Agency Outside the Margins:

Identity Development of Youth Attending Alternative High Schools

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Abstract

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The purpose of this dissertation is to look at the identity development of youth throughout their first year attending two alternative high schools. Alternative schools fall in an interesting space of being able to provide innovative and supportive opportunities that are different from mainstream schooling, yet also alternative schools are part of a mechanism for sorting youth on the margins of education (Vadeboncoeur, 2009). This study examines the interaction of youth and the alternative school contexts they enter, focusing on the process of identity development and the resources in school that help support that identity development (Nasir, 2012). The youth in this study had chosen to enroll in the alternative schools because of previous marginalization or "risk". The alternative schools took a "learning choice" perspective to youth (Raywid, 1999; te Riele, 2007), focusing on empowering youth and providing progressive alternatives to conventional schools. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I describe the problem space in

which this study exists, looking at definitions of school and youth, risk, and identity development. In the second chapter, I explore alternative education and alternative schools, discussing the modern history of alternative education and definitions of alternative schools. In the third chapter, I present the theories that I use in this study – sociocultural literature and, within that, identity development, engagement, and community membership and belonging. For chapters five, six, and seven, I present my findings. I focus in chapter five and six on my two case studies. Each case looks at the interaction of one youth and one alternative high school. Chapter seven is a cross-case analysis of the two cases in chapters five and six. Major findings from these chapters include: a) Identity development was supported through roles that matter, where youth played an integral role in the school, b) Youth developed identities as a process of redefining school, success and learning, community, and individual narratives, c) Identity development included the process of negotiating contradictions between identities and conceptions of school, d) Identities were developed through iteration across the school year. Within the iteration that occurred, moments of performance and moments of risk and vulnerability helped thicken the identities youth developed. In the final chapter, I discuss each of the major findings and then focus on limitations, potential implications of this study, and directions for future research.

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Dedication

To Dave

Chapter One: Youth and Schools on the Margins of Education

This study is about youth identity development in alternative high schools. Within this topic there is much that needs to be defined. While I will spend plenty of time defining identity development, as well as, the youth and the alternative schools in this study, one important feature that both the youth and the schools share is that they are on the margins of education. The schools, by definition, are outside of conventional education and the youth have left other schools, seeking something different. In addition, many of the youth in this study have been previously marginalized[1] or disenfranchised in school. I mention this because, at its heart, this study is about trying to understand the interactive process between youth, who are seeking an alternative, and the alternative schools they enter, schools that offer something outside of conventional schooling. It is about youth who are, in some form or another, wrestling with the world they left and entering into new educational spaces where the rules of the game have changed. However, before defining the study further, I'd like to explore the idea of margins a little bit more. I do so by way of Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

In the Rankin and Bass animation of Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer, there is an Island of Misfit Toys. It is a place for the toys that do not fit in: a squirt gun that shoots jelly, a train with square wheels, a cowboy who rides an ostrich. The story is one where Rudolf, a misfit himself, proves his worth, that his abnormality is actually a strength, and Santa brings the misfit

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[1] According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, (Merriam-Webster online), to marginalize is "to relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group" and Google (Google online) says it's to "treat (a person, group, or concept) as insignificant or peripheral." To that end, I consider marginalization as a social process that includes historical marginalization of different groups on the basis of race, sexual identification, gender identification, and designation of learning disability, and also includes individuals who feel insignificant and powerless in their own education and who may or may not belong to groups that have been historically marginalized.

toys with him on his sleigh to find them homes (Rankin, Bass, & Roemer, 1964). While this animated feature is great in many ways and I have no desire to offend the Rankin and Bass fans of the world, there are problems with the outsider narrative that this story presents. Stories of learning to accept individual differences are pervasive; however, they are rarely complex and tend to be more about embracing those who are broken rather than changing the system that defines success, labels misfits, and marginalizes individuals. Further, these stories neglect to explore the rules of the game that define what qualifies a "misfit". Scholars have shown the ways in which definitions of success are created and perpetuated in school (Baines, 2014; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006; Tierney, 2014; Willis, 1981). These studies show how the definitions of success are embedded in the contexts and structures of the schools in which they exist. Put another way, definitions of success do not exist in a vacuum. So, when considering students who are unhappy or alienated in school (Dean, 1961; Galbo, 1980), students who are academically unsuccessful, students defined as "at-risk" (be it due to failing grades, drug use, etc.) (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002), and students who are marginalized and disenfranchised (te Riele, 2006), it is important to consider the school contexts in which this occurs.

It is valuable to look at the interaction of youth and the schools they attend in order to properly understand youths' process of learning and identity development. This is even more the case when youth seek educational alternatives. Just as in conventional schools, in alternative schools, youth identity development is a process of the individual interacting with the school context. Yet, studying alternative schools can uncover not only students' previous experiences of feeling marginalized and at-risk, but also the process of re-engaging with school and renegotiating their identities.

Current neoliberal views have become intertwined with much of education, pushing for notions of competition (McGregor & Mills; 2012), individual accountability (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002), narrowly defining success, and blaming youth who do not fit in to conventional molds of what it means to be a student (McGregor, Mills, te Riele, & Hayes, 2015). These neoliberal views are in tension with goals of social justice, in which all youth deserve an equitable education. Alternative schools fall in an interesting space of being able to provide innovative and supportive opportunities that are different from mainstream schooling; yet, also alternative schools are part of a mechanism for sorting youth on the margins (Vadeboncoeur, 2009). In this study, I focus primarily on the former quality of alternative schools, as schools that have promise, while recognizing the later, that alternative schools are part of the neoliberal sorting mechanism that exists in public education. It is important to recognize the institutional sorting that occurs (Fine, 1991), because of how it impacts not just alternative schools, but the youth who, actively or passively, have themselves been sorted.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to look at the identity development of youth throughout their first year of attending alternative schools, schools I define briefly later in this chapter and in great depth in the next chapter. I see the benefits of this study as threefold:

1. **Youth.** With the goal of educational equity, it is particularly important to study and collaborate with youth who are leaving mainstream education. If educators are to tackle issues of youth disengagement and marginalization, it is important to understand the experiences and perspectives of youth leaving mainstream education.
2. **Alternative Schools.** It is also important to study environments, such as alternative schools, that seek to re-engage youth, by providing different opportunities, blending

youths' in-school and out-of-school lives, and place relationship-building and identity-development as a center pieces of school. Doing so can provide unique insights into teaching practice, school community, educational resources, and how educational environments influence youth. Additionally, studying the process of identity development for youth attending alternative schools can help explore the ways alternative schools are successful at helping youth develop positive academic identities. It can also help find ways for alternative schools to better meet the needs of the students they serve.

3. **Educational Process.** Finally, it is important to examine the interaction between youth, who are leaving mainstream education, and the alternative schools they enter into. As youth start a new school, they learn the values and practices of the school as they renegotiate their identities. There is an additional layer of complexity when the new school is an alternative and, being an alternative, has different norms and structures from conventional schools. The combination of youth and context in this study provides a unique perspective on education and will, hopefully, help educators better understand the processes of youth marginalization, engagement, and identity development.

In a way, this study is analogous to the process of revision in writing. Sometimes it is enough to revise paragraphs or sentences, but sometimes it is the structure of the paper itself that needs to be examined. This study, in part, explores what it means for youth when the structure of school is changed.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to look at the process of identity development for youth as they enter alternative schools, exploring the following research questions:

- How do youth identities develop as they enter into alternative schools?

- How do these identities contrast to the identities the youth had in their previous schools?
- In the alternative schools, what resources are available for youth identity development and how are these resources taken up used??
- How do youths' out-of-school lives interact with their in-school identities?

In this study, identity is considered to be constantly developing as youth interact within the various and diverse contexts of their lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Dreier, 2002). Youth identities are formed not only by their own actions, but also by interactions with other people within the structures of the schools they attend, as well as, the labels (such as "at-risk") that they encounter (McDermott et al., 2006; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Wortham, 2006). I also consider engagement as a form of identity work in practice (Nasir & Hand, 2008), helping to identify the resources available for identity development.

Identity Development

I view identity development as a process that is dynamic and social in nature. I also consider the ways in which educational structures produce youth identities, defining and framing success and failure for students, and promoting certain practices and identities and marginalizing others (Esmonde, Takeuchi, & Radakovic, 2011; Fine, 1991; Pope, 2001; McDermott et al., 2006; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Willis, 1986; Wortham, 2006). Other research has been done on youth who have been marginalized in school. Two studies that were particularly influential to this dissertation were Phillips (Phillips, 2011; Young, Phillips, & Nasir, 2010), who looked at the experiences and identities of incarcerated youth, and Baines (2014), who explored the ways learning disability labels influenced youth identity development. These studies have looked at the ways that youth identities develop in the context of learning environments, definitions of success, social positioning, and significant relationships. I hope to complement

this work by exploring the ways that school structures and resources influence definitions of success and the process of identity development for youth as they transition into new schools contexts.

For this study, I do not consider students' previous success or failure in school to be a process that is owned solely by them as individuals (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002), but one in which the affordances and constraints of in and out-of-school contexts play a critical role. I build on previous literature on how identities are promoted and marginalized in mainstream school by looking at school communities that are structurally, philosophically, and relationally different than mainstream schooling (Cushman, 1990, 2006; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; De La Ossa, 2005; Gewertz, 2007; Reywid, 1990, 1994, 1999; te Riele 2007). By looking at the identities youth have in alternative schools and how those identities contrast to the identities the students see themselves as having had in their previous schools, I hope to further explore the processes of how identities are defined in school.

Additionally, I consider identity development as a process that is not simply academic or housed in a school building (Bell, Bricker, Lee, Reeve, & Zimmerman, 2006; Bell, Bricker, Reeve, Zimmerman, & Tzou, 2013). Instead, identity development is interwoven with cultural practices and perspectives (Banks et al., 2007), is situated in the multiple contexts and communities in which youth participate (Dreier, 2002, 2009), and includes youths' social and emotional lives (both in and outside of school), as well as, their educational histories, and the educational histories of the institutions of which they are a part (Nespor, 1997). This is particularly important when considering students attending alternative schools, who often have complicated histories with schooling and whose identities may lean heavily on out-of-school contexts and communities. The identities, learning, and interests of youth are not contained to

one setting, but move across contexts, creating an ecology that connects the different resources, places, and people in youths' lives (Barron, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). So, to understand the varying ways in which youth develop their learning identities in alternative schools, it is important to look at not just in-school identity development, but also at the ways in-school identities interact with the rest of youths' lives.

Identity Resources

One way that I hope to explore this interactive process of identity development is to look at the resources for identity development that are available for youth in alternative schools. Previous research has studied the ways that the practices and opportunities available in a classroom or a school influences student engagement, the types of identities that youth are allowed to adopt and, ultimately, the types of people that they become (Boaler & Greeno, 2000; Cobb, Gresalfi, & Hodge, 2009; Cornelius & Herrenkohl, 2004; Nasir, 2002, 2012; Nasir & Hand, 2008; Wortham, 2006). As stated before, engagement and identity development are not just owned by individuals but determined across contexts and communities, through interaction (Hickey & Grenade, 2004; Nasir & Hand, 2008; Nolen, Horn, Ward, & Childers, 2011; Nolen, Ward, & Horn, 2011; Nolen, Ward, Horn, Childers, Campbell, & Mahna, 2009).

Previous literature has compared the resources available to students in classrooms, school sports, and outside of school activities (Nasir 2012; Nasir & Hand, 2008) and has also looked at the processes by which identities are negotiated and constructed in school (Wortham, 2006). Nasir (2004, 2012) and Nasir and Hand (2008) have looked particularly at the types of resources that help youth as they develop their identities, including the importance of allowing youth to put something of themselves into practice and to access material, relational, and ideational resources.

I hope to extend this literature by looking at how youth define their identities in alternative schools, and also by looking at the resources they use as part of the identity development process.

Reframing Marginalized Youth

In this study I look at youth identity development, but also at the role of contexts, agency, and social labels. In the final section of this chapter, I want to recognize the role I, too, play in defining and positioning youth and schools in this study.

I have chosen a focus and set of research questions that position youth as agentic participants in their own education. I want to do more than look at how marginalized youth are re-engaged in school. Framing this study in terms of "the re-engagement of marginalized youth" over simplifies it in two significant ways: it simplifies the youth and it simplifies the schools. It simplifies the youth by removing their agency in their own educational process, and it simplifies the schools by not fully recognizing the interactive and ongoing process that schools play in engaging and re-engaging youth. In the next section, I will briefly explore some of the complexity that I seek in studying youth and alternative schools.

Simplifying youth. When educators talk about re-engaging youth in their learning or preventing them from dropping out, youth are often positioned as unagentic objects. It, of course, is wonderful to have goals of re-engaging youth or preventing dropouts, but it is important to consider the youth as active agents in their education. To not do so objectifies youth, positioning them as things to be re-engaged and not active participants in their education, contributing to the same powerlessness and alienation that many youth experience (Brown, Higgins, & Paulsen, 2003). The choices which youth make – turning in homework, skipping class, changing schools – are all agentic acts, signifying their willingness to participate or not participate in the routines and practices of the schools they attend. Often youth resist as a form of agency and identity

development (hooks, 1990; McLeod, 1987; Nasir, 2004; Willis, 1977). Youth act and react to the classroom and school-wide systems. They respond as a way to make meaning and develop their identities, figuring out how their school world interweaves with all the other pieces of their lives.

Simplifying schools. Framing a problem of how to re-engage marginalized youth also does not properly recognize the significant role that schools play in marginalizing students. Youth are not successful or unsuccessful in a void. There needs to be a context in which youth feel alienated or anxious, a space that they are failing or refusing to attend. The context is often ignored, focused on in pieces, but not the whole, or considered peripherally when looking at academic success, transferring schools, or dropping out (Bridgeland.,, DiIulio.,, & Morison, 2006). Other times, school contexts are viewed as impacting youth, but less so as an interaction and a process (Rumberger, 2011). When context is addressed, it is often done in a piecemeal way, looking for factors that influence alienation or disengagement, but rarely as an interlocking system – structural factors of schooling at interplay with youths' lives, an interplay that iteratively contributes to students' success and lack of success (Eckert, 1989; Willis, 1986).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the major features of this study. Specifically, I briefly described some of the theoretical space that I will use in this study and that I hope to contribute to. I will expand on these theories in chapter three. Finally, I have explored some of the problems of marginalization that I hope to address, including agency for youth and the interactive role that schools play in defining success and in the process of youth identity development. In the next chapter, I further define alternative schools and the type of alternative schools that were a part of this study.

Chapter Two: Alternative Schools and Alternative Education

In this chapter, I will discuss the scope of alternative education and define the flavor of alternative education that I focus on in this study. In doing so, I hope to uncover some cultural views of alternative schools and youth who attend them. I address these views in order to set up a space in which I can fairly represent the youth and the schools in this study. I do not wish to further marginalize the youth or schools by perpetuating definitions of risk or inferiority. Instead, in this chapter I seek to explore the marginalization that occurs by way of being alternative, so that in future chapters I can describe the youth and the schools on their own terms.

I begin by looking, very briefly, at the history of modern alternative schools, including foundational influences to alternative education. I also describe different periods of alternative education over the past fifty years and how they fit into the general climate of education over time, including the ways that many alternative schools are in tension with current approaches to school evaluation. I then consider different types of alternative schools, focusing specifically on how different alternative schools view youth. Following that, I explore the ways labels and stereotypes impact alternative schools and the youth attending them. Within that exploration, I also describe the ways that my research considers and pushes against negative labels of schools and youth simply because they are outside the mainstream of education. I finish by describing the ways that, by reframing youth on the margins, this study can contribute to literature on dropout prevention.

A Brief History of Alternative Schools

The history of alternative schools and alternative education is tied directly to conventional education and normative definitions of school. Miller (1992) contributed much of alternative education philosophy to Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and

Friedrich Froebel. These three philosopher/educators advocated for brands of schooling that focused on child-focused education, in contrast to education that focused on societal demands. Pestalozzi took Rousseau's philosophies and put them into practice in schools. Froebel, who taught at one of Pestalozzi's schools, continued this work, focusing on the individuality of students' needs and abilities (Miller, 1989, 1992). The ideas of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, as well as educators including Ivan Illich, A.S. Neill, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner, were the foundation for the alternative school movement of the late sixties and early seventies. By the mid 1970s, these schools, often called "free", "holistic", or "humanistic" schools, began opening at a remarkable rate in both the private and public sector (Kozol, 1982).

The world of alternative education slowly began to shift in the early 1980s. In 1983 A Nation at Risk was released and doubled down on neoliberal goals of education, specifically social efficiency and economic growth (Miller, 1992; Mills, Renshaw, & Zipin, 2013), while also ignoring the large number of dropouts in U.S. education (Fine, 1991). The landscape of education has changed dramatically since 1983, with an increasing focus on public education to help meet the needs of human capital (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Vadeboncoeur, 2009). The neoliberal discourse towards education has reinforced education as competition instead of education as growth and learning. In the past few decades there has been a duel focus on educational choice and educational standards. Though on the surface, a focus on educational choice aligns with the ideas of alternative education, much of the choice movement is based on neoliberal ideas of a market economy supporting competition, individual accountability, improvement, and success (McGregor & Mills, 2012; McGregor et al., 2015; Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002). Increased focus on standards and evaluation has further restricted definitions of success in school, while also constraining alternative schools time and

ability to do alternative practices, such as experiential trips and interdisciplinary coursework, and still help students be successful on state and district assessments. Since the late 80s, another version of "alternative" school has become prevalent. These schools tend to be more remedial, focusing on improving areas where youth are struggling (Settles & Orwick, 2003). The areas of improvement typically focus on academics, but may also include behavioral improvement (Raywid, 1990, 1994). Continuation schools are one prevalent form of this version of alternative schools, with a defining feature of sending youth back to their conventional home school when they are "back on track" (Kelly, 1993; Rumberger, 2011). While alternative schools that fall into this category may share some similarities to progressive alternative schools that started in the 60s and 70s (with some opening since then, but with far less frequency), there is a fundamental difference in how the schools approach students and their visions of education and success in education (Reywid, 1999; te Riele, 2007).

Judging Success Today

A final shift in the landscape of alternative education has been how many school districts have responded to alternative schools in the era of testing and standards. Many alternative schools have been restructured, shut down, and consolidated. Between 2000 and 2012, public alternative schools have represented 13-35% annually of the public schools that have been closed (United States Department of Education, 2016b), though they only represent approximately 6% of public schools (Rumberger, 2011). The number of closures is more for high schools where, between 2000 and 2012, public alternative high schools have represented between 23-46% annually of high schools that have been closed, with only two years below 32% (United States Department of Education, 2016b). The reasons for these closures include, among other reasons, budgets, test performances, retention, and graduation rates. While many of these changes may

very well be justified, they often are made with partial data, without considering all the factors, and defining success in specific terms. While graduation rates can be an important feature in judging school success, there is also variation in the ways in which it is defined. Specifically, it is important to consider whether rates are based on on-time graduation or if they also factor youth who graduate in their fifth, sixth, or seventh year. Often graduation rates do not include these youth, lowering alternative schools' percentages (Rumberger, 2011). Doing so imposes a norm on what a high school timeline should be. Yet, some alternative schools may not focus on this timeline, encouraging youth to pursue paths and timeframes that fit their needs and interests[2]. Defining graduation rates as four-year completion ignores that alternative schools may be made up of a higher population of students on non-traditional graduation timelines, including youth who enter these alternative schools already a year or two behind, thereby making four year graduation an impossible goal.

Though it is unfair to narrowly define alternative schools and youth attending them, there is a portion of alternative schools that focus on youth who have been less successful in school. Alternative schools often receive students at the moment in which they are already credit deficient. An alternative school can help youth be wildly successful, yet because of their credits when they began at the school, the students may still not be able to graduate on time. It is often similar with standardized testing, where poor standardized tests reflect on the alternative schools where youth have often only spent a few months and not on the schools that pushed those students out. Michelle Fine (1991) presented the ways that conventional high schools define

[2] The notion of choosing to stay an additional year in high school is so foreign to society that it is typically assumed that the reason youth would not graduate in four years is universally because of credit deficiency. Yet, there are youth who are on-track to graduate and pause in order to stay an additional year at their school (Tierney, 2014).

success and guide youth who do not fit that definition into pathways, leading to dropping out. The process in which mainstream schools push out problematic students treats these youth as a bad commodity that, if kept, will negatively impact the school's success. Alternative schools often welcome these youth, yet because of the neoliberal sorting mechanism of education, alternative schools may also become a dumping ground for unwanted youth (Vadeboncoeur, 2009).

A final way in which the current educational system has confined alternative schools is that, by prioritizing quantitative measures, such as test scores and four-year graduation rates, other measures of success are often ignored. The safety youth feel, the feelings of connection they have with the school, and their successful identification with school are all pieces that can be more difficult to measure. Academics may also become more interwoven with youths' personal and social lives (Tierney, 2014). In alternative schools, academic success may look different and less siloed than what is measured on a test. This is not to advocate for ignoring standardized test scores, just that the model of school may impact what the test scores represent. Instead of representing learning, test scores may simply represent an incongruent form of assessment.

I have presented a brief history of modern alternative education in order to explain not only the breadth of alternative schools, but also some of the societal factors that have influenced their creation. I also wanted to recognize the larger context in which alternative schools exist, including the constraints that many alternative schools experience, in the current education climate. My research questions do not directly focus on the changes and challenges of the alternative schools. Still, when looking at the interaction of youth and school, identifying

resources alternative schools provide, it is important to acknowledge the backdrop in which alternative schools exist.

Alternative School Numbers

Approximately 3% of high school students in the United States attended alternative schools in 2010, with that number increasing to over 5% in Arkansas, California, Idaho, Minnesota, Mississippi, Utah, and Washington state. In 2007-2008, alternative schools represented 6% of the public schools, k-12, in the United States[3] (Rumberger, 2011). While the percentage of alternative schools is in the single digits, they still represent a significant number of youth. Considering that, in 2015, an estimated 14.9 million youth were enrolled in grades 9-12 (United States Department of Education, 2016a), that means that, at 3%, that 447,000 youth attend alternative high schools. Additionally, in California in 2005-2006, the number of alternative high schools outnumbered the number of comprehensive high schools, 1,154 to 1,037 (Rumberger, 2011).

Literature Gap

As I have said before and will say again, there is great variability in the types of alternative high school programs. Yet, with the number of youth attending alternative schools, the amount of research being done on these programs is shockingly slim. The literature that exists typically either explores the programs (Reywid, 1990, 1994, 1999; te Riele 2007), student opinions of the programs (Cushman, 1990, 2006; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; De La Ossa, 2005; Gewertz, 2007), or, viewing alternative education as an intervention, it looks at the dropout phenomenon and process (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fine, 1991; Rumberger,

[3] Approximately 5,929 of 98,817 schools.

2011). Specifically, there is currently a gap in academic literature on the identities and experiences of youth who have left mainstream schools to attend alternative schools.

Definitions of Alternative

One particular value of this study is how it explores youth identities in alternative schools, schools that, while still conventional in certain ways, introduce certain non-conventional structures and roles. This provides a unique opportunity to explore the interaction of context and individuals in the process of youth defining, enacting, and shifting their identities. However, while alternative schools are often structurally different from mainstream schools, the label "alternative" is broad and needs defining. When saying "alternative school", one could mean everything from a juvenile detention center, to an online school, to a wilderness focused leadership school. As I explained earlier, the educational landscape over the past fifty years has also influenced the types of definitions of alternative schools. Part of the challenge of defining alternative schools is the wide variety of schools that can be called alternative, as any school that is outside the normative form of conventional schools is, by definition, an alternative.

Raywid (1999) and te Riele (2007) delineated the categories of alternative schools by their approach to youth, specifically how much onus (for success, engagement, involvement, etc.) falls on the youth and how much falls upon the schools. Put simply, do the schools have an approach that youth need to be changed in order to be successful or that the school environments need to be changed? Schools that focus on changing youth are those, like many 'Last-Chance' and 'Remedial Focus' programs (Raywid, 1990, 1994), that view a student's lack of success or disaffiliation as an issue with the student (Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002). These schools take what te Riele calls a 'Youth At-Risk' perspective. This is in contrast to schools that focus on changing the school, that take a 'Learning Choice' perspective. Schools that focus on changing

the school are often innovative schools (Raywid, 1990, 1994) that view: a) that some students need different learning environments, and/or b) that mainstream education is flawed and that unsuccessful students are unsuccessful largely because of the structures of mainstream schools (Raywid, 1990, 1994).

I use the definitions of alternative schools from Raywid (1999) and te Riele (2007) in order to get away from defining alternative programs in terms of just structural features. While structural features are important, indeed they are a primary focus of this study as I look at identity resources, the definition of "Learning Choice" schools better capture the type of alternative schools that I focus on in this study. As is often the case, most schools do not reside in a single category. For example, a school may philosophically take a "Learning Choice" perspective, but elements of the school structure or course offerings may also include a "Youth At-Risk" perspective. Still, recognizing this, I sought alternative schools that, on the whole, took a "Learning Choice" perspective.

Labeling Schools

Describing any context of study can be tricky. For example, when someone says they study math classrooms or museum learning, one might assume certain things and ascribe certain images. Labeling a study narrows the images that people have. People use what they know to define and categorize those things they don't. Yet, this process can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. Often this is the case for alternative schools. When people hear the word "school", they ascribe definitions, based on their experiences of what school is. However, without personal experience, the word "alternative" can be tricky. As opposed to other things carrying the "alternative" label, such as "alternative music" or "alternative medicine", "alternative schools" are often not just labeled as outside the norm, but also a place for youth

who have been less successful in school. While this can be true, it greatly falls short of properly describing the schools and the youth who attend them. Alternative schools can become defined as schools for "drug users", "potential dropouts", "dumb kids", "burnouts" (Eckert, 1989), and "outcasts".

The label "alternative" carries enough baggage than many schools have moved away from the label, focusing instead on Option School, Choice School, and Innovative School, to name a few. Yet, despite rebranding, many of these schools still face the challenge that the labels ascribed to the school still lack the complexity that is needed to understand what is truly alternative, option, choice, or innovative about the school.

Alternative

For this study, I have chosen to continue to define schools as alternative (instead of option, choice, etc.) because of the importance that I see in them being an alternative to conventional schooling. Labeling schools as Option, Choice, or Innovative does interesting things in how the school is positioned compared to conventional schools and how education itself is defined. Yet, of these options, alternative focuses squarely on the normative nature of most schools. In this study, I look at youth experiences in school, be it success, failure, disengagement, or marginalization, as an interaction between the youth and their school context. When youth are disengaged, disenfranchised, unsuccessful, or marginalized, and then enter into an alternative school, the fact that the school is an alternative to their previous school is an essential feature. Alternative schools are always an alternative to mainstream schooling, and that is part of their power to help youth redefine their identities in school (Tierney, 2014). However, public alternative schools also always exist in the context of public schooling.

One key element of public high schools, and public alternative high schools as a subcategory, is graduation credits. For public alternative high schools and the youth attending them, credits are always in the background, impacting the courses and opportunities that are offered and individual students' trajectories. I mention this to recognize that while alternative schools may offer programs that are vastly different from conventional schools, there are still shared currencies, credits being one of the most significant ones. While by no means the predominant reason, some youth choose to attend alternative schools or are guided to alternative schools as a way to earn credits they are missing. However, as I have already stated, this is not a universal factor. Students' reasons for attending alternative schools are many, different, varied, and individualized; however, one commonality is that the students have chosen to leave or have been pushed out of mainstream schools.

Labeling Kids

Since the 1980s, alternative schools have been primarily developed as an intervention or option for youth who have been unsuccessful and/or unhappy in conventional school (Rumberger, 2011). However, it is important not to ascribe negative narratives to these youth, but instead to reflect on the factors that make students unsuccessful and unhappy in school. Often alternative schools cater to youth who may exhibit characteristics (such as truancy, failing grades, disengagement, anxiety, and drug and alcohol use) that can designate them as at-risk of dropping out of school. Yet, this is not always the case and, when it is, it is never a simple story. In tackling major challenges, such as disengagement, marginalization, disaffiliation in school, or reducing the high numbers of high school dropouts, it can be tempting to lean on certain narratives of youth. However, doing so can neglect the complexity of these issues and often ascribes unfair narratives onto students, labeling them as at-risk, unmotivated, or just

needing a different type of learning environment. Fine (1991) reflected on the process in which dropouts were positioned.

> Who is served by this seamless rhetoric of dropouts as losers? What is obscured by a portrayal of dropouts as *deficient* in a *fair* system? If youths who drop out are portrayed as unreasonable or academically inferior, then the structures, ideologies, and practices that exile them systematically are rendered invisible, and the critique they voice is institutionally silenced (p. 5).

Again, I want to repeat that not all or even close to all youth attending alternative schools are dropouts or even potential dropouts. However, Fine's description of dropouts applies to all youth who leave the walls of conventional schools. Labeling alternative schools and the youth attending them as academically inferior, "druggie" schools, or schools for kids who don't fit in, obscures the structures, ideologies, and practices of both the schools that the youth have left behind and the alternative schools they have joined. This perspective removes responsibility from educational institutions for students being unsuccessful or marginalized.

Even defining youth attending alternative schools as needing a different learning environment positions the students as outsiders and "other" (Wilson, 1982), signifying them as not being able to be successful in the normal structure of school. Vadeboncoeur (2009) described how alternative schools sat in the middle of this tension between neoliberalism and social justice in education. On one hand, alternative schools are a sorting mechanism, a way for the educational system to profess equity while allowing conventional schools a way to discard the students they do not want. On the other hand, alternative schools provide a space in which alternative definitions of success can exist and youth can, at least in part, escape the neoliberal values of sorting, competition, and narrowly defining the types of identities afforded to youth in school (McGregor & Mills; 2012; Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002). The existence and processes of alternative schools raises issues of equity. Alternative schools provide a sorting mechanism

for unwanted youth. Yet, for the youth who enter into the alternative schools, they may be provided opportunities for more equitable participation than they had before, experiencing different definitions of success and school membership (Tierney, 2014).

In this study I have chosen to focus on the interaction of youth and educational contexts as the unit of analysis. I have done so to better understand how school structures, practices, and resources contribute to youth identity development, but also to recognize the ways in which schools contribute to educational success and marginalization. In part, I seek to redefine how alternative schools and youth attending them are viewed. I do not wish to ignore the fact that many youth attending alternative schools are there because of previous struggles, but I hope to a) recognize that many youth entering alternative schools have been successful by conventional means (grades, credits), but seek alternatives because of risk or marginalization; b) that youth cannot be defined primarily by definitions of risk or lack of success (grades, credit, drugs, or problems in the legal system). Further, the definition of risk needs to be changed from something ascribed to specific youth to being recognized as a facet of the human condition (Lee, 2009); and, c) that schools need to be examined as part of the interaction that contributes to students' success, marginalization, and identity development.

Dropouts

In the final section of this chapter I describe the ways that this study may contribute to literature on dropout prevention, not because I believe that alternative schools should be defined primarily as dropout prevention, nor that the youth in my study are all potential dropouts, but because of the perspective this study provides on youth leaving conventional high schools. This is not to say that this study will provide quick solutions to the dropout phenomenon. There is a difference between youth who attend alternative schools and youth who drop out of high

school. This is even more the case with the flavor of alternative school that I have focused on, where youth choose to attend and often did not have the credit deficiency that often defines youth labeled as potential dropouts. Yet, there may be a significant amount that can be learned from youth who are leaving conventional schools. The youth in this study left their previous schools because of a mixture of feeling, among other things, alienated, marginalized, unsuccessful, bored, uncared for, and/or disengaged. Additionally, the alternative schools in this study focus on empowering youth and helping youth re-engage in their education.

Current high school dropout rates are at approximately 29-32% nationally (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Public alternative schools are one of the current interventions aimed at dropout prevention as part of the sorting mechanism in education. In order to stem the tide of high school dropouts in public education, it is important to understand how youth engage in schools that lie outside of mainstream schooling. Rumberger (2011) described dropping out in three ways: a label (being a dropout), an event (the moment of dropping out), and a process (the process of disengaging and eventually leaving school). By considering dropping out to be a process, students, over time, develop identities where they can see themselves as dropouts. Similarly, there is a process as youth who have been marginalized and disenfranchised enter into alternative schools and find success, renegotiating their identities in school.

This process of renegotiating one's identity is often in conflict with adolescents' past educational experiences and, possibly, their out-of-school lives. The complexity of dropout prevention requires that educators better understand the processes that youth experience in school, particularly as youth negotiate contradictions in their lives and come to develop visions of themselves.

Again, as I acknowledged before, I do not wish to define this study as a study in potential dropouts. It is not what it is and doing so is unfair to the youth and schools in the study. However, much can still be learned in this study that may be useful to dropout prevention. Specifically, this study may add to dropout prevention literature by considering the process youth take as they re-engage in school, leaving one school and entering another.

On one level, dropout prevention at the high school level is about helping students earn the credits and other requirements they need in order to graduate. However, it is also about helping youth re-engage in their education so they will go through the steps and earning the credits needed to graduate. Yet, in order to help the massive numbers of youth at-risk of dropping out to re-engage in school, then it is important that to understand not only dropout and re-engagement factors (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Crosnoe, 2011; McKenna, Cacciattolo, Vicars, & Steinberg, 2013), but how youth experience school, transition to alternative schools, and the identity work that goes along with this.

Disconnecting or disengaging from school can take numerous forms, some overt and some covert, including truancy, failing grades, drug use in school, anxiety and social alienation, dislike or distrust of teachers and the school community, and criminal activity, to name just a few. However, disconnection from school is a process, one that is unique to each student. Similar to viewing dropping out as a process, thinking of disconnecting and reconnecting helps educators look at the trajectory that youth take as they disengage from school and can allow educators to see ways to intervene. It also can help provide insight not just in the factors, such as failed classes and truancy, that often precede dropping out, but also in how failed classes and truancy are part of an overarching educational process, one that also includes aspects less documented on a transcript, such as anxiety and feelings of marginalization. Examining the

process that youth experience as they wrestle with the multiple tensions involved in developing their identities in alternative schools can help us better understand the interaction, over time, of different factors in the youths' lives and the schools they attend.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explored the history and types of alternative schools, as well as the alternative schools and the youth attending them, that can be negatively labeled, positioned, and dismissed because of definitions of success, stereotypes of youth attending alterative schools, and a lack of understanding of schools (and youth) that lay outside of normative schooling. I also discussed the ways in which this study connects to dropout literature, not because this is a dropout study, but because of the way this study considers the interactive process of identity development and reframes youth on the margins. Moving forward, I will now look at theories that help explore youth identity development and school resources and communities that youth experience as they transition into alternative schools.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Literature on Identity Development

In this chapter, I will explore the theories that I used in my study and the ways those theories help understand the identity development of youth in alternative schools. Throughout the chapter, I discuss sociocultural theories of learning, engagement, and identity development that focus not solely on individuals or contexts, but on the interaction of the two. The ideas behind these theories are that individuals choose their actions, but those decisions are influenced by and interconnected with others' actions and the contexts in which individuals participate. Individual actions cannot be separated from the space in which they exist. This perspective on identity development is particularly useful when considering marginalized and disenfranchised youth, who are actively seeking educational alternatives because their previous learning environments were not working for them. One specific aspect of sociocultural literature that I highlight in this chapter is how definitions of success and failure are informed by society, but defined in local contexts. I also look at literature on identity, engagement, and membership.

Sociocultural Literature

In this study, I use sociocultural literature to help examine the complexities of identity development in and across settings, by looking at the ways that different contexts help construct certain roles and identities (Eckert, 1989; Gee, 2000; McDermott et al., 2006; Nasir and Hand, 2008; Willis, 1981; Wortham, 2005). I focus primarily on the ways that the alternative schools influence the identity development of youth entering the schools, while also considering youths' previous schools and their out-of-schools lives. Sociocultural literature has explored how identities, forms of participation, and, ultimately, academic trajectories are negotiated, produced, and reproduced through classroom discourse, school archetypes, and cultures and communities (Eckert, 1989; Wortham, 2005; Willis, 1981) across settings or worlds of social practice

(Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Dreier, 2002). This is pertinent to my study because of how the youth population in my study is seeking an educational alternative, unsatisfied with the academic identities they were developing in their previous schools.

Similarly, taking a sociocultural perspective, learning is reconceptualized from something housed in an individual's head to changes in participation and engagement (Boaler & Greeno, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir, 2012; Wortham, 2006). In this perspective, the process of learning, while a different conceptual category, cannot be separated from the process of emotion, belonging, or identity development (Nasir, Roseberry, Warren, & Lee, 2006). In this study, I consider identities as one of the ways people mediate participation and demonstrate learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir, 2012) and look at identity as not just identification, but changes in practice.

Shifting the focus of learning from an individual cognitive process to one that is dynamic and social in nature is particularly useful when thinking about youth who are less successful or disenfranchised in conventional schooling. In order to understand the processes of students who disaffiliate and disengage in school, it is important to look beyond individual cognition and motivation. Focusing on the interaction of youth and the contexts in which they are successful or unsuccessful helps examine the ways that the structures and practices of learning environments influence engagement, membership, and identity development. Taking a situated view (Greeno, 2006) of engagement and identity development, I seek to study identity by considering more than just the individual. It is important to understand the context and communities in which an individual participates.

Viewing identity development as an interaction between individuals and their contexts helps recognize the ways in which educational structures define and frame success and failure for

youth (McDermott et al., 2006; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). These definitions of success and failure are particularly pertinent for my study as I consider the ways in which youth interact with these definitions and alternative schools seek to redefine what success can mean in school. Eckert (1989), Wortham (2005), and Willis (1981) all looked at the ways in which conventional school culture recreates certain roles and identities. These studies explored the ways in which youth, over time, took on specific identities and the ways in which these identities created paths, or trajectories, for them in school. In each of the studies, specific trajectories became available for youth, while others were closed off. These trajectories were provided as sociohistorical models (i.e. "smart kid", "dumb kid", etc.), but recreated through individual interactions in the classroom. As students participated in school, they were positioned (Harré, 1984; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009) into different roles and, eventually, their identities thickened.

For many learners in conventional schools, being a good student involves the process of "doing school" (Esmonde et al., 2011; Pope, 2001). "Doing school" includes specific values, practices, and promoted ways to engage. Embedded in "doing school" is an ethic of competition and a focus on satisfying the teacher and gaming the system in order to receive the best grade. Doing school often occurs in conjunction with neoliberal views of education, in which school is a competition and grades are the ultimate currency (McGregor & Mills; 2012, Vadeboncoeur & Portes, 2002). Many youth attending alternative schools have either not done well in this framework and/or rejected it outright (hooks, 1990; McLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977). In this study, I take the stance that when educational systems, officially and unofficially, define success and failure, marginalization and inequity of participation become part of the process of school. In order to understand the identity development of youth leaving conventional schools, societal

structures, such as "doing school" may need to be critiqued and evaluated and social identity placed in higher regard (Eckert, Goldman, & Wenger, 1997) before youth are able to re-identify with education and school (Tierney, 2014).

My study looks, in particular, at the process of identity development and at the resources available to youth to construct their identities (Nasir, 2004; 2012) as they enter into alternative high schools. I explore the process of identity development as youth enter into alternative schools, schools that provide different identity resources including relationships, community, roles, ideas about school, and ideas about youth (Nasir, 2012).

Identity Development

Having looked at the ways in which sociocultural literature helps explore marginalized youth and alternative schools, I will now narrow my focus to look at identity development. I will explore the ways in which identities help youth navigate the world and how identity is thickened over time through participation. I review theories on figured worlds to help present a backdrop to explore the multiple dimensions of identity development, including positioning, authoring, and thickening of identities. I also look briefly at the ways in which identities develop across multiple contexts in peoples' lives. I finish the section on identity development by focusing on resources for identity development – aspects of learning environments that help individuals develop their identities within that space.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), on a general level, defined identity as how a person sees and thinks about themself and the ways that they are seen by others. However, by no means does their definition stop there. They described identity, at least in its expression to others, as a dialectic. In this sense, identity development is a process involving individuals' participation in the world. Both how people define themselves and how they are defined matter,

but, specifically, they matter in practice, not as something abstracted or removed from the world. With this definition, youth do not develop identities in school in general, but develop identities in specific schools and within specific school structures.

Holland et al. claimed that identity helps individuals navigate the world, providing a means through which people place value on the activities they participate in. Therefore, identities are a foundation from which people participate, create new activities and worlds, and make sense of their interaction with the world. Holland et al. also described identities as constantly developing. Put simply, identities are always in process. Additionally, identities are always negotiated as individuals are constantly being positioned and re-positioned as people are put into or put themselves into certain roles, categories, or ways of acting in order to fulfill evolving storylines (Harré, 1984; Harré et al., 2009). These ideas are useful for my study in that I am studying identity development during a moment of change, as youth enter into new schools, schools that contain different roles, categories, and storylines.

The roles and categories in schools are determined, in part, by the institutional labels and arrangements, as well as, available social categories that accompany different contexts. Yet, the roles and categories always emerge and transform in local settings (Wortham, 2006). Specifically, Wortham explored moments of discourse or speech events to see exact instances when individuals positioned themselves or were positioned by others by presenting different signs, signs that label youth in different ways. Wortham described the ways that speech events solidify, over time, into stabilized identities. Similarly, Mills (1997), discussed how, according to Foucault, education is a way of regulating discourse, defining speaking rights and rules for "what can pass for knowledge" (p. 64). As youth transition to alternative schools, they are entering contexts with new sets of discourse, rules, and speaking rights. One example of this is

the way that power dynamics are often different in alternative schools than they are in conventional schools, with more informal teacher/youth relationships. When the power dynamics and relationships changes, so too does the discourse.

A final piece of identity development that I want to specifically recognize is the role of culture and race. Banks et al. (2007) laid out guidelines for thinking about learning across time and space, recognizing how identity is shaped in interaction with cultural practices. Repeatedly throughout this chapter I focus on identity development as an interaction between individuals and context. Nasir (2012) highlighted how this interaction is inherently a cultural and social process and that racialized identities need to be considered in racially stratified societies, such as the U.S. Nasir draws attention to the racial socialization that occurs in families, communities, and schools, and how that socialization influences the identities youth develop. While I do not focus specifically on racialized identities (as well as gender identities and sexual identities) in my study, I recognize the ways that youth are often marginalized based on their race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. I consider culture and race as I look at the ways school structures and resources can create or redefine the margins of school.

Figured Worlds

Holland et al. framed identity development with the backdrop of figured worlds, which they define as, "socially and culturally constructed realm[s] of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Similar in some ways to Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1980), figured worlds are constructed through interaction over time. Each context carries with it specific figured worlds based on the values, structures, and forms of participation afforded and constrained by the context. In this study, I used figured

worlds as a way to understand the different "realm[s] of interpretation" that exist in schools. Particularly, I recognize that the figured world in an alternative school may be different than the figured world of conventional school. "Doing school" takes on new meaning in a school without grades or one that spend significant amounts of time outside the classroom. If the figured world of an alternative school is different, then so too, are the available identities.

Holland et al. defined the identities connected to a figured world as figurative identities. They described four points about how figured worlds interact with the identities that people develop: 1) Figured worlds and identities within figured worlds are in process, 2) Social position matters – identities that are afforded and constrained by one's position and context, 3) Figured worlds are reproduced through social interaction, and 4) People are given roles within figured worlds that carry with them certain identifiable characteristics and labels.

In my study, I use the ideas from Holland et al. to think about the opportunities and agency youth are afforded and how youth are positioned in the alternative schools.

Positioning. In order to consider elements of social power and position, Holland et al. (1998) described the differences between figurative identities, those afforded and taken up by figured worlds, and positional identities, which have to do with one's social position in relation to others: "Figurative identities are about signs that evoke storylines or plots among generic characters; positional identities are about acts that constitute relations of hierarchy, distance, or perhaps affiliation" (p. 128). Later in this chapter, I will describe the process of membership development. Both positional identities and membership in communities help explore the ways that youth identity development in alternative schools is directly linked to their membership and position in the school community.

Harré's theory of positioning (Harré, 1984; Harré et al., 2009) described the ways in which people are put or put themselves into certain roles, categories, or ways of acting in order to fulfill an evolving storyline. The ways individuals are positioned is determined, in part, by the institutional labels and arrangements and social categories that accompany different contexts (Eckert, 1989; McDermott et al., 2006; Willis, 1981). In my study I consider three categories of positioning and social labels. The first category are the roles, position, and labels that exist in the youths' former schools, the second is within the alternative schools, and the third category of social positioning is, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the way that "at risk" youth, youth attending alternative schools, and alternative schools themselves are often positioned within society.

Space of authoring. Holland et al. (1998) also addressed the role of agency for identity development or what they call "space of authoring". "The world must be answered" Holland et al. proclaim, "authorship is not a choice – but the form of the answer is not predetermined" (p. 272). In this respect, individuals are always responding to the world and, in turn, the world is responding back. The authors highlight the fact that one's response to the world is where the opportunity for agency exists, through moments of improvisation. These improvisations are potential moments of shifting identity. In part, authoring space connects with Wenger's (1998) description of how imagination influences the construction of identity. For Wenger, imagination is the quality of thinking beyond the scope of the present environment and its forms of participation, thus conceptually constructing new forms of participation and new identities across settings and time. As theoretical constructs, space of authoring and moments of improvisation help me to identify the resources available to youth, resources that provide a space of authoring, as well as, moments of improvisation and identity shift.

Thickening Identities

While I am interested in the moments in which identities shift, I also hope to study the ways in which identities thicken over time. Wortham (2006) described the process in which, in specific moments and over ontogenetic time, identities are negotiated and developed. Wortham pointed out the connection of learning and identity development and how, using available social categories, students are given and take on specific roles and identities. However, Wortham emphasized the fact that sociohistorical models emerge and transform in local settings; thus, the local models are shaped in situated practice using the sociohistorical models as a framework. For students, the sociohistorical models often involve definitions of success and failure in school. For my work, I am interested in the sociohistorical models that are available, and also how, in part, youth seek educational alternatives, because they are unhappy with the roles and identity models that are available to them in conventional schools.

Sociohistorical categories are not just abstract ideas but develop in local interactions in specific contexts. Wortham explained that in order to understand the production of local models, researchers need to analyze both the types of identities present in a local context and the specific identities of individual students, a process I hope to replicate in this study. Similar to Horn (2007), Wortham showed the connection between conceptions of curriculum and the ways in which students are identified. These processes are not distinct but occur in the same moves and moments of discourse. The curriculum in alternative schools differs, sometimes dramatically, from curriculum in conventional schools, which impacts the definitions of youth.

Using Holland and Lave's (2001) concept of identities "thickening" and Jay Lemke's (2000) concept of timescales, Wortham described the ways that speech events solidify, over time, into stabilized identities. Initially, fluid identities become thickened. These identities are not

just in an individual's head, but are shared by participants in the local community, ways of thinking about individuals and predicting their actions. In my analysis, I pay specific attention to the thickening of identities across youths' first year in the alternative schools, looking at the ways in which various school resources influence how identities are established and thickened over time.

Identities In and Across Communities and Contexts

Though the central piece of my study is to look at youth identity development in alternative schools, I also consider the schools they previously attended and their lives and identities outside of school. Dreier (2009) pointed out how one's identity development or one's self-understanding is inseparable from one's understanding of others and of different contexts. Bronfenbrenner (1986) identified four primary contexts (family, friends, school, and work) in which youth exist. Dreier argued for a perspective of individuals as participating in and across social structures. This participation in structures occurs across both space (different contexts embedded in various structures) and time. According to Dreier (2009), identities are developed across contexts as individuals shift their participation, based, in part, on the affordances and constraints of the different contexts. A person's conception of the self:

> Comprises a person's understanding of how she leads her life by participating in diverse social practices, how she orders and directs her activities and pursuits of concerns and stances, and how she addresses her positioned scopes of possibility and comes to terms with the various relations and conflicts involved in her everyday life (Dreier, 2009, p. 199).

Put another way, Dreier focused on the situated participation of individuals across contexts and structures. Nespor (1997) made a similar move at the classroom level, showing the ways in which classrooms are not solitary containers, but woven into a web of social networks and micro

and macro contexts. For Dreier and Nespor, contexts cannot be bounded and cut off from other contexts.

Bell et al. (2013) built on the work of Dreier and outline a cultural learning pathways framework that specifically considers the ways that power, privilege, and marginalization exist in everyday contexts and interactions. Because of this, power, privilege, and marginalization are part of the spaces in which identity development occurs. They look at the ways in which educational privilege and inequity are produced and reproduced through the construction and interaction of learning environments. The authors show how expectations, actions, and available storylines help produce "scopes of possibility" for participation, interests, relationships, and identity development.

These ideas are useful for my study as I consider the multiple worlds in which youth participate and how their identities are developed as they negotiate the practices and contradictions that exist across these contexts. This process occurs as youth transition from one school context to another, navigating definitions of school and success and how they fit into those definitions. It also occurs as youth navigate their in-school and out-of-school lives. While pushing against stereotypical and simplistic labels of "at risk", I recognize the risk that occurs in youth lives by nature of them being human (Lee, 2009). Risk that ranges from drug and alcohol use to traumatic life events. In this study, I consider the multiple worlds of youth while also looking at the ways in which youths' out-of-school lives are brought into the alternative schools.

Engagement and Identity Development

Literature reviews on engagement and motivation (Hickey & Grenade, 2004; Nolen, Ward, & Horn, 2011) have considered the ways in which participation across contexts impacts identities. These reviews looked at the multidimensionality of engagement across different

conflicting and competing communities of practice, highlighting the role of engagement in identity development (Nasir & Hand, 2008; Nolen, Horn, Ward, & Childers, 2011; Nolen, Ward, Horn, Childers, Campbell, & Mahna, 2009). Nasir and Hand (2008) pointed out the intimate connection of identity and engagement, claiming that engaging forms of participation will help develop students' identities in connection with specific practices. Nasir (2002) used shifts in engagement as an indicator of shifting identities, describing engagement as ways of participating with increasing expertise in the game of dominos.

In a sociocultural context, student engagement is not something owned solely by youth, but an aspect of participation, one that connects to both affect and cognition (Nolen, Ward, & Horn, 2011). Engagement helps recontextualize practices and identification with practices (Nolen, Ward, & Horn, 2011). While I focus on identity development in this study, I view engagement as a valued form of practice that occurs when youth participate in-school contexts. For Nasir and Hand (2008), engagement is considered a mediator between motivation and success in school, involving feelings of success, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When youth are engaged, they also can feel that contexts will incorporate and support their identities (Nasir & Hand, 2008). Nasir (2002) and Nasir and Hand (2008) focused on engagement in specific practices that individuals have linked identities to, but particularly on how designed environments can help facilitate these processes.

For my study I use engagement as both an indicator of youth identity development and community membership, but also to locate the type of resources that exist at the alternatives schools that help youth engage and develop their identities.

Identity Resources

Nasir (Nasir, 2004, 2012) and Nasir & Hand (2008) focused on the affordances and

constraints of different contexts for identity development and how to design learning environments that foster engagement and identity development. This work helps me think about the identity resources available for youth in alternative schools. In Nasir and Hand (2008), the authors discussed practice-linked identities, which, as it sounds, are senses of connection between the individual and specific practices, shaped by the type of engagement practices afford and constrain. They point to the importance of opportunities for integral roles, opportunities for self-expression in practice, and access to the domain. Nasir (2012) expanded this work, looking at the ways in which culture, race, and identity connect in localized settings. Nasir pointed towards four types of resources that help support identity development in youth[4]: 1) providing youth opportunities to put something of themselves into practices, including taking on specific roles, 2) access to material resources, 3) access to relational resources, and 4) access to ideational resources. I specifically use these four types of resources to explore my research question on the resources available for identity development in the alternative schools.

Other work on designing learning environments has highlighted the importance of providing youth situated and authentic challenges and important problems in project-based learning (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006) for increasing youth engagement, depth of learning, and transfer of knowledge and practices (Blumenfeld, Kempler, & Krajcik, 2006). Some project-based learning (Parker et al., 2011; 2013) has added iteration as an additional component, creating challenge cycles of learning (Bransford et al., 2006) across the course of a yearlong curriculum. Design-Based Implementation researchers have also focused on the value of

[4] Engle and Conant (2002) provide similar set of supports for productive disciplinary engagement that include problematizing subject matter, giving students authority to address those problems, holding students accountable to others and to disciplinary norms, and providing students with resources relevant to the discipline.

iteration for research-practice collaborations, looking at the iterative process of design-test-analyze-redesign (Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2011). Both project-based learning and iteration have been shown to impact the youth agency, identity development, and engagement. (Nolen, Tierney, Goodell, Lee, & Abbott, 2014). Iteration is useful to my study to think about not only the identity resources that are present in alternative schools, but how these resources are not static, but are used by youth over time.

Communities of Practice

School community is a central element of my study. As youth enter into alternative schools, the identities they develop within those schools are interwoven with their membership in the school communities. Community member is significant because of the figured worlds of alternative schools are often different than the figured worlds of conventional schools. Community membership then becomes, in part, a process of orienting to the figured world of the school. Additionally, membership and belonging in the school community are tools in which alternative school programs engage youth and help youth develop their identities.

In sociocultural literature, community belonging is often aligned with affiliation or identification with something, someone, or some group (Greeno, 1998; Nasir et al. 2006). A growing body of literature on small schools and alternative education has looked specifically at the ways that school community and belonging connect to student engagement and identity development (Cushman, 1990, 2006; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; De La Ossa, 2005; Gewertz, 2007; Strike, 2010). Additionally, Goodenow (1993) has looked at how senses of school membership lead to a commitment to school goals and engagement in-school practices. This work has looked at the sense of connection that students have and how that impacts their views of learning and school. These studies indicate the importance of looking more closely at the

connection of students' sense of belonging and student engagement. This work connects with self-determination theorists (La Guardia & Ryan, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000) who, along with autonomy and competency, have identified relatedness as one of three characteristics that will promote intrinsic motivation.

Membership and Belonging

Wenger (1998) discussed how communities of practice are not just groups or teams, but involve the way people work together with a shared vision. Participation in a community of practice simultaneously shapes the identity of the participants and also the community of practice itself. Membership can thus be observed through shifting engagement in the practices and values of a community. More specifically, Wenger (ibid) described membership and belonging as forming through a) engagement (informing the negotiation of meaning), b) imagination (creating images of the world through personal experiences, linked with senses of belonging and identification with various communities), and c) alignment (coordinating activities so as to fit into broader structures).

While "imagination" acts as a way that individuals view or frame the world (Goffman, 1974; 1981; Hand, Penuel, & Gutiérrez, 2012; Jurow, 2005), informing their senses of belonging to different communities, Wenger's definitions of "engagement" and "alignment" have more to do with how one actually participates in the community. In this framework, individuals can be more or less engaged and more or less aligned, thus introducing the concepts of central, marginal, and peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), concepts that are particularly useful when studying youth entering into new communities.

Wenger (1998) stated that our engagement, alignment, and imagination (belonging/ identification) all contribute to our membership in a community, which, in combination with

ownership of meaning, builds one's identity. Nasir (2002), explored these concepts further, pointing out that alignment acts as a way individuals coordinate action across communities of practice and that alignment demonstrates and generates one's identity, their participation shifting as they align with (or move away from) a community. In this way, the constructs of alignment, engagement, and imagination help me study how youth identities develop across contexts, and within the alternative schools, both in practice and identification.

Dimensions of Communities of Practice

In order to understand membership and participation in a community, it is essential to understand how communities function. Wenger (1998) defined a community of practice as containing three dimensions: joint enterprise, shared repertoire, and mutual engagement. Joint enterprise is defined as the shared practice of a community, practices that are negotiated in the moment. Shared repertoire is the historical collection of resources (artifacts, stories, tools, historical events, etc.) that can help members negotiate meaning. Finally, mutual engagement is described as the negotiated meaning behind certain practices. The dimensions of a community of practice are useful to help determine the practices and values of specific alternative schools, but are also useful when studying youths' trajectories of membership, as they learn what it means to be a member of the school community.

Forms of Participation

Similar to Hickey and Grenade (2004), Wenger discussed both participation and non-participation in the development of identity. These two terms are not static categories; instead membership can exist as a combination of participation and non-participation. Wenger discussed peripheral and marginal participation as examples of non-participation in a community of practice, yet for differing reasons and with aspects of participation embedded in each. In both

cases non-participation is defined by what participation in the community looks like. In addition to these forms of participation there is also central participation. In addition to types of participation, Wenger also explored trajectories of participation to describe the ways in which participation shifts over time in a community of practice. Trajectories of membership are particularly important when thinking about disenfranchised adolescents who have disaffiliated or disengaged from school. Entering into alternative schools can provide youth opportunities to begin new educational trajectories in the community of practice of the alternative schools.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the breadth of literature and theories that I used in this study. While identity development is the primary construct that I used, I included other relevant work to this study, including resources for identity development, thickening of identities, figured worlds, engagement, and membership and belonging in communities of practice. In this chapter, I tried to convey the web of ideas that these theories cover, intersecting and overlapping, describing the ongoing landscape of participation in the world. Specifically, I tried to explain the ways these theories help explore my research problem, looking at the identity development of youth entering into alternative schools. In the next chapter I describe the methodology that I used for collecting data and analysis.

Chapter Four: Methodology of Data Collection and Analysis

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology I used to complete this study. I will begin by giving an overview of the methodology and the forms of data collected; then, I will explain, in depth, the site entry and selection. Following that, I will discuss the two phases of the study and case study participant selection. Then, I will explain the data sources I used in the study and, finally, the analytical method I employed.

This dissertation uses data from a larger ethnography of youth attending two public alternative high schools. Collected data for the larger study included over 50 hours of interviews and 70 hours of observation, of which I used approximately 25 hours of interviews and 50 hours of observation for this dissertation. The data were collected over one academic year in two phases. The first phase, running September-December, focused on the schools and, specifically, the cohort of transfer (10-12th grade) students entering the schools. All consented students from these cohorts were interviewed. These participants were also observed in orientation activities and classes. The second phase began in the fall and ran until the end of the year, in June. Phase two focused on case study youth, selected from the participants in phase one. Case study youth were interviewed throughout the school year and observed in classes, non-class school activities, and out-of-school contexts. While research methods were largely the same for both phases, the primary difference was the analytical lens I used, shifting from community (the school community in action) and personal (individual perspectives and stories) lenses in phase one to interpersonal (individual interactions) and personal lenses for phase two (Herrenkohl & Mertl, 2010; Rogoff, 1995, 2003). In phase one, the community lens, used primarily during observations, allowed me to identify identity resources available for youth at the school, while the personal lens, used primarily in interviews, allowed me to explore the variety of experiences

of youth in the entering cohort. The interpersonal and personal lenses used in phase two helped me explore in greater depth the process of identity development for individual participants.

Forms of Data Collected

The primary forms of data collected in this study were ethnographic interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews and think-alouds were conducted with students, teachers, principals, and significant individuals from the case study participants' lives (mentors, friends, and family members). Observational tools included ethnographic notes, audio recorders, and photographs. During observations, I shifted between acting as a non-participant observer and a participant observer (Merriam, 2009) depending primarily on invitation from the participants. Throughout the data collection, I kept both reflective journals and audio memos. During analysis, I cross-checked all forms of data I collected as I employed triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

In addition to interviews and observations, surveys (Appendix A) were used to inform case study participant selection. Questions on the survey asked youth their views of the alternative school, similarities and differences to their previous school, and how they spent their time outside of school.

Documents were also collected and reviewed to understand the schools and the role of youth in the schools. Collected documents included school-level information or promotional materials, classroom decorations, classroom assignments, and case study participant work.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) described the four worlds of childhood: family, friends, school, and work. While the interaction between youth and school is the primary focus of this study, I sought data that would provide insights into the other three worlds that Bronfenbrenner identifies. I hoped to be able to put youth experiences and identity development in school in perspective

with their other experiences and relationships and get a glimpse into the ways that the various contexts and relationships of youth lives interact as they develop identities in alternative schools.

Site Entry and Selection

Though I will discuss my entry into each individual site in chapters five and six, I will now briefly discuss my selection of and entry into the two alternative school sites.

Recognizing the complexity of any school, I did not want to choose sites that were representative programs on one criteria such as the small school, the job placement school, the democratic school, the outward education school, etc. While the schools I selected had a number of these types of features, labeling them as representative in one dimension was not the focus of this study. Instead, I was interested in the ways that multiple features combined to provide identity resources for youth and the experiences of youth as they spent their first year at the schools. I was trying to maximize differences in the configurations of identity resources.

Pathways[5] was a small one-year high school program that focused on leadership and environmental stewardship. Youth were put into leadership positions at the district-run wilderness camp, where they lead groups of sixth graders who visited the camp. Youth often referred to Pathways as a family. The other school in the study, Redwood was a high school with a focus on democratic education and personalized learning. Youth were given choice and responsibility for their education. Youth often referred to Redwood as a safe and accepting community.

Using theory, I sought schools that, while they recognized the complexity of youth lives, took more of a "learning choice" instead of a "youth-at-risk" perspective (Raywid, 1999; te Riele,

[5] All names of schools and participants are pseudonyms.

2007), seeking to provide learning environments and resources that had previously been absent in their students' lives. I selected two schools that were similar in certain ways and different in others. I sought schools that may have been positioned as interventions for youth, but were not simply back-on-track interventions and provided programs that were alternative from conventional schooling. In this way, I also sought out schools that were philosophically, relationally, and structurally different from conventional high schools, so that I could examine the ways in which the structure of schools provided resources for identity development. I approached a number of "learning choice" alternative schools, but eventually chose Pathways and Redwood because of their similarities and differences and their interest in the study.

I chose to locate the study in two schools in order to compare the resources and experiences I saw. Having two sites afforded me the ability to compare individual program's features, find what was similar across the two, and then describe findings that were less site specific. I did not extend my study to three sites in order to still be able to spend a significant amount of time at each site and with youth at each site. I felt that three or more sites would spread the study too thin, and I would not be able to get the depth that I wanted in order to study the process of identity development. For differences, I sought schools that differed in size and focus. I considered the influence of small schools (Strike, 2010), but, as I mentioned before, not have it be the central element of the study. I also sought to have one school that was 9th-12th grade and one school that was a continuation high school, in which students returned to their neighborhood home schools after their year at Pathways[6]. Both schools had youth in their second year of 12th grade. Finally, I sought differences in racial diversity of the student

[6] Pathways added a second one-year program during the study year, and a third one-year program after the study was complete. The three one-year programs were related, but separate programs.

population and the percentages of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch. All of these differences are reported in the table below.

Table 1: School comparison

	Pathways	**Redwood**
School Size	Approximately 40 students/ 3 teachers	Approximately 300 students/ 20 teachers
School Focus	Leadership and environmental stewardship	Democratic school, social justice, personalized learning, increased responsibility
Grade Levels	10^{th}-12^{th} grade continuation high school	9^{th}-12^{th} grade high school
Racial Diversity	2014-2015: 52% Hispanic, 31% Caucasian, 8% Asian/Pacific-Islander, 5% African-American, and 5% identified as two or more races	2013-2014: 70% Caucasian, 8% Hispanic, 7% African-American, 7% Asian/Pacific-Islander, 6% identified as two or more races, and 1% Native American
Free and Reduced Lunch	2014-2015: 54% of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch	2013-2014: 28% of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch
Special Education Plans	2014-2015: 18% were on Special Education plans	2013-2014: 22% of the study body was on Special Education plans

My entry into the schools was facilitated by informal meetings I had with administrations, teachers, and students at the school (explained in greater depth in the case study chapters). It was important to establish myself at both schools as an interested observer. In many ways, I needed to demonstrate that I was on their team and had some knowledge of alternative education. Both the principal and a teacher at Redwood spoke to me about individuals who come to the school for a day and think they understand it. One of the highest unintentional compliments I received during the study was when Doris, a teacher at Redwood, said that the people she trusted were those who come and spend a lot of time just observing and learning. When approaching the sites for research, I elicited input on the study from the teachers and principals with whom I wished to collaborate. I made a point to ask teachers and administrators what research would be

of use to them and what thoughts they had about my study. In this way, I wanted them to be a form of partner in the research (Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988; Kirshner, Gaertner, & Pozzoboni, 2010). I felt that I needed this level of transparency and collaboration in order to truly listen and to, at least, attempt to conduct research that was equally valuable to academia and to the students, teachers, and administrators at the sites.

As a former alternative school teacher, I was very aware of my positionality. Having worked in alternative schools, I was aware of the potential of my experiences to bias my interpretation of the school sites and the youth I worked with. I attempted to keep this bias in check by, during data collection, spending a lot of time at the school sites, trying to get to know them as their own programs. Additionally, I attempted to avoid bias during analysis, by triangulating data, grounding analysis in the words and actions of participants, and through peer review and member checks, all of which I explain in more detail later in this chapter. While I tried to keep potential bias in check, I also attempted to use my experiences in alternative education to understand the contexts and youth experiences and to build relationships with the adults and youth at the alternative schools.

Having explained the process I took prior to collecting data, I will now discuss the different phases of data collection, including the analytical lenses I used and the selection of case study participants.

Phases of Data Collection

Phase One

In the initial phase of the study, I focused on my research questions that looked at the identity resources that were available at the school and, to a lesser degree, how identities at the alternative school contrasted to identities youth had in their previous schools. For the latter

research question, I specifically focused on perceptions that youth had of their previous schools and how those perceptions compared to how they viewed the alternative schools. I addressed this research question in greater depth in the phase two case studies.

In this phase of the study, 32 students across the two alternative school sites were observed and interviewed (22 at Pathways, 10 at Redwood)[7]. Additionally, four teachers (3 at Pathways, 1 at Redwood) and two principals (1 from each site) from the schools were interviewed. The teachers interviewed in the first phase of the study were chosen, because they taught or co-taught the orientation class/activities for the incoming cohort of students to the schools.

The cohort of students entering the alternative school were observed in an orientation class at one site (Redwood) and orientation activities for the other site (Pathways). Youth participants were observed throughout the course and activities that served as an orientation to the incoming student cohort, a total of 18 observations at Pathways and 21 observations at Redwood. The cohorts were my initial unit of analysis – exploring the groups' norms, participation patterns, joint enterprises, and frames. As mentioned above, during phase one, I used a community lens during my observations and a personal lens during individual interviews with students in the cohort (Herrenkohl & Mertl, 2010; Rogoff, 1995, 2003), though the lenses often blended, as they should when collecting data on identity in practice.

Observed activities ranged from in-class writing, discussion, team-building activities, leading groups of sixth graders, and creating blogs about the meaning of life, to name just a few.

[7] While I am unsure the exact reasons for the variation between the number of participants at the two schools, the Redwood 101 class had approximately 35 students, while the class at Pathways was approximately 45 students.

Both the orientation class and orientation activities lasted, and were observed, throughout the first semester of the school year.

Phase Two

From the 32 students, 4 students (2 from each school) continued into the second phase of the study as case study participants. Table 2 describes the participants in my study and the type of data collected on each participant. In addition to the data I collected on the case youth in phase one (Orientation observation, 1 interview, survey), I also collected data on case youth in phase two (all data from phase one participants, plus an additional 5-6 interviews, observations in other classes, document collection, observation in outside of class contexts, interviews of a close friend, a mentor, and a family member) (Table 2). The four case participants were observed both in and outside of school (Table 3), and I interviewed significant individuals (a mentor/advisor, a friend, and a family member) for three of the four case youth. The mentors/advisors, friends, and family members I interviewed were identified with the help of the case participants. I asked the case youth to nominate individuals they felt knew them the best and who might be willing to be interviewed. Mentors/advisors were all teachers at the schools, though not always teachers of the case youth. At Redwood, the teachers were the case participants' official Advisors, while at Pathways the teacher was an unofficial mentor. All three of the friends interviewed were friends from before the case youth began attending the alternative schools. Family members included two mothers and one sister. For this dissertation, I focused on two of the cases, one from each school. The other cases influenced my cross-case analysis and the themes I found in each individual case.

Case Selection

The case study youth selection was informed by observing their participation during the orientation class/activities, their responses on a survey, and their initial interview. The primary guidelines for selecting case study youth were their interest in the research, how their stories and perspectives represented the group of participants from each school, and how their evolving stories informed the research questions for this study.

Similar to my site selection, I sought youth whose reasons for attending the alternative schools aligned with a "learning choice" perspective (Raywid, 1999; te Riele, 2007), where, at least in part, they attended the schools by choice, not by requirement or because they felt they had no other option. In their surveys and interviews, they talked about the resources for identity development that were available at the school (a contrasting example for this would be youth who focused primarily on credit retrieval) and their out-of-school lives. I also sought youth with whom I could get a good understanding of their previous struggles and participation in school.

Case study selection criteria also focused on maximizing variation across cases, including: in-school participation, students' previous educational experiences, students' out-of-school lives, and student interests. Across and within the alternative school sites, I made efforts to select students with some differences from each other, i.e. gender orientation, ethnicity and race, different participation patterns in class, different affiliations and interests in and out of school, different educational histories, and different reasons for coming to the alternative schools. I also looked for a sampling of youth who, in the alternative schools, seemed like fish in and out of water, those who took off running and those who remained on the periphery.

Finally, across the cases I sought variation of stories and reasons for attending the alternative school. I did not only want youth who hated their former school, nor did I want youth

who all had similar characteristics (school involvement, drug use, grades, truancy, etc.) or interests. The four case study youth had a wide variety of reasons for choosing to attend the alternative schools: credit retrieval; bullying; gender choice acceptance; wanting to get out of bad situations; dislike of their former school; seeking new opportunities and experiences; other friends attending; interest in the school focus; wanting more hands-on learning; interest in having more freedom, choice, and agency; seeking better relationships with other youth and adults; and just wanting an alternative. All of the participants had multiple reasons for attending the alternative schools. The final selection criterion was that the youth themselves were interested in continuing in the study.

Table 4 below provides a sketch on all four of the cases, describing their entry into the schools, their interests and out-of-school activities, participation patterns, and areas of "risk" (which I report to provide a context for their lives, not a label).

From the four cases, I chose DJ and Penelope because their stories were representative of many youth at Redwood and Pathways. Tables 5a-5d present Redwood youth responses from the survey I gave at the beginning of the year and Tables 6a-6d present responses from youth at Pathways. At Redwood, there was more generally a negative view of their previous schools (Tables 5b-5d), focusing on the ways that their previous schools had marginalized them. In addition, the Redwood students focused on the increased choice and agency they received at Redwood. The youth at Pathways did not have as dominant a negative view of their previous schools. It did exist, but with a far smaller percentage. Instead, the predominant theme in the Pathways surveys was the community and opportunities that Pathways afforded them as leaders and through experiential learning (Tables 6b-6d). While Oda talked about community and

leadership and Taylor talked about her previous school and choice, DJ and Penelope's surveys and initial interviews centered around those themes.

Penelope's and DJ's stories helped highlight the major findings and the process of identity development over the course of the school year and the interaction of identity development between the youth and the school contexts and communities. At the same time, like all the youth in the study, DJ and Penelope's stories were uniquely their own. Just like my selection of alternative schools, I did not wish to pick youth who were representative for one primary characteristic (drug use, anxiety, bullying, truancy, etc.). I worried that doing so would objectify the youth and ignore the multiple facets of their lives and their developing identities.

Data Sources

Surveys

Prior to any of the student interviews, I gave consented youth participants a survey (Appendix A). The survey was given during the one of my first three observations at the schools, and included questions about age, length of time at the alternative school, the number of schools attended in the past three years, and their interests. The surveys helped inform which youth were chosen to be cases in the study, using the previously described selection criteria.

Interviews

This study employed semi-structured (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003) and think-aloud (Ginsburg, 1981) protocols to interview participants (Appendix C). Think-aloud protocols were centered around student work, as well as, in-interview writing and drawing that youth did, choosing and responding to interview prompts (Appendix C-7). Think-aloud protocols provided insights into alternative mediums of expression and academic work. Semi-structured questions were open-ended, asking participants' thoughts about topics, such as learning, their stories, their

roles, their identities, and the school (ex. "How do you define learning?", "Tell me about yourself and your role at the school", and "What does it mean to be a member of the community at this school?"). Both think-alouds and open-ended semi-structured questions allowed the participants to interpret and respond in a more flexible and fluid way. Semi-structured and think-aloud interviews helped me explore participants' views and opinions on their own and the case study youths' histories, identities, and participation in and across contexts. Each interview took between 20-90 minutes, with most being in the 45-60 minute range.

Similar to other sociocultural researchers (Baines, 2014; Nasir & Hand, 2008; Nolen, Horn, Ward, & Childers, 2011; Willis, 1981), I grounded my interviews in observations, viewing them as complimentary data. When possible, I scheduled interviews in the same week as classroom and out-of-school observations allowing me to look at the participants' insights on what happened during the observation. In addition, looking at the observations and interviews across time provided a perspective into the process of identity development across the school year[8]. In chapters five and six, I provide tables that outline the type of data I collected and the timeline for collection.

Recognizing the limit to the out-of-class observation I could do, I sought to capture other out-of-school experiences through interviews with case study youth and others in their lives (family members, close friends, mentors). I asked youth about the range of activities in which

[8] One side note on the interview data I collected is its implications for my second research question: How do these identities contrast to the identities the youth had in their previous schools? For this research question, I was able to triangulate interview and observation data on the youths' identities in the alternative schools; however, interviews were my only source of data about the youths' identities in their previous schools. I did triangulate my data by looking across multiple interviews with the case study participants, as well as, with interview data from other participants, including family members and friends who knew the case study youth before they began at the alternative school. Still, there is a difference between reported identities for their previous school and reported and observed identities at the alternative schools.

they participated, asking in particular about experiences, relationships, and activities that the youth felt had a significant impact on who they were and who they were becoming. Interviews provided a window into the many activities, friends, and life events that, for a handful of reasons, observations could not capture, such as drug and alcohol use in some of the youths' lives, and the friends associated with it, romantic relationships, and various major life events (parent divorces, parents living apart, youth moving out of their parents' house, etc.) that I would not have captured in my observations. These topics were not specifically asked about in interview protocols, but often youth brought them up when talking about their out-of-school lives and identity development.

Observations

Observations allowed me to investigate the identities of the youth beyond interview data. Table 3 lists the in-school and out-of-school contexts I observed for both case youth (Table 3). Through observations, I was able to see the youths' identities in practice, allowing me to compare observed identities with interview data that focused more on the youths' identification with various communities and practices. Observations also were pivotal in exploring research questions about resources for identity development and transfer of out-of-school identities into school. In order to locate the resources and practices of different contexts and how youth take up resources and practices, I needed to observe the actual context.

I observed the youths' orientation classes and experiences throughout first semester of the academic year, approximately twenty observations per site. In addition, in phase two, I observed other classes that the case study youth were in. These classes were purposefully chosen with input from the case participants. Working with the case study youth, we considered the subject of the classes (i.e. art, math, choir), the focal students' participation and roles in other courses (i.e.

active participation, reserved participation, etc.), and what the courses represent to the focal students (i.e. difficult subjects, teachers they like). Classes that were observed included an orientation class, American Government and Economics, Physics, Animation, Algebra, Environmental Science, Leadership, Sociology, and English**.** Additional classes that were analyzed but are not included in the two cases studies include Advisory, American History, and Creative Writing.

I also observed each of the four case study youth in one to two contexts outside of class. Similar to observation in additional courses, I asked case youth to help me choose the contexts to observe, asking for them their affiliation and affinity to the context, their relationships within the context, their roles within the context, and how strongly they felt the context influenced their identity development. Perhaps not surprisingly, youth chose contexts in which they had a central role. Out-of-class contexts for the cases in this dissertation included a neighborhood tour, student's home, a horseback riding lesson, and acting as a camp counselor. Additional context that were analyzed for this dissertation but are not included in the two case studies include a musical performance, after-school mentoring, and additional camp counseling.

I observed each case participant in the out-of-class context 1-3 times. Observational tools included ethnographic notes using an observation protocol (Appendix B) – writing down descriptions of the physical space and participants actions, as well as, when possible, verbatim utterances. Following observations, I wrote additional notes and audio recorded post-observation memos.

Document Review

I collected documents from the school, the classrooms, and the students. Collected materials included photos of the school and classroom, school calendars and class schedules,

student work, class activities and assignments, documents about the schools from the internet (school website, as well as, national sites such as Wikipedia and U.S. News), and email correspondence (with the consent of the participant). I focused in particular on materials that helped define what it means to be successful at the school and a member of the school community, such as material on community norms, materials that help students get to know the school (i.e. informational materials, scavenger hunts), and promotional materials for the schools. Documents collected from the school provided insights into the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To understand the tasks that students were asked to complete in the observed contexts, I also collected classroom documents. These documents were collected primarily to provide context to the work the case youth did and to highlight the type of identity resources (Nasir, 2011) that were available in the students' classes.

Additionally, I collected some case study youth work in order to explore students' developing identities. I focused in particular on work that the students were proud, work that often included the students' choice of topic. I also focused on work that connected, in particular, to identity development, work that asked students to reflect on their development and growth. Some examples of collected work included a sociology essay that had students write about how their environment influenced their development, a Physics presentation on the physics of horseback riding, an essay on why students choose alternative schools, and letters participants wrote to students who would start at the school the following year. These documents helped show the ways in which their academic work intersected with youths' developing identities.

Having explained the various types of data I collected for this study, I will now turn my focus to describing the data analysis. I will start by describing the analytical frames I used; then, I will outline the different phases of analysis I did before detailing each one in greater depth.

Analytical Frames for Data Collection

In order to navigate the lengthy and shifting data collection for this study, I used Herrenkohl and Mertl's planes of analysis (2010). Herrenkohl and Mertl, borrowing from Rogoff (1995, 2003), describe four planes of analysis to think about the processes and relationships between individuals participating in social worlds. For Herrenkohl and Mertl, the analysis planes are: context, community, interpersonal, and personal. The primary difference between the analytical planes Herrenkohl and Mertl identify and those Rogoff identifies ('Transformation-of-participation perspective', 'interpersonal focus of analysis', and 'cultural-institutional focus of analysis') is the division of the final plane, separating it into community and context. These planes are similar to Billett's (2003) work on different sociogenetic sources and Bronfenbrenner's ecology systems theory (1979) in that three of Herrenkohl and Mertl's planes exist within a setting (microsystem) and across settings (mesosystem); yet, the context plane exists more in the macrosystem, acting largely as a cultural model of how things should be. However, while the planes are useful analytic tools, in practice, they interact and blend in a far more complex way.

Each of Herrenkohl and Mertl's different planes affords insight into different grain sizes and, thus, different types of processes. For example, through the personal lens, I was able to better understand individuals' participation in different practices and their identification with those practices (Nasir & Hand, 2008). In contrast, using the interpersonal lens helped highlight the ways in which individuals negotiate and engage in specific communities (Greeno, 1998; Hickey and Grenade, 2004; Engle & Conant, 2002). Looking through a community/context lens provided insight into what the joint enterprise or mutual engagement of a community is and the ways in which communities of practice shift and were reified (Giddens, 1984; Holland et al.,

1998; Nolen et al., 2012; Wenger, 1998).

Each of the different analytic planes or units of analysis affords different perspectives. Thinking of my research questions for this study, I was specifically interested in questions regarding individuals interacting in and across communities, requiring personal and interpersonal units of analysis over space and time. I was less interested in the ways in which specific communities develop and negotiate values and practices over time, which a community analysis would highlight. However, I was interested in the identity resources that the school and the community provided. I was also interested in the values and practices of the school community, in order to determine what membership, success, and engagement looked within the schools. Finally, a contextual frame provided more focused analysis of the structures and idealized values of the institutions. Focusing on students who have disaffiliated from school, I needed to consider contextual factors such as, physical and social characteristics of different institutions, as well as, the values, practices, and tools that are used. Focusing on students who have disaffiliated from school highlights the connection of not just individuals and their communities, but also the connection of individuals and the larger scale context of schooling. Specific structures and institutions carry emotional, intellectual, and ideological weight for each student, based on their personal histories. So, too, societal institutions define success and failure through social categories and norms (McDermott et al., 2006). Contextual factors and the ways they are reproduced in situated environments are particularly salient for addressing the research questions of this study.

Analysis

I included five phases of data analysis in this study: open coding, focused coding based on theory and research questions, writing analytic memos looking in and across codes and data,

generating hypotheses, and discourse analysis of specific sections of data. Transcripts, observation logs and memos, and documents were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software.

The first phase of data analysis was reading and reviewing the entire corpus of data used for this dissertation and, using grounded theory, open coding the interview transcripts, observation notes, surveys, and collected documents. Grounded theory helped emphasize students' and teachers' meanings within the social contexts in which data are collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I first coded interviews, batching the interviews I coded by case study. Following that, I coded observation notes and then documents and surveys. In addition to coding interviews, data on the two case studies used in this dissertation, I also coded data from the other two cases from the larger set of collected data. Finally, I coded principal interviews. Codes were added and revised throughout this phase of analysis and, because of this, I recoded earlier data using the new and revised codes. For interviews, I typically coded by utterance, unless the utterance was extremely long; then, it was divided when there was a change of topic. For observational notes and documents, I coded by section, dividing sections when the topic or participant changed. For all forms of data, codes often overlapped in specific sections or utterances. This overlap later informed some findings.

During this phase of analysis, low inference codes were generated from the participants' own words and actions (Appendix D). This analysis helped provide insight into the main themes of the interview. Specifically, I was able to identify themes and patterns, using the student's exact words as open codes. These themes, such as "school is a family" or "living two lives", were not in my theoretical framework, yet emerged as major patterns across interviews and observations.

During the second phase of analysis I developed and applied codes based on theory and my research questions. Specifically, these codes were grounded in themes such as positioning of self and others by students and teacher (Harré et al., 2009), ideational and relational resources (Nasir, 2012), integral roles, opportunities for self-expression in practice (Nasir & Hand, 2008), and defining the school community. Some of the added codes overlapped codes developed in open coding and, when relevant, they were merged. I recoded data from the two cases in this dissertation using the theoretical codes. Additionally, I recoded surveys, school documents, and principal interviews.

In the third phase of data analysis, I wrote analytic memos connecting the codes. In addition, during this phase I explored specific codes, looking at when the codes were used and writing memos based on themes across the coded moments. I also explored the overlap of codes, noting within and across case occurrences. In this phase of analysis, I wrote in-case memos, looking at themes and patterns within the two case studies. I also looked across types of data (interview, observations, documents) as a form of triangulation, confirming that the patterns I was seeing occurred in participation (observations) and reports (interviews).

During the fourth phase of analysis, I examined the codes and memos to generate hypotheses. In this phase, I compared the two cases, writing memos that encompassed the case specific memos. I also compared memos to previous research I had conducted and other relevant research. Hypotheses included major findings on identity resources at the schools and the process of identity development for the youth. Having generated these hypotheses, I looked across the data to test my assertions. While testing my assertions, I focused in particular on observational notes to ensure that my findings represented youth participation and not just

personal reports. While reviewing data, I added an additional finding about the process of identity development for the youth.

For my fifth phase, I identified particular segments of interviews for discourse analysis. In this phase, I approached discourse as a meditational tool (Wells, 2002) that indicated ways in which youth were talking about their participation in and outside of school. I used discourse analysis to help balance the general narratives of participants' developing identities with specific moments of grounded discourse. For the discourse analysis, I chose case study interviews from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to look at the transition of youth discourse across the year. I used thematic role analysis (Finegan, 2011), and I looked for the ways youth talked about themselves, the scope of action, their previous schools, and the school community. Specifically, I looked at the ways youth used verbs and pronouns to identify the agents (I, we, you, students, the school) and action (thinking, caring, designing, teaching, etc.) that was allowed. This analysis allowed me to explore the ways that talk shifted and to compare the timelines that youth identified themselves as members of the school community. Following the discourse analysis of the case youth, I conducted a discourse analysis of the surveys to examine similarities and differences for how the two schools were written about.

Throughout all five phases of analysis, I discussed my findings and my process with other researchers, including faculty, fellow Ph.D. students, and peers and mentors from other institutions. I also met with the case study participants and teachers interviewed in phase one of the study, and principals during the analysis and writing phases of the dissertation. I asked each of these individuals what future research they thought would be important and what lenses I should consider in my analysis. Throughout the analysis phase of my study, I repeatedly revisited their input, attempting to create a study that spoke to their needs and interests and

extended their deeply important role in this study. Additionally, I conducted member checks (Merriam, 2009) with the case study youth. During the member check, I specifically talked about the details of my findings, as well as, other pieces of the study, and received feedback about their cases and the study writ large. Feedback influenced the ways in which I thought and wrote about their out-of-school lives and the school resources they saw as the most valuable for their identity development. All case study youth, principals, and teachers from phase one were invited to my dissertation defense.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodological approach I used in this study, the site selection and entry, the process of data collection, including case study selection, the types of data I collected, and the process I used to analyze the collected data. I would like to highlight the attempt I made to have my methodology reflect the theory and educational perspective I took for this study. I sought to collect data that could show the interactive process of identity development over time. In the next chapter, I explore the first case study. The case study chapters are focused not just on a single youth. Instead, to recognize the interactive nature of identity development, the cases are youth plus context, looking into the process of identity development and the resources that the alternative schools provided to support identity development.

Chapter Five: Findings Case One – DJ and Pathways High School

Introduction to the Cases

These two cases, in this chapter and the next, are cases of not just the youth, but the two schools as well. I start each case by first describing the school setting, structure, and community. Then I move to describe the focal youth for each of these cases, focusing initially on their reported lives before they started at the alternative schools. The majority of each case then becomes the story of the youth's first year in the alternative schools. In telling the stories of the two youths' identity development I also explore the identity resources available at the alternative schools, including the relational and ideational resources, roles and redefining of school, and moments of risk and performance.

Case Introduction: DJ and Pathways

In this chapter I focus on the first of two cases. This case is not just of an individual youth, but instead is youth plus school – DJ and Pathways. I start the case by introducing Pathways and briefly present the roles and redefining of school that occurred at Pathways. I then describe the school history, demographics, community, setting, and schedule. After describing Pathways, I shift my focus to DJ. I introduce DJ and his experiences prior to joining Pathways, and then I describe his identity development as a student at Pathways. Throughout the case, I focus on the processes of iteration and negotiation of contradictions as key elements of DJ's identity development as he interacted with the roles and resources at Pathways.

DJ is a case of a youth who became a central member of the Pathways community while also trying to make sense of the identity contradictions in his life. He described himself as being "two DJs". He joined Pathways to develop one side of himself and, through iteration with the identity resources at Pathways, became a star leader. However, as his identity at Pathways

thickened, he continued to wrestle with the contradictions between his in-school and out-of-school lives. Because of these contradictions and the way DJ and Pathways interacted, my research questions for this study overlapped as I looked at the process of identity development, comparing his previous identity in school to his identity at Pathways, identity resources in the school, and the ways the out-of-school world flowed into school.

Pathways High School

Pathways High School was and is a one-year public high school in an urban school district, serving 10th-12th graders[9]. Pathways had a duel focus on leadership and environmental stewardship, placing their students into leadership roles as part-time camp counselors at the district-run wilderness camp. The students that attended Pathways went through leadership training and then spent 6-7 weeks of the year at camp, leading 6th grade students who visited for a week at a time. Pathways also had a strong focus on school community and teacher-student relationships, with all the teachers going by their first names.

Roles. Youth at Pathways were leaders. From the beginning of the year, and throughout every activity until graduation, they were positioned and trusted as leaders. The heart of their leadership role, of course, was in the actual leadership they did at camp, but leadership also extended into the school community and their academic learning.

Redefining school, success and learning, and youth narratives. Through the framework of leadership and environmental stewardship, youth experienced a new model of school. The role of leader and the experiences it provided, helped redefine success at Pathways

[9] During the year of the study the school was piloting a second one-year sister program focused on 12th graders who wanted to stay enrolled in a Pathways type school and, the year following this study, they added a third one-year program for 11th graders. Both of these additional years had elements where students could earn college credit as part of their participation in the programs.

to include, but also extend beyond grades and academics. Leadership focused on personal growth as youth sought to become better leaders at camp and in the school community.

History and Demographics

Pathways was originally created as a semester-long program for high school students to become leaders at the district-run wilderness camp where elementary school classes would visit during the fall and spring. Over time the program grew in enrollment and expanded to a one-year program that had just shy of 50 students and three teachers. As the program grew, it also shifted to primarily enroll youth who were at-risk of not graduating and/or who were looking for an alternative to the conventional high school learning environment.

The school district that Pathways was a part of had nearly 71% of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch. During the years 2008-2013, 73% of students attending Pathways qualified for free or reduced lunch and during the study year 54% qualified. In the academic year 2014-2015 52% of the student body at Pathways identified as Hispanic, 31% Caucasian, 8% Asian/Pacific-Islander, 5% African-American, and 5% identified as two or more races. Additionally, 18% of the students attending Pathways were on special education plans. During the study year the program had an equal representation of male and female students. Pathways had a strong, positive relationship with the school district central office, which was very supportive. The program was honored within the district and regionally for its successes with youth. It was partly due to district encouragement that Pathways increased from one to three one-year programs within two years.

My entry into Pathways High School was facilitated by informal meetings with the principal and staff at the school the year prior to the study. I originally emailed the principal,

Rebecca, who immediately embraced the idea of collaborating. Later that spring I met with two of the teachers at Pathways, both of whom welcomed the study to begin in the fall of 2014.

School Community

Students at Pathways typically referred to the school community as a family. The talk about family began at a very early point in the school year, facilitated by the many overnight trips the school took. Another way the school built a family atmosphere was by dividing the group of 40-some students into two groups of approximately 22 students[10]. However, these groups were not static throughout the year, but changed five times. The teachers reorganized the groups so that the students could get to know every other student in the school. They took into account friendships, romances, conflicts (though they were few), and siblings, while also trying to keep an even gender balance in both groups. The smaller groups helped facilitate the experiential activities the school used, but also provided more frequent opportunities for youth to build community, creating shared repertoires and notions of mutual engagement and joint enterprise.

Pathways Schedule

As opposed to many school schedules that follow a daily, two-day, or weekly routines, the Pathways' schedule needed to be viewed over the course of a semester or a year to see the routine and pattern. There was logic in Pathways' schedule, but it was not logic based on bells or blocks, it was based on the seasonal opportunities available to the students. The schedule at Pathways was built upon the idea of youth taking on integral roles in the school and to provide experiences that helped build the school community. In the fall, when the weather was nicer, at

[10] The year after the study the school moved to a three-group model, opting for smaller, more permanent groups, which also more easily allowed for travel for experiential activities.

least half of the school was always at camp. This created a sort of flip flop with half the school at camp, half at the school campus. Then, in mid- November, the camp slowed down for winter and all students started attending the school campus. Starting in March, groups of Pathways students began leading at camp again. This continued until the end of the school year.

Classes were typically two a day, each running two and half hours. Only a few of the classes were held throughout the year, most only held for a handful of weeks multiple times during the year (ex. two weeks in October, five in January/February, and another three in April). This model allowed for a larger range of classes to be offered and for the many experiential opportunities at the school. Some of these opportunities were offered in the colder and wetter months, such as snowshoeing trips and internships, but the program really thrived during the early fall and spring, when the camp was hosting classes of sixth graders. Other significant events were an end-of-year backpacking trip and the midyear presentations of learning, where, for one evening, the school invited in parents to see youth present on posters which they had prepared that demonstrated this first semester learning. Leading up to this event and also at the end of the year, the school had a week of individual conferences. This also served as time for students to catch up on their work for their classes.

School Contexts

As a school, Pathways lived in two spaces. One location was in the school district, comprised of a few portables, and was where the majority of the classroom learning occurred. The other location was at the district run camp roughly forty miles from the school.

Pathways Camp (photo below) was much like one might imagine a camp to be. There was a large dining hall, a large open hall with a stage, small buildings with bunks, and numerous outdoor activities, including a network of trails. There were also a handful of all-purpose cabins

where different small group activities occurred, such as the Pathways leader meetings and the 6th grade classroom activities, such as identifying animal tracks and learning to use a compass. On the outside of the sleeping cabins were different inspirational words, like "teamwork" and "leadership".

Figure 1. Photo of Pathways Camp

In contrast, the Pathways school campus was located on the border of a residential area and an industrial area. A local airport was nearby and planes were frequently overhead. Pathways was adjacent to an unaffiliated alternative middle school. These two programs shared a few common spaces, but students rarely interacted. Physically, Pathways was four large portable classrooms, connected by a wooden platform that they all sat on (photo below).

Figure 2. Photo of Pathways campus

The classrooms were made up of tables and chairs, typically arranged in a large square or horseshoe, facing the front of the class. Some artwork and schoolwork from previous years hung on the walls. One that stuck out to me reminded students that they were Mr. and Ms. at camp (photo below). This poster served as a material resource that helped to scaffold them into the roles of leader that they were afforded and, with those roles, their identity development at the school.

Figure 3. Pathways classroom poster

Youth Perspectives of Pathways: Survey Results and Analysis

In the first phase of this study, I surveyed and interviewed all youth participants to provide insight into my research questions on what resources are available for youth identity development in the alternative schools and how youth identities in the alternative schools contrast to the identities they had in their previous schools.

On the surveys (Appendix A), youth were asked 1) their age, 2) why they decided to start attending the alternative school, 3) what they like the most about the alternative school, 4) how the alternative school is different than their previous school, and 5) how they spent their time outside of school. Questions 1 and 5 provided options for the youth to circle, with question 5 also providing an "other" write in possibility. Youth could circle as many options as they wanted for question 5. Questions 2, 3, and 4 were all free response.

At Pathways, 22 participants filled out the survey. Five youth were 15 years old, 10 of the youth were 16, 4 were 17, 2 were 18, and 1 was 19. Responses to question 5, about interests, are represented in Table 6a. In addition to what youth circled, three participants wrote in activities: "Soccer", "Social Media", "Sleep!", "Spending time with my family", and "Walking my dog". For questions 2 through 4, I examined the various responses that youth provided. If one youth provided multiple reasons in a response, I documented all of those reasons in Tables 6b-6d.

In response to the second question, "Why did you start attending Pathways?", youth responded in terms of why they left their previous schools and why Pathways was a school they wanted to attend. Youth responses are presented in Table 6b. The responses focused partially on what they disliked about their previous schools, but the predominant theme of their responses was on opportunities that Pathways provided. Other comments outside the two major themes,

and not represented on Table 6b, included the ways that they had heard about Pathways and what led to their decision. These responses focused on friends who had previously attended Pathways and experiences at camp as a 6th grader and a one-week leader: other friends went to Pathways previously and said it was "amazing", friends told them about it, sister's best friend was at Pathways the year before and it sounded interesting, wanted their 6th graders to have a better time than they had at camp, ever since 6th grade they wanted to be a leader at camp, and decided to attend after being a one-week leader. Within responses about the opportunities that Pathways provided, many youth focused on leadership and community as values they had as students. Pathways as an alternative school was appealing to the youth in the study because it was not their previous school, but more so because of the alternative education that it provided, both in terms of the roles afforded youth and relational resources. Though the survey was given early in the year, ideational resources were already present, specifically school as family and leadership as personal growth.

Responses to the third question on the survey, "What do you like most about Pathways?" are represented in Table 6c. These responses focused primarily on relationships (school community, other students, and teachers) and secondarily on programmatic features (leading, camping, small classes, small school, active and hands-on learning). In addition to the two predominant categories of responses, there were three responses (not represented in Table 6c) that focused specifically on themselves as individuals. These were: don't fear for their safety like they did at their previous school, I feel more comfortable here than at previous school, and "I'm somebody here..!" As with question 2, youth focused on community as the feature of the school that was most meaningful to them. Of note is the frequent presence of terms like "family", "community", and talk around compassion and caring. While leadership and environmental

stewardship were the ideational focus of the school, it was the relational resources of the community that seemed to be of high value at the beginning of the school year. While multiple elements of school were redefined over the course of the year, school community was the first to be redefined, where youth not only talked about the school as a family, but talked about themselves as a part of that community.

For question 4, "How is Pathways different from your previous school", youth responses focused on teacher/youth relationships, school community, the activities and programmatic feature at Pathways, the school size, structural features of the classes, and views of what and how they are learning (Table 6d). In addition to these six main categories, one youth responded that the rules were different and that at their previous school people didn't care if they showed up (not represented in Table 6d). In the responses both about teachers and the community, the idea of caring was prevalent. An interesting comparison between responses to question 4 (about school differences) and responses to question 3 (about what they liked about the school) is the increased number of comments about the teachers in question 4. While youth liked the family community of the school, many of them recognized the relational resources that the teachers provided and how different that was from their previous schools. Looking more closely at the comments about teachers, youth seemed to particularly value that teachers "actually" cared and supported them. Though relational resources and opportunities the school provided were present in responses to questions 2 and 3, differences in class size and structure were more present in question 4. School size, class structure, and instruction were recognized as important differences, but did not come up as frequently for reasons the youth came to Pathways or features they like the most.

The survey responses provided some useful initial insight into the identity resources at

Pathways. In particular, the relational resources at Pathways seemed important to youth, not only in the student/teacher relationships, but also the community as a relational resources. Both student/teacher relationships and community redefined school and how youth participate in school in an important way. The norm of caring seemed important to youth and how they existed at the school. Caring teachers and school as family were in contrast to the schools they had come from. In phase one, I also focused on the contrast of identities youth had at the alternative schools and their previous schools. The surveys provided initial insight into this question, indicating that their previous identities felt a lack of caring and community in comparison to their developing identities at Pathways.

DJ

During my first interview, DJ talked about the difference between the ways he acted at Pathways Camp and how he acted at his old school and outside of school.

> Gavin: Can you tell me a little bit about who you felt you were in the two situations, and also how people, you think, saw you outside of the wilderness program?
> DJ: I'm still really funny and outgoing and stuff, but I guess I still had a shell at my old school. I was walking around with this guard on my shoulder… The thing about me, my friends, we've done some crazy things. You look at me, 'Oh, he's never done that.' The thing that makes me mad is that I have done, I did do those things… You don't see, because I'm always smiling, I'm always having fun. It's always been a struggle between, a fight between the two DJs, I guess. The one at [my old] school, the one 'I want to be tough,' I don't want people seeing [me as] weak'... Then at Pathways Camp it's like, this is a brand new DJ, and love, always open to learning new things and being himself. It's always been a fight between those two, because I felt like if I brought that person at camp to my old school, would I get accepted, would I be accepted? How would people change their opinion about me? (DJ Interview, 10/20/14)

Negotiation of Contradictions

DJ identified the difference between how he acted at Pathways and how he acted at his former school and around his old friends as "the two DJs". In this quote DJ talked about the ways in which the "two DJs" were, in part, products of the environments in which they occurred.

Though in school, DJ developed a strong identity as a leader, the "two DJs" was the primary contradiction that DJ negotiated as he figured out how his Pathways identity could exist outside of school.

Iteration

Iteration at Pathways was a systematic and intentional process of youth becoming leaders and members of the school community. As described before, youth trained to be leaders, then practiced with their peers, before fully taking on the role as leaders at camp, a role they iterated on throughout the school year. Additionally, iteration occurred in classes, as youth practiced and reflected on their leadership and their personal growth. Through iteration of the leadership role, youth simultaneously redefined school, success, learning, and their membership in the school community.

Data Collection

I collected data on DJ throughout the 2014-2015 school year (Table 7a). During that time I interviewed DJ seven times, with one additional interview in December of 2015. I also interviewed three key individuals from DJ's life. I interviewed one of DJ's close friends, who attended the Pathways second year program. I also interviewed DJ's sister, who was another student at Pathways. Finally, I interviewed DJ's unofficial mentor, who convinced DJ to enroll in Pathways and guided him through his school year. I observed DJ in classes at Pathways nineteen times and six times at Pathways camp. Additionally, DJ led me on a tour of his home neighborhood. I provide a timeline of the data I collected on DJ (Table 7a) to help understand the ways the collected data followed DJ throughout the year.

DJ Across Contexts

While DJ talked about the "two DJs", he was not simply shaped by his environment.

There were aspects of DJ that stayed the same across the contexts in which he participated. As DJ described himself earlier, he was almost always outgoing and very friendly, yet he was also somewhat reserved and shy, never one to dominate a discussion. He was also optimistic and positive and appreciative of those in his life.

DJ was an 11th grader. He was the shortest male student at the school (a physical attribute I repeatedly observed other students at Pathways and 6th graders at camp bring up) and was incredibly outgoing and friendly. DJ is Vietnamese, wore his hair shaved on the sides and pulled back into a ponytail. DJ also identified as male and heterosexual. He typically dressed casually, but purposefully and fashionably. Early in the study, DJ went out of his way to say hello to me and often was smiling. At the end of every interview I asked participants if they had any questions for me. Sometimes they did, often they did not. DJ always did. He would ask me how I was doing, how the study was going, how my daughter was, or just sharing some positive comments about the school or about life.

Though DJ identified himself as Vietnamese, he described his family as very different than many Vietnamese families, saying that they were more relaxed and did not go to church. DJ talked about how he was close to his mom and about his respect for his father, who was unemployed during the study.

Introduction to Pathways: Redefining School and Finding a New Home

DJ had not necessarily sought out a different school. Instead, after prompting from a friend, DJ became a one-week leader at camp, an opportunity for students at any high school in the district to attend a training weekend and then be a camp leader for a week. DJ's first week as a camp leader changed the way he looked at his old school and the life he was leading. DJ had done well enough at his former school, however, having experienced the different culture at

Pathways made him view his former school differently.

> I went in for a week and I loved it. I extremely loved it. I saw the person I am at Pathways Camp and the person I am in the real world, and I didn't like the person I was in the real world. I learned so much about myself in one week than I would ever learn at my old school. I found my passion and I found my home. I would come back to my old school and feel homesick. That's not home, it's like home away from home. I was walking to the classroom with my hoodie on. I feel like I get judged, to the point where I'm like, 'Can I wait outside?' I felt weird, people looking at me. I found this new passion and I learned so much about myself. It's something that people don't know about me. Now walking to the classroom, I know you guys, but you guys don't really know me. It's hard (DJ Interview, 10/20/14).

In his quote, DJ talked about the shift that occurred. Specifically, DJ reflected on the identity work that the week at camp provided him and the passion he had discovered. It is worth noting though that the passion DJ discovered was not an abstract interest, but wrapped up with the integral role he had as a leader at camp, in the practices that the leadership role afforded him, and the community that that role was embedded in. DJ felt he was having an impact on the sixth graders attending the camp and, while DJ did not have total autonomy in his role as a leader, he did have different, and perhaps more, autonomy than he typically did in school. As a leader at camp, DJ was quickly immersed in a model of school that redefined what school, school community, and success in school could be.

Having discovered his passion, DJ felt out of place in his old school, not fully understood by the people there because they did not have insight into the DJ from camp. At his former school, DJ could not easily transfer the passion he had found because that passion was so wrapped up in the role and practices at camp. People at his previous school did not know him the way people at camp had, nor did his old school have the same opportunities or relational supports as at camp.

The "Two DJs": Contradicting Identities

In his first interview, DJ talked about how important Pathways High School had been to

him and how his past year had been a process of wrestling with "the two DJs". One DJ was who he was before he came to Pathways, spending time with his friends from his old school, smoking weed, drinking alcohol, and stealing. The other DJ was "the strong confident man I want to be", who he was at Pathways. "One DJ wants to be tough and like I'm a stereotypical guy and male. The other one… [is] kind of soft and sensitive" (DJ Interview, 3/11/15). DJ talked about how, in many ways, his decision to attend Pathways was because he wanted to develop into the person he felt he could be. Yet he felt that the participatory and social norms of his old school were different enough from those at Pathways that he could not easily transfer his Pathways identity to his former school and his friends there.

DJ said that he was a good student prior to coming to Pathways, though he said he often would come to school high, having smoked weed at lunch. He reported that his grades were ok (A's, B's, and C's), saying his grades were "good enough to get by" (DJ Interview, 12/5/14), and that he tried to do well in school so as to not disappoint his parents. When DJ talked about his former school he talked about how it was a "ghetto" school, but he also spoke well enough about his former teachers – they seemed to be neither a strong positive or negative presence in his life. DJ seemed to have attended his previous school, but, in describing the school, did not talk about being a part of the community of practice. He did not indicate alignment with the school, nor did he indicate that he was a part of a shared repertoire or mutual engagement at the school.

After starting at Pathways, DJ remained in contact with two friends from his former school, though their role in his life shifted multiple times throughout the year. It was when he talked about his friends that DJ indicated the alignment, shared repertoire, and mutual engagement that he had not brought up when talking about school. Yet, at the same time, DJ talked about how the influence of his two friends, who he referred to as his "brothers", was one

of the reasons he chose to attend Pathways, looking to escape their negative influence. Yet, to DJ they were more than just a negative influence. DJ described his friendship, saying:

> My friends are, I guess, I see them as my brothers, but they're such a bad influence on me. I want them to support me with what I'm doing now. It wasn't easy to take this step to go to a new school and be away from them. I knew them ever since middle school. It's hard to step away from your friends (DJ Interview, 10/20/14).

In this quote and throughout his interviews, DJ captured the complexity and contradictions of trying to redefine who he was while maintaining old friendships that he cherished, yet also recognizing the negative influence they had on him. One of my research questions asks about the comparison between youths' previous identities and their identities at the alternative school. There was a noticeable difference between the norms, practices, and resources of the contexts in DJ's life. There was a change in DJ's identity as he joined Pathways, but it was a change of interaction with resources, practices, and significant relationships. The contradiction that DJ experienced was feeling torn between the resources that he had known at his old school and with his old friends and the resources available to him at Pathways. Dreier (2009) discussed that a person's conception of himself or herself includes an understanding of how they participate in multiple contexts and practices and that it also included coming to terms with different possibilities, relationships, and conflicts. Viewed this way, DJ's experiences trying to figure out his relationships with his friends was the process of developing a conception of himself.

Becoming Mr. DJ

Ultimately DJ went to camp three separate times as a one-week leader before starting at Pathways. Additionally, years before, he, like most of the students in the district, had gone to Pathways camp as a 6th grader. As a one-week leader, DJ gained peripheral membership into the Pathways community and an insider's perspective on the norms and practices at camp, providing him experiences with the figured world that existed at camp and Pathways. While containing

similarities to the figured world of school that DJ had years of experience with, the figured world of Pathways positioned school community and roles for youth in a significantly different way. It was a space where personal growth and emotional vulnerability were placed in high regard. I observed this in my multiple visits to camp, as youth shared their history, their goals, and the ways they sought to grow as a leader. In his initial time as a one-week leader and again when he became an official student at Pathways, DJ had experiences where he not only found and pursued his passion as a leader, but he also felt that he was a part of a caring community. He spoke about this during one of his interviews, when I asked about how the school had connected with him.

> I think one of the things is that I felt that love and that family… People were interested in talking to me. They had never met me before, never seen me before, but they were so open to talk to me. Ask me questions about my life and see how I'm doing. Like congratulating me, like 'Oh, good job'. I never felt that love and gratitude towards me, because why DJ, you know what I'm saying, why me? And I guess just that love and that family and that tight community they had, I'd always wanted and never, I couldn't, I always wanted that but deep down I couldn't say I wanted it because I didn't know what it was, I didn't know it exists (DJ Interview, 3/11/15).

In this quote DJ signals how the figured world of Pathways and camp were new and unfamiliar to him. It expanded his definition of school to school as a caring community and, in the fall, as a family. School as family was not something that he had experienced before, but, despite the newness of the community, what clicked for DJ was that he was valued as an individual within the school community. It was not simply that he was cared for, but that he specifically mattered. The role DJ was afforded merged multiple types of identity resources (Nasir, 2012) and Practice-Linked Identities (Nasir & Hand, 2008). There were relational and ideation resources, but those resources were specifically connected to having an integral role and the opportunity for self-expression in practice. The important distinction DJ made was not whether he was loved, but how much he could be himself. Another way to think about self-expression in practice is the ability to put one's personal stamp on something. DJ's comments seem to indicate the

importance of belonging and caring, but also being an individual within the community. For DJ, relationship building went beyond an adult saying they care or showing interest, DJ felt cared about in a way where he could be himself. While the youth and adults at Pathways facilitated DJ feeling he could be "the true DJ", it is important to recognize that the structure of the school program allowed these relationships to form and the school community to feel like a family.

Becoming a Star Leader: Inbound Trajectories and Central Membership

From the very beginning of the school year, it was clear that DJ had already begun to strongly affiliate with the school and the model of what it meant to be a successful student. He talked about the insider perspective he had from being a one-week leader and how other leaders often came to him for advice.

> Coming into this year, I'm being a leader. I knew the role I would have. I would have two times the experience as everybody else. I really know how the camp runs and how everything goes… Showing people, my peers, who I really am and demonstrating my leadership skills leading my peers to success (DJ Interview, 2/2/15).

He felt he had already begun the process of becoming a strong leader well before the first day of school. Penelope Eckert (1989) wrote about the access that the "jocks" had in her ethnography of social categorization in high schools. Specifically, Eckert wrote about how the jocks had insider knowledge to the workings of the school, knowing about school announcements before they were made public. Eckert demonstrated the importance this insider knowledge to the jocks identities in school. Na'ilah Nasir and Vickie Hand (2008) described the process of developing practice-linked identities and how access to the domain is a significant element of this process. One view of Eckert's work would be that the jocks had access to the domain of school or schooling. While not an academic domain, the domain of schooling contains just as many rules, practices, and significant resources as domains such as math, science, and social studies. As DJ described his knowledge coming into the school year, he talked of his insider knowledge of the

camp. DJ had access to the domain of the camp and being a leader there. This knowledge changed his status at Pathways, making him a resource for other students. When thinking of himself as a leader, he considered himself as more of an expert than many of his peers. However, while DJ talked about this expertise in his interviews he also typically said he needed to share his knowledge more often. DJ was able to write himself into the role of leader, making it his own. He was not the loudest or most outgoing leader at Pathways, but still he created his own definition of leader and was recognized in that role. As a leader, DJ made the role is own. He was not just filling a role, but he was uniquely needed in it, strongly impacting the Pathways community and the sixth graders he led. In this way the role was not just being a leader at camp, but also a leader in the school community.

Thickening Identities Through Performance and Vulnerability

As I began observing at Pathways, I was amazed at the speed in which the community was built amongst the students. I first met the students during the third day of school. I introduced the study and collected consent forms from those interested. Then, the following week I went to camp to observe orientation. Within that short time (five days) the students transitioned from a group of youth who didn't know one another to a close-knit community. Observing during my first day at camp, I felt like I was seeing youth who had known each other for years – telling inside jokes, shared choreography, and talking openly about their strengths and weaknesses. The few students who hung back were regularly brought into activities by the other students. Louise, one of the teachers at Pathways, described the first weeks this way:

> The first three weeks of Pathways are critical. We try to hit them with a fire hose at the beginning of the program. We don't worry about curriculum at all as far as academic curriculum. It is completely community building, group development, relationship skills, and it is critical to us that we be with our students overnight within the first two weeks. I think that's probably what makes the biggest change for people coming from the outside, and what doesn't get to happen in regular schools is there's exponential growth that

> happens amongst a group and between us and our students when you get to be with them overnight that never happens in a classroom if you see them for an hour a day. Those first two weeks, we basically create the norms. That's what it is. It's creating norms. (Louise Interview, 2/6/15).

The norm creating and community building helped construct a sense of family. "It's our family now," said DJ. "It's only been a month or two. It's been so fast… we always call each other family" (DJ Interview, 10/20/14). Another one of the teachers at Pathways, Bryant, talked about the first week and how the youth are the ones that start the discourse around family, not the teachers.

Within the first two weeks of school the students went on two overnight trips to camp. These trips were preceded by intensive team building activities at the Pathways campus. I observed the activities at campus and much of the second overnight trip, observing the instruction during the days (focused on leadership and science education) and the activities at night. The first night was superhero night, where the students individually got in costume and came on stage to reveal their leadership superpower. DJ was a samurai whose superpowers were understanding others and spreading smiles. Another student, Oda, was a superhero names "Cletus" and had the power of terminating negativity. Other students became "Math Man", "Pink Ballerina", "The Uplifter", and "The Bubbler", telling the school about their powers of helping people with math, showing every step, bringing happiness, speaking for the unspoken, and changing bad vibes.

The second night at camp was a poetry slam. The students read aloud poems they had written, revealing challenges they had gone through. The English teacher at Pathways, Ted, had guided students as they wrote their poems the previous few days. The poems included sharing about past experiences with drugs, violence, bullying, the challenge of making new friends, and family conflicts. A few of the poems stayed lighter in topic, such as one student talking about

not being a good student, but still being a nerd and another that talked about the importance of hugs. DJ read a poem he wrote about his experiences stealing and a time when he had a gun pulled on him that previous summer. In the poem DJ talked about a boy who wore a mask to cover up who he really was.

During an interview in early February I asked DJ about the poem I had heard him read at the beginning of the year. He told me how he had wanted to write about that time because it was "a really sensitive part of my life", but also said it had been something he was nervous to share. He said that it was something that people needed to hear if they wanted really know him.

> It was just something I was really nervous to talk about. I seem really confident, but when I got up there, I was really nervous. I'm not proud of it, but at the same time, if you really want to know me then I seem like that person who would steal stuff, but really inside if you really knew me, then I'm not like that at all. Basically [Ted, the English teacher] was just like, 'If you really wanted someone to know you, then what would you write about?' I chose that. It was kind of explicit. I used some bad words in there just to describe how I felt and how my summer [went] and the person I wasn't trying to be. Yeah, it just kind of opened me up to be more vulnerable to my peers (DJ Interview, 2/2/15).

Presenting his poem, DJ positioned himself as someone who was not just a good kid, but one who had made mistakes and was trying to change. The poetry slam was one of many moments that allowed youth the chance to perform. Through improvisation (Wenger, 1998), the performances provided opportunities to re-narrate their stories in a way that described them on inbound trajectories towards membership in the community. In this way, youth thickened their identities at the school. Later in the year these performances became less about inbound trajectories and more about indicating their central membership. The re-narration of stories that occurred during the poetry slam seemed to not only present a narrative arch toward community membership, but also indicated their credentials for membership, that they too had been through difficult experiences in life. This form of re-narration seems similar in ways to the process that

other communities use. Two examples of this are religious groups telling personal stories of finding religion and Alcoholics Anonymous (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The poetry slam and other moments throughout the year allowed the youth the chance to publically present their identities, while also demonstrating their ability to be successful at the school, focusing on an academic subject and on leadership. The poetry slam provided DJ and other students a performance opportunity where they could reveal sensitive aspects of their lives, while also authoring and positioning themselves to the other students. The risk involved in the poetry slam raised the stakes. Youth were putting their identities and their membership in the community on public display and the thickening process of membership and identity development sped up when the community responded with support and caring. An indication of this was the use of agentic nouns and pronouns in interviews and surveys. The youth at Pathways very quickly began talking about the school in terms of "I" and "we" when they talked about the school.

Opening Up: The Figured World at Pathways

The performances during orientation were not the only times throughout the year that youth were pushed to open up and make themselves vulnerable. DJ talked about how he had experienced that process of opening up right from the first week that he was a leader. DJ reflected back to how he acted in middle school and then talked about the change that occurred once he started as a leader at Pathways Camp. He said that prior to his experiences as a leader at camp he had not really talked about his feelings.

> When I went to camp, you had to talk about your feelings and how you feel and what are you doing here. I had to get out of my comfort zone and reach out. I was like I have to not care what people think about me right now and just talk about how I really feel (DJ Interview, 2/2/15).

In this quote, DJ talked about how the routines and practices at camp were different than they

were elsewhere – at Pathways they had to talk about their feelings in a way that was not the norm in school. Yet again, through moments of vulnerability, school was redefined. Later in the interview I asked DJ if he had previously had experiences of talking about his feelings.

> Gavin: When you said you went up to Pathways Camp you had to talk about your feelings. Do you feel like that was kind of the first time where you really had an experience where that was the case where you had to talk about your feelings or were there other times?
> DJ: No, that was the first time. I focused on other people and other people were doing the same thing. It's a newer experience I've never experienced before. People were crying and tearing up. I'm not used to that. I never cried in front of anybody. I never cried at all, but my last day there, I just broke down (DJ Interview, 2/2/15).

In his quote, DJ talked about making himself emotionally and socially vulnerable by crying in front of people. However, he also talked about how others were crying as well. DJ described Pathways as the one opportunity "where you have to be yourself and no one cares. People accept you for it" (DJ Interview, 2/2/15). In this definition, DJ framed the school in terms of identity and community – a place where he could be himself and he was accepted. He also defined the school in opposition to conventional schools, emphasizing this comparison by saying: "Where else can you get that?" (DJ Interview, 2/2/15). As I mentioned before, the figured world that existed at Pathways was different than what existed in DJ's previous school and in conventional schools in general. One example of this is how feelings were up for discussion in a way they're often not in conventional schools. I observed this practice during check-ins and discussions throughout the school year. Sometimes this was done through group conversation and sharing, other times through individual reflection. Framed within leadership and their participation in the community, youth were asked to reflect on and discuss the ways their feelings connected to their actions. From his first moments at Pathways, DJ experienced the duel process of making himself vulnerable and feeling support from the community.

"Mr. DJ": Rediscovering Identity Through Relational Resources

It was March – when the weather was starting to get nicer, and the school year was starting to feel long. It was a time of year when many of the students at Pathways were struggling. During my observations, I noted a lot of talk at Pathways, from teachers and students, about finishing the year strong and that how you finish shows who you are. In addition to feeling the impact of that point in the school year, DJ also was trying to start a relationship with a girl at the school. This came with lots of ups and downs, impacting how DJ's participation in class – he was more distracted and quicker to socialize than I had observed at other points in the year.

DJ recounted a significant moment when, up at camp, he had an interaction with Jimmy, his unofficial mentor at Pathways, who commented on DJ's distraction and said he was "letting other people in this group affect who you are as a person" (DJ Interview, 3/11/15). Jimmy told him that he wanted to see Mr. DJ again, "I want to see the DJ I only truly know" (DJ Interview, 3/11/15). Earlier that day DJ's friend Jules, who introduced him to Pathways, gave him a similar message. The interactions with Jimmy and Jules impacted DJ, making him reassess how he was acting and the direction he was taking in school.

> I realized that if I keep this going, I might fail my Pathways year and like I said, I hate to disappoint these two people… this year that was probably the turning point. If it wasn't for that overnight and the people who talked to me, I think I would still be doing the same thing I've been doing before. That was the turning point of my year (DJ Interview, 3/11/15).

DJ talked about how Jimmy and Jules reminded him of his goals and who he wanted to be and, in doing so, helped him reflect on his role and identity as a leader in the school community. It is worth noting that DJ's turning point moment came at a time when he was experiencing a level of risk. While there are certainly areas of greater risk in the lives of adolescents than romantic distraction, DJ felt at a moment of confusion and emotional turmoil. He specifically talked about how, for him, what he was going through felt difficult.

DJ's turning point also contained a performance, though a smaller one compared to others throughout the year at Pathways. The evening after talking to Jules and Jimmy, the Pathways community had a leader meeting where they reflected on their growth and the direction they wanted to go.

> Basically, we had to do is sit in a circle and… [take] accountability for ourselves and what we haven't been doing that we're not proud of and what we want to see from the whole group... I told them I was like, 'What I need from this group is just like to follow through because I see the potential in our group'… I was like, I said, 'I realize that lately I haven't been the best DJ I can be. I need to change… I just had to admit to everybody and to myself. I need to snap out of it because that's not good for me" (DJ Interview, 3/11/15).

In yet another moment of performance and iteration, DJ defined himself and his story to the Pathways community. It was a moment of identification and defining who he was and his goals for the remainder of the school year. Later that evening all of them were asked to write down who they wanted to be as they finished out the year. DJ wrote "Mr. DJ". This allowed him to once again iterate on what it meant to be a successful student at Pathways and to further develop his identity as a leader.

Two months later, during one of his last weeks at camp, DJ received a unique opportunity to take on a slightly different role at Pathways when he was asked to be an apprentice staff at camp. Instead of leading the sixth graders, DJ was part of the staff that helped run things behind the scenes and M.C. the key events throughout the week. At the end of the week, Jimmy, DJ's mentor, asked him to lead a closing campfire. Despite being nervous, DJ did well. As with other times throughout the year, leading the closing campfire provided a performance opportunity for DJ to present himself to the community in a public way. Thinking again about practice-linked identities (Nasir & Hand, 2008), the integralness of the role that DJ was given was significant. He was not simply given a role that had the appearance of mattering; the role truly did matter in

a high stakes way. DJ was given an adult role that he performed in front of his peers.

Leading Moments: Iteration of Integral Roles and Thickening of Identity

Thus far, in this chapter I have tried to capture multiple vignettes that describe the process of identity development for DJ as he interacted with the identity resources at Pathways. However, one thing that vignettes do not capture is the iterative process of leadership that occurred throughout the year. From September through early November youth went to camp every other week for four days and three nights. Then, starting again in March and going till June, youth spent one to two weeks a month at camp. Each week at camp, the youth would assist 6th grade teachers as they taught lessons on the wilderness and environmental stewardship. Additionally, Pathways students would be in charge of a cabin of 6th graders. Typically Pathways students were in pairs for cabin leadership, though each Pathways student got an opportunity during the year to lead a cabin solo. Leading the cabin included norm setting, emotionally supporting the 6th graders, some who were sad to be away from home, playing endless teambuilding games, leading the cabin as a group, preparing and performing skits, and representing cabin spirit throughout the week which included creating cabin cheers. At the end of each week of camp, the Pathways students reflected on their performance and set goals for the next leadership opportunity. I mention all of this to indicate the iterative process that youth at Pathways had interacting with the role of leader and a model of school where youth were active and impactful participants in their education. Through this iteration, youth were also able to redefine success in school and thicken their identities.

Podcast Star: Authoring Identity

While many of the opportunities and resources that helped develop DJ's identity at Pathways were part of the school program, one of the more significant ways in which he was

positioned occurred when he was selected by an environmental journalist to represent the school in a series of podcasts. Before the school year began, the journalist had learned about the Pathways program and decided to dedicate an episode to interviewing one student at Pathways. During her visit to Pathways camp, she chose DJ to be the star of the podcast. The initial podcast on Pathways Camp expanded into two additional podcasts that focused specifically on DJ.

As the star of the podcasts, DJ was given a new role, one where he was a public representative of the program, a central member at Pathways[11]. The role was significant, carrying with it an audience outside the school. In many ways, the podcast performance was higher risk than other performances with the potential for many people, including DJ's family to hear it. The risk associated with the performance provided real authenticity for DJ. It mattered in a significant way.

In April the first two of the podcasts were released online. The producer of the podcasts sent them to DJ and Jimmy. Jimmy called DJ the night he heard it.

> [Jimmy was] just like, 'Wow, I just wanted to call you because you inspired me so much and reminded me of why I do the things I do and why I do it.' He's like, 'It's not a single kid or children or adult that you haven't met that you haven't inspired. Just keep it going.' He said, 'It's been a rough year and a lot of changing. You got through it and you're still here.' (DJ Interview, 5/7/15).

After that phone call DJ said he had the courage to play the podcasts for his parents. He told me he was nervous to play the podcasts for them because, in the podcasts, he talked about his experiences with drugs and alcohol and because of how little, as a family, they talked about feelings. But, after playing the podcasts for them, DJ said he felt release and that his parents told

[11] It is also worth noting that DJ's role in this study may have positioned him in a similar fashion, though, so far, with less of a publically disseminated product.

him how proud they were. Jimmy also played the podcasts for the teachers at Pathways. One of the teachers, Ted, shared them with his friends, an act that floored DJ. Another one of the teachers at Pathways, Bryant, asked DJ if he would play it in his class as part of an activity to help students reflect on camp. DJ had to leave the room when the class listened to the podcasts, but when he returned the other students told him how great he did and how well he represented the school. The podcasts helped further position DJ as a leader and representative of Pathways. Additionally, the podcasts positioned DJ in a number of ways – as a youth who had persevered through hardships, as an eloquent and engaging young man, but primarily as a star leader.

Revisiting the Two DJs: Negotiating Contradictions in Developing Identities

While DJ's identity at Pathways thickened, he continued to wrestle with the contradictions of the "two DJs". Some of the dissonance began to resolve as DJ imagined ways to blend his worlds. In March DJ talked about how he was starting to feel less and less divided, becoming more settled in the DJ he was and wanted to be.

> The DJ talking to you right now is the DJ who I always want to see and never want to change. I never want to see two DJs again. I never want to see that old DJ, that rude or mean DJ. Just the DJ right here, me talking to you. That's the only DJ I ever want to see (DJ Interview, 3/11/15).

DJ expressed how he wanted to be the kinder DJ, the one he presented himself as at Pathways and during our interviews. He also talked about how wanting to be the kinder DJ did not mean he would always act the same – that he would act differently around friends than adults – that he knew how to code switch, but that doing so did not change who he was. DJ's identity had thickened, where who he was at Pathways was the foundation for how he acted elsewhere.

While DJ developed a thickened identity as a leader and school community member, he also continued to wrestle with how to blend his new identity with his relationships with his old

friends and their habits of smoking and drinking alcohol[12]. In the spring he told me how he was smoking weed and drinking again. However, these acts should not be regarded solely as DJ regressing into old friendships and habits. Viewing it that way neglects the complexity of the identities that DJ had developed in and outside of school. DJ's old friends were a significant piece of DJ's identity development. To DJ they were not simply bad influences.

> Jimmy tells me all the time, 'Why do you hang out with those guys?' Dude you need to understand… I have the ability to say no, but in those times I don't say no, it's on me not them. You have to realize these are my brothers since seventh grade. I will never forget it. It's a bond. It's a connection. When it's us three together, we are always talking about old memories. I think about old memories and what we did. That's good. I will never forget those guys no matter what happens, no matter what people say, 'They are a bad influence on you.' You can't forget your roots. If it wasn't for them, those mistakes that I made with them, Pathways would've never happened for me (DJ Interview, 5/7/15).

In his quote, DJ identified the challenge of redefining one's identity. Identity development and identity renegotiation is not a solitary act. It is also not only an interaction between an individual and their localized environment. Instead it is a complex web of interactions with the people and environments in one's life and the histories that are shared with others and that have helped develop one's identity. DJ hit on this when he talked about his mistakes bringing him to Pathways. Throughout the first semester at Pathways, DJ sought to redefine his identity, not forgetting his past, but choosing Mr. DJ over the person he saw himself becoming at his previous school and around his old friends. In his second semester, DJ negotiated what it meant to blend aspects of the two DJs, figuring out how to be the person he wanted to be in all settings of his life. Much of DJ's negotiation during his second semester, trying to resolve the contradictions between the two DJs, revolved around DJ spending more time with his old friends.

One narrative that exists in society is that of a good kid influenced by his bad friends and,

[12] It is important to note that, similar to most high schools, there were students at Pathways who smoked marijuana and those who did not.

thus, making poor choices. The moral of this narrative is that good kids need to make new friends, turning away from the bad influence of their old friends. While not necessarily bad advice, DJ's comments about his friends indicate the complexity of this scenario. DJ recognized the influence his friends had on him. However, he also recognized the bond he had with his friends and the importance of their friendship in his life. In essence, as DJ tried to negotiate the contradictions and tensions in his life, he sought to make Pathways and his friends an additive thing, where they all existed in his life instead of a replacement, where Pathways would fill the spot his friends formerly took.

In our interviews and in moments of reflection throughout the year, DJ talked about figuring out who he was in comparison to others. He talked about making sense of how to negotiate the friendships he had with who he wanted to be and how he wanted to live his life. DJ became more aware of others' influences on him and, doing so, he sought to resolve the contradiction between his two worlds.

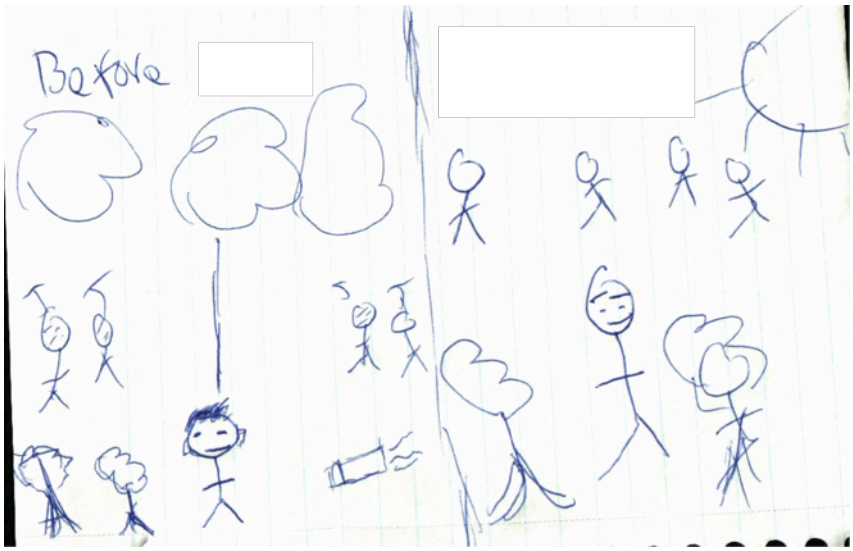
> Now I'm a leader wherever I go no matter if I smoke or drink, I still have... it's hard to explain because I guess my brain or my actions are used to making leadership actions I guess… Even if you do smoke or you drink, it doesn't end that. I wish I knew that before and accept that before, because if I knew that, then it would never be two DJs. Because to me, like I said being at Pathways for me, I thought it was, oh yeah, you have to be super good, no drinking, no smoking, get away yourself from that (DJ Interview, 4/9/15).

While I did not wish to see DJ turn back to smoking weed and drinking alcohol, I recognize that his process was one in which he had solidified his identity at Pathways and then sought ways to integrate it with the old DJ, trying to no longer see himself as different people in different settings. DJ talked about not just going back to the old DJ, but focused on the fact that he no longer felt there were two DJs. Instead, he had figured out who he was as a leader and had begun to carry that role and mindset with him. DJ had transitioned from the role of "Mr. DJ", which was a model of how to interact at Pathways, to a place where his identity from Pathways

was a part of who he was outside of school. DJ's drug and alcohol use demonstrate how identity development is not just a process of youth interacting with identity resources and redefining who they are in school, but also youth negotiating the contradictions they see in their lives. DJ found resolution for the contradictions he saw in his life.

At the end of the year, during an interview, DJ chose to draw a picture of himself, comparing who he was at his old school and who he was at Pathways (I provided a list of art and writing prompts as part of the interview protocol).

Figure 4. DJ's drawing of himself before and after Pathways



> So this before Pathways I have a couple clouds and there's a line splitting the middle… And I got a little cigarette here or a blunt here… And then at Pathways it's sunny. Friends all around me… There's no split. So you can see there's a clear split, there's clouds. I didn't know what I was doing. But no here, I seem a little happier and it's sunnier. I have friends all around me instead of just being a split (DJ Interview, 5/27/15).

DJ's year at Pathways was a story of him trying to figure out who he was as a leader and a member of the community, but also trying to figure out who he wanted to be. Though DJ wrestled with making sense of how he acted in the different spaces of his life, joining the family community of Pathways helped him create his identity. As the academic year progressed, DJ began to see himself as one DJ, the kinder gentler DJ from Pathways where he was a camp

counselor and a leader.

DJ shared similar reflections when he spoke at graduation. In his speech, DJ thanked all the people who had been there for him and how the year had taught him to "embrace the positives because the results of that process will be worth it". That night, DJ won the Pathways Legacy Award, an award given to standout leaders of the community. The award was presented to DJ from his mentor, Jimmy. The next day DJ emailed me. "Man, Gavin, I don't ever know where to begin… I felt like all my hard work this year had paid off in that exact moment. As you asked me before, 'Do you think you'll ever be successful in Pathways?' My answer to that was no, but now yes of course I think it has been a success, a tiny piece of what I call success, but good enough for now."

Chapter Summary

As DJ made his journey through the year at Pathways, he wrestled with developing an identity in the school and negotiating the tensions and contradictions between his new identity and who he had been and his life outside of school. Early in the year DJ identified as a leader, an identity that thickened and developed over the year. The role of leader gave DJ an opportunity to write himself into the practice and to distinguish himself as successful. Over time and in interaction with the rest of the school community, DJ redefined school and what it meant to be a successful student. The role of leader served as a way that he could iteratively practice becoming better, impacting the sixth graders he led and the rest of the Pathways community. At moments throughout the year DJ struggled with being a leader and being an adolescent, yet the relational resources at Pathways helped him continue to develop his identity as a leader. The moments where DJ was vulnerable, including the many moments of performance, became times where DJ's identity thickened. However, as he became more at home in his Pathways identity, he

continued to negotiate the contradictions between that identity and his friends and activities outside of school, a process he continued as the school year ended. In the next chapter, I turn my focus to Penelope and Redwood High School, the other case in this dissertation. Following that, I return to DJ and Penelope for a cross-case analysis.

Chapter Six: Findings Case Two – Penelope and Redwood High School

Case Introduction: Penelope and Redwood

In this chapter, I focus on the second of my two cases. As in the last chapter, the case is not just of an individual youth, but instead, is youth plus school. The youth in this chapter is named Penelope and the school is Redwood High School. Also similar to last chapter, I start by introducing the school and framing the roles and redefinitions of school that existed at Redwood. I, then, describe the school history, demographics, community, setting, and schedule. Woven throughout the first sections are pieces of the structure, norms, and resources at Redwood. Following my description of Redwood, I spend the remainder of the chapter describing Penelope and her identity development at Redwood. I begin by introducing Penelope and two processes that were pertinent to her identity development: iteration and negotiating contradictions. I, then, describe her reflections on her previous school, before shifting my focus to her experiences and perspectives at Redwood.

Similar to DJ and Pathways, the case of Penelope and Redwood is one of youth identity developing as a process of interaction with the resources afforded by the school. However, different from the previous chapter, Penelope is more of a case of a youth moving away from a school where she felt alienated, into a school with vastly different routines and values. It is also about the process of her becoming a member of the alternative school, adjusting to the norms and ideologies at Redwood. For Penelope, a large part of that process was negotiating contradictions by shedding the ideas of school that she carried in from her previous school, while also navigating her life outside of school. I focus in particular on roles and redefining as resources for identity development, as well as, iteration and negotiation as processes for that development. Doing so, I seek to answer my research questions around how Penelope's identity developed,

how that identity was in contrast to her identity at her former school, what resources were available at the alternative school for identity development, and in what ways Penelope's out-of-school life was brought into school at Redwood. As I analyzed my data, I discovered that these questions could not be answer individually, but were intermingled across Penelope's experiences throughout the year.

Redwood High School

The student run Redwood website described the school in this way:

> Redwood is a place where you can define yourself, where every lifestyle is always respected. Redwood is a place where you can be whoever you actually are, not tossed into any of thousands of binary boxes of any supposedly opposite continuum. Redwood is a place with respect and without assumptions. Redwood is a place where whatever you wish to call yourself or however you wish to be seen is respected. Redwood is a place where your work will be honored, where you can get credit for any work as long as you don't fake it. Redwood is ***Not*** a place for worksheets. Redwood is a place for the self-motivated super students who want more materials and time to work in a school setting. Redwood is also a place for struggling students, who need a different kind of help. Redwood is a place for leaders, and a place for communal work, and also a place for independent projects and studies for credit. Redwood is a place where you "have the authority to craft your own adolescent journey" If You Want It. It's a place to heal, to grow and to learn. It's a place for the student who wants to read hundreds of books and receive English credit and the student who needs help reading. It's a school for those who want to start out with a journey like this, and those who feel that the standard high school machine has failed them and want a new place to go. Redwood is a place where you have a voice in how your school is run. Not if elected, but by virtue of being a student at Redwood. Where teacher, staff and Redwood students speak as equals. **There is no other high school like Redwood, and we would be happy to have you.** (Redwood website)

This description of Redwood captures so many pieces of the school culture and the approach to youth. It captures the perspective on learning, credits, identity, community, choice, and Redwood as an educational alternative and, encompassing all of these things, indicates the figured world that was at play at Redwood.

Roles. Redwood did not have the same type of roles for youth that Pathways did, either in routine or dedicated label. However, viewing roles as a set of practices and a certain position

within the school community, Redwood afforded youth roles that contained increased choice and agency, putting youth in charge of their education. Additionally, youth were asked to play a larger part in the operation of the school.

Redefining school, success and learning, and educational narratives. The roles youth were given at Redwood were interwoven with alternative definitions of school and the school community. School at Redwood was based on personalization and individual choice and the community focused on acceptance, social justice, and safety. Success was not judged by grades, but on personal exploration and expression. In the next sections, I will introduce other features that influenced the way that school was redefined at Redwood.

History and Demographics

Redwood was an urban alternative public high school. In 1970, seeking an alternative to educational options offered by the school district, a group of students, parents, and teachers founded Redwood High School. Since 1970, the school had been one of the consistent alternatives in the school district. Redwood also embraced a focus on democratic education, in which youth participated in how the school was run. In the last few decades, the school also increased its focus on social justice and became known as a safe and welcoming school for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth. Similar to Pathways, the teachers at Redwood all went by their first names. As I will discuss later, the teachers were also advisors, in which they served as key adults for a small group of students at the school, meeting with them on a regular basis. All of these features served as resources for youth identity development and helped scaffold youth into new agentic roles they were given at the school.

In the 2013-2014 school year, Redwood had 330 students and 27 teachers and support staff. In that same year, the student body was comprised of 70% Caucasian, 8% Hispanic, 7%

Black, 7% Asian/Pacific-Islander, 6% identified as two or more races, and 1% Native American. In the same year 28% of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch and 22% of the student body was on Special Education plans.

Though Redwood had been around for over forty years, the school had a somewhat tenuous relationship with the school district. Matt, the school principal, told me about having to constantly advocate for the school and how he felt that administrators from the central office rarely understood Redwood. One example that he shared with me was how the district defined graduation rates as graduation within four years and how a portion of Redwood students typically took longer to graduate, in part due to the different figured world at Redwood that focused more on educational process than normative definitions of graduation timelines. Three years prior to the study, Redwood had been forced to change buildings and to accept a number of transfer teachers who were not all a correct fit for the school. Matt (and other teachers at the school) told me that, during the year of this study, they finally felt they had a gotten to the point of having a staff that shared a similar vision of Redwood.

My entry into Redwood High School was facilitated by previous informal meetings I had with the principal and teachers at the school. In 2011-2012, I conducted a smaller pilot study that paved the way for this study. During the pilot study, I met Doris, one of the teachers at Redwood. Doris taught a class for incoming transfer students that helped them orient to the, often unfamiliar, structure and norms of the school. As I prepared for my dissertation, Doris and I continued to communicate, and she helped me plan many elements of this study.

School Community

A consistent pattern across my interviews and informal conversations with youth and adults at Redwood were talk of Redwood as a welcoming and safe a community. They referred

to the school community as kind and accepting and that youth were encouraged to be themselves and to explore their identity. One specific feature that I observed was how, as a form of introduction, teachers would ask youth to introduce themselves by name and preferred pronoun (and sometimes a third piece, such as favorite breakfast cereal). In addition to occurring in classes, the principal, Matt, talked about how he asked preferred pronoun at orientation events. I mention this as just one of the ways adults and youth at Redwood represented themselves as accepting in ways that are not typically seen in school. These introductions provided ideational resources for youth to access the figured world of the school, by signaling to youth what the values of the community were and also indicating the available identities at Redwood.

Another element of the school was the abundance of artistic talent. It seemed that every student had one or more artistic talents and were constantly showing them off as they completed various school projects. Students knit, students drew, students acted, students danced, students created digital animations – the role of artistic expression at the school was seemingly endless, indicating the value on artistic expression in the community. The range of artistic expression also demonstrated multiple entry points into school community. Based on my observations, the value was in expression, less in talent.

Committees provided a role for youth where they had a significant voice in how the school was run. Committees were groups made up of students and faculty that help govern the school. They focused on such things as budget, hiring, and building a safe community. The committees represented the philosophy of democratic education, an important piece of the figured world at Redwood. In doing so, committees provided roles for youth that had an actual impact on the school.

While committees provided an important role for youth, the Advisory system provided a

key relational support and a place where youth could reflect on their academic progress and identity development. Advisories were multi-aged (9^{th}-12^{th} grade) classes, made up of roughly 20 students. In conjunction with Advisory, advisors met individually with each of their advisees on a regular basis. The central role of Advisories and advisors at Redwood acted as a relational resource to help youth access the structure and routines of the school, while also providing a venue for youth to blend their in and out-of-school lives.

The majority of the classes at Redwood were discipline specific: Chemistry, World History, etc. Others were thematic: a history course centered around whistleblowers or an English course that focused on mythology across cultures. Students were also given the opportunity to take independent courses, where they would focus on a particular topic outside of school, such as dance; they would document their time, and demonstrate proficiency with a teacher at the school. Students also would sometimes co-teach courses with teachers at the school. One example of this co-teaching was the Redwood 101 course on which I focused my observations during the first semester of the year. The courses at Redwood seemed to indicate the value of choice and personalization at the school. Additionally, there were no grades at Redwood. Instead, all of the classes were credit/no credit. While a primary focus of this dissertation is to look at the present identity resources available for youth, the absence of influence can also play a significant role in identity development. Specifically, with the backdrop of normative education, the absence of grades helped youth redefine school and focus on personal meaning instead of the grades they received.

School Context

In the year of the study, Redwood was housed in a former middle school. The building was split between Redwood and another alternative school. The two programs rarely interacted,

though they shared a library and a cafeteria. Doris' room (photo below) was where the Redwood 101 class was held and where I spent most of my time during the fall semester.

Figure 5. Photo of Redwood 101 classroom

Many of the classrooms were variations of Doris' room. Some were divided, half the room with a circle of couches and chairs and the other half more traditional, tables and chairs. None of the classrooms I observed had the rows and individual chairs that are often present in conventional schools. In my observations, youth talked about how the living room feel of the classes signaled both the value of conversation and community and also the shift in power dynamics between youth and adults at the school.

The walls of Redwood were painted with different murals and artwork. Some posters promoted upcoming activities that were a mix of those traditionally held in high schools, such as dances and theater productions, and events focused on social justice, including protest rallies, screening of movies around race and inequality, and a group that met regularly about food justice. The space itself seemed to indicate what it meant to be a student at Redwood – artsy, edgy, political, but, most importantly, outside the mainstream of education. Walking into Redwood

gave me the immediate impression that this was not a conventional school and that the norms of school were different here.

Having provided a backdrop for Redwood as a school, I will now transition to discussing Penelope. I will begin by introducing Penelope and her previous experience in high school and then will discuss her identity development at Redwood.

Youth Perspectives of Redwood: Survey Results and Analysis

As with Pathways, in the first phase of this study I surveyed and interviewed all youth participants at Redwood. My focus in the first phase of the study was on my research question on identity resources available at Pathways and Redwood and also, though to a lesser degree, on the contrasting identities youth had between their former school and the alternative schools. The surveys (Appendix A) asked youth 1) their age, 2) reasons for starting at Redwood, 3) what they liked most about Redwood, 4) how Redwood was different from their previous school, and 5) how they spent their time outside of school.

At Redwood all 10 participants filled out the survey. Six of the youth were 16 years old, and the other four youth were 15, 17, 18, and 19. Responses to question 5, about interests, are represented in Table 5a. In addition, three youth wrote in activities: “Dance!!”, “horseback riding, choir”, and “I also do U.S. Army JROTC”.

Responses to the second question on the survey, “Why did you decide to start attending Redwood?”, are captured in Table 5b. The majority of responses focused on negatives of their former school. Additionally, responses also included a focus on what they had heard about Redwood or seen during a tour and personal reasons that did not directly connect to their former school or Redwood as a program. Responses regarding their former school included general dislike, as well as social tensions and lack of connections. Youth also included responses about

how their former school made them feel – angry and anxious. Redwood had an appeal because it was an alternative to youths' previous schools that, for a variety of reasons, they were leaving. A few youth commented on what Redwood provided, but it was not their primary reason for attending.

Youth responses to the third question, "What do you like about Redwood?", are represented in Table 5c. Youth wrote about student choice and agency, teachers, relationships, and responses connected to perceived features of the school. There was also one outlier response, not represented in the table, that the youth liked his bookkeeping class the previous year. In contrast to responses to question 2, responses to question 3 did not have a strongly predominant theme. However, looking across the themes, most of the responses focused on increased choice and agency and relationships with teachers and the community. These responses highlighted ideational and relational resources available for youth at Redwood. Specifically, teachers as sincere, wise, and trusting, and choice and freedom in their education. Within these resources the definition of school and of student was different than in their previous schools. Youth were put into a role that contained responsibility and agency.

Similar themes were echoed in youth responses to question 4: "How is Redwood different from your previous school?". Table 5d presents youth responses to question 4. The focal point of youth responses was on their previous school, a focus on things Redwood provided, many framed as improvements to their previous school, and also on how Redwood made them feel compared to their previous school. Finally, there was one outlier (same youth that was the outlier for question 3) who said it was not that different (response not represented in Table 5d because it was not a major theme). Youth responses that focused on their previous school were all critiques and indicated that Redwood bad the potential to be less judgmental and less focused

on grades, to name a few. Most responses focused on features of Redwood, highlighting how youth saw that Redwood provided more freedom, more interesting classes and conversations, and different structures, such as no grades or a different approach to homework. The final theme in the responses was that youth felt differently at Redwood – feeling less isolated, that they were treated like a human, and that they "Don't wake up with a gaping hole of depression in my chest every morning because I have to go to school". All of the responses in the major themes focused on the things that Redwood gave them and/or improvements over their previous schools. In contrast to responses to question 3, youth did not mention community or teachers as much when comparing their two schools. Different relationships with teachers was what they liked about Redwood, but not seen as a definitive difference. Looking across all responses to questions 2 through 4, the redefining of "student" at Redwood seemed a central feature of survey responses. The roles that youth were afforded, roles that included increased choice and agency, provided an ideational resource for youth to think about their participation in and alignment with the school. Additionally, Redwood in contrast to their previous schools, was a strong theme across responses, particularly when compared to responses from youth at Pathways.

Similar to survey responses from Pathways, survey responses from Redwood helped highlight the importance of considering school contexts when thinking about youth identities. While youth at Redwood did not specifically talk about their previous identities in school in every survey response, they indicated the ways that their former schools lacked choice and freedom, strong, trusting relationships with teachers, and the ways that their previous schools impacted their emotions and well being. Survey responses also helped highlight significant identity resources, such as relational resources with teachers and the importance of self-expression in practice.

Penelope

In March of the study year, I asked Penelope to describe her first semester at Redwood. This is what she said:

> [Starting at Redwood] was just weird at first… I guess it felt kind of like a fairytale at first. My mom and I moved to this new house… Then I started going to Redwood which was also this magical experience for me cause it was so crazy that students could have such independence and could choose what they want to do and have fun with learning. For the first time since middle school I was actually having fun, and I wanted to go to school in the morning… I was so excited to go to school and go to classes and have these really intense discussions… It wasn't this weird fashion show that happened at the previous school I went to… I guess it was kind of towards the middle of the semester when I noticed my thought process started changing (Penelope Interview, 3/27/15).

Negotiation of Contradictions

Penelope's story during her first year at Redwood is a different one than DJ's story at Pathways. It is less about a youth divided, trying to find a true self. Instead, Penelope's story is about entering a new space and the process of becoming a member of an alternative school community – a process that, for Penelope, was just as much about letting go of her ideas and anxieties from her previous school, as it was about learning the routines and norms of a new and different school. Penelope's story tells of the ways in which Redwood fit into the grander scheme of Penelope's life outside of school, including both passions and challenges.

Iteration

The iteration of identity that occurred at Redwood was not done in the same systematic way it was at Pathways, with youth repeatedly practicing to be leaders, but instead existed in the day-by-day experiences across the classes and contexts of the school. Be it discussions around pronoun preference, student agency, or critiques of mainstream education, youth had repeated practice with topics and routines that indicated a redefining of school and the roles of youth. These experiences were placed in the context of personal growth and identity development. As

with DJ, negotiation of contradictions and iteration were significant pieces of Penelope's identity development at Redwood.

Data Collection

I collected data on Penelope throughout the 2014-2105 school year. I interviewed Penelope five times during the school year, once first semester and four times second semester. In addition to these interviews, I conducted a follow-up interview in December of 2015. I also interviewed Penelope's mom, Penelope's best friend, and Penelope's advisor at Redwood. During the first semester of the 2014-2015 school year, I observed Penelope in the Redwood 101 class eighteen times. During second semester, I observed her once in both her Physics and her American Government and Economics classes. I also observed her at the stables where Penelope took horseback riding lessons and I observed Penelope at home, where I got to meet the chickens she raised. Table 7b provides a timeline for when data was collected (Table 7b). I present it to show how the data collected represents a process over time.

Horseback Riding: Caring, Communicating, and Personal Growth

Penelope was a 10th grade student when she started at Redwood. She is mixed-race, Thai and White. She identified as female, preferring she/her pronouns, and identified as pansexual/questioning her sexual identity. She had short, bob-like, hair, which she began to dye different colors as the school year progressed. Penelope was kind and welcoming and always willing to make the time for an interview. When I first met Penelope, she introduced herself saying, "We have two goats right now, five chickens, and a dog" (10/8/14) and then went on to describe her history with horseback riding. Yet, it was the reasons she was a horseback rider that said the most about her identity.

I joined Penelope during one of her weekly Saturday visits to the stables. Once there, Penelope fed and groomed the horses, prepared her riding gear, and then, eventually, rode Frank, a 27-year-old female horse she had been riding for the past year. Frank had navicular issues in her front feet, needing regular medicine and care and consideration from her riders. Penelope explained that one of the main reasons she liked riding at that stable was because she was asked to take care of the horses, a practice absent in most other stables. Penelope had little interest in competing. For her, horseback riding was about connecting with the horses, getting to the point where she could communicate with them and get them to overcome dispositions and fears.

In many ways, Penelope's experience riding horses paralleled what she sought in her education and what she found at Redwood. For Penelope, riding was wrapped up in caring, understanding, and communicating. She had a role that mattered and relationships she valued. In addition, she went to a horse stable that was about personal growth and caring for horses, not about competing.

Redefining Risk

Penelope's story, like DJ's and like every youth that participated in my study, challenges the definitions and stereotypes of youth attending alternative schools. By most measures, Penelope was successful in her previous school. She did well academically, had some involvement in-school activities, and had multiple non-school affiliated activities, including horseback riding, roller derby, Girl Scouts, and choir. However, she sought out Redwood because she was unhappy with her previous school. Outside of academics, the school was failing Penelope. Yet, at the same time, Penelope's family life presented its own challenges.

Carol Lee (2009) talked about the term "at-risk", pushing against the ways in which it has unfairly been ascribed to African-American, predominantly male, youth. She stated that

everyone is at-risk in one way or another. While not "at-risk" of dropping out, Penelope was "at-risk" in the same way so many of us are, because "Vulnerability or exposure to risk is endemic to the human species, indeed to all life forms" (Lee, 2009, p. 64). In many ways, Penelope embodies Carol Lee's reframing of "risk". She was not at-risk of dropping out. She was not at-risk in terms of drugs or alcohol or illegal activities, such as tagging or shoplifting. However, Penelope was at risk in other ways, the ways that often accompany life. Penelope was "at-risk" because she was a teenager going through the long process and aftershocks of her parents having, what Penelope described as, "a really terrible divorce" (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15). Additionally, Penelope's mom was a breast cancer survivor, a diagnosis that occurred while Penelope was in middle school. Penelope's dad had remarried and, in the first months of the study, had another child, which, while not necessarily negative, carried a lot of emotional weight, as Penelope had to redefine her family and her place in it. All of this was increased by the fact that, in her former school, Penelope felt marginalized and disenfranchised. In many ways, Penelope left her former school and started at Redwood in the hopes of finding a school that recognized the reality of youths' lives in and outside of school, letting her be a person, not just a student. Penelope sought a school that, not only asked her to include her interests and knowledge, but also, with increased agency, allowed her to be herself, risk and all in school.

The events from Penelope's life are important, not because they indicate the risk factors she had in her life, nor because they inform us how much resiliency or grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Martin, 2013) she has by continuing to be successful in school. These events are important because they were events in Penelope's life. They are part of her story and her developing identity and were a key element in her interaction with the resources available at Redwood.

We are all at risk. We all have challenges and things that we wrestle with. Penelope's case is one that raises questions about the role of schools – teachers, classes, and school community – when youth face risk. At worst, the schools contribute to the risk (anxiety, alienation). At best, they leverage the risk to help youth make sense of it and what it means for their learning and identity. Penelope's former school fell somewhere in the middle. Through routines, social hierarchies, and a strict focus on academics, Penelope saw the school as too large and focusing entirely on her as a student, not as a person, and so ignoring the risks she was experiencing.

Penelope's Previous School: Resistance and "Doing School"

When I first asked Penelope about her former school, she immediately described it as "standardized" and that "nobody really had a choice of what you could do. You just had to meet the requirements" (Penelope Interview, 10/8/14). The school reported consistently high scores on state standardized tests and SATs. Additionally, the school had been recognized nationally as one of the best schools in America. On paper, the school was highly successful; yet, Penelope described how the focus on tests and the school size impacted her identity. She talked about the school size, saying: "It was very hard to feel individual when you're just mushed into this area with thousands of other students" (Penelope Interview, 10/8/14). Penelope made a connection between the lack of choices and her perceived lack of individuality. In this way, the school confined the space in which Penelope could explore her identity. Penelope viewed the goal of her former school as getting through – that the process didn't matter to the school, just that students were meeting requirements.

Newmann (1981) outlines four aspects of alienation: powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation/estrangement. In describing her former school, Penelope

expressed a lack of power and meaning, but instead of ascribing these qualities to herself, indicating that she did not belong, she ascribed them to the routines, size, and structure of the school. Additionally, Penelope did not express that she felt isolated but that she was largely unseen and was forced into a single unagentic role. While Penelope did not seem to feel a form of alienation where she was fully on her own, she did express elements of alienation in that she saw her former school as lacking meaning and forcing youth into powerless roles that prevented individuality. This provoked resistance.

> I was more quiet there in a way that was like a resentful quietness I guess… I did the minimum amount of work. That was another form of rebellion. I didn't see the point in doing busy work, so, why would I put a bunch of effort into it? (Penelope Interview, 10/8/14).

Literature on resistance (hooks, 1990; Kohl, 1994; Tzou & Bell, 2012) has explored the ways in which youth rebel against formalized structures in order to define their identities. When normative schooling does not represent the cultures youth come from and the identities they wish to develop, youth often choose to resist. Resistance can be exhibited through truancy, classroom disruption, apathy, non-participation, or just getting through. In the quote above, Penelope described the ways in which she pushed against a school structure she did not like. However, on the surface this form of rebellion may go unnoticed, especially compared to other more obvious forms of rebellion, such as truancy or drug and alcohol use. Penelope's quiet rebellion seemed to be a mixed product of her desire to do well, the expectations that others had of her, and her dislike of the system she was in. Penelope got all A's, but felt there was little value in the grades she received, that "the grading system's rigged" and did not represent intelligence or learning (Penelope Interview, 10/8/14). She talked about how the focus of her former school was solely on college, getting all A's, and doing a ton of extra curricular activities. She said that, at Redwood, she still felt able to do that, but:

> Now I've had this chance to explore more things and figure out what I actually want to do and how I want to get there, instead of just thinking about good grades and what… my teachers or this school district has been telling me (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

Penelope identified the shift she experienced as she moved away from the figured world of schooling or "doing school" (Pope, 2001), where grades are the ultimate currency and adult-youth power dynamics are created around that currency. At Redwood, there existed a figured world where one of the most significant features of the school was the absence of "doing school" in conventional sense. There were still credits and other features of schooling, but the currency and norms of the school were different. In this way, Redwood was always in contrast to the conventional mode of schooling and this contrast provided a significant resource. Additionally, Penelope talked about the difference in how the two schools perpetuated or resisted marginalization. When comparing her former school to Redwood, Penelope specifically mentioned sexuality and race.

> I didn't think about my sexuality at [my former school] because there was two people that had come out at that school. It's not really a supported or talked about thing. Race was not talked about unless ... Only the people of color actually talked about it, but they didn't do it in class. People were uncomfortable or something, it was just not talked about. A lot of things were overlooked (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

Penelope identified the ways in which marginalization can exist in subtle ways in school. By ignoring race and sexuality, normative modes of schooling and socialization within school were perpetuated. The mode of schooling that Penelope described overlooked race and sexuality, just as it overlooked individuality and youth as people, not just students. However, in her description of her former school, Penelope rarely talked about individual people. She did not rattle off a list of terrible teachers or mean students or authoritarian administrators (though all of these were certainly mentioned by other students in the study). Instead, Penelope described the structure and size of the school contributing to her experiences and the many things that were overlooked.

The Role of Context on Identity Development

Penelope's identity at her previous school existed in relation to the school she was in. Her identity was defined within school structures and routines. Penelope recognized this. Reflecting back on who she was at her former school, Penelope did not talk about herself as an abstract identity but saw the impact that the school had on who she was.

While Penelope was able to be objectively critical of her former school, her experiences there had an impact on her. Prior to the study and throughout the study year, Penelope tried to find a balance in her life, seeking a way in which stress and anxiety did not overwhelm her. She talked about the anxiety she felt at her former school.

> I was just anxious all the time. I would get up every morning feeling like I was going to throw up. I could not eat until 1:00 in the afternoon, which was really unhealthy. The only thing I could really do is I had a piece of fruit and some coffee and that was pretty much it. I couldn't do anything else (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

Connecting these comments to Penelope's other statements about choice and individuality, the anxiety Penelope described provides a unique perspective on choice and autonomy. Often autonomy and agency are considered important to motivation, learning, engagement, and identity development (Engle & Conant, 2002; La Guardia & Ryan, 2005; Nasir & Hand, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, in this literature, autonomy and choice are often described as positive qualities of learning environments. Penelope's comments seem to indicate the value of also looking at autonomy and choice, as risk prevention. One of the primary forms of risk that Penelope wrestled with was anxiety and stress. Part of her personal journey was to try to find a way to be more at ease. The expectations and lack of autonomy that Penelope faced created risk and, in her former school, it created an environment in which she wanted to escape. This is an important feature to consider when looking at my research question focused on comparing previous identities to identities in the alternative school. Specifically, Penelope described her

former identity in terms of how she interacted with the school structures and practices, not just as an internal sense of self.

Becoming a Redwood Student

While Penelope had many reasons for leaving her former school, starting at Redwood was a process of learning a new way of school: new routines, roles, relationships, and values. Her barometer during her first weeks at Redwood continued to be her previous school.

> The other schools I went to, at the beginning of the year, or every semester basically, the first week was spent reading the rules of the school and all the consequences. That doesn't happen at Redwood, which I really like because… it's not as stressful, because… at least for me, I was always like, 'Oh my gosh, what if I break one of the rules, then I'm going to get in detention, and it's going to be the worst thing' (Penelope Interview, 2/20/15).

In this quote, Penelope identified the ways in which rules and fear are laid as the foundation of participation at her former schools. At the start of the year, school rules were the primary ideational resource for youth to access the role they were given and the figured world of school. Rules positioned youth and defined the power structure at play. In her quote, Penelope also identified the ways in which the first weeks of school typically triggered her anxiety, fearing she'd break the rules and get in trouble, despite how rarely that happened. Redwood and her former school presented different images of school. These competing images created a contradiction. Penelope reflected on some of the differences between discipline at her former schools and at Redwood:

> At Redwood… if you do something wrong, the teachers talk to you about it, and they don't just like call your parents and make you talk to them in the middle of class. There's just more of an understanding kind of and knowing that wherever you're coming from, it's okay, and that they want to help you kind of build yourself up from that place (Penelope Interview, 2/20/15).

In talking about norms and discipline, Penelope identified the primary difference between the schools as the way teachers at Redwood communicated with students and sought to understand

where youth were coming from. As Penelope noted, this change is not just a difference in adult-youth relationships, but also impacted power and discipline at the school. The relational change, focusing on understanding youth ideas, perspectives, and rationales, changed the power dynamics, where adults still had some authority, but they were not disciplinarians enforcing set rules. However, Penelope did not experience an immediate shift in her anxiety around rules. The change in power dynamics and the absence of normative school rules flagged that there was a different definition of school and success; however, it took iterative interaction before Penelope was personally able to redefine school, letting go of the anxiety she carried over from the year before.

> This year, I think it was the same at the beginning for me. I got really worked up and stressed out all the time. I couldn't eat in the mornings. I've gotten the rhythm of Redwood and I started feeling more relaxed. [My advisor] was really helpful in helping me adjust and feeling more relaxed (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

As mentioned earlier, Redwood prioritized its advisory system. Advisors acted as the go-to person for youth at Redwood, helping them keep track of credits, choose coursework, and advise about non-academic lives in and outside of school. For Penelope, and other new students to Redwood, advisors served as relational resources that helped navigate the school and worked on building trusting relationships, redefining what it meant to interact with adults in school.

Redwood 101: Re-narrating Educational Histories

Redwood 101 was taught by Doris, a teacher who had been at Redwood for fifteen years, one of the teachers who had been at the school the longest. The Redwood 101 class was offered to transfer students to the school, and Penelope described it as “a semester long orientation” (Penelope Interview, 10/8/14). Doris’ description of the class, as it appeared on the school, student-run, website described the Redwood 101 class as follows:

> This is not like any class you have taken before. This is a class to take apart the knots,

> and forge/bond/create/tie new ones with education. We will create the class together, no pre-conceived knots. What is everything you wanted to know and didn't get taught? Come share, explore, and learn about voice. Requirements include, but are not limited to: research paper, essay, book project, presentation, participation. We hope you will learn how to navigate Redwood and your own education. We trust that you will take part in creating the curriculum, the meaning, the direction, and the voice. We look forward to working with you as individuals and as a group.

Though students were given English credit for the course and they spent much of the class writing and reading, the underpinning theme of the class was adapting to Redwood and examining students' previous school experiences, taking apart the "knots" of education.

Since Redwood 101 was the primary space I observed at the school, it was where I observed the most iteration. There were regular discussions in the class around the questions students had about Redwood, how their previous schools had defined success and shaped them, and the various forms of agency that were available at Redwood. Questions the students brought up ranged from the process of changing advisors to what to do for picture day – all of them were questions about the roles of youth at the school and the bounds in which the school was defined. Doris played a significant role in redefining school and the role of youth at Redwood. At one point in the first month of school, Doris reframed school discipline as she told the students how she described Redwood to strangers. She said:

> In my observations of being in a mainstream middle school and then coming here to teach, the reason there is so little management issues is because we give so much respect for you. That's in the structure of the school… The students get equal vote for hiring and budget and that's when people snap into attention (Redwood 101 Observation Notes, 9/22/14).

Doris would repeat variations of this statement throughout the Redwood 101 class, not only describing the agency and freedom youth had at Redwood, but in the process, redefining key elements of school.

Another way that school was redefined was through personal narratives. Repeatedly in the first weeks of the school year, students shared about their previous experiences in school and why they had come to Redwood. Penelope talked in class about the social norms at her old school and times when teachers had belittled and disenfranchised youth. Doing so allowed her, and other youth, a way to reconfigure their educational narrative in two important ways. First, they re-narrated their educational story to one where the structure of schooling was responsible for their marginalization, not themselves. Second, by re-narrating their story in this way, they were able to signal their belonging in the school community, that they too had negative experiences in school and had been marginalized. For Penelope, she was able to frame the anxiety she had felt as something that was connected, in part, to the school she had attended.

One day at the end of the semester, Doris spent the majority of the class re-explaining the process at Redwood of turning in work and earning credit. She repeatedly emphasized the importance of communicating with advisors. Then, Doris looked across the faces of the students in her class who stared silently at her. "You all seem not here," she said. "Are you stressed out?" One student joked about crying, and Doris talked about how crying actually helped her relieve stress. Quickly, the conversation shifted, and Doris prompted a discussion around anxiety. Once again, the process of school was redefined to blend students' academic and personal worlds. The class talked about both the process of completing work and earning credit, and the personal stress and anxiety that accompanies it. When they discussed anxiety, they talked about how the anxiety they felt was largely a result of their experiences in school and how the process of schooling encouraged and facilitated anxiety, but that anxiety was not a prerequisite for learning.

Another of the ways in which the class focused on students' previous experiences in school was through writing. Doris spoke about how writing in conventional schools was often

for the teacher, instead of with the goal of creating personal meaning. By focusing on the process of writing, Doris explored the ways in which school assignments were embedded in the structure of school. Through a series of writing assignments, students in the class explored the ways that multiple forms of writing could be reinterpreted to include more choice and personal meaning.

Exploring Identity

Towards the end of the year, I asked Penelope how she imagined herself had she stayed at her former school. She replied:

> I would not have done any of the self-exploration that I have this year. I know that for a fact, because it was pretty much as soon as I switched to Redwood. It started and I started looking within more and having more self-discoveries in terms of what I want to do and how I work or how I learn (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

Penelope, then, compared her self-discovery to the lack of authenticity she saw at her former school.

> I feel like [had I stayed] I would be a lot more fake. I think that's one of the biggest things that I learned at [my former school] was how to be fake and how to act a certain way so that everyone likes you even if you don't like them in return. Everyone puts up those weird personas and I'd have just been so stressed out (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

In both of these quotes, Penelope focused on her identity development and reflection on how she interacts with the world. She talked about how her self-reflection began once she started at Redwood and increased throughout the year. Compared to Redwood, Penelope viewed people at her former school as ungenuine, acting in a way dictated by the social world of the school. This indicates the importance of considering how youth perceive authenticity (Tierney & Scipio, 2012). Penelope talked about Redwood as a space that allowed her the time and space to "look within myself and realize certain things and question certain things" (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15). The contradictions of how to define and participate in school were contradictions that

Penelope needed to make sense of. Penelope entered into Redwood with ideas about the structure, features, and community, but she also entered with a model of school based on her previous experiences. This model included how teachers and students act and the social dynamics of the school. Through iterative experiences across the classes and contexts at Redwood, Penelope eventually resolved the contradiction of defining school, letting go of some of her anxiety and fully taking on the agentic role afforded to her.

Integral Roles: The Redefinition of "Student"

Agency and increased responsibility were key features of the role that Penelope and other youth were given at Redwood. These new responsibilities created a space of authoring. As opposed to being a leader at Pathways, the new role that Penelope was afforded at Redwood did not have a title; yet, it did contain a set of new practices. These practices included open communication with teachers and increased agency and choice over credits and class projects. She also was held accountable for her academic success. This was different from many schools and what Penelope had experienced in her previous school, where a lot of her academic responsibility was given to her parents. Penelope's advisor talked about times how she tried to convey this responsibility to new students.

> I might say, "You could do better if you want to if you want to get out of here in 4 years, this is what you need to do. If you want to take 5 years, this is what you need to do. It's up to you." I am going to love them either way and I say that (Colleen Interview, 5/7/15).

This responsibility over her education held true weight. The decisions that she, and other students at Redwood, made had an impact. Yet, whatever decisions youth made, youth were still supported by the teachers at the school. This academic responsibility allowed Penelope, the following year, to be able to graduate Redwood a year early.

In addition to the increased responsibility over her academics, Penelope also was able to take on roles that were integral as part of the school committee system. As described earlier, the committees were a key part of the school's democratic philosophy, integrating youth voice into every major aspect of the school. The committees were responsible for concrete elements of the school, such as budget and hiring of teachers, and less logistical elements, such as diversity and identity. Penelope's mom, Ellen, talked about the impact that Penelope had as a member of the Redwood committees:

> What she decides and what she does impacts a number of people. For her to think about how are we going to designate money for this program or that program and that she sees the consequence of that, whether it's having to say no to someone or saying yes and rewarding them and seeing that go on, I think makes her really feel a part of the community in a way that it's not just her sitting in a seat (Ellen Interview, 4/4/15).

In her description of the committees, Ellen talked about the impact that Penelope's decisions had and her feelings of membership in the community. The role that Penelope was afforded at Redwood, not only allowed her entry into the school community, but also allowed her to shape it. The integral role on committees gave Penelope immediate access to more central membership. Penelope talked about her participation on those committees, comparing it to her previous school:

> I feel a lot more involved, especially when it comes to committees. I feel very needed and I feel like it's my responsibility to participate in the community of Redwood and make sure that things are still running… I feel like I'm much more needed and important at Redwood than I was at [my former school] (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

While related, involvement and being needed are two separate things. Penelope was needed because her participation was helping the school continue to exist and thrive. Penelope talked about how she felt it was her responsibility to be on the committees, giving back to the school. However, it went beyond personal responsibility. Penelope talked about how Redwood existed on the premise of democratic education, that youth should be involved in how the school was run.

Penelope felt it was her responsibility, as a Redwood student, to support this vision. She understood the underlying ideology of the school and recognized that it required her participation in order for it to work. Penelope was needed in order to make the idea of democratic schooling possible. Once again, the role Penelope was given helped scaffold her redefining of school and what it meant to be successful in school.

Penelope joined committees at Redwood, influencing change within the school, but she also began to be more active in issues of social justice outside of school, participating in protests after Michael Brown was shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Penelope's mom, Ellen, talked about the importance of "being able to come out and say the world is unfair and how can I, as a child under 18, how can my voice be heard?" (Ellen Interview, 4/4/15). In her quote, Ellen described the challenge of having a voice as a teenager. While inside of Redwood youth had many opportunities to impact change and take on roles that mattered, their roles outside of school remained marginalized in many ways (Cohen, 1997; Giroux, 2009; Wyn & White, 2000).

Creating a Space of Authoring through Choice and Personal Meaning

For Penelope, moments of risk and performance seemed important in her identity development at the school. Though there were numerous small moments for students to share during the Redwood 101 class, it was not until the end of the semester that students really had an opportunity to present to the class. The assignment was a book project, in which each student had to read a book of their choice and then do a project in which they somehow internalized the book and created something new. The book that Penelope read had a main character, who wrote about how she associated moments of her life with food. In her presentation (1/15/15), Penelope shared that she did not have that same skill, but did have a strong association with polenta, a food that her grandmother used to make. She recalled how she was forced to eat the polenta that her

grandmother had prepared and how much she disliked it. As part of the book project, Penelope cooked some polenta and brought it to class. "I still hate it," Penelope said to the class as she finished her presentation. This moment created a space where Penelope could author the content of the class, setting the context and tone. The role Penelope took on in the performance was social, personal, and academic in nature. Penelope talked about the many English assignments she had done at her previous school and how they had all been a form of proving she had done the work, writing something for the teacher. For the book project, Doris specifically asked students not to tell her about the books. She did not want to know what happened and told the students she trusted them to do the reading. What Doris asked for was how the book impacted them. Given the freedom of choice in what she would read and the challenge of finding personal meaning, Penelope was placed in a space of authoring, where the goal was not to create something that would please the teacher, but something that had value to herself. The space of authoring was then made public, allowing Penelope to not only talk about herself and her family as topics, but meaningful reflections on who she was and who she was becoming.

Another similar moment of authoring, improvisation, and performance occurred in her Physics class. The class was given an assignment to create a presentation that demonstrated physics in an area of their choosing. Some students chose topics such as black holes or physics in music. Penelope chose to focus on horseback riding. Penelope's presentation combined, not only the ways physics was represented in horseback riding, but also gave an overview of the styles of riding and their histories. It also included some video of Penelope riding. Later that afternoon, Penelope talked about the presentation, saying:

> Most of the other projects I've had to do haven't been very personal. Riding is always personal to me no matter what… Yeah, the biggest thing would be like my physics presentation that had videos of me and my friends riding. It was very related to my personal life and interests (Penelope Interview, 5/29/15).

Penelope repeatedly pointed to her Physics presentation as the work she was most proud of that year and that best represented who she was as a student and a person. During Penelope's presentation, she shared many of her opinions about various riding styles and aspects of horseback riding. The presentation was uniquely her own and, like her cooking polenta, blended her personal and academic roles, while also positioning herself socially.

Penelope's presentations in Redwood 101 and Physics provide insight into my research question on how out-of-school lives are brought into school. Penelope brought her personal history and interests into her class presentations, but she did so in a way that told as much about Penelope as the book she read or the Physics she had learned. By positioning Penelope to not only choose a topic, but to create personal meaning within the bounds of the disciplinary content, she was allowed to author herself into the school community. In doing so, there was the risk and vulnerability that accompanies any performance, particularly performances that present about one's personal life, what Heath and Smyth referred to as "centering risks" (1999).

While student presentations are not something necessarily unique to alternative schools, nor even are presentations with a strong element of choice and personalization, what was different was the safe space in which the presentation was made. Repeatedly, Penelope talked about the school being safe, welcoming, and accepting.

> [Redwood is] a very safe place… Most people feel very comfortable here to explore themselves and explore different ideas and have fun… Redwood students learn how to communicate in the world with adults in the ways that I don't think other high school students get to because there's more of this mutual respect between everyone (Penelope Interview, 12/16/15).

A similar sentiment was echoed in the other youth and adults I interviewed, as well as, the documents I collected from the school's website. Penelope's mom, in describing Redwood, said: "They all respect each other's opinions and it's a safe place for [Penelope] to be able to

express… what she feels or what she thinks or what her opinion is and not be rebuffed" (Ellen Interview, 4/4/15). The presentations, and other projects and assignments at Redwood, were not powerful simply because they allowed for a lot of choice and personalization, they were powerful because that personal expression was given with the backdrop of safety and the backdrop of a school that encouraged youth to explore their identities. The figured world at Redwood included redefinitions of, not just what academics looked like, but also success, community, and students' participation, and how all of these things needed to be blended in order for the school to function.

Relational Resources and Leveraging Risk

Even in early October, when Penelope and I had our first interview, she talked about the differences in anxiety and stress she felt, compared to the previous year. She talked about the previous year of school, saying:

> I definitely feel like last year was more high-strung and just tense all the time. That led to a few meltdowns at school. I don't usually have meltdowns at school but I had three last year, which was a lot for me. I just felt really tired and I was not motivated to do anything (Penelope Interview, 10/8/14)

Penelope then compared that previous year to how she felt since starting at Redwood:

> This year, I feel so much more relaxed and I don't feel that kind of urgency or tenseness that I did last year… I feel like I've figured out how to be myself more around [my friends] and other people. Yeah, I just feel more relaxed and at ease which is nice (Penelope Interview, 10/8/14)

In many ways, Penelope was successful in her previous school, earning consistently good grades; yet, she was experiencing anxiety and lack of motivation. In these quotes, Penelope talked about the difference in anxiety she felt between the two schools. The existing structure at Penelope's previous school made anxiety part of the routine of school. When Penelope joined Redwood,

she was able to redefine school and how youth can participate in school. In essence, she was able to find a way to be a student that did not involve constant anxiety.

While certain structural features, such as a lack of grades or increased student responsibility, provided resources that helped Penelope rethink school and what it meant to learn and be successful in school, I cannot understate the importance of relationships at Redwood. The trust and honesty in which adults at Redwood approached youth was not just a pedagogical move, hoping to re-engage youth and building a connection as a launching point to focus on curriculum. Instead, it was a philosophical approach to youth and people in general: that relating to people was the most important part of every day. I observed this repeatedly as Doris and other teachers at the school would talk with Penelope and other youth in the study, as well as, times, at a group level, when teachers would lead an extended check in with the class.

The authenticity, reflection, and ability for self-exploration that Penelope felt at Redwood came, in part, because of the relational resources that the school provided. How fake Penelope felt was related to her feelings of safety at the school.

> [At Redwood] I felt like I had a safe place. Redwood has basically been this huge safe place for me. When I started having issues with my parents and my mom in particular, I felt really comfortable, so I come here and talk about it (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

Redwood helped Penelope make sense of the events in her life. In contrast to her previous school, Penelope felt that, at Redwood, she had individuals who cared and were interested in hearing about her out-of-school life. However, as with other elements of becoming a member of the Redwood community, open and honest communication with adults at Redwood was a learning process for Penelope.

> Learning, just being able to communicate with my teachers in a (pause), I don't know more adult way I guess, like planning things for myself, instead of having them assign me times or have them call my parents and have them deal with things (Penelope Interview, 3/27/15).

It is important to note that Penelope did not only mention an increase of choice or autonomy, but being given responsibility over her learning in a real way. The role that teachers played extended beyond being just a relational resource, as they helped scaffold youth into a new definition of school and into a redefined role as students. As opposed to Penelope's previous experiences, Redwood teachers sought to blur the in-school/out-of-school divide and to help youth make sense of their lives as a learning process. This was done through advising, but also through the numerous class assignments, projects, and discussions that asked youth to leverage their experiences and opinions, including moments of risk, to make meaning and taking personal responsibility for their learning and education.

The safety that Penelope felt at Redwood was provided by the adults at the school trusting their students, allowing them to make mistakes, and making themselves vulnerable in ways that do not occur in most schools. A specific way that the teachers at Redwood made themselves vulnerable was relinquishing control and allowing youth to have an equal and equitable voice in the school. Redwood was not just a safe space because it had a school culture that was welcoming, nor because the school did not shy away from discussing issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Redwood was a safe space also because of the equitable participation adults provided youth. I observed this, not only through the choice that youth were given for assignments and in the day-to-day practices in class, but I also witnessed it in smaller practices, such as youth never having to ask permission to leave a classroom, but instead leaving when they felt they needed to. The adults at Redwood recognized the ways that schools often marginalize youth through power dynamics and lack of choice and agency. By increasing the responsibility and voice that youth had, adults at the school pushed against marginalizing structures and

patterns and provided not only support for identity development, but also a space that redefined what school meant.

The teachers at Redwood sought mutual respect, approaching youth as people versus students to manage. One instance of this was in the middle of the fall when Penelope got sick. She told me that, every year, she got really terrible allergies and would often miss a week or so of school. She said how, in previous years, she would return to school fearing the consequences of her absence, how the consequences were not just the make up workload and the accompanying anxiety, but that, she was worried her teachers would be mad she had been absent. Penelope said that this anxiety carried over to her first semester at Redwood and the stress she felt returning after an absence.

> Cause I was still stuck in this mindset that I'm going to go back to school, and all my teachers are going to be so mad at me for missing school. They're going to yell at me, and it's going to be terrible, but then I went and then I talked to them and it was really nice. They were just like, 'Oh you know it's okay. Here's what you missed. You need to figure out how you're going to make it up,' which was super nice, and that really helped with the anxiety that I have related to school and my grades (Penelope Interview, 3/27/15).

Penelope returned to Redwood to find the teachers concerned for her and saying they had missed her. Makeup work was secondary to compassion and treating her as a human being. "I realized that the teachers cared too, which is revolutionary for me cause the teachers that I've experienced before, they don't care." (Penelope Interview, 3/27/15). Penelope regarded this moment as key to her transition to Redwood, a moment when she didn't feel alone and was able to let go of some of the anxiety that had previously been constraining her in school.

> It was just this weird feeling of 'oh I'm not really invisible. They do see me. They do care.' Yeah that was the first time that it was really, it was the first time I really realized it… and I was like, 'oh yeah this is what Redwood's like' (Penelope Interview, 3/27/15).

Penelope specifically pointed out the importance of the teachers at Redwood being calm and showing compassion and care. While there should not be risk involved in a student returning to school after being sick, because of the anxiety created in her former school, when Penelope returned to Redwood after being absent she felt she was in a place of high risk. She was worried about her teachers being mad and of the increased work and anxiety. Though unfortunate that Penelope felt vulnerable, the vulnerability allowed her to shift her perspective on school and to more fully take on the agentic role afforded her at Redwood. This experience also demonstrates one of the ways in which Penelope resolved the contradiction between the model of school she had experienced before and the model of school at Redwood. The episode that Penelope described is a good example of the distinction between understanding the process and practices of a community and trusting in them. Prior to being sick, Penelope had understood the routines and norms at Redwood, but only trusted that process when she was in a vulnerable situation and was treated kindly, in a way that demonstrated, in practice, the existence of the figured world that existed at Redwood.

Becoming a Central Member of the Community of Practice

Early in the year, Penelope adopted a few of the visible practices at the school, such as knitting during class, something that, as I indicated earlier, was part of the valued artistic practices of the school. Over time, Penelope changed her appearance, cutting and dying her hair and adding to her wardrobe. During Penelope's first semester at Redwood, she slowly became more comfortable as she attuned to the norms and culture at the school. Penelope discussed the shift she had during her first months at Redwood:

> Then I started on this train of thought of trying to figure out what I want to do instead of just kind of doing what I was supposed to do. It's kind of just exploring different ideas, and that started happening the middle of the semester (Penelope Interview, 3/27/15).

For Penelope, Redwood provided an opportunity for self-exploration that she had not found in her previous school, which, in turn, impacted her participation in school.

> I started talking in class more especially in, I think math class was the easiest for me to speak in because I felt most comfortable with that kind of basic computation and stuff. I don't know. Then it got easier to talk in my other classes... [it] started feeling a little easier to, and then I just kind of fell into a rhythm (Penelope Interview, 3/27/15).

Penelope saw her participation in classes directly linked to thinking about what she wanted, moving beyond thinking primarily of others' expectations. Doing so, Penelope began to take on the redefined role of student at Redwood, a role that was embedded with agency and choice and focused on finding personal meaning. At this point in the year during interviews, Penelope was referring to herself as the active agent, using "I" and "we", in her descriptions of Redwood, compared to earlier in the year when she described the general opportunities Redwood provided and how a third party "students" can benefit from them. By the beginning of second semester, she was describing herself as an active part of Redwood. This is a process that Wenger (1998) described as moving on a trajectory from periphery to central membership. I asked her what she felt helped her make this transition. She replied: "I think since I do feel more comfortable and more confident, I tend to participate more in class, more verbally and outspoken and because of that more people have noticed me" (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15). Penelope identified the process of becoming a more central member as one influenced strongly by how comfortable she felt, that her comfort impacted her participation, which then made her more known in the community. Using Wenger, Penelope's increased participation could be described as increased negotiation of the joint enterprise of the school, influencing the discourse, meaning, and values in the community. Being comfortable was something that Penelope valued and had not found in her previous school, repeatedly bringing it up in her interviews,. It is also a promoted goal of the Redwood community – to provide a safe space where youth feel comfortable.

Another sign of Penelope's inward trajectory of membership at Redwood was the ways she began to redefine school, school community, and learning. This redefining provided her access to the shared repertoire and joint enterprise of the school, where Penelope developed an understanding of what the goals of the school were and a commonly shared language with which to talk about them. The ideas that Penelope adopted through her participation at Redwood could also be considered the ideological resources of the school, the ideas about how to participate and be successful at Redwood.

Negotiating Contradictions

At the end of the year, I asked Penelope what advice she would have given herself about starting at Redwood. She replied:

> You will fit in. I was worried so much that I would just be this kind of awkward outsider, but I have found my place in the Redwood community, because it is kind of, it's very small and so it's very like protective of itself. And so, I was worried and stuff, but yeah I [found] my place and my comfort zones (Penelope Interview, 5/29/15).

At the end of the school year, Penelope felt she had become a member of the community at Redwood. The process of fitting in, for Penelope, centered on finding her place and feeling comfortable. These two pieces, finding her place and feeling comfortable, may seem obvious, but Penelope had not found them in her previous school. These two pieces also included taking on a new role in school. The redefined role of student that Penelope adopted included practices and agency that she needed to become familiar and comfortable with. The new role was accompanied by new ideas about school that Penelope had to embrace over time. This is an example of how new models of school require youth to understand new roles and to develop new definitions of school, success, and learning.

Later in the same interview, I asked Penelope how she imagined herself in another year or two. She said: "I think I definitely will feel more confident and just ... I'll be more confident

and I'll have a better idea of where I'm going" (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15). Penelope provided more context for what she meant by "confident" as she talked about the transition from a conventional school to an alternative school, saying: "I've been feeling kind of lost because it's been such a weird change for me going from this really strict curriculum school to Redwood where everything is up for, I don't know, just discussions and talking about everything" (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15). In this quote Penelope identified a few important features of her process that year. The first was that there was a shift from a more formalized school structure to one open for discussion. She also identified contradictions she negotiated as she transitioned into Redwood, a transition that initially made her feel lost as she navigated what it meant to participate and be a student at Redwood.

In another interview Penelope talked about how much she appreciated her Redwood 101 class, because it was a class that brought the new students together, where they could ask questions. Another view of this class is that it was a place where all of the new students could feel lost together, collectively negotiating the contradictions they encountered. Redwood did not have as formalized a process of role iteration as Pathways did. Yet, throughout the year, Penelope had iterative experiences with her new role as student and the redefinitions of school, success, and learning. It was not just a few haphazard experiences. Instead, the iteration occurred across the entirety of the school, informally and formally. Youth reflected on these experiences through class discussions, informal conversations, and interactions with their advisors. These reflections helped identity not just be repeated, but developed, and thus iterated on. In this way Penelope's identity at Redwood was developed through her iterative experiences with the roles and resources Redwood provided. Towards the end of her first year at Redwood, Penelope spoke about her year at Redwood:

> I feel, the most simple way to put it is that I was feeling very lost in the fall and now I feel ... I haven't found myself really, because it's still something that I'm exploring, but I feel further along the path to finding myself and in a way where I just kind of feel comfortable where I am. Yeah, I think it just feels… I feel lighter (Penelope Interview, 5/11/15).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I tried to describe the process that Penelope took throughout her first year at Redwood, looking at the ways she interacted with the resources at the school, developing a vision of herself in school and negotiating the contradictions she carried over from her experiences at her previous school. As Penelope learned the norms and practices of Redwood, she redefined what school meant and what was valued in school. The roles she was provided, and the relational and ideational resources that were available, helped her through, not only the process of making sense of the figured worlds at Redwood, but also the contradictions and tensions in her life. Additionally, Penelope, and other new students to Redwood, re-narrated their educational stories, developing a critique of educational structures, at the same time as, they were allowed more agency and choice in their learning. The roles at Redwood focused on students taking ownership of their learning and their school. The responsibilities they took on had a direct and immediate impact on their education and the way the school was run. The school's unified focus on choice, agency, social justice, and building a safe community allowed Penelope to have iterative experiences across her participation at Redwood, allowing her to develop and thicken her identity over the course of the year. In the next chapter, I will compare the cases of Penelope and Redwood to DJ and Pathways, exploring the major findings from this study.

Chapter Seven: Cross-Case Analysis

In this chapter, I will revisit findings from both cases, looking across the cases to examine similarities in the processes of identity development and the resources available to help support youth identity development. To answer my research questions, I will also compare youths' previous identities to the identities they developed in the alternative schools and the ways in which their out-of-school lives were brought into school.

I will focus specifically on four major findings: 1) Providing youth roles that matter, roles that defined "student" as integral to the school communities, 2) Redefining school, learning and success, and youths' narratives, 3) Negotiation of contradictions, and 4) The iteration of identity. The first two primarily focus on the identity resources youth used in the alternative schools and the last two look at identity development as a process. I will also examine the ways that identities were thickened over time, adding an additional layer of analysis by examining the discourse youth used to define their membership in the schools.

Roles That Matter: Cross-Case Analysis

The roles that youth were given at Redwood and Pathways embodied the figured world that existed at the schools – valued practices, perspectives on youth, and definitions of success. The roles helped Penelope and DJ define "student" as a member of the community. Additionally, the roles served as identity resources for youth. While the roles, such as being a leader or serving on a school committee, had numerous embedded choices that had actual impact, the value of the roles did not end there. The roles gave youth agency and focused on the schools' central practices, making youth an integral part of the communities. In both DJ and Penelope's cases, youth were given roles that mattered, roles that had a significant and actual impact and that mapped out participation in the schools. The choices that Penelope and DJ made impacted

themselves as students, the school communities, and, at times, people outside the schools, such as the 6th graders, camp staff, and individuals in both DJ and Penelope's lives.

The leadership roles at Pathways provided value for youth in a high stakes way. While leadership was not limited to camp, it was as a leader at camp that DJ centered his identity. It became a reference point for his identity both in and outside of school. The leader role provided a model for participation and membership in the community and repeated high stakes opportunities to practice the role, thickening his identity in the process. The authenticity of the role impacted the way DJ saw himself and Pathways.

The choice, agency, and responsibility at Redwood defined new forms of participation as a student, creating a new role for youth, a new definition of "student" as linked directly to the school community. The newly defined role of "student" helped Penelope navigate her participation in the school, figuring out what was valued and the multiple ways she could express her individuality. At Redwood, Penelope was given actual responsibility over her learning – the classes she chose, the work she did, and the consequences for the educational choices she made. This created a sense of ownership and a space of authoring, where the choices Penelope made represented her developing identity. Penelope was given responsibility in ways she had not experienced in her previous school. Provided an integral role in the ways the school was run, Penelope saw the impact of her actions in ways that she'd previously only seen outside of school. The role was integral because it was essential to the function of the school, but also because it represented a figured world of democratic schooling and personalized learning. The agentic role Penelope was given did not only impact her school membership and identity, but also her academic trajectory as she had the freedom to increase her credit load and, the following year, to graduate a year early.

Nasir and Hand (2008) wrote about practice-linked identities as a way to help support engagement and identity development. They identified three aspects that help practice-linked identities form (access to the domain, opportunities to take on integral roles, and opportunities for self-expression in practice). By looking at the roles that DJ and Penelope took on, it is possible to extend the idea of practice-linked identities. In the two cases, access to the domain, opportunities to take on integral roles, and self-expression in practice seem to be woven into the role itself. In order for the roles to exist in an authentic way, youth needed be able to access the domain, be integral, and to have opportunities for self-expression.

The leadership roles at Pathways were integral to the functioning of the camp, the school community, and to the experiences that the 6th graders had. The leadership roles included "camp leader", "school leader", and, in the case of the podcast, "school representative". The role of "camp leader" afforded opportunities for youth to write themselves into the practices of camp. DJ made the role his own and created continuous moments of self-expression in practice, be it during cabin time with his "boys" or helping to support 6th grade teachers. The practices as "camp leader" transferred to campus as youth reflected on and practiced their leadership in the school community. In this way, the role of "camp leader" connected to "school leader" in the classes at the Pathways campus. DJ made the role his own when he led activities and reflections, where other students told him he sounded like his mentor, Jimmy. He also expressed himself as a "school representative" when the podcast was released, creating a document that helped define the Pathways program and what it meant to be a leader.

Penelope had similar opportunities for self-expression at Redwood: in the many assignments that allowed for choice and authoring and in the community that encouraged and supported individuality and identity exploration. There was regular freedom within classes to

choose what they read, wrote about, and presented on. Each assignment was bounded within the academic discipline, but with a strong focus on youth making their own meaning. While freedom of choice exists in conventional schools, it was pervasive at Redwood and choice was embedded in a community that Penelope saw as safe and supportive. Both Penelope and her mom, Ellen, talked about how Redwood, as a safe community, allowed Penelope to share ideas about herself and the world without judgment. The safe community allowed a space where she could author ideas and aspects of her identity. The safe community created the space in which authoring was encouraged and supported, but Penelope's participation was what defined her trajectory into the school community. Penelope's Physics presentation is an example of choice, where she could choose the topic and had the option to present aspects of who she was, using video of herself and her friends riding. Penelope's participation, taking assignments and making them her own, helped define her as member of the community.

Again, I want to reiterate that the roles youth were given were part of the communities of practice of Redwood and Pathways. The definition of student was linked to the school communities. These communities of practice represented variations on the figured world of progressive alternative schools, a world where youth are given authentic roles and safe communities are built. The connection of the roles to the communities of practice is important because the roles were not just based on choice, but also that the choices were interwoven with the relationships at the school. By giving them roles that mattered, the relationship structure at Redwood was different than in conventional schools. On committees, youth were asked their opinion; through advising, youth and their advisors talked about the choices youth wanted to make. Through these interactions, where youth were in agentic roles, youth built trusting relationships with adults and other youth at Pathways and Redwood.

One strategy for building trust that the teachers at Pathways and Redwood employed was allowing youth to learn, fail, succeed, and grow. The teachers I interviewed talked about how some of the youth slipped up, but they also talked about the importance of messing up and learning from it, indicating the importance of risk in the supportive communities. For Penelope, who felt alienated at her former school, being given a role that mattered helped her navigate her trajectory to become a central member at Redwood. For DJ, the role of leader helped him redefine himself and who he wanted to be. Similar processes occurred for other youth in the study – youth who had been unsuccessful in school and were behind on credits, youth who had been bullied, youth who had been suspended, youth who had hated waking up each morning and talked about how much they disliked everyone in their former school, youth who had felt unaccepted and out of place because of their sexual or gender preferences, youth who never turned in work, youth who never attended class, and on and on. Nearly every youth participant in this study talked about the importance of the roles and choices they were given and the responsibility and trust that accompanied it. Students felt that their teachers trusted them, in part, because their teachers allowed them to make important decisions and to make mistakes and learn from them, all the while showing support and love.

Giving youth roles that matter made the youth a critical and integral piece of the schools. Nasir and Hand (2008) talked about how opportunities to take on integral roles were one of three features of practice-linked identities. At Pathways and Redwood, youth roles were integral in how the schools functioned and how the school community existed. Without youth, the camp at Pathways could not function; without youth, the democratic committee system at Redwood would lose its democracy. The communities at Pathways and Redwood were defined by and created by the youth at the school. Their voices mattered and their voices had an impact on

others and on the functioning of the schools. DJ influenced 6th graders, he assisted in keeping the camp successfully running, he helped build and sustain the Pathways school community. Penelope influenced how the school was run, sometimes acting as the lone student voice on a committee. For both DJ and Penelope, a critical piece of their roles seemed to be that they themselves realized they were needed. They did not just feel that they were needed, but they realized that they had an integral role.

Redefining School, Success and Learning, and Youth Narratives: Cross-Case Analysis

Looking across the two cases, both schools provided ideational resources for youth to redefine school and their roles in school. The redefining of school, success and learning, and youth narratives was part of the process as youth became members of the school communities, learning about the figured world that existed at the schools. These ideational resources helped youth create new definitions of what school meant within the context of the alternative schools and what their successful participation might look like.

Three main categories of redefinition emerged from the data: a) Redefining their definitions of learning and success within the context of the school, and, their roles within it, b) Redefining school, specifically defining the alternative school as a community and a family, and, c) Youth re-narrating their stories, critiquing how educational and non-educational structures and routines contributed to their previous identities.

Redefining Learning and Success and Their Roles in School

Both Redwood and Pathways, while sharing some qualities similar to conventional schools, had different figured worlds than what existed in conventional schools. There were valued forms of participation, ideas about the world and education, and various roles for youth

and adults. Some particularly significant ideational resources at Pathways and Redwood were those that redefined school, including definitions of learning, success, and growth.

Observational data of school time at Pathways revealed that while some of the expectations and definitions of success were the same as mainstream school (prioritizing attendance, work completion, grades), success and learning were almost entirely focused on becoming a leader and being a part of the Pathways community. Students were continually positioned as being leaders and camp counselors and what they learned was framed as being useful for their time as leaders. Sometimes, the content students were taught focused directly on leadership, such as facilitation skills, learning about the process of community building, or learning games to play with the 6th grade students. Other times what the students learned did not have as direct a connection, but still was framed as being relevant and connected to camp and to being a leader such as learning environmental science to better understand the context of the wilderness camp or practicing camp norms in the classroom. Louise, the science teacher at Pathways, talked about that goal: "I still teach what will connect them best at the outdoor school so thinking about the lessons they're going to be teaching up there and how can I go more in-depth with that here" (Louise Interview, 2/6/15). Another example occurred in Sociology, as students were drafting papers about their own sociology. Ted, the Sociology teacher, brought the class together to share pieces of what they had wrote. He said: "We might not be at camp, but we do have the opportunity to do team building. Share parts of yourself… Deciding what would be challenging about yourself" (12/10/14). These instances helped draw the connection between the two Pathways settings, helping youth make the link between what they did as a camp leader and their participation in classes.

When asked to define success, DJ responded, “Showing up everyday and sharing my wisdom and my knowledge to other leaders who look up to me, that’s the success” (DJ Interview, 12/5/14). He continued, saying that, “the only thing I need for me to be successful… is for other leaders to look up to me” and “if I inspire them, we can make a change together” (DJ Interview, 12/5/14). In his comments about success, DJ focused on leadership, but did so within the context of the Pathways community. Learning and success at Pathways were interwoven with leadership and community.

While Redwood had features that defined it as a school, it was not with the same precision that Pathways defined itself as an environmental leadership program. Redwood focused not only on democratic education, and social justice, but also individualized education, student choice and empowerment, and creative and individual expression. Youth were provided ideational resources that helped to make sense of Redwood through numerous programmatic features including, but not limited to, their Advisor, their Advisory class, the Redwood 101 class, and various projects and assignments from other Redwood classes. In the Redwood 101 class, Doris repeatedly positioned youth as being in charge of their education and talked about Advisors as advocates for them. In effect, the identity resources at the schools helped DJ and Penelope reconstruct their identities in school by indicating to them that the rules of the game of school had changed and that, at Redwood and at Pathways, they could develop identities that felt like their true selves.

Often the redefining of school, success, learning, and the youth themselves were interwoven with the roles that the youth were given. The agency and choice within roles and authoring that the youth were able to do through the roles provided a space in which success, school, and community could be redefined.

Redefining School as Community and Family

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance that the youth in this study placed on safety in the school communities they were in. They felt supported and safe to express who they were in ways they had not felt in their previous schools. The ways that safety was demonstrated occurred in scaffolded moments, such as the poetry slam at Pathways or in introductions in the Redwood 101 class, when Doris asked students to introduce themselves by name and their preferred pronoun. It was also demonstrated in relationships, such as when Penelope returned from school after being sick or when Jimmy reminded DJ about "Mr. DJ". It occurred when students at Pathways would call their peers if they were not in class or how, at Redwood, Advisors would meet regularly with their Advisees to talk not only about school and credits, but also about life, acting as relational resources for youth.

In addition to describing their school communities in terms of safety, DJ and Penelope also talked about the schools being a community and a family. In doing so, the students at both schools defined school as more than focused on academics. DJ talked about Pathways as a family because it helped them grow to be better people, like a family was supposed to. Similarly, Penelope talked about how Redwood was a welcoming and safe community, where students could explore their identities. In both schools, the youth valued the safe communities their schools provided, in part, because it allowed them to develop their identities.

Viewing relationships as resources, oftentimes the relationships and community at Pathways and Redwood worked in conjunction with other identity resources to help support, model, and guide youth as they went through the program. For DJ, one example of this was Jimmy, DJ's unofficial mentor at Pathways. When I first asked DJ who in his life I should interview he immediately said Jimmy. DJ described Jimmy as his mentor, his hero, and said he

was “like a big brother to him” (DJ Interview, 3/11/15). Throughout the year DJ talked about Jimmy and the important role that he played during DJ’s experience as a one-week leader.

> I never knew him, I never talk[ed] to him before… He saw the potential and he saw my future. He believed in me when I didn't believe myself… He just kind of saved me… helping me find me and just give me opportunity to be DJ, the real DJ (DJ Interview, 3/11/15).

DJ talked about how Jimmy gave him opportunities to be himself, helping him build confidence being a leader. DJ did not just describe Jimmy as someone who listened or was an emotional support, though those were both roles that Jimmy filled for DJ. Instead, the qualities that DJ talked about were that Jimmy allowed him opportunities to develop his identity and the support to become successful as a leader. Similarly for Penelope, she was able to talk openly to her Advisor, and other adults at the school, about her life in a way that she had not done at her previous school, with the looming presence of grades, assignments, and rules. The adults at Redwood embodied an ideational shift of the role of adults in school. The boundaries of teaching were no longer confined to the school day or specific content.

It’s important to note that teachers were not just relational resources because they supported youth, but they also trusted their students. Prior to attending Pathways, DJ said he had been close to his English teacher, his counselor, and his math teacher; Penelope talked similarly about her English and Choir teachers at her previous school. However, these relationships were not all encompassing enough to provide the resources DJ and Penelope needed. More specifically, the structure of Pathways and Redwood allowed relational resources to support youth differently than at their previous schools. The relationships at Redwood and Pathways involved academics, but also included other pieces of youths’ lives. Additionally, the resources that Pathways and Redwood provided were not a product of caring alone, but part of purposeful programs whose structures allowed adult caring to have a significant impact. Penelope and DJ

had adults who cared in their previous schools. In fact, a majority of the youth in the study spoke about having at least one adult at their former school that they liked and had a connection with. It is not that the Redwood and Pathways teachers cared more, but that their caring and acting as relational resources existed in schools that prioritized caring and relationships. Redwood placed Advisories as a centerpiece of their program; Pathways supported adult/youth relationships as part of their trips and small classes. In this way, the two schools had goals that included academics, but also included relationship building, creating programmatic supports for relationships to be built.

Re-narrating Youth Narratives

Both Pathways and Redwood used re-narration as resources for youth as they entered the schools. Re-narration allowed youth the ability to define their own stories and, in doing so, position themselves within the schools. It also allowed youth the chance to retell their stories in a way that signaled that they deserved membership in the school community. Finally, it helped youth externalize blame for their marginalized status (Nolen personal communication, 4/18/16) and to tell their stories from a perspective where it was the experiences in their life and educational structures that had created their marginalization and risk, not simply their own actions. In this process, youth were not absolved of their role in their personal stories, instead their stories were reframed as occurring in specific schools with specific structures. Doris and other teachers at Redwood framed the school as a place where youth had to take responsibility in order to be successful because of the increased responsibility students were given.

At Pathways, youth had repeated performance moments where they could publically narrate their stories. From the beginning of the year poetry slam, DJ was able to recognize choices he made and reconfigure them into a cohesive story that led to his success at Pathways.

DJ was literally given the stage and in his poem talked about the influence that his friends' had had on him. In the Redwood 101 class, youth talked about the ways in which the structure of their previous schools had contributed to their experiences. Penelope wrote and talked about howt her previous school had made her feel marginalized and unable to explore or express her identity. Penelope talked about the ways that she, once again, claimed writing as her own, presenting her own voice. At both Redwood and Pathways, youth had the ability to re-narrate their stories in ways that simultaneously empowered them and recognized the influence of others and of educational structures on their lives. This process created a common space for youth to build community and, at Redwood, where the incoming students were only a portion of the student body, to navigate their way into a school community of practice. Wenger (1998) defines shared repertoire as resources for interpreting meaning, created through a history of shared experiences. Through re-narration, youth built a shared repertoire, one in which they learned and defined terms of value at Redwood. Examples of this included redefining what credit meant, as well as labels and definitions for "book projects", different committees, and Advisory. They also shared mutual engagement around critique, community building, and, sometimes, performance, allowing them to align with the figured worlds of the school communities.

Negotiation of Contradictions

Another theme that flowed through DJ's, Penelope's, and other students' stories was the idea of divided lives and contradictions. Though few talked about it as pronouncedly as DJ did, many of the youth in the study mentioned the disconnect they felt in their lives – be it between in-school and out-of-school lives, old selves and new ones, others' expectations versus their own, or, like for Penelope, the contractions between the figured worlds in her old school versus those at the alternative school.

DJ repeatedly talked about the divide he felt between the two DJs – who he was in-school and who he was outside of school with his friends. In some ways, DJ's first year at Pathways is a story of developing an identity in school, while also negotiating contradictions in his identity across contexts. Part of this process, for DJ, was also not completely turning his back on his old friends. Dreier (2009) talked about the ways in which people learn to coordinate their multiple selves so they do not feel contradictions. It is unclear whether or not DJ had one unified identity, combining the "two DJs". What does seem to be the case is that DJ resolved the contradictions that he saw between the "two DJs". He talked about seeing himself as a leader in all settings, even when smoking marijuana. This was DJ's way of coordinating his multiple selves. As a star leader and an ambassador for the school, DJ created an identity around who he was at Pathways, he helped shape the community that existed that year, and he successfully negotiated the contradictions between the two DJs, even if in a way that many adults would disapprove of.

Contradiction did not only occur between in-school and out-of-school worlds. Penelope's first semester at Redwood was about her negotiating the contradictions between her previous school and Redwood. She became a member of the community, figuring out what it meant to participate at Redwood, while slowly letting go of her anxiety and the models of participation from her previous school. Penelope wanted a school setting that allowed her to be an individual, incorporating aspects of her out-of-school life and, once given the opportunity, successfully blended her interests and passions from outside of school into school. Becoming a member of the community at Redwood required Penelope to negotiate the contradictions between the two schools, learning new routines and norms and to slowly shake off the echoes of her former school.

Iteration of Identity

The roles that youth were given and the redefining of school, school community, and youth narratives were features of the alternative school programs and the ways DJ and Penelope developed their identities over the course of the study. However, it was the iterative nature of these features that helped thicken the youths' identities. The most systematic example of iteration occurred at Pathways, where the students repeatedly were put in leadership roles at camp, where they not only led the 6th graders, but also focused and reflected on their own growth as a leader. The iteration did not occur only while leading 6th graders. Pathways students were given many other opportunities to iterate on their leadership and learning – through internships, leading activities at school and on wilderness trips, group reflection and discussion times, and, for DJ, reflecting on his leadership during the podcasts. Relational, material, and ideational resources at the school helped support the iteration. The iteration of identity helped thicken how the students acted and were positioned in school. DJ's identity as a star leader thickened through his repeated performances as a leader at the school and his interest in self-reflection and growth.

While the iterations at Redwood were not as systematic as they were at Pathways, they still existed. Some examples include how students repeatedly were given opportunities to re-narrate their educational stories in the Redwood 101 course, to express and define themselves through the highly agentic coursework that existed throughout the school, and, focusing specifically on gender preference, students were repeatedly asked pronoun preference. These iterations provided Penelope ways to develop visions of herself that were different from what she had previously experienced in high school. One important feature of iteration at Pathways and Redwood was how it occurred in multiple venues across the schools. Though much of the iteration around re-narrating school occurred in the Redwood 101 class, I observed interaction

with identity resources, such as roles and redefining, occurring across the Redwood classes, and in the committee work, Advisory, and unstructured times at the school. Two particular features of iteration that stood out in the data were the importance of performance and of risk and vulnerability. In the past two chapters, I have highlighted some important moments of performance and risk, however neither performances nor moments of risk occurred just once or twice, but instead occurred repeatedly throughout the school year, woven into the iterative process of identity development that I observed.

Performance

Though the performances often varied in degree, both Pathways and Redwood had repeated moments of performance. Performances allowed for what Wenger (1998) and Heath and Smyth (1999) refer to as improvisation, moments when youth can author their identities. Penelope and DJ both talked about the importance of these performances for their learning and identity development at the schools. Pathways leveraged performance at the start of the year with the superhero dress up and the poetry slam. DJ talked about the impact these and other performances had on him, first, letting the school see the real him and, later, helping to thicken who he was as a leader. Penelope was able to integrate her out-of-school life and identity into who she was at Redwood through the performance opportunities she was given. In some ways, the moments of performance allowed youth to publically take on multiple roles, as youth, as students, and as incoming members of the community. Performances provided opportunities for youth to tell some of their backstory, while also demonstrating proficiency in an academic task.

While moments of performance were quite different at Redwood and Pathways, in both schools, performances helped thicken youths' identities. The performances varied in size and in weight, but all existed in a context of a safe community where youth were known as individuals.

While there were countless performance moments, where youth presented small glimpses into who they were and how they wished to be perceived, there were also larger scale performances that, sometimes dramatically, shifted a student's identity, such as when the Pathways school community heard the podcast. Through performance, youth had opportunities to redefine who they were and to develop visions of themselves, while also leaving themselves vulnerable to others in the school community.

The best example of the impact of performance was during orientation at Pathways when they had the superhero and poetry slam nights. For two consecutive nights, youth had the opportunity to perform for their peers, teachers, and the camp staff. The first night the students one-by-one put on costumes and announced what type of leadership superhero they were. Students came out in silly outfits and struck poses and then walked down a makeshift runway, just like a model. For a moment, the entire school focused on them, laughing at the superpower they had come up with or the outfit they had chosen, while also learning about the strengths they wanted others to see in them. The following night was the poetry slam. The Pathways students read poems they had written about who they were and what struggles they had been through. While putting on a superhero costume and parading around may have created a certain amount of risk for teens, the poetry slam made them vulnerable as they shared intimate pieces of their lives. Many students cried that night, many said they shared things they had rarely shared before. This performance was not just a moment for youth to position themselves and assume the identities they wanted to have, though that certainly did occur and, in terms of identity development, it was a significant piece of the performance. The performance was also a moment where youth put themselves in a position of vulnerability. Vulnerability seemed to speed up the process of building relationships and community. As an outsider, I was shocked by how quickly the school

community formed. I felt as if I had missed a month or longer of school, not just a few days. The students acted as if they had been longtime friends, while I knew that most of them had not known each other a week earlier.

Observing the superhero night and the poetry slam, I was struck by the way that these performances were designed. While they did ask youth to make themselves vulnerable, they did not ask the youth to take a leap that others were not going to take. Before each performance, camp staff and former students came and performed. Teachers joined in, sharing their own poetry or singing. In between the poems and superhero presentations there was music and the staff danced and jumped around and told corny jokes. The risk and vulnerability was scaffolded in a way that made the silliness of the superhero night and the seriousness of the poetry slam relatively safe. On both nights, one or two students chose not to participate, but at some point all the other students, one-by-one got up and performed. And, as they did, it became more of a performance. Students strutted their superhero costumes and shared increasingly powerful stories, sometimes adlibbing, telling stories they had not initially planned. One of the Pathways teachers, Bryant, described the initial trips to camp this way:

> They go to two overnight trips and it's a lot of fun. They've never done anything like it and they're a family. They share personal stories with each other. It gets very emotional at times and they're showing their vulnerability. Right away I feel like our students have a strong Pathways identity and they believe in the group (Bryant Interview, 2/5/15).

The identity work and the community work happened hand-in-hand. Though each student had moments for themselves, the collective experience seemed to bring the group closer together.

Moments of Risk and Vulnerability

One significant feature of performance is that there is risk involved. There was something at stake whenever Penelope or DJ performed. They both talked about being nervous and pointed out what was at stake in their performances. Heath and Smyth (1999) discussed the

ways that performances involve risk in part because youth are trying something new, but also because there is the risk of returning to a previous failure. While Heath and Smyth focus on arts-based programs focused on performance, the identity-centered performances at Pathways and Redwood asked youth to address risk they'd experienced in their lives. In performing their identities, previous experiences, failures or otherwise helped frame the performances. Examples of this include Penelope talking about the ability to share at Redwood and not be judged and DJ talking about the risk involved in sharing his personal stories with the school community. Bryant, one of the Pathways teachers, talked about the role of youth making themselves vulnerable during small group discussions during orientation:

> Students chose to share some pretty personal experiences and really show their vulnerability. I think just seeing that done by just a few is the seed that allows everyone else to come together and share their own true selves and their own experiences and really come together as a group (Bryant Interview, 1/26/15).

The shared risk involved in sharing personal stories helped involve youth in the process of the group forming. In chapter five, DJ talked about how, after orientation and sharing personal stories, he felt a part of the school family. However, the moments of risk were not limited to performances and discussions. Penelope encountered moments of risk during her first semester at Redwood when she had an extended absence and when her out-of-school life got complicated. Penelope was riddled with anxiety when she returned, worried that the response from teachers would be similar to what she had experienced in the past. The teachers at Redwood treated Penelope with compassion, asking how she was. For Penelope, this moment seemed to redefine Redwood as a learning community. She internalized how relationships and the norms of interaction were different than at her previous school. Penelope talked about the supportive environment that existed there. During the moments of risk, the adults at Redwood responded in a way that increased Penelope's affinity for the school, helping her redefine school and learning,

and helping her make sense of her life. For DJ, the moments of risk occurred in a similar fashion, where the adults and youth at Pathways were there to remind him to be "Mr. DJ".

The processes of caring and community occurred iteratively throughout the year. Whether the risk occurred at key moments early in the year, as they did for Penelope, or later in the year, as they did for DJ, they were part of the iterative process of youth interacting with the relational and ideational resources that were central to the school and to the case youths' identity development. The adults and communities at Redwood and Pathways confronted risk in a different manner than in conventional schools. Not only was risk, in whatever form, addressed, but it was often leveraged, creating opportunities for youth to make sense of their world and renegotiate their academic identities.

In varying ways, the adults at Pathways and Redwood redefined risk. Risk was redefined as being more than ascribed to individual "at-risk" youth. Risk was not viewed just as a deficit, as it often can be with "at-risk" designations. Instead, risk was recognized as a part of life and, because of that, a part of school. Youth were shown through the conversations and caring from their teachers, through performing and seeing other students perform, through teachers themselves opening themselves up and discussing risk, that they need not tackle things on their own, but that they had a supportive community that would help them navigate risk and, doing so, develop their identities. The moments of risk and performance allowed for youth to shift or recalibrate their roles and their patterns of participation in the schools (Heath & Smyth, 1999).

Reflection and Growth

Iteration is not just repetition. An important feature of iteration is the way in which it is reflected on and improved for the next round of iteration (Nolen, Tierney, Goodell, Lee, & Abbott, 2014; Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2011). At Pathways, this occurred through

group discussions, personal reflections, and repeated moments of looking back and looking forward. The students set goals each week at camp and, in groups, had intimate discussions about who they were and where they were going. Additionally, youth met regularly with teachers. At Redwood, the reflection on identity occurred in the Redwood 101 class, where students talked about their previous schooling and what they wanted to learn, in conversations with their Advisor, where Advisors helped youth make sense of who they were and where they were going, specific committees, such as one that focused on gender and sexual identities, and in many, many student conversations.

Thematic Role Analysis: Timeframes for Community Membership

One of my research questions is: How do youth identities develop as they enter into alternative schools? A centerpiece of this question was the various ways youth became members of the school communities. Through the roles youth were afforded, "student" was defined as community member, an integral part of the school. After I uncovered the major findings of this study, I decided to do an additional analysis to explore the ways in which youth identified as members of the community. I did so: a) to provide an additional layer of analysis on how membership occurred and, doing so, link community membership to not only the actions and sentiments of my participants, but also to their discourse, and b) to provide a frame for educators to think about the timeframes youth take when becoming members of a school community. The speed in which youth identify as a community member may be of value to alternative school educators since often alternative schools need to provide additional reasons for youth to attend besides grades and credits. Strong relationships and a sense of community are typical tools alternative schools use. Both Redwood and Pathways focused on community and strong relationships, however, Pathways teachers tended to talk more frequently about individual

actions impacting the community. In addition, Pathways' orientation was, as the Pathways teacher Louise called it "a fire hose", focusing intensively on community building the first weeks of school and spending multiple nights at camp. In part, this analysis was to explore if this early intensive focus on community impacted youth discourse around themselves and the school.

I analyzed youth discourse using thematic role analysis (Finegan, 2011) to look at the timeframes in which youth developed membership in the communities. Thematic role analysis, also known as semantic roles (Gruber, 1965) or "case frames" (Fillmore 1968), examines the various roles ascribed in a sentence. I recognize the history and complexity of role analysis, including the many versions that exist, some with lengthier lists of thematic roles. For this study I only used a portion of the roles that appear in thematic role analysis, specifically Agent, Patient, and Goal (Aarts, 1997). Agent is the subject and describes the actor or doer in a sentence. Patient is the direct object and describes what is impacted by the action in a sentence. Goal is what the action of the sentence is moving towards. It may be a location or an entity. An example of this would be "John drove Mary to the store". In this sentence "John" is the agent, "Mary" the patient, and "to the store" the goal. I focused in particular on the agents that youth used to describe the alternative schools. This analysis allowed me to look at the ways that youth in my study talked about themselves, available roles, and their schools. The purpose of this form of analysis can help identify the ways youth talked about themselves as an active or passive participant in the schools and whether they spoke of themselves as part of the school or removed from the school. For discourse segments about school, when youth use "I" as the agent in their discourse, they frame themselves as the active participant. When youth use "we" to describe the schools, it indicates them taking an insider perspective, defining themselves as a part of the community.

For this analysis I used interview and survey data. Specifically, I chose three of DJ and Penelope's interviews – beginning of the year (October), midyear (February), and end of year (May). The interviews for DJ were on October 20th, February 2nd, and May 27th. For Penelope they were on October 8th, February 20th, and May 29th. Within the interviews, I focused on responses where they spoke about the alternative schools. I looked at the agents used in their responses and the action (verbs) connected to the agents.

I found that the use of "I" as an agent followed a similar pattern across the two cases, indicating that both youth talked about themselves as active agents at the alternative schools. At the beginning of the year both youth used "I" as an agent when they talked about the alternative schools. Penelope's use of "I" remained the same across her three interviews, while DJ used "I" as an agent less frequently in his first interview, but then slightly exceeded Penelope in his interviews in February and May. In his first interview, the utterances where DJ used "I" as the agent and talked about Pathways, the verb used included opinions ("need", "like", "love", "would never", "don't think", "don't want"), observations ("think", "saw", "would describe"), and action ("learned", "get to", "could feel", "found", "was walking"). There were also instances where DJ used "I" as the patient ("got introduced"). In comparison, when Penelope used "I" as the agent and talked about Redwood, used verbs that included opinions ("like"), observations ("think", "would describe", "would have to say", "noticed"), and action ("learned", "went", "heard", "feel", "knew", "didn't really understand"). Midyear and end of year interviews produced largely similar results across both cases. Both students employed a range of verbs in relation to the alternative schools, including opinions, observations, and a number of actions for what they saw themselves as able to do in alternative schools. While there were some

minor differences across the two cases in how they used "I" as an agent, the bigger difference occurred in the use of "we" as an agent.

Both DJ and Penelope used the agent "we" when talking about the schools in their first interviews. However, the way they used "we" was different. DJ used "we" to describe actions that the students had done, but also when describing Pathways ("We're all trying to get to know each other and we always call each other family"). Penelope, on the other hand, used "we" when describing actions they had done in class or when talking about Redwood in comparison to routines at her previous school ("I think all of us were really stuck in that old space where we just wrote whatever the teacher wanted us to"), never when describing Redwood. Yet, when Penelope spoke of her experiences at her previous school or, more so, horseback riding, she frequently used "we" as the agent. Penelope's pattern of using "we" as the agent changed midyear. In her midyear interview Penelope used "we" far more frequently when talking about Redwood. The majority of the use of "we" was describing action she and other students had taken in classes ("We did a chocolate lab"), but did occur minimally when describing Redwood, but in those instances "we" was used as the goal, not the agent ("They (the principal and teachers) spend so much time making sure that we're still a school"). This use of "we" seems to show the shared repertoire and alignment with the community that Penelope was developing over the course of the year.

DJ's use of "we" as the agent followed a similar pattern midyear as in October. At the end of the year both DJ and Penelope regularly used "we" as the agent when talking about the alternative schools. However, like midyear, Penelope typically used "we" to describe actions she and other students took in and out of classes, while DJ used "we" to describe actions he and

other students took, but also to describe Pathways and more abstract practices done at the school ("It's because we get to think about how to be a better you").

In order to see if the patterns of using "we" extended beyond the individual cases, I also looked at the other two cases not used in the previous chapters. This analysis produced primarily similar results with some minor variation. Taylor, from Redwood, used more "we" as agent in her first interview than Penelope did. The majority of the uses were to describe actions taken with other students, but there were also five instances where Taylor used "we" to describe actions taken by the school. However, Taylor's first interview occurred in mid December, not October. Taylor's midyear and end of year interviews mirrored her first interview, with the majority of "we" usage occurring when describing action she and other students took. Oda, from Pathways, used "we" as agent with great frequency across his beginning of year, midyear, and end of year interviews. While he used "we" to describe actions taken with other students, he just as frequently used "we" to describe the school and regular practices at the school. The patterns that all four youth used shows how, over the course of the year, discourse changes shifted by school and youth, but that, overtime, all youth talked about themselves as a member of the community. Yet, the youth from Pathways, the school with a stronger focus on community and a more intensive orientation program, talked about themselves as members earlier in the year, with greater intensity, and to describe the program.

Adding one final layer of analysis, I also looked at the surveys that youth filled out in September. Though there were more surveys from Pathways (22 compared to 10 at Redwood), ten of the youth at Pathways used "we" as an agent when describing the school, the school community, and the common practices at the school. This is compared to one occurrence at Redwood, which was from the second year student who was helping co-teach the Redwood 101

course. The surveys produced a similar result as the interviews, with the Pathways students talking about themselves as community members very early in the year.

The process of identification as a community member occurred faster at Pathways than at Redwood. While there may be multiple reasons for the difference in use of "we" when describing the schools, including school size, I'd like to consider the focus on community at the schools and the ways in which community was formed. Teachers and youth at both Redwood and Pathways talked about community, redefining what school community meant and how youth participated in it. Yet, teachers and youth at Redwood tended to focus equally on individuality and community. Teachers and youth at Pathways, on the other hand, were constantly looking at the ways individuals were influencing the community. Discourse throughout the Redwood 101 course focused on positioning youth as active agents in the school, describing the choices they had and the ways they could personalize their learning and their class assignments. Pathways focused far less on individuals in the first weeks of school. Youth at Pathways were treated as individuals, but as individuals who could contribute to the school community. The entirety of orientation was on building community and norm setting. Orientation at Redwood was different, looking more at the range of choices available, empowering youth to take responsibility, and discussing identity and social justice. Put another way, through team-building and overnight trips, the shared repertoire, joint enterprise, and mutual engagement at Pathways was seemingly built in a far faster pace. Penelope and Taylor began to use "we" as an agent, but not as early and often as DJ and Oda did, particularly using "we" to describe the school and school practices.

In interpreting the data from this analysis, I do not seek to promote one form of orientation or approach to community over another, more it is to look at the ways that the

resources available at the schools impacted not only the identities that were developed, but also the timeframes in which those occurred.

Academics

The majority of this study has looked at the identities youth developed in alternative schools. While connected to schools and learning, the identity development I focused on was not linked directly to academics. For the last section in this chapter, I want to highlight some of the academics at Pathways and Redwood. I do so to demonstrate the ways in which academics were linked to much of the identity process I have already discussed. I also do so because of the common view that alternative schools lack the rigor of conventional education, a view I do not wish to perpetuate.

It is important to recognize that while the figured worlds at Redwood and Pathways were different than in conventional education, there were still significant pieces of school, such as academic rigor, earning of credits, and a focus on success after high school. The ideational differences at Redwood and Pathways, compared to conventional schools, does not mean that learning was devalued or that the schools existed outside of the structures of public education. The classes focused on academic skills, just as conventional classes would. There was also a consistent focus on graduation and what credits students were earning and on options following graduation. Both schools took standardized tests, which I observed both resistance to and acceptance of, including how the entire student population protested the new state test and how students at both Redwood and Pathways spent time outside of class to prepare for the ACTs and class-level exit exams.

In many ways the complexity of academic achievement was greater at Redwood and Pathways than at larger schools. Because of their sizes, the schools did not have the breadth of

courses that conventional schools do and, often, youth of wildly varying ability levels would be in the same course. In my interview with Bryant, the math teacher at Pathways, I asked him what he struggled with as a teacher. He replied:

> My number one biggest struggle is differentiation. Thinking about as a math teacher, I've got special ed kids with calculus kids in the same classroom. I really don't have an answer yet… I wish I could have them all adopt the identity that they can do math and they're math people… That's something I'm really struggling with and haven't found success with (Bryant Interview, 2/5/15).

Teachers were constantly navigating the ways to teach this range of youth, while also very conscious of not negatively positioning youth based on ability. In the next chapter, when I discuss areas for future research, I focus on the need to look at how content area identities interact with the identities youth develop as a member of a school community. In my first month of observing at Redwood, Doris, the Redwood 101 teacher, consistently talked about writing at Redwood, compared to the writing many of the students had previously done in school. An example of this occurred the second day of observing: "In this class you learn how to speak and write in the way you want" (Redwood 101 Observation, 9/11/14). Doris followed up talking about this change in writing with talk of becoming a Redwood student. "You all walked in [Redwood] being told you get to do what you want with your education. But that is really really hard. Part of this class is a semester long orientation" (Redwood 101 Observation, 9/11/15). Then, over the next few months she continued to repeat these sentiments: "The only thing you're not allowed to do is to write something because you have to. Write like you're not in school. You're all interesting people, your writing has showed me that" (Redwood 101 Observation, 9/29/14). The schools were in a contradictory space where they helped youth redefine success and community, while also working with youth in areas where some of them had historically struggled. The teachers at the schools used identity resources to help with academic skill

building and credit retrieval, seeking to reframe academics and credits so that they were not just pieces of the game of school, but individually valuable to the youth (through choice and agency of study), and useful for the future and for the students' roles at the school.

In a similar promotion of choice and agency, college was typically discussed as one of many future options. During my observations of the Pathways senior year program, I saw one day of a yearlong process where students would present on post high school avenues, presentations that included local colleges, but was not limited to college as a viable option. The schools sought to inform and empower the youth to make choices that they were passionate about. In this way, when possible, academics and credits were not siloed away from youths' personal and social lives, but interwoven as another piece that fit into the figured worlds of the schools.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have looked across the two cases and explored some of the major findings. The findings focus on features of the alternative school programs and DJ and Penelope's identity development: roles that matter and redefining learning and school, school community, and their own narratives. There are also findings on the process of identity development in the alternative schools: negotiating contradictions and the iteration of identity. Just as the cases in this study are not focused solely on the schools or the specific youth, but the combination of school plus youth, all of these findings are not simply features of the school programs or the individual youth, but are part of the interaction between the two. I now move to my final chapter where I will review the various parts of this study and discuss the implications, limitations, and areas for future research.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Future Directions

In this chapter, I will revisit the goals, research questions, and procedures of my study. I will then outline the major findings and briefly discuss each one. I will end by addressing potential limitations, future research, and implications of my study to education.

Study Review

This research study was started because, as a former alternative school teacher, I hoped to learn more about the experiences of youth as they enter into alternative schools. I also hoped to explore the resources that these schools provide for youth who are often coming to the schools marginalized and disenfranchised. One goal of my study was to add to what we, as educators, know about the identity development of youth. I leveraged alternative schools as schools on the margins to provide a unique perspective into learning spaces outside the norm of schooling. In this way, this study can provide insight into the conventional schools youth came from, the design of the learning environments they entered into, and the process they took as they transitioned schools and developed new identities in new educational spaces. This study can specifically contribute to what we know about the identity development of youth entering alternative schools, but can also contribute to youth identity development in other contexts as well.

I looked for the opportunities and resources that youth were given in the alternative schools and how youth took up those opportunities and resources. I also sought to reframe views of youth attending alternative schools as more than just "at-risk" (Vadeboncoeur and Portes, 2002). While the lives of youth are often complex and risk does exist, I hoped, by telling individual stories, to complicate the labels that can often accompany youth when they attend alternative schools (unmotivated, drug users, misfits, academically unsuccessful, etc.). While DJ

smoked marijuana and drank alcohol, it did not solely define him. He was also an intelligent, kind, and passionate young man, who embraced his role at Pathways and influenced the school community. While Penelope was wrestling with challenging life events outside of school, they also were only a part of the overall narrative of her life and her identity development.

I approached my research from a sociocultural perspective, that youth success, learning, and identity development is an ongoing interaction between individuals and the people and contexts in their lives (Holland et al., 1998; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006; Willis, 1981; Wortham, 2005). Too often youth are positioned as being the ones solely responsible for their success in school – being unmotivated, making poor life choices, etc. – or students' out-of-school lives are defined by risk (Bridgeland et al., 2006). While I do not discount the roles of students' motivation and choices or their out-of-school lives, the role of schools cannot be discounted. With alternative schools as a setting, I wanted to highlight the ways in which schools themselves interact with youth lives and influence the identities and trajectories they develop. While unique in many ways, the alternative schools in this study are just examples of the ways in which schools interact with and influence youth identity development. The same could be said of any context in which youth interact. To understand this process, I looked at features of the school that impacted youth identity development and how those features were built into the ideologies and structures of the schools.

Research Questions

My research questions for this study focused on both the youth and the alternative schools, looking at identity development as a continuing and interactive process. I asked:

- How do youth identities develop as they enter into alternative schools?
- How do these identities contrast to the identities the youth had in their previous schools?

- In the alternative schools, what resources are available for youth identity development and how are these resources used?
- How do youths' out-of-school lives interact with their in-school identities?

My first research question covered the entirety of the data I collected, looking at youth experience at the schools. I focused on cases in order to look at the processes in depth throughout the school year. My second question looked at how the youth described their previous identities and how those descriptions compared to who they were becoming at the alternative school. My third question focused on the resources available for identity development and how those resources were taken up by the case study youth. Finally, my fourth question explored the ways youths' out-of-school lives were brought into the alternative schools.

In this study, I was interested in both the youth and the alternative schools. I wanted to hear about the perspectives and experiences of youth and, in a small way, give them the voice they so rightfully deserve. It is critically important to hear from youth on the margins of education, youth who have left conventional schools. By passing these students off as just alternative students, misfits who didn't fit into the mainstream version of schooling, these youth are further marginalized. However, instead of just marginalizing individuals, whole schools of youth are marginalized. Portraying youth (dropouts or otherwise) who leave conventional schools as losers or as deficient obscures the structures, ideologies, and practices of the schools they leave (Fine, 1991). The same can be said by youth-focused rhetoric that says some youth need to get back on track or that they just need a different form of learning (te Riele, 2007). Again, this framing puts the onus on youth and avoids the critical examination of schools and school structures. To stop the marginalization of youth and of alternative schools, it is important to listen to what youth attending alternative schools have to say about education.

While there is impressive literature that looks at identity development and youth engagement, including a strong and growing body of work that looks at the role of context and communities on identity development (Baines, 2014; Nasir, 2012; Nolen, Tierney, Goodell, Lee, & Abbott, 2014), there is currently little work that looks specifically at identity development for students who have left mainstream schools and entered into structurally different school settings, such as alternative schools. In this study, both the youth and the settings sit outside the mainstream. Therefore, this study critically examines mainstream education from the outside, while also looking at the ways students navigate alternative schools and other contexts in their lives. By looking both in and outside of school, this study seeks to provide a complex look at how alternative schools (and the teachers, staff, and students existing within them) open up and shut down access and opportunities for students to create and sustain identities as successful learners and members of the school communities.

Method

The data for this dissertation is from an ethnographic longitudinal study of youth attending two alternative high schools over the course of one academic year that includes over 50 hours of interviews and 70 hours of observation. The study contained two phases: 1) Cohorts of incoming students (first semester) and 2) Case studies (all year).

The first phase focused on the schools and the cohort of students entering the school (32 students across both school sites). Cohort participants were interviewed and observed in orientation classes and activities made up of transfer students new to the school. Additionally, school principals and four teachers who mentored the incoming cohort were interviewed.

The second phase focused on case study youth, selected from the students in phase one (four students – two from each school). These four students were interviewed throughout the

school year and were observed in multiple school classes and contexts. Each of the case studies included approximately five-to-seven hours of interviews and 20 hours of observation (occurring over ten months), both in and outside of classes. Significant individuals for three of these case study youth were also interviewed: friends, significant teachers, and family members. In observations and interviews I sought representation from the multiple worlds of the participating youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). I selected case study youth by looking at survey data, observations, and interviews. Case study youth were selected by observing their participation during the orientation class or activities, their responses on a survey, and their initial interview. Case study selection criteria focused on maximizing variation across cases. The two cases chosen for this dissertation were selected because the two narratives were representative of the youth in the study and their experiences helped address my research questions.

The primary forms of data collected in this study were interviews and observations. Additionally, surveys were used to inform case study participant selection and documents (school and class handouts and case study participant work) were reviewed. Observational tools included ethnographic notes and photographs of the school settings.

Methodological Approach. I used Herrenkohl and Mertl's (2010) planes of analysis as an analytical approach to my data collection. Herrenkohl and Mertl, borrowing from Rogoff (1995, 2003), described four planes of analysis to think about the processes and relationships between individuals participating in social worlds. For Herrenkohl and Mertl, the analysis planes are: context, community, interpersonal, and personal. Using these planes of analysis I was able to focus on different levels of participation and process at the two sites. Specifically, using the context plane, I was able to explore the types of identities and ideologies that were promoted at the school; using the community plane, I was able to see the ways that identities and

ideologies played out in the practice of the school community; using the interpersonal plane, I was able to see the ways in which case students' identities developed in practice over time; and, using the personal plane, I was able to explore individual students' stories of education and identity development.

Analysis. In both interviews and observations, a combination of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and theoretical constructs (Nasir, 2012; Wenger, 1998) were used to create codes and coding categories for the case study. I focused on five phases of data analysis in this study: open coding, focused coding based on theory and research questions, writing analytic memos looking in and across codes and data, generating hypotheses, and analysis of specific discourse events. For the discourse analysis I used thematic role analysis (Finegan, 2011) to identify how, over the course of the year, youth used verbs and pronouns to identify the ways they talked about themselves and the schools. This analysis allowed me to see how talk shifted and the timelines that youth identified themselves as members of the school community.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss each of the major findings from my research study. I will then discuss potential limitations of this study, areas for future work, and implications of this study for theory, research, and practice. I will focus on implications for both general education and, specifically, for alternative schools.

Findings

This study had four major findings: 1) Roles matter. In both of the cases, the roles that the youth were given influenced their access to success and ideologies at the school and also impacted the identities they developed at the schools. The roles provided choice and agency and the roles they were given really mattered; they were roles that carried weight and had consequence. 2) Youth redefined and reframed their views of learning and school, including

definitions of success in school and school community. Additionally, youth re-narrated their personal stories. Doing so, the youth reframed their own role and identity in school. 3) As part of their identity development, youth negotiated the contradictions they saw in their lives. Youth saw their lives divided by space and time. The contradictions centered on who they were asked to be before coming to the alternative schools and how that aligned or didn't align with the identities they were developing at the alternative schools. 4) Students' identities thickened over time through iteration. The iterative nature of student roles and opportunities to reframe and re-narrate increased the ways in which the case study youth developed identities that were linked to the school. Two particular features of iteration that emerged as significant were moments of performance and moments of risk and vulnerability, both of which helped thicken youth identities.

For this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on findings that I believe will apply broadly, contributing to what educators know about youth identity development. The resources youth were provided and the processes that youth took in developing their identities were not specific to alternative schools, but apply to learning contexts writ large. All learning contexts provide roles and all learning contexts provide definitions of success and learning. Additionally, the value of iteration and negotiating contradictions are not just representative in the identity development of youth attending alternative schools. Finally, this work helps look at the ways identity resources are intertwined in the structure of the entire learning environment. The relational resources at Pathways and Redwood had value to DJ and Penelope because the school structures supported their value. I want to push against notions that alternative schools are too unique for findings to be applied to other schools. Though all learning environments may not

position youth as camp leaders or ask them to engage in democratic education, the roles, redefining, negotiating contradiction, and iteration still exist.

Roles That Matter

Though the roles that Penelope and DJ took on differed in nature and the type of impact they had, these roles helped the youth develop their identities within and outside the alternative schools. The roles youth were offered at Pathways and Redwood also contained a significant amount of choice and agency, but choice and agency that always carried actual weight, not just the appearance of impact or influence. The choice and agency provided a space of authoring for the youth to define their identities, a space where they could express themselves in practice. Additionally, the roles were authentic, providing responsibilities often relegated to adults, as well as being authentic to the youths' lives and social worlds (Tierney & Scipio, 2014). In their roles, DJ and Penelope felt needed and that they were an integral component of the schools. However, they felt needed as individuals, not just that they were doing a meaningful and authentic job, but that they were making it their own and being a unique and individual part of the community. Youth self-expression was not just linked to individual practices, but the communities of practice at the schools. The roles that youth were given included a relational shift in the adult-youth power dynamics at the schools, increasing youth voice, shared responsibilities, and a deepening level of trust.

Often times in education terms like choice, agency, and autonomy are code for giving students the illusion of real choice (Dweck & Molden, 2008). They can choose from a limited list of things all within the confines of a bounded system where the role of youth rarely extends beyond student. Much of Penelope's frustration with her former school stemmed from this very routine. It could be argued that, in some ways, the system at Redwood is similarly bound, with

adults handing out credit, taking on roles of authority, and providing a support network so that youth do not fail to the extremes they would without it. This is all true, yet, in comparison to mainstream education, the choices are greater. This critique is not to say that there are not opportunities for authentic autonomy within the bounded system of choice at conventional schools. Instead, my goal is to point out that there are important variations in how we define choice, agency, and autonomy. While valuable, choice, agency, and autonomy are often bounded in schools to specific projects or classes. The roles at Pathways and Redwood provided choice, autonomy, and agency in a way that extended beyond class projects, expanding their impact to more than a class grade. Penelope's committee work at Redwood helped her feel not only involved in the school, but also needed. Wenger (1998) defines communities of practice as not just existing things that individuals enter into, but shifting and changing through participation over time. Penelope acted as a member of the school community of practice, not just adopting static practices and values, but influencing the way the school continued to exist in practice. While involvement is an important feature of the roles youth are given, the need and impact of roles reframed youth participation as integral to the schools. Both Penelope and DJ talked about how the integral roles helped them feel that they were a part of the school communities. Additionally, youth voice changed the school communities for the better. DJ was able to reach 6th graders in ways an adult possibly could not; on committees, Penelope provided insights that adults on the committees may have not seen. Giving youth voice helps adults redefine views of youth. Though youth are still growing, that does not necessarily mean their opinions and experiences lack value and are not fully developed (Cohen, 1997; Giroux, 2009; Wyn & White, 2000). Giving youth voice values what youth bring to the table.

Redefining Learning and Success, School Community, and Re-narrating Youth Narratives

Results from this study also indicate the importance of resources that help students re-narrate their identities and their definitions of learning and school. Specifically in this study, three categories of redefinition emerged from the data and are exemplified in the case studies: a) Redefining school, specifically defining the alternative school as a community and a family, b) Redefining youths' definitions of learning and success within the context of the school and their roles within it, and, c) Youth re-narrating their stories, critiquing how educational and non-educational structures and routines contributed to their previous identities.

Redefining learning and success and youths' roles in school. In any environment, definitions of learning and success are wrapped up in what is valued and what types of learning and growth are promoted (Holland et al., 1998; Wenger, 1998). Ideational resources (Nasir, 2012) about success and learning help define what it means to be a part of a given community. In many mainstream schools, ideas of learning and success involve playing the game of school, what Denise Pope (2001) called 'doing school'. While alternative schools may contain aspects of 'doing school', many of the rules of the game of school are redefined. Youth entering into alternative programs often carry images of school, based on their previous experiences, but then reconfigure these images as they figure out what learning and success can mean in the alternative schools. At Pathways and Redwood, redefinition included academics, but not in the same fashion as at other schools. Academics at Pathways was often closely linked to youth roles as leaders and at Redwood it was connected to choice and individualized learning. The redefinition of learning and success was part of the process in which youth became central members of the school, in part by learning the figured worlds that existed at the alternative schools.

Redefining school as community and family. As part of the process of redefining

success and learning in school, DJ and Penelope redefined what a school community could be. From an early point in the study, both youth identified their school communities as being welcoming, accepting, and close-knit. Penelope focused on Redwood being a safe space, where individuals were accepted. While different in scope and focus, DJ talked about how much of a family the students at Pathways were. Both DJ's and Penelope's comments were echoed in observations and throughout interviews I had with other students, teachers, and administrators at the schools. Throughout the year, both DJ and Penelope talked about how the school community allowed them to be comfortable and to be themselves. Individual relationships and the school community served as relational resources to help youth develop their identities.

The school community was not just a general sentiment of safety; it was also individual relationships that served as relational resources for the youth. For both DJ and Penelope, what teachers cared about was not just academic and credit driven, but also looking at long-term success, feeling safe, and helping youth find a role. It is also important to note how the relational resources at Pathways and Redwood were not just adult/youth relationships, but also comprised a community that was safe, focused constantly on personal meaning and reflection, and encouraged identity development and agency. The community provided a space where youth felt they could successfully develop their identities. Penelope talked about how, at Redwood, she felt more like the person she was with her friends; DJ talked about how Pathways let him be the real DJ. DJ and Penelope's experiences in the alternative schools demonstrate the situatedness of identity development as the structure and purpose of the alternative schools provided a richer set of resources for them to use.

Re-narrating youth narratives. Both Pathways and Redwood provided opportunities and a framework for youth to re-narrate their stories. DJ was able to provide a narrative of his

life by looking back on the choices he made. He repeatedly talked about his experiences making him who he was, but, by providing that narrative to take place in a public space, DJ was also able to frame it as part of becoming a leader and a community member at Pathways. Penelope, largely through Redwood 101, was able to develop a critique of mainstream education and of her previous educational experiences. The Redwood 101 class focused, in part, on recognizing the structural pieces of conventional education and how those pieces can influence and constrict students' experiences. Penelope was able to share her thoughts and experiences in school with other students who had felt similar things. Narratives shifted from youth being unsuccessful or not fitting in (Vadeboncoeur and Portes, 2002), to narratives of how educational structures impact agency and success (McDermott et al., 2006; Nasir & Hand, 2008).

The re-narration that DJ and Penelope did helped to reframe their previous experiences and to position them as active agents going forward. This indicates the power of youth telling their stories and the importance of recognizing how youth narratives are framed. Both DJ and Penelope were able to tell narratives in a way that positioned them as a member of the community, aligning them to valuable practices at the schools. In essence, though in a far more complex way, their narratives told other students that they belonged there too, that their previous experiences provided entry into the community. Though past trials and tribulations, such as negative experiences in school or illegal activities, carry weight in the re-narration process, it does not seem that they are essential to it. There may be power and utility, for any school or group, alternative or otherwise, to include re-narration of stories to support community membership, affiliation, and as part of the process of developing identities.

Negotiation of Contradictions

As Penelope and DJ developed their identities in the alternative schools, part of their process was negotiating contradictions that existed within their identities and within their visions of school. DJ could not just take on a new identity and leave the old one behind – he developed his new identity, but then had to negotiate how it fit in with the entirety of his life, including any contradictions that existed between his new identity and his old friends and routines (Dreier, 2009). Penelope negotiated how to participate at Redwood, while still carrying echoes of her previous school. Practice and relationships in school were redefined, but done so through a process of negotiating contradictions (ibid). Within that negotiation, Penelope also negotiated the tensions that existed outside of school, using Redwood as a resource to do so. For both Penelope and DJ their process was one of developing their identities in the alternative schools while also negotiating the contradictions that came up in the process.

For youth experiencing risk and on the margins of education, it may be important to not ask them to replace one version of themselves for another one. Doing so may deny youth the opportunity to negotiate the contradictions in their lives. DJ couldn't just replace the DJ he was for Mr. DJ. It didn't make sense when considering the range of contexts and relationships in his life. Asking youth to turn over a new leaf and turn their back on their former community, friends, and/or identity seems even more challenging because the replacement identities, such as DJ's developing identity as Mr. DJ, are newly formed when they enter the schools and their trajectories as central members not yet solidifed. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to think about the ways that schools help youth not only renegotiate their in-school identities, but also the ways in which they make sense of the multiple identities, contradictions, and tensions that they embody across the contexts of their lives (Dreier, 2009).

Iteration of Identity

As part of my study, I hoped to look at the process in which youth identities developed in interaction with the schools they attended and other contexts and people in their lives. Doing so, I found that the role of iteration was a critical piece in how DJ and Penelope's identities thickened over time. They approached and internalized the ideational resources available at the school through iteration. They deepened their relationships and roles in the school communities through iteration. And, through iteration, they became central members of the school communities.

Both DJ and Penelope went through processes in which they figured out what it meant to participate in the alternative schools. DJ knew before the school year began that success at Pathways was connected to being a good leader. Over time he iteratively reconfigured this definition of success as he faced different experiences and challenges at Pathways. During the school year, DJ was also able to find a place for himself at Pathways as a successful leader by having repeated experiences as a camp leader and a leader at the school. These experiences were bracketed by moments of reflection and goal setting. Through the ideational resources of reflection and goal setting DJ examined his role and position in the community of practice. Penelope renegotiated her vision of school through the processes of transition from her former school to Redwood. Over time, through iterative experiences with the ideational and relational resources of critiquing conventional education and trust-building at the school, she learned that the practices from her former school were not the same at Redwood. Penelope eventually included more and more of her out-of-school life into her participation at Redwood. She began to question and experiment with who she was, while also talking about feeling that she could be herself. Penelope had iterative opportunities for choice, impact, and discussion and reflection

around gender, sexuality, and race.

Performance moments at Pathways and Redwood provide good examples of how moments of risk and vulnerability were leveraged to help youth renegotiate their identities and membership within the school community (Heath & Smyth, 1999). These moments created spaces of authoring, allowing youth to take on multiple roles and author their identities in the safe communities of the schools. They took on roles as competent students, leaders, athletes, artists, poets, and, most importantly, were valued as their unique selves. The performance moments were moments of trust-building, the youth making a vulnerable piece of themselves public. They were also important moments for iteration, when the youth could reflect on their identities and present their personal visions of themselves. The moments of high risk, be they performance or not, allowed DJ and Penelope opportunities to shift and solidify their roles and perspectives of themselves and the school.

Many times youth attending alternative schools are labeled 'at-risk' (Miller, 1989; Raywid & Mintz, 1998). Typically this designation is associated with the potential to drop out, indicating that, for whatever reason, the youth has demonstrated warning signs that they may not complete the requirements needed to graduate or that they will stop attending school. Other times, as both DJ and Penelope exemplify, youth encounter risk though they may not be identified as "at-risk" (Lee, 2009). DJ did fine academically, but had concerns about his out-of-school activities and where they were leading him. Penelope disliked her former school, feeling she couldn't be an individual, and struggled with anxiety around school. Both DJ and Penelope encountered risk in their family lives, DJ's father being out of work, Penelope's parents getting divorced, as well as struggles with alcohol and cancer. All of this was on top of the risk that they

encountered being adolescents, trying to figure out who they were and who they wanted to be, constantly developing and refining their vision of themselves.

The schools that DJ, Penelope, and other youth in the study previously attended dealt with risk in different ways. It is not my belief that any teachers or administrators deliberately sought to ignore the risk that youth were wrestling with, however the schools that participants attended prior to Redwood and Pathways seemed to either be unaware of the risk youth encountered, as was the case with DJ, or unintentionally added to it, as Penelope described.

As Carol Lee says (2009), everyone is at-risk. There is no one who does not have hardships and challenges that they are wrestling with. As DJ pointed out, when talking about his romantic woes, what he was going through may not seem that challenging compared to bigger life challenges, but that it felt challenging to him. The ways that Pathways and Redwood approached risk raise a number of questions for schools regarding who carries the onus for making sense of the risk in youths' live and how risk itself should be viewed. At Pathways and Redwood, risk was not only supported, but leveraged to help youth renegotiate their identities and help build a successful and supportive school community. When leveraged, risk can become a resource.

While general iteration across multiple school contexts helped thicken DJ and Penelope's developing identities, iterative moments of risk, vulnerability, and performance seemed to reconfigure and solidify their views of themselves, the schools, and the world in significant ways. These moments fit into the general pattern of iteration, but during these moments more was at stake. With more at stake, how the adults and youth in the school responded carried substantial weight in helping to form the identities youth developed in the schools.

Strengths and Limitations

In order to understand, in depth, the process of identity development and negotiation of youth attending alternative high schools, this study focused on a small sample of case study students. A limitation of this study is that it did not look at a larger number of students or wider range of alternative schools. A larger sample might highlight certain features of the students' experiences (i.e. adult-student relationships, meaningful curriculum), but would miss the process itself. The data, triangulated across interviews and observations, looked deeply at how youths' identities are developed in practice.

Another element of the study is that the data collection only lasted one school year. Because of this, the study only captured a short period of identity development in the youths' lives. While there is also great importance in studying the long-term identity development of youth, this study targeted the process of youth entering into alternative schools. While not a limitation, it is also important to recognize the timeframe of my study and how it was a situated moment in the schools' histories. Schools are always changing. This may be even more the case for alternative schools that, because of flexibility, size, and teacher influence, can more rapidly adjust and grow. Both Redwood and Pathways experienced significant changes in the year following the study – Redwood changed buildings, moving back to its original location and Pathways added an 11th grade year, making three connected, but stand-alone one-year programs. With these changes, each school also wrestled with different elements of what it meant to be an alternative school. Redwood wrestled with issues of student independence and community as they tackled attendance and smoking on campus; Pathways tackled issues of growth and size, as they tried to maintain the family community that was a foundation of the school and the ability to continue doing experiential learning. Both schools simultaneously also wrestled with exterior tensions of being an alternative school in a public school district. While the major findings in

this study would likely remain the same independent of school year, it is important to recognize the ways that the schools were shifting and changing and that those changes may have impacted the identities that youth developed in the schools.

A piece of this study that I embraced as a strength, but was cautious of becoming a limitation was that, prior to pursuing my Ph.D., I spent five years as an alternative high school teacher, teaching in two different alternative schools. I used this experience as a strength to build rapport with the teachers and principals in my study and to make sense of the alternative models of education that I observed. I wanted to make sure that my experiences as an alternative school teacher didn't unconsciously bias my data collection or analysis. I attempted to address potential bias through triangulation, peer review, member checks, and grounding the analysis and writing in the words and actions of my participants.

A final element of this study, both strength and limitation, is that, because of the focused qualitative nature of the data, causal claims could not be made, either about youth attending alternative schools or education in general. By studying a process, in-depth, this work expands what is known about youth identity development. Specifically, this work will add to literature on youth in transition within education, looking at the ways identity and identity resources impact how youth adapt to their new schools.

Directions for Future Research

Without a doubt the most important area for future work is to look at a wider variety of youth stories in alternative schools. Specifically, it would be good to explore youth who are less successful in the alternative schools and the interaction between success in the alternative schools and academic skills. The larger corpus of data from this study includes youth who had different trajectories from DJ and Penelope, one who participated in one interview and then

vanished (both from the study and from the school), a few others who struggled continually with attendance, others who demonstrated more resistance to the schools, others who became strong members of the community, but were inconsistent with their academics. While the findings from the two cases in this dissertation remain the same, the stories of other youth are varied and include many stories that could further help understand youth identity development as they enter into alternative schools. One example of this comes from Penelope's participation in the committees at Redwood. While the committee work seemed important to her role at the school, not all the students at Redwood participated in committees. One thing that the variation in committee participation does point out is that it often is not enough to only offer youth opportunities, school must also seek to understand why youth do or do not take up those opportunities.

Another feature to explore in greater detail is the ways in which youth are able to access the resources available at the school. In her interviews, Penelope identified the importance of discussion and talking at Redwood. I also noted, in the many observations I did, that the role of discussions at Redwood were a highly valued form of participation at the school. While strong discussion skills were not a prerequisite for success at Redwood, it did seem to help youth adapt quickly to the school. Though the practices were different, Pathways also had promoted forms of participation. One example is how leadership at Pathways was often demonstrated as a very outgoing energetic activity. The teachers talked about the variety of valuable ways to be a leader, yet still the students were pushed to be loud and energetic in their leadership at camp. At both Redwood and Pathways the promoted forms of participation may have unforeseen disadvantages, making access to identities and success at the school easier for some youth than others. Doris, one of the teachers at Redwood, talked about how some youth come to the school and are fish in

water, hitting the ground running, while others take varying amounts of time to adjust, figuring out the social and academic norms and skills needed at the school. An avenue of future work would be to look at the specific social and academic skills that help youth adjust and thrive in different alternative schools and how those skills interact with identity resources in the schools, looking at the interaction between the practices and youths' abilities to take them up.

Additionally, I recognize that youth may see themselves as successful at the school, yet still think themselves less successful in a specific content area. It may be useful to look at more nuanced identities for youth in alternative schools, examining how their overarching identities interact with context or content specific identities, such as their identities in math or science. Relatedly, it may be useful for future studies to explore the connection of identity development for youth in alternative schools with the grades, credit they earn, or their entry into college. For this study I specifically chose not to pursue this line of research because I felt that doing so would devalue identity development as something that is only worthwhile if the outcome is good grades or credits earned. Additionally, while I wanted to recognize DJ and Penelope's background, I wanted to look at their overarching narrative, which I felt quantitative outcomes might diminish, while also further positioning them as successful or unsuccessful.

A final area of future research that I would like to pursue is to continue to explore the identities and trajectories of youth outside of school. DJ found much resolution between "the two DJs", saying, at the end of the year, that he now felt like one person. However, when considering factors such as drug use, absenteeism, and not turning in work, developing a strong identity within the alternative school may not be enough. DJ and Penelope both developed strong identities within the alternative schools; these identities became interwoven with their identities from other parts of their lives. Many contradictions were resolved. Yet, contexts,

relationships, and histories carried significant weight. DJ went back to smoking weed and drinking alcohol and other students still struggled with absences or earning credit. It is true that DJ felt more in control and felt a more unified identity. Yet, he still smoked weed on a regular basis. Context matters. DJ was always the same person, but friends and contexts outside of school still influenced him. The identity work that DJ did throughout the year demonstrates how a "just say no" attitude towards bad influences is not often a realistic approach, nor one that helps youth develop undivided identities. Yet, there is still more to learn. I hope to continue to do work that helps us understand how students' identities in school can better transfer outside of school and impact the decisions they make and trajectories they take after graduating from the alternative school.

Much work has been done on the multiple resources, places, and people in youths' lives (Barron, 2006; Bell et al., 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). While this study considers the multiple worlds of youth, future work could continue this path, following youth and looking at day-to-day moments of transition and participation across contexts. Alternative schools may not just be alternatives to normative schooling, but also may be an alternative to much of the world. They may create bubbles that do not always mirror the world outside the schools. This is not to say that alternative schools should change to mirror other parts of the world – both DJ and Penelope's stories show the flaw in that reasoning. Yet, more work needs to be done to understand how to help youth in alternative schools transfer and transform the other communities and contexts of their lives, present and future.

Implications and Contributions

By identifying the process of identity development of students in the study, I hope to contribute to scientific knowledge about alternative schools, marginalization and success in

school, and the process of youth identity development. This study will also hopefully contribute to conversations about educational equity, promoting alternative paths to educational success, the structures and practices of education, and thinking around high school dropouts. Specifically, I hope to: 1) Contribute to literature on youth identity development, 2) Contribute to the larger dropout literature and the educational practices of re-engaging youth, 3) Add to the rather small body of literature on alternative schools, and, 4) Contribute to educational theory by using sociocultural theories from the Learning Sciences to explore topics less explored by that field, such as disengaged students, the dropout phenomenon, and issues such as motivation and re-engagement.

Contributions to Youth Identity Development

While I am not the first, nor the best, researcher to do so, the value of giving youth voice is significant enough that it bears repeating. Youth on the whole are marginalized in our society (Cohen, 1997; Giroux, 2009; Wyn & White, 2000). They are viewed as in process and, thus, their perspectives are often taken with passing amusement and a grain of salt. This is even more the case for youth on the margins of education. Their perspectives are often discounted because they have negative labels (Vadeboncoeur and Portes, 2002) or, as alternative school students, are outside the norm. I take a slightly different view. I believe that, if educators seek to improve education, it is important to seek out youth perspectives, particularly youth on the margins.

Each of my findings on identity resources and on the process of identity development could have an impact on not just what we know about youth on the margins or alternative schools, but youth identity development writ large. In addition, this study has shown the ways that identity resources do not exist as separate from the schools they are in, but are intertwined with other resources and structures at the schools. The relational resources at Pathways and

Redwood had an impact on youth because the structure of the schools positioned those resources as valuable, providing the means for which strong relationships and strong school communities could form. In studying youth identity development, it is important to look not only at individual resources, but the ways those resources exist in concert with the rest of the structure of the educational context. This study also informs youth identity development in the value of roles. In particular, educators should consider the ways in which youth roles are integral to the school and carry true meaning for youth. Additionally, the redefining that occurred at Redwood and Pathways impacted the ways that youth participated in the schools. It may be useful for researchers to examine not only definitions of school, success, and learning, but also the utility in redefining them. For, in redefining school, success, and learning, youth narratives also can be redefined.

This study also can inform what educators know about, not just resources for identity development, but the process itself. Specifically, I hope this study informs literature on youth identity development to consider the ways in which contradictions are negotiated in youths' lives and the important role of negotiating contradictions. For both case study youth, negotiating contradictions was a central part of their identity development. Educators could benefit from paying attention to contradictions and further theorizing ways to help support youth to negotiate them. I also hope that this study contributed to theories of youth identity development by examining the iterative process in which youth identities are thickened as youth interact with the identities resources available to them.

One undercurrent of my research questions, my interview protocols, and many other pieces of this study, was to try to capture youth perspectives, documenting what youth saw as relevant. In this study I focused on identity development, but I consciously avoided housing that

identity development in one specific academic area. I did so in part because I wanted to examine a larger scope of identity development as youth entered into alternative schools, but also because I wanted to provide a space where the youth in the study could bound their identities, identifying practices, contexts, and individuals that were relevant and significant in their lives. I attempted to capture, through interviews and collaboration, what youth saw as important and how youth defined their identities.

Contributions to Re-engagement and Dropout Prevention Theory and Practice

This study may be useful to dropout prevention by looking at the role of identity development as a critical element of youths' experiences, and the ways in which youth interact with identity resources as part of their identity development, by considering how marginalized youth become successful members of alternative schools, and reflecting on the ways that youth and risk can be redefined to empower youth on the margins of education.

In order to think more deeply around student attrition, it is important to understand the interaction between youth who are leaving mainstream education and the alternative schools they enter into. It is also important to study educational settings that attempt to tackle both the realities of students' out-of-school lives and previous marginalization in school. In particular, by studying identity development as an interaction between youth and the schools they attend, risk factors are redefined, no longer just characteristics of youth or schools. This perspective may help think about youth labeled as potential dropouts and programs aimed at dropout prevention. Finally, the redefining of school, learning, and community that occurred at Pathways and Redwood focused on redefining structures, be they academic or social. Ideas of school were redefined. If educators want to re-engage youth then perhaps they need to redefine school.

Contributions to Alternative Education Theory and Practice

A significant goal of this study is to help alternative schools. This research may be beneficial to alternative schools as it informs approaches to helping marginalized and disenfranchised youth redevelop their identities in more agentic and supportive school communities. I hope this study can help alternative schools better understand the ways in which alternative schools successfully serve some youth, as well as, how to better serve others.

Though identity development is central to the work that occurs in alternative schools (Tierney, 2014), there is a gap in academic literature about the identities of youth who have left mainstream schools to attend alternative schools. Literature that documents the process of identity development for youth entering into alternative schools is needed if, for no other reason, than to provide support for alternative programs that are successfully helping youth on the margins of education. Such work is necessary in order to fully understand what occurs in alternative schools. Pope (2001) introduced the idea of 'doing school', which involves the mindsets and practices of, superficially, what it means to be successful in mainstream school. While 'doing school' is not necessarily an ideal end goal, the students who are successful in mainstream school are those who understand the rules of the game of 'doing school'. In part, by looking at identity development in an alternative school, this study explores what it means to 'do alternative school'. If alternative schools are, in part, a safety net to help prevent students on the margins, then it is important to understand the rules of the game in alternative schools, so those programs can successfully and equitably serve all their students.

I hope that this dissertation provides a documentation of alternative schools that will help people better understand the value of these schools and the ways that youth interact with the alternative school programs. I also hope to provide some findings that help alternative school educators. Specifically, I hope that this study adds some insights into the youth attending

alternative schools, the process of identity development, and the ways youth interact with the identity resources the schools offer.

I hope this study provides a perspective on youths' lives that may be helpful for alternative school educators when they consider the influences in youths' lives or the process in which youth become members of the school community. Additionally, I hope that this study helps alternative school educators consider the process of identity development for youth entering into their schools. By focusing on identity as an interaction, the process of identity development that DJ and Penelope took cannot be separated from the resources provided by the schools. It may be useful for educators to consider these resources as ways to help youth become members of the schools they enter. While alternative schools, such as Redwood and Pathways, may already have the resources I identify in this study in place, it may be useful for these schools to be conscious of the resources and intentional in their use. In addition, there are many alternative schools that may have yet to consider the power of roles, the impact of redefining and re-narrating, or the processes of negotiating contradiction and iteration.

Contributions to Sociocultural Literature

There already exists a significant body of work in the Learning Sciences that has studied how identities and forms of participation are produced and reproduced through social categorization in mainstream education and the informal contexts surrounding it (Eckert, 1989; McDermott et al., 2006; Willis, 1981; Wortham, 2005). While some studies, such as Eckert, Fine (1991), and Willis (ibid), have looked at resistant social groups, these youth are studied in contrast to adaptive social groups and the mainstream schools that help produce these groups. In her study, Eckert mentions an alternative school populated by "burnouts" but maintains her focus on the mainstream high school. Each of these studies is valuable, helping educators understand

the processes of how social categories are produced in schools and the, potentially negative, impact they can have on students. This study will, hopefully, contribute to this literature by providing insights into youth in transition, the process of identity development, and identity resources.

This study looked specifically at youth as they started at alternative high schools that were structurally, relationally, and ideologically different than the schools they had come from. As DJ and Penelope and many other youth transitioned to the alternative schools, they went through a process of learning new norms and practices at the schools. They also went through a process in which they developed identities within the alternative school communities of practice. Throughout these processes, DJ and Penelope's previous and out-of-school lives were constant reference points for making sense of the new schools. For youth in transition, it may be useful to further theorize on what reference points and definitions of school youth bring into their new schools.

The process of iteration, accented with performances and moments of risk and vulnerability, helped them transition and become a member of the community. I hope that the field can benefit by considering the ways that not only learning, but identity is thickened through iteration and how iteration of identity can be designed into learning environments.

Additionally, this study extends the work on identity resources by looking at the ways outsider communities (such as alternative schools existing on the outskirts of mainstream education) use these resources to help the identity development, engagement, and success of youth. One of the major findings of this study was that youth redefined learning and success, school community, and their own narratives. While the process of redefining pulled on the elements that support identity development (Nasir, 2012), such as relational and ideational

resources, the data was not just another example of these constructs. Instead, each of the constructs were given increased value within the context of the alternative schools and new elements were brought to light. The ideational resources the school provided were in tension with those the youth carried from conventional schools and other areas of their lives. Additionally, the ideational resources were intimately connected with youth roles, relationships, and iteration, including moments of risk and performance. The relational resources existed at both alternative schools, however, it was moments of performance and risk and vulnerability that seemed particularly significant to identity development. Finally, the relational resources were not just strong supportive relationships, but connected to ideational resources and depended on the type of school community that existed at the alternative schools.

Conclusion

My hope is that this study will contribute to conversations about educational equity, alternative education, the process of identity development, the structures and practices of education, and youth voice. With the goal of educational equity, it is particularly important to study students who are leaving mainstream education. It is also important to look at youths' experiences as they enter alternative schools. Doing so can help redefine concepts of success, risk, community, alternative schools, and youth attending those schools. This redefinition is itself a form of equity. By empowering disenfranchised youth, redefining and re-narrating what school and success can mean, and looking at the process of identity development of youth in alternative settings, educators not only learn from youth and schools that exist on the margins of education, but also reduce the margins of education themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey

STUDENT SURVEY PHASE ONE

How old are you?

15 16 17 18 19 20

Why did you decide to start attending [school name]?

_____

_____

_____

What do you like most about [school name]?

_____

_____

_____

How is [school name] different from your previous school?

_____

_____

_____

How do you spend your time outside of school?

Work Volunteering Taking care of siblings Time with friends

A sport Videogames Art, Music, or Writing Online

Other? _____

Appendix B: Observation Protocol

Date:
Location:
Start time:

End Time:

General Notes:

Subject/s of focus:
Case Students:

Other Consented Students:

Absent –

Describe the physical space:
Demographics:
Youth (Number of youth, gender, ethnicity, etc.):
Adults and their roles:

Activity Log:

Observation: Interpretation/ Reflection

Overall participation norms:

Peer/ social activity (typical social activity):

Relational Resources:	**Material Resources:**
Ideational Resources:	**Writing Self Into Practice:**
Integral Roles:	**Access to the Domain:**
Practices:	**Participant Structures:**

Values, principles, practices, tools, emotions, distinctions of worth (activity around these moments)? What is neutral (a given)?

Participation patterns of focal participants?

Who is interacting with whom (include gestures) (interpersonal interactions and social arrangements)?

Changes in Language?

References to previous school/ education or out-of-school contexts/ lives? Resources?

Engagement and disengagement (triggers, shifts)? Afforded identities?

Appendix C: Interview Protocols

Appendix C-1: STUDENT INTERVIEW #1 PROTOCOL (Prior to selection of case study students)

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

1. Imagine that a student just moved to Seattle and was thinking about coming to [school]. How would you describe the school to them?
   School community
   Belonging/ Membership
   Events/ routines that build community
   Norms – formal or informal

2. What do you like most about the school? What's one thing that you would like to change?

3. What does it mean to be a member of the community at this school? What does it look like? What rules are there at this school?

4. Tell me about the first few weeks of school (probe about different times of it). What did you do? *How did the first few weeks go for you? What did you think about that (mention specific activities)?* What was the most important thing you learned in the first few weeks? *What's one thing you really liked about your first few weeks? What's one thing that you would like to change?*

    a. Tell me about (core class). What do you do in that class? How has that class gone for you? What did you think about that (mention specific activities)? What was the most important thing you learned from that class? What's one thing you really like about your [core class]? What's one thing that you would like to change?

5. Tell me a bit about yourself. How do you spend your time outside of school? [follow up about types of places time is spent]

6. Tell me a little bit about your previous school. How is (school) different from you previous school? What did you like or dislike about your previous school(s)?

7. Can you tell me the story of how you came to be a student at this school? What made you decide to come here?

8. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself back when you were attending you previous school? How are you different now, compared to how you were back then?
    a. [Probe for grades, attendance*, social fitting in, relationships with teachers*, participation in classes, *views of self*]
    b. (Possible follow up question: *What kind of a student were you? When did (absences, poor grades, etc.) begin? What kind of a student are you now?)* What is difficult for you in school? (What was difficult for you in your past school?) What is easy? (What was easy for you in your past school?)

9. Do you act the same when you are doing _____ as you do at [name of school]? [Ask for examples] In what ways do you feel like [school] lets you be yourself?

10. If Time Permits: How do you think people saw you in your previous school? How do people see you outside of school (other contexts mentioned earlier) (probe for various individuals: teachers, mentors, friends, staff, parents, siblings, etc).

11. Can you *sketch out* for me the important or influential people in your life? Has this list of people changed over time? (If so) How? (When do you typically see these people? How do you and ----- typically communicate (in person, texts, twitter, facebook?)) (What do you and ----- typically do when you're together?)

12. If Time Permits: When you first came to this school, how did you feel about the school? How are things different now compared to a few weeks ago? *When you came in here, how do you think people saw you? Has this changed?*

13. If Time Permits: What is success look like at this school?
    What is success outside of school (other contexts mentioned earlier)?
    What is success in other schools?

14. If Time Permits: Thinking back to either the last few weeks or the past few years, what types of things have you enjoyed doing in school? What do you like about school?

15. What are your plans for next year? What are your plans for after you graduate?

16. Is there anything else about _____ (school community, experience in school, interests/activities outside of school) that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me? Do you have any questions for me?

<u>Information to get somehow in the interview:</u>
1. What grade are you in?
2. Number of schools they have attended over the past few years?
3. If applicable: Who is your advisor?
4. Talk of pseudonyms

End Interview #1

Appendix C-2: ORIENTATION TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your thoughts on education and your experiences teaching in this school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and this school? Tell me about your role at the school.

2. Imagine that a student just moved to Seattle and was thinking about coming to [school]. How would you describe the school to them? What the most important rules or norms at the school?
   Belonging/ Membership
   Events/ routines that build community
   Norms – formal or informal
   Follow up: Tell me about the school community at [school]. How about the community of your classroom/[core class]?

3. Can you tell me the story of how you came to the school? How long at the school?
   Follow up: Why did you get involved in this sort of work?
   Follow up: What have your experience been like?

4. Can you tell me the various things you do within your job as a teacher at this school? What aspects of your job do you feel are the most important?

5. Can you tell me a bit about ---- class?/ Can you talk through your other classes from last semester? How about this (upcoming) semester?

6. Can you tell me a little bit about the focus on the class(es)? What types of activities in the classes you teach? (whole class discussion/ middle-sized groups, etc.)

7. If Time: Can you tell me a little bit about the different types of participation in your classes? Do students participation change or stay the same across types of activities?
   Pathways: At camp?

8. What is your definition of learning?

9. What do you think the point of school is?

10. Describe to me the kids that come to this school? What should I know about them?

11. What were the educational experiences like for these young people (previous schools)? What are the educational experiences like for these young people at ---- (outside and inside school)?

12. Recognizing that students each have their own story, are there any general similarities across the students that come here? Views of school? Views of teachers/ adults? Attendance? Credit deficiency? Level of reading/ math? Drug use? Motivation?

13. Can you tell me a little bit about the process for students entering the school? Tours? Interviews? Selection Criteria?
    Follow Up: How do student learn about -----? What types of social connections or networks do students enter the school with? How does that influence their time here?

14. What types of students do you think do really well at this school?

15. Can you talk to me about changes that occur for students throughout their first year at this school? Based on your experiences with students, how do you see students' identities changing once they start here?
    Follow Up: Have you seen students' views and dispositions towards schooling and learning change while they are at the school? How and why? Does the length of time they are here make a difference?
    Pathways: Does this maintain or change upon their return to their home school?
    Follow Up: Can you tell me a story of some students who you think had typical experiences at [the school]? How did their identities change over time? Can you think of a student who changed in the opposite way?

16. In what ways do students' personal or social lives mingle with their academic lives here at ----? Either formal or informal ways that this happens? What about their out-of-school lives?
    Follow Up: What ways have you seen students make moves to incorporate their out-of-school lives into school?

17. What struggles do students have at this school? Revisit topics from earlier question: Views of school? Views of teachers/ adults? Attendance? Credit deficiency? Level of reading/ math? Drug use? Motivation?

18. If Time: Do you have any thoughts on why students are more or less engaged in school? What influences students to be more or less engaged?

19. If Time: Often teachers talk about the challenges of student motivation, apathy, and resistance. Can you talk to me a little bit about each of those, maybe starting with student motivation? Apathy? Resistance?
    Pathways: Talk about how I expected more apathy/ cynicism. Ask about why it didn't exist.

20. What are the challenges you face as a teacher? District support? Parent interactions? What rewards you gain as a teacher/staff member that maybe aren't the obvious ones?

21. What is success look like at this school?
    What is success outside of school (other contexts mentioned earlier)?
    What is success in other schools?

22. Advice to students who are starting at this school?

23. How can my research best serve you and the young people you work with? In what ways can I help advocate for this school and alternative schools in general?
    Follow Up: What are your concerns about educational research done?

24. Is there anything else about _____ (school community, experience in school, interests/activities outside of school) that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me? Do you have any questions for me?

Bonus Questions: Engagement

25. Give me an example from the past week of student engagement. What did it look like? What contributed to the student being engaged?
    Possibly follow up by asking about opportunities and constraints on participation, students' social networks, student positioning (by others and by self), roles (offered and taken up), and membership, affiliation, and belonging.

26. Give me an example from the past week of students being less engaged. What did it look like? What contributed to the student being engaged? Was there anything non-school related that the student was engaged in?
    Possibly follow up by asking about opportunities and constraints on participation, students' social networks, student positioning (by others and by self), roles (offered and taken up), and membership, affiliation, and belonging.

27. How typical of student engagement are the events you just described?

End Orientation Teacher Interview

Appendix C-3: STUDENT INTERVIEW #2 PROTOCOL

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

Learning

1) Tell me about a time you learned something, and how you know you learned it? [If an in-school example, ask for an out-of-school or vice-versa.]
   a) Do you like learning that?
   b) Have you learned anything else like that?

2) What is your definition of learning?

3) Do you think of yourself as a learner? Where and how?

4) Do you like learning? Why or why not? What about?

5) What helps you learn?
   a) Where do you learn best?
   b) Who helps you learn and how?
   c) Who prevents you from learning? What prevents you from learning?
   d) Do you learn mostly when people teach you or when you figure something out on your own?

Schooling

6) What do you think the point of school is? Do you like school?
   a) In previous set of questions: [Probe for grades, attendance, social fitting in, relationships with teachers, participation in classes, views of self]
   b) Possible follow up questions: What kind of a student were you in your previous school? When did (absences, poor grades, etc.) begin? What kind of a student are you now?)

7) Why do people go to school? Why do you go to school?

8) Do you feel like you were learning in school?

9) Do you pay attention in school? Why or why not and where?

10) What do you learn here in school?

11) Difference between schooling and learning? Is one more important than the other?

12) In one word, how do you feel about school?

13) Can you tell me a little bit about your previous school? What kind of identity did your school have?
    a) Mascot?
    b) School Spirit?
    c) Rivalries
    d) How students view the school

14) If Time: Do you have any thoughts on why students are more of less engaged in school? At [school] specifically? What influences students to be more or less engaged?

Identity

15) *Is there anything about how you see yourself that you think people ought to know?*

16) *What are your goals in life?*

17) *What is your vision of who you are? How have you come to develop that vision of yourself?*

18) *Sometimes people talk about having different identities. Like, for me, I have an identity as a dad, as a researcher, as a musician, stuff like that. Can you tell me about the different identities that you have? Look for academic, social, civic, cultural, around specific activities.*

19) *Can you describe to me how you think the other people at this school view you?*

20) Can you tell me a bit about any struggles you had in your last school (skills, credit, attendance, turning in work)? Do you still struggle with that?

21) Can you talk to me a little bit about your thoughts on college? Do you plan to go? Who do you know that is close to you that went to college or has knowledge about college?

Experiences in School

22) Best and worst school experience in and out of school?

23) If Time: Thinking back to either the last few weeks or the past few years, what types of things have you enjoyed doing in school? What do you like about school?

24) In school, what do adults care about (what matters to adults)? What do adults care about at this school?

25) *What do you consider to be the most important qualities in a teacher? How about in the teachers at this school?*

26) What types of things do you like most about school? What types of things do you most like to do? What do you most like about this school? [Note: when veteran students at Redwood answered this they talked about Freedom, Choice (classes), In Driver's Seat, Ability to Talk to Teachers.]

27) Can you talk to me a little bit about the non-class times at -----? How do students spend their time? How do you spend your time? In what ways does the down time influence who students are at this school? How does it influence who you are?

28) Any advice to students who are starting at this school?

29) Is there anything else about _____ (school community, experience in school, interests/activities outside of school) that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me? Do you have any questions for me?

End Interview #2

Appendix C-4: STUDENT INTERVIEW #3 PROTOCOL (Planning observations)

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this second interview is to start to get a better sense of who you are and your life and for you to help me start to map that out and to hear your thoughts on the best ways for me to successfully complete this study.
[Describe how I will be observing a few classes and a few out-of-school contexts, all planned with them, and that I'll interview them following some of the observations, as well as interviewing others in each space (i.e. teachers, parents, co-workers, etc.)]

Out-of-school life

1. I have some specific questions I would like to ask, but let's start with you helping me plan out my observations and interviews. Since I don't have all the time in the world to observe every day of class and every activity you do, I need your help to think about the best times and places to observe. So, using myself as a model, I have a lot of parts of my life [Draw out various activities – grad student (dissertation data collection, work, writing time), family time (M and I, all of us, at home, out and about), musician (on own, band), runner, friends and extended family. Make sure to label people I am with.]. So, in order to understand me you kind of have to understand all of this stuff. [Circle 4-5 key things].

   Now, can you do a similar thing and draw out your world?
   a. Different activities you do? [The What] Are there any other activities that you enjoy doing? Is there anything you really dislike doing?
   b. Different places you go? Describe it physically, politically, in terms of norms? [The where]
   c. Different people and communities you interact with? [The with whom]
   d. Follow up to last three questions in terms of the time of day/week when these things/locations occur [The When]

   Talk about ideas of where and when to observe and who I might want to interview. Ask about people to interview at school (and camp for Pathways).
   [Look for how the contexts represent certain things to the student/ challenge level/ type of activity/ youth roles (participant's and in general)]

2. This covers the regular routines of your life; I'm curious what key moments in the last year or so that have helped define who you are? How did this moment shift who you are? How did it shift how you relate to the world? What about looking back further to the last few years? Key moments throughout your life?

3. Can you pick a few days from this past week and tell me what you did and where you went from when you first woke up until you went to sleep? Can you draw me a map of the different places you went?

4. If time: Can you talk to me about the different people in your life that you interact with a lot?

5. If time: Are there any activities that you identify strongly with (that you think represents, at least a bit, who you are)? [Examples from my life, referencing map from question #1]
   a. Are there any groups of people or specific people that you identify strongly with? [Again, provide examples from my life]? Do you have any groups of people or communities that you feel you are a part of?

Classes

6. Now, to help me think about your life at school, can you tell me about each of your classes. What do you do in [go through various classes]?
   a. What's one thing you really like about ----- class? What's one thing that you would like to change?

7. To what extent is [class] representative of who you are and how you interact in the world? How about [core class]?

8. Tell me about something that you did in a class or [core class] this past week.
   a. Possibly follow up by asking about opportunities and constraints on participation, students' social networks, student positioning (by others and by self), roles (offered and taken up), and membership, affiliation, and belonging.
   b. How typical is the event you just described?
   c. Tell me about something (fun/interesting/exciting or boring/uninteresting – depending on response to previous questions – that you did in that class this past week.

9. You know how people act differently in different situations? Can you tell me a little bit about the ways people typically act in school, like maybe the different types of categories of how people act? How about here at this school, are there categories of how people act here?

End Interview #3

Appendix C-5: STUDENT INTERVIEW #4 PROTOCOL
Note: Ask them to bring their school/ class binder.

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

1) Can you tell me about a time when you were truly needed? Have there been any times in school over the last few years when you have felt truly needed?

2) I know in the past you've talked that last year one of the major things you wrestled with was ---- (anxiety, turning work in, absences, drugs, getting in trouble), can you tell me how that has gone this year?
   Alternately: What do you consider to be the major things that you wrestled with last year?
   a. Is there anything else that you wrestled with last year?

3) If Applicable: Can you talk to me a little bit about your absences this year? What contributes to you being absent? What do you do when you are absent? Are there any patterns to your absences, such as days of the week or times of day you tend to miss more often? How do your absences compare to last year?

School Work

4) Can you walk me through your binder (specific class(es) for Redwood) and talk about the different things in it?
   a. Can you tell me about the work you've done that you're most proud of? Why?
   b. 5 assignments they worked the hardest on.
   c. Two to three assignments that show who they are as a student.
   d. Not interesting assignment.

Race/ Gender/ Sexual Identity

As you know, in my study I'm really interested in your identity – who you are, who you were, who you're becoming. My main focus is on school, but I'm also interested in the ways that your race, gender, and sexual identity influence who you are.

5) Can you tell me a little bit about the role that being [male/female] plays in your life at school? And what role does your race play in your life at school? What about your sexual orientation? What roles does your gender, race, or sexual preference play in other parts of your life? Are there other parts of who you are, such as race, gender, or sexual identity that you think play a significant role in your life (SES?)?

6) Imagine a new student (cousin?) who was [pick significant pieces from previous question – race, gender, sexual identity] was starting at this school. What would you tell them?

Relationships

7) In the first interview you told me about the most important or influential people in your life. Can you talk to me about the important or influential relationships in your life right now?

8) In the past you've talked to me about people that you are close to. Talk about social networks. Can you talk to me about the network of people in your life? Can you sketch out your social network, starting with the people you're closest to or that you spend the most time with? How has your network changed over time? In what ways do you think (pick different people) influence your identity or how you act in the work?

9) Can you tell me a little bit more about your parents (guardians)? In what ways have your parents influenced who you are?

10) How much do you use social media stuff like facebook, instigram, twitter? Other? Do you use it mainly for communication or for other things? What other ways do you typically communicate with people? Do you communicate with different people in different ways, like texting with family, facebook with friends, stuff like that? How important is ----- in your life?

1) Describe yourself as a member of [school]. As a member of [different classes]? Now, can you describe yourself as a member of [out-of-school community/ friend group]? What about [other out-of-school community]?

2) Can you talk to me about how your views of the school community have changed since the beginning of the year? How has your role in the community changed?

3) Can you talk to me a little bit about the community at this school? What are the most important parts of it? What else is important to you about this school? What do you value here?

4) When you came in here, how do you think people saw you? Has this changed?

5) How do you think people saw you in your previous school? How do people see you outside of school (other contexts mentioned earlier) (probe for various individuals: teachers, mentors, friends, staff, parents, siblings, etc).

6) Tell me a little bit about the social world at [school]. What about at [activity]?

7) What do you consider to be your most important relationships at [school]?
   a) Follow up about specific classes/ Advisory at Redwood.
   b) For the students in both [core class] and ----- class, does your relationship with them change between classes?

8) Ask about relationship with Advisor/ significant teacher
   a) What are your recent interactions and conversations with [core class teacher/ other significant teacher]? To what extent is that typical? What's your relationship with [core class teacher/ other significant teacher]?

End Interview #4

Appendix C-6: STUDENT INTERVIEW #5 PROTOCOL (following class or context observation/ Context Protocol)

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

Identity

1) What are you really good at?
   Pathways: What do you do that makes you a good leader?

2) Can you tell me how you imagine you would be had you stayed at your last school?

3) How do you imagine your future self now that you are attending [school]? How do you imagine yourself as a member of the school?

4) Not necessarily thinking about a career, can you talk a little bit about how you see yourself in the future?

Relationships

5) In the first interview you told me about the most important or influential people in your life. Can you talk to me about the important or influential relationships in your life right now?

6) What will [friends mentioned in last question] be doing in 40 years?

7) What do you consider to be your most important relationships at [school]?
   a) Follow up about specific classes/ Advisory at Redwood.
   b) For the students in both [core class] and ----- class, does your relationship with them change between classes?

8) What will [people mentioned in last question] be doing in 40 years?

9) How do you think the people you're close to, in or out of school, would answer the same question about you?

This Study

10) I'm interested in getting your thoughts on this study. Can you talk to me a little bit about why you decided to participate and what you've gotten out of the study?

11) If you were designing a follow up study on youth attending alternative schools, what would you want it to be focused on?

School/ Learning

12) Can you talk to me a little bit about your thoughts on different school subjects? English? Social Studies? Math? Science? (Art/ Music/ Dance?) (Engineering? Technology? Design?) Others? [Perception of their abilities]

13) In what ways do you interact with these subjects outside of school? English? Social Studies? Math? Science? (Art/ Music/ Dance?) (Engineering? Technology? Design?) Others?

14) Can you talk to me a little bit about the work you've done for classes this year. How challenging has the work been for you? Can you talk to me a little bit about deadlines? (urgency of getting work done/ turning in on time).

15) Can you pick 2-4 assignments you've had this year that stick out to you? What was the goal or purpose of those assignments? How do you think you did? Anything you would do differently?

16) If Relevant: Can you talk to me a little bit about the classes you have that I have not observed? What do you typically do in that class? What role do you typically take? How challenging is that class for you? In what ways does that class matter (To you? Your future? Being at the school?)

17) [Possible concluding/follow-up probe for anything I want to hear more about] Is there anything else about _____ (school community, experience in school, interests/activities outside of school) that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me? Any questions for me?

End Interview #5

Appendix C-7: STUDENT INTERVIEW #6 PROTOCOL

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

School/ Learning

1) Can you talk to me a little bit about your thoughts on different school subjects? English? Social Studies? Math? Science? (Art/ Music/ Dance?) (Engineering? Technology? Design?) Others? [Perception of their abilities]

2) In what ways do you interact with these subjects outside of school? English? Social Studies? Math? Science? (Art/ Music/ Dance?) (Engineering? Technology? Design?) Others?

3) Can you talk to me a little bit about the work you've done for classes this year. How challenging has the work been for you? Can you talk to me a little bit about deadlines? (urgency of getting work done/ turning in on time).

4) Can you pick 2-4 assignments you've had this year that stick out to you? What was the goal or purpose of those assignments? How do you think you did? Anything you would do differently?

5) What are the objectives of [go through classes]?

6) What are the norms of [go through classes]? What norms are you holding yourself accountable to?

7) If Relevant: Can you talk to me a little bit about the classes you have that I have not observed? What do you typically do in that class? What role do you typically take? How challenging is that class for you? In what ways does that class matter (To you? Your future? Being at the school?)

Engagement/ Success

8) What engages you in your various classes? What are the most engaging things in class (activities/ discussions/ etc.) you've done this year?

9) For classes: I want to ask a few questions about student engagement in [ask about various classes]. Can you tell me a little bit about what you think engages students at [school] when they're in class? Outside of class?

10) Thinking about both your own experiences and the experience of one or two other students who have been successful at [school/ classes/ out-of-school]…
    What contributed to their success?
    What resources (people or objects) helped them?

What roles did they take on?
How did they express themselves?

11) Thinking about one or two other students who have been less successful at [school/ classes/ out-of-school context] and either left or have just coasted along…
What contributed to their success?
What resources (people or objects) helped them?
What roles did they take on?
How did they express themselves?

Questions and Ideas for Journaling (Select one or two)

- Draw a picture of the school.
- Draw a picture of the school, but instead of just drawing rooms draw why the school is important to you.
- Draw a picture of yourself.
- Draw pictures of yourself in different places in your life.
- Draw a picture of your school last year.
- Write a poem that talks about who you are.
- Write a poem that talks about how you've changed this year.
- Write about what school should know about you, but they don't.
- Write about how you feel and how you think of yourself in different places: Home, school, out with your friends, anywhere else?
- Think about schooling and learning, how they are connected and how they are different?
- How and where do you think of yourself as a learner? How do other people think of you in these spaces?
- Draw a picture of yourself before you came to this school.
- Draw a picture of yourself in school here.
- Other ideas?

Out-of-school

12) Imagine that someone was thinking about joining/ getting into [out-of-school activity]. How would you describe it to them? How would you describe the [activity] community to them?
Belonging/ Membership
Events/ routines that build community
Norms – formal or informal

13) Tell me a bit about yourself when you're a part of [out-of-school community].

14) What do other people think of you in these places (including teachers, friends, staff, parents, siblings, etc).

15) What are the goals of ------? What are the norms of [the out-of-school context]? What norms are you holding yourself accountable to?

16) For the students in both [school] and [out-of-school], does your relationship with them change between places?

17) Tell me about a time you learned something in [out-of-school community].

18) In previous interviews you talked about all the different parts of your life (places, activities, people). To what extent is [out-of-school context] representative of who you are and how you interact in the world?

General

19) What are your recent interactions and conversations with (Core class teacher/ other significant teacher/ out-of-school interviewed participant)? To what extent is that typical?
    Go through other interviewed people.

20) Top 3 things you've learned here—and when.

21) When you came in here, how do you think people saw you? Has this changed?

22) If you could say something or give some advice to yourself from a year ago, what would you say? What about at the beginning of this school year, when you started at -----, what would you say? Other moments that you would give advice (Two years ago?, etc.)

23) Advice to others?

24) Future?

25) [Possible concluding/follow-up probe for anything I want to hear more about] Is there anything else about _____ (school community, experience in school, interests/activities outside of school) that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me?

End Interview #6

Appendix C-8: STUDENT INTERVIEW #7 PROTOCOL (Follow-Up – a few months after interview #6)

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

General

1. How's it going? Can you describe the past few months to me? What have you been doing in [classes/ school/ out-of-school contexts]? Have there been any key moments from the past few months?

2. How are you the same or different than you were a few months ago? What's new in your life?

3. How would you describe yourself if this were the first interview of a different study?

4. Can you tell me about any important events from the past few months? Can you tell me how that went?

5. What key moments in the last month has helped define who you are? How did this moment shift who you are? How did it shift how you relate to the world? What about looking back further to the last few years? Key moments throughout your life?

School/ Classes

6. Imagine that a student just moved to Seattle and was thinking about coming to [school]. How would you describe the school to them?
   School community
   Belonging/ Membership
   Events/ routines that build community
   Norms – formal or informal

7. What does it mean to be a member of the community at this school? What does it look like?

8. Describe yourself as a member of [school] this year. How has your views of the school changed, if at all?

9. Tell me about [out-of-school activity]. How's that going? Any new activities?
   Music. Horseback riding. Gaming. Social Justice/ Social Movements
   Roles that matter. Challenge level.

10. Tell me about your classes this year. What do you like about ------ class? How is it the same or different from other classes you've taken here?
    Animation. Science. Math.

11. How has your participation in [school/ classes/ out-of-school contexts] changed over the past months?

Relationships

12. Can you tell me about your relationship with [interviewed person]? How about [another interviewed person]?

13. How has your relationships with (teachers/ out-of-school interviewed participants) changed over the past months?

General Part 2

14. In previous interviews you talked about all the different parts of your life (places, activities, people). To what extent is [school/ classes/ out-of-school context] representative of who you are and how you interact in the world?

15. Advice to others in life? What have you learned about life, school, or whatever that you think others should know? How would you help orient a new student to the school?

16. Can you tell me about how you feel like you've made an impact this past year? In what ways have you influenced other people, other things, the school, whatever?

17. Future? Not necessarily career. Life goals? Dreams? College access?

18. [Possible concluding/follow-up probe for anything I want to hear more about] Is there anything else about _____ (school community, experience in school, interests/activities outside of school) that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me?

End Interview #7

Appendix C-9: CASE STUDY PERSONAL INTERVIEW (FRIENDS/ FAMILY/ MENTORS) PROTOCOL

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you know [case study youth]?

2. How long have you known them? OR When did you first meet [case study youth]?

3. Can you tell me a little bit about [case study youth]? How would you describe them?

4. Tell me about your relationship with [case study youth].

5. Can you tell me what kinds of changes have you seen in [case study participant] over the past year?
    a. If applicable: How about going back further, are there any other significant changes over time that you have seen in [case study youth]?

6. Are there any specific moments where you have seen a shift in [case study youth]'s personality or identity?

7. How would you describe [case study youth] since they started attending [school]?

8. How do you think [school] is influencing who they are and how they act?

9. School/ Context: What roles have you seen [case study youth] take on in [school] or you've heard about them taking on? What roles have you seen [case study youth] take on in [context] or you've heard about them taking on?
    a. If context interview: Talk to me about the types of activities that [case study youth] does when they're here.

10. How do you feel that <u>you</u> influence the type of identity [case study youth] has developed and is developing?

11. Friends/ Context: What kind of things do you and [case study youth] do together?

12. If Appropriate: Can you tell me about any significant conversations that you've had with [case study youth]?

13. Can you tell me of any vivid memories you have of [case study youth]?

14. If Relevant: Can you tell me a little bit about [case study youth] relationships with others people you know?
    a. Can you tell me a little bit about [case study youth]'s friends and the communities they are a part of?

15. What interests does [case study youth] have?

16. How do you think [case study youth] would describe themselves?

17. What hopes do you have for [case study youth]?

18. Can you describe how you imagine [case study youth] in five years? Ten? Twenty?

19. Is there anything else that you think I really need to know about [case study youth]?

20. [Possible concluding/follow-up probe for anything I want to hear more about] Is there anything else that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me or that you think I should know? Any questions for me?

FRIENDS/ FAMILY

1. What do you think the point of school is?

2. What is your definition of learning?

Mentors

1. Can you tell me a little bit about this school and your role at the school?

2. Imagine that a student just moved to Seattle and was thinking about coming to [school]. How would you describe the school to them? What the most important rules or norms at the school?
   Belonging/ Membership
   Events/ routines that build community
   Norms – formal or informal
   Follow up: Tell me about the school community at [school]. How about the community of your classroom/[core class]?

3. Can you tell me the story of how you came to the school? How long at the school?
   Follow up: Why did you get involved in this sort of work?
   Follow up: What have your experience been like?

4. Can you tell me the various things you do within your job as a teacher at this school? What aspects of your job do you feel are the most important?

5. If teacher of observed class: Can you tell me a bit about ---- class?/ Can you talk through your other classes from last semester? How about this (upcoming) semester?

6. If teacher of observed class: Can you tell me a little bit about the focus on the class(es)? What types of activities in the classes you teach? (whole class discussion/ middle-sized groups, etc.)
   If Time: Can you tell me a little bit about the different types of participation in your classes? Do students participation change or stay the same across types of activities?

7. What do you think the point of school is?

8. What is your definition of learning?

9. Describe to me the kids that come to this school? What should I know about them?

10. What were the educational experiences like for these young people (previous schools)? What are the educational experiences like for these young people at ---- (outside and inside school)?

11. Recognizing that students each have their own story, are there any general similarities across the students that come here? Views of school? Views of teachers/ adults? Attendance? Credit deficiency? Level of reading/ math? Drug use? Motivation?

12. What types of students do you think do really well at this school?

13. Can you talk to me about changes that occur for students throughout their first year at this school? Based on your experiences with students, how do you see students' identities changing once they start here?
    Follow Up: Have you seen students' views and dispositions towards schooling and learning change while they are at the school? How and why? Does the length of time they are here make a difference?
    Pathways: Does this maintain or change upon their return to their home school?
    Follow Up: Can you tell me a story of some students who you think had typical experiences at [the school]? How did their identities change over time? Can you think of a student who changed in the opposite way?

14. In what ways do students' personal or social lives mingle with their academic lives here at ---- ? Either formal or informal ways that this happens? What about their out-of-school lives?
    Follow Up: What ways have you seen students make moves to incorporate their out-of-school lives into school?

15. What struggles do students have at this school? Revisit topics from earlier question: Views of school? Views of teachers/ adults? Attendance? Credit deficiency? Level of reading/ math? Drug use? Motivation?

16. What are the challenges you face as a teacher? District support? Parent interactions? What rewards you gain as a teacher/staff member that maybe aren't the obvious ones?

17. What is success look like at this school?
    What is success outside of school (other contexts mentioned earlier)?
    What is success in other schools?

18. Advice to students who are starting at this school?

19. How can my research best serve you and the young people you work with? In what ways can I help advocate for this school and alternative schools in general?
    Follow Up: What are your concerns about educational research done?

End Personal Interview

Appendix C-10: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences in school. I also want to explain that everything you share with me is confidential. The only exception to this is if you share something about harm to yourself or harm to someone else. Your name will not be used when I type up notes or a transcript from this interview. This interview will be audio recorded. You may ask me to stop recording at any time, or you may stop the interview at any time when you feel uncomfortable.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and this school? Tell me about your role at the school.

2. Imagine that a student just moved to Seattle and was thinking about coming to [school]. How would you describe the school to them? What the most important rules or norms at the school?
   Belonging/ Membership
   Events/ routines that build community
   Norms – formal or informal
   Follow up: Tell me about the school community at [school]. How about the community of your classroom/[core class]?

3. Are there any other key features of the school that you think I should know about?

4. Can you talk to me a little bit about individualized education and school community here? In what ways are those two things in synch or in tension?

5. In the interviews I've done with students, I don't get much about the history of the school. Can you tell me about the history of the school since you've been here?

6. While my focus is on the experiences of students, I'm really interested in understanding what's happening at the school level, recognizing the ways it can impact the experiences the students have.

   What areas do you feel the school is growing or changing right now? Follow up: Ask about process of current areas of growth or change.

7. What is the school community (students, staff, or both) wrestling with? What points of tension or discussion currently exist?

8. Can you tell me a little bit about the school's relationship with the district and the ways that supports or constrains the work being done here?

9. Are there any other significant relationships that the school has, such as to community organizations, etc.?

10. What are the challenges you face as a principal? District support? Parent interactions? What rewards you gain as a principal that maybe aren't the obvious ones?

11. Can you tell me the story of how you came to the school? How long at the school? Follow up: Why did you get involved in this sort of work?

Follow up: What have your experience been like?

12. What aspects of your job do you feel are the most important?

13. Describe to me the kids that come to this school? What should I know about them?

14. What were the educational experiences like for these young people (previous schools)? What are the educational experiences like for these young people at ---- (outside and inside school)?

15. Recognizing that students each have their own story, are there any general similarities across the students that come here? Views of school? Views of teachers/ adults? Attendance? Credit deficiency? Level of reading/ math? Drug use? Motivation?

16. Can you talk to me about changes that occur for students throughout their first year at this school? Based on your experiences with students, how do you see students' identities changing once they start here?
    Follow Up: Have you seen students' views and dispositions towards schooling and learning change while they are at the school? How and why? Does the length of time they are here make a difference?
    Pathways: Does this maintain or change upon their return to their home school?
    Follow Up: Can you tell me a story of some students who you think had typical experiences at [the school]? How did their identities change over time? Can you think of a student who changed in the opposite way?

17. Are there any characteristics of students who do really well at this school?

18. What struggles do students have at this school? Revisit topics from earlier question: Views of school? Views of teachers/ adults? Attendance? Credit deficiency? Level of reading/ math? Drug use? Motivation?

19. In what ways do students' personal or social lives mingle with their academic lives here at ----? Either formal or informal ways that this happens? What about their out-of-school lives?
    Follow Up: What ways have you seen students make moves to incorporate their out-of-school lives into school?

20. If Time: What is success look like at this school?
    What is success outside of school (other contexts mentioned earlier)?
    What is success in other schools?

21. If Time: What do you think the point of school is?

22. If Time: What is your definition of learning?

23. If Time: Advice to students who are starting at this school?

24. How can my research best serve you and the young people you work with? In what ways can I help advocate for this school and alternative schools in general?
    Follow Up: What are your concerns about educational research done?

25. Is there anything else about _____ (school community, experience in school, interests/activities outside of school) that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me? Do you have any questions for me?

End Principal Interview

Appendix D: Code List

Academic Challenge
Academic Subject(s)
Access to the Domain
Active Learning
Alignment
Alternative school teachers
Attendance/ Effort/ Drugs/ Etc.
Caring
Central membership
Challenges during study year
Changes since attending alternative school
Choice/ Autonomy/ Independence
Complicated lives
Confidence
Conformity
Contradiction/ Tension
Contributing/ Being a role model
DJ
Defining Alternative School
Defining Alternative Schools/ Alternative Education
Defining self
Defining youth at the alternative school
Defining/ Positioning by others
Discourse Analysis
Emotional opening up/ Vulnerability
Engagement/ Engaging
Environmental Science/ Environmental Ed
Family
Feeling like an individual
Figured World
Future Plans. Plans after hs/ college plans
Future Research
Gender/ Sexual Orientation
Good quote
Ideational resource
Identity
Important relationship
Influence of the study
Interest/ Passions
Introduction to the school
Knowing students they wouldn't at old school
Leader
Learning
Liking school – Happy in life/ At peace
Listening
Material resource
Norming
Oda
Old friends – influence

Old self
Open to opportunities
Others' expectations/ Pressures
Own pace for learning/ Developing self motivation
Productive Disciplinary Engagement
Participation in class
Peers/ Friends
Penelope
Performance
Peripheral participation
Personal growth/ Goals/ Self expression
Personal learning
Play
Point of school
Potential
Previous school
Previous teachers
Programmatic features
Proud
Putting oneself into practice/ self-expression in practice
Questioning/ Critique
Race/ Culture
Rehabilitation school
Relational supports/ Relational resource
Relaxed/ Stress & Anxiety
Respect
Responsibility
Roles that matter
Safe/ Accepting Environment
School Culture: School as family/ community
School stuff – turning in work/ grades
School Year – Ups and Downs
School level challenges
School reputation
Schooling/ Conventional Schools
Significant Moment
Social Justice
Social world of the alternative schools
Student learning who they are in the world
Student-run
Students as individuals
Success at the alternative school
Success in life
Taylor
Technology/ Technology as a distractor
Trajectory
Transcript Mistake
Transfer issue
Two lives
Verb

Verb – School
Verb - Self

Tables

Table 2: Participants

Participants	N Pathways	N Redwood	Type of Interview	Number of Interviews	Number of Observations	Types of Artifacts
Case Study Youth	2	2	Think-aloud and Semi-structured	6-7 per participant	20-26	Survey, schoolwork, journaling, and drawings
Additional Youth Interviewed	19	8	Semi-structured	1-3 per participant	4-18	Survey (for all), schoolwork (for Phase Two participants)
Teachers of Orientation Activities and Classes	3	1	Semi-structured	1-2 per participant	6-15	N/A
Family Members of Case Participants	1	2	Semi-structured	1 per participant	0-2	N/A
Close Friends of Case Participants	1	2	Semi-structured	1 per participant	0-2	N/A
Mentors/ Advisors of Case Participants	1	2	Semi-structured	1 per participant	0-2	N/A
School Principals	1	1	Semi-structured	1-2 per participant	0-2	N/A

Table 3: Context Observations for Case Study Youth

DJ	Penelope
Classes:	**Classes:**
Orientation	Redwood 101 (Orientation class)
Math	Physics
Leadership Class	American Government and Economics
Sociology/ English	
Science	
Personal Communications	
Outdoor Recreation	
Outside of classes:	**Outside of classes:**
Between classes/ lunch	Between classes/ lunch
Presentations of Learning	Horseback riding stables
Camp	Home
Neighborhood	

Table 4: Case Study Youth

Redwood	Pathways
Penelope: 16 years old Came to Redwood: "Previous high school I went to stressed me out to the point that I couldn't eat breakfast or any food until mid afternoon because I felt so anxious." The workload was too much. Was always tired. Only liked two teachers. Sought a school with more acceptance of gender and sexual choices. Like most about Redwood: teacher/student respect and trust. Freedom to pursue interests. Democracy. Introduction to the school: friends from Roller Derby went to Redwood. "Risk": was anxious in previous school and felt that the school did not allow her to be an individual. Interests: horseback riding, singing, writing Out-of-school activities: horseback riding, Girl Scouts, Roller Derby (quit in the fall), choir (quit in the fall) Participation: consistent participation, but appeared nervous and shy.	**DJ:** 16 years old Came to Pathways: "advance leadership skills and become a better person". Wanted a family at school. Like most about Pathways: strong and close community. Working with people he wouldn't at his previous school. Introduction to the school: Friend attended previous year. Went to camp as a one-week leader. "Risk": Spent a lot of time with old friends smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol Interests: soccer, videogames, music Out-of-school activities: taking care of siblings, soccer, time with friends, online Participation: very friendly, but reserved in discussions.
Taylor: 16 years old Came to Redwood: "Was read for a fresh start and wanted to spice up my life. I also wasn't in love with my old school. I didn't have close friends there." Like most about Redwood: community Introduction to the school: close friend started attending the year before. "Risk": anxiety and over commitment, some	**Oda:** 16 years old Came to Pathways: "Wanted a school that cared more about me as a person" Like most about Pathways: like a family. Watch out for each other. Introduction to the school: close friend came to Pathways midyear the previous year. "Risk": behind on credits when entering

bullying at previous school, Interests: music, visual art Out-of-school activities: played bass in a band Participation: often quiet, but very outgoing at times.	Pathways. Often did not turn in work. Interests: videogames, music Out-of-school activities: volunteering with friends, sleeping Participation: Energetic and outgoing in class

Table 5a: Redwood responses to "How do you spend your time outside of school?"

Time with friends	7
A sport	6
Art, music, or writing	6
Online	4
Work	3
Videogames	3
Taking care of siblings	1
Volunteering	1

Table 5b: Major themes Redwood survey responses to "Why did you decide to start attending Redwood?"

Negative views of their previous school	**Perceptions of Redwood**	**Personal Reasons**
Bullied in previous school	Liked how open the school was about gender	Moved to the area and wanted a different school experience
Disliked the teaching method at their previous school	Had heard good things	Had previous experiences, and thus familiarity, with alternative schools
Anxiety and exhaustion at their previous school	Wanted more choice in their education	Redwood was close to their home
Too heavy a workload at their previous school	Wanted to create closer bonds with people	Redwood would help them manage their depression
Only liked two teachers at their previous school		Wanted a fresh start
Felt angry at their previous school		
Hated their former schools		
Disliked students at their previous school		
Thought that Redwood would help them better than their former school		
Felt like their former school was a prison		
Didn't have close friends at their former school		

Table 5c: Major themes in Redwood survey responses to "What do you like about Redwood?"

Choice and Empowerment	**Teachers at Redwood**	**Community and Relationships**	**Perceptions of Features at Redwood**
Freedom to pursue interests, compared to being told what to do	Understanding their humans, not robots – "we all make mistakes and have boundaries and limits"	Community	Light homework load
Democratic school	Intelligent and wise teachers	Very nice people	Interesting classes
Focused on student opinions	Sincere teachers	Positive environment	More valuable education
Control over their education	Mutual respect between students and teachers – "the trust that teachers give students"		Always ask pronouns
Responsibility the school gives them			
Choosing their own classes			
Students have a say			

Table 5d: Major themes Redwood survey responses to "How is Redwood different from your previous school?"

Previous Schools	Redwood Features	Emotional Impact of Redwood
Everything was about grades at their previous school	More freedom	Doesn't make them feel stressed out or isolated
At their previous school teachers decided everything and students did not have much say	More freedom	At Redwood can actually focus on learning
Previous school was "semi-alternative", but Redwood is "authentically alternative"	Interesting classes	Treated like a human
Teachers at previous school did not help them	Interesting classes	"Don't wake up with a gaping hole of depression in my chest every morning because I have to go to school"
Previous school was clique-y	No grades	
Students at previous school judged based on clothes, rather than being kind	Open campus	
	Flexible schedule	
	Redwood is much more together than previous school	
	Teachers have respect for students and vice versa, better relationships with teachers	
	Time and hours	
	Deep thoughts	
	Doing homework is all on them as students	

Table 6a: Pathways responses to "How do you spend your time outside of school?"

Time with friends	17
A sport	9
Art, music, or writing	13
Online	14
Work	6
Videogames	6
Taking care of siblings	11
Volunteering	4

Table 6b: Major themes in Pathways survey responses to "Why did you start attending Pathways?"

Responses about their previous schools:	**Responses that focused on what Pathways provided:**
Previous school was horrible and filled with Gangbangs	Pathways sounded more fun than their previous school
I didn't get anything out of attending my previous school other than a bad attitude	Always had a passion for Pathways camp and kids
Bad experiences at previous school	Wanted to call classmates family
Needed to get away from their previous school	Being a one-week leader made them a better person
Doing poorly at their previous school	Love hiking and the outdoors and the idea of mixing those things with school
Students at their previous school started drama	Love working with kids and being in the outdoors
Really hated their previous school	Want to be a CPS worker when they grow up and think Pathways can help
Tend to not learn well in a conventional classroom	Wanted to make new friends
Didn't get any help at their previous school	Felt Pathways Camp was for them
Didn't fit in at previous school and always got in trouble	Wanted something new and different
Didn't like their previous school because they expected "more than what you can do"	Wanted to try something different
Previous school was closing and they didn't want to go to the school they'd gone before that	Their grades were horrible and they know Pathways would help
Previous school did not meet their special education accommodations	Prefer hands-on learning and being active
Got bullied at previous schools	Feel that what the teachers teach is valuable and will help them become a better person
	Wanted to improve their leadership and social skills
	Wanted to find themselves "and what better way is that than to be able to lead and be in charge at all times (almost)"
	Wanted a school that cared more about them as a person
	Love camping and wanted to gain leadership skills
	Credit retrieval
	Feel like Pathways is a safe environment
	Wanted to become a better leader
	Always wanted to be a camp counselor

	Would like to become a better leader and work with kids
	Needed to get credits to graduate
	Wanted something different
	Wanted to work on community and leadership skills

Table 6c: Major themes in Pathways survey responses to "What do you like most about Pathways?"

Relationships – Community, Students, and Teachers	**Programmatic Features at Pathways**
Small family-like community	Hands on
Small community	Camping
Like the whole community, including the teachers – "they're all nice"	Learning to lead
Close like a family	Love math and science
Everyone treats each other with respect	Great place to work on my goals for the year
Like the people	Camp is "so much fun"
"We are super comfortable with each other"	Learn in a fun way
Everyone cares about one another	Being in the environment
Watch out for each other "because we're like a family"	More active
Like the people/students and teachers at the school	Overall meaning of the program
Love everyone at Pathways	How it helps us as individuals
Becoming a family	Good vibes
Family environment	Different and easier than other schools
Became a community	Small classes
How close they have come together	Classroom environment is engaging – style of teaching "makes me want to focus"
Bond with teachers/ staff – actually "knowing/feeling that they care about us and our education"	Teaching style
Support, love, and community – "Goes from 'nobody' to 'family in just a couple days'"	Small school – "So I pay attention more and rarely get singled out"
Teachers are friends	Working with kids
"We are positive and extremely open minded"	Level of energy
Strong and close community	Learning fits all learning styles – active
Get to work with people they wouldn't at their previous school	
Everyone is in the same position of trying to better themselves	
It's be fun to see the people they become	
Close community; "We have become a family" – different than previous school	
How much teachers and staff put into the program	
Help one another	
We all want to make the world better and give kids a better future and an experience	

Table 6d: Major themes in Pathways survey responses to "How is Pathways different from your previous school?"

Teachers	Community	Activities	School Size	Classes	Learning and Instruction
Teachers care	How everyone communicates and is already close	Get to go to camp	Fewer students	Class size	Learning skills that will be helpful in life instead of busywork
Teachers care more and want to help you	Previous school didn't make them feel like they cared	Camp	Small group that the teachers really connect with	Same classes all year long	Use real life scenarios
Teachers actually care – "want to help you become a better person"	We care about each others feelings	Letting them do hands-on stuff	Small school	Previous school had 6 daily semester-long classes and more focus on "core classes"	Easier than previous school
Teachers actually care about you – it's more than just a job for them	The environment makes them want to come to school	Outdoor school Hiking and snowshoeing	Small school – everyone knows each other's names – "always ask about our day", "is like a little town not a big city"	Do everything together and everyone tries to participate, compared to previous school where they sat in chairs every 30 minutes to listen to instructions	Learning fundamental skills
Teacher/student relationship	Create bonds and comfort with each other		Previous school was much larger	Two hour classes and 10 minute breaks	Learning how to be the best person or adult they can be
Teachers keep	"Get to view				Isn't boring –

authority, “just like regular school”	everyone in all their forms of who they really are”				“though it’s fun, I still learn”
Teachers and students care how they’re doing and prefer to see them make progress, rather than perfection	Didn't talk to a lot of people at their old school – only hung out with “a certain amount of friends”				Previous school didn’t teach in an alternative way for some people who think differently
People, especially teachers, are way better and supportive – more caring					
Feel more close to the staff and peers make them feel more comfortable					
Teachers that understand them					
People actually care about you and want you to succeed, rather than “handing you a piece of paper and telling you you’re wrong all the time”					

Table 7a: DJ Interviews and Observations Timeline

	September 2014	**October 2014**	**November 2014**	**December 2014**	**January 2015**	**February 2015**	**March 2015**	**April 2015**	**May 2015**	**June 2015**	**…**	**December 2015**
Case Youth Interview		Interview 1 (10.20)		Interview 2 (12.5)		Interview 3 (2.2)	Interview 4 (3.11)	Interview 5 (4.9)	Interview 6 (5.7) Interview 7 (5.27)			Interview 8 (12.9)
Friends, Family Members, and Mentor Interviews							Mentor Interview (3.31)	Friend Interview (4.21)	Sister Interview (5.27)			
Observations	Camp Observations (9/15 & 9/16) Orientation Activities (9/24 & 9/26)	Class Observations: Leadership & Math (10/7) Camp Observation (10/29 & 10/31)		Class Observations: English/Sociology, Science, Leadership, & Math (12/1, 12/3, 12/5, & 12/10)	Class Observations: Math & Presentations of Learning (1/13 & 1/15)	Class Observations: Math & English/Sociology (2/12, 2/19, & 2/25)	Neighborhood Tour (3/18) Class Observations: Math, English/Sociology, & Lunch (3/9, 3/30, & 3/31) Camp Observation (3/24)	Class Observation: Outdoor Rec (4/14)	Class Observations: Math, English/Sociology, Personal Communications (5/12 & 5/18)	Camp Observations (6/2 & 6/4)		

Table 7b: Penelope Interviews and Observations Timeline

	September 2014	**October 2014**	**November 2014**	**December 2014**	**January 2015**	**February 2015**	**March 2015**	**April 2015**	**May 2015**	**June 2015**	**…**	**December 2015**
Case Youth Interviews		Interview 1 (10.8)				Interview 2 (2.20)	Interview 3 (3.27)		Interview 4 (5.11) Interview 5 (5.29)			Interview 6 (12.16)
Friends, Family Members, and Mentor Interviews								Mom Interview (4.4)	Advisor Interview (5.7) Friend Interview (5.22)			
Observations	Class Observations: Redwood 101 (9.11, 9.15, 9.18, 9.22, 9.25, & 9.29)	Class Observations: Redwood 101 (10.2, 10.9, 10.13, 10.20, & 10.27)	Class Observation: Redwood 101 (11.20)	Class Observations: Redwood 101 (12.1 & 12.15)	Class Observations: Redwood 101 (1.8, 1.12, 1.15, & 1.22)			Home Observation (4.4) Horse Riding Observation (4.4)	Class Observation: Physics (5.11) Observation: American Government and Economics (5.29)			