Liminal Lessons: Transitions as Human Spaces Between
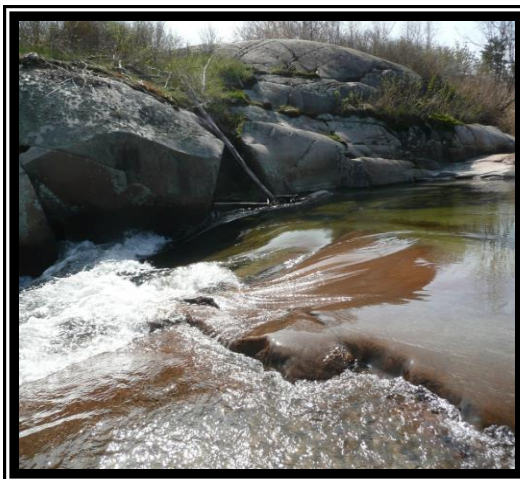
Fresh Starts and False Starts:
Young People in Transition from Elementary to Secondary School

- ➢Three Year Qualitative Study

- ➢Review of International Literatures

- ➢Final Report 2010 (Series)

- ➢124 Group Conversations (800 people)

     (600 youth, 125 educators, 75 parents)

- ➢130 Youth Interviews

- ➢37 Families of schools, 6 Regions on Ontario

Tilleczek, K. (2012). Policy activism *with* and *for* youth transitions through public education. *International Journal of Educational Administration and History, 44*(3), 253-267.

Tilleczek, K. (2008). Building bridges for young people: Transitions from elementary to secondary school. Education Canada, 68-71

Phase 1: (Grade 8)
34 Focus Groups: n= 321
(256 youth, 33 educators, 23 parents)

+ 52 youth Interviews

Phase 2: (Grade 9)
44 Focus Groups: n= 305
(215 youth, 68 educators, 22 parents)

+ 78 youth Interviews
 (35 were follow-ups with Phase I youth)

Phase 3: (Grade 10)
29 Focus Groups: n= 174
(125 youth, 24 educators, 25 parents)

Human Holistic Complexity

- **stages!**

- **social actors!**

- **stories!**

- **strategies!**

Visual Transition Narrative

FAMILY

Pre-Transition: Lives in rural community; moved homes 6 times; lives with parents and 3 siblings (one with a disability). **Transition**: Low SES: Both parents injured or sick and not working; dysfunctional relationship with parent.
Post-Transition:
Parental drug use, depression, violence and theft of money; disclosed long history of sexual assault in home; told extended family who called police; parents abusive after disclosure; after placement in care, abuser welcomed back into home; currently living in foster care; has not spoken to parents in months; desperately misses youngest sibling and pet; more devastated that parents did not take her side than by sexual abuse; loves foster mother but has conflictual feelings about living with 5-7 other fostered girls; Struggling with poverty and lack of supports

SCHOOL/ACADEMICS

Grade 8: Changed elementary schools 4 times; 50% average; high school education as "very important" to her and parents and "somewhat important" to friends; "passing" is main goal at school; teachers as "very good" in most categories; school itself "not good at all"; one teacher and a friend make her happy at school; "mean friends" make her feel badly. **Grade 9**: Very long commute by bus; mostly Applied courses and grades have improved; personal interests and school programs are good fit; teachers are helpful, good listeners, caring and with teaching styles that suit her needs; low self-esteem relating to schooling. **Grade 10**: Former high school is outside foster home catchment area; forced to leave school she knew and loved; has switched to Applied due to stress; Claims new school has "good academes"; taking grade 9 and 10 Applied courses; grades have improved to 60-70%.

SELF

Pre-Transition: 13 years old, grade 8; born in Canada, Caucasian. **Transition:** 14 years old, grade 9; severe speech impediment (improving with help from school); panic and anxiety; closest connections are best friend and pet; loves performing arts; earned high level in a sport and on a team. **Post-Transition:** 15 years old, grade 10; severe speech impediment still improving; anxiety and panic attacks abate upon leaving family home; Car accident/injuries.

FRIENDS/YOUTH CULTURE

Pre-Transition: Socially marginalized - feels like an outsider, awkward and does not belong, lonely, bored; other don't like her, does not want to go; has experienced severe bullying. Physically marginalized - compared to classmates she feels she looks shorter, younger and is not good-looking. **Transition**: Drug use is norm at school; she claims to abstain and wants friends to stop; pressure to skip class and be promiscuous; describes herself as hyper, annoying to others and no longer shy; socially engaged and happy, lots of friends and potential boyfriend; baby-sits and shovels snow for extra money. **Post-Transition**: At former school she was with the "wrong crowd", skipping class and taking drugs; very unhappy at new school; socially marginalized - no friends, impenetrable cliques and is bullied due to emotional state and poverty; lots of "druggies" at school, but she stands up to peer pressure; no longer participating in performing arts or her sport; now works 30 hours a week at a food establishment; very emotional in school and teachers, counsellors unsympathetic, unhelpful.

FUTURE GOALS

Pre-Transition: Paramedic. **Transition**: Paramedic, hairdresser and children's sport instructor. **Post-Transition**: Paramedic/sport teacher, hairdresser or "some kind of social worker.

Emotional Contradictions

Emotions	Phase I (n=228)	Phase II (n=211)	Phase III (n=124)
Happy	73%	76%	61%
Anxious	57%	40%	23%
Confident	47%	54%	57%
Hopeful	45%	41%	32%
Confused	29%	32%	23%
Frightened	29%	15%	7%
Frustrated	10%	18%	27%

Phase II: (Grade 9)
Relative Frequency of **Friendship,** **Hope** and **Fear**

Hinderances

"Outsiders"

No school supports
Few teacher connections
Poor school spirit
Few extra-curricular
Low grades
Missing class
No fun in learning
Little choice of courses
Not working with friends

Inequity

"lives of quiet desperation"

"One thing we have discovered is that the social, emotional challenges supersede all the other challenges they have. It's the pressing - it's the priority in their life

- Poverty
- Peers as problem
- Family as problem
- System is ill-equipped
  (poverty, mental illness, emotional challenges, discrimination)
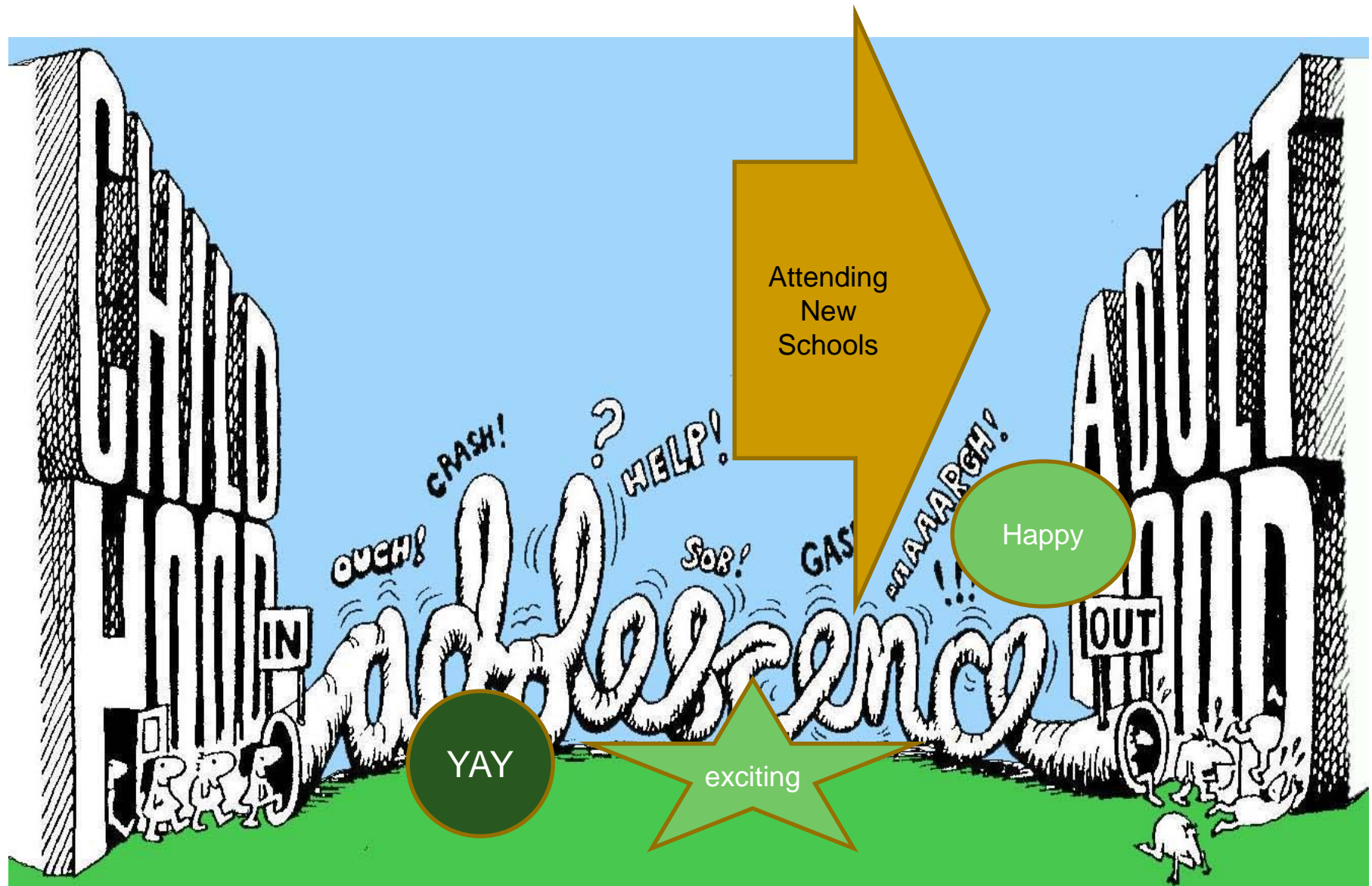- Difficulty negotiating academics

"It is a sad commentary that we've lost the connection between elementary and secondary schools...It is lamentable for a system that professes to be different and professes that it has that intimacy."

"Well first of all, the curriculum between grade nine and grade eight has to link up, and it doesn't."

Transitions as Human and Nested…

Being
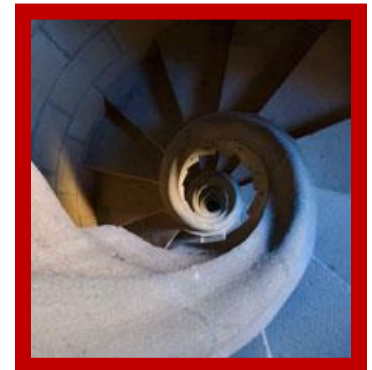
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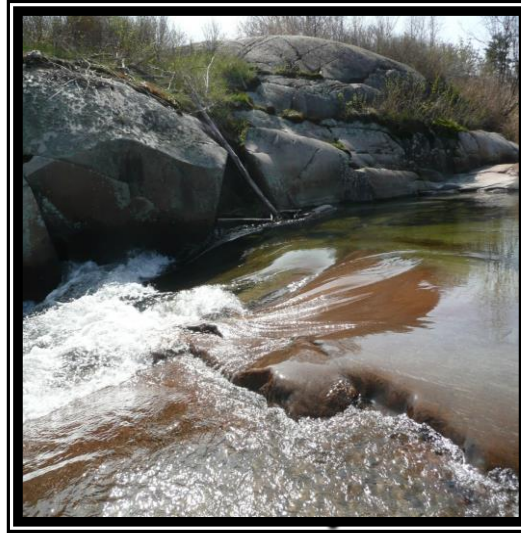"ache of the real"

Belonging

Social beings in
Educational systems

Becoming

Changing beings in
Changing societies

What helps?

➢ Animate **Being, Becoming** and **Belonging**

➢ Grasp the fluidity of young lives, schools & society

➢ Develop extended transition teams- across schools/time

➢ Plan OVER TIME (not one-off)

➢ Create new youth-centric tools – visual transition narratives