent with wanting out of school. Alex presented with a tough façade and rarely asked for help. Instead, he presented a long list of issues on so many fronts that it was difficult for us as helpers to sort through and develop a plan to assist Alex. Alex’s mother also faced so many immediate stresses that it was difficult to know where to start. Right after she signed the papers to drop him out of school, Alex’s mother stated that her responsibilities were simple and basic: “I don’t want to have anything to do with that school- that’s Alex’s life not my life... it’s not my job to worry about what they think.

My job is to put a roof over our heads and food on the table” (Field Notes, October 21, 2008). With such limited support, Alex knew he was on his own.

The strategy that the University team started to use to organize the work and to continue to move forward was to help Alex develop his own list of needs and to help Alex’s mother develop her list of needs. The large school meeting designed to plan Alex’s return to school after he dropped out illustrates how he and his mother were in a position of needing help, however, they also knew that they were in subservient positions. Even with the known disparities in power, as Alex presented his list of needs at the meeting, it allowed him to have bit of control over the meeting agenda:

Alex: Well, I need like, well, I need help like to stay in classes. Like, I can’t stay for the whole 90 minute classes. It’s hard for me to stay in one place for like that amount of period time. I don’t know....And, oh, planning things before I get angry. Planning what I should do before I get angry and walk out of classes and stuff.

During that same meeting, Mrs. Catano expressed her hopes and concerns, stating that there was a desire for his success but that there was only so much help available, given that he had “burned a lot of bridges”:

Mrs. Catano: And you’ve burnt a lot of bridges and you’ve upset a lot of people where it took, you know? I mean, and I’m the first one to admit it, you know? It’s very hard for me to sit here and want to go to bat for you when I’m afraid that I’m going to go out on a limb once again, and we can’t look at it like that. You know, we have to just really believe in you and know that you once had it, and you can do it...The second you start veering off that path, that’s when the whole environment changes. And I’m telling you that you have the ability to change the entire school environment. That group of people that you’ve hung out with, we have things very under control right now, and it scares me to death to have you come back and have those waves rock the boat again. You know? But I know you can do it. I mean, and that’s the only time I’m gonna say it, because I can’t say it anymore. You know? I’ve been saying it for four years, so. I think now, we’ll, you know, we’ll meet as a team and now we have to decide what’s gonna be best. That’s my feeling...

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Mrs. Catano laid out the dilemma that she and others faced: she knew that the school needed to continue to serve Alex, but that the support would come at a high price for her and others in the school, especially when Alex behaved badly. Alex was calm and responsive during this meeting, promising “to do better.” Alex received a signal of support from the principal, Mrs. Stavros, who said, “we didn’t know if we really did have an idea, because we didn’t know what Alex wanted. Now, what I would ask is, Alex has given us some ideas, we’ll work really hard to honor that. We’ll put together what we think will be applicable, maybe some credit kind of things...” (Transcripts, November 25, 2008). Despite their history of defiance as a family, Alex and his mother understood that they desperately needed the school’s help and cooperation to re-admit Alex into school and help him succeed.

Alex and his mother understood that they were in a relatively powerless position. Alex’s mother, knowing that she had little in the way to offer in exchange for the school’s help, provided a promise that she and her son would try to take responsibility and put in the effort, in exchange for the school helping Alex once again:

Mom: Well, I would like to see Alex come back and excel. I would like him to, to be responsible and to be here and attend school and do what he needs to do and not have absences and follow through on his part of trying to control his anger and control areas that he had most difficulties in. Do I have a doubt that Alex could do it? If Alex could put his mind to anything Alex wants to do, if Alex really wants this to happen, he can make this happen. He’s not a dumb kid. He’s very smart, but Alex also, well...he needs the structure, well, a more physical structured environment to figure out what his boundaries are, and therefore I hope that if Alex is allowed to come back here and he does, that he keeps up his end of the bargain and he does what he needs to do so that then in the end, I can stand there and watch him get his high school diploma and be proud of him. (Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

Mrs. Catano, Jonathon, and the school team continued to try to help Alex throughout the school year, despite the multiple problems and disruptions he had in

school and in the community. Jonathon went to Alex's house several times in the late spring of 2009, but Alex and his mother would not answer the door or the phone. Alex called Jon when he was released from the county jail in May 2009, and Jon helped Alex re-connect with the school. Alex turned 18 years old in July of 2009, freeing him from the court order requiring him to attend school. Alex began the 2009-10 school year in an alternative school, but he was again having multiple absences and in-school conflicts. Alex eventually stopped going to the alternative school when his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, reflected in an empathic email from his alternative school teachers:

No Alex today. BUT... I did talk to his mother, who said he didn't come yesterday and won't today because he is sick. She said he has a nasty cold. She also confirmed that She had a grand mal seizure and a stroke a week or so ago. She said that the days that Alex missed last week were because he was staying home with her. She said that he (and she) has gone through a lot of trauma in the past couple weeks. She started to cry (it sounded like) while talking about it, and she said she really wants him to graduate, and that she'll try to get him back in here as soon as he's feeling healthy. So, in that context the good work that he's been doing here is even more impressive. Any thoughts, comments, ideas...? Thanks everyone.
(Email, November 18, 2009)

Criticism and Exclusion

The final contextual element that served to amplify the struggle over access to social resources concerns instances when the adults criticized the youth and when that criticism was perceived as a tool of control. Often, critical comments in an educational context are intended to help the student learn and perform better. Criticism can also be used to hurt or separate one member from the dominant community. In the social context of relationships, the way the recipient of the criticism responds indicates how control is exerted. All four youth described instances where they felt isolated, or they chose to disengage because of the direct negative feedback they had received from a teacher, an

administrator, or a parent. Depending on the context, there were also examples of when the youth accepted and responded positively to critical feedback.

Shelly did not like being reprimanded by Mrs. Fairchild or Mrs. Catano, indicated by her lack of response when they confronted her in January of 2009. Shelly was not, in their view, putting effort into her work. Shelly shrugged, did not respond to their criticism, and found it embarrassing:

Mrs. Fairchild: Do you have an idea, Shelly, at all, how you made out?

Shelly: Kind of.

Mrs. Fairchild: Huh?

Shelly: Kind of, yeah.

Mrs. Fairchild: Kind of, could you update me, kind of? Because I really am not [sure] confused... Well, no, it's so we're not disappointed, it's this some more, just so we know where we, what you think you're getting in math, you know?

Shelly: Yeah. C

Mrs. Catano: A C? No. An incomplete.

The meeting continued, and Shelly barely contributed as Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild, and I tried to figure out how to help Shelly. Later during that same meeting, Mrs. Fairchild empathized with Shelly and asked her to reflect on how she dealt with failure and challenges, in order to help Shelly realize that her strategy may not be the best for her success. Shelly responded:

Mrs. Fairchild: No, I think my concern, Shelly, was just getting back in touch, on a regular schedule. We've had crazy time off, between snow days and people missing, and we thought everything was OK, and then, all of a sudden, this semester, we were like, oh no, are we going to, you know, the grades kind of slipped a little bit, and that must've been pretty overwhelming for you, too, wondering. And sometimes, when those things happen in your life, what's your reaction? What do you do, sometimes, when things get overwhelming?

Shelly: Shut down.

Mrs. Fairchild: Do you tackle it, or do you avoid it?

Shelly: Avoid it.

(Transcripts, February 3, 2009)

Shelly was engaged when the criticism was given with a message of caring. In fact, Shelly subsequently requested a meeting to revisit her overall plan and figure out her graduation path. The combination of her concern for her relationship with Mrs. Fairchild and her openness to learn and accept help allowed Shelly to take the criticism and do something positive with it. Shelly also understood that criticisms, given in the absence of caring and an explanation, was being used to try to get her to do something different, and was thus perceived by her as an act of control.

Julie did not like critical comments from her teachers and she was quite vocal about it. Early in our work together, Julie described how her English teacher insulted her parents and family:

Mrs. Fairchild: What's that last one? (Looking at the flip chart)

Julie: Treat you different. Like my English teacher.

Mrs. Fairchild: What did your English teacher do, that didn't work for you?

Julie: She just asked about things that she doesn't need to be, it's like she thinks that she's better than everybody else, and stuff like that, and then when I got done telling her that my parents worked for the [city?], and she's like, I don't care. And she was giving me an attitude about what my parents do, like she was doing the best thing she could ever do in her life.

(Transcripts, September 18, 2008)

It is not clear why a teacher would berate a student's family, but Julie clearly interpreted the teacher's comments as making her feel "different," or somewhat diminished. Both of Julie's parents worked for municipalities, and both supported Julie. Mrs. Fairchild seemed unsurprised that this teacher would say such a thing, indicating that this particular teacher could be "sarcastic" at times. Regardless of the teacher's intent, Julie took her comments as demeaning, a sentiment echoed by Julie's mother during a meeting with Mrs. Fairchild, Julie, her mother and the University facilitators:

Julie: She's the one who told the class that, people who work in the city are lowlifes, and all they do is sit on their ass...--

Mrs. Fairchild: And, did you [OVERLAPPING VOICES] --

Julie: My mom says I can leave (this school) and go to the adult school. So, I freaked out on her

Mrs. Fairchild: Do you need a break?

Julie: -- and I told her [OVERLAPPING VOICES].

Mom: Actually, I talked to my husband about it, and he was like, excuse me? He said, well, let's take a ride over there. I said, they're not there right now, by the way. Yeah, no, I was pretty tweaked. That was a Friday, I think it was a Friday night you told me that. It was a damn good thing it was a Friday night.

[LAUGHTER] Because I had two and a half days to cool down, before I came in here.

(Transcripts, December 9, 2008)

Julie argued that these types of interactions fed her disdain for school and served to reinforce her belief that she did not belong there. Julie would, however, accept criticism when given to her in a spirit of working together and problem-solving. For example, she responded positively to Mrs. Fairchild's criticism about falling behind in her assignments:

Mrs. Fairchild: You started out real strong, I'm seeing A's and B's..you know from some of these beginning projects and then it's intermingled... I'm seeing some zeros...quizzes.. maybe you just weren't there because of the tardies... what happened to get those zeros?

Julie: I didn't do them

Mrs. Fairchild: and What was the obstacle the challenge for you?

Julie: She aggravated me... I got tired of it... she aggravated me and I got tardies and that hurt, and it got hard so...

Mrs. Fairchild: Right. So you shut down when you get aggravated...

Julie: Um hum

Mrs. Fairchild: And who is that hurting?

Julie: Me

Mrs. Fairchild: How can we turn that around for you?

Julie: I don't know

Malloy: Do you mind bringing that in every week?

Julie: bringing what in?

Malloy: That print out... and so... you're shooting for a good week this week... so that next week that will look better...

Julie: Yeaaaah

Malloy: can we stay on top of you? Just in terms of looking at it every week?

Julie: Yeah but you'll have to give her a note cause she won't give me another week

(Transcripts, October 21, 2008)

When confronted with the evidence, Julie took responsibility for the failures, and she could have easily shut down and refused to tackle the problem. Instead, she responded, however weakly, to try to rectify the issue. Criticism or confrontation given in a context that was less threatening and personal tended to motivate Julie (and Shelly) to continue to access help to work on their problems.

Manny, like Julie, was very offended by some of the comments that teachers made in class. This incident, described in Chapter V, was one of the reasons Manny said he withdrew his effort in that class:

Manny: A few teachers, to me they make us sound like we know nothing at all, that I come to class and pay attention but I never do my work, so its treating me like I'm dumb, that what it feels like to me

Malloy: Talking down to you

Manny: Yeah, 'I know what you're doing you're dumb' like there were a couple of worksheets that we did and he said 'how did you know to do these, I bet these are wrong,' and I said 'I'm done' and he said 'they can't be right' and he checked them and everyone was right

Malloy: Like he didn't expect you to do well,

Ms. West: Ok so low expectations doesn't work: Do you have high expectations for yourself?

Manny: What do you mean?

Ms. West: Meaning if the teacher's expectations of you are low, how do read your own expectation levels, like, are your own expectations of yourself like do you expect to do not well?

Manny: No

Malloy: You just don't like someone else talking to you, like you're *dumb* as you said

Manny: Yeah

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

In this exchange, Manny identified with other students ("they make us sound like..."), indicating that students are in a different community than teachers. Further, Manny stated that he did not agree with the teacher's assessment of his abilities or of what he expected of himself. Manny had established an alternative source of support for himself, and so the teacher's requests meant little and lacked credibility to Manny. As

with Julie, it's not clear why a teacher would make such a personally critical statement to a student as it was not instructive in any way. Instead, the statement "I know these are wrong" is an indicator of the teacher's frustration and negative expectations, and it served to put Manny "in his place."

The criticisms of teachers and other helpers were not helpful if they were not within the youth's power to change. Manny responded positively to criticism when it was given in the context of problem solving, but he knew was not able to benefit from and rejected criticism when it was given unfairly or given in a situation that was out of his control. For example, towards the end of the 2008-09 school year when Ms. West noted that it was up to Manny to get his math work done, she also noted that the math curriculum was difficult for many students. Manny said that he would try but the conversation offered no solutions because we could not agree on the source of the problem, reflected in a field note:

Ms. West doesn't want to be in the position of advocating with her peers and the teachers for Manny if he has not done his part. Her beliefs: that students should try and give effort.... Funny, after the meeting Ms. West talks about this math program and how hard it is for many kids....Ms. West says she finds this math classes (integrated Math) to be very difficult for many kids- she criticizes the program... *but in the meeting, she criticized Manny for this.... I am sure he didn't want to do the work in the study, but I am trying to get the school folks to understand that it is unconstructive and unproductive to blame kids when the environment is contributing to the problem... but they are caught in turf wars and feel powerless.....I was trying to show Ms West how Manny's lack of effort may be due to his inability to do the work, he is still coming to the class, "he hasn't given up- maybe he can't do the work"*
(Field Notes, May 6, 2009).

Certainly Manny was showing very little effort in class, and he agreed with that observation. But he also said, "I'm not blaming the teacher, but she hardly knows how to explain it" (Transcripts, May 5, 2009), an observation that was confirmed by another

student and Mrs. Fairchild. Ms. West criticized Manny without taking into account the context that made it difficult if not impossible for him to succeed. By laying the responsibility on Manny, she was able to divest herself from responsibility or from helping him.

Alex often reacted angrily to criticism, especially when it was from his mother. In the large school meetings Alex would respond to criticism by offering explanations or pledging to do better in the future, but in our small planning meetings he would be more defiant. During our second meeting, he explained why he became angry with his math teacher, saying, "I hate it when teachers run their mouth out on me," (Field Notes, May 22, 2008), meaning that he felt he was being criticized by his teacher. This theme was repeated many times while we worked with Alex. For example, Alex explained why he did not want to continue to go for math tutoring at the group home:

Alex: I hate it up there they just... you... what they- it's boring for one, for two there's no one after a while just sit there and do nothing I hate that --- just sitting there doing nothing---So hopefully after I'll hopefully go for the net for a bit because there's nothing to do {he is getting anxious again, talking fast and stammering} just sit there...then she (the group home manager) yells at me --- I'm bored and then I go do the PLAYTO --- she still yells at me—
(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex's conflicts with teachers and others in the school were pervasive, and it is difficult to know if the tutor at the group home really yelled at him. The key idea is that Alex did not possess the social and cultural capital to conform to the social expectations of the dominant school community, and he knew this. In an attempt to create an alternative set of resources for himself, he blamed the adults and the system and he stopped going to certain classes because he had given up on succeeding in those classes.

In contrast to what seemed to be a life filled with interpersonal conflicts, Alex often responded positively to Jonathon's counsel. For example, during the same discussion about continuing his tutoring at the group home, Alex and his mother engaged in a nasty shouting match about his resistance to complying with the school's plans. Jonathon intervened, calmly explaining how Alex could get more of what he wants if he went into the upcoming school meeting prepared:

Jonathon: So when you go in there (the school meeting) on Thursday, OK make it that you need to help with suggestions, OK?

Alex: uh huh

Jon: If that's alright- one is to be negotiable OK?

Alex: Yup

Jonathon: and another one is to talk about what you've done and succeeded at OK? It's OK to talk about what you've been doing good OK?

Alex: Yeah

Jonathon: And then the last thing is to tell them in a nice way what you would like to see for yourself as far as you being in school

Alex: Yup

Jon: Alright? Then if you if you do it that way they're more likely to work with you and I think they will work with you

(Transcripts, January 20, 2009)

Alex learned, in part through Jonathon's preparation for his meetings, how to participate and express his needs to those who had control. This strategy tended to keep the adults engaged and the support flowing for Alex, despite the many setbacks he encountered. Jon kept talking about compromise, and this seemed to be an important and new skill that Alex tried to adopt (with varying levels of success).

Jon: So, what we're trying to do, is when we go in there and we have to deal with people who are in positions of authority, we have to try and make compromises with them instead...

Mom: Right.

Alex : I'll be nice, I promise

(Transcripts, November 25, 2008)

In a gentle way, Jonathon was trying to instruct Alex about alternative, less confrontational methods that Alex could use to try to get the help he needed. Given in a context of caring and instruction, this type of criticism was received calmly by Alex. In the end, however, the negative experiences built up and Alex wasn't invested enough in the outcome to try harder in school, and his anxieties were heightened by the social isolation he felt there.

The Social Goods Balance Sheet

All public schools have multiple and varied responsibilities, including the legal obligations to provide a free and appropriate education to all children in the community, the responsibility to include students with disabilities, to protect the safety of the children, and to contribute to the social and emotional development of all students. The New Hampshire rules governing education empower local school boards to develop rules, within limits, governing the conduct of all students, and to exclude certain students for “gross misconduct” and other rule violations:

189:1-a Duty to Provide Education. – It shall be the duty of the school board to provide, at district expense, elementary and secondary education to all pupils who reside in the district until such time as the pupil has acquired a high school diploma or has reached age 21, whichever occurs first; provided, that the board may exclude specific pupils for gross misconduct or for neglect or refusal to conform to the reasonable rules of the school (State of New Hampshire, RSA, 1978)

Beyond the institutional power vested in schools to protect children and to perform the public good, there are the local norms and personal beliefs that govern how and when individuals with power and authority sanction others. Further, there are the highly specific and personal relationships between teachers and students that take place in the classroom that determine who is rewarded and who is punished. Within this complex

set of levels and context-specific interactions that were often difficult for the youth and their parents to understand, this chapter has attempted to capture, from the experiences and the vantage points of the four youth, what it is like to experience control by teachers and administrators. There was often a price to pay for receiving help, presented by the adults to the youth as a condition of adult help. The youth did not resent acts and offers of help, however, when the help was perceived as given with care and respect.

The Emmerton High School administrators were obligated to protect the health and safety of all the students, which was accomplished primarily through the development and application of punishments and rewards such as grades, discipline for behavior infractions, and exclusionary actions such as suspensions. These rules and systems tended to deter most students from behaving poorly, and those students who knew they had a good possibility to reap the benefits of a high school education tended to be motivated by the incentive of good or passing grades. The norm in the school was that certain academic and behavioral conformance was rewarded and served to keep students engaged. This message from the school community was received differently, however, by students like Shelly, Julie, Manny, and Alex. For these four students, the message was that they could meet the expectations if they chose to, but if they chose not to perform there would be few benefits to them because they chose not to be part of the community. The sanctions of the school community did not motivate the four youth to do better, but the sanctions served to exclude them from the community of learners. All four youth described being “treated different” from other students, and they had begun to seek and create alternative sources of support for themselves. We see that all four youth in this study were at times divested from the potential benefits they might have received from

working harder, and so the punishments exacted upon them were of lesser value. In addition, while the Emmerton student handbook states that the rules are to be enforced according to objective criteria designed to protect every student, the adults in the school often expressed their own subjective reasons for doling out sanctions or not. The reasons often given were moral authority, a perception, based upon history, that the youth would fail, or poor personal relationships with the youth. In this context, it is surprising that we saw the youth continuing to strive for conformity and success at all. While Shelly, Julie, Manny and Alex were personally offended by many of the sanctions exacted upon them, there were also situations here where they were given the supports they needed to make it “worth their while” to conform to the rules and change their behaviors.

The teachers, administrators, and other staff at Emmerton High School were extremely busy from the beginning of the school day until they went home. There were only so many resources in each person’s resource “bank.” The problem of having to choose where one spends one’s time in relationships and offer one’s help is expressed in the literature:

...because the amount of time and resources available for social life is necessarily limited, and because some partners are more valuable than others (see Noe and Hammerstein 1995), there are certainly some social interactions that bear a net cost because they waste resources that could be used more efficiently in other interactions (Andre’, 2010, p. 207)

There were numerous examples of how teachers and administrators made meaning of their time spent helping each of the four youth, keeping what we might call a “social goods balance sheet,” weighing the possible benefits or costs of spending the time and effort to help the youth. The adults often used economic metaphors to describe the value of their helping efforts with terms such as “invested,” “spending,” “a waste of

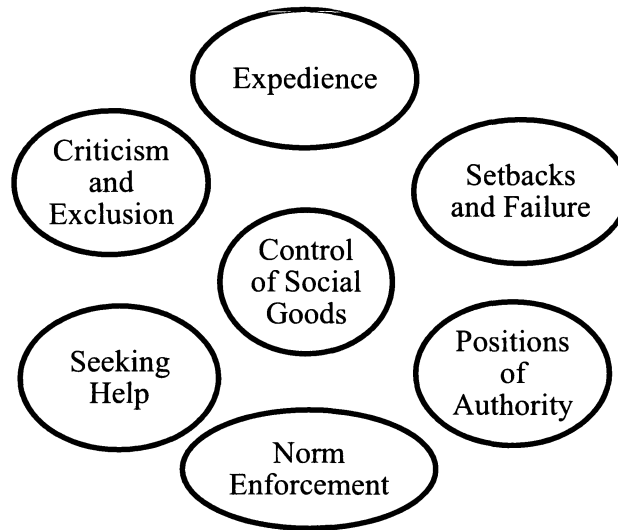
time,” “compromise,” and social support is “gold.” There were expressions by the adults that they kept track of their efforts, withholding or expending more help and effort depending on their beliefs that the effort would result in socially acceptable outcomes.

Conclusion to Chapter VII

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how the four youth responded in situations where control over social goods was at issue, and how the characteristics of that control was highly specific to and dependent upon context and relationships. In addition, the analysis attempts to organize the search for acts of control and the meaning made of those acts in the framework of six contexts or social elements that drove the actions that controlled social goods. These contexts or social elements were interrelated and often reflected in one event. For example, being in a position of asking for help, expedience, and the enforcement of norms appear in several events but had different qualities and characteristics when played out by the actors. For example, while Alex and his mother needed the school’s help and had little to give in return, Mrs. Catano was concerned about enforcing the school norms, and about the expenditures of time and other resources. The contextual model for this analysis shows these relationships:

Figure 22

Contextual Model of Control of Social Goods



In addition to the interrelationship of these contexts to acts of control, these contexts and the social actions they represent are highly related to the other three social processes in this dissertation: positive reciprocity, negative reciprocity, and agency. For example, many of same social actions that characterized the youth's responses to perceived negative reciprocal acts were the same social actions that showed lack of agency and disengagement in response to perceived control that could not be overcome. The final chapter attempts to bring coherence to these notions of socially- and culturally-driven actions across categories and contexts as the youth interacted with adults in the helping process.

CHAPTER VIII

SUCCESS, HARM, RELATIONSHIPS, AND CONTROL:

THE PURPOSES OF SOCIAL ACTION

As a novice qualitative researcher, it has been a major challenge to interpret and characterize the actions of these four youth without oversimplifying or trivializing their experiences. Through the socio-cultural lens, the actions of the youth reflected multiple purposes, were context specific and filled with shifting dynamics. The conclusions or associations to be made of the behaviors and meaning making from the social actions of the youth are specific to these four young people and their experiences. In other words, the analysis is filled with nuances. As Agar (2006b) notes, “meaning and context expand, contract, and then blur,” (p. 20), and many of the contexts that represent one social process are represented in others. For example, the negative social reactions of the youth occurred in response to multiple influences and interpretations, including historically learned behaviors, unsupportive environments, poor self-efficacy, attempts of others to exert control, and a calculus of costs and benefits. In addition, several important events characterized many different types of social actions and purposes. The work of coding, categorizing, recoding, creating sub-categories and writing, however, led me to discover that the actions of all four youth as they attempted to access their social resources fell into four basic purposes or themes. These themes include attempts to attain success, to avoid harm, to maintain relationships, and to gain greater control. This chapter is designed to bring coherence to the many layers and interrelated actions within the four social

processes of positive reciprocity, negative reciprocity, agency, and control over social goods. The discussion concludes with recommendations for further research and for educational reform.

Major Themes

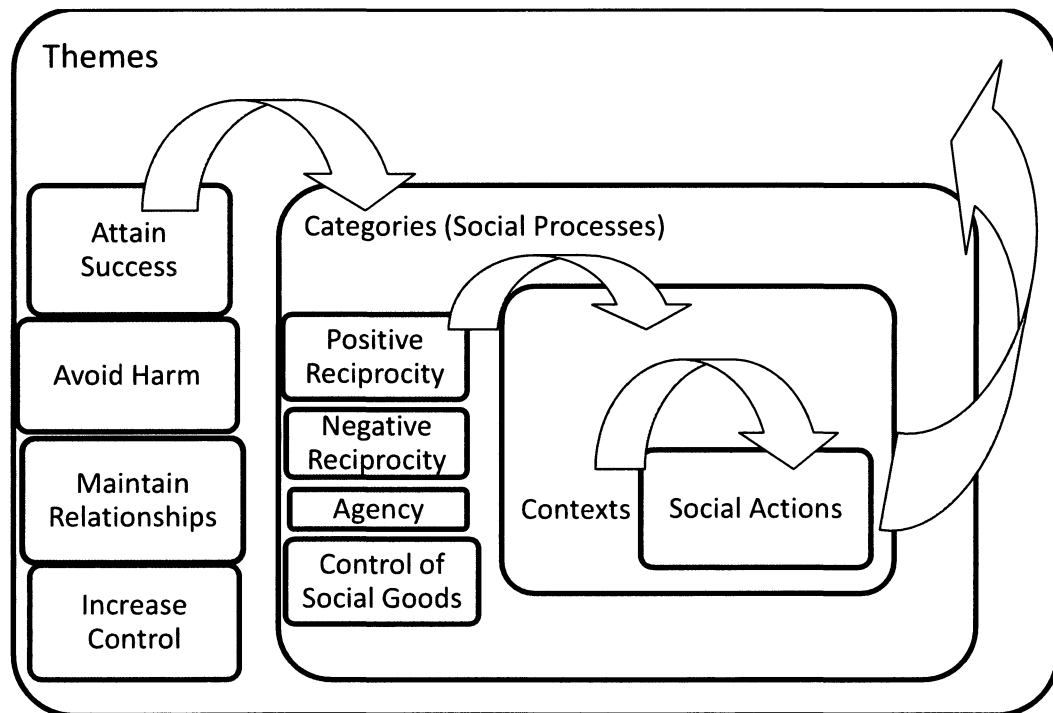
In the previous four chapters we have seen an interpretation of how Shelly, Julie, Manny, and Alex responded to situations that were made available to them through the RENEW process. These situations were devised to help them access social resources, help them to plan their strategies for the short and long term, and help them make connections between their pasts, their presents and their futures. The RENEW process provided “constraints” or boundaries in which the research could take place (Agar, 2006a). Further, the social capital sensitizing concept remained relevant as I collected and analyzed the data. Acts that signaled the social processes of positive and negative reciprocity, primary features of social capital theory, were significantly present in the contextual analysis of the data. Further, the tensions created by individual agency and control of social goods, noted by social capital theorists as processes that reproduce inequalities in groups, communities, and societies, became important and were commonly observed across the experiences with all four youth.

Ethnographic research and the analysis that results is a messy business. I have tried to lend coherence to this analysis by looking at the social actions of the youth within and across contexts nested in four social processes. Agar (2006a) states that one of the primary tasks of ethnography is to produce a cultural translation, and that the ethnographer is looking for instances “when people do something in a situation that we don’t understand...rich points... the fuel that drives ethnographic research” (p. 5). Several

rich points became evident as I tried to understand why the youth were responding in certain ways given certain contexts. I represent the drivers or purposes of social action as those to attain success, to avoid harm, to maintain relationships, and to increase control. The location of these major themes is depicted in relation to the social processes, contexts and individual social actions in Figure 23. The following section highlights examples of these “rich points,” or unexpected actions of the youth that, in context, make sense and have meaning from the youth’s perspective:

Figure 23

Model for Accessing Social Capital



Attain Success

Given the failed experiences of each youth in school and in their relationships, it is a bit surprising that Shelly, Julie, Manny and Alex had aspirations to be successful and to achieve the types of goals that are of the dominant social Discourse, including the

desire to have careers and other generally-acceptable goals. Julie's mother cried when she learned that Julie expressed a goal to become a nurse after years had passed since Julie had ceased to talk about her vocational interests. The intentional expression of a goal or aspiration was, in many cases, the action that began to drive and illuminate the youth's agency towards attaining what, in their views, would be success. While we may assume that youth at risk of high school dropout are "unmotivated," "don't want to be here," "don't have goals," or "have given up," we see here that each youth had traditionally valued goals and aspirations. We also see that the youth had insight into what would likely stand in their way of achieving success with varying degrees of depth and self-knowledge. It must be devastating, at 17 years old, to admit that you cannot have the same aspirations of your peers because of history, family disadvantage and broken relationships. It was surprising, then, to observe that each youth continued to develop goals, with encouragement, and each took positive action to achieve some sense of success.

The analysis also shows that each youth and their parents/caregivers understood the dynamic of reciprocity and trust in relationships and that each understood, in various ways, the importance of the resources in his or her social network to reaching a particular goal. Within the context of social capital, or "the collection of resources owned by the members of an individual's personal social network, which may become available to the individual as a result of the history of these relationships" (Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2004, p. 200), we have seen how each youth was able to access, or not, certain types of help from certain individuals. For example, Julie learned that in order to obtain the principal's support to transfer to adult education, she needed to negotiate and reciprocate

with the principal's requirement that she work more and try harder in all of her classes. Alex and his mother understood quite well that they needed to acquiesce to the demands of the high school team if he were to stay in school. Manny understood that he would receive certain privileges and people would "get off my back" if he put in more effort. Conversely, each youth made calculations about when it was or was not worth activating their socially-based resources. Often these decisions were based on poor relationships or a belief that they could not be successful. The support each youth received to make these decisions increased their access to social capital, including counseling to break down large, seemingly overwhelming problems into smaller steps that then appeared more achievable, and assistance to identify specific needs that made it easier for each youth to ask for help.

As we have seen, each youth had positive experiences that led to expressions of self-efficacy. This was also a "rich point." Manny "felt better" when he handed in his math assignments and English packets. We should understand that, with his depression and his feelings of social isolation, completing schoolwork was very difficult for him. The view of many of the teachers, however, was that his lack of motivation was a deficit and that Manny could somehow "turn a switch" and begin to do the work if would just try. What we saw through Manny's experiences, however, is that he needed support to develop a positive self-view, and that the support was of value only when given in a caring manner. He would not simply ask for help. In fact, we saw that all four youth would not actively seek help. Instead, the helpers needed to work with each youth to develop strategies for support that were mutually agreeable and offered in the context of a respectful relationship. The support needed to be developed in collaboration with and

accepted by the youth if it was to be used. When the adults demanded compliance, demanded reciprocation or offered strategies that they felt would be helpful but were offered in the absence of trust and reciprocity, the youth typically rejected the help. Each of the four youth was quite sensitive to punishment or other harmful acts and were highly unlikely to accept help from a person whom they felt was controlling or who did not care about them.

In short, the processes of using, needing, and controlling social resources were illustrated over and over again, and were influenced by the beliefs of the actors. What influenced the actions of the adults as the youth tried to access help and as the adults offered or withheld their help were the beliefs that the youth were or were not trying to or could not be successful in socially valued terms. Manny wanted to do well in math. Julie wanted to accumulate credits. Shelly wanted to do well in math and be socially accepted. Alex wanted to be a chef. Their aspirations were quite real but were dampened by the skepticism of the adults.

Avoid Harm

From the point of view of the youth, many of the negative interactions that all four youth experienced with teachers, administrators and at times, their parents, indicated that they were outcasts, misunderstood and not receiving the help they needed. Given the extremely negative histories that Shelly, Manny, Alex, and to a lesser extent, Julie described, they came to our work together quite disengaged and separated from the typical student/adult learning community. In fact, all four youth expressed hurt and anger at their circumstances, feeling they had been treated unfairly. While there were noted instances when each youth expressed hope and self-efficacy and all continued to persist

and go to school, many of their narratives were dominated by feelings of powerlessness and isolation. In response to this isolation, each youth had developed “alternative” communities or social networks. Alex and Shelly expressed a strong bond based upon trust and mutual understanding. Julie was attached to one friend at school and a boyfriend who had dropped out. Manny was isolated at school, but mentioned one friend at the group home and he fantasized about being in a gang in his hometown. The need for affiliation was there and when the youth could not find it among the people in the school, they found it elsewhere. All four youth also expressed frustration and anger that they did not have what they needed from their parents. Negative social interactions with others such as criticisms, suspensions, reprimands, or insistence that they do work that they could not perform were interpreted by the youth as additional assaults on their positions and each youth often responded with rationalizations and blame. The youth were trying to protect themselves from harmful attacks on their person, position, and abilities.

Julie’s interpretation of why she was not successful in school offers insight into the notion that she was trying to protect herself and find a rationale for her actions. Julie blamed her teachers, argued with teachers, bullied other female students, and walked out of class. The basic message that Julie offered was “I don’t care” because “teachers don’t care,” “they treat you different.” Julie’s anger and disengagement was her way of disavowing her deficits, explaining her failures, and dealing with social rejection from peers and others in the school.

It is important to note that each youth was able to learn from his or her failures or mistakes, but only when the problems were presented to them in a certain manner. Mrs. Fairchild was able to get Shelly and Julie to admit that they engaged in self-defeating

behavior but the conversations were in a context of problem-solving and shared power. When Shelly or Julie was confronted in an accusatory manner, Shelly lied and Julie denied her responsibility and fought back. In effect, not every mistake or failure was an event for which that the youth would avoid or deny responsibility. Instead, the analysis shows that the youth would avoid events that were harmful to their person or self-view and that each had varying degrees of ability to deal with failures and setbacks. It is clear, then, that attempts to teach socially valued behaviors through punishments and control were not effective with any of the four youth.

Alex, for example, frequently expressed his frustration with school, blaming teachers, his mother, and peers for his failures. Like Julie, Alex felt “stuck.” He was required to attend school and wanted to see his friends, but he clearly did not see how he would be able to pass his classes, except for culinary arts. Alex was also highly sensitive to criticism and he responded angrily and would blame others or the situation when he felt he was being attacked. Alex’s defensiveness was clearly evident when he dropped out of school and when he was confronted about his cell phone. Alex reacted violently when he felt he was being criticized in front of other students because he wanted so desperately to appear capable and in control. Alex interpreted public criticisms of him or confrontations as assaults on his very person. Manny and Julie also described, with extreme hurt and anger, how teachers criticized them in front of other students. The reactions of the youth—blaming, attacking others, and avoiding the work—are behaviors that the youth used to protect themselves from what they perceived as harmful assaults or from doing work that they felt would be a waste of time. Despite the fact that each youth wanted to be successful on some level, they had also given up on trying to become what

others wanted them to become and we see in the data how difficult and painful this struggle was for each youth.

Maintain Relationships

The importance of a caring relationship, filled with trust and positive reciprocity, was expressed by all four youth as well as many of the adults. Each youth indicated, however, that a caring relationship had particular characteristics. For Shelly, a caring relation that included trust was one in which the person “accepts me for who I am and doesn’t judge me.” For Julie, a person who cared was one who allowed her freedom and trusted her to do her work. For Manny, a caring relation was one in which the person showed enough interest in him to “nag” him. Alex had a difficult time explaining a caring relation, since he had been so deprived of care. What was notable, however, was how sensitive Alex was to the interactions of others and as his English teacher stated, Alex had a keen sense of when a person genuinely cared: “Well, I think he’d certainly store it away. I think he’d certainly store it away. I mean as much as he can’t store anything else, I think he’d store who’s genuine and who’s not.” The lack of caring relationships encountered by youth in our modern age is described by Noddings (2002b), as a growing social problem:

Today many young people not only fail to develop the capacity to care, but also seem not to know what it means to be care for. Some confuse coercion with care, some deceive themselves that they are cared for in highly exploitative situations, and some have simply given up hope that anyone will care. James Comer (1988) has described the feelings expressed by inner-city high school students towards their teachers: “They don’t care.” (p. 25)

What we have seen in the analysis of these texts is how important it was for the youth to develop, maintain and sustain valued relationships with those whom they felt they could trust and who could help them. These relationships had different qualities

depending on the youth and the circumstances. Julie seemed not to care about anyone's concern for her. Manny, however, enjoyed and expressed gratitude for the assistance he was given and Shelly worked intentionally to keep her relationship with Mrs. Fairchild.

It is also important to note that the youth and their parents understood the principle of reciprocity: that if someone does something for me I must, at some point, offer something in return. Alex's mother understood that she needed to thank the school for all they were doing for Alex, and Julie's parents participated and helped with Julie's planning because they knew they needed to support all that the school was doing for Julie. Shelly offered Mrs. Fairchild a poem of gratitude. What is clear, however, is that the receiver of help must see the value of what is being provided to him or her. So, for example, Alex knew that he needed to agree to the school's plan for his re-entry into school but, in the end, he had no interest in the majority of what was being offered to him. We have seen through the experiences of all four youth that they must feel heard, respected, and feel that the other person genuinely cares about them if they are to reciprocate in a positive manner and work to maintain the relationship, much as care ethicists indicate (Noddings, 2002a, 2002b). In the context of joint decision-making and shared problem-solving, we often saw the youth taking on new ideas and strategies that empowered them and helped them to get what they needed. For example, Julie learned how to negotiate with the school principal to modify her class schedule and transfer to adult education, rather than fail all of her classes. Alex learned how to state his needs in a calm and reasonable manner. Shelly learned how to advocate for a change in her classes.

Increase Control

As we have seen, all four youth engaged in acts of agency and attempted to manage increased control by others through acts of avoidance, passive resistance and at times, aggressive acts in response to what each youth saw as a threat. With particular supports, we also observed how each youth participated in shared problem solving and positive action in the face of shared power or control. These acts, viewed through the eyes of the youth, made sense in context. For example, Alex saw no utility of his mother's lecturing about his behaviors. He argued against his mother's criticisms because he was using a strategy that, in his view, was working for him, and he felt that his mother did not have all of the right information. He also did not like to be portrayed as at fault in front of others.

The instances when we saw acts of agency—viewed as positive, goal directed actions—generally occurred within interactions where the youth felt that they were acknowledged as having some, if not equal power, control, and investment. In these situations Manny, Julie, Shelly and Alex interacted with the adults in a respectful manner and shared the work of problem solving, negotiating, and compromising. As Noddings (2002b) indicates, we saw respectful, reciprocal behavior when the adults did not attempt to overpower the youth: “How good I can be depends at least in part on how you treat me. My goodness is not entirely my property, and the control I exercise as a carer is always shared control” (p. 89). Control is a relational concept, created in a socio-cultural context and as Alex stated, much of the control ultimately rests with the youth.

As the analysis has shown, the adults tended to exert greater control over each youth when there was a failure or setback. The process of taking over greater control was

most prominent because of the pressures the adults felt to enforce the school's social norms, their lack of trust in the youth, and for expedience. The analysis also shows that these attempts to take over were generally unsuccessful.

At the institutional level, and despite the school's responsibilities to other students and to the courts (for Alex and Manny), attempts to coerce the four youth with punishments and other forms of control were basically ineffective. Manny and Alex were required by the courts to attend school, which they attempted to do. As we saw, Alex resented this requirement and while he would attend school, he wandered the halls, was often sick, or stopped attending certain classes when it became evident that he was not going to pass them. Manny also went to school, but he would often lay his head on the desk, socialize, ignore the teacher and otherwise not participate. Julie needed to go to school because her parents insisted and Julie valued their support, but she was also skipping classes, not participating, and leaving early. In short, the institutional requirement that the youth attend school did not mean that they would do anything once they were there. In fact, youth who are so highly disengaged may show behaviors that frustrate teachers, isolate them from their peers, and otherwise confirm that they don't belong in the school and are not part of the school community. As we have seen in the literature on power and subordination (e.g., Emerson, 1962), the person who has little investment in the social group will find a different community and a different set of social resources.

What was also noted in the experiences of these four youth, however, is that re-engagement is possible and an agentive self-view can be constructed, but it must happen within a relationship of trust, shared work, and positive reciprocity. We have seen

through the texts and interactions how Manny began to see the possibilities and benefits of getting his schoolwork done. Julie began to see the benefits of working cooperatively with others to make the transition to adult education and reach her goals. The tension between actions designed to protect the welfare of all students, including using punishments and coercion and the need to provide every child with what he or she needs to become a citizen who acts morally and ethically is prominent in education. What we have seen, however, is that all four youth resisted attempts by others to control or coerce. Conversely, we saw instances when each youth accepted the consequences or control of others, usually in a relationship of trust, where there was a dialogue about the reasons why the actions were important, and when the youth had some say in what was happening. We saw instances when Manny, Julie, Alex and Shelly “fessed up” and admitted their mistakes and took responsibility for failures or negative interactions with others. We also saw many instances when they blamed others for their problems and failures, and these particular situations were laced with control or the youth saw no reason to invest in the outcome. In fact, each youth was making a calculated decision about when and where it was worth investing his or her time and effort. In fact, as Alex tells us, we cannot compel any youth to do anything that they do not want to do. We have made rules that require children and youth should go to school, as we should, but we need to provide services, supports and attractive options for them once they get there or they will make the lives of the teachers miserable.

Recommendations for Additional Research

This dissertation has focused on the experiences of four youth who had multiple, recurring negative experiences in school, at home and in the community, as those youth

receive an intervention designed to help them express their goals and develop a plan for completing high school and for accessing social resources. The many contexts and meanings that are depicted in this dissertation are but a snapshot into the experiences of these four youth and are complicated by the motivated action of multiple players in multiple contexts. The major findings include the notion that each of the youth wanted to be part of the dominant Discourse communities, that each wanted to be successful as students, workers, friends, and family members, that each engaged in behaviors to protect themselves and their positions, that each understood the need for reciprocity in productive relationships, that each showed various levels of skill as individual agents, and that each responded positively to authority and control when each felt respected as partners.

The meaning-context analysis provided in this dissertation has shown that youth who are otherwise disengaged from the school community can re-engage and be more successful when certain environmental elements are present, including caring relationships, interventions focused on the needs of the youth, and supportive interactions. The responsibility of communities for creating safe and caring learning environments for students who have disabilities and emotional and behavior support needs is described by Carr (2007):

Positive behavior support (PBS) is a great and worthy idea predicated on the notion that creating a life of quality and purpose, embedded in and made possible by a supportive environment, should be the focus of our efforts as professionals. Our chief concern is not with problem behavior, and certainly not with problem people, but rather with problem contexts. (p. 3)

This research project has focused on the meaning-context dynamic using social capital as the sensitizing concept and in that context, several questions have emerged

from this dissertation that warrant additional exploration. Additional research is needed to:

- Explore the intricacies of the social processes that enable youth at risk of school failure to take more control, act as positive agents in the planning and execution of their future plans, and develop skills to engage with others to build relationships of trust and reciprocity.
- Investigate the impact of “graphic facilitation” on how youth and adults learn and construct new meanings together. The technique of depicting a conversation in a public manner, such as using flip charts, was not the focus of this dissertation but warrants additional investigation.
- Identify the importance to youth of reciprocal peer and adult relationships, including how at-risk youth make meaning of these relationships compared with youth who are performing well in school. The intensity of the feelings each youth expressed for adults who they perceived as critical, uncaring, and incapable is also worthy of additional research.
- Explore the influence and control asserted via the special education process. While special education eligibility offers resources and opportunities for many students, there is a need to understand the professional stances and control exerted by special educators in relation to students, parents and other educators.
- Investigate the approaches and interactions that are most helpful to re-engage youth who are at risk of failure in school, including the relational dynamics from the youths’ perspectives.

- Finally, this project identifies a need for further investigation of the gender differences and similarities between the youths' responses to offers of help, including their efforts to build and interpretations of what is self-efficacy, and efforts to leverage social capital. In addition, three out of four youth in this study became parents while we worked with them, a fact that requires more explanation.

Closure

It is clear from this research project that:

- Despite their many experiences with academic failure, social isolation, and neglect, each youth expressed positive hopes for their futures and valued the help they received to articulate and pursue their plans.
- The four youth responded positively when teachers and other adults listened to them, when they felt heard and when they were treated respectfully. Each youth displayed the capacity to “give” back and reciprocate when they received help that they considered valuable.
- The adults were often too busy or too stressed to take the time to listen and respond to the needs of each youth. Many of the adults did not feel it was worth their time to assist the youth and they developed rationales, other than their feelings of inadequacy, for their lack of success with these youth.
- The four youth in this study did not expect to be heard or respected and they rarely sought help from others without coaching and support. When help was initiated and provided, however, each youth built an improved sense of self-efficacy and agency.

- The “return” of the investment for providing help within a caring relationship was often noted by the adults who provided that help. The adults felt more efficacious as educators when the youth responded positively to their helping efforts.
- Despite their difficult backgrounds and histories, the youth and their caregivers understood the “golden rule” of reciprocity.
- The presence and enforcement of policies to protect all students and adults in the school community did little to positively impact the educational participation of the four youth and, in many instances, served to further isolate each youth from the school community.
- Each youth engaged in agentive acts when they were involved in problem-solving and decision-making activities in a context of shared power and shared work with their adult helpers.

The debate about what is a quality education and what are effective educational practices defines the tension between content-driven instruction and a “liberal, democratic” education philosophy. It is clear from this study that Shelly, Julie, Manny and Alex were not a part of the school’s Discourse community, in other words, they were not high achievers in academics, they were not accepted socially, and they did not behave as expected. Each of the youth began to create his or her own self-views and social networks as a result, but in that process they lost access to the socially-based resources offered by the school’s community. In order to ensure that there are fewer Shellys, Julies, Mannys, and Alexs, educators in high schools should:

- Engage in problem-solving and shared decision-making activities with all students, especially with students at risk. This can include formal instruction and coursework in problem-solving, student-driven learning plans, community-service activities and opportunities for self-reflection, and to learn about cultural difference.
- Engage in conversations with youth about their futures, respecting the voice of each youth, focused on their strengths and placing the youth at the center of the academic, social, and emotional education process. Follow the lead of and support each youth based upon his or her strengths, talents, preferences and needs.
- Provide professional development and support to teachers and other staffs about the psychological and social processes that impact children and youth who have been abused, neglected, or who otherwise experience emotional or behavioral disorders.
- Develop alternative and more instructive interventions than the punishment-only and zero tolerance policies that currently dominate the discipline practices in schools and provide instructional, supportive, and restorative opportunities when children and youth engage in socially destructive behaviors.
- Use schoolwide systems and organizational frameworks and interventions to ensure that all the adults in the school consistently use positive and instructive responses to youth, especially students with emotional and behavioral support needs.

Educators are challenged by an increasing population of learners with more significant emotional and behavioral challenges, while they are faced with multiple pressures to meet educational standards. Educators cannot meet their goals, however, if students are resistant or openly hostile to what our education system is trying to accomplish. We need a kinder and gentler education community, where students and teachers are on the same page, where the work of learning how to become a wholly formed adult is shared work, where social resources are freely shared, and where decision-making is shared among the educators, students, and their families.

Post Script

All four youth followed their own paths. As of January 2011:

- Shelly graduated from high school in June of 2009 and had a healthy baby girl in November 2009 (Alex is the father). Her mother had her seventh child the month before. Mrs. Fairchild and I visited Shelly in October 2010. Shelly was despondent, indicating that she felt she was dying and quite afraid. Shelly's mother was visibly pregnant. Our last contact was with one of Shelly's sisters who told us that Shelly had another baby, two months premature, in December of 2010 (a boy, Alex is the father) and Shelly's mother had her eighth child in November of 2010. Shelly hid her pregnancy from her mother until she went into the hospital.
- Last we heard that Alex was working in a pizza shop and taking care of his mother.
- Manny was suspended from his new school for the remainder of the 2009-2010 school year in January of 2010. The assistant superintendent told me, "He is into

some really bad stuff, gangs and other crimes. The police are watching him” (Field Notes, January 2010). I thought for sure he was in jail. In Spetmber, 2010, however, Mrs. Stavros said: “Guess who stopped by yesterday. Manny. He is working, in adult education, and he looks great. He said he misses us here” (Field Notes, Sepetmebr 2010). I almost cried.

- Julie returned to Emmerton High school for classes in the fall of 2009, and had a baby girl in January of 2010. She graduated with an adult education diploma in June of 2010 and, when she last talked to Mrs. Fairchild she said, “Thank you and please thank the University people for me. You really helped me” (Field Notes, September 2010). She told Mrs. Fairchild that she still planned to go to the community college to become a nurse.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TOPICAL QUESTIONS

Topical Subquestions	Why Do I Need to Know This?	What Kind of Data Will Answer This Question?	Anticipated Procedures
1. What are the characteristics of the self-described career and adult life goals of youth at risk of failing in school?	To understand the dreams and goals of youth with EBD and see if they are surprisingly different from what is common among most youth.	The visual diagrams and conversations from the personal futures planning (intervention) meetings. (discourse analysis)	-I will use the protocol for planning and problem solving as part of the supportive intervention, along with graphic facilitation provided by the facilitator (flip chart notes) -Ask questions of data using Gee's guide
2. How do the youth view their "life chances," and how do they describe their positions in the school, community, at home, and in other important environments and contexts?	To determine how the youth perceive their connectedness to others within the context of pursuing career and education goals, and the extent of their congruence with the "social" norms and common expectations of high school students.	Data from planning meetings and student interviews (discourse analysis).	- The protocol for the intervention, along with semi-structured interviews with students focused on reflection about their position in the contexts. - Ask questions of data using Gee's guide

<p>3. What are the indicators that there are social lines of demarcation constructed between the at-risk youth and social networks in the school and the community? How are the actors in the setting negotiating these social forces?</p>	<p>To determine if there are obvious patterns in the experiences of at risk youth in creating and accessing social capital and in their engagement with others, and to determine how people act/react in the context</p>	<p>Data from interviews with students and adults in the school. Discipline records, student school record review. (discourse analysis)</p>	<p>-From the student interviews and planning meetings, find areas of dissonance between what I would expect (Discourse Model) and what I find. -Ask questions of data- what doesn't fit?</p>
<p>4. What meaning do students attribute to their social capital?</p>	<p>To understand how the youth attribute value to the resources available to them and what they note as valuable through their social networks and relationships.</p>	<p>Data from interviews and planning meetings (discourse analysis)</p>	<p>-Use the data from planning meetings and interviews to key in on data that relates to the social capital definition. -Ask questions of data using Gee's guide</p>
<p>5. What meaning do the students ascribe to the act of asking for or seeking help from people in their social networks?</p>	<p>To determine and note patterns about how students talk about social capital and how they access it.</p>	<p>Data from interviews, planning meetings, and observations. (discourse analysis)</p>	<p>- Data from protocol and follow-up meetings. - Ask questions of the data using Gee's guide</p>
<p>6. What meaning do the youth give to the result of and their experiences with help-seeking?</p>	<p>To understand how the youth understand and perceive the outcome of their help-seeking efforts</p>	<p>Data from student interviews and planning meetings (discourse analysis)</p>	<p>- Data from protocol and follow-up meetings. - Ask questions of the data using Gee's guide</p>
<p>7. What meaning do others (parents, significant people in the lives of the youth) ascribe to their ability to help the youth to achieve their goals?</p>	<p>To uncover the perceptions of others regarding the conditions and processes by which social capital is made accessible to the youth.</p>	<p>Data from interviews with students, parents, and other adults in the student's social network (discourse analysis).</p>	<p>-Semi-structured interviews with parents and other adults. - Ask questions of the data using Gee's guide</p>

APPENDIX B

YOUTH MAPPING PROTOCOLS

Student planning and follow up meetings:

Facilitator explains the purpose of the process, allows student to ask questions. This may take place in 1-3 meetings. Using flip chart paper to record the conversation, the facilitator asks:

- Tell me a bit about your history; What were the major events that you remember?; What had a big impact on your life? (prompt) (facilitator creates a timeline)
- Tell me about your current situation. Where do you live? Who else lives there? How would you describe your life now? (prompt)
- Tell me about the important people in your life? Who would you call if you needed help in the middle of the night? Who are the people in your network of “paid” helpers? (prompt). Who is in outer circle? What do your closest friends, teachers, and family members do to help you?
- What are the most important connections that you have? On typical day, what do you do? Who are you in contact with? What works? What doesn’t seem to work for you? (prompts)
- Ok, let’s look at what you see as your greatest accomplishments- why? What are you proudest of?
- What situations work for you (in school, with your friends, etc.)? What doesn’t work and why? (prompts)
- Ok let’s look ahead. What are your dreams? 3-4 years from now, what are you doing, with whom? What do you own? Where are you living? Be specific.
- What do you need to accomplish to get to those dreams? What may get in the way of your accomplishing these dreams? Who can help you? How can they help you?
- Let’s break down your dream into goals- 5 or 6 months out, what do you need to accomplish. Who can help you? How can they help you?
- OK, let’s make a list of next steps. Who will do what? How do you feel about asking _____ to help you?
- Close the planning phase.

Follow up sessions 1 and 2 (6 months and one year):

- Ok, let’s look over what you accomplished these past few months (prompts).
{Discuss what has been accomplished on the list}
- What seemed to work well, what didn’t work well? What surprised you?

- Who was most helpful to you? How did that work? (prompts)
- What does your network of people and supports look like now? (prompts) How has it changed? What do you think about that?

Develop a new set of goals and activities for next 5-6 months.

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL BOARD APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORMS

University of New Hampshire

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

08-May-2008

Malloy, JoAnne
Institute on Disability
56 Old Suncock Road, Suite 2
Concord, NH 03301

IRB #: 3689

Study: Achievement in Dropout Prevention and Excellence II

Review Level: Full

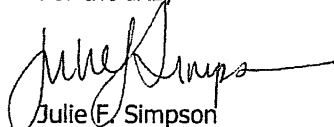
Approval Expiration Date: 19-May-2009

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for time extension for this study. Approval for this study expires on the date indicated above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your study is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. This document is available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html> or from me.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,


Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Cioffi, Grant

IRB

IRB

University of New Hampshire
 Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
 Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
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21-Mar-2008

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RECEIVED

APR 23 2008

OSR

IRB #: 3689
Study: Achievement in Dropout Prevention and Excellence II
Review Level: Full
Approval Expiration Date: 19-May-2008

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Annual Continuing Review Questionnaire

The IRB is obligated to conduct at least annual reviews of ongoing projects. Accordingly, the IRB asks you to answer the following questions and attach a report of findings to-date for this project. If the project is CLOSED, please submit a final report (copies of abstracts, articles, and/or publications specific to the project are acceptable).

1. Is this project still active (see question #4)? If YES, please read the NOTE below. Yes No
2. Please give date of termination if project has ended. _____
3. Please give proposed date of termination if project is still active, and refer to the Note below. 9/30/09
4. At what stage is your research: a) subject recruitment*, b) data collection, c) data analysis, d) interpretation, e) other [specify]? [Research projects in stages a - d are considered active, thus you need to request a time extension.] a, b, c
5. How many months have you actually performed the proposed investigation or activity? 22
6. How many subjects have been studied or involved to-date? 64
7. Have you conducted the research in accordance with the procedures approved by the IRB? yes
8. Have any problems emerged or serious unexpected adverse subject experiences been observed? If YES, please describe on a separate sheet. Yes No

Principal Investigator/
 Advisor Signature: Jo Anne M Malloy Date: 4/20/08

*If you are still recruiting subjects, please attach a BLANK copy of the INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT(S) YOU ARE CURRENTLY USING to the completed form and return with any supporting materials to the address below.

NOTE: IRB approval is granted for a maximum period of one year. Approval for your project ends on the date noted above. If your study will continue beyond this date, you must request a time extension at least two weeks prior to the approval expiration date. To do this, complete and return this form along with a written request for a time extension. Call Julie Simpson at 603-862-2003, or Kathleen Stilwell at 603-862-3536 with any questions.

Achievement for Dropout Prevention and Excellence (APEX) II

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Dear _____ :

The purpose of the Achievement for Dropout Prevention and Excellence (APEX) II project is to work with high schools so that more students graduate. As one of the directors of the project (APEX II), I am especially interested in the experiences of individual students as they develop their plans and work toward graduation. I am writing to ask your permission to include your child in the APEX II project and a research study that explores your child's experiences in high school. This study is part of my doctoral research at the University of New Hampshire.

If you give your permission, then I will also ask your son or daughter whether he or she wants to be part of this project. Participation is voluntary. Whether you and your child are part of this project will have no effect on school standing or services to which you and your child are entitled. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the project at any point for any reason.

I am inviting your child to be part of this because:

- She/he may benefit from individual help with career planning, classroom support, or other school- or career-related services to be more successful in school, or
- She/he has dropped out of school and could benefit from career and education support services.

If you and your child agree to participate, school staff members and APEX counselors will help you and your child create a vision about what he or she would like to do in the future and how to get there. The APEX training and research will not interfere with the typical services and programs that your child is already eligible for. I will interview you and your child, collect information about your child's school situation, work, involvement with police (if appropriate), and the personal planning process. I will also be part of and collect information from the planning meetings and look at your child's school records. I will consult with and interview teachers and other staff about your child's needs and situation.

I also seek your permission to conduct a series of 3-5 interviews with your child and one or two interviews with you. The purpose of the interviews is to discuss how your child's friendships with other students and relationships with other students and teachers, counselors and others contribute to his or her school success. Each interview will last from 45 minutes to an hour and will be scheduled at a time convenient to your child or you. I plan to audiotape the conversations. These tapes will be transcribed. Once the

accuracy of the tapes is established, the recordings will be destroyed and the transcripts maintained in a secure file.

Achievement for Dropout Prevention and Excellence (APEX) II

I will make sure the information that I collect in this project remains private and secure. I will not name individual students. I may share portions of the transcripts with the professors at UNH who are advising me, but I will be careful not to identify particular students. It will not be possible to identify any individual from the results I report. There are rare times, however, when a court of law might force me to share information with someone who is not part of this research. I am obligated also to report suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect.

There should be no risks for your child to be in this study. Being part of the project activities is voluntary. All of the activities that take place as part of this project should help your child's educational experience rather than harm it in any way.

If you decide to participate in this project and allow our child to participate, your child will receive individualized support to develop his or her future plans, career goals, and concrete steps for completing high school (or returning to high school or obtaining a GED, if your child has dropped out of school). Thus, the benefits of your child for participating in this project could be great.

Contacts

If you have any questions about this project, we would be happy to answer them at any time. You can contact:

JoAnne Malloy, Co-Director, UNH, 56 Old Suncook Road, Concord, NH 03301
(phone: 603-228-2084, e-mail: jammalloy@aol.com)

Kathleen Abate, Program Director, Alliance for Community Supports
gsffcmh@aol.com

If you have any questions about your rights as a project participant, please contact Julie Simpson at the University of New Hampshire's Office of Sponsored Research. Her phone number is
862-2003

Achievement or Dropout Prevention and Excellence (APEX) II

Consent

I have read this form and have been able to ask (and have answered) any questions I have before making a decision about this project. I have been given a copy of this form.

Yes, I consent/agree to participate in this project and I agree that my child can participate in this project.

No, I refuse/do not agree to participate in this project and I do not want my child to participate in this project.

Child's Name: _____

Child's Date of Birth: ____ / ____ / ____

Parent/Guardian's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

STUDENT MEETINGS AND INTERVIEWS

Julie:

	Date	Purpose- People	Taped- Y/N	LINE
1	9/10/2008	Mrs F., Malloy, Ms. McGurk, Julie, first mapping meeting	Y	38
2	9/10/2008	Mrs F., Malloy- review Julie's history	Y	350
3	9/18/2008	Malloy, Jon, Mrs F. Julie, second mapping meeting	Y	386
4	9/30/2008	Julie, Malloy, Jon, Ms. McGurk, (Mrs F comes in halfway through)- 3 rd mapping meeting	Y	1037
5	10/07/2008	Ms McGurk, Jon , Mrs F, Julie, Malloy, 4 th mapping meeting	Y	1453
6	10/21/2008	Malloy, Ms. McGurk, Julie, Mrs. F. Mr. Price from Guidance....Continue mapping	Y	2720
7	10/28/2008	Malloy, D (friend invited by Julie), Julie, Mr P, Ms McGurk- continue tracking and planning for credits	Y	3425
8	11/19/2008	Malloy and Jon- consulting on what has transpired with mom	Y	4205
9	12/02/08	Julie, Malloy, Mrs F, Ms. McGurk, Friend, Donna- review plan-	Y	4385
10	12/09/2008	Malloy, Mrs F., Julie, mom, Donna- Mrs. S (principal) comes in at the end)-continue to review plan for spring and transferring to adult ed	Y	5596
11	12/16/2008	Mrs. S., mom, dad, Mrs F., Malloy, Julie- to talk with parents about alternative diploma	N	6260
12	12/22/2009	Malloy, Julie, & Mrs F to check in	Y	6296
13	2/10/2009	Mom, Donna (University staff), Mrs F. and Malloy	N	6590
14	2/17/2009	Ms. McGurk, Mrs F, Malloy, Julie, her boyfriend, Jon	Y	6630
15	3/3/2009	Julie, Malloy, Donna, Jon, Boyfriend	Y	7015

Appendix D (continued)

16	5/7/2009	Principal, Donna, staff at Adult Ed, Julie, boyfriend, mom, dad, me-Review plan to take adult ed classes, where she stands on credits	N	7356
17	7/16/2009	Malloy, Mom, dad- interview about process and reflections	Y	7718

Shelly:

	Date	Purpose- People	Taped- Y/N	LINE
1	April 28, 2008	First meeting with Shelly to introduce Malloy and project, with Mrs F, in Guidance office	N	11
2	May 19, 2008	Planned meeting with Mrs. P, Malloy & Shelly for first time- she's a no show- in Guidance Conf Room	N	60
3	May 21, 2008	Meet with Shelly , Malloy,& Mrs F. to reconnect in Mrs F's office	N	75
4	May 27, 2008	Mrs F., Mrs. Pennington Shelly and Malloy -first meeting-goals and history flip charts	N	99
5	June 17, 2008	Mrs F, Mrs. Pennington, Shelly, and Malloy- continue planning, GOALS	N	378
6	July 15, 2008	Mrs F, Ms C and Malloy-	N	552
7	July 22, 2008	Shelly, Mrs F, Ms P and MALLOY	N	587
8	August 12, 2008	Shelly, mom, Mrs F, Malloy, and Mrs C	N	743
9	September 10, 2008	Mrs F., Malloy, Mrs C (early release, Shelly is a no show)	Y	908
10	September 18, 2008	Mrs F., Mrs C, Shelly, Malloy- check in on progress	Y	1479
11	October 8, 2008	Mrs Pennington, Mrs F, Shelly , Malloy- check in	Y	2281
12	October 28, 2008	Shelly and Malloy- check in- other helpers not available	Y	3182
13	November 4, 2008	Shelly, mom, friend, Mrs. F, Jon, Mrs C., Malloy- celebrate passing her classes	N	3270
14	January 13, 2009	Shelly, Mrs F., Guidance counselor, Ms West, Malloy, review classes	Y	3334
15	February 3, 2009	Shelly, Mrs C., Mrs F., Mrs P and Malloy	Y	3570

Appendix D (continued)

16	February 17, 2009	Shelly, Mrs F and Malloy	Y	4373
17	March 5, 2009	Shelly, Mrs Pennington, Mrs F and Malloy	N	5005
18	March 17, 2009	Vocational rehabilitation counselor, Mrs F, Shelly, Malloy , Jon, Mrs C	Y	5036
19	March 30, 2009	Mrs. F. Jon, and Malloy- consulting on progress	Y	5614
20	April 2, 2009	Mrs F., Shelly, Jon, and Malloy	Y	5648
21	May 5, 2009	Jon. Mrs C., Mrs L., Mrs F's daughter, Mrs M. Mrs F., Malloy- celebration of passing grades and pending graduation	N	6177
22	July 16, 2009	Malloy and mom interview	Y	6404
23	December 8, 2009	Mrs Pennington and Malloy- interview about Mrs P's perceptions, reflections about being a mentor	Y	7375

Alex:

	Date	Purpose-People	Taped-Y/N	Line
1	First meeting April 29, 2008	To meet-Introduce Project, Malloy, Mrs F & Alex	N	10
2	May 8, 2008	Alex, Mrs. F and Malloy meet, meeting with mom in her home	N	32
3	May 22, 2008	Alex, Mrs. F, Jon and Malloy, brief meeting- he is not interested	N	90
4	August 27, 2008	Mrs. F, Maria and Malloy- consultation about Alex	N	150
5	September 3, 2008	Interview with Mr. P, a previous teacher, Jon, Maria A., Malloy, Mrs. F. to conduct a functional behavioral assessment	N	323
6	September 10, 2008	Mrs. F, Mrs P., Mrs C. and Malloy. Alex has indicated he wants to participate and we are reviewing his plan	Y	380
7	September 16, 2008	Malloy, Jon.- interviewed English teacher for functional assessment of behavior	Y	800
8	September 18, 2008	Mrs. F, Jon, Malloy, Alex- to introduce the RENEW process	N	1698

Appendix D (continued)

9	September 23, 2008	Meeting with school "team," Mrs C., Mrs Black, nurse, truant officer, Principal, Malloy, Jon, Alex (mom cannot be there)	N	1725
10	September 23, 2008	First true "RENEW" meeting with Alex, Jon, Malloy	Y	1930
11	September 30, 2008	Jon, Malloy, Alex,	Y	2560
12	October 7, 2008	Alex, Jon, Malloy, and Mr. P, school-to-career coordinator	Y	3310
13	October 17, 2008	Jon, Malloy, Mrs F consult about Alex	N	4665
14	October 21, 2008	Jon, Malloy, mom and Alex at his home	N	4766
15	October 21, 2008	Jon, Malloy- discuss progress at home and in school	Y	
16	November 4, 2008	Jon, Malloy, Mom Alex at home-planning to re-enter school	N	5050
17	November 19, 2008	Jon, Malloy, mom, Alex at home	Y	5212
18	November 25, 2008	Jon, Malloy, Alex, mom at home	Y	7122
19	November 25, 2008	School meeting: Mrs L, Mrs F., Mrs C., Assistant Principal, mom, Alex, Jon, Malloy	Y	7400
20	December 2, 2008	Jon, Malloy, Alex at home	Y	8848
21	December 3, 2008	School meeting to finalize re-entry plan: Mrs. C, Mrs S. Jon, Malloy, Alex, mom	Y	9205
22	December 9, 2008	Meeting at home-mom, Jon, family friend, Alex, Malloy to gain help for mom at home and brainstorm employment ideas for mom	Y	10210
23	December 22, 2008	Meeting at home: Jon, Malloy, mom and Alex	Y	10650
24	January 8, 2009	Jon, Malloy, Alex, mom at home-meeting to check in about school	Y	11353
25	January 13, 2009	Jon, Mrs S (principal), Mrs C., Mrs F., Alex, Malloy, and Mr. P.- School meeting to check in and plan for next quarter	Y	11910

Appendix D (continued)

26	January 20, 2009	Alex, Jon, Malloy, mom, at Alex's home- he has been suspended	Y	12112
27	February 3, 2009	Jon, Malloy, Alex, Mrs F, meeting to check on progress in second term	Y	13009
28	February 17, 2009	Jon, Malloy, Mom and Alex at home- he has been suspended	Y	13790
29	March 3, 2009	Jon, Malloy, Alex at home- suspended from school	Y	14552
30	March 24, 2009	School meeting: Jon, Malloy, Alex, Mrs C, Mrs F., Principal	Y	14672

Manny:

	Date	Purpose-People	Taped-Y/N	Line
1	May 16, 2008	Mrs F., Manny and Malloy: first meeting to introduce RENEW	N	10
2	November 25, 2008	Ms. West, Manny and Malloy- first mapping meeting	Y	27
3	December 9, 2008	Ms. West, Donna, Jon, Manny and Malloy- check in about school and second mapping meeting	Y	812
4	January 8, 2009	Ms. West, Manny, Malloy, Jenny from group home- 3 rd mapping meeting	Y	1634
5	January 20, 2009	Ms. West, Mrs F., Manny and Malloy- 4 th meeting check in	Y	2161
6	March 3, 2009	Ms. West Manny, Jenny, Donna, Malloy	Y	2434
7	May 5, 2009	Ms. West, Jenny, Donna, Manny, Malloy	Y	2722
8	June 11, 2009	Ms. West, Malloy Jenny, Donna, Manny	Y	3175
9	July 7, 2009	Jenny, Donna, Manny and Malloy, at group home to talk about family	Y	3533
10	July 13, 2009	Malloy, Jenny, and Manny- follow up on missing info from previous meeting	N	4226
11	July 16, 2009	Malloy & Mrs. Black about Manny's history, profile	N	4283
12	September 3, 2009	Malloy, Jenny, (guardian ad litem, lead teacher, Mrs F, Manny- meeting to begin to plan out new school year, possible discharge in December 2009	N	4459

Appendix D (continued)

13	October 1, 2009	Jeannine, Mrs W., Mrs F., Guardian ad litem, Donna, Manny, MALLOY, Bio teacher	N	4525
14	October 19, 2009	Manny, Mrs F, MALLOY and lead teacher- regroup with Manny, begin to plan for when he goes to his home community high school	N	4555
15	November 5, 2009	MALLOY, Manny, group home staff, guidance counselor at new school-enroll	N	4657

APPENDIX E

REFLECTIVE MEMO

September 18, 2008

Reflections on Role, Process, Personal versus Organizational

I met with Dr. Cioffi today and am much relieved. I explained my recent advocacy efforts on behalf of Alex and my ambivalence about the resulting actions taken by the sped teacher. Dr. Cioffi supports my efforts- he basically said of course, when you see a situation of neglect you are ethically bound to intercede- there is no question. I also asked about possibly including 4-5 youth in the study rather than 7-8- he suggested I talk to Dr. Schram about that.

We talked about what I am doing and learning. Me: "I don't want this study to be about me and my insecurities, but sometimes that's how it feels." I told him that the book *Emotions in Fieldwork* has become my favorite companion, as the authors relate the dilemmas and conflicts that I feel as I move in and out of several roles- I am a project director, consultant, researcher, advocate- YUCK! But... I don't want "the self-absorbed self to lose sight altogether of the centrally different other... but can understand the other through writing..."

Mrs C: I talk with Mr. C. about how she talked to the student after I had offered my thoughts on his need- and she took over and told him she was moving him- Mrs C "I'm sick of it!" He will have his needs met there" "He flipped out" Is she trying to please us? Get rid of the student? Does she feel unsuccessful with him? Is she embarrassed? What is she trying to do? I know she is going through a messy divorce (she has a young daughter)- she seems stressed and in a hurry all the time....

9/24/2008

Then there is Mrs F., who I work very closely with to set up meetings, work behind the scenes with students, etc. She is dedicated to the students but she has several different roles including 1) she is the "crisis" guidance counselor, so people send kids to her all the time, but she has no authority....2) she is in the middle school for 3 days a week and the HS 2 days a week, 3) she runs a social skills group, 4) she chairs the student behavioral support teams at both the middle and high schools.....How can she do it? I am also beginning to see that the interface between the disciplinarians, guidance, and

SPED, and teachers is confused and hap hazard. Mrs C makes decisions about Alex without telling Mrs F (who offers his support at least a few times a week). The turf and "silos" (I hate that word) of authority act like ping pong paddles and the youth are the ping pong balls....

I need to look at the context and write more about the context....

APPENDIX F

ACTION PLAN

Julie, May 1, 2009

Action Item	Person Responsible	Completion Date	Comments
Complete IM2 assignments	Julie	Tuesday May 12 th 1pm	Julie will turn in all make-up assignments to Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Fairchild will make sure they get to adult education.
Update Futures Plan	Julie, Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Couture	Tuesday May 12 th 1pm	Julie will update her goals and career interests. This will help her choose an appropriate work study/community service placement.
Set up an appropriate community service/work study placement	Julie, mom and dad, , Mrs. I	ASAP – see Mrs. I	Mom and dad agreed to help Julie look into the City of Maintenance Department and the Humane Society as well as any other locations of interest. Once determined – forms and instructions can be obtained from Mrs. I.
Update Personalized Learning Plan	Mrs. Stavros	By the end of the month	Mrs. S, can you update the PLP with the changes we talked about in the meeting and send us a new copy?
Look into taking economics through VLACS this summer	Julie, Mrs. Couture, Mrs. Fairchild	Tuesday May 12 th	Go online at www.vlacs.org to determine if it is a possibility
Obtain Biology progress report	Julie	Tuesday May 12 th	Review at meeting with Mrs. Fairchild and Mrs. Couture
Continue with Employment search	Julie	Ongoing	Julie will continue to search for employment through the online JobMatch system, newspapers and word of mouth.

APPENDIX G

RISK ASSESSMENT

Morley, & Veale, (2002). Student Risk Assessment for Identifying Needs and Evaluating Impacts. Monograph. Retrieved November 2005.

CRITICAL FACTORS:	Shelly	Julie	Alex	Manny
Dropout or expelled			X	
Victim of physical, psychological, sexual abuse, rape or other violent crime; student has experienced trauma.	X		X	X
Pregnancy/teen parent.	X	X	X	
Homeless (on the street, shelter, transitional housing, living with friends or other temporary arrangements)			X	X
Language/cultural barriers. Recent immigrant				
Student is significantly behind same-age peers in accumulation of credits towards graduation.		X	X	X
Poor attendance, repeated suspensions, repeated tardiness (for example, more than 3 unexcused absences in past 4 months, late to school more than 3 times)		X	X	
Repeated behavioral infractions (sent to office more than 3 times per month on average)		X	X	X
Current or recent out-of-home placement (foster care, detention, independent living, residential treatment, etc.).				X
Committed criminal acts.			X	X
Engages in self-injurious behavior (cutting, taking part in very dangerous or risky behavior)			X	
Gang membership				X
Parent is incarcerated, has a serious mental illness, or is frequently hospitalized			X	X
Has/is experiencing repeated school failure (low achievement, low grades)	X	X	X	X
Special education student, including mental, learning, emotional or physical disability needs that are not met through SPED services	X		X	

APPENDIX H

DISCOURSE EXERPTS

Question: "What works and what doesn't work?"	
Shelly	Works: "When the teachers describes and is clear about the assignments" Doesn't work: "Giving the work and not explaining"
Julie	Works: "Gives you work when its like quiet. Like, I can't do work when it's wicked loud" "Yeah, or like, worksheets, and stuff like that. Just hand them out and do it." Doesn't work: "Otherwise, it's like, wicked loud? And no one pays attention. I just get distracted" "Or when they {the teachers} run their mouth when they shouldn't be"
Manny	What works: "My probation officer said when I'm 16 he will help me pay for driver's ed and my car so..." "I like hand's on stuff" "I like working on group projects" "I like reading" Doesn't work: "When the teacher writes stuff down like he goes and erases it when I'm half way done with it"
Alex	What works: "My schedule works for me" "My class, Culinary" "I'm hanging out with family more, now. I mean, you know, my brother's kids" "Having friends that, friends in classes, and friends in school, works for me" Doesn't work: "I don't like when people are like, being around people that much, anymore" "Getting into fights" "Caring too much"

The responses of the youth to the question about what their lives look like today are depicted below:

Life Today MAPS

Question; "What is your life like today?"	
Shelly	"Chaotic" "Passing Biology"
Julie	"Stressful" "Fighting with my dad" "I can't keep dealing with home and school" "Worried"
Manny	"Better than before" "I haven't gotten suspended this year at all" "Everybody is putting stress on me"
Alex	"I'm never home" "I'm facing a year in jail" My relationship with my brother and mother's ex-boyfriend are bad "Everything in my life is so stressful. I live with it" "I'm Bi-polar" {Indicating Bi Polar Disorder}

Contexts of Julie's Engagement

Event	Discourse	Date
Explaining why she has so much trouble dealing with school on top of all the other pressures in her life	Julie: That's the thing, that's why I want to graduate early, because <u>I can't keep dealing</u> with home and school and things like that in high school. Not that, I don't even know why, why I'm going to do night school, and find out I have more time out of my house.	Transcripts, September 9, 2008
Julie continues to express her hatred of school and is being heard by others.	Julie: Better than in here. It's like jail. me: Well, I know it probably seems that way. Ms. McGurk: We're not really jailkeepers, though. Julie: Yeah. me: Well, we'll try to get you out of here early. How's that? [LAUGHTER] Julie: That's what I want.	Transcripts, October 7, 2008

Appendix H (continued)

<p>Problem-solving around her credits and gaining credits at adult education</p>	<p>Mrs Fairchild (to Julie): Ask Mr. Price, right now, go ahead ask him... Julie: So would a biology there count as a credit here? Mr. Price: It would. We transfer anything from Adult Ed....If it's a full credit at Adult Ed it could count as a full credit here... Julie: So if I did biology at night there I wouldn't have to take it here?... Price: So we'll put in the possibility of night school then? Julie: Yeah</p>	<p>Transcripts, October 21, 2008</p>
<p>Later that same meeting, Mr. Price explains that Julie could leave the high school and possibly complete her diploma entirely in adult education.</p>	<p>Mr. Price: It's an adult ed diploma, so the requirements are a bit different, but some like ours. Julie: So instead of going to school during the day you go at night? Price: Um huh? Julie: AWESOMALLOY... me: Are you sure? Julie: Yeah me: You wouldn't want to see anyone here? No? Price: You would be removed from us... you would longer be on our---</p>	<p>Transcripts, October 21, 2008</p>
<p>The possibility of going to adult education and not having to come into school has energized Julie and she is working hard to pass all her first semester courses</p>	<p>Mr. Price: they were able to go back and fill in that math credit. Julie: I took nine tests -- Mrs. Fairchild: So, we're just looking for a half credit [in math?] me: Can you do that by Friday? Mr. Price: Got you. This is all [math?] block. Julie: I just did three, today. me: Wow. Jeepers. Julie: It's not that hard.</p>	<p>Transcripts, October 28, 2008</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>Julie expresses her interest in the alternative adult education diploma and that this is what she wants.</p>	<p>Mrs. Fairchild “This is what she {Julie} wants, she expressed it, she’s given it thought and even though it’s not what all of us may want, she felt supported... she’s working hard and still getting slammed...” Julie was suspended again- she is having disputes with an English Teacher.</p>	<p>Field Notes November 19, 2008</p>
<p>Julie is working hard to finish her classes so she will be able to show her parents and the school that she can finish at adult education</p>	<p>Julie is super organized... she has all of her classes and progress reports and she keeps track. Her agenda book is filled with items, timelines, highlighted by class, etc. She uses this as strategy to keep on track.... The progress report for history shows a comment by her teacher: “Julie is doing great this quarter.”</p>	<p>Field Notes, December 2, 2008</p>
<p>Julie is quite focused on following through so she can get to her goal</p>	<p>Julie: The only goals I have is, getting the credits I have now. And then, after, going to adult classes.</p>	<p>Transcripts, December 9, 2008</p>
<p>Julie has now signed out of the regular high school program and is enrolled in adult education, with her parents permission.</p>	<p>Mrs. Fairchild: “She (Julie) finds the RENEW process helpful to keep her on track and wants to continue that.” Mom agrees. Mom: “I know she can do this. It’s a big deal for us (husband and her) to sign her out of <i>school</i>. <i>But I know she can do it’ Mom cried and thanked us several times. Mom is supporting her tremendously. Julie has responded and is working hard for herself. This is the situation that engages people</i></p>	<p>Field Notes, February 10, 2009</p>
<p>Julie has been going to adult education for two months and has disengaged from working with us at the school.... but she reaches out....</p>	<p>Facilitator: I just got the text below from Julie....she is in Biology right now and is overwhelmed. She worked hard on a project that she needed to present tonight, but she did it all wrong. She is asking for our help to get her back on track. Email: “Subject: Hey donna its Julie, .i need your help with biology..im in over my head :(Sent from my Verizon Wireless BlackBerry</p>	<p>Text from Julie to University facilitator, May 21, 2009</p>

Appendix H (continued0

<p>Parents are supporting Julie to develop her plan for the 2009-2010 school year</p>	<p>Mom: So at least that way you know I'm on board with her me: Yup Mom: And that we're together as to what she's doing so that she can show up at the meeting because Bill and I can't be there.</p>	<p>Transcripts, July 16, 2009</p>
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Contexts of Manny's Engagement

Event	Discourse	Date
<p>Manny is explaining how life is at his group home and how the staff trust him.</p>	<p>Malloy: So you feel some trust there, they trust you Manny: Yeah. They you know they've got a lot of trust in me, because there have been 3 or 4 of us who have been there for a long time. One kid who has been there he's 18 now his birthday was a couple of months ago, he's been there 4 or 5 years.</p>	<p>Transcripts, November 25, 2008</p>
<p>Explaining how teachers treat him and other students as we try to get to know him and find out what he thinks about school</p>	<p>Manny: A few teachers, to me they make us sound like we know nothing at all, that I come to class and pay attention but I never do my work, so its treating me like I'm dumb, that what it feels like to me JM: Talking down to you Manny: Yeah, 'I know what you're doing you're dumb'</p>	<p>Transcripts, November 25, 2008</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>Talking about his support network in order to get to know Manny</p>	<p>Ms. West: How specifically does {the group home director} support you? Manny: {Big yawn} Well he's like when I have study he'll be there when I'm at study and he'll like just you know ask me if I'm doing good and he'll help me if I need some help, I mean like all the staff will do that Ms. West: Yup. What about you know, just personal support, like beyond school what does he provide for you, like do you feel comfortable talking to him about anything like is he a support that way? Manny: Yeah like he'll talk to me about me getting into trouble, keep me out of it.</p>	<p>Transcripts, December 9, 2008</p>
<p>The end of the meeting, when we chat about interests</p>	<p>Donna(University facilitator): I thought they were books, I never got into them Is that the vampire books? Manny: Yeah...Ok well its like OK, its like not like every vampire movie you would see like probably the best one, like vampire that you see on book covers and that like those are the good ones, like they won't eat humans though, 9they eat animals Jon: Sounds like Buffy (laugh)</p>	<p>Transcripts, December 9, 2008</p>
<p>Discussing his progress in school and looking at how he can improve his work in English, sharing insight into his own challenges</p>	<p>Jean (group home staff member): What do you think would happen even if you got all your work done? Manny: Like I don't know Jean: Like would he still pass you like what do you think Manny: Well... I don't like, like I'm the person, I don't know like sometimes <i>he bothers me sometimes</i> like I get a bit in a mood, like I get mad, like I just try to keep it inside me</p>	<p>Transcripts, January 8, 2009</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>In a check-in meeting to continue to plan and follow-along Manny's progress in his classes, Manny is quite proud of turning in his work and has received positive feedback from the teacher.</p>	<p>Manny: I finished all the math that Mr. H gave me... Ms. West: Where is that? Manny: He has it Ms. West: Good that's awesome, was he psyched? Manny: Yeah he said wow, you actually finished a packet in a week that we gave you... Ms. West: So uhhh, I think he's actually I shouldn't speak for Manny what do you think about all of this? Manny: I <u>feel better</u> than before I felt better...I don't know why but I <u>felt better</u>... Mrs Fairchild: Manny that's huge... Manny: I don't know why but I felt better... me: Makes you feel like you accomplished something Manny: Yeah</p>	<p>Transcripts January 20, 2009</p>
<p>We review how Manny is doing- it's the second half of the year and Manny is doing much better in his classes</p>	<p>Manny: Right, so far I'm passing that class Ms. West: So far, Mrs. Lewis {was the person who kicked him out of her study last year} has been really happy with, in there</p>	<p>Transcript, March 3, 2009</p>
<p>Talking about the idea that Manny might have an internship at the Barber Shop he likes in town</p>	<p>me: What you can do Manny is you might not get paid but you can get credit for it.... Manny: Yeah, it's fine with me... it's definitely fine</p>	<p>Transcript, March 3, 2009</p>
<p>Manny is talking about his job at the Barbershop, sharing with us what it's like</p>	<p>me: So what do they have you doing? Manny: He gave me a list of stuff like I do the baseboards, like I'm cleaning the baseboards with oil soap, clean the TV, dust off the pool table, mop and sweep the floor and vacuum, pretty much that stuff yeah</p>	<p>Transcript, May 5, 2009</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>Ms. West is looking for another job in another district and tells us she is likely to leave Emmerton High School</p>	<p>Ms. West: Anyway.....so um Manny: Well we'll miss you a lot... Ms. West: Thanks Manny Manny: I won't but.... (he is kidding, laughs, everyone laughs) JM: Very funny.... Manny: I'll miss you</p>	<p>June 11, 2009</p>
<p>We met at his group home, it's summer. We are talking about his family of origin and the transitions that will be coming up when Manny will turn 17 and be released by the court.</p>	<p>Donna; How often? Manny: Well it's actually court ordered now, that's the condition for me to go home, I have to see them like I just stayed over two nights, stayed over 2 nights, and yeah....well I have to see them Donna: Uh huh like is it every weekend? Manny: Yeah every weekend... yes.. yes...every Thursday... like I go to summer school and then I go to work and then I go home until Saturday until 3 O'Clock... yeah JM; So are you working at the Barber Shop? Manny: Yeah Donna: How is that working out? Manny: Super...</p>	<p>July 7, 2009</p>
<p>During a phone call with Manny's group home director.</p>	<p>Manny on our RENEW meetings: {Group Home Director}: "he seems to like that, yeah- he says no one is nagging him or telling him what to do at those meetings"</p>	<p>Field Notes, October 14, 2009</p>

Contexts of Alex's Engagement

Event	Discourse	Date
<p>Alex needs assistance re-entering school as he walked out after another student threatened and teased him and his mother signed the papers so he could drop out, quickly realizing that she will lose some of her welfare payments</p>	<p>Jon: The thing is, that you want to get back in school, right? Alex: Yeah, but I'm not going to ...for a gay meeting where I'm going to talk to all these people that I hate.... me: Well, they are not going to let you in school any other way, so you're going to have to figure it out. Alex: I just want to go back to my classes Jon: Well, the meeting's purpose is to make sure everybody is on the same page with everything. Alex: Why? Cuz you want me to just go to my classes...</p>	<p>November 17, 2008</p>
<p>During a formal school-reentry planning meeting, including the principal, assistant principal, Alex, mom, Jonathon, Mrs. Fairchild, Mrs. Catano, truancy officer, facilitator and researcher</p>	<p>Alex: Yeah. Well, I want to come back to school because finding a job is kind of hard for me, because I do not do good around, like, I get like nervous and shy and stuff around other people. I know a job would be hard for me to do, and going to that GED thing, I'm not really up to that right now because I won't understand, I probably won't understand the test and I was told that the test would be hard for me, with my difficulty learning, cuz I can't learn really good. So, I'd like, the best idea is to come back to school because I can learn a lot more. And I wanted to come back anyways, I've got my friends at school.I'll try to do better than I was doing. Like getting all my work done and just pay attention to one the classes more. And, but my then my ultimate goal is just to get high school diploma, at the school. I want to graduate, pretty much.</p>	<p>Transcripts, November 25, 2008</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>Same meeting as Mrs. Stavros, the principal, asks Alex what the expectations are for coming back to school</p>	<p>Mrs. Stavros: Alex, you and I have chatted for over a year on and off, it seems like now its super reasonable that you should know some of my expectations for you. Alex: Mmhm. Mrs. Stavros: Would you identify what you think about the expectations are going to be? Alex: Well, you need me to stay out of trouble and like work hard on my work and not like be into like all the drama and issues and stay out of trouble and stay away from all that. And that you have to stay in classes to succeed. Mrs. Stavros: Okay. Do you understand attendance is very important? Alex: Yeah, attendance, yeah.</p>	<p>Transcripts, November 25, 2008</p>
<p>meeting at Alex's house to check in when he re-enters school- he wants us to know he has reunited with his girlfriend, Shelly</p>	<p>Alex: Oh, information, I got back with Shelly---- finally. I talked to her, I'm happy. We actually went on a date to the movies, uh, Saturday. Jon: Did you have fun? Alex: Yeah! Jon: What movie did you see? Alex: Twilight. Jon: Was that good? Alex: It was a good movie.</p>	<p>Transcripts, December 2, 2008</p>

<p>Follow-up, formal school meeting to finalize Alex's re-entry schedule and plan. There are numerous expectations laid on the table, and Alex agrees</p>	<p>Mrs. Stavros: We need to set you up with Ms. Fairchild or Mrs. Secourt... to sort of work on the anger thing, so until that happens... Alex: Well, I'm like mostly closer to Ms. Fairchild, so I could work with her easy, I don't know, I open up to her easily. Mrs. Stavros: Okay, so until we get sort of an official anger management plan up there, what do we do now in Culinary if somebody busts your chops and your fuse goes up. Alex: Just walk away. Walk away from them. I won't get pissed. I won't get pissed, because I really don't get pissed anymore.</p>	
<p>meeting at home with mom to check in on how his relationship is going at home and how things are at school</p>	<p>Jonathan: Alright. What else is helping things go well for now with Alex? Alex: I've been helping out my Mom, cleaning and stuff. Jonathan: Okay. So Alex help out. What have you been doing lately, Alex to help your Mom out with cleaning? Cuz the house looks great. Alex: Keep my room clean and picking up messes people make when they're here. me: Okay. You also were doing dishes every day? Or? Alex: I fixed the dents in the wall and the holes in the walls myself. Because I have to repaint this whole house.</p>	<p>Transcripts, December 22, 2008</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>meeting with Alex at home to check in how he is doing. He is being very honest about what he will and will not do, and is planning on getting back to a full school day if he meets the expectations that the school placed on his return to a full day</p>	<p>Jonathan: Yeah, you've been doing great. Alex: Yeah. I've been out of trouble, anything trouble. Jonathan: How do you escape it all? Alex: I can't blow, I can't afford to blow up, if I blow up, I'll get cops involved with it or just be in trouble and put it back to my probation officer, I go back in jail for a year. JoAnne: So those things work for you. Alex: ___ I'm gonna have to stay out of trouble</p>	<p>Transcripts, January 8, 2009</p>
<p>meeting with Alex at his home- he has been suspended from taking the regular bus and is home from school today because he had an outburst on the bus. Alex believes he is meeting the school's expectations and is making his case with Jonathon and his mother.</p>	<p>Alex: I'm not going back (to his alternative half-day class). I'll go to school, you'll see I'll go to my class I'm always on time for my class I'll go to class, Jon: I think he is on time for that class--so I think the Mom: Well you need to be back- Alex: Have you ever seen me be tardy? Mom: Maybe you'll- Alex: I have never been tardy Mom: Maybe they'll let you go back in there in the building and you know do more hours in the building (Alex is talking over her) in the school building Alex: I was always on time---there was one time today that I was tardy because I didn't have a ride until Shelly's mom came really late and picked me up...</p>	<p>Transcripts, January 20, 2009</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>At the same meeting, Alex restates his hopes and goal</p>	<p>Jon: Alright- and you have been doing a good job with culinary me: Absolutely Alex: I want to go to school, I just want to stay with what I'm doing, and after I get my diploma from school, I'm gonna, I I going to (???) culinary arts program. And they call it culinary arts – free membership- Jon: And if you're thinking about that— Alex: (stammering now) I can do it, {the teacher is} having a contest for culinary arts class, Jon: Yup</p>	<p>Transcript, January 20, 2009</p>
<p>meeting at school to check in on how the semester is going with his new schedule. Is is less than 2 weeks into the semester and Alex indicates there are problems</p>	<p>Jon: About a week – I think it's yeah, almost it will be a week this Thursday? Alex: Yeah – screwed me up the whole thing screwed me up – there's only one teacher in there and (he is yawning)so...I just do it by myself Jon: OK Alex: He's (the teacher) not so helpful Mr O. I don't like him I think he's annoying Jon: OK so what would help you in the class you think? Alex: Oh I just need help in that class support Jon: So just someone to help you? Alex: Yeah in the other class there used to be a teacher like who was with me like Mrs D. or Ms C. was with me sometimes or some teachers in there with me and now there's no one in there and I have the just regular teacher... and just I don't know</p>	<p>Transcripts, February 3, 2009</p>

Appendix H (continued)

<p>Formal school meeting to check in with Alex. Mrs. Stavros, Mrs. Catano, Mrs. Fairchild, - he had been suspended and incarcerated, missing a fair amount of school after getting into a verbal fight with the Assistant Principal-</p>	<p>Alex: I just talked to him (Jon) I want to start back doing that (the RENEW process) with him again. Jon: OK Jon: A couple of weeks ago Alex wasn't feeling well and we hadn't met for a few weeks... we can start back up, um as of next week, next Tuesday... Alex: Well I talked to (stammering) Mrs. Stavros and just walking down here and I am doing way better in my block schedule and my third block and into it an um she knows that so I'm just saying that...</p>	<p>Transcripts, March 24, 2009</p>
<p>Alex was suspended for an incident with his culinary arts teacher, has been arrested and incarcerated again, and has missed several weeks of school.</p>	<p>Alex has an ankle bracelet and is on "house arrest."Jon said Alex "was surprised that I came... he thought I was done since he wasn't in school any more"</p>	<p>Field Notes, June 24, 2009</p>
<p>Alex conforms to the requirements of his probation</p>	<p>Jonathon: As you may have heard, Alex's charges were all dropped due to the circumstances and his awesome behavior report from his pretrial/probation officers. He came to 1 to 2 days/week of community service, showed up on time, and did excellent work helping build houses, to repairing buildings, to cleaning up public property. He is excited about planning for the fall and having the conversation about getting a state diploma through the High School.</p>	<p>Email, August 21, 2009</p>

Adult Reflections on Giving and Receiving Help

Student	Discourse	Source/date
Shelly	Mrs. Catano to Shelly: Well I have to go in a minute but we can change those classes. It's a lot of work Shelly (looks at her}. You remember that we had to pull you out of that one math class but then you gave up on the class last year because you didn't like the teacher- You can't do that this year.	Field Notes, August 12, 2008
	I sit next to Shelly and Mrs. Fairchild gives her a gift of hand cream. Mrs. Pennington could not be there but she sent along a gift of a pink water bottle.	Field Notes, November 4, 2008
	This girl has struck gold! I want to thank all of you for all you support behind this incredible young lady!	Email, May 21, 2009
	me:" Should be stop helping her to dream? Should we prepare her to die?" Mrs Fairchild:"I don't know why I'm so emotional, that's why I want you there...next time we meet. I can't do this."	Field Notes, May 21, 2009
	Mrs. Pennington: it would be something that she could recall one day and she'll say 'ok, I gained that' or it's a way of thinking or a positive attitude – I think that is more important so during our RENEW process I think what I've gained is I could be you know influencing somebody like a student in THAT way	Transcripts, December 8, 2009
Julie	Mrs. Fairchild:...there is only so much we can do to help you get that diploma... there's stuff that you can do too... how is getting you weekly progress report going to help you?	Transcripts, October 21, 2008
	Mrs. Fairchild to Julie: if you try to manipulate the system in a short term way with the painting class,,, then people who have that authority will stop working for <i>you</i> .	Transcripts, December 2, 2008
	Mrs. Stavros to Julie: that if your classes don't start until January and that maybe if we opt to drop this 4 th block and that you could give us more hours (at work) for now? Is that a possibility?	Transcripts, December 2, 2008

Appendix H (continued)

	The principal and {adult education counselor} are “angry” at Julie for manipulating them- they have put in a great deal of time and trusted Julie and they are feeling upset about her lack of response to them.	Field Notes, May 15, 2009
	Donna, one of the University staff members, expresses her frustration that they (Julie and mom) have not followed through on “anything they have said they would do for the past month.” Mrs. Fairchild says, the principal “is embarrassed and has stuck her neck out for Julie... I don’t know if she will do it again.”	Field Notes, July 7, 2009
Manny	Ms. West to Manny’s group home staff person: “The more communication the better, He’s really responding to all the support you’re giving him, much more invested and seeing it as a lifeline....	Transcripts, January 8, 2009
	Manny’s alternative English teacher: “I have not seen Manny complete, or try to complete, any work. It’s really hard to justify passing a student when I have witnessed absolutely no effort on their part.”	Email, January 21, 2009
	Ms. West: “my boyfriend goes to the barber that Manny likes, and, I didn’t ask them but my boyfriend did and the owner says he has work for Manny, Sunday nights, cleaning up”	Field notes, April 20, 2009
	Donna: “Ms. West had already given up on him...she was talking about credit recovery before you came in”	Field Notes, May 5, 2009
	Ms. West: I really understand this that like that my attachments to students is really different than their attachments to me and you know...meaning that ... its like I... you know I still think about the students that I first worked with but you know, you know they, you know their teachers, they’re teachers they have for one year and then they move on its not a big deal...	Transcripts, may 5, 2009
	Mrs Stavros says to me: “Oh I heard from Dan’s shop teacher that Dan said he’s going to dropout of school when he turns 18.... After all that we have invested in him... I wanted to let you know...”	Field Notes, September 2, 2009

Appendix H (continued)

Alex	Mrs. Catano: Alex is only 17 and he is in junior standing. I don't feel as though it is time to "give up" on him, although last year was truly unimaginable.	Email, September 5, 2008
	Mrs. V., Alex's English teacher: "Well, I think he'd certainly store it away. I think he'd certainly store it away, I mean as much as he can't store anything else, I think he'd store who's genuine and who's not... I think he's keyed into that about people, yes." Mrs. V.: "But you see what I mean, he chalked that up, puts that on his belt and that's where it's more money and you know more... I don't know what you want to call it, but whatever it is he puts away, that's more for him, I did it. I did it once, can it do it again. That's why I wouldn't waste my time, if you know he did something, just point blank say, "Look, this is where you were, this is where you should have been, it's wrong, here's what we're gonna do". And I know (assistant principal) likes the process (talking and questioning a student), but with Alex, he's gonna end up talking to himself to death and it isn't gonna work. It's a waste.	Transcripts, September 16, 2008
	Mr. Prince: "I am working harder than he is"	Field Notes, October 28, 2008
	Jonathon to Alex and his mom: So, what we're trying to do, is when we go in there and we have to deal with people who are in positions of authority, we have to try and make compromises with them instead.	Transcripts, November 25, 2008
	Mrs. Catano: I think we have expectations that {we} can discuss. I think so that you all know where we're coming from. I think Alex is a smart enough young man to understand a lot of bridges have been burned and to be in a positive, you know, a positive note, of course we want what's best for him and we would never want differently. However, we have a lot of work to be, we have a lot of stuff we need to do to make this a successful plan	Transcripts, November 25, 2008
	Assistant Principal: "why do we spend so much time on these kids?"	Field Notes, January 20, 2009
		Mrs. Stavros to Alex : We need a commitment because as it stands before, you said yeah you're gonna do it and you didn't show so...