Intentions Lost In Translation: An Ethnographic Examination Of Recognition Of Adolescent Cultural Capital

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Intentions Lost In Translation: An Ethnographic Examination Of Recognition Of Adolescent Cultural Capital

Abstract
Cultural capital is largely conceptualized as high-status (or “dominant”) knowledge and practices that yield a return or benefit for those who enact these forms of capital. Literature in this field has produced a rich understanding of how cultural capital is transferred from one generation to the next, yet there is little understanding of the micro-interactions in which gatekeepers recognize and acknowledge these forms of cultural capital. This dissertation project aims to deepen our understanding of cultural capital through an investigation of the micro-interactional moments in which gatekeepers “read” adolescent cultural capital “bids”. Situated in the context of the educational experiences of adolescents in a juvenile rehabilitation center, this project provides insight into the cultural repertoires of adolescents who are marginalized by class, conceptions of delinquency, race, and gender.

Data for the analysis of these cultural “bids” and readings comes from 20 months of ethnographic methods and interviews of 28 adolescents in a juvenile detention facility. Through this ethnographic examination of bids for the recognition and acknowledgement of literacy practices and non-cognitive skills, I find that adolescents make complex cultural bids that largely align with their social needs and dominant educational values. Whether these bids are acknowledged as dominant cultural capital or relegated to non-dominant capital is influenced by timing, alignment of skills with teacher’s academic framework, and the gatekeepers’ prior perceptions of adolescent behaviors.

In an analysis of transitional planning that is essential to successful re-entry for these adolescents, I analyze whether successful cultural bids yield results for these adolescents. I find that adolescents who are able to make successful bids at having their cultural capital read, receive support that contributes to confidence in transitioning from the juvenile detention facility, while adolescents who do not make cultural bids —or who make unsuccessful bids—experience little additional support, resulting in precarious transitions. The findings from this study highlight the importance of the interactional nature of readings of cultural capital, carrying implications for how we can more accurately assess the cultural repertoires of adolescents on the margins of society.

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INTENTIONS LOST IN TRANSLATION:

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF RECOGNITION OF ADOLESCENT CULTURAL CAPITAL

Rita N. Harvey

A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those teachers, in both schools and family, who have taught me to be a student, open-minded and attempting to understand the world around me. You continuously provide me with tools, both academic and social, that push me into growth zones.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the students who taught me to be a teacher, pushing me to see your brilliance, hear your joys and frustrations, and imagine a new world.
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Annette, thank you for being a lighthouse. The guidance you have provided throughout this process has helped me find a perseverance I did not know existed within me. I was not always certain that I could complete this task, but you continued to support and nurture me intellectually and emotionally throughout this process.

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Marcel, you are the blessing I could not imagine. You have been a light in the darkest of days. Thank you for sitting up with me in the early hours of the morning as I squeezed words onto pages. Thank you for seeing the best in me, even when I feel my worst.

Dad, thank you for the wonderful father that you have always been, but I am filled with so much gratitude for all that you’ve done to make sure that I finished this piece of my
education. The final years of this have been filled with shared grief and a lot of uncertainty, yet you supported me in every way that you could.

I am forever indebted to my dearest mother. In the time we had together, you were my home, my dearest teacher, and best friend. You made sure that I never had an emotional or material want, and in filling my needs, you were my daily confidante. I carry you with me always.

Finally, thank you to the young people who shared their stories with me. I am filled with gratitude that you would open yourselves and share your understanding of the world. It is my hope that each of you finds a path that brings you joy and a deep understanding of all that you have to offer this world.
Cultural capital is largely conceptualized as high-status (or “dominant”) knowledge and practices that yield a return or benefit for those who enact these forms of capital. Literature in this field has produced a rich understanding of how cultural capital is transferred from one generation to the next, yet there is little understanding of the micro-interactions in which gatekeepers recognize and acknowledge these forms of cultural capital. This dissertation project aims to deepen our understanding of cultural capital through an investigation of the micro-interactional moments in which gatekeepers “read” adolescent cultural capital “bids”. Situated in the context of the educational experiences of adolescents in a juvenile rehabilitation center, this project provides insight into the cultural repertoires of adolescents who are marginalized by class, conceptions of delinquency, race, and gender.

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In an analysis of transitional planning that is essential to successful re-entry for these adolescents, I analyze whether successful cultural bids yield results for these adolescents. I find that adolescents who are able to make successful bids at having their cultural capital read, receive support that contributes to confidence in transitioning from the juvenile detention facility, while adolescents who do not make cultural bids—or who make unsuccessful bids—experience little additional support, resulting in precarious transitions. The findings from this study highlight the importance of the interactional nature of readings of cultural capital, carrying implications for how we can more accurately assess the cultural repertoires of adolescents on the margins of society.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Groundings

There is a vast body of research that shows that adolescents from low-income families and communities—particularly those labeled “urban”—face a number of challenges navigating educational institutions. These challenges include disproportionate referral to special education services (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Osher, Woodruff, & Sims, 2002) and being subjected to unfair disciplinary practices (Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2008). For this population of largely Black and Latino “urban” youth face these challenges in educational environments, schools become an extension of the criminal justice system (Rios, 2011; Winn, 2011), putting this population of adolescents at risk for incarceration and decreased educational opportunities. Those adolescents who enter the juvenile justice system are at increased risk for processes of social reproduction that include a wider educational gap than their peers of similar racial and economic backgrounds (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, McGrew 2008) and increased risk of recidivism and transition to the adult criminal justice system (Mooradian, 2007; Myers, 2007). The social reproduction risks associated with adolescents who enter the juvenile justice system requires that we look continue to look at educational processes of adolescents who are part of this institution.

In this dissertation project I turn to the educational experiences of adolescents in a juvenile detention facility I call Crossings. I use ethnographic methods to gain an enhanced understanding of how teachers perceive and acknowledge the cultural displays of a group of adolescents within this facility. Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptualization of cultural capital and Turner’s (1960) notion of educational sponsorship provide a rich framework for understanding the complex interactions between teachers and students. Using this framework, I seek to
explore how teachers perceive the cultural capital of a group of adolescents who are risk of being misread and misrecognized as a result of being associated with deviance and addiction. Additionally, I attempt to better understand the circumstances under which these teachers support these adolescents in developing plans that disrupt cycles of social reproduction.

In this dissertation project I attempt to deepen our understanding of cultural capital through an investigation into the micro-interactional moments between teacher-gatekeepers acknowledge adolescent displays of cultural capital. I look at these moments through a process of what I call cultural capital “bids.” During these “bids,” adolescents present behaviors or skills to their teachers in an attempt to have their cultural capital acknowledged as legitimate, with the goal of seek institutional support. This project provides additional insight into the cultural capital of adolescents who have been marginalized through their experiences of race, gender, and incarceration.

The adolescents at the heart of this project share a number of characteristics and experiences with truancy and drug use, yet there is variation in how gatekeepers perceive these adolescent cultural displays. Through an exploration of micro-interactions, I attempt to better understand the contexts and circumstances under which adolescent cultural bids are recognized and acknowledged by teachers, in a way that yields benefits for the adolescents as they prepare to leave the juvenile facility and return to their homes.

The young people at the center of this project are a cast of lively and complex adolescents, who challenge their teachers in a number of ways. There are moments when they can be perceived as disruptive, and moments when they are disengaged from both their academic tasks and social surroundings. Even while acknowledging these moments, in this
setting, I documented a group of young people who were making enthusiastic bids to have their
cultural capital acknowledged by the many adults who surrounded them, yet these bids were
unevenly recognized.

**Theoretical Groundings**

Adolescents in the juvenile justice system are at a particular risk for patterns of social
reproduction that include high rates of recidivism, lower levels of educational attainment
compared to their non-incarcerated peers, and increased risks of transitioning into the adult
criminal justice system (Myers, 2007). Incarceration within the adult criminal justice system
(either as adolescents or adults) creates patterns in which formerly incarcerated individuals
have decreased access to employment (Pager, 2007) and housing, perpetuating cycles of
poverty and recidivism as individuals face opportunities in which they violate probation in
attempts to care for themselves and their families (Alexander, 2010). Even as I acknowledge the
risk of social reproduction for incarcerated youth, I seek to understand the social mechanisms
and practices that adolescents and educators in a juvenile detention facility employ in an
attempt to disrupt cycles of reproduction. Cultural capital literature provides a generative space
for understanding potential mechanisms for disrupting these cycles of reproduction.

I turn to cultural capital within the broader social reproduction literature to highlight
mechanisms that can be employed to begin to disrupt patterns of recidivism and academic
deficits. The first draws from Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) formulation of how in educational
settings it is the cultural capital of the dominant population that is most valued by schools.
Educators, they argue, often serve as gatekeepers to academic success by reifying the value of
dominant forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In the role of gatekeepers,
teachers expect that students and their families will possess the skills and practices (forms of cultural capital) required to ensure student success in school. As I elaborate below, these expectations may include particular levels and types of parental participation in their child’s education (Lareau, 1987) as well as access to resources such as books and other educational materials (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999).

**Cultural Capital**

The literature on the role of cultural capital in education has proliferated since Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) introduced the concept as a means of explaining how certain beliefs, knowledge, and skills have value in society, including educational settings. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualizes cultural capital as having three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized, providing a framework for understanding the elusive and interactional nature of cultural capital. In embodied and objectified forms in particular, yielding results from cultural capital is not merely about possession, but how a person transmits their capital, or cultural knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986). As research on cultural capital in education continued, scholars have developed numerous understandings of what constitutes cultural capital. Scholars who look at educational outcomes (Dimaggio, 1982; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Sullivan, 2001) show patterns of defining cultural capital in terms of cultural goods (or objectified state) that includes reading choices and consumption of the arts. Those who look at how cultural capital is transmitted, and the interactional nature of the rewards that it yields (Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, & Shaun, 1990; Goldberg, 2014; Lareau, 2011) include embodied conceptions of cultural capital, providing an understanding of the dispositions and interactional styles that result in educational rewards that are the result of relationships between educators and students. Lareau and Weininger (2003) simultaneously clarified and re-emphasized that cultural
capital should be understood as unfixed competencies that allow “culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next.” Research continues to demonstrate how students who display dominant cultural practices fare better with respect to academic achievement (Lareau, 2011; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999) for certain individuals.

Under this system of cultural and social reproduction, teachers traditionally play the role of gatekeepers, perpetuating the dominance of certain cultural forms (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Goldenberg, 2014). This literature has been generative in helping us understand the role that cultural capital plays in successful navigation of educational institutions, yet there is a presumption that possession or embodiment of cultural capital yields results. I seek to complicate this presumption by looking at micro-interactions between adolescents and the gatekeepers they encounter in a juvenile detention facility, and examining these moments in which adolescents seek to have their cultural capital acknowledged. I refer to these moments as cultural capital “bids,” or moments in which individuals attempt to have their capital acknowledged, facing the prospects of either acknowledgement or rejection.

In the case of Crossings, educators (including teaching and counseling staff) serve not only as gatekeepers to educational success, but also take on the role of inculcators of cultural capital through their attempts to foster social skills and knowledge in selected students. In their role as inculcators of cultural capital, the educators at Crossings develop an understanding of the strengths and capital adolescents bring from their homes and communities, and attempt to help selected students apply these skills in their transitional planning, which I explore in Chapter
Six, on the transitional planning process. These dominant displays of cultural capital include the teaching of “appropriate” work and school related behaviors (as seen in Chapter Five on Non-cognitive factors) as well as preparation for post-secondary education as adolescents prepare to leave Crossings. While the inculcation is an important component of the development of cultural capital at Crossings, only certain students are recipients of this additional teacher guidance, emphasizing the notion that displays of cultural capital provides access to scarce resources (in this case, the scarce resource is individualized teacher attention and support in transitional planning). In order to understand the role that cultural capital plays in this juvenile detention facility, I turn to the notion of cultural capital “bids,” which I elaborate below. Using the concept of cultural capital “bids,” I seek to identify the factors that contribute to teachers’ response to student displays of cultural capital by analyzing the moments when adolescents make bids to have their objectified (through their literacy practices) and embodied (through their displaying of non-cognitive skills) cultural capital legitimized by teachers and other gatekeepers at Crossings.

**Perceptions of Incarcerated Youth**

This dissertation is grounded in a theoretical framework that privileges socio-economic class as a critical organizing factors in society. While cultural capital provides a structure that allows me to move adolescents from a deficit framework, to one that recognizes their rich cultural repertoire that includes both dominant and non-dominant cultural capital, it does not satisfactorily acknowledge the role of other organizing factors in influencing how incarcerated youth are perceived and their cultural bids are recognized. In order to understand the factors that contribute to recognition and acknowledgment of cultural capital as well as selection for educator sponsorship, it is also important to understand perceptions of adolescents in the
juvenile justice system. Given Rivera’s understanding of cultural match is rooted in perceived similarities, it is critical to understand how groups are perceived when trying to understand sponsorship based on cultural fit. Understanding how the adolescents at Crossings how they are perceived by educators involves employing an intersectional approach that includes notions of deviance, disability and race¹, as these are the factors around which the site is organized.

Crenshaw (1991, 1993) conceptualizes intersectionality as a framework that pushes the notion that marginalized people frequently have multiple factors influencing their lives in a simultaneous fashion. One is not poor in one moment and Black in another. Rather, intersectionality allows us to analyze data from a perspective that simultaneously acknowledges multiple social factors in our understanding of marginalized people. In the case of the adolescents in this project, intersectionality allows me to understand the adolescents in relation to the multiplicity of factors that may be influencing their thoughts, behaviors, and interactions with teacher at any given moment, including race, gender, disability, sexuality, and status as criminalized. Conversely, it provides mechanisms for understanding how teachers may perceive the cultural bids of their students.

As a juvenile detention facility, the adolescents at Crossings are immediately marked as deviant or criminalized. To this end, Rios’s notion of “deviant politics” (Rios, 2011) is critical for understanding how student behavior is interpreted by gatekeepers at institutions. Deviant politics provides critical perspective on how youth (particularly Black and Latino) who have been labeled as delinquent or criminal develop a culture of deviance as a component of their

---

¹ There are additional factors that can be included in perceptions of incarcerated youth including gender (Winn, 2011), but I limit myself to these three conceptions as a result of their frequent recurrence in the literature on incarcerated youth.
response to labels they have been given by institutions, including schools and the juvenile justice system (Rios, 2011). As institutions (educational and other, such as the juvenile justice system) come to see and treat children as at-risk, deviant, and criminal, adolescents may begin to take on dispositions associated with these labels, even as they attempt to resist the outcomes of social reproduction and provide a social critique of being criminalized (Fader, 2013; Rios, 2011). In taking on “deviant politics,” not only are adolescents reproducing class in socio-economic terms, but also developing behaviors that reify societal expectations of deviance.² 

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that habitus develops from the inculcation of familial and formal institutional teaching. However, the literature on the outcomes of incarcerated youth suggests that for incarcerated youth, the juvenile justice system is as strong an inculcating force as the family and school. As explored in the Transitions Chapter of this dissertation, the deviant label and politics influences relationships between adolescents and potential educator-sponsors.

The disproportionate representation of Black adolescents (and Latino adolescents in locales where Latino populations are the predominate minority) throughout each decision point in the juvenile justice system and the pervasiveness of Black adolescents being transitioned to adult courts (Myers, 2007) are evidence that there is a racial component to the juvenile justice system. Omi and Winant’s Racial Formation (1986, 2015) provides a theoretical context for understanding how racialized thinking influences macro-level systems in the US, from using science to confirm racialized thinking, to how race is discussed in terms of politics. Under the theory of racial formation and their conceptualization of racialization, Omi and Winant assert

² While deviance is the term in the literature, I am hesitant to adopt this language, as their behavior is not simple deviance, but rather a nuanced response to how they have been treated by institutional actors.
that racial projects are ongoing in society, turning race into a concept that permeates daily life. In a society that is suffused with ideas of race, people unconsciously come to expect racial phenotype to match with racial performance. As society comes to read race on an on-going basis, racial meaning is given to constructs that previously did not have racial connotations. Reading the criminal justice system through a lens of racial formation, the notion of criminal (a construct that does not have a racial connotation) comes to be associated with blackness, as shown in the works such as Ferguson’s *Bad Boys* (2001), where teachers read assertive behaviors of Black elementary aged boys as deviant. Researchers have also documented several instances in which educators associate young Black boys with jail.

In the 2015 update to Racial Formations, Omi and Winant explain assertions of racial formation become complicated in a society that sees itself as “post-racial,” as many believe the concept of race should be eradicated, even as race continues to be an organizing factor in both the structure and collective thinking of the US. While asserting notions of colorblindness, people continue to think, process, and converse in ways that are racialized (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Omi & Winant, 2015). This combination of post-racial and color blind combined with elements of racially organized thinking is supported by evidence of unconscious racial bias and research on colorblindness (evidence can be found in a number of works including Bonilla-Silva (2013) and Marsh, Mendoza-Denton & Smith (2010)).

In the context of the juvenile justice system and incarceration more broadly, racial formation and unconscious racial bias are critical features in how Black and Latino males are perceived and how criminal activity comes to be racialized. While there are many arguments as to why there is disproportionate racial representation in the criminal justice system (including
arguments by some that Black males commit more serious and violent crimes), there is evidence that even among males who commit similar crimes with similar criminal backgrounds, Black males receive harsher and longer sentencing for crimes than their White counterparts (Johnson, 2012). Elements of racialization also become evident in post-incarceration employment seeking. In Pager’s (2007) study of race, employment-seeking, and incarceration, she found that White males with criminal records were more likely to be called back for interviews than Black males with or without criminal records (finding that Black males with criminal records are least likely to be called back for interviews). Even as a language of post-racial and colorblindness continues to develop in the US, there is evidence that racial thinking continues plays a large role in the criminal justice system and social reproduction. While the goal of this project is not explicitly concerned with racial formation, I am interested in the moments when teachers employ racialized language in their discussion of clients, and the impact that it has on how students navigate their relationships with educators.

As with theories of racialization, Disability Studies in Education provides me with a conceptualization of disability that can help understand how readings of cultural capital are influenced by disability labeling. Disability Studies in Education (DSE) provides a groundwork for understanding the impact that disability labeling has in educational settings, providing a framework for understanding the role that ableism has in how educators interact with students with disabilities (Gabel, 2006). While it is a broad literature, I call on the elements that allow me to analyze interactions between students and teachers, to form a strength-based analysis.

Although these intersectional perceptions of incarcerated youth have potentially long-lasting repercussions, in my study, I found that the youth served by Crossings display practices
that resist simple classification. Many of the youth move between performing practices embodying cultural values and skills resonant with the dominant culture (including educational advocacy and a sense of professionalism) and those more associated with non-dominant cultural values, which Carter (2003) defines as displays that allows “individuals to gain ‘authentic’ cultural status positions” within their communities. In response to displays of non-dominant culture in dominant cultural settings, the educators engage in relationship building and pedagogical practices that attempt to help youth foster a habitus associated with dominant standards and values. Of course, since there is more than one educator at the school, there are multiple gatekeepers. At times, these educators embody somewhat conflicting readings of students’ displays of cultural capital. At other points, the educators are extremely similar in how they react to students’ interactions.

Drawing upon theories of the role of readings of cultural capital and cultural match as mechanisms to disrupt cycles of social reproduction, this dissertation project seeks to reframe deficit-oriented approaches to educating incarcerated youth by exploring alternative pedagogical strategies for better serving at-risk adolescents. Using these theoretical formulations in an ethnographic context, this project seeks to answer the following questions:

- What forms of cultural capital (in the form of academic and social skills and critical understandings) do adjudicated youth bring to educational programming in a juvenile treatment facility?
- How do these marginalized youth enact these skills and forms of knowledge in academic settings?
- How do educators read the behaviors of these students and interact with them to understand displays of cultural capital?
- What lessons can be learned from teacher and counselor interactions with students at Crossings with regards to meeting the educational needs of “at-risk” students more broadly?
Argument for Theory in Context

As explained in greater detail in the theoretical groundings above, the literature on cultural capital suggests that cultural practices have unequal recognition across various fields. Despite the formidable contribution these studies have made to understanding the transmission and recognition of capital, the sociological research has not been sufficiently attuned to the micro-interactional moments in which individuals (adolescents, in the case of this project) make “bids” to have their cultural capital display recognized and legitimized, and the responses to these bids. In order to further understand readings of cultural capital, it is crucial to understand the moments when bids are (1) recognized and legitimized, (2) ignored, or (3) delegitimized and relegated to non-dominant capital. If no bids are recognized, the potential profit of sponsorship is thwarted. Looking at these bids is critical in complicating a literature that has been overly deterministic in understanding that cultural practices are rewarded in specific context. While it is critical that some bids are recognized, even those students who successfully attain sponsorship have moments in which their cultural capital is ignored or misrecognized. Moments of acknowledgement of displays of cultural capital are situationally specific.

While there are other facets of cultural capital that can be explored in this context (including musical tastes and leisure-time activities), I focus on literacy practices, non-cognitive factors, and transitional practices as sites for reading cultural capital. Each of these sites of cultural reading is central to the educational process at Crossings, and are spaces where incarcerated adolescents and other minority youth are typically framed in terms of skill deficit (Baron, 2003; Leone & Weinberg; 2010). Foregoing this deficit reading, I show that student behaviors can be understood as an effort to have their cultural capital acknowledged and recognized as part of their bid for teacher sponsorship. In the face of these dominant cultural
displays, the bids are not universally received. Hence, within each site of cultural reading, I analyze moments through a categorization of types of cultural capital to understand what types of activities are acknowledged as dominant cultural displays, which go unacknowledged by teachers, and which become relegated to non-dominant cultural capital (see Table 1).

Table 1. Conceptualization of Cultural Capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Capital Type</th>
<th>Project Conceptualization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Cultural Capital Bid</td>
<td>In the context of this project, these are the micro-interactions in which an adolescent makes a cultural capital bid, and the educator-gatekeeper acknowledges the bid. Examples include well-timed help-seeking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacknowledged Cultural Capital Bid</td>
<td>Micro-interactions in which adolescents make a bid for their cultural capital to be acknowledged by gatekeepers as dominant, but the bid goes unacknowledged. The lack of acknowledge can be the result of mistiming, misaligned academic goals, or perceptions of the adolescent. Examples include moments such as when adolescents seek to receive help for the college search, but the request for help-seeking is mistimed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-dominant Cultural Capital Bid</td>
<td>Micro-interactions in which an adolescent makes a cultural bid that is connected to how they understand their lives outside of educational institutions. These are bids that are made towards figures with whom adolescents share non-dominant preferences and understandings (i.e. disciplinary staff). Examples include moments when adolescents share slang and vernacular with gatekeepers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Context: Juvenile Justice System**

Given that I collected the data for this dissertation in a juvenile detention facility, an overview of the juvenile justice system and drug courts that is central to understanding the circumstances of the adolescents at Crossings. The first iterations of the juvenile justice system were established in 1899 with the purpose of meeting the developmental needs of children in a rehabilitative setting distinct from the adult criminal justice system (Nurse, 2010). The system
was to evolve substantially over the course of the 20th century. Approaches to working with youth in the juvenile justice system have vacillated widely from periods in which there was a focus on the development of vocational skills to others where the focus is more on academic credentials and knowledge (McGrew, 2008). The importance of skill development among incarcerated youth has also been enshrined in educational law. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) each mandate that all children have access to a quality education, including incarcerated youth (Boundy & Karger, 2011), yet the de-centralized juvenile justice system makes implementation of educational programs challenging. In spite of the expressed commitment to the education of this special population of students, adolescents in the juvenile justice system continue to be a population whose needs are framed in terms of a discourse of academic and social deficit. Prior to entering the juvenile justice system, adolescents most at risk for having contact with the system also tend to experience academic difficulties resulting in failing grades, truancy, and below grade level performance in math and reading (Boundy & Karger, 2011). These academic challenges continue once adolescents are incarcerated. Many youth end up leaving detention facilities with even larger gaps in their academic progress as a result of the highly transient nature of the juvenile justice system, the lack of teachers qualified to meet the academic needs of the population, and lack of rigorous curriculum. This, in turn, makes it difficult for the youth to transition back into their community schools and eventually graduate, let alone gain the skills needed to pursue higher education (Baltodano, Platt, & Roberts, 2005; Boundy & Karger, 2011). As a result of these gaps, formerly incarcerated adolescents face increased risk of recidivism, fueling a cycle of poverty and incarceration.
Often in scholarly attempts to explain the disproportionate representation (both racial and disability) of certain populations in the juvenile justice system, these youth are framed as exhibiting patterns of academic failure (Geib, Chapman, D’Amaddio, & Grigorenko, 2011), sometimes related to aggressive and impulsive behaviors (Holsinger, 2011) or low levels of self-control (Baron, 2003; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Even among those scholars who engage in a critique of the juvenile justice system and its educational practices, there is an emphasis on the deficits of the youth in analyses of the difficulties they will face in transitioning back to school and to their communities (Baltodano, Platt & Roberts, 2005). This focus on the deficits of incarcerated youth as well as on the inadequacies of educational programs for incarcerated youth has resulted in minimal research on educational practices that are effective for this special population (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher & Poirier, 2005). In light of the

In addition, while scholars have looked at many aspects of life for incarcerated youth and adults, they have not sufficiently engaged with how young people in juvenile detention facilities attempt to enact cultural capital as a strategy for navigating key moments in their rehabilitative stays. As I explain below, cultural capital provides a framework for broadly understanding measures that help young people and their families navigate educational institution, I also show that the construct can be applied to incarcerated youth as a strategy for reframing these adolescents as having rich cultural repertoires, rather than being deficient in skills. In addition to the contribution that cultural capital can make to how we understand incarcerated youth, this project attempts to provide a more in-depth understanding of cultural capital by looking at moments when of cultural capital bids can yield reward or benefit for young people in educational settings. Without unpacking these moments of recognition, we have an
insufficient knowledge of how young people gain access to scarce rewards (teacher sponsorship and guidance, in the case of this project).

**Overview of the Dissertation**

As outlined above, cultural capital is largely conceptualized as a repertoire of behaviors, attitudes, and practices that help individuals (comfortably/“naturally”) navigate middle class/privileged social situations, providing them with access to social networks (and opportunities for success). Under this conceptualization of cultural capital, individuals (students) display appropriate cultural capital and gatekeepers (teachers) provide them access to resources and support. These studies have been incredibly valuable in helping understand how cultural capital operates. Many have argued that the possession of cultural capital should yield social profit from that capital, but have yet to recognize the variability in the skill and embodiment of how student performers display cultural capital and how gatekeepers respond to this variability. The relationship between student performers and gatekeepers is a complex portrait in which there is a range of cultural capital performances and responses to these performances, but these issues have not been sufficiently discussed in the literature. This portrait is further complicated by the presence of multiple gatekeepers, who often embody conflicting values and standards, making the student responsible for multiple nuanced displays of capital.

Rather than reading displays and recognition of cultural capital as a static process, this project seeks to look at displays of cultural capital through micro-interactions between adolescents and the multiple gatekeepers they interact with at a juvenile detention facility. Although marginalized youth are typically framed in terms of capital deficits, this project seeks to understand displays of cultural capital in a highly marginalized educational setting (where
students are at high risk for social reproduction through poverty and recidivism). Through the lens of a group of adolescent clients at a juvenile rehabilitation and detention facility, this project seeks to document (a) how adolescents display their range of cultural capital and (b) how educators and disciplinary staff work as gatekeepers in the navigation of cultural capital.

Analyzing various displays of cultural capital in facility, this project shows that as adolescents engage in displays of cultural capital, gatekeepers accept or reject these displays through three processes. They (a) legitimize displays as seen through literacy practices, (b) recognize and acknowledge displays of cultural capital shown through the lens of non-cognitive factors, and (c) create teacher-student partnerships that yield valued incomes in transition planning. Looking at these three practices, I find there is a range in the student knowledge and skill around displaying cultural capital, and an even broader range of potential responses by the multiple gatekeepers to which the students must appeal. Even in moments when students perform in similar ways, there is variability in how gatekeepers respond to student displays of cultural capital.

**Dissertation Roadmap**

The dissertation is organized as follows. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the methodology, the research site, my role in the field, the methods I used to collect and analyze data, and the participants. The ethnographic methods I employ in this project are central to how I came to my research question and understanding of the interactions between adolescents and the multiple gatekeepers with whom they interface. Ethnographic methods allowed me to see beyond the limited scope with which I entered the site. While I continued to see the space in terms of disability studies and special education services, ethnography provided a way for me to understand the role of cultural capital in the lives of all
the students. Additionally, ethnography allowed me to see the spaces where actions and behaviors either confirmed or contradicted the words of both the adolescents and the gatekeepers.

**Chapter 3: Navigating Multiple Gatekeepers**

Discussions of cultural capital of low-income urban students are largely framed in terms of their relationships to dominant gatekeepers, yet students frequently interact with a host of non-dominant or working class gatekeepers that may include cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and custodial staff members. In the third chapter I explore the relationships between adolescents and the multiple gatekeepers with whom they interact, unpacking the multiple types of capital that adolescents must enact in order to successfully navigate their time at Crossings. This short chapter serves as a bridge between the methodology and the data chapters, in which the analysis is centered on academics. While interactions with teachers serve as the central focus of this dissertation, adolescents’ non-dominant interactions with other gatekeepers also contribute to how successfully they navigate the institution and receive support in their transition back to their homes and families. Although all gatekeepers have the potential to provide support to adolescents, the complex social structure of Crossings creates the potential for conflict amongst groups of adults, as it pertains to finding the best path to support the needs of the adolescents.

**Chapter 4: Tensions in Literacy**

The relationship between literacy and cultural capital in educational settings has typically been framed in terms of curricula, standardized tests, and restricted literacy tasks. In this chapter, I explore the question of the legitimization of literacy practices. Looking at moments of adolescent-valued literacy practices, I analyze how teachers legitimize practices
that are aligned with their standards and educational value system and devalue those that are
deemed low-skill capital. These practices include (a) basic low-level literacy practices such as
reading signs and menus, and understanding driver’s license manuals, (b) computer-based
literacy practices that are employed during credit recovery activities, and (c) legitimized
literacies that students enact when they research, write, and present senior projects. In my
analysis of displays of everyday literacy, I examine how teachers legitimize practices that are
aligned with their value system and devalue those that are deemed low-skill capital.

Chapter 5: The Social Graces (Non-cognitive Factors)

There is a burgeoning literature on non-cognitive factors in educational settings, where
scholars argue for the importance of non-cognitive factors such as perseverance and emotional
intelligence in contributing to academic success. In this scholarship, academic success is
measured in a number of ways including grade point average, awards, and tasks completion.
Scholars looking at non-cognitive factors in low-income urban school settings argue for the
importance of developing these factors in students who have been labeled at-risk as a means of
improving student outcomes and school performance.

While non-cognitive factors are not studied in terms of cultural capital, they are
frequently framed as mechanisms that have the potential to break cycles of reproduction. In
order to advance an understanding of how non-cognitive factors contribute to academic
achievement and social relations, it is important that we look at these factors on a micro-
interactional level. Non-cognitive factors are behaviors and skills that must be legitimized by
educational gatekeepers in order for them to contribute to student education. Adolescents at
Crossings display a number of non-cognitive factors in order to further their educational goals,
but recognition of these non-cognitive factors is complicated by a context that values discipline
and compliance as much as it values educational outcomes. Given the value placed on discipline, adolescent displays of non-cognitive factors are read as non-compliant and disruptive. While there are many factors that complicate our understanding of the impact of non-cognitive on educational success, this project shows that embodiment and the context in which these factors are displayed greatly impacts how successful students are in their attempts at perseverance and help-seeking.

Chapter 6: Transitional Planning

Transitional planning is a critical component of the programming in the juvenile justice system, particularly as it pertains to reducing the risk of recidivism and other factors that contribute to patterns of social reprocution. The literature on transitions typically focuses on the success and failures of transitions, rooted in recidivism. Under this umbrella, scholars analyze the correlation between a range of factors (including strong familial relationships, problem-solving skills, anger management skills, and academic plans) and recidivism. Although they have developed an understanding of the factors that can reduce recidivism, few scholars have closely analyzed how gatekeepers within the juvenile justice system help to foster these skills and relationships with the adolescents they serve. By unpacking the circumstances under which gatekeepers build partnerships with students during their transitional planning, I contribute to our understanding of how cultural capital yields social and academic outcomes for marginalized youth.

Cultural Capital in Moments of interactions

While they do not have a language for it, many adolescents at Crossings have an implicit understanding that there is a highly valued dominant cultural knowledge they must subscribe to in order to connect with their teachers, counselors, and social workers. As I show in the
dissertation, some of the moments where students make “bids” to gain access to highly valued resources include bids in the following areas:

- College aspirations
- Gaining access to stable jobs including jobs in “business”
- Entrepreneurship
- Standards of “appropriate” behavior

Although they attempt to enact dominant capital when interacting with educators, counselors, and social workers, the adolescents at Crossings must grapple with multiple gatekeepers. Their displays of dominant cultural capital are complicated by their relationships with the disciplinary staff, who also have a presence in the Learning Center. In order to build relationships with the disciplinary staff, they must enact a non-dominant cultural capital that is simultaneously rooted in discipline and what some have deemed a culture of the streets, as this is a means of connecting to gatekeepers who have shared the experiences of addiction and street violence.

**Chapter 7: Intentions Lost in Translation**

In this concluding chapter, I offer a reflection on my ethnographic look at reading adolescent displays of cultural capital. After a brief summary of the main findings of the thesis, I reflect on the implications for educational research as well as policy.

The dissertation wraps up with a short methodological reflection, an appendix with my interview guide, and the bibliography.
Chapter 2: Methodology

Located in a racially and socioeconomically diverse northeastern city, the data for this project was collected at a residential juvenile facility I call Crossings. Crossings emerged as an ideal space for studying the educational experiences of adolescents who have been marginalized by numerous institutions, including schools, the child service system, and the juvenile justice system. When I first began thinking about my dissertation project, I was interested in the intersection of class, race, and disability in educational settings. As a residential adolescent treatment facility for substance abuse, Crossings allowed me to look at this intersection in the context of adolescents who were even further marginalized by their struggles with addiction. In its role as a treatment facility, Crossings also serves as a facility within the juvenile justice system. The majority of the adolescents at Crossings have been sent to this institution as a result of committing drug-related offenses that include distribution of substances, putting them in touch with the juvenile justice system. In addition to those adolescents in the juvenile justice system, there are a small number of adolescents who have admitted themselves for substance abuse treatment and strategies for behavior management.

I first encountered Crossings while attempting to find a location where I could tutor students. As a former special education teacher, I wanted to work with students while completing my course work. After making initial contact with the principal, Ken³, I visited Crossings and arranged for the numerous clearances I needed in order to volunteer in the space, including a fingerprinting for an FBI background check, a child abuse clearance, and a physical

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³ All names used throughout the dissertation are pseudonyms. In selecting code names for each participant, I tried to keep names that reflected the personalities of the participants.
examination with their medical staff that included testing for illegal substances. Once my clearances had been completed, Ken assigned me to work with several adolescents on an array of academic projects, serving as a tutor to many of them.

During my first weeks working with this group of adolescents, I learned that many of them were at Crossings as a result of criminal offenses they had committed while either under the influence of illicit substances or through selling of illicit substances. Although I was there as a tutor, I found myself in a situation where I learned a vast amount about the juvenile justice system, and how these adolescents situated themselves in terms of multiple institutions, including the juvenile justice system, educational structures, families, and their communities. After two weeks of tutoring students, I began working with the principal to develop an ethnographic research project concerned with interactions between teachers and the clients at Crossings. My initial conversation included explaining to Ken that my research project would include observing the adolescents and members of the staff, having informal conversations with them, and more structured interviews. While I had broad interest in teacher perceptions of students, I explained that the project would evolve over time. Ken provided support for my interest in their educational facilities, and helped me to develop a plan for getting parental consent, as well as adolescent permission. I visited each of the classrooms, explaining the project to the students, answering any questions they had about my dissertation, and assuring them that they could continue to ask questions during my observational and interview process. During this initial period at Crossings, I was not only attempting to develop my role at Crossings, but also begin to develop relationships with the many groups that comprised the Crossings community. For more details about my thoughts about being in the field and interacting with
students, see Appendix A, which provides an overview of some of my reflections on being in the field.

After a month at Crossings, Ken (the principal) informed me that Crossings would be changing locations. While the original building sat on the outskirts of the city nestled amongst trees, their new building was moved to an urban setting. This new location would serve as the site of this dissertation project, as I did not begin collecting data until the adolescents and staff were settled into the new space. This new space brought a number of changes. At the original location, the clients were a group of 30 boys, who operated in very minimalist classrooms. With the opening of the new location, a group of eight girls joined the Crossings population (and would continue to rotate in during my time there), and there were numerous changes to the staff, and how the building was structured. In this new building, the adolescents were given access to a number of resources including a fitness room, recreation room, and technology in the classroom, which the principal believed would help the adolescents with educational engagement. Below, I describe the scene at the second Crossings location.

**The Research Site**

While Crossings is located in a large city with public transit, it is not easily accessible without a car. The streets of the neighborhood are narrow with cars parked on the sidewalk, covered in broken bottles and other litter that I attempted to avoid on my walk. Segments of the neighborhood have no sidewalks at all. The one-story building that houses Crossings stands in contrast to the surrounding car lots and small brick houses of neighborhood. Crossings is a modern and expansive ivory-colored building with large floor-to-ceiling windows. From the
outside, one can see the basketball courts where clients play sports and engage in an assortment of physical activities when the weather is conducive to being outdoors.

Entering Crossings during the school day, I am buzzed into the brightly lit lobby by one of the student workers. There is a brightly lit waiting area where one sees parents, outpatient clients, and potential employees waiting on any given occasion. There is typically light, but consistent, movement through the area as counselors and social workers move from one space to the next with clients. The rooms are brightly lit with fluorescent lighting and white walls in the waiting areas are covered with inspirational quotes. To the north end of the building are administrative offices (see Figure 1 for a layout of the building). Beyond the lobby, I enter a corridor that wraps around the building, broken into segments by locked doors. Along this corridor are the offices of the nurse, physician, and client counselors. After reaching a door, I reach the residential area. Wrapped around the south end of the building are client dormitories, a weight room, and a movie-screening room. Although they share the common areas, girls’ dormitories are separated from the boys by locked doors. Along this corridor are several unlocked exits with silent alarms in the event that adolescents leave grounds.

While students move along these corridors throughout the day, the study focuses on the Learning Center, which is located in the center of the building. Other than the weight room, recreational room, and movie room, the educational center is the only series of rooms without windows. There are four classrooms that comprise the Learning Center. In this small area, there are two classrooms on either side of a small hallway. At the north end of the educational center is a door that leads to the cafeteria. During school hours, students rotate between the four classrooms and cafeteria for their academic classes, meals, and rotating kitchen responsibilities.
(in which each group has a day on which they are responsible for cooking lunch for the group and cleaning the cafeteria).

Entering each of the classrooms, the layouts are fairly similar. Along two adjacent walls are 10 computers. There is a smartboard on one wall, and a large flat screen television on the adjacent wall. Under the television are bookcases, filled with an array of subject-oriented books. In the room where students have history, the wall with the television shares space with several maps. In the resource room, empty wall space is filled with a rotation of student work. Additionally, the walls of the hallway feature a décor for holidays and multicultural histories along with celebrations of student achievement, including a large poster indicating student honor roll and academic improvement.

The facility was designed to be physically bright, inviting, and accessible for student learning and growth, reflecting the institutional mission for meeting the complex needs of the adolescents they serve. The building was filled with light from the floor-to-ceiling windows that made up the majority of the building façade. Several of the walls were covered with motivational quotations, and in the Learning Center, there was a rotating display of posters celebrating holidays, heritage months, and students’ academic achievements. Regarding the broader context, Crossings is simultaneously typical as a juvenile detention facility in terms of the youth it serves. There is a disproportionate representation of Black and Latino adolescents (between 87% and 90% of the population were Black or Latino during the course of my project), along with disproportionate classification of students with learning disability, intellectual disability, or emotional disturbance (approximately 32% of the students at Crossings had Individualized Education Programs, classifying them as having a school-based disability). This
disproportionate representation of Black and Latino youth, as well as school-based disabilities reflects typical patterns seen in the juvenile justice system (Mooradian, 2007; Osher, Woodruff, & Sims, 2002). In the face of this highly racialized group of adolescents, a third of whom have specialized learning needs, the staff of Crossings attempts to employ a range of educational and restorative practices that meet the complex needs of their student population. These practices are further outlined in my overview of the Crossings’ Disciplinary Practices, Counseling and Therapy, and Learning Center.

Crossings Population
While the population of Crossings fluctuated as adolescents were admitted to the facility and transitioned home, there were approximately 38 clients at any given time. With some slight variation during my research cycles, approximately 34 of the 38 clients at Crossings were Black or Latino. The remaining students were white. One third of the students had
Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for special education services, while many others were diagnosed with labels that include Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The youth also tended to lag in their accumulation of academic credits. Considered collectively, this demographic overview makes Crossings an ideal space for looking at a typical juvenile justice facility. In the face of this population, the educators (including counselors, social workers, and teaching staff) attempted to employ multiple strategies for working with these adolescents during the course of their time at Crossings.

The timeline for adolescent stay at Crossings is determined by a treatment team, consisting of members of the educational, counseling, and disciplinary staff, who work with students to determine the course of rehabilitation and re-entry. Although there is variation depending on the needs of the adolescent, the typical stay at Crossings is six to nine months.

The clients at Crossings are divided into four teams for both academic learning and social/behavioral improvement: three groups of boys divided by age and educational attainment⁴, and a group of girls. The clients rotated through their classes (described below) with this group of students, and worked with this team to earn disciplinary points for weekly rewards.

Adolescents interfaced with a number of staff members that include the disciplinary staff, counselors, teachers, and social workers. Each department has a role in the development

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⁴ Educational attainment included a range of factors that were not always clear. Those students who had only completed middle school and were too young to enter high school, were placed in a team with high school aged students who had IEPs, or only had the credit accumulation from one year of high school. The middle group consisted of those who had completed accumulated enough academic credits to be classified as sophomores or juniors. And the third group consisted of high school seniors, those who had completed high school, and those who were on track to complete General Equivalency Development (GED) tests.
of the educational, social, and emotional development of the adolescents, as well as their transitional planning, giving each group of adults a role in the gatekeeping process. Below, I outline the general goal of each department at Crossings.

**Disciplinary Practices**

Disciplinary and behavioral practices are central to the lives of the adolescents at Crossings, as these young people spend the majority of their days under the supervision of this staff. During my time at Crossings, these practices manifested themselves in a number of ways including a complex point system in which they earn and lose points as a team for a range of positive and negative social behaviors. Although they are assigned to a team based on their age and academic credit accumulation, with the disciplinary staff, the notion of team was built on the idea of holding one’s peers accountable for making good behavioral decisions, including following rules, being prepared for class time, and deescalating conflicts between their peers. When each team (see Table 2 for an overview of the teams) successfully completed these tasks, they were given points by members of the disciplinary staff. At the end of the week, the team with the highest number of points were given treats that included ordering dinner from a local restaurant and getting access to candies at the Crossings concession stand. In addition to peer accountability, one of the key elements of these behavioral systems at Crossings that speaks to the transitional literature is the focus on developing skills associated with social resilience, or the idea that communities and adult figures provide adolescents with stability and support in the face of challenges (Chung, Little, and Steinberg, 2005) and decision-making. While the daily behavioral systems are focused on the skills and routines that are critical to social development, one of the most critical development of social resilience is through the earning of “day passes.” As adolescents move through their rehabilitation program, they earn day passes for between 8
and 24 hour periods, during which they are allowed to return home and interact with members of their family and community. When they return to Crossings from these outings, they are given substance tests, and assessed for any changes in behavior that may indicate they will experience challenges in their transitions.

**Counseling and Therapy**

Various forms of therapy were central to the adolescent time at Crossings. Each client is assigned a counselor, with whom they meet several times a week to work on developing various social and emotional skills, as well as providing treatment for addiction. While I did not attend these sessions in order to respect student privacy, I was given the opportunity to discuss them with the adolescents, as well as talk through their trauma narratives with them, a process during which they outlined key moments of trauma and discussed their emotional needs, including anger management and problem-solving skills. These traumas included the loss of father figures, witnessing violence, and feeling neglected over the course of years. While there was some variation amongst the adolescents, these were the general themes that came up regarding trauma for both court-appointed and self-admitted adolescents. Additionally, counselors provide weekly group counseling for adolescents to discuss their needs as a community and how to approach any major conflicts and disruptions in their community, reinforcing the development of problem-solving skills and emotional management. The final component of the counseling experience was family counseling, in which adolescents met with members of their family to work through the challenges they faced as a family, and how to approach it when adolescents returned to their families.
The Learning Center: Educational Programming at Crossings

The work done in the Learning Center provides students with support in academic development, restorative justice, and employment skill development, which are shown to be essential factors in reducing rates of recidivism. Academic development included support in developing literacy and math skills, as well as the implementation of academic programs for continued credit accumulation (to get or keep students on track for completing high school). Restorative Justice programming (which is outlined in Chapter 6) included discussions and assignments in which adolescents reflected on the harm their actions caused their community, and how they could begin to repair some of the harm as they returned to their communities. Adolescents were divided into four groups or teams (see Table 2 for a description of these groups), based on a combination of age, academic credits, and the special education teacher’s assessment of literacy and math skills. Given the small population, all girls were placed in one group together. Various forms of skill development were infused into many components of their teaching practices and lesson planning, from Nathalie’s career units to Ken’s restorative justice projects and Dave’s work on senior projects (all of which are explained in more detail throughout the data analysis chapters). In addition to their academic tasks, the Learning Center hosted a family night once a month, as an extension of the process of building familial relationships. In preparation for this event, students worked with their English teacher, Dave, to develop a newsletter that featured student poetry, an interview with one of the staff members, and student works of art. On Family Night, parents were invited to meet with their children’s teacher in an environment that focused on successes and moving forward.
Table 2. Student Academic Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cavaliers</td>
<td>The Cavaliers were those students who had only completed one year of high school credits, along with those who had intellectual disability and more severe learning disability labels. Additionally, this included those middle-school aged students (between the ages of 13-14) who had not yet entered high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboys</td>
<td>The Cowboys were comprised of those students who had enough academic credits to be classified as being in the middle of high school years (high school and junior status).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blues</td>
<td>The Blues were comprised of those students who had completed enough credits to be classified as seniors, or who were preparing for GED testing. Additionally, this group included those adolescents who had completed high school. The adolescents in the subset of the Blues were 18-19 years old, and typically had been advocated for through the juvenile courts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinals</td>
<td>The Cardinals was the group of girls at Crossings. Because there were only 5-10 girls at any given period, the Cardinals was comprised of a wide range of students regarding academic credits and disability labeling. While both the disciplinary and educational staff attempted to keep the Cardinals separated from the other groups to create a single-sex learning environment, they frequently could be found completing work with students from other groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of my time at Crossings was spent in the Learning Center, where I had the opportunity to observe and interact with a number of members of the Crossings community, including adolescent clients, teachers, counselors, social workers, and the disciplinary staff. The complex structure of Crossings created disruptions throughout the day for many student, but in spite of the changes, a typical day contained movement throughout the building (see Table 3).
### Table 3. Typical Student Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00am-8:00am</td>
<td>Wake-up, preparation for the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00am-8:30am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30am-10:45am</td>
<td>Rotation through first three classes of the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45am-11:30am</td>
<td>Lunch preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30am-12:15pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15pm-2:30pm</td>
<td>Rotation through last three classes of the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30pm-3:30pm</td>
<td>Community meeting (Friday only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30pm-6:30pm</td>
<td>Study and leisure time (basketball, movies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30pm-6:30pm</td>
<td>Dinner preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30pm-7:30pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30pm-8:30pm</td>
<td>Dinner clean-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30pm-9:00pm</td>
<td>Evening preparations: medications, evening showers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00pm</td>
<td>Light’s out: adolescents must be in their dorm rooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The days at Crossings combined elements of educational programming, counseling, and a series of life skill responsibilities. Adolescents rotated between English, Science, History, Math, and a Resource Room throughout the mornings and afternoons. In the middle of each academic day, a group of students is assigned the responsibility of cooking meals and cleaning the cafeteria. This typical schedule is also modified to include group therapy sessions on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, and a community meeting on Friday afternoons.

**Building Relationships**

When I made the transition from tutor to participant researcher, one of the key tasks that I had to complete during my time at Crossings was to develop relationships with the key
figures in the space. With the goal of understanding the interactions between adolescents and gatekeepers, I had to develop a researcher identity that allowed me to collect data through interacting with a range of different participants.

As a former high school teacher who worked with low-income students, I was able to build relationships with teachers through shared discussions about educational practices and approaches to engaging students. In the classroom, I made myself available to help teachers with various students during assignments, and attempted to fill small roles when they had need. While they were very welcoming, one of the challenges I faced with teachers was remaining neutral when they had questions about student engagement. My time as a high school teacher helped me develop empathy for teacher frustration when students were not engaged or were disruptive, but in my role as a researcher, I attempted to minimize my response to student behaviors with their teachers, which could prove to be a difficult tasks at times.

In contrast to the teachers, it was much more difficult building relationships with students. In my role as a tutor with the clients, I began to build trust with small groups at a time, but I had to reassure students that I was not a teacher. This pronouncement was usually followed by questions of why I wanted to spend time with them, or learn from them, if I was not getting paid as a teacher. Adolescents tended to be more comfortable with me when I explained my role as a graduate student. The process of explaining my thesis project and role in the school involved not only explaining my project to them, but also opening the door for them to ask me questions about my experiences in school. Building relationships with the students was an ongoing process given the high rotation of adolescents throughout Crossings.
Methods

While this project does not constitute a complete ethnography, I employed ethnographic methods that allowed me to immerse myself into the Crossings community to document the relationships between gatekeepers (teachers, social workers, counselors, and disciplinary staff) and the adolescent clients. An ethnographic approach to Crossings allowed me to be open in my approach and look at the institution and participants from many perspectives to begin to develop understand the patterns that I saw in the space (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). When I initially looked at Crossings as a field site, I was interested in learning disabilities and teachers’ perceptions of learning disabilities in a juvenile detention facility. Ethnography provided me with the tools to look beyond this limited scope and focus on several questions that came to include cultural capital, how micro-interactions facilitate (or inhibit) the reading of cultural capital, and the role these readings play in social reproduction. An ethnographic approach to my thinking allowed me to immerse myself in a community and engage with participants to better understand how they see the world, while simultaneously pushing me to be reflexive and question how I was seeing both participants and the data I got from observing and talking with them. While learning and intellectual disabilities played a role in how teachers interacted with students, participant observations and ethnographic interviews allowed me to see that there were a number of factors that influenced how teachers read their students’ cultural capital. As my questions began to emerge, I employed several ethnographic methods in order to understand the readings of capital that were occurring at Crossings.

The data from this project was collected over a period of 20 months, broken into three data collection cycles that coincided with school terms at Crossings. While I had ongoing relationship development with the educators and disciplinary staff, I had to build relationships
with the students during each of these cycles. There was overlap with each group of students, but the constantly changing population meant that rapport building was an ongoing process at this site.

**From Participation to Observation**

When I first made the transition from tutor to participant-researcher, the central focus of my data collection was participant observation and the writing of field notes. My initial observations were broad overviews of the space, documenting the programs that were in place, and understanding general dynamics between students and various staff members, as well as between staff members. As I began to know the informants, participant observation allowed me to document everyday interactions between students and teachers and staff across a variety of settings in the institution. As a tutor and observer, I focused in particular on small group tutoring sessions and observing student-teacher interactions in classroom settings. Participant observation in small group settings provided me with the opportunity to document moments in which adolescents engage in a variety of displays of cultural capital through their peer interactions, including both non-dominant displays as well as traditionally valued displays of capital. Observations in larger classroom settings were critical for an analysis of questions concerning what cultural capital these students display, the moments in which displays manifest themselves, and how teachers process these displays of capital. In order to document these interactions, I produced field jottings during my site visits, which I have later turned into field notes and analyzed along with analytic memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Through field notes and analytic memos I documented complex displays of non-cognitive skills that include intellectual curiosity and socio-emotional intelligence. Additionally, I observed behaviors and statements signifying that adolescents value the acquisition of forms of cultural capital, that
include developing literacy skills and aspirational articulations. I also gathered data of students’ everyday discourse giving insight into how they perceive and experience the institution and set about navigating the institution. With regards to teachers and their interactions with students, I documented particular patterns in how they recognize and misrecognize cultural capital, and the moments in which teachers engage in a reflexive praxis about meeting the academic needs of their students.

**Ethnographic Interviews**

As a complement to field notes and memos, reflexive ethnographic interviews (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013) were a critical source of data for understanding how the adolescents viewed their educational experiences in the context of Crossings. Observations served as the foundation for my ethnographic interviews, which allowed me to ask students and educators what they thought was most important throughout a day. The ethnographic interviews helped provide shape for my project, as both teachers and student showed me the importance of relationships in how well students did at Crossings.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The biggest challenge in my data collection was the completion of semi-structured interviews. While ethnographic interviews and field notes provided me with a rich source of data that gave shape to the project, semi-structured interviews provided me with answers once I had developed research questions. I completed 28 semi-structured interviews with the adolescent clients to develop an explicit understanding of their personal histories with educational institutions, how they understand their adjudication, and how they perceive themselves in terms of academic engagement and skills. Based on the interview material, I identified a series of emic categories (Maxwell, 2013) that adolescent participants use to make
sense of their experiences in their own terms (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). As I began conducting semi-structured interviews, the adolescents who had become comfortable with me in an ethnographic setting, came concerned with having right answers to questions that I had. As a result of their concern with performance, the semi-structured interviews became an overview of how adolescents understood schooling and the role they played in their educational processes.

**Document Analysis**

While it was a much smaller component of my data, during my time at Crossings, I also collected a number of documents that provided insight into the educational philosophies and practices that were employed by teachers. These documents included assignments they gave during class as well as documents that outlined some of the institutional goals. The assignments were particularly useful in providing clarity in how teachers understood their educational responsibilities and the abilities of the students they were teaching.

Additionally, some adolescents volunteered to share documents they had written that gave insight into their educational experiences. These included trauma narratives, senior projects, and restorative justice assignments. While I go into more details about each of these documents in through data analysis, they provided insight into adolescent experiences in school prior to Crossings as well as their personal academic interests.

**Key Participants**

**Adolescents**

The key participants in this study are the adolescents who shared their ideas, understandings, and experiences with me throughout the data collection process. My
observations focused on the broad range of interactions between adolescents and gatekeepers, but given the high turn-over of adolescent clients at Crossings, there were a small group of students who became central to the project. These youth displayed a variety of behaviors regarding their participation in the programming at Crossings. Of the students who became most engaged in participating in this study, the majority displayed active engagement with the educational process, although engagement was not always consistent. These students engaged with their teachers to understand how many credits they needed to continue in school, actively completed assignments, and frequently sought individual help when they did not understand academic tasks. A smaller portion (approximately 10% of the active participants) consistently displayed either disruptive or disengaged classroom behaviors. The table below describes some of the adolescents who feature prominently throughout the dissertation. To reiterate the footnote from above, all names in the following tables (and throughout the dissertation) are pseudonyms. I attempted to provide names that reflected the personality of the participants.

Table 4. Adolescent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic/Racial Self-Description(^5)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>A middle school student, Matthew was one of the youngest adolescents at Crossings. His teachers viewed him as motivated in most circumstances, but there were moments when he was viewed as non-compliant to requests. He is featured in the chapter on non-cognitive skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolas/</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>One of the youngest clients at Crossings during his time there, Nicolas was viewed by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) During interviews, I asked adolescents how they racially identify, and have labeled them as they identify (even it is framed in terms of a national/ethnic identity). Ethnic identity played a large role in how adolescents understood themselves, particularly regarding a sense of pride.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicky</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>his teachers as academically gifted. Although heavily invested in his academics, Nicolas was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which contributed to behavioral difficulties and inconsistencies in the classroom. He often had outbursts of anger with both educators and disciplinary staff. Nicolas is featured in the chapter on literacy. In spite of these outbursts, he was highly engaged in academic tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaden</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Jaden is featured in the data analysis chapter on non-cognitive factors and transition planning. He was a self-admit to Crossings for fighting and drug use, which included marijuana and Percocet. While Jaden did not have strong academic skills, he had educational aspirations that included attending college with a major in business. During his time at Crossings, he developed and began to execute a plan for college preparation, but struggled in his transition after leaving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Isaiah was diagnosed with an intellectual disability, and was highly disengaged during his time at Crossings. Although he was disengaged in his academics, he had a strong interest in art. He is featured in the discussion of transitional planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Stephan was in his final year of high school during his time at Crossings. Although he initially appeared very disengaged in classroom settings, he was highly engaged in projects that were of interest to him. He is featured in Chapter 2’s discussion of literacy and Chapter 6’s discussion of transitional planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Daniel had few concrete aspirations in terms of academics, but through his relationship building with educators and peers at Crossings, he began to pursue a path for high school completion. Daniel was admitted to Crossings by his parents for fighting and drug use, which included synthetic marijuana.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While Daniel displayed some moments of academic engagement, he was inconsistent. Daniel is featured in the data analysis chapters on non-cognitive skills and transitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Calvin was immediately noticeable because of both his physical size and gregarious personality. During his time at Crossings, he became known for his lyricism in writing raps and being a “class clown.” He is featured in Chapter 5 on non-cognitive factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Latino/Puerto Rican</td>
<td>During his time at Crossings, Felix was known by not only the educational and disciplinary staff, but developed strong relationships with some of the administrative figures. Prior to his time at Crossings, Felix had been heavily involved in the selling of drugs and considered himself to be most comfortable with a life on “the streets”. During his extended stay at Crossings, he began to develop a series of academic aspirations and legal career goals, for which he developed a concrete action plan. Felix is featured in the data analysis chapter on transitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Kyle was a senior at Crossings, who participated in the work study program. He had an engaging personality, and frequently interacted with teachers and other gatekeepers. He is featured in the chapters on literacy and non-cognitive factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Samuel also features prominently in the chapter on transitional planning, as pertains to his career aspirations and goal-setting. Samuel was one of the oldest students at Crossings during his time there. Although Samuel was relatively quiet and reserved, he displayed a confidence in his engagement with his peers. While Samuel did not have college aspirations, he was incredibly career focused during his time, developing a transition plan that included concrete steps for career training when he left Crossings. Samuel was also the only openly gay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grace F 16 White
Grace features in the chapter on educational and career aspirations. Grace struggled with an opiate addiction, and was a self-admit to Crossings. Her addiction featured strongly in many of her educational and career goals. During her transition planning, Grace worked with members of her treatment team to find a placement in a school geared towards educating adolescents who struggle with addiction, so that she could combine her academic goals with her addiction recovery.

Savannah F 16 Black
Savannah was a teenage mother with an outgoing personality. She was highly engaging, but also defied rules or expectations that she did not feel were aligned with her academic and personal goals. Savannah is featured in the chapter on non-cognitive factors.

Emma F 18 Black
Emma existed on the fringes of the students at Crossings. She was frequently seen with a book in her hands, and at work study. Although she was incredibly quiet and attentive to her work, she was always willing to engage with questions about how she understood education and social structures. She was also able to build relationships with Dave, which happened with few students. Emma is featured in the chapter on literacy.

Clare F 18 White
Unlike many of the other adolescents that have a strong focus in the dissertation, Clare had very few academic aspirations, and did not attempt to employ many of the skills that would allow her to build relationships with educators. While Clare did not have strong educational or career aspirations, and had a volatile personality, she engaged in

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Nicolas’s sexuality was a large part of his experience at Crossings. He made reference to his sexual identity throughout our interactions. While many of the adolescent males made derogatory comments about queer identities in the abstract, students acknowledged Nicolas’s sexuality, but did so in a way that was respectful of him.
help-seeking that lead to many interactions with teachers. Clare features in the chapters on literacy and transitions.

**Educators**

While this dissertation project attempts to focus on the experiences and thoughts of adolescents, much of their educational experience at Crossings is shaped by how educators read the behaviors and motivations of the students they encounter. The staff at Crossings could be classified into roughly four groups that included administrators, counseling, disciplinary staff, and educators. The administrative offices house seven staff members with a range of responsibilities from fundraising and program development to the medical and nursing staff. The counseling staff was comprised of seven individuals that included the counselors who worked with clients on a daily basis and their social workers who were their liaison to the court systems.

The range of staff members at Crossings is reflective of the multiple gatekeepers to which adolescents had to be attuned. Of the education and counseling staff, here are the individuals who feature most prominently in this dissertation project:

Table 5. Educators at Crossings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Ken was the Social Studies teacher and principal of the Learning Center at Crossings. He had the longest tenure as an educator at the site, and as the school leader, he took on many additional roles. In addition to structuring the history curricula, Ken also structured science courses for students, and led them in restorative justice projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Steve taught mathematics at Crossings. Students frequently noted that he worked to make math accessible to all of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
them, while challenging them. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Steve managed much of the technology accessibility at Crossings and started a chess club for students.

Dave
M
White
Dave was the English teacher at Crossings. Dave was interested in teaching traditional English courses, but felt restricted by both the structure of Crossings and the general academic skills of the students. He had contentious relationships with many of his students, that resulted in a number of verbal altercations.

Nathalie
F
White
Nathalie was the special educator at Crossings. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Nathalie took on many administrative responsibilities including acquiring and maintaining student files and records. Students were frequently found in her classroom throughout the day and after school until she went home.

Lynn
F
Black
Lynn was a teacher’s assistant. Although she worked across all of the classrooms, she worked most closely with Ken and Nathalie. She was completing her Bachelor degree to become a math educator while working at Crossings. Like Nathalie, Lynn frequently worked one-on-one with students during class and after school.

Michael/Mike
M
Black
Mike was a social worker for the adolescents at Crossings, who took them to their court appointments and worked with them in their transitional planning. In addition to working with adolescents on the formal aspects of their transition planning, Mike could frequently be found talking with students about financial literacy and relationship building.

**Disciplinary Staff**

The disciplinary staff stood in contrast to the educational staff in both their interactional style with students and their physical presence. Sitting at the door of each classroom, their presence was always a part of classroom activity, even in moments when teachers did not require their support. While they worked to foster positive relationships with the adolescents and develop conflict-resolution skills with the adolescents, there were many moments in which
their presence in the Learning Center disrupted the goals of the teachers. These disruptions were most frequently seen when students interrupted classroom activities to talk with the disciplinary staff. Additionally, focus on discipline resulted in moments in which they interrupted teachers’ lessons to give students feedback on behaviors they did not like.

They also stood in contrast to the other staff members in terms of their attire. Administrators, counselors, and educators wore casual attire of their choosing that included jeans and tee shirts for some, or dress pants and dress shirts for others. In contrast, like the adolescent clients, the disciplinary staff had a uniform of khaki pants and polo shirts. The lead members of the staff wore red shirts, while the general disciplinary staff wore navy polo shirts.

The disciplinary staff that feature most prominently throughout the project include:

Table 6. Key Disciplinary Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Tim was one of the lead members of the disciplinary staff. Affectionately referred to as “Old Head,” the adolescents had strong relationships with Tim. When they talked with him, he listened, and connected their experiences to his past experiences. He generally got along with the educational staff and supported them in their educational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joann</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Joann was a member of the disciplinary staff in her mid-20s. She spent much of her time with the group of girls, providing them guidance on a number of personal issues, including relationships with boys, parenting, and religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Sharon was one of the members of the disciplinary staff who was on the floor with students throughout the day. A middle-aged woman, she approached the students with what she described as “tough love,” encouraging them towards discipline as a critical component of rehabilitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Keisha was a member of the disciplinary staff, who spent much of her time with the girls. She was in her mid to late 20s, and engaged with the clients with high energy, frequently joking and laughing with them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shaun | M | Black | As with Tim, the adolescents at Crossings frequently displayed warmth towards Shaun, noting that his experiences mirrored many of theirs. Students indicated a veneration for him, because he had been shot, but made changes in his life, giving them a sense of hope.

A Note on Race and Gender

The intersection of race, gender, and disability played a large role in the structure and dynamics of Crossings. Elements of these intersections are inflected throughout various components of experiences at Crossings, including the structure of the staff. All of the teachers\(^7\) were white, while the majority of the disciplinary staff was black. The differences between the teachers and disciplinary staff were amplified by the nature of the uniforms the disciplinary staff had to wear, which mirrored what adolescent clients wore.

Similarly, the idea of disability was inflected throughout the structure of the program. All of the students were on a series of medications, and many with whom I spoke told me of the litany of their diagnoses, which impacted their schooling. Student disability labels included Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, and Manic Depressive Disorder. In addition to these labels, those students diagnosed with more severe disabilities (including intellectual disability, and some learning disabilities) were organized into a learning group with the younger students, dividing them from peers their age.

While race, gender, and understandings of disability play a role in the dynamics that existed and how the relationships unfolded, they were very rarely overtly discussed. Throughout

\(^7\) Although Lynn worked with the teaching staff as an assistant, I do not include her as a teacher for a number of reasons. She had not yet completed her Bachelor’s degree or teaching certification, and as a result she did not teach lessons, although she did interact with students on a daily basis.
the data chapters, I draw attention to the moments that were inflected with racialized, ability-laden, or gendered language, in an attempt to show how these factors influence the recognition of cultural capital bids.
Chapter 3: Navigating Multiple Gatekeepers

Although the data from this project highlights the interactions between a group of institutionalized (either through incarceration or self-admission for treatment), low-income adolescents and their teachers, the social structure of Crossings is a much more complex terrain. The adolescents at Crossings navigate relationships with at least four groups of gatekeepers during the course of a day. These groups of gatekeepers included teachers, social workers, counselors, administrators, and members of the disciplinary staff (see Table 7 for details on the gatekeepers that were essential figures in adolescent life at Crossings). In this chapter I show that adolescents must successfully employ multiple interactional styles and forms of cultural capital as they move amongst these gatekeepers.

The literature on cultural capital is largely situated in how young people and their families display (or lack the resources to display) cultural capital of dominant social and cultural institutions. For example, Sullivan (2001) emphasizes the importance of reading and television viewing habits as displays of cultural capital that contribute to successful test-taking, as part of an information transmission process. Sullivan also includes musical taste and participation in cultural activities such as museums and concerts in her operationalization of cultural capital, but finds that these activities do not significantly impact educational performance when measuring test scores. When gatekeeper evaluation of students are included as a component of educational success, scholars such as Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) find that cultural capital produces educational returns, particularly for white students of relatively high socioeconomic status.
This research simultaneously creates parameters for what constitutes dominant cultural capital, while also using empirical data to show how dominant cultural capital plays helps young people successfully navigate educational institutions. The extant literature on cultural capital provides us with a rich understanding of the expectations of dominant cultural gatekeepers including teachers and other “dominant” gatekeepers such as counselors. Yet, throughout the day, students interact with a host of gatekeepers who do not interact with students based on the standards of dominant cultural capital, including cafeteria employees, security staff, and bus drivers. These figures also influence student behaviors, and are essential to how young people understand the social world. In order to understand how students navigate these relationships, it is important to understand non-dominant forms of cultural capital.

Prudence Carter (2003, 2005) provides an alternative to dominant displays of cultural capital, arguing that young people have other forms of capital, she calls non-dominant cultural capital. These forms of capital include alternative linguistic patterns, musical tastes, and styles of interacting (2003). Additionally, Carter argues that many adolescents, particularly racial minorities, engage in cultural straddling, in which young people navigate the boundaries between their peer groups and gatekeepers of educational institutions, enacting non-dominant cultural capital with their peers and dominant forms of cultural capital with educational gatekeepers. Carter’s conceptualizations of non-dominant cultural capital and cultural straddling provide us with tools for complicating how we understand cultural capital through an exploration of non-dominant capital and cultural straddling, arguing that dominant cultural capital is essential to successfully navigating institutions, while non-dominant cultural capital is essential for navigating informal social networks. Even in this conceptualization of non-dominant cultural capital, it is relegated to more informal spaces, and non-dominant
gatekeepers are not acknowledged. Carter’s conception of non-dominant cultural capital is one in which marginalized people, particularly young people, display forms of capital in attempt. I attempt to expand on this concept to show that while

This chapter attempts to explore the question of what happens when adolescents have to navigate multiple gatekeepers in the same institutional setting. *How do young people navigate the boundaries between institutional gatekeepers who enact different forms of cultural capital?* In this chapter, I look at the spaces in which the adolescents at Crossings are expected to interact using dominant cultural styles, the spaces in which they interact with non-dominant cultural styles, and what happens in the moments when the lines between dominant and non-dominant gatekeepers are blurred.

**Gatekeepers**

Over the course of a day, the adolescents at Crossings move between a number of gatekeepers including educators, disciplinary staff members, and administrative figures. While the overarching goal of Crossings is the treatment of adolescents for substance abuse and behavioral difficulties, each group of gatekeepers approaches this goal with a different set of expectations for student-client behavior and interactional style or attitude. The adolescents were expected to adapt and modify their behaviors and interactional style to meet the expectations of each set of gatekeepers. At moments of transition the variation in interactional styles created tensions between adolescents and their teachers, as well as tensions between various groups of gatekeepers.

The faculty and staff members attempted to organize Crossings so there were boundaries and structured allotment of time for various activities, but the boundaries and
schedules were frequently blurred as each gatekeeper attempted to influence the adolescents.

In the following section I outline each group of gatekeepers (see Table 7), the role they play with the adolescent clients at Crossings, and the type cultural capital that is at the center of interactions between adolescents and each group of gatekeepers. I base the description of interaction on the type of relationship that gatekeepers establish with adolescents.

Although there some gatekeepers interact with non-dominant forms of cultural capital, including sharing musical taste, shared informal language, and shared cultural experiences, all of the gatekeepers at Crossings play a role in helping the adolescents navigate the institutional processes and developing skills they utilize as they transition from Crossings back to their communities.

In addition to the cultural capital at the center of the exchange between adolescents and gatekeepers, it is important to acknowledge that adolescents have a range of interactions with these adult figures. Even in relationships where Dominant cultural capital is the currency, adolescents may engage in both formal and informal exchanges with their teachers and counselors. Formal exchanges include those explicitly related to classroom/educational activities, while informal exchanges can include discussions about a teacher’s life outside of school, or how they came to be a teacher. Conversely, although adolescents largely interact with disciplinary staff using Non-Dominant cultural capital, they have both formal and informal exchanges. Formal exchanges may include reprimands for fighting, while informal interactions may include shared meals and discussions about sports.
Table 7. Gatekeeper Categories and Interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gatekeeper</th>
<th>Role with Adolescents</th>
<th>Cultural Capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Instruct adolescents in core academic areas, in formal classroom setting. Serve as member of transition team.</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Formalized counseling sessions focused on trauma, substance abuse, and relationship rebuilding with both family members and peers.</td>
<td>Dominant(^8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. educational planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Study(^9)</td>
<td>Supervise students in career skills, including administrative jobs, custodial work, and professional development skills including time management and other work behaviors.</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. employment-related interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary Staff</td>
<td>Guide and supervise students in behavioral development. There are disciplinary staff members on duty twenty-four hours a day.</td>
<td>Non-dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. navigating peer relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>Serve as official transition liaisons to adolescents. Escort adolescent clients to court dates, have transition meetings after adolescents have been released, and escort them to other required meetings.</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. navigating juvenile justice system and non-dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. navigating family relationships(^10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^8\) In order to respect the privacy of the adolescents’ interactions with their counselors, I did not observe counseling sessions. As such, my knowledge of the relationships between counselors and students was based on interactions in classrooms and adolescent description of interactions with counselors. As a result, while much of the cultural capital interactions I observed were grounded in dominant cultural values.

\(^9\) Only one-third of the students are selected for work study programming, but I include the work study supervisors with the gatekeepers because they provide adolescents with an abundance of both vocational and interactional skills, and assist adolescents in the transition to employment outside of the Crossings context.

\(^10\) Although counselors provide formal support for building relationships between adolescents and their families, I include navigating family relationships as non-dominant cultural capital as one of the shared experiences between social workers and clients. Social workers shared their experiences in informal interactions with clients to both build relationships and help clients devise strategies for navigating family relationships that did not follow formal counseling strategies.
Educators, Work Study, and Counselors

This dissertation’s focus is recognition of dominant cultural capital in formal learning interactions between adolescents and their teachers. Through an exploration of literacy practices, non-cognitive factors, and transition planning, I attempt to show that the behavioral, academic, and attitude expectations of teachers were that of dominant cultural capital. As such, I will not go into all of the details here of the type of cultural capital interactions that adolescents had with their teachers.

Adolescents spend six periods of 40 minutes in classroom settings with four teachers. During these periods of time, adolescents completed coursework in English, Science, Math, Social Studies, study skills, and career skills. There were variations in the expectations of each teacher regarding the level of formality in the classroom, how students should approach help-seeking, and whether they could work in groups or were expected to work independently. In spite of the variation in interactional styles, when students entered the classroom, there were basic expectations that students would sit quietly in a chair and either complete assignments they had been given, or wait for teacher instruction and guidance in a lesson plan.

For example, when the English-teacher, Dave, taught a lesson on metaphors and similes, each student sat quietly in front of a computer station. With the exception of one student, who appeared disengaged, their chairs were turned towards the center of the room, with their papers in one hand. Dave had each student read a line of a poem about a trip to a creek. When he got to 14-year old Ivy, she declared, “I don’t feel like doing this,” refusing to read a line aloud
as she played a game on the computer. Dave moved towards the computer, turning off the monitor, “You’re going to participate in what we’re doing in class.” She continued to refuse to read, but the expectation was set of her behavior during this class activity, and she sat facing the center of the room, even while engaging in her protest of the activity.

In the following data analysis chapters, I attempt to show in more detail that student bids to have their cultural capital acknowledged were more likely to be accepted by teachers when they reflected dominant cultural norms. While adolescent attempts to display dominant cultural capital were not always acknowledged by their teachers, there were behavioral and academic expectations that reflected the standards of dominant social and cultural values, particularly regarding the rules of classrooms and academic environments. The expectations of dominant cultural capital were also present in the interactions between adolescents and their work study supervisors, as well as with their counselors.

Regarding work study, a select group of students who had behavioral strengths (as determined by the disciplinary staff) as well as academic focus, were selected to participate in the Crossings work study program. These behavioral strengths included deescalating conflicts with peers, following instructions, and being proactive in community participation. Academic focus was measured by students’ attempts to complete assignments and engage with teachers, but was not measured by scores on assignments or tests.

Selected students were allowed to participate in two jobs through the work study program, for which they were paid every two weeks. One involved completing janitorial tasks, such as helping to maintain the landscaping, retouching paint, and developing some basic carpentry skills with their supervisor, Robert. The other job involved working the front desk and
completing administrative tasks, under the supervision of Teresa. In this job, they buzzed guests into the building and greeted them, and directed them to the various staff members they were scheduled to see. They also answered phone calls, directing callers to appropriate staff members. In this role, they became gatekeepers to individuals attempting to interact with members of the Crossings staff and faculty.

This work study program attempted to replicate the expectations of employment opportunities outside of Crossings. Students had to display time management, motivation, and a sense of professionalism. For example, during one of my visits, a woman wearing khaki pants and a winter jacket, approached the outer door. Eighteen-year old Kyle was working the front door, and buzzed her into the lobby. “Welcome to Crossings,” he greeted her with a smile, sitting up as she came into the foyer. “May I ask who you’re here to see?” Although he had the same warm smile he always put on his face when working the front desk, his tone was more formal than the very relaxed, “Hey, Miss Rita! How you doing today?” with which he had greeted me upon arrival.

She did not know the name of the person she was scheduled to visit, but Kyle confidently picked up the phone to call Teresa. “Do you know the purpose of your visit?” he asked the woman, placing his hand over the receiver. She explained that she as interested in admitting her child, which Kyle relayed to Teresa. Kyle ultimately directed the woman to her destination with one of the social workers, walking her through the doors before returning to his post at the desk. Kyle not only displayed the professionalism in his interaction with the woman, but engaged in problem-solving and help-seeking when he could not immediately resolve her inquiry. Kyle’s interaction with this visitor was part of a pattern of meeting work
study behavioral expectations. Even in working class jobs, the students were expected to display behaviors that were aligned with dominant cultural standards regarding work performance and interactions.

**Disciplinary Staff**

While the adolescents spent the day with educators and other educationally-related gatekeepers, they interacted with the disciplinary at every point throughout the day. There were two groups of disciplinary staff members: the red shirts and the blue (navy) shirts. The red shirts were the managers of the disciplinary staff, to whom the blue shirts reported. The blue shirts were members of the disciplinary staff who interacted with the adolescents on an ongoing basis, who also sat outside the door of each classroom.

In their formal roles as the disciplinary staff, they implemented behavioral point systems, taking points for any disciplinary infractions from unmade beds to failure to follow instructions. Even in their implementation of formal practices and programs, the relationships between the adolescent clients and disciplinary staff members took on a very different interactional style than with the dominant gatekeepers. Exchanges between adolescents reflected a non-dominant cultural capital in which they shared informal language and slang, shared experiences, and shared interests in music and sports.

Fourteen-year old Nicky explained the relationship between the adolescents and the disciplinary staff members:

*I mean some of them are punks, they just want to start shit with you, not let you do stuff. But most of them, they been where we been. They from the streets too, and they want us to do better. They trying to show us that we don’t have to be on the street to do good things. Like Tim, that’s my Old*
Head. He stay real, but he want me to do better. That’s how most of them treat us.

Nicky’s explanation of the interactions with disciplinary staff members reflected a repeated sentiment that the staff members understood a familiar and intimate part of the adolescents. The staff members had come from similar neighborhoods, and several had shared experiences of recovery from substance abuse. There was a sharing of non-dominant cultural capital between adolescents and the disciplinary staff. This non-dominant cultural capital was reflected in the exchange of nicknames such as “Old Head,” or declarations that, “thas [that’s] my son,” towards staff members, in contrast to the formality of adding Mr. or Ms. to the first name of educators and work study supervisors. In the informal relationship, students such as Nicky invite the disciplinary staff into an intimate part of their life with the understanding that members of the disciplinary staff have experience the same challenges that Nicky (and other students) faces when he does not have the boundaries of the institution.

This non-dominant cultural capital was also reflected in the behavioral rewards and structures that were in place. For example, the student groups that received high behavioral totals at the end of the week were rewarded with informal dinners with staff members on Friday evenings. The staff members tallied group totals, and any group that reached over 300 points was allowed to place a special dinner order. On Thursday afternoons staff members moved from classroom to classroom with a sheet, taking order for grease filled meals of

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11 I acknowledge that while students used colorful and informal language with me and engaged in asking me personal questions about my life and experiences, they referred to me as Ms. Rita as a result of my tutoring interactions. I received their “formal” title, while they alternated between displaying dominant and non-dominant cultural capital with me.
sandwiches, chicken fingers, and fries. Their formal programming included a very informal and relaxed practice that reflected home activities.

The informal nature of their interactions resulted in a level of trust and confidence between adolescents and the disciplinary staff members. For example, during one rainy Thursday afternoon in Ken’s social studies classroom when adolescents started getting restless, sixteen-year old Devon sat in one corner of the room, mumbling insults at seventeen-year old Tyson. After several mumbled exchanges, Tyson got up and started hitting Devon, who was much larger in size than him. “Why you hitting me, man?” Devon responded, putting his hands up, as he remained in the chair, but started to punch back at Tyson. In response to the chaos that had unfolded in his room, Ken slowly stood and left the room to get one of the disciplinary supervisors, Nate. Nate was much faster than Ken in his movements, as he entered the room, pulling the students apart, encouraging Devon to take a seat. He gently touched Tyson on the shoulder, looking him in the eye. “Hey man, you okay? Take a breath,” he encouraged him. “Let’s work through whatever is going on.” Tyson immediately began to calm, the tension escaping the room. There was a warmth exchanged between Tyson and Nate, who did not punish Tyson, but removed him from the situation to discuss his feelings, until he felt prepared to return to the classroom.

This informal nature of their exchange was useful in establishing relationships between the disciplinary staff and adolescents, but could create tensions during class hours, as their interactional style was very different than the classroom behavioral style. During the classroom hours, the disciplinary staff was stationed at the doorway of each classroom. During these hours, they sat in navy blue chairs with clipboards to document any misbehaviors and intervene
in any aggressive situations. In addition to these formal disciplinary roles, they also took
adolescents on bathroom breaks and escorted them to other activities throughout the building.

Additionally, the disciplinary staff serves as their supervisors during lunch time. Once or
twice (depending on the rotation of schedules), each group of students miss a class period as
they cleaned the cafeteria under the supervision of a disciplinary staff member.

The presence of the disciplinary staff was acknowledged by adolescents on a number of
occasions, occasionally creating disruptions to the classroom environment. During one resource
room period, sixteen-year old Grace was working on an assignment with the resource room
teacher, Nathalie. As Grace struggled with writing her assignment, she noticed one of the young
women on the disciplinary staff, Keisha, stationed at the door to the classroom. Grace stopped
working and started calling to Keisha, “Keisha, when you going to take me to get my shampoo
and stuff.”

Initially Keisha attempted to ignore Grace, who continued to talk to her, eventually
moving from the table with Nathalie to the doorway. She and Keisha began talking, causing
Nathalie to respond with rolled eyes before working with another student. Although she usually
attempted to refocus students, in this moment, Nathalie’s frustration was directed at the
Keisha’s, who allowed Grace’s distraction. Grace, who was usually focused on academic tasks in
spite of her difficulties with physical writing and reading retention, turned to another
gatekeeper in this moment. She chose to engage in a conversation unrelated to classroom
materials, using her non-dominant gatekeeper as a distraction from her frustration with her
academic tasks.
In addition to the difficulty of maintaining boundaries with non-dominant gatekeepers stationed at the door of the classroom, the informal nature of the relationships between adolescents and the disciplinary staff made transitional periods difficult as adolescents moved from non-dominant cultural capital and familiar interactions with disciplinary staff to dominant displays of cultural capital with their teachers. One such difficulty occurred during the transition from lunch to afternoon classes. During lunch and the bathroom breaks after lunch, the students engaged in a number of exchanges with the disciplinary staff.

One spring morning, a group of students, led by seventeen-year old Calvin, composed a rap together. During their lunch period, the disciplinary staff allowed them to perform the rap they had composed together. This performance sent the students into a frenzy of positive energy, that bled into the classroom as they transitioned from lunch to their classrooms. Although I was seated in one of the classrooms at this time, I heard the roar of the student excitement. Their excitement spilled into the hallways as they left the cafeteria, moving into each classroom. Stationed in Nathalie’s room, Calvin was approached by a number of his peers with questions about the rap, as Nathalie attempted to get the class focused and on academic tasks. She let out a deep sigh as other students crowded around Calvin, “Guys,” she huffed, “I need you to take a seat. We need to get on task.” In spite of her frustration with the classroom excitement, the disciplinary staff remained outside, not attempting calm the students. Moving the adolescents from the care and interactional style of one series of gatekeepers to another proved to be a difficult tasks, as the students were more interested in the informal interactions and non-dominant cultural capital recognition they had received from their peers and disciplinary staff members, than the formal interactional style of the classroom.
Social Workers

The social workers occupied a special place as gatekeepers to the adolescents at Crossings. Upon initial observation of the interactions, the social workers appear to be gatekeepers of dominant cultural capital. Their interactions with the adolescents are centered around taking the adolescents to their court appointments and interacting with them during the formal transition process. The social workers, Michael and Louis, were the point of access to Crossings when adolescents had left the institution. These formal interactions required dominant cultural capital, as Michael and Louis made sure that the adolescents were appropriately dressed for court dates, had their portfolios organized when the adolescents faced judges, and served as the formal transition liaisons. They guided the adolescents in navigating institutions, a form of dominant cultural capital that was essential to adolescents who had to learn to present themselves in front of a judge and articulate the growth that they had experienced during their time at Crossings.

Although their formal role was built on dominant cultural capital, Michael and Louis also served as informal mentors to the students, resulting in a blurring of lines between dominant and non-dominant cultural capital. Of the gatekeepers at Crossings with college degrees, Michael and Louis were the only two Black men, and in their role, they were always neatly dressed in either dress pants or khakis and a button down shirt. They interacted with students in a way that reflected the formality of their relationship, but they also attempted to build relationships using non-dominant cultural capital. As I sat with seventeen-year old Jaden in the lobby, during work study, Jaden called to Michael as he walked to the administrative offices. “Hey man!” Michael greeted them. They began catching up about Jaden’s transition, their conversation turning to the difficulty of interacting with their single mothers. Jaden explained
his worry about returning home, and the expectations that his mother would have about his behaviors and caring for his siblings. In response, Michael explained that maternal expectation did not go away, as he still contended with them with his mother. This interaction reflected a relaxed familiarity that was not displayed with their teachers.

In contrast to the disciplinary staff, whose interactions were built on non-dominant interactions, Michael and Louis, attempted to serve as guides between the dominant and non-dominant cultural capital interactions. They engaged in non-dominant interactions to relate to the adolescents, but were still centered in teaching adolescents how to navigate social institutions.

**Discussion**

This overall dissertation project is centered on adolescent attempts to make bids at having their dominant cultural capital recognized by their teachers, showing their investment in their academic development and goals for developing career-related skills. Even with this central premise, it is essential to understand that adolescents were attempting to have their dominant cultural capital recognized while also navigating an institution with several gatekeepers, who did not share the same goals or cultural capital expectations. The adolescents at Crossings were navigating gatekeepers who shared their non-dominant cultural capital, while also attempting to be legitimized by teachers and work study supervisors who were attempting to prepare them for the cultural expectations of dominant social institutions. Attempts to compartmentalize interaction styles were disrupted by the blurring of the socio-cultural that existed in Crossings.
These lines do not only exist in residential facilities such as Crossings. Young people in an array of educational institutions face a number of gatekeepers as they move from morning bus rides to the classroom, or interactions with cafeteria employees and disciplinary gatekeepers at lunch back to the classroom. It is important to acknowledge the presence of these gatekeepers as well as the impact they have as students move through multiple cultural spaces within one institution. Each gatekeeper plays a role in helping adolescents develop a range of skills, both social and academic. While the rest of the chapter focuses on the acknowledgement of dominant cultural capital, there were a number of relationships in which the adolescents at Crossings developed skills through relationships that were founded on non-dominant interactions.
Chapter 4: Challenging Conceptions of Literacy

During my first December at Crossings, I frequently found myself interrupting the reading of one of the student workers, Kyle, who buzzed me into the lobby of the building. When I walked into the office, he was holding a small book with a salmon colored cover. Over the period of a week, I found that several other students, including Kyle, had started reading Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, after asking their English teacher, Mr. Dave, to add the book to their classroom library. When I approach Mr. Dave about this reading, he excitedly shared stories of students who were enjoying the book:

*It started with Kyle. He told me he wanted to read the book, so I searched this entire mess of a library to find it for him. Then, once he started reading it, some of the other students started asking me for it. It’s exciting, because it’s better than that other street stuff they like to read. That’s what they usually ask me about.*

Through his encouragement, Mr. Dave legitimized Angelou’s book as a form of dominant cultural capital, but when I encountered another student, Emma, about why the students were interested in this particular book, she explained, “Her story is crazy. It’s stuff that we know. You see the girls around here, most of them have babies and stuff. We understand teen pregnancy and rape and stuff. We want to read the stuff that happens to us. I wanna be able to connect to the stuff I read.”

Mr. Dave’s excitement about Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was indicative of a moment in which he both recognized and acknowledged his students’ cultural capital bid, while relegating their more frequent cultural bids to non-dominant capital. Although *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was not part of his curriculum, he recognized Kyle’s bid to have this book acknowledged as dominant capital. The recognition of Angelou stood in contrast to what
Mr. Dave classified as “street stuff,” contemporary novels, largely written by African-American authors centered around the experiences of characters in low-income urban communities that feature African American Vernacular English. Although Mr. Dave only legitimized one form of capital, Emma understood these two cultural bids as connected. She connects Angelou’s work to the lives of the girls around her and the urban fiction they enjoy reading. In this way, the acknowledgement of the desire to read Angelou’s work is not only a recognition of cultural capital, but also a glimpse into the complexity of how teachers understand their student’s cultural bids.

Although there are were number of students who read novels and engaged with their teachers about the extracurricular materials they read and the texts they wrote, many of the students made bids for literacy they could apply to their daily lives. Students attempted to have teachers acknowledge their desire to develop computer-based literacy practices, along with literacy for life skills including driving. In contrast, teachers generally articulated a desire to have adolescents comply with their academic tasks, that included poetry reading and reading comprehension tasks. This mismatch between the academic literacy valued by the staff and the applied literacy that many struggling students sought, resulted in a complex literacy culture at Crossings. For those students who could not (or did not wish to) participate in traditional academic literacy, they developed subversive practices for developing applied literacies that were only acknowledged outside of academic time.

**Literacy as Cultural Capital**

In a setting such as Crossings, where teachers frequently discussed the academic and behavioral limitations of their students, it is important to look at interactions in which teachers
acknowledge both dominant and non-dominant literacy practices. Arguments for literacy and cultural capital in educational settings acknowledge the importance of skills for standardized testing (Kimelberg, 2014) and institutional practices (Carrington & Luke, 1997), including set curriculum. These understandings of the acknowledged literacy practices are critical for understanding how teachers conceptualize literacy practices in classroom settings, yet they do not account for the diversity of literacy practices that students may attempt to enact in classroom settings. Understanding those literacy practices that fall outside the purview of traditional cultural capital arguments, it is also important to understand critical literacy practices.

**Critical Understandings of Literacy**

In contrast to literacy being framed in terms of cultural capital, is a series of critical literacy scholars, who have made numerous arguments for the broadening of conceptions of literacy (Gutierrez, 2008b; Mercado, 2005; Winn, 2011). These scholars argue for the acknowledgement of home and non-dominant practices to be acknowledged as educationally valuable. In these discussions of literacy, scholars forego the language of cultural capital to create a bridge between the vast knowledge that students possess and what their teachers expect of them.

In more expansive understandings of literacy, scholars such as Kirkland (2011) argue that even a resistance to reading certain texts can be indicative of an engagement with literacy rather than a simplistic resistance to it. He argues that, when explored, a student’s refusal to read may be grounded in an understanding of the relationship that literacy practices have to racial and cultural identities. Related to Kirkland’s expansion of the concept of literacy is
Gutiérrez’s concept of a sociocritical third space literacy (2008a). She argues for the development of a classroom literacy philosophy and practice that acknowledges both the social and historical context in which students exist. A sociocritical literacy provides strategies for critically engaging students in literacy practices that acknowledge the strengths that students bring to the classroom from their homes and lived experiences. An idea such as this is essential to the student literacy practices at Crossings, where students resist literacy that does not apply to their lives. Although theories around critical literacies center students, they do not provide adequate strategies for how to construct literacy practices that meet the academic needs of educators. Critical literacies that acknowledge that adolescents from low-income communities or communities of color have special knowledge regarding reading and writing is essential to an expansion of cultural capital. By acknowledging literacy practices that are important to students as legitimate tools for education, teachers are acknowledging that student-centered literacies are a form of cultural capital.

Given the numerous debates about what constitutes literacy (particularly legitimizing literacy), I center this chapter in a number of broad practices that are grounded in reading, writing, and speech (Winn, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2016). Some of these literacy bids are acknowledged and legitimized by the teachers at Crossings, while others go largely unacknowledged, or are relegated to non-dominant literacy practices unworthy of classroom time.

I seek to look at the space between literacy as cultural capital and critical literacies. I begin by looking at the broad contrast in how teachers at Crossings approach literacy practices and teaching in order to create a baseline for how they legitimize literacy. As an extension of
understanding the impact that acknowledged literacy and practices can have on students, I look at a student who is able to successfully use his investment in legitimized and acknowledged literacy practices as foundation for creating other cultural bids with his teachers and other adults at Crossings. From there, I turn to literacy practices that are frequently relegated to non-dominant capital. These practices include (a) basic low-level literacy practices such as reading signs and menus, and understanding driver’s license manuals, (b) computer-based literacy practices that are employed during credit recover, and (c) legitimized literacies that students enact when they research, write, and present senior projects. While literature on critical literacy legitimize these forms of literacy, I analyze the classroom moments in which these cultural bids are either acknowledged or rejected as they are relegated to non-dominant capital, and attempt to understand the circumstances under which these forms of capital are recognized. I conclude my analysis of literacy practices with a look at senior projects, where student interests are legitimized as forms of cultural capital.

**Literacy at Crossings**

A survey of the classroom activities and materials at Crossings shows that the teachers are committed to developing the literacy skills that students would need to develop in traditional classroom settings. Each of the classrooms is filled with books and material reflecting literacy connected to the subject area. In Ken’s classroom, there are an abundance of maps on the wall, and the bookshelf is filled with an assortment of history and science books, some of which are textbooks, while others are for general interest. Next door, in the math classroom, there are standard math textbooks, but the walls are also covered with posters that define math concepts and terms for the various levels of math that must be told. In the resource room, the special education teacher, Ms. Nathalie, has stocked her classroom room with novels, English
textbooks, resources for science, career planning books, and study guides for the GED and SAT.

Similarly, Mr. Dave’s English classroom bookshelves are filled with books to the point that they cannot be contained. There are leveled readers for students who struggle with reading, middle-school aged books that include Goosebumps, and classic works such as Of Mice and Men.

Although Mr. Dave’s classroom is filled with an assortment of books, he laments being unable to read with the group. Articulating both the desire to engage with students and a deficit orientation towards them, Mr. Dave shares:

*I would love to be able to read the classics, Romeo and Juliet, and such with them, but there’s so much movement, plus they just aren’t interested. But I do try to bring some literature into the classroom for them. It’s usually poetry, and I have a rule that it has to be less than 1000 words. Usually it’s less than a page, but no more than a 1000 [words], because these kids aren’t going to read more than that. And even if they were interested in reading more interesting texts, there’s a new kid here every day. There’s a kid who always thinks he’s leaving tomorrow.*

In Mr. Dave’s articulation, he expresses a desire to engage with students beyond the simple assignments he created for them. In his words, “I would love to be able to read the classics,” he also provides a glimpse in the literacy cultural bids that he would like to see from his students. While he understands the limitations his students face in terms of their skills, as well as the limitations he faces as a teacher in a classroom with a fluctuating population, he also expresses a desire for a different cultural context in which students are able to share his cultural capital.

Although it is more understated than Mr. Dave’s clearly articulated interest in reading more complex texts with his students, the value of academic literacy as dominant cultural capital is apparent in other ways at Crossings. For both their Social Studies and Science
assignments, students are expected to complete readings of long chapters of approximately 30 pages, and answer between 15 and 20 response questions. For their writing assignments, students are expected to write long passages that express their thoughts on a number of subject matter. Those students who comply and excel using these methods of learning are celebrated and given access to a warmer side of many of their teachers. While there were small groups of elite students who embraced these forms of literacy, many of the students showed investment in literacy skills they could apply to their lives beyond their time at Crossing.

The resource room teacher, Ms. Nathalie, and teacher’s assistant, Ms. Lynn, created the exceptions to this culture of academic literacy. While she placed a high value on reading and writing, when asked about her teaching style, Ms. Nathalie articulated an understanding of the variety of learning needs in the students at Crossings, and attempted to modify her classroom practices to meet a variety of learning needs:

*I have never been a math person. I have always struggled with it and had to come up with alternative ways to understand it. That’s how these kids are. While there may be some who don’t care, they just need different ways to engage. Sometimes it means helping them think about their strengths and skills, and that can look like so many things. It’s our job to help them, especially while they’re here. This is a chance to help get them back on track.*

Ms. Nathalie’s willingness to try multiple means of working with students resulted in an environment where all “non-academic” activities were relegated to her resource room. She creates an environment that is set-up to recognize and acknowledge multiple types of bids from the students. She was charged with a number of tasks including literacy testing, career development, learning plan development, test preparation, and credit recovery organization, and attempted to structure these tasks so that all students could achieve their academic goals. In her absence, students did not have access to these resources:
I was gone for almost four months, and I come back to find that they just stopped doing things. I don’t know half these kids, but I’m expected to complete work for them that should have been done while I was gone. They didn’t get their transcripts, they didn’t assess them, and now they want me to do all the things they say they don’t care about.

In spite of her articulated frustration, when Ms. Nathalie worked with the students, she was fully engaged, bringing them the materials they needed to complete a variety of activities that engaged them. Unless it was an occasion when she locked her classroom door to complete reports or have a moment to breathe, her classroom was filled with students, asking her for advice on any number or things from what they needed to do in order to complete the GED exam to her opinions on their vision boards. The level of engagement that Ms. Nathalie’s classroom fostered stood in stark contrast to other classrooms, where students were caught sleeping and with their heads covered. As a result of her engagement with the needs of the adolescent clients, students frequently came to Ms. Nathalie to develop their literacy skills.

**Nicolas: The Reader**

While there were many students who struggled with literacy during their time at Crossings, one student’s love of reading served as a foundation for building relationships with both the teachers and disciplinary staff. While his cultural capital bids could be erratic, he created a foundation that resulted in supportive relationships with both the teachers and disciplinary staff. Nicolas (who preferred to be called Nicky) was 14-years old when I first encountered him at Crossings, puberty showing in the faint mustache that grew above his lip, much lighter than the dark hair that covered his head. He was tall for his age, with a stocky build, and slow lilting stride, moving as though there was never a reason to be in a rush. While he wore the standard Crossings uniform, Nicky always accessorized his ensemble with an array of new sneakers. Throughout his time at Crossings, his personality was mercurial: highly
engaged and warm in one moment, he became frustrated in the face of challenges, which frequently manifested itself in anger.

Ms. Nathalie encouraged the two of us to meet because he was one of the younger students at Crossings, and although he was quite academically advanced (regarding his test scores), he rarely did any school work when he first arrived. In addition to the truancy that plagued his academic records, Nicky did not initially feel compelled to do work because he had not entered high school. Whereas many students frantically completed work with the hopes of accruing credits for high school completion, Nicky did not feel this pressure. “I’ll do school work when I’m in a real school,” he explained during one of our earlier meetings. “These credits don’t matter.” Like many of the students, he expressed a hesitation at the idea of earning credits while under the purview of the juvenile justice system. Although Ms. Nathalie worked daily to make sure that all of their transcripts were on file so she could create learning plans for them, the notion that Crossings was not their real school was a recurring theme for many students. Nicky had arrived after completing his 8th grade year, yet he held this mindset, which made it difficult for us to get to know each other.

One afternoon, Nicky came into Ken’s classroom for Social Studies and touched the breast cancer ribbon I wore on a chain around my neck. “Why are you wearing that?” he asked with skepticism.

“My mom bought it for me. She has breast cancer, so she buys things like this for everyone in our family.”

“Your mom has breast cancer?” his skepticism remained.
“Yes, this is her second time battling it. The first time was when I was in college.”

“Aren’t you in college now?” he sat down, folding his hands.

“It’s not quite the same. Graduate school comes after the college you go to when you finish high school.”

“Ah, okay. And your mom got cancer when you were in college?” I nodded in response.

“My mom died from breast cancer when I was young.”

“That must have been hard.”

“I guess,” he shrugged his shoulders. “Life happens…but you’re right. You miss people when they’re not here. It was a long time ago, but I still miss her sometimes.”

After this discussion about our mothers, Nicky would come to sit beside me and ask how my mother was doing. This lead to him eventually telling me about the things he and his mom did together when they were young, including going to a science museum in the city. As I got to know him, I saw that he was also developing a relationship with some of the other students who were working with me. He would sit with us while they worked, playfully antagonize some of the students who were doing work. This teasing was punctuated by moments in which Nicky would help struggling students with their work. As he built relationships, he gradually began to do his own work. During the moments when Nicky would complete a math assignment or focus on a task, Ms. Nathalie and the math teacher, Mr. Steve, began to serve as cheerleaders for Nicky. Ms. Nathalie brought him peanut butter cups in celebration of weeks when he completed all of his work. Mr. Steve allowed Nicky to stay after the school day was done to work on math puzzles.
Over time, there was a gradual shift in how he interacted with teachers and engaged with his school work. He began completing all of his assignments, constantly checking the gradebook to see how many of his assignments had been graded. He would frequently check in with Ms. Nathalie about how he could earn the credits he needed to have a good start in high school.

As his academic-self began to emerge, Nicky displayed a hunger for history and literature. In addition to completing his classroom assignments, Nicky would ask Mr. Dave for book recommendations and keep a journal of the books he read. Nicky wanted to read anything he could get his hands on from novels to the poetry Mr. Dave recommended for him, that included an array of literature from mysteries to Shakespeare. Additionally, Nicky’s fascination with history and consumption of information, led him to read Howard Zinn’s *The People’s History of the United States*. While reading Zinn, Nicky was filled with questions not only about history, but he began developing a critical analysis of both his work and the world around him. As he read Zinn, he developed a series of questions about politics, drug laws, and geography.

This love of reading and writing was not only academic. Nicky walked around with a notebook filled with his own poems, sharing them as he began learning about literary devices. In response to this display of cultural capital, Nicky’s teachers continued to respond by supporting him. Although Mr. Steve was the math teacher, he would frequently share news articles with Nicky, the two of them exchanging thoughts on current events after school hours. Similarly, Nicky went to Ms. Nathalie for information about college preparation. She gathered information on colleges and attempted to provide guidance as to what he would need to accomplish in each year of school in order to be prepared for college. There was an excitement from both teachers
and Nicky about the student that Nicky was becoming. For example, there was a period during
which Nicky completed all of his assignments for a week, without any outbursts with the
teachers. Ms. Nathalie brought him a package of Reese’s peanut butter cups to celebrate his
success. Before giving them to him, she explained, “He’s just doing so well. I want him to know
that he’s supported, and that we encourage him to continue this work. I think this will be a nice
treat, a little encouragement to continue this caliber of work.” In her desire to motivate Nicky,
Ms. Nathalie brought him one of his favorite treats that she did not regularly bring for students.
His commitment to a dominant display of academic cultural capital yields him the benefit of
support that is manifested in both guidance and special treatment.

Although Nicky displayed strong academic interests that captured the attention of his
teachers, as he neared the end of his time at Crossings, he began to challenge both the Learning
Center staff as well as the disciplinary staff. His academic focus and behavior began to change as
he reached the period where he was given home passes. He stopped doing work, reverting to
behaviors that mirrored his early days at Crossings. There were moments when he made the
decision to sleep in, although all of the students were expected to be in class at the same time.
During one of the days that he slept in, he finally came into the Learning Center out of uniform,
wearing pajama pants and a tee-shirt, refusing to complete any work. His behavior both in the
classroom and on his home visits began to drastically decline. After one of his home visits, his
drug test revealed that he had done an assortment of drugs. When asked about it, he explained,
“I’m just ready to go home. I’m sick of this bullshit. It’s the same people doing the same shit
every day. When I go home I want to forget this place.”
Nicky attempted to explain his behavior as the desire to return home, but each infraction at home extended his stay at Crossings. With each extension of his stay, his misbehavior became more unapologetic. While much of his time was spent talking to his peers, rather than working, when he wanted attention from his teachers, he would interrupt them. On one occasion, after Ms. Nathalie asked him to wait one moment for her attention, Nicky interrupted, “No, you need to do your job. You ask me to do work, but then won’t help me when I need it,” he scolded her. In this transition, Nicky’s academic focus and behavior became highly inconsistent.

In spite of his misbehavior, Nicky continued to display an interest in reading and learning, although he refused to complete work. In contrast to his own explanation, members of the staff thought his behaviors were aligned with patterns they had seen before in students who had become comfortable with the structure at Crossings. One of the disciplinary staff managers, Tim, explained,

_There’s something happening at home. You see it all the time. When they’re in here, they realize that people care, but when they go home, they realize they’re on their own. Because you know, and I know that if he really wanted to go home, he’d be doing everything to make sure he could get home. But what can we do? The only thing we can do is keep him here, which is what he really wants._

His teachers continued to work with him in spite of the reversion in his behavior, even beyond classroom activities. Mr. Steve allowed Nicky to sit in his classroom after school hours, teaching him to play chess.

Nicky not only possessed strong reading and writing skills, but an academic curiosity that both teachers and disciplinary staff recognized and valued. The value he placed on
literature, poetry, and history, and his willingness to see math as a series of puzzles to be solved, made it so that he was able to build relationships with the teachers and staff. As he began to understand that the support he received at Crossings was going to change, he modified his behaviors to reflect what he thought he would face at home. Nicky’s story in which he leveraged his love of words and thoughts to build relationships stood in contrast to many of the students’ attempts at displaying literacy. Where Nicky faced support, even when he challenged the adults at Crossings, other students faced obstacles and road blocks in the literacy activities they wanted to pursue. His dominant cultural capital bids that included preparations for attending a four-year college, reading a variety of material, and writing for both academics and pleasure were warmly received by teachers, providing him with a foundation of support at Crossings.

**Everyday Literacies**

In contrast to Nicky’s immersion into a world of worlds, most of the students made literacy bids that were centered around their life experiences and everyday needs, as they defined them (in contrast to how their teachers may have defined their needs). These literacy practices were often unacknowledged as cultural bids, and treated as disruptive bids that interrupted recognized classroom practices. This created moments of conflict with teachers, who viewed everyday literacy as being outside of their academic purview. Many students faced challenges in classrooms with traditional academic values. Prior to coming to Crossings, they struggled with truancy and finding the value in classroom settings. In spite of difficulties with traditional academic materials, many adolescents came to view their time at Crossings as a period during which they could build on the foundational skills they missed in their classroom experiences.
Although there were many strategies adopted by the adolescents, one of the mechanisms students employed develop these foundational skills is enacting an applied literacy. One of the most important applied skills for them was job development skills. In terms of literacy this practice included writing résumés, being able to complete job searches, and filling out job applications. Throughout the year, Ms. Nathalie’s classroom walls featured a rotating selection of neon green and pink poster boards covered in student summaries of tips for job searches, interviews, and strategies for keeping a job. In preparation for these posters, students displayed a number of literacy skills as they worked in groups, reading through materials on job preparedness, discussing what was most important for job success, and constructed posters with glue sticks and a variety of materials. During these sessions, all students were engaged, focused on their tasks. When asked why he was so engrossed in this task, seventeen-year old Calvin explained, “We need to get jobs when we get outta here. Most of us are here because we needed to make money. We need to be ready when we go back out in the world.” His tall figure hunched over a poster board with a glue stick, was an image that differed from the student who usually ran from classroom to classroom, sitting to chat with his peers until one of the disciplinary staff noticed his absence.

Through the applied nature of the work, students readily engaged in the practice of reading for comprehension and engaging with the material, questioning each other as well as their teachers. In addition to job preparation, another applied literacy that was of value to the group was the driver’s license. Students frequently requested help with their reading in order to prepare for the written portion of driver’s license testing. They made requests for the books to be printed or brought to campus, reading them after rushing through assignments in their academic classes.
Because many students were not familiar with the terminology in the books, they would frequently sought help in explaining the rules of driving, and reading through the manual with them. It was during this process of help-seeking that students would be scolded for being off-tasks. During one English class, Ivy rushed through her assignment on imagery in poetry, hastily turning it into Mr. Dave, before returning to her seat and flipping through her driver’s manual. A few moments later she returned to Mr. Dave, “Mr. Mr. Dave, what does yi-, what does yi-el-d mean?” she inquired.

Mr. Dave: No, that’s not what we’re doing in this class now. You need to focus on task.

Ivy: I did focus. I finished.

Mr. Dave: No, you rushed through it, and now you want my help with something that has nothing to do with school.

Ivy: Whatever. Your assignment doesn’t matter anyway (under her breath). We can’t do anything with it.

In this moment, Mr. Dave rejected Ivy’s bid to have her reading practice acknowledged as legitimate. She returned to her seat, putting her head on the desk for the rest of the class. Ivy later returned to the driver’s manual in resource room, where she was able to move between periods where she asked questions about the driver’s manual and worked on computer-based coursework. While Ivy displayed a dismissive tone in her interaction with Mr. Dave, she expressed a sentiment that recurred amongst many students at Crossings. They would complete most work that was put in front of them, but they wanted to engage with work that applied to their lives beyond their time at Crossings.
Test Preparation

A more traditionally valued literacy that a small group of students at Crossings displayed was an interest in test preparation. The testers fell into two groups of high-ability (regarding reading and math skills): those older students who did not have enough credits to complete high school and wanted to sit for the GED test, and a small group of students who had earned credits during their time in school and were interested in applying to college. As with résumé writing, employment guidance, and life skills, students seeking to complete their GED exam or prepare for the SAT turned to Ms. Nathalie’s resource room for support in preparing for the exams. After learning what test they wanted to prepare for, Ms. Nathalie organized study programs and lent SAT preparation books for those who showed a commitment to preparing for the tests.

This small group of students that included 16-year old Jaden and Nicky, who carried their books from classroom to classroom, requesting assistance on all of the sections they did not understand. Additionally, they would organize after-school sessions to complete practice tests. When the test-takers were in Ms. Nathalie’s classroom, either during their resource room period or after school, she provided them with an abundance of resources to support them. Like Ms. Nathalie, when Mr. Steve was the math teacher at Crossings, he worked with students after school to identify and improve their areas of weakness in math, and get comfortable in the areas that were their strengths. One afternoon during math class, Jaden approached Mr. Steve’s desk with his SAT book open. “I need your help with this geometry problem. I can’t remember all these parts of a circle,” he slumped into the chair next to Mr. Steve’s desk. “I can do that. You seem to be doing well in your algebra, so you have that practice in your first math class. We can work on geometry when you come here in the afternoon,” Mr. Steve responded, before proceeding to help Jaden define and understand radius and circumference.
Mr. Steve and Ms. Nathalie stood in contrast to Mr. Dave, who considered this preparation to extend beyond his job responsibilities. During the period when Jaden was preparing for the SAT, he carried his SAT book to every classroom. Most teachers acquiesced and helped him with materials related to their course. When Jaden asked for help with SAT vocabulary, Mr. Dave shook his head and leaned back in his chair: “I help you with prep every week. We have vocabulary words every week. If you understand the words on our sheets, you’ll be fine.” While Mr. Dave provided minimal support for the testers, test preparation was a space where students found support in developing their reading, writing, and math skills.

Ms. Nathalie and Mr. Steve’s recognition of the SAT preparation as cultural capital, in contrast to Mr. Dave’s decision to ignore Jaden’s specific bids for help, show the complexity in how students’ literacy bids are recognized. While social scientists have shown the importance of standardized testing as a critical form of cultural capital, in an interactional context, Mr. Dave sees the test as disruptive. As the English teacher, he has a skill set that should be able to help students with SAT preparation, but chooses to only acknowledge the materials that he has created.

**Basic Literacy**

In contrast to those who had scored high on their academic testing, were a small group of students who scored significantly below grade level in their reading skills. In spite of their difficulties in both reading and writing, these students expressed a commitment to literacy that rivaled the testers. Like the testers, the readers advocated with Ms. Nathalie for support in developing their reading skills.
Their exceptionally low reading skills required modifications to their assignments in order for them to be completed. While Ms. Nathalie created modified assignments for her class as well as all of Ken’s assignments, she expressed frustration at Mr. Dave’s resistance to developing assignments that were appropriate for students who were reading at third grade reading levels and below.

*He [Mr. Dave] always says that he makes things easy for everyone, so that even those kids should be able to do them, but he won’t just do what he needs to help these kids. Modifying assignments doesn’t mean making it boring so that none of them want to do it. He doesn’t understand that he needs to support them, so they have a chance.*

She felt that his inability to acknowledge that those students reading significantly below grade level as well as those with (IEPs), was doing them a disservice. When these students were in their classes, Mr. Dave and Ken would read sections of texts when students sought help, but they expected students to complete the assignments as they were given to them.

In spite of the resistance to modify work to meet the needs of this group of students, the readers were a group that persisted. Two such students, Brandon and Kenneth, were unable to independently finish much of the work they were given in Mr. Dave and Ken’s classes, but they worked with their teachers (and sought help from me) to complete their assignments. In addition to committing themselves to their classroom work, Brandon and Kenneth had established reputations among the larger staff as being reliable and hardworking, both of them earning positions in work study as well as the extracurricular activities that were available.

Sixteen-year old Brandon had been classified as having a learning disability, and was reading on approximately a first-grade reading level. He worked with Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn
to complete all of this assignments for class. Additionally, he worked with me twice a week to build his reading skills. When we began talking about his commitment to reading, he explained:

*I just want to be able to get through the days and get a job, but they don’t understand. I have to think about every letter I write. It takes me forever. I want to be able to fill out a job application without stopping on every letter.*

For those students reading significantly below grade level, their interest in literacy was in developing the skills they needed to navigate daily activities. They had developed the skills they needed to seek help and complete their school work, but they also aspired to develop independent reading skills. Similar to Brandon, seventeen-year old Kenneth read between a second and third grade reading level. He too wanted to build his reading skills so that he could engage with and have confidence in his life beyond Crossings:

*For so long, I just couldn’t get the words out, and it made me feel stupid in school, like I didn’t know anything. You need to read for everything. And when I get out of here, I want to be able to take my girl out for dinner and know what I’m ordering from the menu.*

These students would leave their academic classes to sit at a table with me to sound out the one-syllable words they needed for a reading foundation. While they were provided with little public support and resources to independently navigate their school work, these struggling students displayed an enthusiasm for improving their reading.

These projects, particularly those related to applied literacy and basic literacy skills, were relegated to resource room activities. While students were allowed to silently read *non-academic* materials when they were finished with their assignments, they were not allowed to ask questions about them in academic classrooms. In contrast to an environment where
students’ needs and academic desires were frequently ignored, Ms. Nathalie’s classroom became the space where students were safe to seek help beyond standard academic activities.

**Technology-Based Literacies**

Walking into the classrooms of the Learning Center at Crossings, one of the most immediately noticeable features is the abundance of technology. When Crossings moved from the suburban outskirts of the city to its current location in a desolate urban area of the city, Ken excitedly took me on a visit to the new facility to show me where the adolescent clients would be completing their school work, working, and living. After walking the halls of the living quarters, recreational room, and cafeteria, Ken showed me the Learning Center. The Learning Center was a small corridor in the interior of the building with four classrooms. There were no windows in the classroom, but each room was brightly lit. Ken’s voice usually monotone voice rose with excitement when showed me the technology. In each room ten computer stations lined two of the walls, a Smart Board was mounted at the front of the room, and a 50-inch flat screen television was mounted on the remaining wall. Ken expressed an enthusiasm for the potential to academically engage students using this technology.

After transitioning to the new building, and being introduced to a number of credit-recovery programs designed to help students complete work using the computers, students expressed a noted interest in completing their work. They began making cultural capital bids that were connected to the computers. For those students, such as Jaden and Nicky, who articulated an interest in college, the computers were an exploratory tool for college searches and understanding the requirements to apply for college. For those students who had learning difficulties, computers meant they did not have to write out every word for long assignments.
A burgeoning literature exists on the importance of technology in educational inequity (Attewell, 2001; Paino & Renzulli, 2012), showing that the role that technology plays in academic achievement is fraught with debate. While some argue that access to technology may aid student achievement, others argue that technology may detract from student academic performance. Paino and Renzulli (2012) find that teachers can play a mediating role in the connection between technological literacy and student achievement. In spite of arguments for the importance of students being technologically literate, cultural bids to have technological literacy acknowledged were fraught with conflict in the Crossings context. While technology in education debates are useful for understanding how the Crossings teachers approach technology as a form of literacy, I move away from notions of achievement, instead looking at how teachers recognize or misrecognize computer-based learning as a cultural bid.

Within a few weeks of the move to their new building, the teachers talked of online credit recovery programs and incorporating technology into their lessons. This excitement over technology began to fade when students changed the computer wallpaper to images of women in half dress, attempted to access social media and online games, and made requests for headphones to listen to music while they were completing their work. As this shift happened, much of the Crossings staff (both teaching faculty and the disciplinary team) came to see the computers as a distraction from learning, resulting in a number of restrictions to using the computers. Adolescent cultural bids for technologically-related literacy practices to be acknowledged were treated as disruptive.

As I hope to show, even with the distractions, there were many moments when students wanted to use computers as a means of facilitating their learning and work. In spite of
the utility of the computers for completing work and engaging students, much of the staff only processed the moments when students were distracted. The computers quickly came to be associated with defiance and distraction.

Credit Recovery Programs

Many of the students at Crossings were behind in the credits they need to be on track for high school completion and graduation. In response to this challenge, Ms. Nathalie could frequently be found making requests for high school transcripts and testing students to assess their reading and writing grade levels. In the transition to the computer-based programming, after completing their testing, Ms. Nathalie would then work with each of the students to develop a learning plan to both develop their skills and earn credits during their time at Crossings. While the students earned some of their credits by completing the packets and assignments in their classroom, many of their credits were earned through online credit recovery programs. Because the students span a range of grades, abilities, and credits they have earned, Ken explained that the online programs provided the teachers with the opportunity to ensure that each student had what they needed in terms of academics:

> You see, we try to group them by grade, but even in these small groups, you can have one student who is in middle school, while another might be 16 and only has three credits. You see, with PLATO and Apex\(^{12}\), and these other programs, we can make sure that all of the kids have work that’s on their level. We can even help the kid who wants to learn about psychology or sociology.

\(^{12}\) PLATO and Apex are online credit recovery programs adopted by high schools to help struggling students make up courses they have failed and get on track for graduation. Based on the courses that students need in order to get credits, teachers develop programs of study using these programs. There are a range of programs that include mathematics courses, foreign language, history, and various science courses. Students are then given individual log-in details to provide them with access to their programs of study, allowing students to work at their grade level in a mixed-grade classroom environment.
With the admission of each new student to Crossings, Ms. Nathalie continued to make sure they had their placements for online credit recovery, but over time, there were increasing restrictions to accessing the programs. When they first started, students were given a combination of paper assignments and online credit recovery curricula, and could determine how they would complete all of the work in order to earn their credits. Over time, this freedom gradually waned. Three months after having access to online credit recovery, Ms. Lynn informed me that during their staff meetings, they had decided that students had two days a week they were allowed online for work. Six months later, students could only access credit recovery programs on Wednesdays. The computers had been locked, requiring teachers to log them on.

Ms. Lynn shared that she and Ms. Nathalie still let the students work when they wanted, but that general computer access had been blocked. Even in moments when the teachers encouraged students to complete their credit recovery, the disciplinary staff continued to see computers as a distraction. While I sat with a small group of students, who were working on Social Studies packets, seventeen-year old Frankie entered the room, giving a nod of acknowledgement, to which I responded with questions of what classroom he had left in and if he had his teacher’s permission, to which he responded that Mr. Dave had allowed him to come work because it was his second time in English class that Thursday. While I did not know Frankie well, he was generally quiet, so I allowed him to work without interruption. He sat quietly, and I occasionally glanced over my shoulder to make sure that he was working on his assignment. Some time later, I turned around to find one of the disciplinary supervisor’s, Tim, standing at the door. “What are you doing! You see them, working, and you’re on the computer when you’re supposed to be in the classroom,” he yelled at Frankie.
“I’m just trying to do my work,” Frankie responded without looking at Tim. “This is not computer time. You need to go to class,” Tim responded, his volume increasing, “You don’t listen.” “I talked to Mr. Dave. I don’t have any work to do in his class, so I’m trying to work my English,” he let out a sigh. “I’m just trying to get my work done.”

The altercation continued until Tim came into the room, standing next to Daniel until he stood to leave the classroom, returning to his English classroom. Mr. Dave stood outside his room and nodded with acknowledgement when Tim explained that they needed to learn the difference between class time and computer time. Although Frankie was working on his English coursework, because he was at a computer, he was immediately read as being off-task, and ultimately defiant. The computer and learning were read as incompatible, and Frankie was pulled from working towards credit, to return to a classroom where Mr. Dave had not prepared a lesson for his students’ second classroom visit. In this instance, it was not a teacher who rejected Frankie’s bid to use the computer, but a member of the disciplinary team. While it did not create conflict with the teacher, it was a moment in which a student lost an opportunity that a student lost to work on a credit recovery assignment.

This sentiment of being kept from the credit recovery recurred time and time again as the restrictions continued. During another afternoon, sixteen-year old Kamil came into Ms. Nathalie’s classroom at the end of the school day as she prepared for their Thursday afternoon staff meeting. During the school day, Kamil and Ms. Nathalie had gone over his credits, and he had been disappointed when he found that he had 13 credits instead of the 17 he thought he had. In response to his disappointment, he and Ms. Nathalie developed a plan so that he could
earn the credits he needed to enter his senior year when he returned to his neighborhood school. That afternoon, he returned to follow up with her:

Kamil: Ms. Nathalie, can I stay to work on my Spanish?

Ms. Nathalie: Not right now. I have to go to the staff meeting.

Kamil: But that’s not fair. You told me I needed to do to get the credits, but we’re never allowed on the computers. There’s just one day in class, then we have to find time on our own, but we can only work when one of you is here.

Ms. Nathalie: I know. I’m sorry, but an adult has to be in the room with you...Rita, are you leaving soon? Would you mind staying with Kamil while he works on his Spanish?

In this instance, Ms. Nathalie was as frustrated by the restrictions as her students. “We tell them they need it, but make it so hard,” she sighed. In response to her request, I agreed to stay with Kamil for an additional hour, until the disciplinary staff called him to another activity. Although the staff initially expressed excitement over online credit recovery program, they eventually came to create tension between students and the adults in the Learning Center. Students wanted to complete the work they needed in order to earn credits, but their access was restricted, causing them to find means of working, even in moments that made them respond with defiance. Presented as a tool for enhancing the learning experience at Crossings, the computers came to represent conflict between staff and students.

Computer-based Classroom Support

Even during periods when students were allowed to use computers to complete their school work, there were numerous limitations put in place that inhibited students from being
able to use the computer for learning activities. All of the computers had been outfitted with filters that restricted students from accessing most search engines and websites. While these filters are standard practice in public school computers, it also limited the work that students were able to complete at Crossings. One afternoon Matthew had been moving from classroom to classroom, getting scolded for disrupting other students, finally coming into Ms. Nathalie’s room, where he sat down to work on a packet of science work. He worked quietly, occasionally turning to me ask a clarifying question or to read some words for him, until he reached the bottom of the page. “I can’t do this,” he showed me the assignment which instructed him to use the internet to find out the plural name for several groups of animals. “Ms. Nathalie,” he stood to show her the assignment, “Do you want me to do this part?” She looked at the instructions to the assignment and shook her head:

No, you can’t do that. You need to get on the internet for that, but you won’t be able to find any of the answers you need without search engines. Anytime you come across one of these critical thinking activities that requires a computer, you just skip it. You can’t do it with our computers.

In a moment where a student was instructed to engage in critical thinking, the computer restrictions prevented him from completing his assignment. Additionally, the restrictions on the computers made it difficult for those students who used the computer as a tool for navigating learning disabilities. This was the case for seventeen-year old Daniel who had dyslexia. While Ms. Nathalie modified many of his assignments to accommodate his difficulties in reading and writing, for one of Ken’s assignments, he was asked to handwrite write several pages. After working with him on the assignment, I inquired with Ms. Lynn as to the best path for typing his assignment, to which she responded:
They just have to write neatly. I know it says that they can type, but the tech people have done something so that the computers don’t read the flash drives. Only one computer reads the flash drives, and we cannot have them all working on that computer, so we’re just telling them to write it neatly, unless you don’t mind typing and printing for him.

Daniel and several other students with learning disabilities were in a position where they could not have access to the resources that would help ameliorate some of their difficulty in writing. Being instructed to write neatly caused Daniel to close his eyes and sigh. While he had worked for two hours answering the questions while I transcribed his answers by hand, he was then given another task that would take him a significant amount of time to complete.

**Circumventing the Restrictions**

In spite of the restrictions that are placed on computer usage, students developed a series of social strategies and maneuvers to circumvent filters and the time limitations. As with the support they received in other activities, Ms. Nathalie was the teacher to whom the students turned when they wanted to work on their credit recovery. She and Ms. Lynn made sure students were out of staff sight, logging them onto the computers as long as they were completing work. Additionally, throughout the day, students would enter her classroom, pleading for her to stay after school, so they could return to her classroom to work on their Spanish or Algebra 2 assignments online.

In addition to turning to Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn as their allies in getting access to computers, students also persisted to circumvent the filters that blocked them from accessing most websites. They developed a list of search engines they could access, games they could play, and sites that were available for them to listen to music. Because the filters even blocked teachers from most internet access, the teachers would frequently turn to students when they...
needed to complete searches. While navigating the internet was seen as defiant by most of their teachers and the disciplinary staff as defiant, Ms. Nathalie attempted to read their actions through a strengths-based lens. After convincing a student to focus on his work, rather than playing games, she noted:

Yes, there are moments when that can be obnoxious, always looking to break a rule, but we need to see that it’s also moments when these kids are creative and really smart. They figure out how to get the resources they need. Plus, how am I supposed to get a kid to work if he just doesn’t want to do it? We have to find some way to make this useful.

While there was a general culture of restriction and staying on academic tasks that permeated the teachers and disciplinary staff, Ms. Nathalie created a classroom environment that encouraged student engagement and saw them from a strengths-based perspective. Even in moments where students engaged in mischief, including playing games and changing the computer wallpaper, she understood it as a skillset the students had. In this classroom where adolescents were viewed in terms of their strengths and skills, students who had been asleep in other classrooms, frequently greeted Ms. Nathalie with smiles when they came into her classroom and immediately began the work they needed to do well in their academics during their time at Crossings.

In the face of bids to have access to technology, students faced a number of barriers. Timing was an essential component of a successful bid to use computers, although each student was assigned a number of tasks to complete in credit recovery. Although their bids were frequently rejected by teachers and disciplinary staff, students developed strategies to circumvent their rejected bids.
**Senior Projects**

While there were many literacy practices in which the students engaged in Crossings, many of them created tensions between teachers and adolescents. While students saw the value in a number of practices, the teachers viewed them as disruptive to the practices they valued in their classrooms. One of the spaces where teacher and student values aligned were in the completion of senior project.

Every public school student is required to complete a senior project as part of their graduation requirements. One morning in March, Mr. Dave gathered the seniors in his classroom, handing each of them a 28-page packet. “Okay, guys, listen up. The city requires that each of you complete senior project in order to graduate. I know a lot of you have gotten your credits, but you have to do your senior project too.” He explained that each of them would have to write a 15-20 page research paper based on a topic of interest to them. After completing the paper, they would have to give a presentation in front of a panel (consisting of their teachers). After Mr. Dave explained the project, several of the seniors began moaning they would not be able to do the project. “I know that it seems like a lot, but this is what’s required for graduation. You can do this. Plus, Ms. Nathalie and I will mentor you through this process. We’ll help you come up with topics and make sure that you have the work you need.”

Over the next week, whenever a senior entered Ms. Nathalie’s classroom, they would approach her about the project with a sense of anger about being required to write a long paper. Eighteen-year old Clare sat at the table between Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn, her jaw set firmly. “I’m not writing a paper this long.”
“Come on, now, Clare,” Ms. Nathalie sighed. “You can do this. Let’s think about the things that are important to you, and once we find something, you’re going to be able to do this easily.”

As the students choose their topics, their tones about the project changed immensely. A sense of excitement around their topics came to replace the dread they felt about writing a 15-page paper. There was a cluster of six students (five seniors and one enthusiastic junior) who worked on their projects. The following examples provide an overview of their projects and the excitement that they came to have for their projects, with the support of their teachers.

Abby was a 16-year old who had been enrolled as a junior in high school before coming to Crossings. Her personality was warm and engaging, and she was always moving from classroom to classroom, talking to students until someone upset her. She had deep brown eyes and brown skin and wore her dark hair pulled into a ponytail on the back of her head. She was very open about both her strengths and challenges she faced:

School has always been important to me. I wanted to do well, so I did. It didn’t matter that we moved around a lot. We were in North Carolina for a while, then we were in New York. And school was always my strength. And when we moved here, I was doing really well at first. Then, you know, I started hanging out with the wrong crowds. And I was smoking. And that didn’t help me with my anger, and I just stopped going to school. My mom made me see there was a problem, so I’m trying to get myself together here.

The love of school that Abby discussed during her interview was reflected in her behavior at Crossings. While she was incredibly social when she finished her work, during class time, she sat in a corner of the room, hunched over textbooks, her right hand wrapped tightly around a pencil as she wrote. Although Abby was only a junior, when she heard some of the others talking about their projects, she went to Mr. Dave to complete a project of her own. For
her senior project, Abby chose to write a paper about the animal cruelty that resulted from puppy mills. When asked why she chose the topic, she explained with squeals interspersed in her voice, “I just love dogs so much. They’re just so cute, and when I think about what’s happening to them, I get really upset. I think people that hurt animals should be hurt themselves.” In spite of her enthusiasm about the project, Mr. Dave continued to question whether or not she needed to complete her project during her time at Crossings:

Mr. Dave: Okay. Now, you’re not a senior yet. Is there any reason that you decided to do this now?”

Abby: I don’t have a reason not to do it. I’m trying to get back on track with everything, and I have a topic that excites me. I don’t think I can graduate, but I may as well work hard, because it helps to keep me focused. I think projects like this are good for that.

Abby was excited about senior projects as a means of keeping focused, and was supported by the teachers in her endeavors. Ms. Lynn printed document after document to help Abby with both her paper and a poster for her presentation. Although she did not need to complete her project at that time, Mr. Dave, along with other members of the staff, legitimized and affirmed Abby’s bid for her project. They showed support for her bid by providing her with resources, and allowing her to complete a city-mandated tasks that would put her in a good position for her transition back to her community school.

Emma was an 18-year old senior from the western part of the city. Emma was slightly overweight and had dark brown skin, and wore her dark hair in twists. She was incredibly soft-spoken, but filled with a passion for reading, writing, and music. Although quiet, when she was in the classroom, like Abby, she was always hunched over a paper, getting through her work.
And every time I encountered her working the front desk, I was inevitably interrupting her reading. As with Nicky, her passion for academics, helped her navigate relationships with her teachers.

Where most of the seniors went to Ms. Nathalie or Ms. Lynn for support on their senior project, Emma was able to turn to Mr. Dave for support on her paper, based on their shared love of music. For her senior project, Emma wrote a paper on the history of punk music and its intersections with race:

*I like school, but we don’t usually get to do the things that interest us. I like to write, and I like music, so I came up with this project. See, most people don’t know that there were black people involved in the punk scene, but it’s this great scene, with music and politics.*

*Mr. Dave, he really loves music, so we just started talking about punk music. And it was great. He helped me get all this information about the punk scene. Now I know even more than before. That’s the great thing about this project. You really get to learn about something that’s interesting to you.*

Emma’s passion for her senior project reflected her general passion enthusiasm for learning, but like the other students, she became even more immersed in this project because it was a topic that was of interest to her. This interest also allowed her to connect with a teacher who had an antagonistic relationship with many students, including Emma’s girlfriend, Clare, who was also working on her senior project.

In contrast to the ease with which Mr. Dave acknowledged Emma’s bid to have her project recognized, he did not make this connection with Emma’s girlfriend, Clare. While Clare and Emma were physical opposites, they had similar personalities. Clare had pale skin, with light brown hair, and was petite in stature. Her physical appearance garnered much attention from the boys, but she ignored them, in favor of an outward personality that was quiet and studious.
Like Emma, Clare always completed her coursework. Although she did not have a specific interest in school, she articulated a desire to do well:

*I've never had a bad experience in school. Some teachers were good, some weren’t so great, but you just do your work, and some of the good ones will help you. So, I always do my school work, but I don’t know if it matters for what I want to do in life.*

When it came time for Clare to complete her senior project, she chose to look at the US opiate epidemic. For the early weeks, she worked with Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn on collecting documents about how opiates work, how their use has increased in the US, and the dangers of using them. After collecting her documents, she would sit with either Ms. Nathalie, Ms. Lynn, or myself, to read through the documents and summarize their main points, ultimately developing a thesis about the danger of opiate use. She slowly began composing her paper on Ms. Nathalie’s computer (choosing this approach, because she could not save her work on the classroom computers). Every afternoon, she could be found writing. In contrast to the nonchalance she generally displayed about school, she spoke with a fervor when discussing the danger of opiates, showing an investment in this project.

As Clare got close to her deadline, Ms. Nathalie got sick, and was not in school for several days. Clare became sullen, fearing that she would not complete her senior project. One afternoon, she approached Mr. Dave about using his computer to complete her project. “Don’t you think you’re pushing it a little too close to the deadline,” he responded.

“I’ve been working on it on Ms. Nathalie’s computer,” she attempted to explain herself.

“Well, I don’t have access to Ms. Nathalie’s computer, so I’m not sure if you’re going to be able to finish your project.”
Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn had provided support for Clare’s bid to have her project acknowledged, helping her with both her reading and writing of the project. This interaction with Mr. Dave stood in contrast to a bid that had been supported for several weeks. Rather than acknowledging the work she had completed, he misrecognizes her bid for self-advocacy in the face of a setback. In spite of his rejection of her cultural bid, Clare continued to search for a teacher to help her with the completion of her project. Later that afternoon, Ms. Lynn appeared, and recognized the difficulty that Clare was facing. After Clare explained that Mr. Dave would not allow her to use his computer, Ms. Lynn reached out to Ms. Nathalie to email her Clare’s paper, so that she could finish it on Ms. Lynn’s computer.

While Clare’s senior project was ultimately completed, and her cultural bid to create a project on opiates was acknowledged and supported, she faced challenges in how her non-cognitive skills were perceived, almost creating a serious setback to completing a necessary task for her graduation. The challenge she faced in completing her project influenced her later relationship with teachers, and how she approached her transition from Crossings, which is explored in Chapter Six. This rejection of Clare’s bid shows the crucial role that teachers play as mediators in the legitimizing of students’ requests, as well as the power they have to derail student progress.

Seventeen-year old Stephan was an enigma during much of the time that I knew him at Crossings. When he first arrived, Ms. Nathalie was excited by how easy his transition was regarding his education. He could tell her the name of his school, how many credits he had, and the classes that he needed in order to complete graduation. After this first week, his behavior

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13 See chapter 4’s for a discussion of the role that non-cognitive skills play in cultural bids.
changed. He withdrew to the corners of the room, and could usually be found sitting at a computer table with his arms and head pulled into his royal blue sweatshirt. Neither teacher nor disciplinary staff directed their scolds at him, so he was largely under the radar.

As the students worked on their senior projects, his personality reflected some of his early enthusiasm. After completing her project, I agreed to help Clare with her presentation, and found myself in a quiet classroom, talking her through her project. As she informally told me about how devastating opiates were, she wrote her notes on index cards. “Okay, I think I’m ready.” She organized her notes, then stood about three feet away from me. As she finished her second read-through of her project, Stephan burst into the room with his poster in hand.

“You’re practicing with Clare,” he hopped from one foot to the next. “Can I practice when she’s done? And the two of you can give me feedback?”

When Clare finished, Stephan stood, making sure his shirt was tucked, running his hands across the front of it. He pulled his index cards from his pocket and began reciting his presentation. Each time he messed up on reading one of the index cards, he started over.

After three tries, he finally recited it to his liking. “That was great. What made you decide to do your project on income equality?”

Well, I guess it goes back to when I was in real school. We would talk about all these political topics, and it’s just crazy that women aren’t paid the same as men. I can’t imagine my mom getting paid less than some man, and she’s supporting our family. That’s crazy. It’s just everywhere.

Stephan’s personality and approach to school still remained subdued, but in the senior project, he found a topic that excited him. This project became a space in which many students
articulated an interest in an array of topics that were of interest to them. Where this usually created conflict with teachers, they were supported in their senior project.

After the students finished their presentations, Mr. Dave sighed with excitement. “I didn’t know if they were going to be able to pull it off, but they did a really great job. It shows that they can do the work, when they really want to do something.”

The students who completed senior projects reflected the range of students at Crossings, from those who were enthusiastic about school and learning, to those who were jaded about educational practices. Although their relationships to school and topics were wildly different, students became invested in these in-depth literacy-based project. The senior project shows that when teachers provide an opening in academic tasks that allows for student interests, literacy can be valued by both parties.

Senior projects became a space in which adolescents could make cultural bids based on their interest, and have these bids recognized by teachers. During the completion of senior projects, student interest in a range of topics was legitimized as dominant capital, if they were willing to complete a long-term research project. In addition to subject matter being legitimized, teachers worked with students to ensure that they had access to technology. Where technology is frequently misrecognized as non-dominant capital, the focus that students displayed in creating their senior projects, helped to legitimize the need for technology.

**Discussion**

In the literature on literacy as a manifestation of cultural capital, reading practices, leisure reading, and test preparation are identified as forms of capital that provide students with access. Young people who have access to and engage in various reading practices are considered
to possess cultural capital. In this chapter, I highlight the complexity of literacy practices as a form of cultural capital. The students at Crossings attempt to make bids for various forms of cultural capital to be acknowledged as cultural capital (some of which are acknowledged as dominant cultural capital in the literature, including SAT preparations), yet the acknowledgement of literacy practices as a legitimate bid for cultural capital, is highly contingent on how students present their literacy desires, as well as the relationship between teacher and student. Bids can be accepted or rejected depending on the teacher’s unstated goals, the timing of the bid, and other unspoken rules to which adolescents must know to adhere.
Chapter 5: The Social Graces

As I sat with a group of boys in Mr. Steve’s math class one afternoon in October of 2014, one of the disciplinary staff calls, “Last bell,” sending the students into a flurry of movement from one classroom to the next. Mr. Steve’s classroom is left empty, except one student, Jaden. He stands, stretching his arms before approaching Mr. Steve with a newspaper. “Did you read about this Ebola stuff? This is crazy,” he points to a section of the newspaper.

Although Jaden should have moved to his next classroom, Mr. Steve allows him to remain. The two of them discuss the Ebola outbreak and other items Jaden has read about in the newspaper. Their interactions are collegial with Jaden moving from the table in the center of the room to Mr. Steve’s desk when he wants to provide him with written evidence to support their discussion.

Over the course of a thirty-minute period, their conversations moved from an update on current events to Jaden requesting help with getting job applications printed. The two of them move to a computer and come up with a list of stores where Jaden can apply for work. “Okay. This looks good. And when we get them printed, do you think you can help me fill them out, to make sure that I am doing them right?” Under Mr. Steve’s eye, none of the disciplinary staff interrupts this exchange between teacher and student.

Over the course of several months, I came to see that Jaden was able to leverage a number of interpersonal skills and behaviors that endeared him to teachers. He engaged with them about academic matters, education and career aspirations, and current events. Observations of him with the Crossings gatekeepers, along with a number of interactions with him, revealed that Jaden understood how to make cultural capital bids using his non-cognitive
skills as a foundation for his relationships with educators. Jaden made a number of successful bids across several of the gatekeepers throughout his time at Crossings, including his teachers, counselor, and social worker. Jaden’s bids were largely shaped by the non-cognitive factors he displayed, grounded in a sense of self-advocacy and perseverance.

Non-cognitive skills are a series of behaviors, personality traits, and habits that have entered educational discussion as being a component of classroom success (Almlund et al., 2011). There are a number of skills and behaviors that fall under the umbrella of noncognitive factors, including time management, study skills, self-control, growth mindset, emotional intelligence, and perseverance. Largely grounded in economic and positive psychology, the literature on non-cognitive factors typically highlights one factor that a scholar deems to be of particular importance to academic success. Dweck (2009, 2010) argues for the importance of developing a growth mindset in children, so they come to understand that their talents and academic performance can be improved and developed through hard work and effort. Duckworth (YEARS) argues for the importance of grit, or perseverance, in academic success. Using these constructs, scholars such as Dweck (2009) and Duckworth (2016) view teachers as figures who can help develop these mindsets and behaviors in their students to help push students on this path to academic success. Farrington et al. (2012) provide a more holistic look at non-cognitive factors, including growth mindset and perseverance under an umbrella of behaviors and skills that not only help students engage academically, but also contribute to alleviating other educational disparities.

Although much of the literature around non-cognitive factors argues for how these behaviors and skills can improve academic attainment, the other side to this argument is that
the lack of skills increases academic difficulties. Scholars such as Jacob (2002) argue that a lack of skills contributes to difficulties boys face in educational settings. Similarly, there are arguments that adolescents from low-income homes have a non-cognitive skill gap (Heckman, 2006) that develops in early childhood that can only be addressed through early intervention.

While there is little literature that explicitly focuses on displays of non-cognitive factors amongst incarcerated youth, many of the adolescent in the juvenile justice system, including those at Crossings, would fall into the male demographic from low-income communities. One could argue that it would be difficult to develop these skills amongst a population of incarcerated youth that are already marked as being deficit in behavioral and social skills (Baron, 2003; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). The lack of non-cognitive skills would only serve to contribute to social reproduction, putting these adolescents at risk for recidivism and relapses. In spite of this literature, observing students such as Jaden, it became apparent that many of the adolescents at Crossings were attempting to display non-cognitive factors with the gatekeepers, including teachers and the disciplinary staff. Through an analysis of their interactions, the question became one of understanding the circumstances under which teachers affirmatively read their displays of non-cognitive skills and support their academic and social aspirations as a legitimate cultural capital bid. Conversely, I also came to see the ways in which teachers rejected adolescent bids to have their non-cognitive skills acknowledged because of mistiming or misaligned goals.

The teachers at Crossings did not employ a pedagogical philosophy that included non-cognitive skills, yet the literature argues that displays of these skills are associated with academic success and life success (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Nagaoka
et al. (2013) and a number of other scholars argue that the convergence of academic behaviors, perseverance, social skills, and learning strategies as part of the school experience can produce post-secondary economic gains. The underlying assumption in arguments for non-cognitive skills is that these are a series of objective behaviors and attitudes that have positive academic and economic outcomes for students. These are habits and behaviors that teachers should work to foster and develop among their students (Yeager, Paunesku, Walton & Dweck, 2013). Although there is a rich literature on the utility of the development of non-cognitive skills in correlating with academic success, there is little information on how non-cognitive skills and behaviors are deployed and acknowledged in the classroom. In this chapter, I look at moments when adolescents make bids to have their non-cognitive skills recognized as dominant capital, and how gatekeepers respond to these non-cognitive bids.

Through an analysis of some of these non-cognitive behaviors and skills, I ask if student bids to have their non-cognitive factors legitimized as dominant capital are recognized, in a setting where the staff is focused on routines, discipline and compliance as a means of combatting risks that include addiction relapses and juvenile recidivism? For those students who display non-cognitive behaviors, including perseverance, growth mindset, and socio-emotional intelligence, does it enhance their educational experience? What are the circumstances under which these non-cognitive bids are acknowledged by the teachers and disciplinary staff when students are in the Learning Center?

**Perseverance**

Perseverance has become one of the most widely cited non-cognitive factors in both scholarly and applied educational literature, particularly through the concept of grit. Duckworth
and Quinn (2009) define grit as “passions and persistence for long-term goals” (p. 166). Some of the markers of grit include deliberate practice (2010), being diligent, a hard worker, and not being discouraged in the face of setbacks (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007).

Through a number of studies in which participants rated themselves on a grit scale, Duckworth et al. argue that grit is associated with educational attainment and success in academic performance.

As an overall pattern, the academic records of adolescents in the juvenile justice system are marked by periods of truancy and low-academic attainment. This pattern held for many of the students at Crossings, who noted that their lives either using or selling drugs made it difficult for many of them to view school as a priority.

Matthew arrived at Crossings during the month of January, as a 13-year old middle school student. As a middle school student, Matthew was part of the Cardinals group, receiving additional support from Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn during their time in resource room. Although I would come to note and document some of the moments when he was distracted, during his time at Crossings, Matthew focused on completing the work that would help prepare him or high school. When I encountered him in January, he had bright, inquisitive eyes that were always focused when he talked with both his teachers and peers.

During Matthew’s first week at Crossings, when I arrived at the site on a Thursday, Ms. Nathalie sat at her desk, flipping through pages with the names of the newest clients. “There’s a new student here that I think you should talk to. You don’t want a kid that young to be in here, because he learns the wrong things. He made mistakes, but you don’t want him to lose that...I
don’t know what you call it...that sweetness,” she explained, showing her investment in this student from the time of his arrival.

Matthew arrived in the classroom an hour after Ms. Nathalie told me about him. In spite of his age, he was of average height amongst the boys at Crossings. He had deep brown skin and a small afro. His eyes were bright and inquisitive, becoming wider when Ms. Nathalie called him to her desk. He sat at the table in the middle of the room, softly greeting her, before she introduced the two of us. “Matthew, I know that a lot of the work that we’re doing is for high school students, so I wanted to check in to see if you wanted to work with me and Ms. Rita on work that’s your grade level.”

“That sounds good to me,” he responded. “What kind of work do you want me to do?”

“Well, I’m trying to get it organized, but I want you to do 8th grade work, so you can keep on track for high school. I’ll organize work to make sure you have English, math, and science. But we’ll do it a little at a time and see what you know.”

A week later, Ms. Nathalie had started creating packets of middle school work for Matthew. When Matthew came into the classroom, Ms. Nathalie handed him a blue folder with his name on it. “You can take this to your classes, but you’re going to leave this here each afternoon,” she explained to him. “This is how you’ll earn credits for me, Mr. Ken, and Ms. Ellen. I’ve talked to Mr. Ken and Ms. Ellen, and the three of us will help you. You can also always ask Ms. Rita and Ms. Lynn, anytime you need help with the work.”

He responded with a smile and a shrug, before taking a seat next to me. I explained to him that I would be taking notes for my project, but that I would be happy to help him with his
work, anytime he needed support. He pulled out a science packet, “I figured Ms. Ellen can help me with the math, but you can help me with the English. And can you help me with the science?” I explained that I would be happy to help, and he responded by saying that he wanted to try things on his own, but he would ask for help when he needed it.

Every site visit, Matthew came and sat by either me or Ms. Lynn, and began working on his packets. Science was easy for him. During the time that he sat and talked with me, he also read packets about fossils, classification of animals, and earth science, then completed comprehension questions. He excitedly shared the information that he learned through his science reading. In contrast to the ease that he faced in his science work, English was more of a challenge for him. While completing a packet where he wrote sentences that featured active verbs, he plopped his hand in his head and sighed. “I don’t understand how this is going to help me. It’s a waste of time, but I still need to do it.”

In spite of his expressed frustration with the assignment, Matthew continued to work on writing sentences and identifying various types of verbs and adjectives, asking questions when he didn’t understand. Even when the work was not of interest to him, he remained persistent in completing his tasks.

This persistence was particularly evident in moments when Matthew was challenged by Mr. Dave and members of the disciplinary staff. After receiving his English work from Ms. Nathalie, Matthew came to Mr. Dave’s class with one of the packets on a day that Mr. Dave was teaching about descriptive language using a poem about a creek. Mr. Dave sat behind his desk with a stack of papers as the boys filed into the room with a boisterous energy. “Hey hey hey!” he yelled. “You guys need to settle down. Come in and grab a sheet.”
Matthew approached Mr. Dave, pulling a small stapled packet from his folder. “Mr. Dave, do you think you can help me with this English that Ms. Nathalie gave me? I need help with the adjectives.”

Mr. Dave looked up at him and shook his head, without looking at the packet. “Not on my time. You need to put that away and take a sheet like I asked you,” he said curtly. Matthew snatched a sheet, and put away the packet, whispering words under his breath that I could not hear, before sitting at one of the computer stations, as Mr. Dave started his lesson on descriptions. He had the students read the poem and identify words that were particularly vivid in the poem. In spite of this rejection, Matthew participated in the lesson, while several of the other boys turned to computers, listening to music or playing games while Mr. Dave attempted to teach his lesson. At the end of his class, Matthew handed in his assignment. In spite of Mr. Dave snapping at him, Matthew stayed after school with Ms. Lynn to get additional help on the assignment. “I just want to get this one done. I can do a lot of them on my own, but I don’t want to spend forever on this stupid stuff,” he explained to me why he was staying after classes. For Matthew, his goal was to complete the assignments, even if he had to take creative paths to complete his work.

This persistence that Matthew displayed became even more evident a few months into his time at Crossings. During one April afternoon, he came entered Ms. Nathalie’s classroom with a stack of notebooks in his hands. In comparison to other days, Matthew moved slowly and his eyes were slightly closed. He sat at the table, resting his right hand on his forehead. before letting out a sigh. In spite of the visible fatigue in his body language, he took out a pencil and began reading a passage on mammals. When I asked him how he was feeling, he explained that
the medical staff and counselors were working on getting his medical dosage calibrated for his ADHD, and the medication was making him tired. “I’m just a little tired, miss, but I can do this work.”

He slowly read a paragraph before putting his head on the table, when a voice from the hallway called his name. One of the staff members yelled, “Matthew, get your head off that table. Sit up! This is not nap time,” he came into the room. “All of you! Sit up,” he walked around the room, making sure the students were sitting up. “These kids just don’t know what to do in a classroom. This is why they need discipline.”

Most of the students sat up, but as soon as he left the room, several started playing computer games and listening to their headphones. While the other students found ways to get around the staff member’s yelling, Matthew continued to slowly work on his assignment. Although he had to read the passage several times, he completed the questions for that assignment by the time the class was finished. It was the end of the day, so he put his assignments in his folder, and put his folder in the bin that Ms. Nathalie had set up for student work. “Ms. Nathalie, I’m almost done with this set of packets. I just have to do the review,” he said to her, the cadence of his speech still slow.

In contrast to the staff member, Ms. Nathalie celebrated his work. “You’re doing a great job, Matthew. You just have to keep this up, and you’ll be ready when you start high school in the fall,” she

There were several moments when Matthew faced reprimand from the staff, but he continued to work in Ms. Nathalie’s room, in spite of the conflict he faced with staff. In other classrooms, where the teachers were not as engaged with him as Ms. Nathalie, Matthew
became more distracted. In the late spring, when he developed a crush on one of the new girls, he would sit in most of his classes doodling her name on paper that he would throw away, or sitting in a huddle with the boys talking about the girls. He moved between working with Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn, and a lack of focus with the teachers who did not actively acknowledge his hard work or attempt to work with him when he was struggled with his work.

While Matthew’s persistence was perceived as disruptive in moments, and treated as a lack of trying when he struggled with fatigue, it was an example of the way that many of the students adapted their non-cognitive skills to the relationships they had with teachers and staff. In a space where Matthew was supported, he completed his work, even when the staff attempted to disrupt his space. But in classrooms where teachers did not attempt to engage Matthew, he began to disengage. He became less focused on their work, and became a part of the Crossings community of adolescents.

Matthew’s perseverance was concerned with remaining academically focused and on a trajectory to return to school, but other adolescents displayed perseverance in matters they felt directly impacted their personal goals and lives. Savannah was a 16-year old mother who displayed a more complex form of perseverance, marked by both academic and personal goals. Savannah had a big personality that was immediately noticeable, which garnered both positive Between the turnover of adolescents, court dates, counseling sessions, and family meetings, it was difficult to discern when there were new students at Crossings (particularly if they were admitted over the weekend), but I immediately noted Savannah’s presence in the classrooms during her first week.
I sat in Ken’s social studies classroom with six girls, who quietly moved between working on paper history packets and completing independent study on computer programs. Savannah walked into the room laughing, and immediately filled the space with her large voice, as she sat with next to one of the girls who was working at the computer. She had brown skin with thick dark hair that she wore in two short French braids.

After several interactions with the girls, I began working with one of the younger students, Ivy, who was struggling with a number of her academic subjects, including multiplication tables. Ivy and I would sit in Ken’s classroom, going over rote reading and mathematic skills. One afternoon, while we were filling in a multiplication table, Savannah approach our table, and placed her hand on one of the pieces of paper. “Can you help me with this too? We were supposed to learn it in school, but it never stuck.”

I agreed to bring her multiplication tables for her to complete so that she could practice both multiplication and division during their recreation time, to help her prepare for the higher level math she was completing in Mr. Steve’s math class. One afternoon, Savannah sat in Mr. Steve’s classroom, attempting to complete basic algebraic equations. She began getting flustered with the problems, so she approached his desk. “Can you please help me with my times tables so I can do these problems?” she handed him her algebra.

“I understand what you want to do,” Mr. Steve explained to Savannah, “But you need to be focused on your algebra, so you can get your credits.”

“But how do you expect me to do those problems if I can’t do the basic work,” she sucked her teeth and rolled her eyes.
“Everyone else uses a calculator.”

“But there aren’t enough calculators and this is something I should know how to do. You want me to just wait for someone to share a calculator with me,” she stared at him, to which he responded with a shrug of the shoulders.

Savannah acquiesced to Mr. Steve’s desire for her to work on her algebra work, but she continued to return to his desk, asking for help with the basic multiplication and division that were at the root of her problems. Later that afternoon, when classes were complete, Savannah walked into Ms. Nathalie’s classroom, and sat across from me. “Can you still help me with my multiplication?” she rolled her eyes. “He won’t help me in class, but I can just do it after school, if you’ll stay here and help me.”

During the next few weeks, Savannah would work on her algebra assignments during her time with Mr. Steve, but twice a week, she would remain in the Learning Center after classes to work on her multiplication tables and converting that into basic division skills. As her basic math skills improved and she memorized her basic multiplication table, she began to bring algebra to her after school sessions.

When I asked why she was staying late to work on her algebra, she explained that she wanted to accomplish her goals on her own, as part of an extended sense of autonomy: “I don’t want his [Mr. Steve’s] help. I can do it myself. It may take me longer, but I’m not asking anyone for help that doesn’t want to help me. See, teachers always think we need them, but I can do this just like I’m going to do all the other things I have to do to take care of myself.”
Savannah’s desire for independence and commitment to setting goals was not just a part of her academic experience at Crossings. In addition to wanting to attaining some markers of academic improvement, Savannah’s desire to succeed at Crossings was marked by the desire to prepare for independent living when she completed her treatment. One spring afternoon I sat with a group of girls quietly working on an array of assignments. Savannah was notably absent from the group, but it was not out of the ordinary considering the myriad of reasons that students had for being out of the classroom. As we worked, Savannah came quietly in the room, and sat beside me with a stack of papers. When I inquired as to where she’d been, she quietly explained that she was with her counselor:

*I’m working on all the paperwork I need to apply for independent living, so I can get my daughter back, and we can have a place to live. That’s why I do all this stuff. I need to stay clean, and I need to do well in school, so they know that I can take care of my responsibilities, even if I live by myself. I also have to do better for my daughter. I can’t have excuses when it comes to her. I want her to see that I’m trying to do the right thing, but these people don’t care. So, I just do what I do until I get out of here.*

Savannah’s 16-month old daughter was in the custody of her mother while she was at Crossings, but Savannah displayed a quiet commitment to both her academics and behavior during her time at Crossings, that was in contrast to the boisterous personality she displayed when she interacted with the gatekeepers. They viewed her as distracted, but she established her own set of personal goals to which they were not privy. Savannah’s perseverance and goal-setting was not for public display. As such, she frequently had conflicts with teachers and the disciplinary staff for her public displays, while she quietly displayed a perseverance that included both academic and personal achievements.
Students such as Matthew and Savannah frequently displayed a perseverance that would be acknowledged by scholars of non-cognitive factors, yet their teachers frequently rejected their bids as a result of misaligned goals and mistimed bids. In cases where students’ bids were rejected, the adolescents attempted to continue to display perseverance, but it was most evident in moments when they were away from the teachers who had rejected their bids.

**Self-Advocacy**

One of the non-cognitive factors that emerged as being essential to adolescent success at Crossings was the notion of self-advocacy. Scholarly conceptions of self-advocacy are typically relegated to literature about students with disabilities, but it was highly applicable to a number of students in Crossings as well. Because the literature around self-advocacy focuses on students with disabilities, it is not noted under the non-cognitive factors umbrella. In spite of its exclusion from the umbrella, I have chosen to include it here, as self-advocacy is defined as self-directed decision making (Martin, Marshall, and Maxson, 1998) that includes an understanding of rights and responsibilities. In the case of many of the students at Crossings, self-advocacy had many characteristics of perseverance, but it did not always concern long-term goals, but was instead centered in a clear articulation of the educational needs they had.

While many students in the juvenile justice system have also been diagnosed with behavioral and learning disabilities, even those without school-based disabilities, face challenges in making informed decisions as they attempt to transition back to their schools and homes (Baltodano, Platt, & Roberts, 2005; Boundy & Karger, 2011). While the details of their transition planning will be explored in the next chapter, a critical component of receiving support in both
their education attainment and transition planning was self-advocacy for the adolescents at Crossings.

Those students who were most successful at Crossings were those who developed self-advocacy as a skill that was essential to their interactions with adults. The teachers at Crossings were attempting to meet the educational needs of approximately 40 students, with a range of learning needs, spanning from 8th graders to high school graduates, who had come from a number of schools throughout the city. When students arrived, Ms. Nathalie sat with each of them to get the name of the last school they attended and a general assessment of what courses they had taken. From these initial conversations Ms. Nathalie developed a temporary learning plan for each student while she contacted their schools to get their transcripts, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and disciplinary records. In the face of inaccurate record keeping, those students who had a sense of their social and academic needs were at an advantage regarding advocating for having the most appropriate educational experiences at Crossings.

Grace, whose process of transitional planning will be explored later, was a 16-year old client who attempted to advocate for both her educational and rehabilitation needs during her time at Crossings. Grace had such a presence, that teachers talked to me about her before I encountered her. During one of my site visits, Ms. Nathalie sat at her desk, tapping her pen against one of the piles of paper on her desk. “There’s a student I thought I wanted you to work with...I think...I don’t really have a read on her. I thought she might need help, but then she

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14 In the transitions chapter, I explore the connections between rehabilitation and education for Grace, who more openly struggled with addiction when compared to many of the adolescents at Crossings. Many were at Crossings because of offenses committed while under the influence of narcotics, but Grace admitted herself to Crossings because of her opiate addiction.
seems to be on top of things, but I don’t know. It’s hard to explain, but I’m going to keep an eye on her.”

Ms. Nathalie went on to tell me about a host of other students, so I was surprised to find that Grace approached me the next day. Matthew and I were sitting in Ken’s room, while Matthew worked through several science reading comprehension questions, when a young woman approached me. Grace was of average height and slightly overweight, carrying the weight in her midsection. Her face was round with mischievous blue eyes and dirty blonde hair.

“Grace, what are you doing in there?” Shaun, one of the disciplinary staff members called to her. “No girls when there are boys in a room.”

“Just a second,” she yelled, rolling her eyes. “I’m taking care of something.”

She leaned on the table and looked at me with her piercing eyes. “Miss, I need your help. I wanna finish this history before I leave here, but I can’t do this. Miss Nathalie told me that you studied African-American History in college.”

“I am familiar with some African-American history, but we’ll have to talk about this when one of your teachers is around,” I explained. Although I talked with all of the students for the dissertation project, tutoring had to be sanctioned by one of the teachers.

She continued to plead with me, when Ms. Nathalie ducked her head in Ken’s room. “Grace! What are you doing in here?”

“I’m trying to get help for African-American History since you won’t help me,” Grace walked past Ms. Nathalie, who remained at the doorway, motioning for me to approach her.
“That’s the student I was telling you about. She is diligent, but I still don’t know if we should waste time with tutoring. I think she can do the work on her own. There are other students doing African-American History that actually need the help.”

That afternoon, Ms. Nathalie brought a small group of boys who were working on African-American History to me after their classes were completed. The three of us sat at the table, reading comprehension their largest challenge in the face of the history assignment. Not long after we started to work on the paper, Grace pushed the door open and walked towards Ms. Nathalie, yelling: “Oh no! You didn’t want her to help me, but she’s working with another group on the same thing!”

Grace sat in one of the seats next to me and opened her history book: “Miss, I know they’re on a different chapter, but can we come up with a plan so that you can work with me on this on my history some afternoons?”

In spite of the fact that she was not supposed to be in the room with the boys, that afternoon, Grace sat next to me, letting the boys ask their questions, before she would turn to me for help with her own question.

While much of Grace’s story is about her ability to advocate for herself regarding rehabilitation, she also displayed a strong commitment to her education. As a junior in high school, Grace had many of her credits, and wanted to stay on academic track while in Crossings. In spite of Ms. Nathalie’s reassurances that she could do it on her own, Grace continued to seek guidance for completing her history. During the time when I sat with Grace for her history, I saw that she her reading and comprehension was stronger than the boys who were getting help with their history, but her ability to retain what she read was diminished. She could read a paragraph
and summarize it, but by the time she prepared herself to write the answer, she could not remember the content of the material she read. When she was finally able to write, her hand had a quiver that made it difficult for her to write for extended periods of time. Over a few weeks, the boys quickly caught up with her, but she organized the group so that they could read and write together, in spite of her teacher’s insistence that she did not need help. She joined this group, and by May, all of the students had completed their African-American History course.

Ms. Nathalie viewed Grace’s perseverance as a sign that she did not need academic assistance, but Grace resisted the notion that she did not need help because she worked hard. She understood her limitations and pushed against her teacher’s decision that she worked best independently. Grace had an understanding of her strengths and weaknesses in terms of academics, and continued to challenge her teacher in order to complete her work. While she had a number of strengths regarding organizing and socializing with her peers, she counted on them to help her recount some of the material that she forgot, and worked with them to develop a shared language for understanding the material.

In addition to focusing on their academics, adolescents at Crossings were encouraged to explore career paths and develop professional skills. There was a culture of professional development that was evident throughout the community. In Ms. Nathalie’s resource room, the classroom walls featured a rotation of student-designed posters that featured career pathways, interview strategies, attire that should be worn to interviews and work, and habits to develop in order to maintain a job. During their career unit, Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn led a classroom discussion highlighting the importance of body language, interpersonal skills, and language when seeking a job. The boys were then instructed to choose a sub-topic to research for the
creation of posters. Those who were interested in similar topics worked together to create posters.

At the conclusion of this brief career unit, 17-year old Calvin approached Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn about putting these skills into practice. Compared to many of the students, Calvin had an imposing presence, standing approximately six-feet tall with a muscular build. When he first arrived at Crossings, he was quiet and rarely smiled, yet his presence was noted by the teachers. “He’s a client?” Ms. Lynn chuckled after Calvin had introduced himself to Ms. Nathalie. “He looks like a grown man,” she observed, noting a marked contrast between how students such as Calvin were perceived when compared to younger students such as Matthew.

After a few weeks at Crossings, this visible exterior belied a warm sense of humor and innocent mischief. Calvin would frequently enter the room, with a wiggle of his shoulders and warm smile. One afternoon, when the students did not have any classroom responsibilities, he sat with a group of other boys sat in a classroom, exchanging humor-filled rap battles. He had developed a reputation amongst his peers as being gifted in creating rap lyrics, yet amongst his teacher, the large teenager developed a reputation for being a class clown.

As his personality emerged, he became more comfortable interacting with the teachers and disciplinary staff. His jovial personality afforded him the privilege of breaking the rules and moving from one room to another when he wanted to engage with a teacher. After being established as being the class clown, this humorous figure sought help in applying the career unity. He approached Ms. Nathalie and Ms. Lynn with a smile and tilt of the head. “Yo, can I get some help with this job stuff? I’m trying to make sure I can get a job when I get out of here. I need help with this interview stuff.”
He explained that he wanted them to help him practice for an interview, because he had not idea of what they would be like, but his demeanor sent them into a fit of laughter, before they left the room.

Calvin remained in the room, sitting across from me. “Miss Rita, will you help me? See, they don’t be taking me seriously when I ask for help, but how am I supposed to find a job if I don’t even know how to do this? You know what my only job has been? Well, you know…I guess I shouldn’t talk about that. But the point is I need to get a job when I get outta here.”

I agreed to help him with an interview, asking what approach he wanted to take.

Calvin: *I know some things I’m supposed to do, but it’s hard, ya know what I’m saying? I need to practice. In this one article, they were explaining how you act when you walk in the office and stuff. But you need to practice that.*

R: *Okay, so let’s talk through it and practice.*

Calvin and I looked at his highlights and established some rules for interacting with a manager or boss during an interview. He wanted to practice from an entrance at an office through the entire interview, so he walked out of the door, so he could knock on the office door and practice his entrance. The minute he walked into the door, he burst into laughter, but regrouped to extend fingers for a handshake. I explained that he should extend his entire hand for a firm handshake, so he wanted to restart his mock interview. The second time that he walked in, he extended a hand, but would not make eye contact with me. “You need to look me in the eye, when you shake my hand.”

Calvin: *Nah, I can’t do that, Miss. You don’t just look people in the eye. That’s weird.*
I explained that it was an important component of establishing the relationship, so he left the room again. As Calvin walked into the room for the third time, the teacher assistant, Ms. Lynn walked in behind him. “Ah, so you were serious about wanting help with interviewing?” she laughed, as she sat to watch him practice a mock interview.

He stepped back into the hallway, knocked lightly on the door, and entered after I opened the door. I greeted him, and extended a hand, and once again, his eyes fell to floor. “Okay, we need to work on eye contact,” I repeated.

He responded with a smirk and chuckle. “I can’t, Miss. I can’t look you in the eye.”

Ms. Lynn interrupted with laughter, standing to leave the room again. “See, you don’t take this seriously. Stop wasting people’s time.”

“If you say so,” he laughed in response.

Even after she left, Calvin continued to practice, until we had gone through the entrance, practiced interview questions, and rehearsed a goodbye. “Thanks, Miss Rita. I appreciate it. I don’t get how we’re supposed to make sure we do the right thing if we don’t really know how to apply for a job. Don’t they know that most of us have not had interviews and jobs, but we need this money.”

In this instance of Calvin attempting to solicit career mentorship, he was cognizant of his lack of interview and social skills in a job setting. The teachers held conceptions of him as a class clown, resisting the idea that he was serious about working on skills that he thought he needed for his transition. Although he had done research and identified areas where he needed to
improve his social interactions, he was perceived to be wasting time, because of the humor that
he was using to cover some of his lack of comfort with social interactions.

While many of the students at Crossings faced challenges when they displayed non-
cognitive factors, the work study group was able to successfully navigate organizing and
advocating for “professional attire.” The first time I arrived at Crossings, I was greeted by an
adolescent client who worked at the front desk. Like any office receptionist, he greeted me with
a smile, inquiring about my business at the facility, before using the phone to contact the
principal, Mr. Ken. Over my next several visits, I came to see different faces at the front desk, all
friendly and warm as they greeted me and walked me to the Learning Center. Although it
evolved over time, as the students and I came to know each other, this adolescent greeting
became a part of the routine of my site visits.

These student receptionists were part of one of the work study programs at Crossings.
After earning enough behavioral points and being academically successful, students were able
to petition to join the work study program, where they received monthly paychecks and
financial guidance on how to set up a savings account for their income.

Approximately two months after I began collecting data, the Crossings program
relocated to a new building (that I describe in the methodology chapter). With the transition to
the new building, there were a number of changes to programming that brought a number of
visitors. In addition to their general receptionist duties, many of the students were given the
additional tasks of working with their teachers on guided tours of the building. One afternoon
when I arrived, the student receptionist on duty was wearing a cerulean blue button down shirt
in place of the sweatshirt and polo the rest of the students wore. A few other work study
students walked past, wearing similar attire, with black dress shoes, in contrast to the sneakers that the majority of the students wore. “Wow! A new ensemble,” I greeted Rasheed, who worked the desk on Thursdays.

“Yeah, Miss Rita, we had to make sure we’re looking good if we’re going to greet everyone who come in here. There were people coming in and out of the building, and we have to walk them around.”

“So, how did this come about?”

“Well, it’s just been different since we got to this building, so a group of us got together and started talking to Mike [one of the social workers]. When we told explained to him that we needed to look better if we were going to have all these visitors. He told us we needed to take our thoughts to Greg [the administrator in charge of Crossings programming]. We made an appointment with him and explained to him that we needed professional attire if we are going to be the first face people see when they come here. And of course Greg loved it. He’s the one who brings in all these visitors, so we’re just making him look good,” he smirked, wrapping his left fist with his right hand.

“So, does everyone have new uniforms?”

“No. Do you see most of these kids? Most of them don’t care. They don’t want to do anything. They don’t understand that you have to dress the part if you’re going somewhere in life. Most of them don’t understand that you need to look the part, and you need to act the part. They don’t even care about school, so what do they care about a uniform,” he
distinguished between the work study clients and those who had were not allowed to participate in special programming.

This group of work study students was able to observe their surroundings and responsibility and make an argument for why they needed to have new attire at the new Crossings facility. Using an argument of professionalism, that frequently recurred at my front desk encounters, the group of adolescents were able to organize themselves to advocate in a way that appealed to the people in charge of Crossings. Where many students were unable to advocate for their individual learning needs, this group of adolescents was able to call on values that the professionals in charge of Crossings understood in order to argue for their own professional development.

The story at Crossings paints a more complex picture of how non-cognitive skills operate in an educational space that is dictated by discipline and compliance. With notable exceptions, the disciplinary staff and teachers have the expectation that adherence to directives is essential for adolescent success. A number of students at Crossings display non-cognitive skills, and attempt to make cultural capital bids in which these non-cognitive skills are recognized as useful social skills, but teachers and the disciplinary figures frequently reject these bids. When a student such as Savannah is academically behind, her commitment to developing math skills is read as a distraction. In order for readings to be successful, adolescents must display their non-cognitive skills in a way that is identifiable to their middle-class teachers. If the bid for these non-cognitive skills does not align with the goals of the teachers, it is rejected.

Those students who are able to most successfully display non-cognitive factors are those who do so through engaging their teachers in a way that appeals to their interactional
expectations. Although he was unable to successfully navigate the system beyond Crossings, within the facility, Jaden was able to appeal to his teachers for support by engaging them with questions about college and pursuing middle-class career paths in business, even when the concept of business was ambiguous for Jaden.

Similarly, the work study students were able to successfully advocate and argue for a uniform that created what they deemed to be a professional aesthetic. Through both the uniform and the performance of work-related responsibilities, these students also distinguished themselves from others at Crossings. For Jaden there was an understanding that preparing for four-year college was more desirable than getting an associate’s degree. His teachers were willing to go above and beyond when he advocated for an education that distinguished him from his Crossings peers. Similarly, the work study students viewed themselves as part of a Crossings elite, who understood that part of their success included “looking the part.”

**Non-cognitive Bids**

Much of the literature on non-cognitive factors hails these behaviors and mindsets as beneficial tools that help students navigate relationships, and create a foundation for educational success. They are presented as a toolkit that students can employ to work hard and persevere in the face of challenge. The situation at Crossings paints a much more complex picture of the role that non-cognitive bids play in educational success. Rather than being an objective series of behaviors, non-cognitive factors become interactional tools that must be recognized by both educators and the disciplinary staff. Students frequently make bids for their perseverance to be acknowledged, but these bids are rejected by both teachers and disciplinary staff when the are mistimed or misread by educators. Rather, students such as Matthew and
Savannah can be read as disobedient, particularly by the disciplinary staff, when they attempt to have their bids for their perseverance to be acknowledged. Bids to have non-cognitive factors recognized are most successful when student goals align with their teacher’s social expectations, and are carefully timed.
Chapter 6: Finding a Way Home

One of the most important components of the work done at institutions such as Crossings, is preparing adolescents to return to their communities with skills that reduce their risk of recidivism. Reducing the risks of recidivism includes increasing adolescent opportunities for successful continuation of education and career opportunities. Although it is a critical component of the work that is done in the juvenile justice system, there continue to be many challenges and failures in the execution of transition or reintegration planning (Baltodano, Platt, & Roberts, 2005; Fader, 2013). These challenges can include a lack of continuity in education, homelessness, and a return to illegal behaviors for adolescents. While scholars have looked at the experiences of adolescents after they have left juvenile detention facilities, it is also critical that we begin to understand transition planning before adolescents leave juvenile detention facilities, to understand how they are being prepared for the return to their communities, schools, and families.

Support in Transition Planning

Scholars are beginning to understand factors that can reduce the risk of recidivism, but adolescents continue to face a number of challenges in both their reentry and transition to adulthood. These challenges generally include a range of both academic and social skills that were underdeveloped when adolescents entered the drug treatment or juvenile detention facility. One of the biggest challenges that adolescents face when they leave juvenile detention facilities is lagging in requisite academic skills they need for both school and the job market. Adolescents entering the juvenile justice system tend to display patterns of truancy in academic settings, which results in decreased access to cultural capital markers that include reading and language skills, as well as lagging in academic credits. The frequency of movement through the
juvenile justice system and drug courts makes it difficult for them to make gains in these skills (Geib, Chapman, D’Amaddio, and Grigorenko, 2011; Leone and Weinberg, 2010). While there is great variation in educational models in the decentralized juvenile justice system, the high rates of turnover, difficulty accessing records, and range of skills, usually results in adolescents leaving the system lagging with an even greater deficit in academic skills and job training (Anthony et. al, 2010).

Social Deficit

In addition to general to the challenges they face in the immediate transition from facilities, adolescents in the juvenile justice system face a range of social challenges in their transition to adulthood. Adolescents who find themselves in the juvenile justice system display high rates of depression and anxiety, as well as disruptive disorders such as oppositional defiance disorder (Chung, Little, and Steinberg). These challenges include a range of behaviors that make it difficult to be successful in academic settings, which creates a number of challenges for transitioning from the juvenile justice system.

Disability

Adolescents with educational disabilities face additional challenges in their transitioning. Given the overrepresentation of adolescents with specific learning disabilities, intellectual disability, and emotional disturbance in the juvenile justice system (Osher, Woodruff, and Sims, 2013), they face increased challenges when they are in the system. They tend to be referred for more severe crimes than are more likely to face recidivism (Zhang, Barrett, Katsiyannis, and Yoon, 2010) than their peers in the general education population. This creates a unique set of challenges in the transition planning of adolescents with disabilities, which was apparent at Crossings, where they were grouped together in their classroom setting. As with their peers in
general educational classrooms, scholars have shown that incarcerated adolescents with disabilities have difficulty with continuity in their education (Zhang et al., 2011).

Although there are a number of challenges to reentry, researchers have started to understand some of the factors that help contribute to successful reentry. While the skill deficit and academic difficulties are a challenge that many adolescents face in their transition, developing academic skills and credit recovery (programs that allow students to use earn credits for courses they have previously failed) can be a key factor in successful transitioning (Ramirez & Harris, 2010). For both adolescents in general education and special education settings, education has been shown to be critical in a successful transition. Although education has been shown to be critical for transitions, there is still a gap in how education operates in the transition process.

In addition to developing academic skills, adolescents who are either enrolled in school or have found employment in the period following their release from juvenile detention facilities decrease the chance of returning to the juvenile justice system (Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, and Spann, 2008). While educational experiences are shown to have a strong impact, it is not employment in and of itself that reduces the risk of recidivism. Rather Uggen and Wakefield argue that employment can serve as a tool for providing an identity that is not associated with criminality (2005). Developing plans for education and employment can be a critical component of a successful transition, which is a central tenant of Crossings theoretical underpinnings.

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15 The difficulty in defining a successful transition is that there are no set parameters for what constitutes successful. For some measures, success is marked by staying out of the juvenile justice system for a period of time, while others have definitions of success that include educational and employment markers.
although this chapter aims to show there is variation in the support that adolescents receive in planning for this component of their re-entry.

While education and employment are key to successful transitions, another factor in reducing recidivism is having strong social and familial ties. Chung, Little, and Steinberg (2005) argue that adolescents who are able to form supportive social bonds with members of both their families and community are less likely to re-enter the juvenile justice system. When parents are able to develop intervention skills for their children, adolescents are less likely to reoffend (Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Amrosio, 2001). Beyond parenting, adolescents who are able to develop positive relationships with adults are less likely to find themselves re-entering the system. Having strong adult relationships can help to develop strong community ties that help with the process of reintegration (Uggen and Wakefield, 2005).

Although I will touch on the importance of family ties and emotional regulation, given situation of my project in The Learning Center at Crossings, I focus on the role that education and employment planning play in how adolescents come to understand their transitions. I seek to add to this understanding of transition planning by focusing on the interactions that adolescents have before they re-enter their community. This chapter attempts to contribute to the broader transition and reentry literature by focusing on the ways in which the relationships between adolescents and gatekeepers contribute to how adolescents understand their transitions away from the institutional structures of Crossings. I start by looking at the overarching transitional practices at Crossings to show that the staff has developed a program that addresses the many factors that have been shown to contribute to a successful transition into adulthood. Although Crossing’s approach to transition is grounded in theory and addresses
the risk factors, there is great variation in how adolescents approach reentry. My observations and interviews show that planning for the reentry process is shaped by how adolescents navigate relationships with gatekeepers, as well as how gatekeepers read the aspirations and cultural capital of the adolescents. Where adolescent goals are aligned with the cultural capital of educational gatekeepers, they receive additional support in their transition planning.

**Transition Planning at Crossings**

As a collective, the staff at Crossings has a holistic approach to transition and reentry planning for each of their adolescent clients that includes continued rehabilitation strategies, emotional support management, and plans for academics and employment goals. As a facility that largely serves a population with a history of substance abuse, rehabilitation is at the center of both treatment and transition planning. From the time adolescents arrive at Crossings, they become a part of a “treatment team” that includes a family member, a member of the educational staff (usually Ms. Nathalie or Ken), and the adolescent’s on-site therapist. Additionally, the team receives reports on their behavior from the disciplinary staff. The treatment team meets on a monthly basis for each student, with the goal of both tracking their progress and preparing them for reentry to their community.

In addition to treatment team meetings, each adolescent is required to participate in a series of programs that serves as the foundation for their time at Crossings. The overarching structure of this programming includes behavioral and disciplinary systems, a comprehensive counseling program, and an educational program (see Chapter 2 for an overview of the program details). While these three programs are the central elements of the daily structure at Crossings, they also serve transitional purposes for the adolescents.
The Learning Center provided numerous programs that are central to transition planning including educational continuation, GED preparation for those students who did not have enough credits to return to school, and vocational training, yet, the teachers frequently conveyed feeling as though their work is not considered as valuable as the other departments at Crossings. One afternoon, a group of students were pulled from the classroom for basketball tryouts, and Ms. Nathalie conveyed her frustration. She let out a sigh before looking at me and explaining why she was about the disruptions to their work in the Learning Center:

Oh, yes, it’s fine to just pull the entire class from their academic work in order to play basketball. You know, it just blows my mind. Yes, sports are important, and I get it, but they couldn’t wait an hour for school to be finished. It just shows the kids that school is not important, when really this is one of the things they should be working on. Geez, I don’t want to rant. It’s just that, they’re constantly showing us that our work is less important.

Ms. Nathalie understands the importance of the work that is done in the Learning Center, but feels that other members of the staff, particularly the disciplinary staff (who are in charge of basketball), do not respect the work that is done in the Learning Center. This idea was reiterated by Mr. Dave, after students were pulled from the classroom to go to the counselor.

While Ms. Nathalie was upset by the lack of importance given to education, Mr. Dave explicitly understood the disruptions as being destructive to the adolescent’s rehabilitation:

Consistency is the one thing these kids need, but do they get it here? Think about it this way. These kids struggle with addiction. Anyone will tell you that addicts need structure and constant routine. But when something comes up here, their routines are destroyed. The counselors disrupt their routines. The staff disrupts their routines. All the adults think their issue is the most pressing, and don’t realize how much these kids need consistency.

Here Mr. Dave articulates the tensions that exist between many of the gatekeepers at Crossings, but he also shows the importance of social skills that adolescents need to develop,
which all of the teachers repeatedly displayed during my visits. They engaged in their teaching practice with the goal of preparing students for either returning to school or post-secondary education, but they were also aware of many of the limitations that existed at Crossings. While the educational staff was cognizant of some of the factors that made transition planning and teaching difficult, in this chapter, I seek to understand how their relationships with students impacts the work they seek to do, particularly regarding transition planning. Looking at moments in which adolescents are concerned with post-Crossings education and employment, I analyze moments when adults support adolescents in their goal seeking, or are dismissive of adolescent goals.

There are innumerable nuances to the differences that these adolescents experience as they prepare for their transition from Crossings to their home lives, but in this chapter, I attempt to show patterns among three broad groups. The first group is the largest group of adolescents at Crossings. They receive the transition planning that is required of all students. Their treatment team works with them to develop a plan for returning home and their community schools, but these adolescents do not receive the individualized support that other students are able to get from the teacher-sponsors, resulting in precarious transitions. The second group of students has some success in navigating relationships with Crossings sponsors, but face moments of setback in their relationships. As a result, they receive additional support in their transitioning, but it is punctuated with moments of precarity. While they experience these moments of precarity, there is more security than those who received minimal individual support. The third group of adolescents are those who are able to successfully navigate relationships with their teachers and counselors. With the support of the adults in the Crossings
community, these adolescents experience a confidence in their goals and plans as they prepare to leave.

**Precarious Transitions**

The goal of this project was to look at the moments in which adolescents make bids for their cultural capital to be acknowledged. Embedded in this project goal is the idea that the adolescents are making cultural bids and convey some investment in their educational process. For most the adolescents at Crossings, this was the case. For a small group of about three or four students, there was a deep-rooted disengagement with the educational setting.

Most of these students who were disengaged sat on the perimeters of classrooms, either playing games on a computer, or with their heads tucked into sweatshirts. I made attempts to interact with these students, but was rebuffed by claims that I was disturbing their rest. Two exceptions to these students were Isaiah and Daniel. As a result of my interactions with them, I am able to provide some analysis on how they approached both education and their transition from Crossings. In contrast to the students that follow them, Daniel and Isaiah’s transition planning was filled with precarity, as they had no plan beyond that which was organized for them.

Isaiah was a 16-year old with a small afro and dark brown skin. He was thin, and generally reserved. While many students who displayed moments of disengagement, were social with their peers, Isaiah rarely engaged with his peers, which Ms. Nathalie hypothesized was related to his Intellectual Disability. “Kids like him try to hide. He doesn’t want anyone to know how hard school is for him, so he just hides,” Ms. Nathalie explained one afternoon when I attempted to work with Isaiah on an assignment, and he responded by shaking his head and
leaning on the table. “The kids who don’t care about school still want to be social, but someone like Isaiah just tries to disappear. We can keep trying, but I don’t know how much progress we’ll make.

Throughout Isaiah’s time at Crossings, Ms. Nathalie provided him with a modified sponsorship, even when he did not engage. While other students made bids for her time, she gave individual attention to Isaiah in an attempt to make him comfortable with school. I first encountered Isaiah when Ms. Nathalie asked me to complete a skills assessment with him. Before introducing him, she paused and explained:

*He doesn’t talking much, so I don’t really know much about him. I’m still waiting for some of his files, but his reading levels are incredibly low. When I asked him to complete this assessment with me in the classroom, he just shook his head. I figure that you may be able to get him to talk, if you go somewhere more private.*

Isaiah and I went into a separate space, and he completed the assessment with me, shaking his head and mumbling responses as I read the statements on the assessment to him. He responded to whether he believed he had skills in a range of areas that included technology, kinesthetic tasks, mathematical skills, and literacy skills. While he responded that he had few mathematical or literacy skills, he responded that he had some experience with using computers. During his first few weeks, Isaiah came to imitate the patterns of other disengaged students. He sat in the far corners of the room, facing a computer. In comparison to many of the other students who did not have an Intellectual Disability diagnosis, Ms. Nathalie continued to try to engage him in school-related tasks.
“He doesn’t ever want to do anything, except sit at that computer and play those games. I let him, but I wish there was some way that I could find out what he needs. I want to help him, but I just don’t know what to do.”

In spite of Isaiah’s overt disengagement, Ms. Nathalie continued to attempt to find some means of engaging him in classroom practices. He continued to reject her bids for support, although he made one bid for his cultural capital to be read. After a session with his counselor, the staff at Crossings discovered that Isaiah enjoyed drawing. His counselor bought him a sketchbook, which he brought to class, and transitioned from the computer to making various drawings. One afternoon, he approached Ms. Nathalie with his sketchbook and quietly asked her if she would get him some drawing pens. Because of her investment in his engagement, she agreed, and purchased him pens that she brought several days later. Although she acknowledged this bid, Isaiah continued to stay on the outskirts of the classroom, occasionally sharing an abstract drawing with either Ms. Nathalie or myself.

Isaiah agreed to complete an interview with me about his goals, even after several months of disengaged behavior. He sat across from me with his eyes averted, and tried to answer some of the questions. When I asked him about his experiences with school, he looked up at me, then glanced down and said, “I don’t know.” This was his response to the first few questions, which I had modified to make more conversational. Finally, he looked at me:

Miss, I don’t understand why you’re asking me some of these questions. School is not my thing. I’m not really into school, so I don’t think I’m a good or bad student. I just want to draw and mind my own business. I just want to do my time and get outta here. I don’t know what I want to do when I get out of here. I don’t have no plan.
Isaiah’s thoughts around transition planning were unclear. Although he once responded that he wanted to own a strip club when he got older, that was the only moment in which he noted any future-oriented thinking. Unlike many students, Isaiah was able to yield the reward of attention from Ms. Nathalie, although he did not view it as a reward. In spite of having access to the resources, Isaiah did not engage with Ms. Nathalie’s bids to engage him. This resulted in unfocused transition planning, where he did not articulate any goals.

In contrast to Isaiah, Daniel’s thoughts around transition planning were filled with more anxiety. Seventeen-year old Daniel had light brown skin with deep red undertones. His dark hair was slightly long, but was straight as it laid against his head. Daniel was another student who initially displayed patterns of disengagement in the classroom setting. He fluctuated between sitting in corners with his head on a table, and talking with his friends. He began dating Grace approximately two months into his time at Crossings (see chapter 2 methodology for an overview of Grace, and later in this chapter for a more in-depth description), which changed how he approached the classroom. When Grace would ask for help with her African-American History assignments, Daniel would come and sit next to her, but she would not engage. “Not right now. I’m doing my work. You can try to sit, if you’re going to do some work, but if not, I’m going to tell Tim that you’re not supposed to be in here.”

“You would do me like that,” he looked at her with a crooked smile.

After Grace’s threat, he sat at the table, struggling to write his responses to a science assignment. Grace and Felix began working on their history together, giving me a chance to help Daniel with his assignment. Over time, he came to reveal that he had dyslexia, making it hard for him to read and write. On several of his assignments, he inverted his b and d. In spite of this
challenge. He continued to come to Ms. Nathalie’s room to work on his assignments, but rarely engaged with his teachers, whom he viewed with relative disdain:

_ I don’t want to do work for some of these assholes. Man, they is assholes sometimes. It’s hard when you can’t read easy, but they don’t always help, so I only do they work when I feel like it. I’ll do Miss Nathalie’s work. She cool, but everybody want her help, so I don’t know how to get help from her sometime._

Unlike Isaiah, Daniel selectively engaged with some of his teachers. He wanted to build a relationship with Ms. Nathalie, who was known for being helpful, but did not know how to navigate the social space and relationship building.

As he and Grace got closer to their release date, Daniel began to articulate anxiety about leaving:

_ Man, I thought I would just finish my time, but I fucked up. Oh, excuse my language. It’s just that I didn’t think about what I would do when I was done. I see, like Grace, she knows what she wants to do. She been thinking about since she got here, but I’m getting ready to leave and I just don’t know what I want to do. I think I want to go back to school, but I don’t know if the teachers will help me and stuff. This is just a lot to think about._

In an interview setting, he proved to be reflexive about his lack of engagement, but did not have the knowledge of either cultural navigation or social intelligence to attempt to make bids with his teachers. This resulted in a transition period that was fraught with anxiety.

**Analysis**

Daniel and Isaiah are examples of two adolescents who were both academically disengaged and had school-based learning disability, making their transition planning both vital and difficult. Their lack of concerted thought about schooling and education resulted in a
transition period that lacked clarity. Daniel had not made any active cultural bids for help-seeking, resulting in a transition in which he had little clarity, and high concern.

**Liminal Transitions**

Although there were four or five students at any given point who refused to engage during the time in the Learning Center, most of them engaged in class work and assignment, particularly when there was a topic of interest to them. Those who engaged typically still had a complex relationships with their teachers and the educational process. They completed their work for credits, but had no sense of purpose in their education.

One student who displayed a particularly complex relationship with schooling was Clare, who was mentioned in Chapter Four (literacy). Clare was enrolled as a senior during her time at Crossings, but prior to her time there, she had been enrolled in a high school program that accelerated her credit accumulation. She described herself as an “average student, not too good, not too bad,” but noted that as her drug use increased, she left home and turned to prostitution to financially support herself. Although she had been enrolled in an accelerated high school, school became less of a priority with increased drug use. This wavering relationship with school, seeing it as important, but turning from it, continued during her time at Crossings.

Although Clare was typically in a classroom completing her work during school hours, one afternoon when I arrived in the Learning Center, she had taken a seat on the sofa that was at the end of the hallway, removing herself from her classes. When I attempted to speak to her, she slouched down further, putting her feet on the table. I further asked if there was anything she needed, to which she responded with a sigh before quietly explaining her frustration:
Clare: *I just don’t feel like doing this bullshit today. They act like getting my credits is a big deal, but then they don’t want to help when I ask for fucking help. This is not that important, and today is just not the day for me to deal with this. I don’t feel good, so I’m not doing it.*

Clare had been working on her senior project (as described in chapter 3), and wanted help from Mr. Dave to ensure that she completed the typing of her research project. When he refused to let her use a computer to complete her paper, she left his classroom, isolating herself from the community. This questioning of the value in school, stood in contrast to the daily work that Clare completed and thoughts she shared two weeks after this encounter. Clare described herself as feeling smartest when she stayed at Crossings to finish her high school education: “I made the decision to stay here and get my diploma. I think that was one of the smartest decisions I’ve ever made in my life. I focused on my main priorities...if I had left I would have still been out there using drugs, being not compliant with school."

She viewed finishing high school as integral to her return home, but her vacillation ultimately revealed a complex understanding of the value in education as part of her transition planning. Although teachers supported her in completing school, she was not supported in developing a concrete plan for how she could continue her education or seek employment after being released from Crossings. The week after she had completed her senior project, two weeks before the Crossings graduation, students shared with me that Clare had “run” from Crossings, in spite of the progress she had made in both her rehabilitation and education. Leaving Crossings virtually ensured that she would be sent to a more secure facility when she was caught. What should have been a confident transition became precarious as Clare cut ties with the support team she had developed at Crossings.
While Clare made the bold decision to leave Crossings, most of the students did not display such an extreme response in the face of challenges. Instead there was a subtle questioning of the purpose of school. For example, Stephan was a senior who showed little engagement in the classroom. He had a small, thin frame with large expressive eyes, that were typically only animated when he walked from classroom to classroom, teasing his friends. During school hours, he completed his work, but in general he disengaged from the Learning Center.

One afternoon, when I walked from Mr. Dave’s class into Ms. Nathalie’s room, Stephan was alone, slouched in a chair in the far corner of the room. He did not respond when I entered, but nodded when I said hello to him. He was supposed to be completing independent work, but instead had on headphones and was listening to music. When I asked why he wasn’t working, he explained, “Today is my off day. They have us do work every day, so sometimes you need an off day.”

While this behavior (or comments about needing a break from school) was fairly typical at Crossings, students often moved from the extreme of not doing work, to being excited by specific projects that engaged topics of interest to them. In contrast to the behaviors that I saw in the classroom, talking to Stephan showed the complexity of his relationship to educational systems. For his senior project, Stephan worked on a complex paper about the wage-gap for women. The afternoon he was scheduled to present his senior project to his teachers, he excitedly stood in front of me with his poster, asking if he could practice his presentation with me. He told a narrative of income inequality and unfairness, speaking with confidence as he...
occasionally glanced at his note cards. After responding to some general questions in response to his project, he sat to explain why this project was important to him.

> When I was in school, this group of students came in from the University. They would always talk to us about how women were paid less than men, and that just didn’t make sense to me or whatever. It’s not fair, or whatever. I think about my mom, and know that she does anything as good as a man, but there’s a chance that’s she’s not getting the money she is supposed to get or whatever.

In contrast to his excitement about the senior project and graduating, Stephan had not created a concrete plan for what he would do once he graduated and left Crossings. “I hope I’ll eventually go to college, but I don’t really know what I want to do. I’ll figure it out,” he explained approximately one month before he was scheduled to leave. This process of “figuring it out,” resulted in a decreased transition planning for many of the adolescents who did not advocate for themselves. Many students did their work to get credits, but did not make a concrete plan for how they would continue or use their education once they returned home.

**Confident Transitions**

Although many of the adolescents had educational goals that did not extend beyond their time at Crossings, there were small clusters of adolescents, that included students such as Felix. These were the students who were initially perceived as disengaged by their teachers but ultimately showed a commitment to their schooling during their time at Crossings. This commitment to education and relationships with their teacher resulted in additional support from teachers and counselors as they prepared to transition.

The adolescents at Crossings had a range of academic and career interests they articulated during data collection, but Felix was a particularly unique case of a student who went from having few academic aspirations early in his time at Crossings, to developing a thorough
transition plan by the time he was released from the facility. Both Felix and Nicolas are examples of adolescents who were able to have their cultural capital bids acknowledged, as well as receiving the support of gatekeepers as they prepared for their transitions.

At 18-years old, Felix was one of the older students at Crossings. Although he stood approximately five feet, six inches, he had a stocky build and carried himself with a confidence that he would referred to as his swagger. He kept his dark hair trimmed short, but wore a full beard. Ethnically, Felix self-identified as Puerto Rican. When he first arrived at Crossings, he had little interest in school:

Miss, when I first got here, the only thing I knew was that I wanted to get out of here. I was ready to get back to the streets, because that’s what I know. I wasn’t thinking about school, because I wanted to get back to my paper [money] and my life, ya feel me. You see, some people are for school, and then there are people like me, who aren’t thinking about school beyond what my family was telling me I needed to do.

In spite of his articulation about his lack of engagement with school, he was able to build relationships with his teachers. From the first time that I met Felix, it was evident that he had the ability to charm multiple gatekeepers at Crossings. He was one of the few student that would move from room to room without consent, talking with the disciplinary staff as he went into a room that is not his classroom. “I have to ask Mr. Ken a question about this project,” he explained when one of the staff members attempted to stop him from leaving his classroom.

His strongest relationship was with Ms. Nathalie, with whom he would sit and discuss the 2015 presidential primary campaigns. She brought him newspaper articles about the candidates, and he would come over them, asking staff members their thoughts on Clinton, Trump, and Cruz. When discussing the presidential campaign, he became vibrant, ready to
engage or debate anyone who disagreed with his opinions on candidates and issues. This passion for the presidential campaign became the topic of his senior project.

He continued to state that he had no interest in school or academics, as he began mapping and outlining the central issues to the campaign, and how each of the candidates responded to the key issues. The paper for his senior project was an in-depth analysis of both the history of presidential elections and the key issues for the 2016 elections. After completing the project, Ms. Nathalie sat with him, having read his senior project and engagement as a bid for support. “Felix, you see how much passion you had for that project. I think you can turn that into something really special. You just have to be willing to give it your all.”

“What are you talking about, Miss?” he raised an eyebrow.

“I’m talking about you. You can finish school. You can finish your high school diploma while you’re here. I really think you could go to college, but we can start with finishing high school.”

“Slow your roll. Let’s talk about this a little at a time. You want me to finish high school here? What do I need to do?”

She opened her folder and pulled out his transcript. The two of them discussing what credits he needed to complete. After Ms. Nathalie’s offering of sponsorship, Felix became invested in the goal of finishing his coursework. He stayed late to work on African-American History, and completed his work for all of his other classes.

As Felix came close to completing his coursework for his high school diploma, one morning he approached Ms. Nathalie about applying for community college. She had been
sitting alone in her classroom, when he sat at the table near her desk, “Miss, you told me you thought that I might be able to go to college, and I been thinking about it, and I’m wondering if we can talk about it. I think I want to look into some business programs.”

Like his other bids, this one was recognized as well. She put away her paperwork, and began talking with Felix about potential paths for college. There were no other students in the room, making it in an optimal time for Felix to receive individual attention. Over the next several days, Ms. Nathalie went to Felix’s counselor to get an application to a local community college, and began helping Felix complete the application. She worked with Felix and his counselor to not only complete the application, but also apply to programs for students of color and students with disabilities. Additionally, she worked with the counselor to make sure that Felix was prepared for the examination for remedial testing, explaining that remedial courses did not mean that he could not complete college.

When I engaged with Felix about why he felt he got support, he had an awareness of his ability to engage with many types of people:

So, a lot of these kids, they think they’re the shit because they know how to do a little hustle on the streets. But that’s not that real shit. You have to know how to talk to lots of different types of people, and that’s what the streets taught me. See, when I first made a little money, I wasn’t just trying to do the same thing. I wanted to make more money. I wanted to play the part. So, I started looking for people who could help me. You gotta know how to get them invested in you.

The same thing that I was doing on the streets, I do in here. I wasn’t thinking about college, but I was thinking about how I talked to people. And when I talked to them right, they just drawn to me. And once I got them, it’s done. Then, I don’t know. I get them, and then people like Miss Nathalie be seeing the best in me, and believing in me.
Felix did not use a language of cultural capital bids and field, but he had an astute understanding of his ability to engage with people, and that this ability to interface with multiple people could yield results for him. Prior to his time at Crossings, he had been selling drugs and working with a host of characters. During that period, he came to understand that he had to develop strong communication skills that spanned various types of people, which he clearly articulates above. He understood that different gatekeepers require different types of engagement, and co-constructs a reality in which people come to accept his bids as legitimate.

In addition to Felix’s college planning, there were students such as 16-year old Grace, who did not have the charisma of Felix, but still understood the importance of education in their transition planning. Grace’s eyes droop at the outer corners and she has a mild tremor in her hand that is highly visible when she holds writing utensils. Additionally, she has a minor delay in her responses in conversations, that teachers initially read as being disengaged.

When I first met Grace, Ms. Nathalie was concerned about her performance in school and approached me about tutoring her. “She just doesn’t seem like she’s all there. There’s a delay when you talk to her…I don’t know how to describe it, but we need to watch her. I just don’t think she’s going to focus on the work, so she may need some help.”

In spite of Ms. Nathalie’s initial perceptions of Grace, she showed full engagement in not only completing her school work, but making sure that she understood material, even if it meant repeatedly reading material. Grace was also one of the students who was adamant about developing a concrete plan for her transition home.
One afternoon, Grace’s absence had been notable, but she entered the Learning Center around 2pm, with a big smile on her face. She and Clare immediately began excitedly talking, before Grace came to sit with me.

Rita: Why are you so excited this afternoon?

Grace: My counselor just took me to the school that I’m going to when I leave here.

Rita: What makes this school exciting for you?

Grace: I feel like it’ll be good for me. It’s for kids like me, in recovery. And it’s really small. There are like 30 students, so it’ll help me to stay clean. I’ll have the help I need for school, but I’ll also be able to really stay clean, so I can get it together and really do something with myself.

Rita: How’d you find out about this school?

Grace: Well, my counselor told me about it, so I told her I wanted to apply. I kept telling her that I wanted to apply, and we did. And today we went to visit. I just think it’s going to be good for me.

Like Clare, prior to her time at Crossings, Grace had a tense relationship with her family because of her opiate addiction. She had lived in multiple homes with various family members, attending several schools throughout the city, resulting in weak relationships with school. In spite of her prior experiences with school, Grace advocated for herself with both her teachers and counselors to get the help she needed in her education. She understood that her education was tied to her sobriety and future goals, so she developed a concrete plan to support her in her
transitions. As a result of setting clear goals related to both sobriety and education, Grace was able to get her counselor to acknowledge her bid, along with her teachers.

Grace and Felix show that interest in education pathways could capture the attention of adults at Crossings in a way that garnered them additional support in their transitions. Complementing their interest in continuing their education and articulation of a clear desire for sobriety, Grace and Felix were also loquacious figures who engaged with their teachers. In contrast to the outgoing personalities of Grace and Felix was the soft-spoken personality of Samuel. Samuel was an unassuming figure with his quiet demeanor. He stood a little over six-feet tall, was slightly overweight, and had a slow lilt when he walked. Samuel was a 19-year old student who had completed high school before arriving at Crossings, and usually spent his days quietly at either a computer or writing in a notebook. Because he had already completed high school, the teachers rarely actively engaged with him. The quiet that surrounded Samuel initially rendered him slightly invisible to me in contrast to those students who either garnered much attention from teachers and the disciplinary staff or were in repeated need of teacher assistance.

Although we always spoke to each other, one afternoon he was sitting at the table where I usually talked with the high school students. Isaiah and Matthew were also sitting at the table, and the three of us exchanged a series of pleasantries while we waited for Ms. Nathalie to give work to Matthew and Isaiah. As we sat, Isaiah leaned back in his chair and looked at Samuel.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{16}}\text{At his request, I refrain from indicating why Samuel was sentenced to Crossings.} \]
“You know man, I think you mad cool. I don’t even care that you gay.”

Lynn looked up from her paperwork and raised an eyebrow at Isaiah. “Don’t say that,” she warned him.

“What. I didn’t say anything. I don’t care that he’s gay.”

“Stop calling him gay.”

“Why?” Samuel interjected. “I’m not ashamed of being gay.”

“Oh! Really? I didn’t know that.”

I came to understand that Samuel’s openness around his sexuality and sexual identity became a point over which he connected with his counselor and teachers. He was the only openly gay male student I encountered during my time at Crossings, and in an environment where students were frequently homophobic. Samuel’s quiet confidence afforded him a respect amongst both his peers and educators. While discussion of his sexuality was not a cultural bid, these discussions allowed him to foster relationships, which provided a foundation that contributed to his cultural bids being acknowledged. He articulated an understanding of building these relationships. During one of my site visits, Samuel came into the classroom and sat beside me with a novel by E. Lynn Harris. After saying hello, he sat opened his book, but kept glancing at me. “What are you reading?” I asked him.

Samuel: Oh, you wouldn’t be interested in this.

Rita: Why not?

Samuel: It’s just a book about things that wouldn’t interest you.
Rita: Try me.

Samuel: It’s a book about gay men (he whispered).

Rita: Okay, that’s interesting to me. Where’d you get the book?

Samuel: My new counselor. I think they assigned me to him because he’s like me. He gave me this book, and we can talk about things.

Rita: I’ve heard about this new counselor. What do you think of him?

Samuel: I know not everyone is comfortable with him, but I like him. It’s good to be comfortable, and he’s really helping me think about what life is going to be like when I leave here.

Through his actions, Samuel showed that he understood that his personal and social skills were a means of getting support in areas where he needed support. All of his interactions with teachers and other gatekeepers occurred in private, quiet settings. He stood in contrast to many of the other students at Crossings who were able to develop relationships with the teachers. Where students such as Felix, Jaden, and Samuel relied on gaining attention in an outward way, Samuel quietly navigated relationships at Crossings, activating cultural capital with both the gatekeepers and his peers. As he got close to his release date, Samuel worked with Ms. Nathalie and Mark on a detailed transition plan.

He pulled out his paperwork and spread it on the table in front of us. “It looks like you have this all planned.”
“I do. Mark helped me get into this house,” he pointed to a paper with the address of his group home. “I’ll have some place to stay while I’m in training. And I’ll be in training for three days a week, but I have to have a job to stay in this house, but the great thing is that this house helps you find a job. That’s one of the programs they have, so I’ll be making money, and I’ll be doing my carpentry training.”

“This is amazing. I’m so happy for you. How did you do all this? I never saw you working on these applications.”

“You have to know the right people,” he quietly laughed. “Everyone is so big here, but you can do things in a more quiet way. Sometimes the teachers want a break, and that’s when they’ll help you. I had some goals, and I know how to talk to people.”

There were many other adolescents who were quiet, but these were usually cases such as Isaiah and Brandon, where they were trying to blend in to avoid being the subject of attention in an academic setting. Samuel used a quiet resolve to develop relationships with the educators at Crossings, building connections through a more subtle approach to his relationship with both educators and his peers. This calculated approach resulted in Samuel making successful bids for support in the many goals he set for himself. Like Felix, his bids were accepted as legitimate, because he understood unspoken rules about how to interact with gatekeepers.

**Discussion**

Observational data provides insights into understanding the importance of cultural capital as a central component of planning in the transition of adolescents at Crossings. While the literature on reentry to communities from the juvenile justice system repeatedly shows the
importance of both education and employment in successful transitions (particularly regarding reducing the chances of recidivism), the literature provides little insight into how these adolescents receive support in planning for their reentry.

Transition planning is where cultural capital yields results for many of the young people at Crossings. In order to successfully prepare for their transitions, adolescents must not only display cultural capital that is accepted by the educators, but they must recognize that their capital has been read in order to build their network.

**Support**

All of the students at Crossings engaged in a multiple-step process of planning for their reentry, that included developing academic and career goals, creating and a plan for staying substance-free as they returned to their families and communities, and restorative justice programming. In spite of this emphasis on planning that covers many of the issues that academics cover in the transitional literature, a number of the adolescents at Crossings do not feel prepared for their reentry as they reach the final days of their time at the facility. Those who articulate the most confidence in their reentry plans are those adolescents who were motivated and had the social skills and understanding navigate relationships to receive additional support from their teachers and therapists.

Adolescents who were most successful at yielding the result of individualized support from their teachers were those who understood that Crossings was a social space with a number of unspoken rules of engagement. Students such as Felix, Nicky, and Grace had moments in which they broke the rules of engagement with outbursts of anger or moments of disengagement, but overall, they had a sense of timing and understanding of the rules that
allowed them to develop relationships with their teachers, disciplinary staff, and counselors that ultimately resulted in them receiving individualized support as they prepared for their transition to their families and communities.
Chapter 7: Intentions Lost in Translation

Studies of social reproduction have made clear that class-based cultural resources can be influential in student success in educational settings. One such theory that illuminates the importance of these resources is grounded in Bourdieu’s conceptualization of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). As the notion of cultural capital made its way from France to an American context, it has taken on many definitions, largely centered around high-status preferences and behaviors that are legitimized and reify social stratification. Lareau and Weininger (2003) provide a particularly expansive understanding of cultural capital that is useful for understanding how cultural capital can be understood outside of a high-status context. They argue that rather than just understanding cultural capital in terms of its high status or dominance, cultural capital are those practices which give access to scarce resources. This conceptualization illuminates the importance of understanding the interactional nature of cultural capital.

This project also highlights the challenge individuals face when navigating multiple gatekeepers who value competing forms of cultural capital, namely dominant and non-dominant. Carter (2003) conceives of non-dominant cultural capital as those practices and preferences that are used by “lower status individuals” as they attempt to acquire status within their lower status community. These conceptions of non-dominant cultural capital are generally studied in contrast to dominant cultural capital, rather than alongside dominant cultural capital. The notion of non-dominant cultural capital has invaluable in our understanding of how low-income and students in the racial minority enact multiple forms of cultural capital, but have not

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17 For an in-depth review of how cultural capital has been conceptualized in Sociology of Education, see Lareau and Weininger, 2003.
acknowledged the difficulty that individuals face when navigating gatekeepers with competing standards.

Conceptualizations of dominant capital have been particularly useful in illuminating how certain groups of people attain and maintain access to resources and status, while other groups retain their lower-status social positioning. Notably, studies of dominant cultural capital presume that possession of cultural knowledge automatically leads to successful deployment of cultural capital (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Lareau, 2003; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). In this dissertation I seek to problematize the presumption that possession yields successful deployment. I suggest that individuals make cultural capital “bids” which are then either recognized as dominant or ignored (rejection) by teacher gatekeepers, who provide access to resources. Although previous studies of cultural capital have been valuable in illuminating types of cultural capital and how cultural capital helps individuals successfully navigate educational institutions (Farkas et al., 1990; Jack, 2016; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Sullivan, 2001), they have not sufficiently unpacked the interactional moments when individuals attempt to have their cultural capital acknowledged. As a result, scholars have presumed that displays of highly-valued cultural knowledge automatically lead to profits. As I have shown in this dissertation, we need to see the process of cultural reading as contingent. These moments of cultural capital bids are further complicated by the presence of multiple gatekeepers, all of whom place an emphasis on different forms of cultural capital (dominant and non-dominant). It is important for scholars to recognize these moments of recognition and rejection. Doing so contributes to the cultural capital literature by illuminating the interactional influence when actors attempt to have their cultural capital recognized on potential profits such as students gaining access to teachers’ attention, support, and expertise.
In this final chapter, my comments are organized around four questions:

1. What forms of cultural capital do adjudicated youth bring to educational programming in a juvenile detention facility?
2. How do marginalized youth enact these skills and forms of knowledge in academic settings?
3. How do educators read the behaviors of these students and interact with them to understand displays of cultural capital?
4. What lessons can be learned from teacher interactions with students at Crossings with regards to meeting the educational needs of “at-risk” or marginalized students more broadly?

At the onset of this dissertation, I outlined the above questions which gave shape to this project’s discussion of cultural capital in a juvenile detention facility. With the help of ethnographic methods, these questions helped provide me with insight as to how I could better understand the behaviors and practices of the adolescents at Crossings. In the data chapters I attempted to unpack these questions by looking at how adolescents deploy literacy practices and non-cognitive skills, and how teachers respond to these displays. Here, I provide reflections on the questions in an attempt to bring clarity to this project. I close with a brief reflection on the relationships between students and teachers.

**What forms of cultural capital do adjudicated youth bring to educational programming in a juvenile detention facility?**

While this is the most direct of the research questions, an adequate answer requires looking at both the broad conceptualization of cultural capital and specific forms of cultural capital. Situated in a larger discussion of larger cultural capital, the data from this project shows that the adolescents display both dominant and non-dominant capital. Once again, in the context of this project, I use Lareau and Weininger’s conception of dominant cultural capital as a starting place for defining dominant cultural capital. Dominant cultural capital are those
behaviors, practices and preferences that provide users with access to scarce resources or benefits (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). In Crossings, the scarce resources that adolescents seek to attain are individual attention from gatekeepers and guidance in managing institutional tasks such as transition planning.

Carter provides a useful framework for understanding non-dominant cultural capital. Non-dominant cultural capital are those behaviors, practices, and preferences of “lower status groups” that allows individuals to navigate the social world and acquire status in their “lower status” communities (Carter, 2003). While displays of dominant and non-dominant cultural capital are typically not framed in the same arguments, in the case of the adolescents at Crossings, adolescents were constantly moving between non-dominant displays with their peers and the disciplinary staff, and dominant cultural bids with their teachers and counselors. As such, while I employ these definitions as the basic framework for understanding capital, my goal is to show how adolescents make bids to have their cultural capital recognized as dominant with teachers, while also deploying non-dominant capital with those gatekeepers who are also part of their classroom environments. Previous cultural capital scholarship has recognized gatekeepers of dominant cultural capital (Blanchard and Muller, 2015; Calarco, 2014, Gaddis, 2013), but as I show, there are multiple types of gatekeepers, and students have multiple cultural resources from which they must select. Students must decide which cultural resources to activate in a given situation.

For this dissertation project, dominant cultural capital manifests itself in both literacy practices and non-cognitive skills. Within the realm of literacy practices, these bids for the recognition of cultural capital were most successful in senior projects. While students were
focused on topics that interested them, teachers legitimized these topics because they were embedded in a traditional academic skillset. Students displayed skills in academic research, writing, and presentation, all of which were legitimized by the teachers who mentored them in their projects.

Regarding displays of non-cognitive skills (see Chapter 5), there was more complexity to the recognition of capital, but adolescents displayed a strong understanding of both perseverance and self-advocacy. When non-cognitive skills are put into practice in schools, teachers are encouraged to use tools to measure and assess student employment of these skills (West et al., 2015; Tough 2012). Non-cognitive skill development was not an explicit teaching focus at Crossings, yet data from this project shows that adolescents displayed a number of non-cognitive skills in both academic and social tasks, including perseverance and self-advocacy. Deploying self-advocacy involves an understanding of academic standards, persistence, as well as the ability to articulate needs to gatekeepers. Although these skills were easy to recognize as an outsider, recognition by gatekeepers was more complex. In short, students sought to use their cultural knowledge (in the form of non-cognitive skills) to gain institutional advantages, but their efforts were not recognized as legitimate by teachers and other gatekeepers. For example, see the moment when Terra (Chapter 4) attempts to advocate for support in developing her basic math skills. She articulates why she needs to develop these skills, and why her teacher should support her in developing these skills, yet her self-advocacy bid is rejected because the basic math skills are determined to be too low-status for a high school math classroom. The teacher does not acknowledge either her self-awareness or her argument that basic math skills are important to understanding the higher-level math. As a result, her advocacy does not realize
a profit. Studies of cultural capital need to be more attuned to these contingent moments in which student help-seeking is rejected than they have been in the past.

In the case of literacy practices, cultural capital bids that are rejected include basic literacy skill development and literacy practices grounded in technology. Students provided evidence that the basic literacy skills they sought to develop were important to navigating their everyday lives. Yet, teachers felt these practices were low-skilled and did not recognize them as capital in their classroom settings, even in instances where there was no clear curriculum. Similarly, there was value in online credit recovery programs to academically-oriented students, but cultural capital bids by students around these systems were also rejected in many instances. In a school where adolescents came from a range of schools and had a range of skill levels, online programs were a tool for students to continue to earn credits for their academic pathway. In spite of the value articulated by both students and teachers, as I have shown, these technologically-based practices were often viewed as disruptive to traditional classroom activities. In short, students made energetic and enthusiastic attempts to gain additional math and literacy skills, yet their pleas were rebuffed by educators as either low-skill or disruptive to the classroom culture. The skills they sought to develop were not valued by educators, thus adolescents were unable to obtain the support required to meet these standards. This finding suggests that scholars in education, culture, and society need to be more focused on how interactions influence the deployment of capital, rather than seeing cultural capital as inherent in the person. Recognition and acknowledgement of cultural capital is situationally based.
**How do marginalized youth enact these skills and forms of knowledge in academic settings?**

The first research question tasked me with observing and recognizing adolescent behaviors that could be classified as cultural capital. In this second question, I had to develop a deeper understanding of how adolescents used these behaviors in their interactions. From a group of children who had largely been shaped by drug use and juvenile delinquency, some students were able to make successful cultural capital bids, while others were not as successful. In the field, this question became a question of what distinguishes successful bids from non-successful bids.

**Successful Bids**

All of the young people at Crossings had moments in which they made unsuccessful bids for having their capital recognized, yet there were a number of students (including Nicolas (see Chapter 3 on literacy), the work study students (see Chapter 4 on non-cognitive skills), Felix, and Samuel (see Chapter 5 on transition planning)) who were able to make multiple successful bids. In attempting to understand how these students made successful bids, I had to find the success cases and look at similarities in their patterns. Those who made successful bids were a diverse group in many ways. They varied in age, race, and family structures. Some were quiet, while others were loquacious. Looking at the moments when they make cultural bids, as well as their discussions about navigating schools and other institutions, those who made successful bids understood that the recognition of cultural capital required interactions and social intelligence. Students who repeatedly made successful bids were cognizant that they were making bids and recognized that they needed gatekeepers to acknowledge their bids in order for them to be successful. In their successful bids, these students actively adapted the delivery of their bids to
consider timing and the personality of the gatekeeper. This was most strongly articulated by Felix (see Chapter 5) who prefaced any cultural capital bid with a moment of social interactions with his teachers. He would sit in a seat, leaning back and ask a teacher how their day was going, before outlining his requests. Students who successfully made cultural capital bids understood that the interactional nature of their education, adhering to unspoken rules of timing, framing, and social intelligence.

**Barriers to Successful Bids**

In contrast to those students who have patterns of successful bids are those whose cultural capital bids go unrecognized. Those students who were not able to make successful bids fell into two broad categories: those who did not make bids at all, and those who did not adhere to the rules of engagement that gatekeepers had established. These students made cultural capital bids, but did so in ways that gatekeepers perceived to be disruptive. These disruptions could be the result of ill-timed bids or content that was misaligned with their teacher’s academic goals, but the teachers chose to reject the bids rather than postpone them to other times in the classroom. In these moments, according to educators, students were not sufficiently attuned to the educator’s priorities, yet it was an unstated expectation that it was the student’s responsibility to raise these bids in other moments that would be more appropriate to educators. Hence, scholars need to look more at the timing of the activation of cultural capital, and the degree to which it aligns with educators’ goals. This construct of timing in cultural capital bids has implications for future work, including in college settings when students make requests for extra time on assignments or attempt to have their grades modified. While there have been numerous studies of bids for activating cultural capital through help-seeking (including Calarco, 2011; Jack, 2016; Streib, 2011), these studies have not been sufficiently
attuned to the role that contingent factors such as timing and alignment of goals play in the acceptance of cultural capital bids.

**How do educators read the behaviors of these students and interact with them to understand displays of cultural capital?**

Although adolescents at Crossings regularly made bids for the acknowledgment and recognition of their capital, they were only one half of the Interactional equation. This third question recognizes the role that gatekeepers play in the recognition of cultural capital. While Nathalie could be viewed as an outlier who sought to see the strengths and understand the cultural repertoires of the students, all of the teachers at Crossings had moments in which they recognized cultural capital, and other moments in which they ignored or rejected student cultural bids. These moments of recognition and rejection are central to understanding how cultural capital operates in this learning environment.

There are many potential explanations for why teachers only recognize some bids. Based on the data presented in this project, recognition of this cultural capital is shaped by teachers’ prior conceptualizations of student personality, timing, and academic agenda. One of the recurring patterns in teacher misrecognition was preconceived notions of their students. As an example, when students are perceived as “class clowns,” or disruptive, they are less likely to have their cultural bids recognized.

If the cultural bid is not made an appropriate time, the cultural bid is rejected. The teacher may recognize the importance of the cultural bid, but consider it to be inappropriate for classroom time. Related to inappropriate timing, is academic agenda. Although the teachers at Crossings had few academic guidelines or curricula in place, many of their responses to student
cultural bids was shaped by their understandings of what was appropriate for the academic setting they were attempting to create. As an example of this we can turn to Jaden’s bid for assistance on his SAT vocabulary in Chapter 3. Although SAT vocabulary development is recognized as dominant cultural capital in the literature, Dave rejects Jaden’s bid to get help on his SAT preparations. Dave argues that he has already created a classroom environment that supports vocabulary development, so Jaden’s bid is read as disruptive rather than additive to the classroom community. As a result of his mistiming, Jaden’s bid is rejected.

This study acknowledges the role that timing, academic agenda, and perceptions of students play in whether cultural bids are recognized as dominant or rejected by gatekeepers. A more complete understanding of how teachers perceive the students requires looking at the intersection of race, class, gender, and disability at Crossings. The teachers at Crossings did not make comments that were overtly racist or ableist, but there were many moments in which their language was either racialized or tinged with bias towards those students with learning and intellectual disability. For example, there was a moment in which a class of students was being particularly disruptive. They were not following the teacher’s instructions as they turned to computers, speaking over him as he attempted to read a poem with them, and leaving his classroom without permission. The teacher finally walked to the hallway, where I was standing with some of the disciplinary staff and sighed with resignation. After I indicated that it appeared that he was having a rough day, he tilted his head to the left and assuredly stated, “I have to remember these are not students. These kids are thugs and criminals. There’s a reason they’re in here.” His use of the word “thugs” not only indicated that his students were misbehaving, but

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18 I refrain from indicating the classroom to protect the teacher’s identity.
is also an example of a racially-tinged term (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Ferguson, 2001). Although it is the case that the adolescents are in a juvenile detention facility, when they are in the Learning Center, they are students, even in the moments when they are misbehaving. This response to student misbehavior has racial undertones, influencing how the teacher perceives this group of students. While I witnessed a handful of moments in which teachers employed language that had these racial undertones, the patterns were difficult to discern, although this may be a result of the caution they employed when talking to a black woman with an interest in a stated interest in educational equity. It is undeniable that racialized dynamics permeated all aspects of the facility, but there was not a clear racialized pattern in how the cultural capital bids unfolded, although further research is needed on this important point.

Those adolescents who make successful cultural capital bids are more likely to receive support in their re-entry and transition planning. Making successful cultural capital bids creates foundations for relationships with teachers, as seen in the case of Felix's discussions of politics with Nathalie (Chapter 6), or Nicky's engagement with rigorous literature with Dave (Chapter 3). Teachers were more likely to share the scarce resource of their time and social knowledge with those students with whom they have foundational relationships. In short, those students who are able to make successful bids also tend to receive the benefit of additional teacher support in their transitional planning. To be sure, at times there were bumps in the recognition of cultural capital, but these did not prevent persistent students from, overall, making cultural capital bids and having them legitimated by teachers. Since prior work has not sufficiently recognized the moments when actors make cultural capital bids and gatekeepers either acknowledge and

\[19\] During my initial conversations about the project, I was open about my desire to understand how they understood student strengths, even as this concept evolved.
recognize or reject the bid, this finding is a step towards a better understanding of the interactional nature of cultural capital. This finding illuminates some of the factors that contribute to whether a gatekeeper acknowledges a cultural capital bid and provides access to resources.

**Deepening the Understanding of Cultural Capital Recognition & Yields**

The final question that I outlined at the onset of this project is **what lessons can be learned from teacher interactions with students at Crossings with regards to meeting the educational needs of “at-risk” or marginalized students more broadly?** Answering this questions requires reflecting on the implications of the findings from this study.

**Research Implications: Literacy**

When attempting to understand student literacy practices in Crossings, my initial goal was to focus on literacy that could be valued in traditional understandings of cultural capital, including engagement with high-status (or canonical) works of literature, and participation in well-developed writing practices. While there were some students who engaged in these “high-status” literacy practices, most of the students were interested in literacy practices they deemed to be of value to their lives (see Chapter 3). These practices included reading for a driver’s license examination and skills as basic as reading menus and street signs. Critical literacy literature continues to attempt to legitimize a wide-range of practices that students employ in their home and everyday lives (Kirkland, 2013; Mercado, 2005). Related to those doing work on everyday literacies, is the work of scholars such as Gutiérrez (2008) and Winn (2011) who argue for the creation of classroom literacy practices that acknowledge the sociocultural and historical contexts from which students are coming, centering the learner in conceptions of literacy.
Although this literature is doing the work of expanding how we conceive of literacy, it remains outside of the scope of dominant cultural values.

Understanding literacy as part of the interactional cultural repertoire offers the opportunity for researchers to bridge the gap between educator-valued (dominant) literacy practices and student-valued literacy practices. Some potential questions for future research include:

- What are the characteristics of classrooms where teachers build curriculum based on student interest and need?
- How do teachers legitimate the needs and interests of students in their mainstream classroom practices?

**Research Implications: Non-Cognitive Skills**

The extant literature on non-cognitive skills and factors, frames these behaviors and mindsets as essential skills that students need in order to be successful in educational settings (Duckworth and Gross, 2014; Petrides, Frederickson, and Furnham, 2002; Susana, Paunesku, and Dweck, 2016; West et al., 2016). According to many of these scholars, non-cognitive skills can be developed in students, including the cultivation of skills such as persistence and self-control (Cunha and Heckman, 2008; Dee and West, 2011). In my investigation of non-cognitive skills as a component of interactional cultural capital, I delve into moments (or extended periods of time in the case of persistence) in which students display some of these skills. Rather than finding abstract skills that help students, these behaviors are part of interactions that must be recognized by teachers. Teachers have the potential to derail or bolster the success of non-cognitive skills through their acknowledgment of these behaviors.
Understanding that non-cognitive factors are part of interactional processes, opens the door to investigating how non-cognitive skills look in practice rather than through assessments, that do not fully explore the challenges that students face when they are gritty or advocating for themselves, or attempting to develop a growth mindset. Some potential questions to consider regarding non-cognitive skills include:

- How do educators define non-cognitive skills, including perseverance, enthusiasm, motivation, and self-control?
- How do educators teach or develop non-cognitive skills in their students?

In order to fully understand how cultural capital operates, it is important that researchers continue to look at cultural bids and repertoires from an interactional perspective, particularly in classrooms and other spaces where cultural bids are a part of the organizational culture. An interactional perspective encourages us to move away from deficit understandings of young people, and focus on how they understand their strengths and skills (or cultural capital) and attempt to enact them as they navigate institutions.

**Research Implications: Perceptions**

In my discussion of teacher perceptions of students, I allude to the importance that racialized thinking plays in how teachers perceive the students at Crossings. While there were a few moments in which teachers were more explicitly racialized in their thinking, they rarely shared these insights in front of me. In spite of their relative quiet around topics of race, there is evidence that race, class, gender, and disability influence how they interact with their students. The racial element of these interactions must be further explored to better understand how cultural capital is put into action in the field.
Beyond the racialized nature of the juvenile justice system, there is evidence that Crossings is a racialized space. This can be seen in the segregated nature of employment in the space. Much of the administrative and teaching staff is comprised of white individuals. In contrast, the majority of the disciplinary staff is comprised of black individuals. The optics are almost immediately perceptible in a walk-through of the space. These optics are made even more apparent in the distinction in attire. Administrative and teaching staff wear business casual attire of their choosing, while the disciplinary staff wears a uniform that mirrors those of the adolescent clients, differing only in the color of their shirts. Underneath these optics are several tensions between the teaching and disciplinary staffs. They articulate different goals for the clients, enacting different methods to attain these goals, and have very different relationships with the students.

I did not see evidence of how race shaped how teachers responded to student bids. As I have noted, timing, alignment with student goals, and perceptions of adolescents were crucial in teacher’s acknowledgment of bids. There were not obvious ways in which race shaped the putting forth of bids and how gatekeepers responded to them. Still, given the highly segregated nature of the various staffs and different forms of capital students deployed with different gatekeepers, it is entirely possible that racialized dynamics drenched these processes in ways that I did not recognized here. Future work my further probe these issues of race by examining questions such as the following:

- How does racialized thinking influence how teachers select students for support or mentoring?
- How do factors such as race, gender, and disability influence how teachers understand their teaching identity?
Methodological Limitations

I chose to use ethnographic methods in order to better understand how cultural capital operates amongst those young people who are marginalized by numerous factors. Ethnographic methods allowed me to engage with this community through participant observation, which requires the researcher to invest in the community. For this project, my investment came not only through my talks with students, but also through tutoring, which gave me a chance to understand both the academic and social selves of these adolescents. Tutoring provided me with an opportunity to see their cultural capital in action as they navigated tasks. While being in the field gave me a deeper understanding of student behaviors, this could be deepened by engaging with adolescent and teacher participants in the co-construction of research. From the perspective adolescents, co-constructioning a research agenda would provide the opportunity to teach them strategies for making cultural bids as part of their learning process. Similarly, co-constructioning research with teachers and educators provides an opportunity to engage in discussions that potentially shape how they read the cultural bids of their students, while deepening the researcher’s understanding of how teachers recognize adolescent bids.

Policy Implications: Transition Planning

Recognition of cultural capital bids is critical for the adolescents in both their transition from Crossings and into adulthood. While Crossings has a transition team in place to support these adolescents as they re-enter their communities, looking at adolescents engage in transitional planning shows that those students who receive additional one-on-one support have more confident planning (. Those students who are able to make cultural bids and receive support from their teachers and counselors articulate clearer plans for their transition.
Young people with disabilities receive strength-based services to guide their transitions into young adulthood from the time they are 16-years of age. These transitions services are mandated by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides a number of other guidelines for the educational services of young people with disabilities. In contrast to IDEA, there is no legislation in place that regulate transition planning for adolescents in the juvenile justice system. Instead, the juvenile justice system is a de-centralized system with rules and guidelines that are shaped on the state and city level. In spite of the lack of legislation around transition planning, the literature shows that transitional planning is an essential component of a successful re-entry that reduces the risk of recidivism for adolescents who have been in the juvenile justice system.

The findings in Chapter 5 bolster the idea there is a need to implement policy regarding the transitional planning of young people in the juvenile justice system. While the educators at Crossings have a system in place that is supposed to help these young people, there is still great variation in how prepared adolescents are for their transition. Those adolescents who experience the most confidence in their transitions are those who are able to build strong relationships with gatekeepers. Those who do not have the additional support, have a lack of structure in how they think about their transitions. Broadly speaking, the findings at Crossings show that a detailed transition plan should be policy for young people leaving the juvenile justice system. The findings also indicate that there is the need for the development of strong interpersonal relationships as adolescents engage in their transitional planning.

The young people at Crossings are a small sample of the many young people who lives their lives at the margins of society. They are framed in terms of delinquency and deficits, yet
when we begin to look at them as culturally rich, there is the potential for transformation to occur. When we recognize marginalized youth as having vast cultural repertoires, they begin to see themselves differently. This is not to argue that adolescent such as Felix or Nicky won’t make mistakes in their transition to adulthood, but they see the potential in themselves to recover from mistakes and break the behavioral and social cycles that result in their tenure at places such as Crossings.

**A Final Note**

During my time at Crossings, I came to know several groups of adolescents who were attempting to navigate multiple institutions in order to successfully re-enter their communities. In the field, I saw adolescents who were inquisitive, committed to developing skills that had gone underdeveloped, and attempting to create a foundation for the path to young adulthood. Stepping away from the field, and engaging with an analysis of raw data, I came to see that the adolescents at Crossings defy simple classification. While I was able to see the ways in which they were attempting to make cultural bids, I also saw patterns that could be read as disruptive and non-compliant to the disciplinary structure that teachers and staff were attempting to enforce. While the adolescents have a rich cultural repertoire, they do not always effectively make bids that their teachers can recognize.

Similarly, the teachers who serve as their gatekeepers are not merely villainous figures, rejecting cultural bids. While there were patterns of misrecognition of adolescent cultural capital bids, there were also moments in which teachers recognized and supported adolescents in their cultural bids, as seen in numerous moments with the resource room teacher, Nathalie. This recognition (or misrecognition) of cultural capital was influenced by a number of factors
that could be seen in interactions between the gatekeeper-teachers and their students. By studying this these moments of recognition and misrecognition, as well as the factors that contribute to how these bids unfold, my hope is that researchers and educators might be more attuned to the cultural capital bids of marginalized young people who are generally perceived as having deficits in strengths and skills.
Appendices

Appendix A: Methodological Reflections

While my methodological section was a relatively straightforward outline of how I acquired access to the field site and collected data from participants, the process of collecting data and writing up my analysis was a highly emotionally driven process. As a researcher employing ethnographic methods, I was the instrument of data collection (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). As the instrument, I employed a reflexive positionality, acknowledging that while I attempted to employ a relatively objective stance in my documentation of the behavior of participants, my observations are also shaped by many elements of my identity including formerly being a teacher in a low-income urban public school. My position meant that while the various staffs at Crossings referred to the adolescents as clients, I saw them as the students of a group of multiple types of teachers.

I experienced a vibrant energy from the adolescents, in spite of being in a juvenile detention facility. As a result of this energy and general openness to interacting with me, I was able to learn an immense amount from these adolescents. I trekked to Crossings in rain, in snow, and on warm sunny days, the weather seemingly influencing the climate in the building. On rainy days, I noted patterns of frustration, the adolescents were more likely to argue with each other. Disciplinary manager, Tim, explained, “They feel pent up in here. They see the gray skies, and it’s like everything just dampens, and they don’t have patience with each other. That means we [the disciplinary staff] have to work hard to keep them calm, be patient with them.” In contrast, on sunny days, their energy was ebullient, and they frequently pleaded with the staff for the chance to have their physical education courses outside.
The energy they emitted then influenced my field notes and memo writing, as I attempted to convey the mood and interactions between individuals. In my role as both tutor and ethnographic researcher, I interacted with these adolescents on a regular basis. The frequency of our interactions and familiarity that developed over time meant that I was not spared from their mercurial temperaments. When they had good days, they were open to talking and sharing their thoughts. On bad days, their moods could range from sullen to outwards bursts of anger. Even, and maybe especially, on these bad days, I attempted to approach students with a neutrality that signaled that I still wanted to hear their thoughts, their stories. In these ethnographic interactions, I was subjected to reproach on some occasions, but this also opened the possibility of hearing honest thoughts, shaped by their emotions and logic.

**The Shapes of Interviewing**

Being open to their mercurial nature, meant observations and ethnographic interviews were a particularly engrossing component of the project. The adolescents were not short on thoughts and opinions about the world, and freely shared these thoughts when given the opportunity. Their words were frequently punctuated with humor, vulgarity, and creativity, as they tested the boundaries of what they could say in my presence. As a teacher I would have scolded them for their vulgarity, homophobia, and sexism, but as a researcher I merely documented it.

**The Challenge of Tools**

The adolescents’ openness became more of a challenge when I began collecting semi-structured interviews. The adolescents I had known for months, readily agreed to participate in the interviews, helping me to organize a schedule for interviews, before some of them returned home. Their willingness to agree to these semi-structured interviews proved exciting, but the
logistics were much more difficult when we started them. Meetings with counselors, changes in work study schedules, and court dates, meant that there had to be flexibility in when we actually completed interviews. Then, in the moments when we were able to interview, locking ourselves in an empty classroom, there were frequent interruptions from other students, knocking on the door in an attempt to talk to their friends, or “find a quiet place to get work done.”

Once we were able to actually start interviews, two interesting quirks arose: first, on a rather light-hearted note was my choice of recording instrument. During my graduate studies, I had come to rely on a small digital recorder when I completed interviews. As much as I hated the sound of my voice when transcribing, these small tools had become an extension of my research self. Most participants agreed to be recorded, and we found our quiet space, beginning to discuss interview guides.

But the moment I pulled out the recorder, several adolescents who had known me for months, came to question my positionality. Calvin immediately hesitated, “Wait, you said you’re a student. Why you got that? You trying to get me caught?” He laughed after saying this, but his tone had changed. I worked to explain to him that it was just a tool that graduate students and professors at universities used to make sure that we got his words correctly. He ultimately acquiesced, but I found myself concerned by his initial response.

I hoped this initial reaction was an anomaly, but when I completed my interview with Daniel, he also responded with surprise that I had that recording device. He explained, “That’s that jawn like the detectives have. I don’t know about that, Miss. How did you even get that?” As I did with Calvin, I explained why I was using the device, and he continued with the interview,
eventually becoming so comfortable that his interview was filled with vivid stories and explanations.

Ultimately, I was able to convince both Daniel and Calvin that I had ordered the recorder from Amazon, and that it was just something I used to make sure that I got their words correctly, I could see that it was becoming a problem. On the third interview in which the recorder was an object of discussion, one of the participants provided me with a simple solution to my policing problem. They did not have a problem with me recording their words, it was merely that these specific recorders reminded them of police interviews and environments in which they were being accused and found themselves in trouble.

When it came time to interview Felix, the same issue arose. Felix leaned back in his chair, then rocked forward, and picked up the recorder. He was more comfortable than Daniel and Calvin had been, examining it. As with the others, he explained: *This reminds me of when you get booked, and you go in and they’re trying to get you to talk.*

As someone had never been interviewed by the police, we had a gap in our knowledge. “Really, some of the others have said it. Does it make you uncomfortable?”

“I mean, I don’t know. It just reminds me of those assholes who are always trying to get you. You got a iPhone, right? Can’t you just use that?”

With Felix’s suggestion of using my cell phone to record interviews, this problem faded. Adolescents were familiar and comfortable with these devices. Although it served the same purpose as my small, silver recorders, cell phones were safe to them. In spite of a participant providing me with a solution, the issue of the recorder was a reminder that an ethnographer
must adapt to their environment. Even when I thought we were comfortable with each other, I had to be attuned to how I approached and interacted with them.

Is that okay: Seeking to give the right answer

An additional challenge with semi-structured interviews was the adolescent hesitation and desire to present the right answer to me. In working with this group of adolescents, I attempted to get them to understand that they were the experts of their experiences. While I could help them with class assignments, they were the experts when it came to their lives and experiences with school. It is my belief that they hold on abundance of knowledge about the popular culture that influences their lives, the world in which they live, and how they understand this world to operate.

During ethnographic interviews, this belief resulted in interactions in which the adolescents were open and gave signs that they were comfortable being themselves. This confidence changed during semi-structured interviews. During the interviews, I noticed they paused more frequently when answering questions. They looked at me for reassurance in their answers. Adolescents who sat on the perimeters of the classroom and had expressed disdain about school in our ethnographic interactions, described themselves as engaged students, who loved all the teachers they had encountered.

While I attempted to remain as neutral as possible in these interviews, I do not think the adolescents had the same confidence and openness they possessed during other interactions. I have still included data from these interviews, but I include them as one component of a set of data that paints a much more complex picture of these adolescents.
Participant as Social Critic

In their openness, I came to see that these adolescents had an astute social critique of the world around them. They were cognizant of the world around them, interested in politics, health epidemics. They articulated desires to get their lives on track so they could one day help young people like themselves.

In the face of their astute critiques, race was noticeably absent from their conversation. This surprised me, because as a teacher, and during subsequent classroom visits with high schoolers, I had frequently heard accusations of racism, and invocations of racialized thinking. At Crossings, the conversations were notably devoid of racial analysis. Where I had noticed clear racial lines between teaching staff and disciplinary staff, the adolescents remained quiet.

This absence of racial analysis was most notably absent during one of their Restorative Justice project. They had been tasked with writing a paper about a topic related to criminal and juvenile justice or making amends, and were given a list of seventeen topics, one which explicitly focused on racism and discrimination as a component of the juvenile justice system. While Daniel worked on this assignment, Nathalie helped him select a topic, asking him questions about each topic and his opinion on whether or not it would be a useful topic for his project. When they got to “racism and discrimination,” her eyes widened when he responded that he didn’t think it was useful. “But don’t you think the system is a little racist?”

“Not really,” he responded.

“But look at this place. There are more Black and Latino kids here. Why don’t you think there are more white kids here?”

“I don’t know, Miss. Maybe they don’t drugs like we do. They just stay out of trouble.”
Nathalie’s eyes opened wide, “Do you really think that?”

While Nathalie was cognizant of the racialization of the system where she worked, Daniel remained convinced that the only reason he had been sent to Crossings was because of his wrong doing. This stance was not as strong with other adolescents, but while they attributed their circumstances to economics and the abundance of drugs in their community, they rarely noted race.

Grace was one of the few students who was very openly spoke about race, as noted in Chapter 4. She was cognizant of, and asserted the notion that she had privilege as a student who was both white and a woman. Additionally, in contrast to Daniel, she had an awareness that there were many white adolescents participating in opiate use.

The overall lack of racial analysis proved to be startling to me. As someone who frequently turns to critical race literature and theories of racialization as part of my toolkit for understanding educational spaces, I had to find a middle ground for explaining what I was seeing. In instances that were clearly racialized (even if not overt racism), I attempt to note them, while paying respect to a group of adolescents who rarely spoke in racial terms. This gap between how I have come to theorize and understand the world and how the adolescents understand the world created tension in both my data analysis and writing. The goal of my analysis and writing was to remain true to what the adolescents said in our time together, while also unpacking how social structures and organizing factors such as race influence their experiences in both education and the juvenile justice system.
Writing Challenges

Once my data collection was completed, I faced the task of organizing and understanding the data, culminating in a dissertation write up that clearly conveyed what I had learned during my time with this group of adolescents and their teachers. When I first began my analysis, I was excited to develop codes for understanding what was unfolding at Crossings, and how it connected to larger theoretical concepts. My initial excitement quickly turned to anxiety as I realized the task that was ahead of me, and I faced a number of challenges in getting my thoughts on the page. While I faced a number of challenges in writing, three of the largest difficulties included developing a strong argument that could be clearly woven throughout the dissertation, explaining thoughts that feel clear in my head, and making sure that I fairly represented the participants.

The Difficulty of an Argument

A strong argument is a critical component of any thoughtful writing, especially in academia. It is the largest tool at one’s disposal to make sure that your reader understands what you are saying. As the central component of the writing, developing an argument became a puzzle to me. While I understood what I wanted to say, I struggled to weave it together with what academics had written before. I struggled to make sure that I made a strong statement.

I am still uncertain as to whether or not I clearly articulated the argument that exist in my head, but during the writing of this dissertation, I learned that developing an argument is a process that requires me to return to the page time and time again. I had to share my writing with others before I felt ready to do so. I had to listen to their feedback, and learn that while writing is an incredibly solitary act, the development of clarity of thought is a process that happens in community.
Expanding my Words

When I was sixteen years old, I attended a three-week long academic camp in which I took a number of classes. In one of the final classes of camp, I was told that I say a lot while using as few words as possible. After years of schooling and teaching, I have learned to use more words, but not to the extent that academic writing requires.

I have always (rather optimistically or naively) assumed that it is safe to allow people to fill in the blanks of my thoughts (rather written or spoken), not recognizing how dangerous this can be. In academic writing, clarity is important. To allow someone to fill in words or thoughts, is to allow them to skew the meaning of what I intend to say.

One does not undo decades of being concise in the course of a single dissertation, but in writing this document, I have learned that it is important to say a little more, bring a little more of myself to the page, rather than remaining hidden. Only in saying more do I get a little closer to the argument and a little closer to completing the task that is most important to me: being fair in how I present the young people who have shared themselves with me.

Justice

My final, and largest challenge in writing has been to do justice to the adolescents and teachers who shared their thoughts and time with me. As a person who has a strong commitment to equity and fairness, I wanted to make sure that I was fair in how I described both the young people and teachers who shared themselves with me.

There were moments when I was frozen by the thought of describing an adolescent on paper. I feared that I had not seen all that they were, and did not have enough words or field notes to accurately create an image of what these students or teachers were like. This project is
centered in the experiences of adolescent who struggle with addiction, and have committed illegal offenses while under the influence of drugs. These are young people and teachers who have displayed volatility in their interactions with each other. Many people who encounter the humans (rather than the words) may consider these young people to be villains, yet spending almost two years with them, I saw really complex and conflicted adolescents. Capturing the complexity of this group of people proved to be a challenge. I did not want them to be one-dimensional figures, especially considering they were simultaneously difficult and likeable.

Ultimately, I had to fight myself until words came to the page. These words represent people who exist in this world, and it was my responsibility to share my understanding of this group of people, after all they had shared with me. There was no magical formula for how I overcame these challenges. It largely entailed being vulnerable with myself and others, so that I had a chance to be vulnerable on the page. When I shared drafts with my peers and advisors, I tried to remain open to their critiques and suggestions with the hope that I could make my words a little more honest, a little clearer. Overall, I was quite challenged by the task of translating the data into an argument with a clear structure, it is my hope that in the preceding pages and words I have done some justice to the adolescents who shared their experiences with me.
Appendix B: Interview Guide

The semi-structured interviews were the final stage of data collection. During participant observation, I attempted to document patterns and displays centered in interactions between adolescents and gatekeepers, along with adolescent bids to have their capital recognized and acknowledged. While observations and ethnographic interviews were focused on specific moments, semi-structured interviews allowed me to get a broader sense of how adolescents understood themselves in terms of their schooling and strengths.

This particular interview guide was used for students with disabilities (This label was not included in the final guide), to understand how they understood disability labeling to be part of their educational experiences (those students who were not in special education settings were still asked questions about whether or not there had been attempts to diagnose them as having any disability.

Labeling the Pipeline

Interview Guide: Students with Disability

Introduction: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and complete this interview.

This project focuses on how students understand themselves in the school-to-prison pipeline (If they are not familiar with the term): The school-to-prison pipeline is the idea that schools have practices that make education difficult for certain students and can play a role in students’ dropping out or getting in trouble with the law), and how teachers and other people at schools can reframe the way they look “at-risk” students in the public school system.

I want to re-emphasize that any information you share in this interview will remain confidential. If at any time, which I don’t anticipate, you feel uncomfortable, you may skip the question. You may also end the interview at any time, if you do not feel comfortable continuing. Please also feel free to ask any questions if there is a question you do not understand.
None of the information that you share during this interview will be shared with your peers, teachers, counselors, or administrators at Crossings. While any information you share may be included in the final project, your name will not be shared. Do you have any questions before we get started?

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?
2. How was your experience in school prior to coming to [the site]?
   1. **Probe** (grades, extracurricular activities, disciplinary action).
      i. What school did you attend before coming to Crossings?
   2. Relationships with teachers.
   3. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in school?
3. What have been your most positive educational experiences?
   1. Favorite subject/class? Why?
4. Describe a time when you felt most successful?
   1. **Probe** (what made you feel good about the experience?)
5. Describe a time when you felt your smartest? **Probe** (activity? What your strengths were in this instance?)
6. What does it mean for you to have a [disability label]?
7. What are the spaces in which you are most aware of your disability?
   1. Are there ways [disability] has been useful to you? **Probe**.
   2. One final question about school. If you could create your own school, how would it function? **Probe** (who would it serve? What would the teachers be like?).
8. Tell me a little about how you came to [the site]? **Probe** (how they began getting into trouble? What their story is?)
9. Before you came to [the site], what were your responsibilities at home?
10. What would you say your passions (hobbies, sports, reading, music, etc.) are? **Probe**
    1. How did you get into this activity?
    2. Why do you like this activity so much?
11. What are your educational/career goals for when you leave [the site]?
    1. What is your plan for accomplishing your goals?
12. What are your personal goals for when you leave [the site]?
    1. If things go right during the next five years, where do you see yourself?
13. What is the one thing you cannot wait to do when you get home?
14. Background:
    1. Age:
    2. Last Grade Completed in traditional school setting:
3. Race:

15. Thanks for chatting with me. I really appreciate it. My final question is whether or not you have any questions for me regarding this project?
Appendix C: Analytical Codes

After my first round of observations and ethnographic interviews, I read and analyzed field notes and memos to develop a series of codes that would influence my questioning and analysis moving forward. The following codes were the result of these initial readings. While some of these codes did not become themes in the larger thesis project, they are all a component of how adolescents understand themselves. While the codes emerge from displayed behaviors and discussions with adolescents, the definitions are rooted in previous empirical or theoretical works.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Curiosity/Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Reference to or display of adolescent interest in academic materials and activities. Explanations as to what intrigues adolescents about academic tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anger</strong></td>
<td>References to adolescent anger, anger management strategies, or moments when the adolescents displayed anger in Crossings context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>How adolescents define community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How gatekeepers define or impose ideas of community on adolescents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence</strong></td>
<td>Displays of confidence, in which adolescents assert who they are (does not have to apply to any specific area).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Capital</strong></td>
<td>Adolescent understanding and displays of dominant capital.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescents understanding of the ways in which their habits and behaviors exist outside of mainstream culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>References to disability, psychological diagnoses, and/or learning/educational disabilities. May also include references to medication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/Substances</td>
<td>References to drug use or substance abuse, including opiates, marijuana, alcohol use, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Displays of EI, caregiving, or understanding of emotional needs (of either others or self). Displaying Emotional Intelligence does not have to be aligned with positive behaviors (may include empathy, impulsivity, assertiveness, or the ability to process emotions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Discussion of familial relationships, difficulties with parents/guardians, or siblings. May also include sense of responsibility to family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>References to gender, differences in gender. Adolescent behavior that is gendered in some way (note the details that lead to a gendered analysis).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>References to various institutions that are central to adolescent life (including schools, juvenile justice system, child services, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>References to hobbies, activities completed during free-time, and interests outside of classroom activities or work. May include sports, reading, art, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Discussions of the importance of reading and/or writing. Displayed behaviors related to reading and/or writing. These discussions and behaviors do not have to be connected to academic literacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-dominant capital</td>
<td>Displays of capital that are recognized, but treated as inappropriate to classroom/mainstream behaviors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent understanding/explanation of skills/behaviors that are related to their home and community lives, that do not overlap with school values.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perseverance/Grit</td>
<td>Academic displays of a long-term commitment to a problem. For data collection, it is repeated notation of a problem, how adolescent is working towards resolving conflict, and must occur over a period of months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Behavioral displays that are related to professional development (job skills, career information, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Discussions of race, racism, and racialized thinking. Moments that are racialized (note the details that make them racialized).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry/Transition</td>
<td>References to returning home (may include plans for school, employment, continued treatment, discussion of home visits, or day passes). Moments in which adolescents are engaged in transition planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Advocacy</td>
<td>Moments in which adolescents articulate a sense of understanding of their needs, and are vocal advocates for these needs (can be disruptive, but note when adolescents follow social cues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>References to responsibilities, both imposed and perceived. References can be to chores, jobs, sense of responsibility for family members or friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second chance</td>
<td>Moments in which adolescents are given a second chance, or describe being given a second chance (including references to probation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sobriety/rehabilitation</td>
<td>Adolescent references to sobriety and coping with substance abuse, including drugs, alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Intelligence</td>
<td>Displays of social intelligence that include navigating and managing relationships with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness of others’ needs and perceptions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Special education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>References to special education services and classrooms, including IEPs, special education references, learning disability diagnoses, or disability that is limited to classroom experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent displays of technological skills, including computer navigation, the internet, etc..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moments in which they discuss their understanding of technology.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
References


