Narratives of Youth Literacy: The Case of Prince Edward Island

Kate Tilleczek, PhD and Valerie Campbell, MA, University of Prince Edward Island

Abstract

This article examines social processes by which young people could better be supported in transitions to literacy. It includes setting a context in current literature, interviews with twenty-two youth, and interviews with twenty-two service providers. The results detail three emerging narratives of youth literacy: (1) a praxis narrative which is ecological and strength-based; (2) a youth literacy program narrative which is fragmented and in need of integration; and (3) narratives of youth transitions to literacy which detail a nuanced and balanced approach. Reading, writing, and numeracy are critical and necessary but not sufficient for youth literacy. Implications point to a transferrable, cross-provincial conversation in youth literacy based on this Prince Edward Island exploratory study.

Key words: youth literacy, youth narratives, youth transitions to literacy, Canadian youth literacy.

> *If a person has trouble with reading and writing you're going to have a hard time on the job, big time; even the simplest job like McDonalds, you gotta read the screen to say, if it says no onions on that Big Mac, you can't put onions on that Big Mac and if you can't read, you don't know what that sign says…I think it's a big, big deal. As for relating to me, I've applied for different jobs where I've gone and been given an application that's like 10 pages long and not understood a lot of the words on there so I couldn't answer the questions, which maybe, if I knew, like if, somebody had said 'you know this word means this' Oh! Well I know the answer to that, that's easy! (Inez).* [2]

> *Literacy encompasses every aspect of teaching, not just language arts, reading and writing, but numeracy as well. [it is the] most important piece of the puzzle for students. It affects every aspect of your life (Steven).*

[2] All participants in this study have been given pseudonyms.

The latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results were released in December, 2013. PISA provides an assessment of the learning progress of 15 year-old students in 74 education systems across the world. The numbers for Canada in reading assessment were significantly above the OECD average, with the exception of Prince Edward Island (PEI) which was at the OECD average (Brochu, Deussing, Houme, & Chuy, 2013). Although PEI's reading average is slightly higher in 2012 than 2009, it is lower than 2006 and significantly lower than 2000 (Brochu et. al, 2013). Without hesitation, parents, public educators, industry, media representatives, and academics responded with a host of questions: What do PISA scores really mean? What is the character of literacy for PEI youth? Which young people struggle with literacy and how? How do these struggles last into their lives?

This article is based on an exploratory qualitative study designed to examine these questions. It gets beneath PISA scores, which measure only some important aspects of literacy and only for young people in school. The aim of the study was to examine social processes by which young people could better be supported in their pathways to literacy. The article includes a context from current literature. The experiences of young people in risk situations are often left out of research and little is known about PEI youth. Therefore, the study included individual interviews with twenty-two PEI youth who were under-represented in the research to date (only half of them were in school or work) and with twenty-two PEI service providers (both front-line and administrative personnel in education, industry, and community agencies).

Currently, 28,607 people between the ages of 15 and 29 live on Prince Edward Island (PEI Statistics Bureau, 2013). Emerging evidence suggests that PEI youth form a group in risk for difficulty in securing "decent" and meaningful work. Many are ill-prepared for the workforce due to early school leaving and their struggles with literacy (PEI Literacy Alliance, 2010; Timmons, 2005). Youth literacy research is a developing field directed toward ecological, strength-based, and culturally-grounded approaches and measurements.

There is currently an extensive research literature dealing with literacy and literacy programming in general. At the same time, there is a developed body of research dealing both with "youth-at-risk" and with conditions required to redress the risk factors faced by youth. It is at the intersection of these largely

separate fields of research that [youth literacy] literature … can be situated (Malcolmson, 2001, p.3).

Additionally, a more recent collection of work on adolescent literacy demonstrates that "more research [is] needed in adolescent literacy" (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009, p.12). The authors further stated that, "Sadly, we are not implementing in the schools and our communities what researchers, including those who study their own practice, have found and also what merits further implementation and investigation" (p. 12). Youth literacy may be considered to shape "the core strategies by which adolescents learn to negotiate meaning and think critically about the texts in their lives, whether in the context of the school or the world outside of the school" (Vacca, 1998 cited in Malcolmson, 2001, p.6). The move from functional to contextual definitions is apparent with the addition of skills such as creativity and critical thinking. Malcolmson (2001, p.6) states, "An examination of promising practices in adolescent literacy amply demonstrates that it is precisely this aspect of quality literacy programming that can awaken interest in learning and creative expression amongst youth who have had negative experiences with schooling". The Government of PEI`s Proceedings of the Minister`s Summit on Learning (2010) agrees by insisting on the context of 21st century learning skills needed for all young people – creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. Indeed, the Summit dialogue addressed a PEI focus of educating the whole student, more student-centred learning, and the creation of a "larger tool kit" for lifelong learning.

The literature simultaneously shows that the transitions of young people between secondary schools and the work force are becoming more complex in modern society (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Tilleczek, 2011). A current youth policy framework from the Government of Canada (Franke, 2010) demonstrates that sub-groups of young people in every Canadian province and territory are at risk for unsuccessful life transitions. Career services for Canadian youth are also fragmented and inadequate, particularly for those young people who have left school and/or struggle with literacy. For many youth from Prince Edward Island, low literacy levels are a barrier to success for these young people who should otherwise be poised to lead in PEI's Prosperity Plan (Carroll, 2009; Chaulk, McQuaid, & Smith, 2002; McKenna & Penner,

2009; PEI Literacy Alliance, 2010). Indeed, almost 50% of PEI's working population has less than a high school education (McKenna & Penner, 2009) and those in the 16-25 age categories scored poorly in literacy assessments (Lees, 2006). PEI was one of five Canadian provinces to demonstrate decreased reading scores between 2000 and 2012 as measured by PISA (Brochu et al., 2013).

Interpretive Framework

The Complex Cultural Nesting approach (Tilleczek, 2014; 2011) is an interpretive framework for studying youth literacy. Young people in Canada face many challenges and opportunities relating to literacy within and across interconnected spheres of life (home, school, work, family, and community). Young people and those closest to them are inseparable from, and nested within, cultures and contexts. *Being* a young person and *becoming* an adult is the result of many social forces that impinge upon the daily lives of young people. Tilleczek (2011) suggests that a focus on the tensions in the social processes of *being, becoming, and belonging* encapsulates and defines the bulk of research on youth. These fundamental social processes are part of critical developmental tasks of identity negotiation/construction and developing an autonomous sense of self (Eccles et al., 1993). In conjunction with their social class, minority group status, gender, and cultural experiences, young people form identities as learners, friends, family members, and community members. The move towards autonomy is traversed on physical, biological, cognitive, emotional, and social terrains (Lerner, 2006). Personal coping resources that help buffer ill effects of stress include a sense of autonomy, self-efficacy, competence, and confidence (Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work has been influential in *describing* multiple social levels at which various risk or protective influences occur. These levels - chronosystem, macrosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem - are well known to researchers who describe the contexts within which young people develop. Youth adapt to role and setting changes such that young people making life transitions confront "ecological transitions" (1979, p.26) and "every transition is both a consequence and an instigator of developmental processes" (1979, p.27). The Complex Cultural Nesting approach moves beyond this descriptive model of ecological settings and towards a deeper sense by which social contexts are structurally (politically, economically, and socially) organized and the processes used to negotiate them. It draws upon Bronfenbrenner's

Ecological model, the Developmental Contextual model (Lerner, 2002), the Socioeconomic Gradient and Income Inequality models (Keating and Hertzman, 1999; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), the Life Course model (Elder, 1995, 1997) and the various sociological lenses used in Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2002) to ground social analysis in everyday lives of young people.

The Complex Cultural Nesting approach does not view development in the traditional sense in which young people are understood to move along easily determined linear pathways. Time and growth (physical, social, emotional, psychological, spiritual, academic) remain central aspects, but transitions are instead conceived as non-linear and dynamic (Furlong, Biggart, Cartmel, Sweeting, & West, 2003; Tilleczek, 2014; 2011) and nested within complex, dynamic cultures. This dynamic aspect makes it necessary to determine how and why young people live out their narratives, become resilient, and make life changes (Pais, 2003). Narratives and biographies are important in understanding youth and help to avoid the mistake of seeing all members of risk groups (e.g., youth struggling with literacy, in poverty, early school leavers, and so forth) as necessarily and simply "at-risk" without also seeing *how* they are at-risk, their potential for resilience (Unger, 2004), and the fluidity of risk situations for youth (Tilleczek et al., 2010). Research too often focuses on the pathological aspects of "at-risk" youth's experiences, leaving little room for analysis of their resiliency (Schonert-Reichl, 2000; Tilleczek, 2011). Fine & Weis (1996, p.270) suggest that "simple stories of discrimination and victimization, with no evidence of resilience or agency, are seriously flawed and deceptively partial, and they deny the rich subjectivities of persons surviving amid horrific social circumstances". Thus, personal stories may also generate narratives of "hope and possibility" (Smyth & Hattam, 2001, p. 412) that seldom emerge from pathological analyses. Whitewashing problems and inequalities, however, must also be avoided in balanced, critical analyses. The Complex Cultural Nesting approach calls for a strength-based, ecological, balanced and nuanced study of the everyday lives of young people who are striving towards literacy.

Research Methods

To follow rules-of-thumb of qualitative sampling of speaking with a range of people who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Morse, 2000) and to work toward saturation in the data, interviews with 44 key informants (22 service providers and 22 young people) were conducted to garner: 1) the meaning of literacy and its role in youth pathways; 2) a detailed discussion about the barriers and facilitators to youth pathways on PEI; and 3) a listing and description of programs and services currently in place for youth pathways to literacy, education, and employment on PEI. Service providers responded to our initial mapping of services that was generated through the literature. All research tools were created for use in this study including the socio-demographic Face Sheets, the interview questions for service providers and for youth, and the research ethics forms for informed consent of participants.[3]

Data Collection

The main inclusion criterion for selection of youth participants was age (18-27 years). The target age range for youth participants was 18-27 years for three reasons: a) to cover the age range of the various definitions of "youth" used in service and programming (the range is from 15 to 29 years); b) to address the age range that demonstrated the largest gap in the literature (young people who are no longer in secondary school); and c) to speak to young people for whom parental consent was not necessary according to ethical guidelines (over the age of 18 years). The inclusion criteria for service providers were both front line and administrative roles from across three sectors: education (secondary school, post-secondary school, PEI Department of Education); industry; and community agencies.

To address the qualitative sampling principle of sample variation (hearing a wide range of experiences in an exploratory qualitative study) both youth and service providers from various communities across PEI were identified through a snowball sampling technique. We sought to speak with service providers from front-line (n=15) and administrative (n=7) positions and youth from rural (n=13) and urban (n=9) communities. Youth participants were either currently taking part in youth programs or were outside of school, programs, and services. Service providers assisted in finding youth participants

[3] Interested readers should contact the first author for access to the ethical and research tools

and/or recruitment posters were also placed in public areas such as youth centers, shelters, and food banks. This population of young people is difficult to find by virtue of their "in-between" status and lack of connection to education, social services, and programs. Their stories and perspectives on pathways to literacy are of value and often missing from research.

Service providers and administrators were contacted via emailed letter introducing the study and requesting their participation. This email contact was followed by direct telephone contact requesting an interview. Where youth participants were recruited through key informants, service providers assisting with recruitment were given an Information Letter regarding recruitment and a Letter of Introduction and Consent to be Contacted, which was passed on to prospective youth participants. Once youth contact information had been returned to the Project Manager, youth participants were contacted directly through their preferred method.

The service providers and youth were interviewed at a mutually agreed upon and convenient site: their places of work, UPEI, a local restaurant within their community, or community centres. Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were audio-taped. The interview began with the completion of informed consent forms as approved by the UPEI Research Ethics Board to provide an overview of the study purpose. A brief socio-demographic Face Sheet was then presented to participants who recorded important variables for analysis (for instance, age, gender, position in the system, years of service in the system, cultural/ethnic identity, educational background, literacy level, etc.). The Face Sheet took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The interview ensued with a list of specific questions; each group of informants (youth, front-line service providers, and administrators) had a unique list but with some common questions. The service providers were also presented with the emerging map of the youth pathways system as produced from the literature and asked for comment (e.g., Did we miss anything? How are these services connected?).

Youth participants were provided with a $20 honorarium for their participation. Cash was placed into envelopes on which a formal receipt was attached. Once the participant had signed the receipt, they were given the envelope. This transaction took place after the informed consent forms were

signed. Participants who chose to withdraw from answering questions (none did) were also provided the honorarium. All participants were asked on the consent form to select the way they would like to receive the study findings. A summary of findings were provided to all who were interested in receiving them.

Data Analysis

Three types of analysis are provided in this paper: 1) The socio-demographic Face Sheet analysis to provide descriptive statistics about the samples and their perspectives on education, employment, and literacy; 2) The interview transcript notes analysis for direct quotations and themes; 3) The interview notes and Face Sheets, from the young people, were also analyzed as brief narratives with information and experiences derived across spheres of self, school, community, family, and ideas of literacy/the future. These brief stories were written out and mapped as *visual transition narratives* (See Tilleczek et al., 2010; Tilleczek, 2012) to provide a less fractured picture of their lives and pathways. In opposition to other forms of analysis, such as thematic or discourse, narrative analysis attempts to hold lives and experiences in context and avoid fragmenting or reducing them too much. Narrative and story allow examination of intersections of *being* and *becoming* as surmised from biography, memoir, life history, and other poetic/visual narrative forms (Tilleczek, 2014, 2011). Bruner (1986) has proposed narrative as a unique way of understanding people, their intentions, and the vicissitudes of their lives. Such forms of understanding play crucial roles in youth research. As Lawler (2002, p. 242) asserts, narrative research fully portrays . . . accounts which contain transformation (change over time), some kind of 'action' and characters, all of which are brought together within an overall 'plot'—are a central means with which people connect together past and present, self and other.

Narrative analysis in this paper, therefore, strives for an 'interpretation and reinterpretation of experience . . . to understand 'lived time' (Bruner, 2004, p. 692) and the complex cultural nests of these young people on their pathways to literacy.

Results

The Study Participants

The 22 service providers were given the opportunity to complete a Face Sheet prior to their interview on which to record socio-demographic information. The service providers were mostly female (n=17) and ranged in age from 20 to 60 years. Two were not born in Canada. The service providers' places of work and positions in their jobs reflect the variation of the sample. For instance, they represented 19 different programs across three sectors: education (n=13), industry (n=3), and community (n=6). They also held a range of front-line (n=15) and administrative (n=7) positions, and ranged in their length of time in their current positions from less than one year to 20 years. They all had high school diplomas, 13 had college diplomas, and 6 had university degrees. It is worth noting that many of the service providers who were classified as administrators had also been (or were at the time of the interview) frontline workers.

Face Sheets were also completed by the young people to provide a range of information relating to their socio-demographic background. Of the 22 youth participants, 13 were male and nine were female. Most lived in a rural community (n=13) with nine living in either one of the two larger urban centres on PEI. Of the rural youth, nine were from the eastern and four were from the western regions of PEI. Those who "grew up" in a rural PEI community and attended school there were counted as rural even if they had recently moved in a larger urban centre. The young people ranged in age from 18 to 27 years with nine in the 18-20 range and 12 in the 21-27 range (one did not provide an age; the mean age of the others = 21.6 years). All youth participants were Canadian born. The majority of these young people were living with someone other than their parents (n=12) while eight lived at home and two lived alone. Three of the young people considered themselves to be homeless but were currently in a shelter or with friends. Only six of these 22 young people were employed at the time of the interview and five others were in a training program.

Eight of the young people had graduated from high school (two of them had a GED) and 12 had not yet graduated from high school even though they had

been through high school earlier in their lives (they left high school prior to graduation). Their interviews presented a useful retrospective perspective on high school experiences and their pathways since. Most (n=16) of the youth participants had attended one of the 10 PEI English high schools. Table 1 shows the highest grade attained by these young people and reports that four of the participants had not entered senior high school. Seven of these young people had so far been involved in academic upgrading and six reported having been identified with a special educational need in high school. Almost all reported familial support and encouragement for education (n=20) while only 12 reported consistent teacher support and encouragement.

Highest Grade	Frequency	Percent
8	2	9.1
9	2	9.1
10	6	27.3
11	6	27.3
12	6	27.3
Total	**22**	**100.0**

Table 1: Highest grade attained by youth participants

The young people were asked to provide their ratings of the importance of education to them, to their friends, and to their family. The mean responses (on a 4 point scale with 4 being "very important" and 1 being "not at all important") were 3.57, 2.71, and 2.95, respectively. This suggests that these young people perceive that both they and their parents value education more than they do their friends. They also provided a mean score of 3.45 (on a 4 point scale) in response to the "importance of education in achieving their goals". However, when asked to rate their perceived opportunities to gain more education on a 5-point scale (with 1 being "very poor" and 5 being "very good"), the mean score was 3.73, which suggests that these young people see only an average chance to improve their education at present.

The youth participants were also asked to self-rate a number of aspects of their reading and writing abilities to date. The mean self-reported reading and writing ability for the group was 3.86 and 3.41, respectively (on a 5 point scale with 1 being "very poor" and 5 being "very good"). It is worth noting the distribution in responses and the high proportion that feel that their abilities are currently "very poor" or "very good" (See Table 2 and Table 3). There is a

difference between their perceived abilities in reading and writing such that writing tends to be rated with less confidence.

Rating	Frequency	Percent
2	5	22.7
3	3	13.6
4	4	18.2
5	10	45.5
Total	**22**	**100.0**

Table 2: Self-reported reading ability of youth participants (1=very poor; 5 =very good)

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	1	4.5
2	3	13.6
3	9	40.9
4	4	18.2
5	5	22.7
Total	**22**	**100.0**

Table 3: Self-reported writing ability of youth participants (1=very poor; 5=very good)

The young people were also asked to rate their level of reading and writing outside school or work and their current attitudes towards reading and writing. Ten of them reported that they read at home "regularly" or "a lot" while five read "sometimes" and seven "rarely" or "never" read outside these contexts. Similarly, eight of the youth participants "never" or "rarely" write anything outside school or work, and 10 reported that they write "regularly" or "a lot" in these contexts. Three of the youth said that they write "sometimes". Table 4 and Table 5 illustrate the range, percentages, and frequencies of responses. The mean rating for current attitude for reading was 3.95. The mean rating for current attitude toward writing was 3.36.

Rating	Frequency	Percent
2	2	9.1
3	4	18.2
4	9	40.9
5	7	31.8
Total	**22**	**100.0**

Table 4: Current attitude toward reading of youth participants (1=very negative; 5=very positive)

Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	2	9.1
2	1	4.5
3	9	40.9
4	7	31.8
5	3	13.6
Total	**22**	**100.0**

Table 5: Current attitude toward writing of youth participants (1=very negative; 5=very positive)

Youth Literacy Program Mapping

> *There is programs out there, but if you don't know about them, or if you don't know somebody that went to it or done it, for me I found it was kind of difficult cause like for a while I needed to do something, and I wanted to do something but I didn't know what and I didn't know what was out there and I didn't know there was funding and I didn't know I'd qualify and things like that. But if people do want help there are lots of programs to help you, you just gotta look for it and you gotta go out and you gotta talk to somebody that even knows about it (Inez).*

Internet searches for programs and initiatives on PEI specific to youth literacy were undertaken at the outset of the project but were largely unsuccessful at first (only six results were easily found - four national and two provincial). The searches led to websites for provincial and national organizations such as PEI Literacy Alliance and the National Adult Literacy Database. Searches for youth employment programs yielded more results (45 programs), but many of the programs identified were *not* specific to youth. When the 45 employment

programs were further examined, only 18 targeted youth and seven of these were for "students" only. Some searches yielded only names of programs and others referred only to organizations. The difficulty of finding information suggests that much of what is available is not easily discovered online by university researchers and could be more difficult still for young people.

Figure A1 illustrates the PEI youth literacy programs and initiatives that were identified in this initial search (Appendix A). Those delivered by educational institutions were from secondary and post-secondary institutions. Industry refers to initiatives carried out in the workplace or presented by organizations in the for-profit arena (e.g., construction or manufacturing). Workplace employment programs were not limited to youth but most include Literacy Essential Skills (LES) upgrading or Graduate Equivalent Diploma (GED) preparation. Community programs were those offered through private and non-governmental organizations. The government initiatives identified were umbrella programs, which provide funding for community and industry. These funding linkages are demonstrated on the map. Other linkages are depicted as defined by collaboration. For example, the PEI Department of Education works with industry partners to deliver the Apprenticeship Program.

Figure A2 illustrates the response of the service provider participants in viewing the initial map. They provided information on missing programs as well as programs that are no longer active. The difference between the two maps is significant, further indicating that programs and organizations are not always easy to find. Therefore, Figure A3 provides a comparison of the initial search results with the programmatic knowledge provided by the service providers (Appendix A for Figures 2 and 3). The yellow text boxes are those that were common in cases; the green text boxes are those mentioned by the service providers only; and the dotted red lines are the original search results. Particularly noteworthy is the wealth of knowledge service providers have about supports available in public education, community, and industry. This knowledge suggests the usefulness of ongoing cross-sector conversations, collaborations, and information sharing to support youth literacy. It is also clear from Figure 3 that PEI is engaged in numerous initiatives relating to youth pathways to literacy, education, and employment. The question relating

to access, use, and efficacy of each program or initiative is one for ongoing research.

Indeed, Figure A4 illustrates that the 22 young people interviewed were aware of only a handful of programs, most of which were community based (see Appendix A). This is not entirely surprising given the small sample size and mean age (21.6 years) of young people in this exploratory study. In Figure 4, the dark blue text boxes show the programs and initiatives that were identified by youth only (n=11). The yellow text boxes show those identified by both youth and service providers (n=17) and the dotted green lines illustrate those identified by service providers only (n=69). The numbers beg the question as to how many other young people are aware of and/or can access the range of programs and initiatives designed for them. It is important to reiterate that qualitative research is dedicated to descriptions of social phenomenon and processes and not to statistical generalizability. Different groups of young people or service providers could be privy to different sets of programs. However, these figures do illustrate a disconnection between what is available and what is accessed by young people who have left high school and are seeking further literacy, education, or employment. Many young people interviewed simply did not know what programs (other than the GED which is widely advertised) are available to them. Indeed, many did not even know where to begin looking. Service providers also indicated that they have limited awareness of programs outside their own scope or geographical area.

> *Last August we had a Youth Outreach Worker for this area, funding was provided through Services Canada, and it was a great resource for our youth. But the funding got cut last year so now, it's like, where do they go and who do they reach out to? (Yvette).*

> *Sometimes the supports that are out there are hard to access . .. . it`s tough, I think it`s tough for people to maneuver all that, to understand what it is, to make the first step (Sylvia).*

One program that was widely acknowledged by both youth and service providers was the GED. This program is offered through a number of service providers, making it accessible. However, although most youth participants had some knowledge of this program, there was confusion as to how it actually worked, especially in terms of cost and time. Although they are two different programs, many participants refer to the College's GED and "upgrading"

programs interchangeably. Given the relative knowledge of the program, the GED could better provide a linkage point to corollary literacy and employment services for young people who are no longer in public education or work. It is also important to note that all of the community/government programs discussed by both service providers and youth do not have a fee associated with them. Indeed, participants are, in some cases, paid to attend the program that breaks down persistent barriers of economic hardship for many of these young people.

Many initiatives available to youth on their pathways to employment are **passive.** They include career centres, internet job banks, and printed career information that require the participant to initiate contact and find a way through the procedures; something that can be done only if aware of the existence and ability to access and make use of such resources. For example, the Government of PEI has a job registry on its website, for temporary employment. It is relatively easy to find because there is a link called "Job Opportunities" on the home page. But it involves first finding the government website and determining the availability of resources. Indeed, if literacy is a barrier to entry and retention of employment for youth, the access point and programs are required to work at their current levels of literacy. Some more **active** programs actually put young people into the workforce if only for a limited time. These programs are often funded by various federal government initiatives and delivered through industry or community organizations. Known colloquially as "make work" projects, these short term opportunities are designed to provide job skills. However, none of the searches or interviews indicated the availability of any empirical information about what happens to participants at the end of the program. Only one service provider discussed following up with participants after three and six months. As seen in Figure A4, programs accessed by youth are those that are well established rather than the temporary, short-term initiatives. The system suffers from gaps in collaboration, access, lack of evaluation, passive outreach, and clear entry points. Supports are often fragmented, "yo-yo" and short-term, not well integrated, difficult to access, and not collaboratively managed.

Youth Literacy Narratives

Thematic analysis of the range of facilitators and barriers arising in the youth and service provider interviews are published elsewhere (see Tilleczek and Campbell, 2013). The narrative analysis, however, corresponds to those findings. The narratives illustrate that barriers congealed around a complex spiral for young people excluded from both access and success in education and/or employment and are not continually gaining literacy skills necessary for adulthood. Familial socio-economic factors, academic struggles, and public education's failure to collaboratively mitigate them are constant obstructions.

Nonetheless, important nuances appeared in the narrative analyses. Some young people also spoke about enjoying school, feeling relatively literate, and trying to negotiate their way towards full literacy with the assistance of solid programs. They possessed a good deal of "local knowledge," insight, and reflection. They also demonstrated how literacy falters and affect further education and employment and that even successful completion of high school has not guaranteed them full literacy. The first interview question asked was, "Could you please tell me what was going on in your life when you left high school?" Whether they had graduated or left high school early, each young person began to unravel the past and present influences of family, teachers, schools, friends, and community on their experiences as it related to literacy, further education, or employment. One of the most striking and surprising findings is that it was difficult to envisage which young person struggled with literacy and which excelled. These fine distinctions in the narratives were not captured in the literature or in thematic analysis of the interviews.

For instance, young people who had left high school were not always those who uniformly disliked school or that felt themselves illiterate. For example, *Mitchell*[4] (now aged 20) left school in Grade 11 to become a rock star after having read a biography of Axel Rose. He loved to learn but did not like schooling and finds himself today still reading for pleasure and loving to read, although he feels he could enhance his speaking and writing skills. He has been refused admission to a community college due to a lack of background preparation for the carpentry program in which he is interested. He has a plan to meet his goals but is frustrated by his lack of skills and abilities to navigate the system and make them happen.

[4] All youth have been provided pseudonyms

Narrative analysis captured more of the context of experiences and influences of *Mitchell* and the other young participants. This section presents data from 10 of the 22 young people as visual narratives to illustrate influences of school/academics, family/friends, community, and self on literacy and the future. The 10 visual narratives have been selected from among the 22 youth participants to reflect differences, similarities, and nuances in life stories while taking gender, community, and high school experiences as points of variation. Five visual narratives presented are of young women and five are of young men. In each case, two graduated from high school and three did not. It is noteworthy that the stories of the young women who have left school early differ from each other in many ways. They are also both the same and different from the young women who have completed school and from the young men who have not.

The first three narratives are from *Mary, Carmen, and Dawn* who are three young women who left high school before graduation (Figures B1, B2 & B3 in Appendix B). Mary was a very good student with high grades. She is now 22 years old and considers herself to be literate and wishes to be a Journalist. She comes from a rural community with a supportive family but has had challenges with addictions and mental health over the course of her life. Carmen was also a straight-A student at school and considers herself to be literate at 27 years of age. Family issues resulted in her entering the foster care system and her school's response to her pregnancy forced her to leave in Grade 8. She has plans and goals to become a precision machinist and has been waiting for two years to get into the GED program. Dawn is now 21 years of age and struggled with most of the courses in high school although she did well in mathematics. She is not confident, at present, with her literacy skills but is diligently working on her GED to become a child and youth worker. She hopes to return to her Aboriginal community and make a difference working with high-risk youth.

The next two narratives are of two young women who graduated from high school. These women have both similar and different experiences in school as did Mary, Carmen, and Dawn. For example, *Inez* is now 25 years old and remembers that she did well in school during her final years and was well supported by teachers and family. However, she did struggle in school in earlier years. She considers herself literate but has trouble comprehending some

documents and forms. She recently had a child and is taking time to upgrade her skills and make some life changes toward her goals, which include breaking from some of her more problematic friends. *Mona* is 20 years of age and has earned her Grade 12 Diploma but feels the need to upgrade her skills because she is unable to enter programs of her choice at college or university. She feels literate enough but knows that new skills will be needed for the next part of her journey into post-secondary school, which is intimidating, at present. Both Inez's and Mona's narratives are depicted in Figures B4 and B5 in Appendix B.

The following narratives portray the experiences of three young men who left school early: *Mitchell, Jack, and Nate* (see Figures B6, B7, & B8, Appendix B). Mitchell's story was brought into focus in the introduction to this section. Jack is 27 years of age and remembers leaving high school after Grade 11 to care for an ailing parent, the other being absent. He is the eldest of four brothers and has been the primary caretaker in his home. He is applying for a program to help upgrade his skills, obtain a Grade 12 Diploma, and earn hours toward unemployment insurance benefits. He lives in an urban area but feels that PEI is a closed community and he does not know the right people to get a good job. Nate is 26 and he also left school in Grade 11. He did not like the large class sizes and struggled in many courses. He began using drugs at age 14 and developed an addiction. He currently lives in a city homeless shelter but came from a large, stressful family. He does not think that young people are interested in literacy, but rather just having "fun times". He is currently enrolled in a GED program to upgrade his math skills for heavy machinery operations work. He is anxious to move ahead with his life and "not go down the same road" that he has in the past.

The final two narratives are of *Tyler* (20 years of age) and *Fred* (19 years of age) who both received their high school diplomas (Figures B9 & B10, Appendix B). Tyler attended college after high school but left during his first year because he was unsure of his career goals; he is currently "checking out" a performing arts program at college. He is articulate and feels he is literate but has no patience for reading. He has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) but feels confident he will do well in his new home on PEI with the help of supportive friends with whom he lives. Fred also received his high school diploma and is hoping to join the Canadian Navy to further his education. He enjoyed elementary school but did 'just enough to get by' in high school and had no career guidance. As a result, he is unsure of his options but

is involved in a learning centre program to explore them. Although money is not a real issue for Fred, he still does not wish to take the wrong program and spend what he has saved for his education.

In summary, these ten narratives demonstrate the nuance and variability of the lives and pathways of these young people as they move toward further education, employment, and levels of literacy. Their stories suggest the complexity with which policies, programs, and supports need to be constructed. Differing ages and stages of struggle are obvious as are the specific spheres of life in which supports are required. Their lives suggest the need for ongoing and flexible supports as they move towards their goals and for service providers and educators to understand the lived complexity. Sharing these kinds of narratives across services could assist in better program and planning.

Discussion

If youth literacy is the cultural tool kit needed to move successfully towards adulthood, we must continue to examine how many Canadian young people are managing, what stands in their way, and how we can further assist them. These questions are especially crucial for young people currently in at-risk situations and between formal education and employment. Moreover, these questions will remain moving targets given the pace of change in modern youth pathways to adulthood.

This study suggests the usefulness of youth literacy praxis narratives, which theory and practice attend to the ecological and strength-based character of youth pathways. It also details a fragmented narrative about youth literacy programming. The narratives of youth transitions to literacy detail a nuanced understanding of what these young people are up against and how some young people continue to struggle. They run up against the same socioeconomic, educational, familial, and community factors well cited in the literature. They continue to navigate their pathways as best they can, but some require a good deal more assistance.

However, young people are not alone in risky situations that must be attended to. The narratives presented show how risk is a flexible and moving target. Even high school graduation or post-secondary enrolment does not end

youth's literacy challenges as currently understood and defined. Indeed, a complex spiral can be discerned for some young people who are barred access and/or success in either education or employment. Without education, literacy falters and effects employment and has long-term consequences. The transitional narratives of the young participants further animate the complex ways in which different young people can be derailed from their successful pathways. It can be difficult to predict how these pathways will unfold. But, educators and service providers should be aware of the complexity and intricacy of the negotiations these young people are making as they move across their life course.

The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training's *Progress Report on Literacy* (2010, p. 5) also addresses the need to target literacy initiatives at all stages of the life course with "increased awareness of the socio-economic benefits of improving literacy and essential skills". They suggest targeting pre-service teacher training, curriculum development, assessment, and tracking literacy for diverse groups of students and engaging workplaces in further literacy program creation. However, young people who have left school prior to graduation and/or may not be employed become invisible in policy, practice, and research. A holistic youth literacy agenda does not yet appear in provincial policy frameworks. When it does appear, it is seen as an issue for "schools only" rather than through an understanding of the complex cultural nests of young people and their intersecting, complex, contemporary lives.

Malcolmson (2001) suggests that understanding youth pathways to literacy should begin in practice, then to evidence, and then to policy. However, the findings of this study suggest a need for praxis and inseparability of practice, evidence, and policy. Programs and practice must be grounded in evidence and policy must be set in response to this emerging field of youth literacy. Indeed, a cross-sector dialogue and knowledge sharing mobilization strategy is required on PEI and the process followed here for program mapping and speaking to youth and service providers is transferable to other provinces. At issue is how to best theorize, research, and practice youth literacy.

This study has identified conceptual, evidence-based, and programmatic gaps as a point of departure. Similar to Lees (2006), the PEI Literacy Alliance (2010), and Bell and O'Reilly (2008) calls for evidence on the efficacy of the programs that make up the current patchwork. This evidence must attend to

the nuance and complexity by which programming is established and operated and young people's ability to access and make use of it given the complexity of their lives. Ongoing evidence-based programming could be enhanced by attending to the following: 1) Youth literacy is emerging as an ecological concept. What are the implications for the ways we measure, define, and build programs for youth literacy? What is the range and efficacy of programs and strategies in public schools dedicated to childhood and youth literacy in the fullest sense? What more must be in place (in schools, communities, and families) to assist all youth in their pathways to literacy?; 2) There is a need to continue to map the range of youth literacy programs across sectors to share that information for linkages and integrations. There is a need to continue to attend to program scope, longevity funding, gaps, and duplications; 3) Programs and services must be rigorously assessed to provide ongoing evidence-bases for practice. This knowledge must be shared with all literacy stakeholders. How could we better integrate and coordinate efforts to achieve youth literacy given the varying meanings and measures of literacy? Who should be doing this and how?

> *If it were simple and laid out so that I could see everything I had to do then it wouldn't be that bad…but sorting things out and finding out what I need to do is ...it's like untangling Christmas lights, I don't mind putting them up but I don't want to sit there and untangle them. (Mitchell)*

References

Bell, D., & O'Reilly, E. (2008). *Making bridges visible: An inventory of innovative, effective or promising Canadian school-to-work transition practices, programs and policies.* Ottawa, ON: The Work and Learning Knowledge Centre.

Brochu, P., Deussing, M., Houme, K., & Chuy, M. (2013). *Measuring up: Canadian results of the OECD PISA study, 2012 first results for Canadians aged 15.* Toronto, ON: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Active minds, possible worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research, 71*(3), 691-710.

Bussiére, P., Knighton, T., & Pennock, D. (2007). *Measuring up: Canadian results of the OECD PISA study, the performance of Canada's youth in science, reading and mathematics, 2006 first results for Canadians aged 15.* Ottawa: Minister of Industry.

Carroll, W. (2009). *Preliminary PEI labour force view.* PPT Presentation. UPEI.

Chaulk, P., McQuaid, S., & Smith, N. (2002). *An evaluation of the employment pathways program: Final report* (Prepared for Southern Kings and Eastern Kings Health Regions). Charlottetown, PE: Atlantic Evaluation Group.

Christenbury, L., Bomer, R., & Smagorinsky, P. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of adolescent literacy research.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET). (2010). *Progress report on literacy.* Retrieved from http://www.camet-camef.ca/images/eng/docs/2010%20Literacy%20Progress%20Report%20ENGLISH%20FINAL.pdf

Eccles, J. S., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C. M., Reuman, D., Flanagan, C., & MacIver, D. (1993). The impact of stage-environment fit on young adolescents' experiences in schools and families. *American Psychologist, 48*(2), 90-101.

Elder, G. H., Jr. (1995). The life course paradigm: Social change and individual development. In P. Moen, G. H. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher. *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development.* Washington, DC: APA Press.

Elder, G. H., Jr. (1997). The life course and human development. *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development, I,* 939–91. New York: Wiley.

Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1996) Writing the 'wrongs' of fieldwork: confronting our own research/writing dilemmas in urban ethnographies, *Qualitative Inquiry, 2*(3), 251-274.

Franke, S. (2010). *Current realities and emerging issues facing youth in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Policy Research Initiative.

Furlong, A., Biggart, A., Cartmel, C., Sweeting, H., & West, P. (2003). *Youth transitions: Patterns of vulnerability and processes of social inclusion.* Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change: New perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Government of Prince Edward Island (PEI). (2010). *Proceedings of the Minister's summit on learning.* Charlottetown, PE: Author.

Keating, D. P., & Hertzman, C. (Eds.). (1999). *Developmental health and the wealth of nations*. New York and London: The Guildford Press.

Lawler, S. (2002). Narrative in social research. In T. May (Ed). *Qualitative Research in Action*. London: Sage.

Lees, J. B. (2006). *Literacy research in PEI: A reflection - Looking back before moving ahead.* Charlottetown, PE: PEI Literacy Alliance.

Lerner, R. M. (Ed.). (2002). *Concepts and theories of human development*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Lerner, R. (2006). Developmental science, developmental systems, and contemporary theories of human development. In R. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds). *Handbook of child psychology: Volume 1, Theoretical models of human development.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Lord, S. E., Eccles, J., & McCarthy, K. A. (1994). Surviving the junior high school transition: Family processes and self-perceptions as protective and risk factors". *Journal of Early Adolescence, 14*, 162-199.

Malcolmson, J. D. (2001). *What works in youth literacy and why?* Vancouver, BC: Youth Literacy Canada.

McKenna, G., & Penner, A. (2009). *Island prosperity report: Literacy levels in adult developmental education*. Charlottetown, PE: Holland College.

Morse, J. (2000) Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research, 10,* 3-5.

Pais, J. (2003). The multiple faces of the future in the labyrinth of life. *Journal of Youth Studies, 6* (2), 115-126.

PEI Literacy Alliance. (2010). *Environmental scan*. Charlottetown, PE: Author.

PEI Statistics Bureau. (2013). *Province of Prince Edward Island thirty-ninth annual statistical review 2012*. Charlottetown, PE: PEI Department of Finance and Municipal Affairs.

Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2000). Children *and youth at risk: Some conceptual considerations*. Paper presented at the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda (PCERA) Symposium, Ottawa. April, 2000. Available: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-589-x/81-589-x2001001-eng.pdf

Smith, D. (2002). Institutional ethnography. In T. May (Ed.). *Qualitative research in action*. London: Sage.

Smyth, J., & Hattam, R. (2001). 'Voiced' research as a sociology for understanding 'dropping out' of school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education 22*(3), 401-415.

Tilleczek, K. (2014). Theorizing youth: Biography, society and time. In A. Ibrahim & S.R. Steinberg (Eds.), Critical youth studies reader (pp. 15-25). New York, USA: Peter Lang Press.

Tilleczek, K. (2011). Approaching youth studies: Being, becoming and belonging. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press.

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., & Campbell, V. (2013). Barriers to youth literacy: Sociological and Canadian insights. Language and Literacy, 15(2), 77-100.

Tilleczek K., Laflamme, S., Ferguson, B., Roth Edney, D., Cudney, D., Girard, M & Cardoso, S. (March, 2010). *Fresh Starts and False Starts: Young People in Transitions from Elementary to Secondary School.* Toronto: Hospital for Sick Children (Report to the Ontario Ministry of Education).

Timmons, V. (2005). *An extensive look at early school leavers on Prince Edward Island*. Charlottetown, PE: UPEI.

Unger, M. (2004). *Nurturing hidden resilience in troubled youth*. Toronto, ON: U of T Press.

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Appendix A: Programs

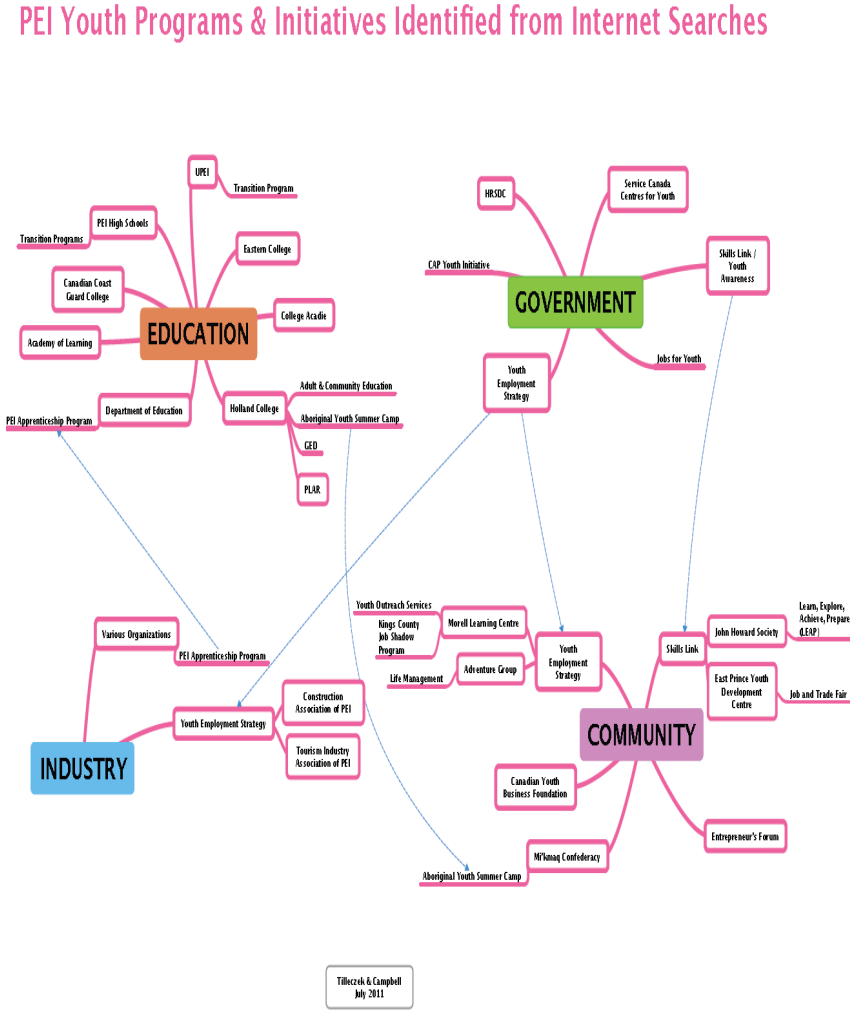

Figure A1

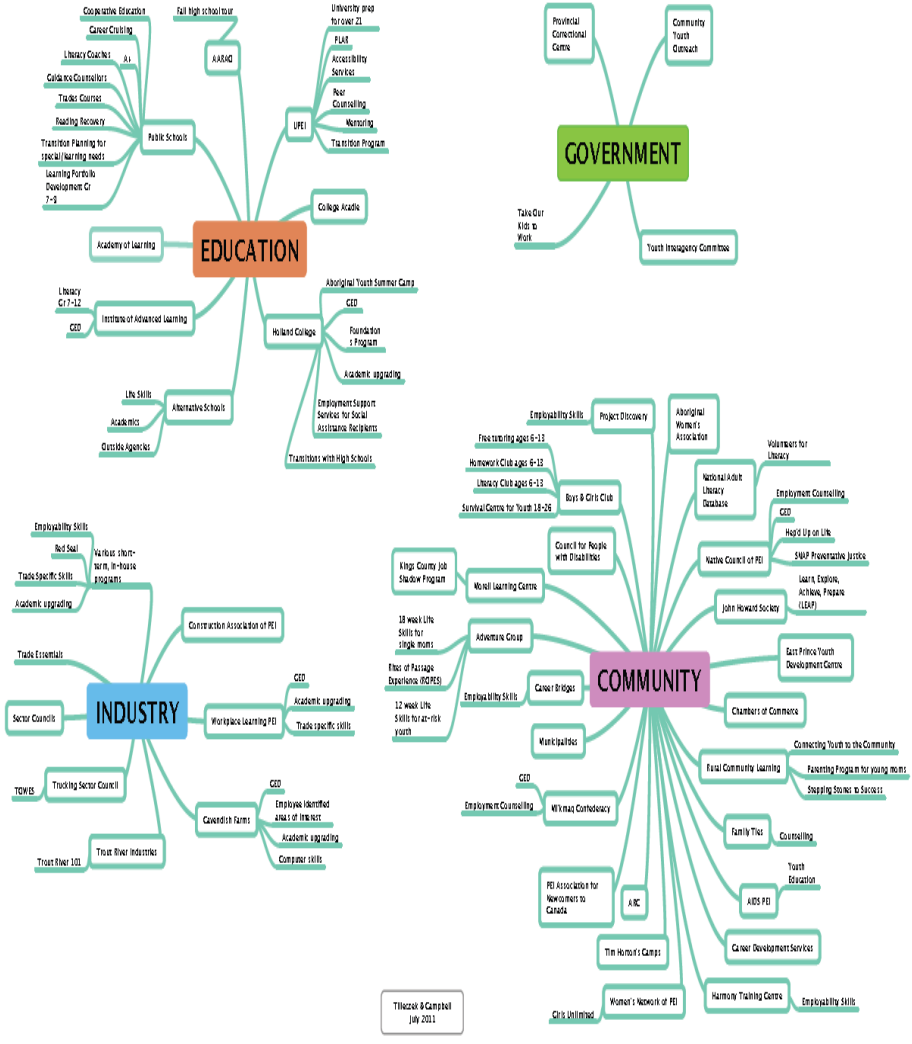
PEI Youth Programs & Initiatives Identified by Service Providers
EDUCATION
Public Schools
Cooperative Education
Career Crafting
Literacy Coaches
ALs
Guidance Counsellors
Trades Courses
Reading Recovery
Transition Planning for special learning needs
Learning Portfolio Development Gr 7-9
AARAD
Fall high school tour
UPEI
University prep for over 21
PLAR
Accessibility Services
Peer Counselling
Mentoring
Transition Program
College Acadie
Academy of Learning
Institute of Advanced Learning
Literacy Gr 7-12
GED
Holland College
Aboriginal Youth Summer Camp
GED
Foundation 1 Program
Academic upgrading
Employment Support Services for Social Assistance Recipients
Transitions with High Schools
Alternative Schools
Life Skills
Academics
Clientele Agencies
GOVERNMENT
Provincial Correctional Centre
Community Youth Outreach
Take Our Kids to Work
Youth Interagency Committee
COMMUNITY
Project Discovery
Employability Skills
Aboriginal Women's Association
Volunteers for Literacy
National Adult Literacy Database
Employment Counselling
GED
Hand Up on Life
SNAP Preventative Justice
Native Council of PEI
Learn, Explore, Achieve, Prepare (LEAP)
John Howard Society
East Prince Youth Development Centre
Chambers of Commerce
Rural Community Learning
Connecting Youth to the Community
Parenting Program for young moms
Stepping Stones to Success
Family Ties
Counselling
Youth Education
AIDS PEI
Career Development Services
Harmony Training Centre
Employability Skills
Girls Unlimited
Women's Network of PEI
Tim Horton's Camps
ARC
PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada
Mi'kmaq Confederacy
GED
Employment Counselling
Municipalities
Career Bridges
Employability Skills
Rites of Passage Experience (ROPES)
12 week Life Skills for at-risk youth
Advantage Group
18 week Life Skills for single moms
Kings County Job Shadow Program
Morell Learning Centre
Council for People with Disabilities
Boys & Girls Club
Free tutoring ages 6-13
Homework Club ages 6-13
Literacy Club ages 6-13
Survival Centre for Youth 18-26
INDUSTRY
Construction Association of PEI
Workplace Learning PEI
GED
Academic upgrading
Trade specific skills
Employability Skills
Red Seal
Various short-term, in-house programs
Trade Specific Skills
Academic upgrading
Trade Essentials
Sector Councils
Trucking Sector Council
TOWES
Cavendish Farms
GED
Employee identified areas of interest
Academic upgrading
Computer skills
Trout River Industries
Trout River 101
Tillcezek & Campbell July 2011

Figure A2

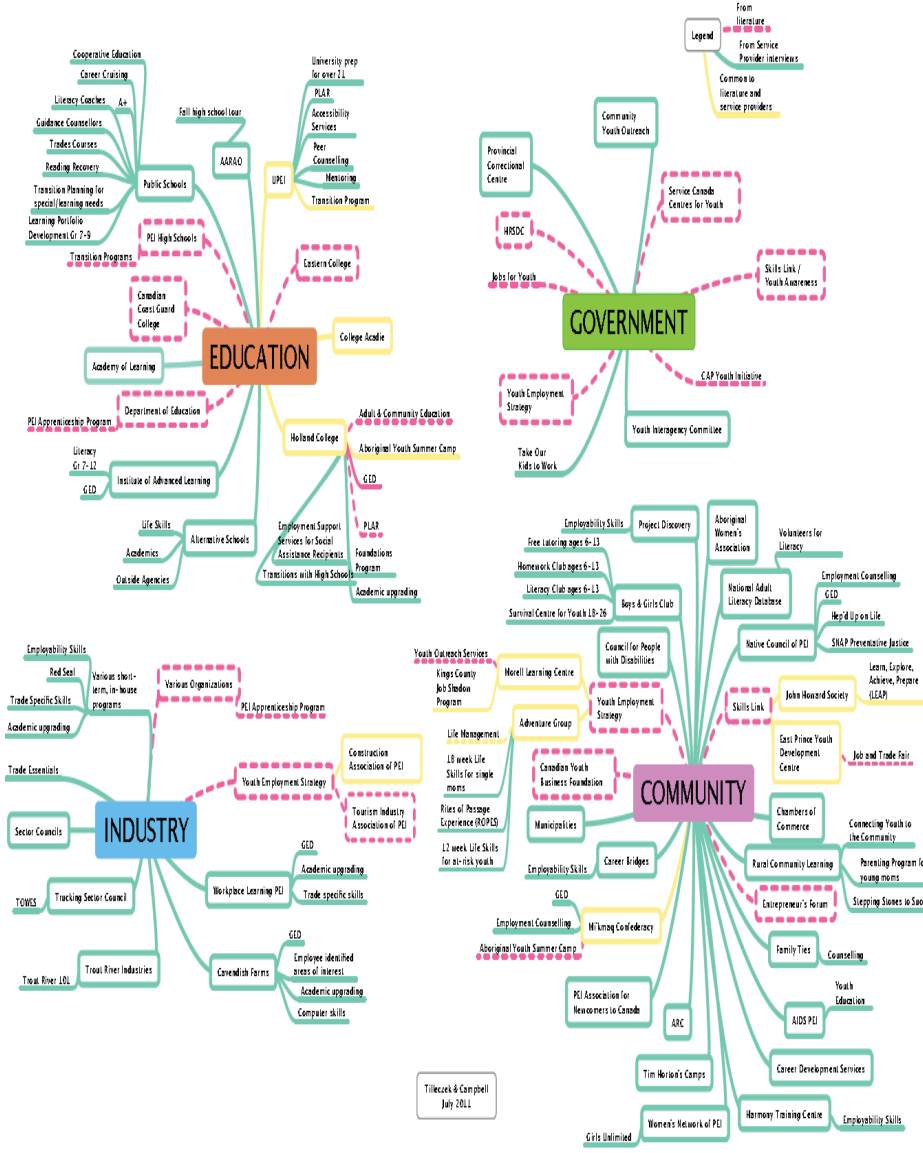
Service Providers compared to Internet Searches
Legend
From literature
From Service Provider interviews
Common to literature and service providers
EDUCATION
Cooperative Education
Career Cruising
Literacy Coaches
A+
Guidance Counsellors
Trades Courses
Reading Recovery
Transition Planning for special/learning needs
Learning Portfolio Development Gr 7-9
Transition Programs
Public Schools
Fall high school tour
AARAO
University prep for over 21
PLAR
Accessibility Services
Peer Counselling
Mentoring
Transition Program
UPEI
PEI High Schools
Eastern College
Canadian Coast Guard College
College Acadie
Academy of Learning
Department of Education
PEI Apprenticeship Program
Holland College
Adult & Community Education
Aboriginal Youth Summer Camp
GED
PLAR
Foundations Program
Academic upgrading
Employment Support Services for Social Assistance Recipients
Transitions with High Schools
Literacy Gr 7-12
GED
Institute of Advanced Learning
Life Skills
Academics
Outside Agencies
Alternative Schools
GOVERNMENT
Community Youth Outreach
Provincial Correctional Centre
Service Canada Centres for Youth
HRSDC
Jobs for Youth
Skills Link / Youth Awareness
CAP Youth Initiative
Youth Employment Strategy
Youth Interagency Committee
Take Our Kids to Work
COMMUNITY
Aboriginal Women's Association
Volunteers for Literacy
Employability Skills
Project Discovery
Free tutoring ages 6-13
Homework Club ages 6-13
Literacy Club ages 6-13
Survival Centre for Youth 18-26
Boys & Girls Club
National Adult Literacy Database
Employment Counselling
GED
Help'd Up on Life
Native Council of PEI
SNAP Preventative Justice
Council for People with Disabilities
Youth Outreach Services
Kings County Job Shadow Program
Morell Learning Centre
Youth Employment Strategy
Skills Link
John Howard Society
Learn, Explore, Achieve, Prepare (LEAP)
Life Management
Adventure Group
18 week Life Skills for single moms
Riles of Passage Experience (ROPES)
12 week Life Skills for at-risk youth
Canadian Youth Business Foundation
East Prince Youth Development Centre
Job and Trade Fair
Chambers of Commerce
Connecting Youth to the Community
Rural Community Learning
Parenting Program for young moms
Entrepreneur's Forum
Stepping Stones to Success
Municipalities
Career Bridges
Employability Skills
GED
Employment Counselling
Aboriginal Youth Summer Camp
Mi'kmaq Confederacy
Family Ties
Counselling
Youth Education
AIDS PEI
PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada
ARC
Tim Horton's Camps
Career Development Services
Harmony Training Centre
Employability Skills
Women's Network of PEI
Girls Unlimited
INDUSTRY
Employability Skills
Red Seal
Various short-term, in-house programs
Trade Specific Skills
Academic upgrading
Various Organizations
PEI Apprenticeship Program
Trade Essentials
Youth Employment Strategy
Construction Association of PEI
Tourism Industry Association of PEI
Sector Councils
Trucking Sector Council
TOWES
Workplace Learning PEI
GED
Academic upgrading
Trade specific skills
Trout River Industries
Trout River LOL
Cavendish Farms
GED
Employee identified areas of interest
Academic upgrading
Computer skills
Tilleczek & Campbell July 2011

Figure A3

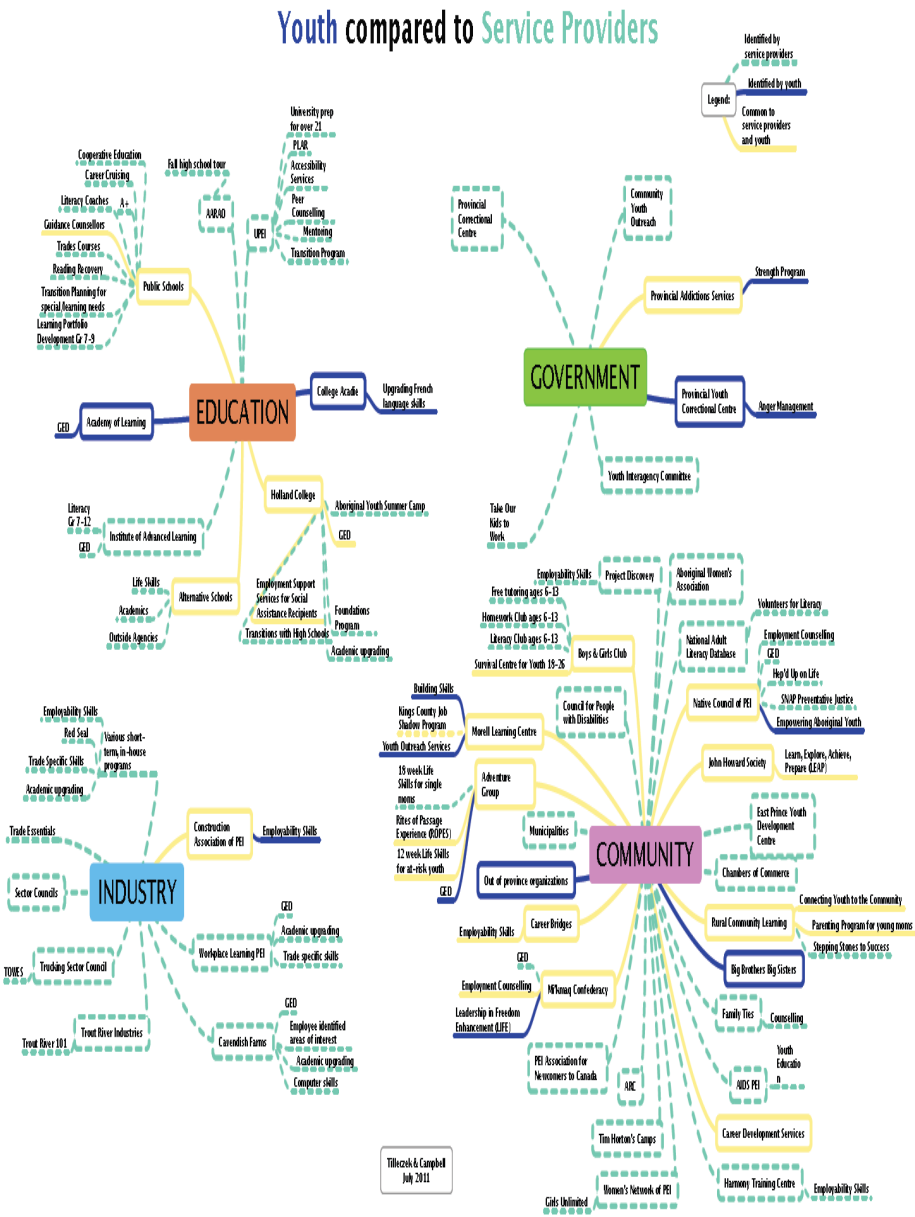
Youth compared to Service Providers
Legend:
Identified by service providers
Identified by youth
Common to service providers and youth
EDUCATION
Public Schools
Cooperative Education
Career Cruising
Literacy Coaches
A+
Guidance Counsellors
Trades Courses
Reading Recovery
Transition Planning for special learning needs
Learning Portfolio Development Gr 7-9
Full high school tour
AARAD
UPEI
University prep for over 21
PLAR
Accessibility Services
Peer Counselling
Mentoring
Transition Program
College Acadie
Upgrading French language skills
GED
Academy of Learning
Holland College
Aboriginal Youth Summer Camp
GED
Literacy Gr 7-12
GED
Institute of Advanced Learning
Life Skills
Academics
Outside Agencies
Alternative Schools
Employment Support Services for Social Assistance Recipients
Transitions with High Schools
Foundations Program
Academic upgrading
GOVERNMENT
Provincial Correctional Centre
Community Youth Outreach
Provincial Addictions Services
Strength Program
Provincial Youth Correctional Centre
Roger Management
Youth Interagency Committee
Take Our Kids to Work
COMMUNITY
Employability Skills
Project Discovery
Aboriginal Women's Association
Free tutoring ages 6-13
Homework Club ages 6-13
Literacy Club ages 6-13
Survival Centre for Youth 18-26
Boys & Girls Club
National Adult Literacy Database
Volunteers for Literacy
Employment Counselling
GED
Hep'd Up on Life
SNAP Preventative Justice
Empowering Aboriginal Youth
Native Council of PEI
Building Skills
Kings County Job Shadow Program
Youth Outreach Services
Morell Learning Centre
Council for People with Disabilities
John Howard Society
Learn, Explore, Achieve, Prepare (LEAP)
16 week Life Skills for single moms
Rites of Passage Experience (ROPES)
12 week Life Skills for at-risk youth
GED
Adventure Group
Municipalities
Out of province organizations
East Prince Youth Development Centre
Chambers of Commerce
Employability Skills
Career Bridges
Rural Community Learning
Connecting Youth to the Community
Parenting Program for young moms
Stepping Stones to Success
Big Brothers Big Sisters
GED
Employment Counselling
Leadership in Freedom Enhancement (LIFE)
Mi'kmaq Confederacy
Family Ties
Counselling
PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada
ARC
AIDS PEI
Youth Educatio n
Tim Horton's Camps
Career Development Services
Girls Unlimited
Women's Network of PEI
Harmony Training Centre
Employability Skills
INDUSTRY
Employability Skills
Red Seal
Trade Specific Skills
Academic upgrading
Various short-term, in-house programs
Construction Association of PEI
Employability Skills
Trade Essentials
Sector Councils
Trucking Sector Council
TOMES
Trout River 101
Trout River Industries
GED
Academic upgrading
Trade specific skills
Workplace Learning PEI
GED
Employee identified areas of interest
Academic upgrading
Computer skills
Cavendish Farms
Tilleczek & Campbell July 2011

Figure A4

Appendix B: Visual Narratives

Figure B1

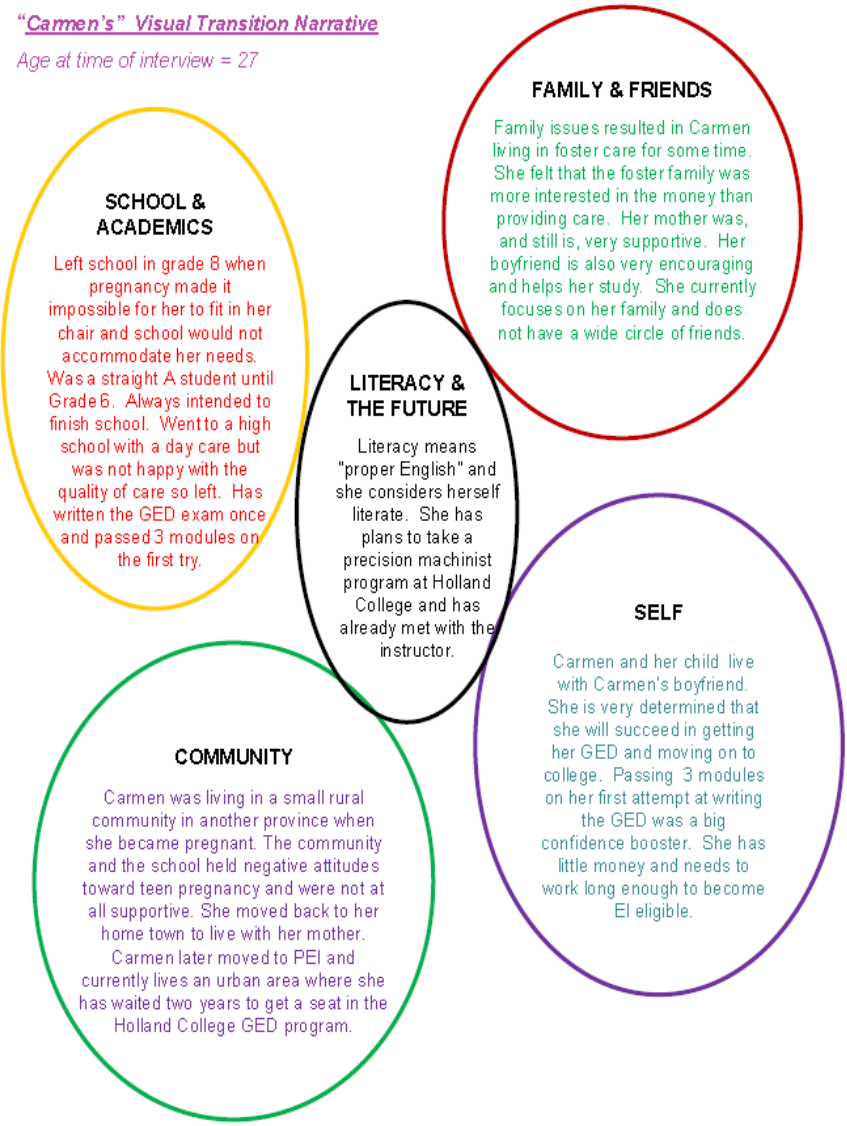
"Carmen's" Visual Transition Narrative
Age at time of interview = 27
FAMILY & FRIENDS
Family issues resulted in Carmen living in foster care for some time. She felt that the foster family was more interested in the money than providing care. Her mother was, and still is, very supportive. Her boyfriend is also very encouraging and helps her study. She currently focuses on her family and does not have a wide circle of friends.
SCHOOL & ACADEMICS
Left school in grade 8 when pregnancy made it impossible for her to fit in her chair and school would not accommodate her needs. Was a straight A student until Grade 6. Always intended to finish school. Went to a high school with a day care but was not happy with the quality of care so left. Has written the GED exam once and passed 3 modules on the first try.
LITERACY & THE FUTURE
Literacy means "proper English" and she considers herself literate. She has plans to take a precision machinist program at Holland College and has already met with the instructor.
SELF
Carmen and her child live with Carmen's boyfriend. She is very determined that she will succeed in getting her GED and moving on to college. Passing 3 modules on her first attempt at writing the GED was a big confidence booster. She has little money and needs to work long enough to become EI eligible.
COMMUNITY
Carmen was living in a small rural community in another province when she became pregnant. The community and the school held negative attitudes toward teen pregnancy and were not at all supportive. She moved back to her home town to live with her mother. Carmen later moved to PEI and currently lives an urban area where she has waited two years to get a seat in the Holland College GED program.

Figure B2


"Dawn's" Visual Transition Narrative
Age at time of interview = 21
SCHOOL & ACADEMICS
Dawn left school after completing Grade 11. She did well in math but struggled with other subjects, especially English. School was not a happy place, she felt that teachers were not interested in her – they never told her she wasn't doing well yet she failed some courses. Dawn is currently working on her GED and has passed 3 modules. She will apply for the Child and Youth Care Worker program at Holland College when the GED is completed.
FAMILY & FRIENDS
Dawn's mother feels school is important and has been supportive – reminds Dawn of her role in the community/family. Her older brother also encourages Dawn to continue with her education. She had issues with friends in school being overly dramatic, talking about each other. Her other friends were from other districts, many of them were younger, and not all of them stayed in school. When she left school, she moved in with a friend from another community.
LITERACY & THE FUTURE
Dawn is not confident of her literacy skills, she rates her reading ability as 'average' and her writing ability as 'poor'. She experiences difficulty filling out forms/ applications and typically asks friends to help.
COMMUNITY
Dawn moved around quite a bit as a child but lived in Charlottetown when in high school. She has strong ties to her Aboriginal community. She has accessed programs through NCPEI , the Mi'kmaq Confederacy, and the Adventure Group.
SELF
Dawn is very goal oriented, skills she attributes to programs she has taken. She would like eventually to work with high risk youth, in her Aboriginal community. She cites lack of motivation as one reason for leaving school.

Figure B3

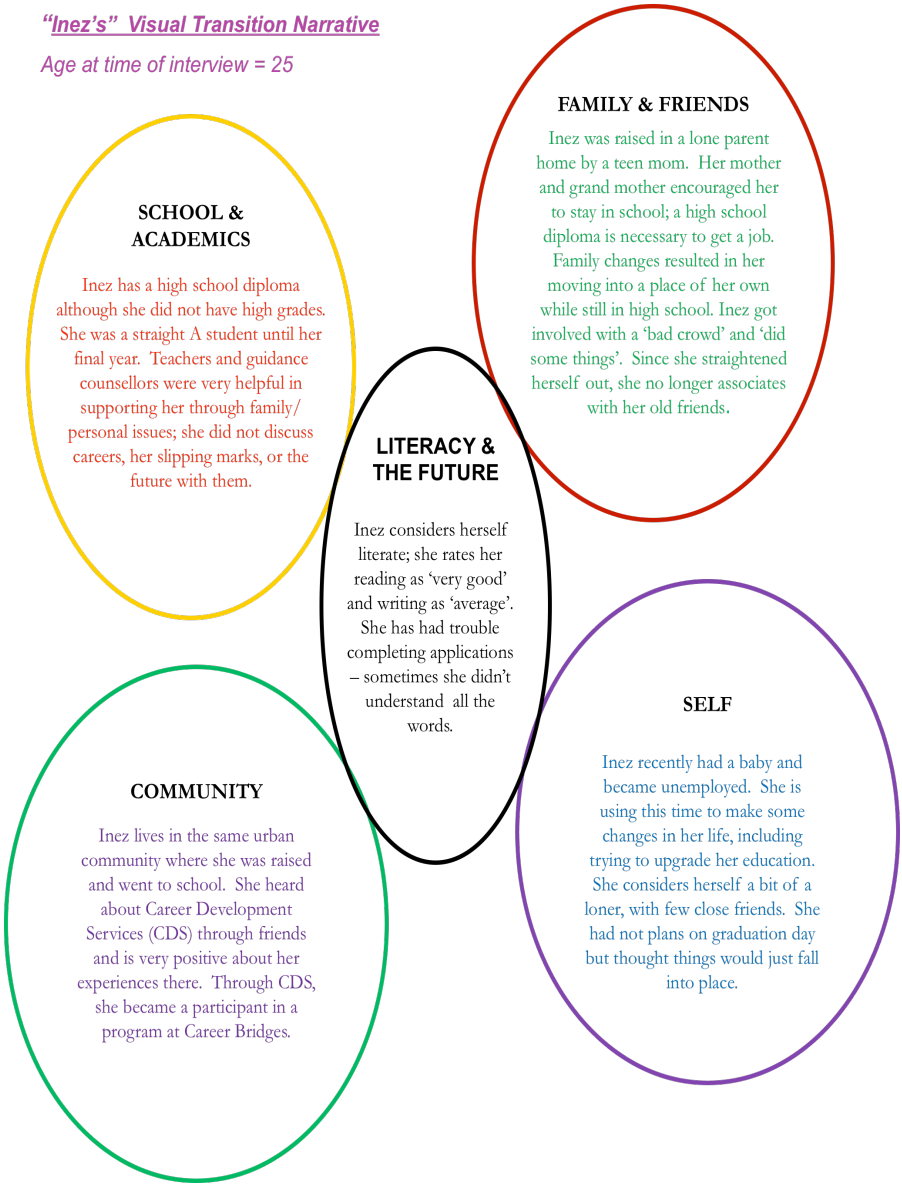
"Inez's" Visual Transition Narrative
Age at time of interview = 25
SCHOOL & ACADEMICS
Inez has a high school diploma although she did not have high grades. She was a straight A student until her final year. Teachers and guidance counsellors were very helpful in supporting her through family/ personal issues; she did not discuss careers, her slipping marks, or the future with them.
FAMILY & FRIENDS
Inez was raised in a lone parent home by a teen mom. Her mother and grand mother encouraged her to stay in school; a high school diploma is necessary to get a job. Family changes resulted in her moving into a place of her own while still in high school. Inez got involved with a 'bad crowd' and 'did some things'. Since she straightened herself out, she no longer associates with her old friends.
LITERACY & THE FUTURE
Inez considers herself literate; she rates her reading as 'very good' and writing as 'average'. She has had trouble completing applications – sometimes she didn't understand all the words.
COMMUNITY
Inez lives in the same urban community where she was raised and went to school. She heard about Career Development Services (CDS) through friends and is very positive about her experiences there. Through CDS, she became a participant in a program at Career Bridges.
SELF
Inez recently had a baby and became unemployed. She is using this time to make some changes in her life, including trying to upgrade her education. She considers herself a bit of a loner, with few close friends. She had not plans on graduation day but thought things would just fall into place.

Figure B4


"Mona's" Visual Transition Narrative
Age at time of interview = 20
FAMILY & FRIENDS
Her parents separated when she was in high school. Her friends were very supportive. Since graduation, her family has encouraged her to go back to school.
SCHOOL & ACADEMICS
Mona has her grade 12 diploma. She switched from academic math because the non-academic was easier. She ws more interested in making friends than school work. Looking back, she wishes she had understood the importance of education and tried harder. She struggled with some courses but really enjoyed peer helping class. Teachers were always very supportive.
LITERACY & THE FUTURE
Literacy is not a barrier for Mona, she is confident in her ability to read and write. She hopes to upgrade her high school marks to attend college/ university.
SELF
Mona was interested in becoming a veterinarian but was unaware of the necessary qualifications for veterinary school. She also didn't feel like she was smart enough when in high school. She lacks confidence in her math skills in particular. Going back to school is scary, but she is afraid that if she doesn't she will be stuck in a job she doesn't like.
COMMUNITY
Mona lives in a very rural area approximately 20 km from the nearest town. She recently obtained her driver's license so transportation is less of an issue for her. She has not accessed any education or employment programs but is aware of what is offered through Holland College.

Figure B5

"Mitchell's" Visual Transition Narrative

Age at time of interview = 20

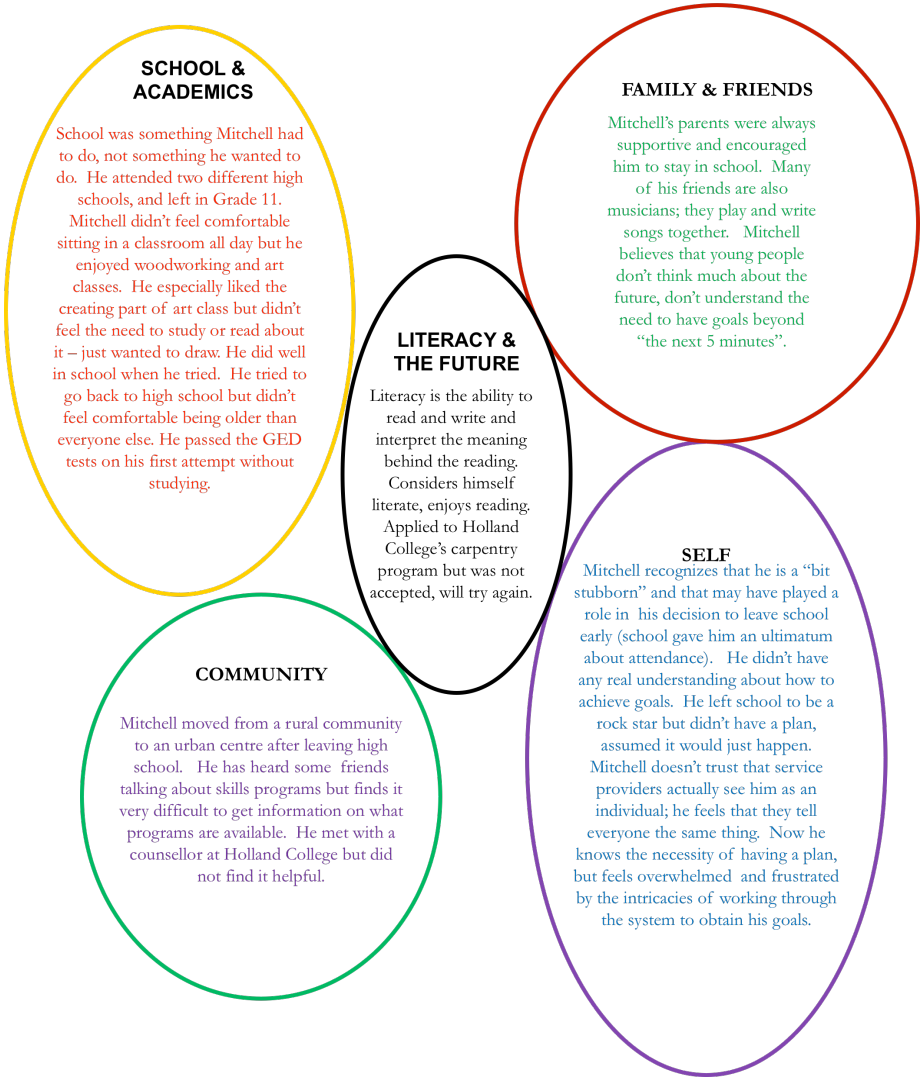

Figure B6

"Jack's" Visual Transition Narrative

Age at time of interview = 27

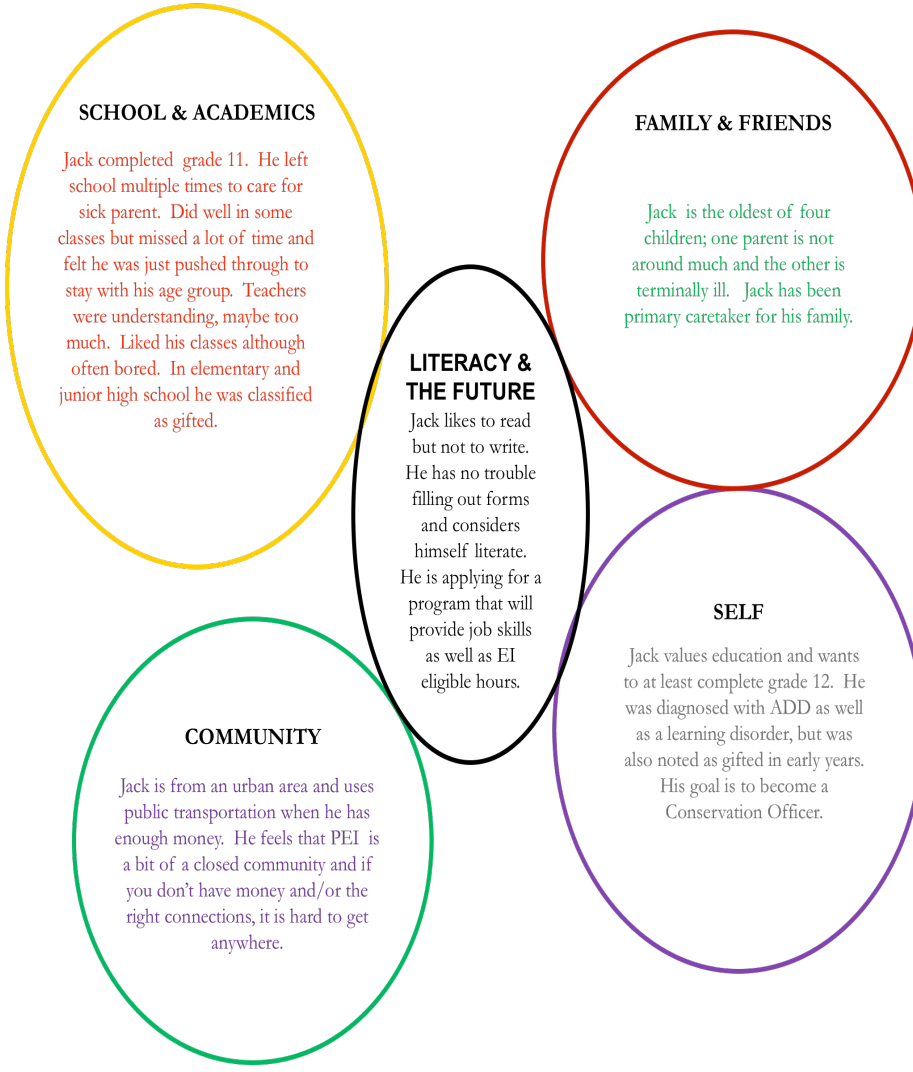

Figure B7

"Nate's" Visual Transition Narrative

Age at time of interview = 26

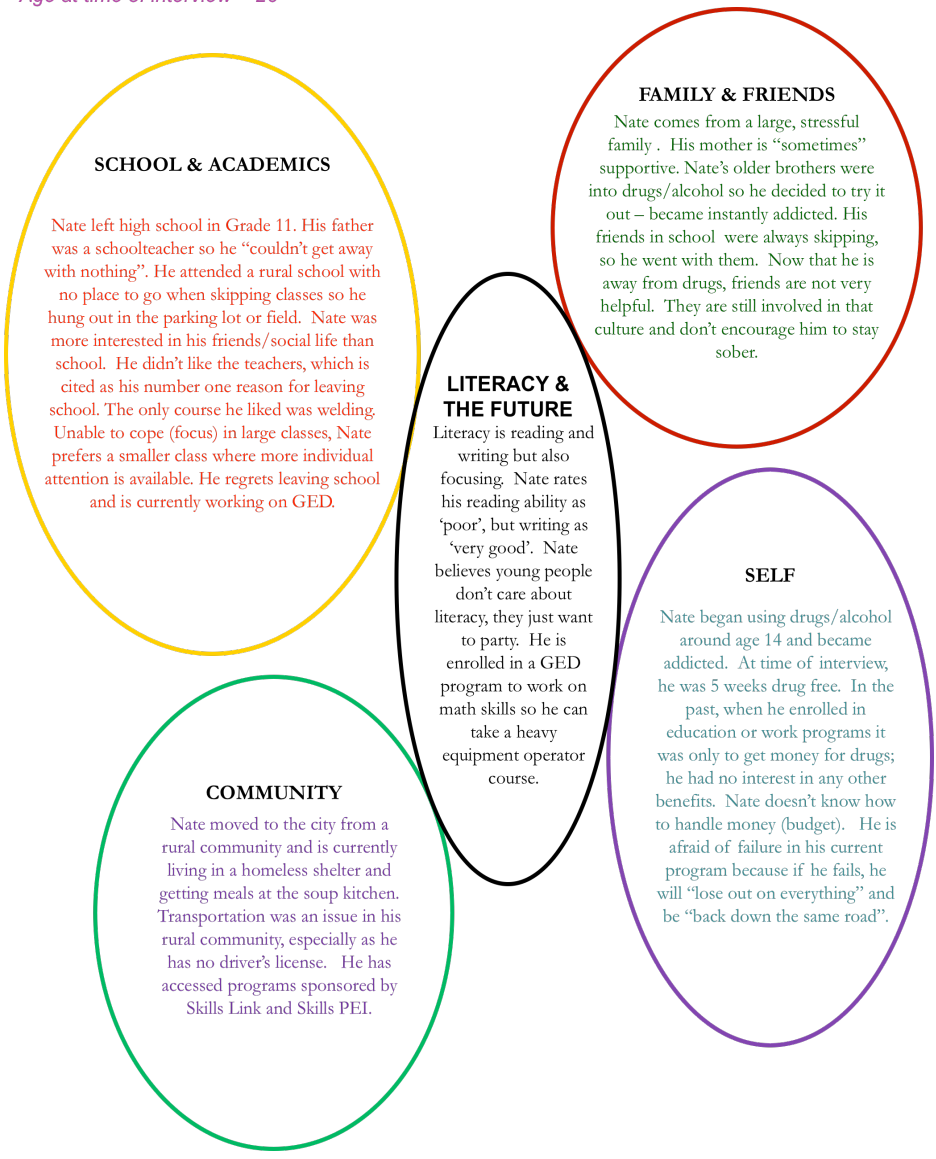

Figure B8

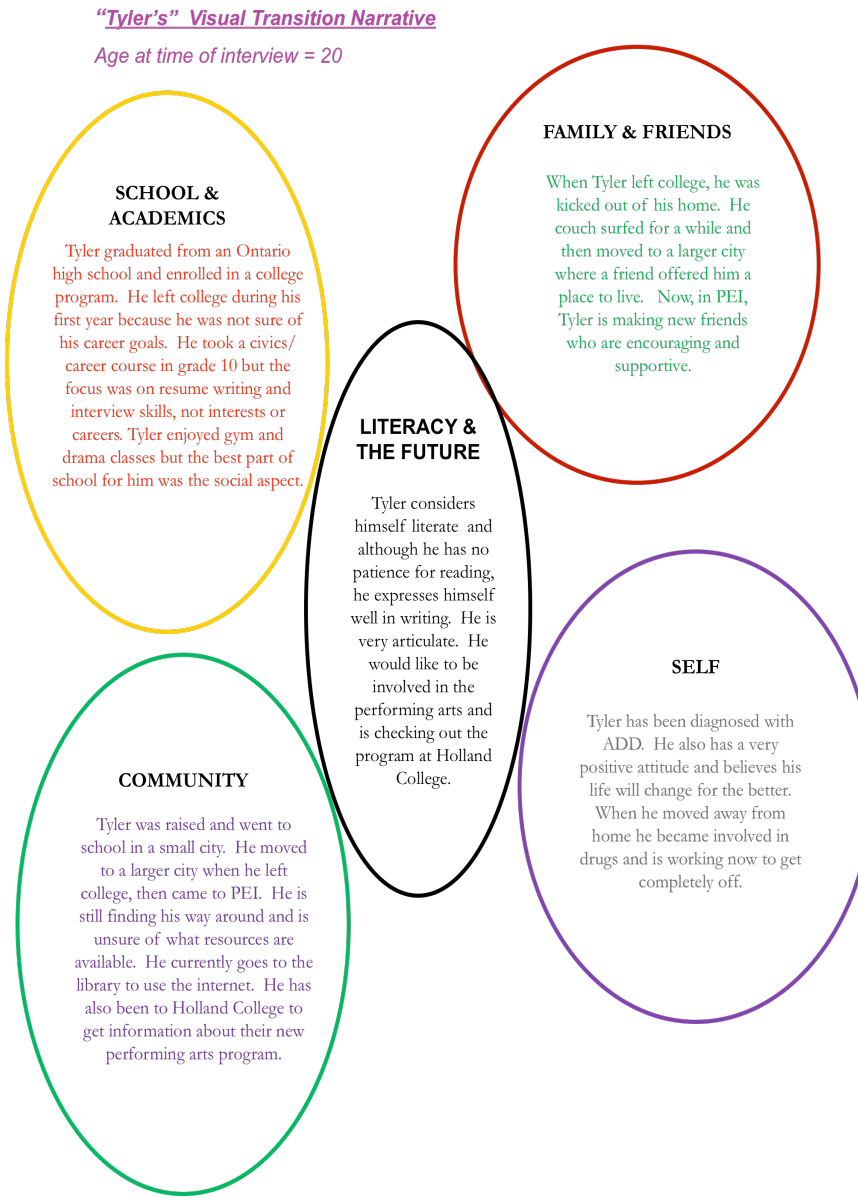
"Tyler's" Visual Transition Narrative
Age at time of interview = 20
SCHOOL & ACADEMICS
Tyler graduated from an Ontario high school and enrolled in a college program. He left college during his first year because he was not sure of his career goals. He took a civics/ career course in grade 10 but the focus was on resume writing and interview skills, not interests or careers. Tyler enjoyed gym and drama classes but the best part of school for him was the social aspect.
FAMILY & FRIENDS
When Tyler left college, he was kicked out of his home. He couch surfed for a while and then moved to a larger city where a friend offered him a place to live. Now, in PEI, Tyler is making new friends who are encouraging and supportive.
LITERACY & THE FUTURE
Tyler considers himself literate and although he has no patience for reading, he expresses himself well in writing. He is very articulate. He would like to be involved in the performing arts and is checking out the program at Holland College.
SELF
Tyler has been diagnosed with ADD. He also has a very positive attitude and believes his life will change for the better. When he moved away from home he became involved in drugs and is working now to get completely off.
COMMUNITY
Tyler was raised and went to school in a small city. He moved to a larger city when he left college, then came to PEI. He is still finding his way around and is unsure of what resources are available. He currently goes to the library to use the internet. He has also been to Holland College to get information about their new performing arts program.

Figure B9

"Fred's" Visual Transition Narrative

Age at time of interview = 19

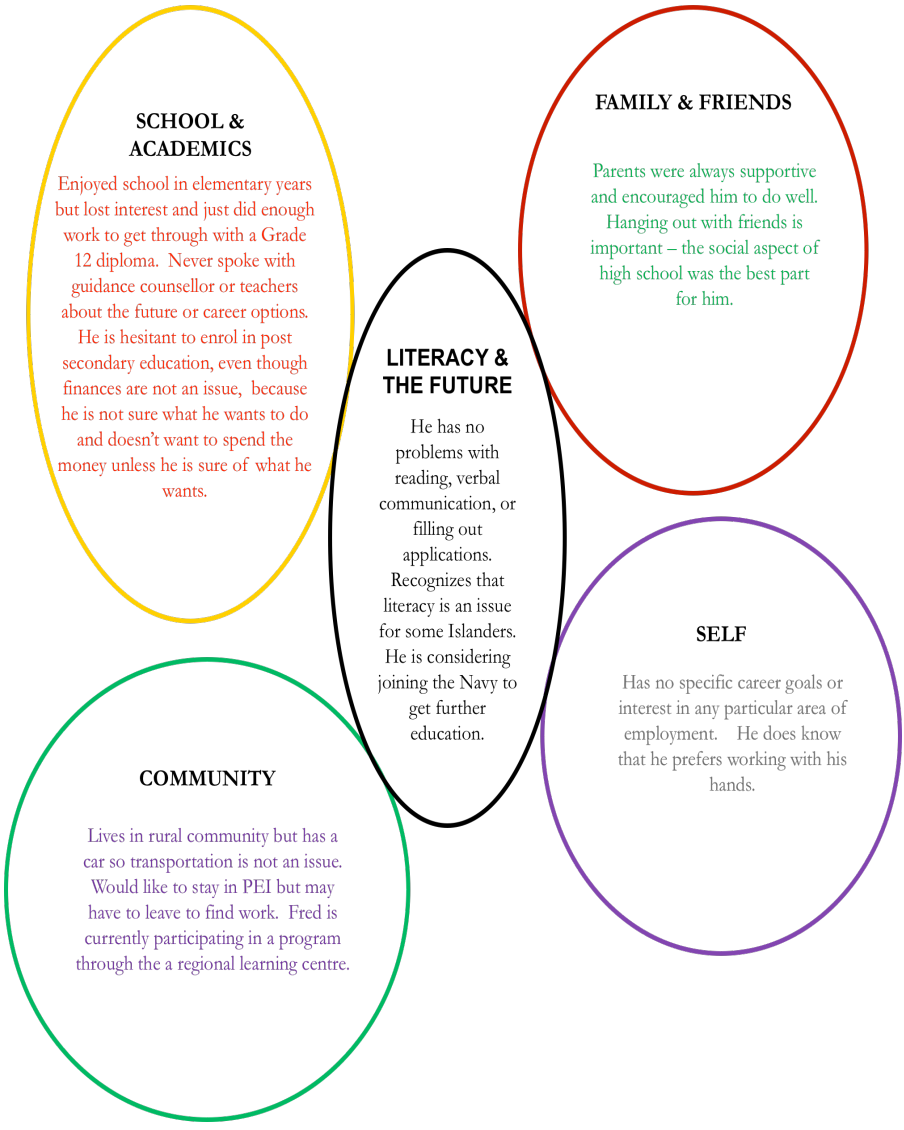

Figure B10