

"A SLUSHY TIME":
THE TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCES AND CHANGING IMAGES OF
ADOLESCENTS CROSSING THE BRIDGE TO ADULTHOOD

by

JO-ANN (JAN) ELLEN MAYNARD NICOL

B.G.S., Simon Fraser University, 1990
M.A. (Educ.), Simon Fraser University, 1994

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 2001

© Jo-Ann Ellen Maynard Nicol, 2001

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Centre for
Department of the Study of Curriculum & Instruction

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date Oct. 10, 2001

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the liminal experiences of a group of grade twelve students. Their narratives describe their experiences as they prepare to leave the structure that has framed their lives for thirteen years and move into the adult world. The study begins with an overview of the literature in which the notion of adolescent transition into adulthood has shifted over the decades from an emphasis on transition as a *rite of passage* to transition as a societal economic concern and the more recent regard for the personal experience of transition. Interviews, field notes of group discussions and site observations, as well as student surveys and their own narratives form the body of the work. Structured as a narrative, the study presents a co-construction of how these students talked about their pressures and concerns, and their hopes and fears of moving into the adult world. While looking forward with varying degrees of anticipation to graduation celebrations, the students, like Janus, the Roman god of the doorway, reflected on past events that have brought them to this place. The study also describes various influences on students' experiences and raises questions about how students might be guided toward adulthood so they have greater confidence in themselves and their future.

Students' evocative stories reveal that grade twelve is a time of uncertain identities and of personal transformation. Their

narratives reveal that there is a need for more sensitive pedagogy for senior secondary students, one that acknowledges their personal transformations as well as the importance of supportive relationships during this time of uncertainty. The final chapter describes how a number of the students in the study have fared since their graduation.

The Epilogue reflects on how the "Subjective-I" (Peshkin, 1988a, p. 18) shaped the study and the resulting text, then briefly re-examines the value of Turner's (1967) notion of liminality in the study of present-day adolescent transition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgments	vii
Dedication	ix
INTRODUCTION: TRANSITIONS AND CHANGING IMAGES	1
Purpose of this study.....	6
Overview of the study.....	8
CHAPTER 2: TRANSITION: AT LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Investigating the transition to adulthood.....	12
Shifting the focus	24
Observing life's passages	24
Being 'Betwixt and between': the liminal period	29
Uncovering assumptions intrinsic to the liminal phase	32
Acknowledging limitations of rites of passage for present study	34
Using the notion of liminality as a heuristic	37
Questioning the use of the framework	42
CHAPTER 3: ENTRY INTO THE LANDSCAPE	45
Choosing a constructivist paradigm	46
Revealing the presence of self in the research process	50
Appreciating subjectivity as a virtue	56

Choosing the site	60
Seeking co-constructed understandings	66
Re-presenting the co-constructed understandings	77
CHAPTER 4: IN THE MIDST OF LIMINALITY: BETWIXT AND BETWEEN THE ENDING AND THE BEGINNING	82
Arriving: "I made it!"	84
Waiting: "a slushy area, like getting ready for Something"	94
Being pressed: "Why is there so much pressure?"	99
Reflecting: "After a while you realize"	108
Hoping: "a setback . . . means you do in a different direction"	117
Leaving: "It's not my place . . . any more"	128
Celebrating: "sort of like the final goodbye"	134
CHAPTER 5: FROM THE OUTSIDE IN: INFLUENCING THE BETWIXT AND BETWEEN	152
Spheres of influence	153
Developing an explorative framework	156
Exploring how expectations influence liminal experiences	160
Exploring how the institution influences liminal experiences	173
Exploring how sacra influences liminal experiences	199
Exploring how communitas and flow influence liminal experiences	205
Reflecting on the spheres of influence	211

CHAPTER 6: CROSSING THE BRIDGE: THE MYTHS AND REALITY	
GRADUATION AND ENDINGS	214
CHAPTER 7: BEYOND LIMINALITY: NEW BEGINNINGS	237
EPILOGUE	248
REFERENCES	254
APPENDICES	261
Informed consent forms	262
January survey form	264
May survey form	266
Application for copyright permission	268
Copyright permission	269

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a long journey that began with a different destination in mind. As well, there were many stops along the way - some more unexpected than others. Without the love and support a great many people, some of those stops would likely have become permanent. I am grateful for all of the people who walked with me on this journey.

I am especially grateful for the support of my committee who, I am thankful to say, never gave up on me. I particularly thank my co-chair, Walter Werner, who challenged, prodded, and encouraged me through good times and bad. Walt, I know that I grew as a researcher and became more precise in my writing under your careful guidance and I thank you.

In addition, I feel truly fortunate to have had the support and guidance of my other co-chair, Carl Leggo, who encouraged me to think narratively and who, with understanding, guided me toward clarity when I saw the world metaphorically. Carl, your support helped me tell the stories of the students in this study in a way that, hopefully, honoured them as people rather than subjects and, for that, I am grateful.

As well, I am grateful for the encouragement and support of Carolyn Shields who guided me in my growth as a researcher. Carolyn, I thank you, not only for your guidance but also for your support and friendship over the past several years.

The fourth member of my committee, Stephen Smith, began

walking pedagogically beside me many years ago when I started out along the path toward my Masters Degree. For more than ten years, he has encouraged, listened to, and guided me with pedagogical thoughtfulness. Stephen, I am grateful for your support, your understanding, your wisdom, and your friendship.

I would also like to acknowledge, with appreciation, the contributions of the students and staff at Eagle Spirit Secondary School. Your participation made this study possible but, even more importantly, you gave me an enormous gift -- a gift of your trust, your support, and your friendship. It was a gift that was beyond expectations and I was honoured by it.

Finally, there are a number of people in my personal life to whom I owe an enormous debt of gratitude. To my three children, Tad, Susan, and Janice, thank you for your continued love and encouragement, for never giving up on me, and for your patience during all the years I have been following this path. As well, I thank my seven grandchildren (five of whom have never known a time when their Nana was not a student) for their understanding when my studies kept me from fun times. And finally, I am grateful to my earlier mentor, George Dixon, who never stopped believing in me and who, in another time and place, provided the love and support to give me the courage to travel this road. It has been a road of discovery and recovery. I wish I could promise my family that I will not find other roads to travel but already new destinations beckon.

DEDICATION

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my grandchildren: Christie, Brandon, Kareline, Lauren, Cameron, Zoë, and Aidan with the hope that, as each of you travel life's journey, you will always receive the love and support you need during your times of transition.

}

INTRODUCTION:

TRANSITIONS AND CHANGING IMAGES

It is precisely in the change of self-image and the changing of one's image of the world and how one thinks one should relate to the world that a rite of passage takes place. (Oldfield, 1996 in Mahadi, 1996, p.151 [italics in original])

As we enter the third millennium, many might argue that rites of passage are merely a ritual of earlier times. However, no one would argue that transition itself, whether marked by ritual or not, is a part of the human condition. As Belgian folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1960, pp.2-3) pointed out,

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one stage to another and from one occupation to another. Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence.

Some of life's transitions are gradual, others celebrated or ritualized as momentous occasions. Whether it is the infant taking those first steps to become a toddler, the five-year-old going off to school for the first time, the birthday finally turning a child into a 'teenager,' the high school graduate moving off into the adult world, relationships and marriages beginning or ending, adults adjusting to parenthood, or even dealing with 'mid-life crisis,' every passage begins a new phase in the life journey.

The many new beginnings along this life journey cannot begin without an ending. But what of the in-between? Is it possible to identify a space between the ending and the beginning?

Van Gennep (1960, p.11), studying societies where significant passages were marked by what he termed *rites de passage*, pointed out that when the activities associated with such ceremonies were examined, it was possible to distinguish phases he labelled separation, transition, and incorporation. Although the structure of rites of passage theoretically includes the three phases, van Gennep noted that in specific instances the three phases are not equally important or equally elaborated.

Drawing on van Gennep's model, Victor Turner (1967, p.94) also concluded that all transitions are marked by three phases: separation, margin or *limen*, and aggregation. The separation phase comprises a detachment (symbolic or otherwise) from an earlier state in the social structure. In the third phase an individual is accepted into the new state with clearly defined rights, obligations, and ethical standards. Transition from one state to another is "a process, a becoming, . . . even a transformation" (p.94).

*It is like being a butterfly..... no.... being in
the cocoon before you become a butterfly.....*
(Sandi, student Interview #11)¹

¹ Student quotes from interviews and questionnaires used in this chapter are from the data collected in this study. Informa-

Turner further argued that at the mid-point of the transition process all "transitional beings" are "betwixt and between" all the recognized fixed points in space and time (p.97). This mid-point is a time of **liminality**. Liminality, a concept Turner (1977, p.36) "borrowed" from van Gennep, comes from the term *limen* -- a threshold -- which van Gennep used to denote the midpoint of the transition process.²

Although Turner's study focused on rites of passage in pre-industrial tribal societies, Bridges (1980, p.117)³ examined the notion of the liminal phase of transition in the context of our urban post-industrialized society. Referring to van Gennep's model, he suggested that the consciousness-

tion about data collection is found in Chapter 3.

²Turner (1977, p.37) contended that in the case of protracted rites of passage the *limen* or threshold is a very long threshold, almost a corridor.

³ To date there has been very little interest in the notion of transition. Other than an anthropological interest in rites of passage in tribal societies, investigations appear to have been limited to adolescents successfully entering the work force or completing first year of postsecondary schooling. There has been some interest in exploring, from a sociological perspective, the transition of seniors as they cope with "old age" (e.g., Hamburg, 1981 in Eurich, 1981). The focus of previous studies appears to have been from a positivist or postpositivist perspective. One exception is the work of William Bridges (1980) who explored with groups of people the difficulties they encountered as they worked through transitions in their lives. A second, more recent, exception to the traditional interest in adolescent transition is the collection of articles edited by L.C. Mahadi (1996), *Crossroads: The quest for contemporary rites of passage*. Both of these will be reviewed in Chapter II.

altering techniques used in the traditional rites of passage "enhanced the natural tendency to see and understand the world differently in the gap between one life phase and the next" -- something that is missing in modern society. Because they were highly ritualized and sanctioned by society, the rituals not only marked the passage but provided support for individuals. Bridges (p.112) further pointed out that one of the difficulties of being in transition in the modern world is that we have "lost our appreciation for the gap in this continuity of existence" -- this in-between, this being 'in-passage,' this "liminal" phase (Turner, 1967).

One of the significant transitions in our present society where ceremony and ritual place emphasis on the ending and great expectations on the new beginning is the progression from secondary schooling to life in the adult world. Although the ceremonial aspect of the progression is absent for those who do not reach the magical Graduation Day, in the end it makes little difference to how the transitional experience is perceived. The emphasis is on the transition to post-secondary education or the work force with little consideration paid to how students experience the passage. Yet, by its very nature, grade twelve is a time of liminality, a time of being "betwixt and between" a high school student and a young adult. Secondary schooling ends with the completion of grade twelve⁴

⁴ Although the Graduation ceremonies mark the *formal* ending

and, ready or not, students must make the transition into the next phase of their life journey.

I feel that I'm not that well prepared. I'm actually quite worried about my future. (Questionnaire #081)

. . . everyone always says that when you get out of high school your whole world is back in high school and I see it as the whole world is out there and you're stuck in high school. I feel like I'm stuck here and there's no point to what I'm doing. (Sophie, who is not going to graduate, Student Interview #31)

In keeping with the perspective that the passage itself is of lesser importance, many educational researchers focus their attention on the new beginning phase of the adolescent transition process. To date much of the research has examined transition *into* something rather than the transition process *from* secondary schooling. In particular, researchers have shown increased interest in the economic implications of youth transition (Bettis, 1996; Brown, 1980; Coleman & Husén, 1985; Hamburg & Takanishi, 1989; Holmes, 1995; Irwin, 1995; Kerkhoff, 1990; Merganhagan, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1996; Wyn & White, 1997; and others) with an emphasis on youth transition as a labour related issue. Rather than examining youth transition to adulthood as a process involving individuals on their life courses, researchers seek to identify problems in the school-to-work transition. The experiences of the individuals most fundamentally concerned are not of primary interest.

of secondary schooling, emotional and mental endings occur earlier thereby opening the way for liminal experiences.

The exception to the emphasis on "new beginnings" are studies that focus on high school drop-outs (Fine, 1991; Kelly & Gaskell, 1996).⁵ While the stories of these students offer insight into the experience of school leaving, they are not meant to uncover the transition experience -- being in the in-between space -- as students move into the post-secondary phase of their lives.

But what are the experiences which appear to represent the transition process from secondary schooling to the adult world? What meanings does this passage hold for adolescents? And how could I, as an adult outsider, gain some understanding of the "liminal experiences" of grade twelve students? Are there aspects of the various notions of transition that might be useful in understanding these adolescent "liminal experiences"?

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the 'in-between' phase of the transition -- the liminal experiences -- of grade twelve students. It endeavoured to determine the various aspects of the liminal experience for grade twelve students and what events or situations

⁵ Generally these studies look at the phenomenon of dropping out as a failure of the system or the student but seldom examine the range of experiences themselves.

precipitate these liminal experiences. In the exploration, several related questions arose. What meanings do grade twelve students give to their liminal experiences? What part do relationships play in liminal experiences? What part does the curriculum play in liminal experiences? Of primary concern was how best to uncover the liminal experiences of grade twelve students and understand the constructed meanings of those experiences. Therefore, a conceptual framework gathered from anthropologists studying rituals of pre-literate societies and sociologists investigating youth labour market trends might suggest an epistemology which is antithetical to a constructivist position where methodological assumptions focus on constructed realities. Although the notion of liminality has largely reflected a structuralist perspective of how we move along our life journey (hardly a position conducive to understanding how adolescents make sense of their own transitional experiences), elements of that notion can provide a heuristic in our attempts to understand the passage from secondary schooling.

I believe that the significance in trying to understand how young people experience this important passage cannot be understated. As Eisner (1979, p.156) pointed out, our tacit beliefs about factors that motivate students and the conditions that foster learning influence the educational decisions we make. Uncovering how students experience various

aspects of the transition process can enhance our curricular and pedagogical decisions as we work with adolescents progressing through the liminal phase of the transition from secondary schooling.

Overview of the study

Chapter 2 of this work⁶ explores the notion of transition as described by various authors. Research on youth transition has, itself, undergone a transition. Early interest in youth transition emerged from anthropological studies of rites of passage in traditional societies, in particular, passage into womanhood or manhood. In recent decades, as western society continues to shift to a postindustrial society and the effects of deindustrialization become evident, interest in the economic implications of youth transition has increased as has an emphasis on youth transition as a labour related issue. More recently some authors (e.g., Bridges, 1980; Mahadi, 1996; Wynn and White, 1997) have explored transition as a personal experience. From this latter body of literature, an understanding of transition as transformation began to emerge.

⁶ Throughout this work, two different styles of type have been used to distinguish the various voices re-presented. The main narrative is written in regular type, including background information and direct quotes from the students, whether from survey comments or individual interviews. Italics are used to signify my personal reflections and field notes.

Coming to an understanding of transition as part of the life journey, I began my exploration of the liminal experiences of grade twelve students. That exploration is described in Chapter 3 where my journey into the world of grade twelve is described. This chapter outlines how the study gradually took shape as I reflected on previous conversations with grade twelve students as well as my own approaching graduation. Although an adult outsider significantly separated by age⁷ from grade twelve students, those reflections often enhanced the conversations with students in the study as we sought to co-construct an understanding of their liminal experiences.⁸ The students' stories, and the themes that emerged, are related in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 examines some of the factors that contributed to the liminal experiences of these grade twelve students.

Chapter 6 seeks to recapitulate how a group of grade twelve students experience the liminal phase of the transition from secondary schooling. The chapter begins with my reflections on my year at Eagle Spirit Secondary and raises

⁷ The term 'age' is used here as a surrogate measure for a number of social, psychological, and physical characteristics.

⁸ Since this study focused on the co-construction of an understanding of the liminal experiences of this group of grade twelve students, my own extensive reflections and questions have been included in the text. Some of these reflections are in response to observations of or conversations with the students. Others are personal reflections about what it means to be in transition and how we support those involved in the process.

questions about how we might better support adolescents in transition. As well, it suggests implications of the findings and proposes questions for further study of the liminal phase of adolescent transition.

Chapter 7 presents brief glimpses of how a number of students in the study have fared in the two and a half years since graduation. It illustrates how changing self-images altered the way they are choosing to make their way in the world.

The Epilogue briefly reflects on how my "Subjective-I" (Peshkin, 1988a, p.18) shaped the study. As well, it briefly re-examines the value of the notion of liminality as presented by Turner (1967) in an exploration of the "in-between" stage of transition from secondary schooling and the adolescent world to the adult world in 1999-2000.

This, then, is an exploration of the liminal experiences of a group of grade twelve students.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSITION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The term 'youth transition' is used in a variety of contexts to describe a range of events and experiences involving adolescents. Different scholars focus on often very different notions of what life transitions are all about. As a result, much of the literature could be arrayed on a spectrum that ranged from 'youth transition to adulthood as a societal concern' to 'youth transition to adulthood as personal transformation.' It should be noted, however, that the concepts 'youth' and 'adulthood' are vague and often not well developed in the youth literature (Irwin, 1995, p.27).

Irwin (p.3) contends that 'youth' is an historical construct which gives certain aspects of the biological and social experience of growing up their meaning. Wyn and White (1997) suggest that, for institutional and policy purposes, 'youth' as an age category generally starts around 13 and continues until age 25. They also suggest that in future this "shifting category" (p.1) will extend even further, at both ends. Coleman and Husén (1985) submit that, in the post World War II period in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, a stage of development known as 'youth' emerged. This is a stage between adolescence and adult-

hood. However, recently a "rather blurred borderline between youth and adulthood" (p.11) has arisen because age corresponds less to lifestyle than in the past. Although Hutson and Jenkins maintain the concept of adulthood is not very developed in the youth literature (1989, in Irwin, 1995, p.27), in much of the current youth research literature it appears to be closely linked to financial independence.

Investigating the transition to adulthood

In recent decades, as western society continues to shift to a postindustrial society and the effects of deindustrialization become evident, the predominant focus of research on youth transition has been on the outcomes of youth transition and the consequences of these life course transitions within the broader society. In particular, researchers, as noted earlier, have shown increased interest in the economic implications of youth transition with an emphasis on youth transition as a labour related issue.

Rather than examining youth transition to adulthood as a process involving individuals on their life courses, researchers have sought to identify such things as problems in the school-to-work transition. This is certainly true for such authors as Glover and Marshall (1993). While their article examined the transition of students from secondary schooling, the focus was on the preparation of students for the workforce. According to

the authors, "the lack of a systematic bridge between school and work"(p.593), while most adversely affecting poor and minority students, also affects others who choose not to pursue a baccalaureate degree. The authors called on all levels of government as well as labour and business to be active participants in developing a process to facilitate the transition from school to work for young people.

Other authors, examining the school-to-work transition, have also argued for the need to develop appropriate education and training policies to facilitate the transition from school to employment. In a study designed to examine the attitude toward training for new technology, economic locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-estrangement in a group of Canadian adolescents, Taylor, Boss, Bédard, Thibault, and Evans (1990) found that students who had been out of the educational system for more than a year (and likely been unable to find employment in that time) had a different attitude toward training for new technology than did their secondary counterparts. While this study did not examine the transition experience for students leaving secondary school, it did reveal the importance of having students describe their level of confidence in the transition experience.

Rosenbaum (1996), after a review of the research on high school-to-work transition, suggests that the school-work transition may be improved if schools made academic instruction vocationally relevant, if employers based hiring on applicants'

achievement in school, and school-employer linkages were created and appropriately designed. Further, he argues that the view of vocational education as a form of tracking which precludes opportunity is an oversimplification. Rosenbaum contends that tracking is a more complex issue than social critiques have suggested.

Preoccupation with the relationship between the labour market and youth transition appears rooted in the belief that employment underwrites the ability to secure independence and an adult lifestyle. However, Wallace (1987, *In Irwin, 1995, p.21*) argues that these "'normal' paths to adulthood" that were established during full employment in the 1950s and 1960s are no longer possible. In fact, the weakening of the youth labour market has prolonged transition into adulthood. Williamson (1985, *in Irwin, 1995, p.20*) describes these underemployed young adults as "trapped as teenagers" while Willis (1985, *in Irwin, 1995, p.20*) suggests they "experience an extended youth as a period of suspended animation, and [are] caught in a 'frozen transition'."

Brown (1980) also wrote of this extended transition and noted that the transition into adulthood has never been easy. In his report of the National Commission on Youth, he pointed out, however, that

Contemporary youth move in a society far different from that of their peers several centuries ago. The pace of learning is quicker. Sexual maturity arrives earlier. And yet, through a combination of many factors, youth are held back and shielded from the adult world. The bridge of time between youth and

adulthood has become a bridge too long. (p.9)

Brown supported his argument by outlining how society has altered the way it transforms its youth into productive adults. He identified two distinct evolutionary periods: a *work phase* (a time when young people were rushed into work roles as soon as they were able to do the job they were expected to perform) and an extended *schooling* phase (brought about by the change from an agrarian society to an industrial society and designed to produce increased economic opportunity for youth). With compulsory schooling, direct access to economic productivity was postponed in the name of economic opportunity. Brown maintained that "the emergence of the school as the dominant institutional force in the lives of youth led to a diminution of the home, the church, and the community as settings where youth learned about the transition to adulthood" (p.13). The Commission's Report, presented to educators, sociologists, legislators, and youth policy making bodies recommended, among other things, that schools "break down the barriers to reality and spearhead the transition of the young into the adult world" (p.16).

Use of the metaphors "frozen transition" and "bridge too long" when referring to underemployed young adults supports the contention by some authors that financial independence equates to adulthood. Irwin's (1995) study of youth transition is based on this notion. Noting the pattern of deferral in the timing of transitions from the partial dependence of youth to the independence associated with adult status, Irwin (p.2) began her study with the question: what are the consequences of economic change,

in particular changing structures of employment and labour demand, for the transition from youth to adulthood? In her study, she explored the relationship between employment opportunities and changes in the timing of making the transition into taking on roles traditionally associated with adulthood, in particular, family formation. Irwin argued that changes in the earning power of young people, particularly women, as well as increased economic status of parents who provide the means for youth to stay in school longer are two factors that have affected the age of transition into adult status. While Irwin examined the reasons young people gave for their decisions, she did not explore how young people experience the transition.

In Coleman and Husén's (1985) view, too much attention has been focused "too exclusively" on the employment problem. In their findings for the Transition to Adulthood project for the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation,¹ they noted that "there is a growing suspicion that the troubled transition to adulthood depends upon the failure of existing institutions, particularly the regular school, to cope adequately with their socialization task, either singularly or in their mutual relationships"(p.7). The 'troubled transition to adulthood' may be related to what Coleman and Husén termed "the discrepancy between aspirations inculcated by prolonged schooling and what

¹ The Centre is connected to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, an international body of which Canada is a member nation. The report was written in close consultation with the Secretariat.

[young people] are likely to achieve in terms of status and economic remuneration"(p.9). In their report which embodied the results of a conceptual and research-oriented analysis of the broader issues related to the transition to adulthood, the authors concluded that there is a strong need to rethink the place of the family, the school and the workplace in socializing young people into adult society, and to find appropriate links between them.

Hutson and Jenkins (1987a, p.94, in Irwin, 1995, p.25) vigorously opposed suggestions that youth unemployment undermines the process of "becoming adult." They approached the definition of adulthood and the structuring of transitions from two directions: 1) stressing the social psychological aspects of attaining adult status, and 2) developing an understanding of transitions in relation to a general concept of citizenship. The authors argued that "the transition from childhood to adulthood is in large part a moral transition - a change in the individual's ability to make certain kinds of decisions - and that a bargain, and an agreed definition of adulthood, is struck between parents and children" (p.25). While Hutson and Jenkins opposed the view that transition into adulthood is directly related to financial independence, they did not speak of transition as a personal transformation. However, their contention that moving into adulthood is a moral transition locates their work within the small body of literature that acts as a bridge between the views of transition as transformation

and transition as a societal concern.

Although not focusing specifically on youth transition, Greene (1990) sought to investigate what informs adolescent expectations of the future. She, too, pointed out that the life course,² with its composite stages, is a construction of social institutions (e.g., cultural ideology, educational systems) (p.291). In her earlier (1986) study, she concluded that adolescents construct a narrative of the future that is largely informed by the events and experiences encountered in the past and that they encounter in the present (1990, p.290). Results of her later study showed that cumulative exposure to cultural institutions, such as formal education, provides an important means by which the individual's narratives of future life course are informed (p.303). While the focus of her work was on the individual and not specifically on outcomes (e.g., success in the labour market or post-secondary education), Greene's study examined youth transition to adulthood within the social context rather than youth transitional experiences thereby placing her work between transition as transformation and transition as a societal concern literatures.

Bellamy's (1992) unpublished doctoral dissertation could also be classified as part of this "bridging" literature. In her study of grade twelve students making the transition to adult

² Life course refers to the interlocking pathways across the life span within which all transitions are embedded. It favours a process view of transition, from activities leading up to the event to the post-transition itself.

life, she investigated how and why individuals choose various post-secondary destinations. While the study examined such things as factors that influenced students' decisions, the processes that underlaid those decisions, and how students perceived those processes, which are all individual considerations, the focus of the inquiry was grounded in a societal concern rather than the concept of transition as transformation. However, the students' narratives, used in the study to illustrate students' decisions about post-secondary destinations, reveal some of the uncertainties authors such as Turner (1967, 1977) and Bridges (1980) claim are part of the liminality of transition as transformation. Also exploring youth transition as a societal concern, Marlis Buchmann (1989), in *The script of life in modern society: Entry into adulthood in a changing society*, argued that a person's life course is institutionalized, that society organizes and defines individual life courses. She contended that progression is governed by a set of formal rules that, among other things, orders life as a sequence of life stages and regulates transitions between them. Buchmann also described (84) a new life stage discussed within the social sciences: postadolescence (Keniston, 1989, 1971; Gillis, 1974; Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell, 1982; all in Buchmann, 1989, p.84) which represents a new type of transition to adulthood. Postadolescents are adults except for the fact that they are economically dependent on others. The extension of schooling is seen as the major factor contributing to the establishment of

this new life stage. Young people with higher social class background are more likely to participate in it. However, Buchmann (p.84) contended that the concept of postadolescence as a life stage overlooks the fact that, from a sociological standpoint, the condition of schooling and/or professional training has always been the discriminatory feature of the youth status. Buchmann (p.85) argued that "the rapidly increasing temporal disconnection of different events in the transition to adulthood helps to extend, to diversify, and to individualize the life period of becoming an adult--both in structural and cultural respects." Further, she argued, stable integration into the labour force has been replaced by repeated cycles of retraining and interrupted labour-force participation. As a result, "retrained (or unemployed) youths and retrained (or unemployed) adults become, structurally speaking, alike"(p.85). The transition to adulthood becomes blurred although the focus is no less economic.

Like Buchmann, Kerkhoff (1990) focused on a life course approach to analysis of the transition from adolescence to adulthood. He argued that an analysis of life course patterns must consider the social context within which the lives are being lived (p.1) as life courses are socially constructed (Meyer, 1988, in Kerckhoff, 1990, p.3). Kerckhoff's study of adolescent to adult transition concentrated on similarities and differences in educational systems in Great Britain and the United States and ways in which those similarities and differ-

ences appear to contribute to post-school pathways. Kerckhoff found that "the central element of the difference between the two societies' social mobility regimes is the school-to-work transition"(p.13). The author notes that full-time schooling continues much longer in the United States and the school-to-work transition is "closer to a one-time event"(p.13). On the other hand, the school-to-work transition in Great Britain can be seen more as a process that continues over a number of years given the significance of part-time further education (p.13). According to Kerckhoff, although some have received more attention than others, there are at least five transitional events involved in becoming an adult: leaving full-time school, entering the labour force full time, establishing a residence independent of one's family orientation, marrying, and becoming a parent (p.14). While Kerckhoff did not claim a young person was required to experience all five events in order to become an adult, many would argue that, given the complexities of present day society, Kerckhoff's notion of transition into adulthood is, indeed, a bridge too long!

In *Rethinking youth*, Wyn and White (1997) offer a perspective on youth that takes the complexities of present day society into account. Discussing the notion of 'youth transition', the authors point out that, while the term "has the imagery of process, fluidity and change, [it] has been harnessed to a static, categorical notion of youth"(p.95). Further, they point out, "the term 'transition to adulthood' draws on the idea that

young people make one transition to adulthood, and that adulthood is a clearly defined status--a destination at which one arrives"(p.96). According to the authors, when the realities of the transition to adulthood are examined, it becomes clear that the process is full of complexities. The very processes that have added to the complexity of the experience of growing up have also undermined the taken-for-granted meaning of adulthood (p.148).

Wyn and White also point out that although some form of education and training is an accepted 'pathway' to adulthood for all youth and the marketing of 'youth' through products such as music and clothing creates a sameness based on age, the appearance of commonality among youth is superficial only. Arguing that there is a "tension between the apparent universality of youth and the highly specific, differentiated and socially divided nature of youth"(1997, p.3), the authors suggest that "youth is most productively conceptualized as a *social process* in which the meaning and experience of becoming an adult are socially mediated"(p.4). It is a specific process in which young people engage with institutions such as family, schools, the police, welfare, and others. The process of transition to adult life--for each individual--reflects both an individual and a collective process (p.5). The authors argue that "there are now wide gaps between the experiences of young people, especially some groups, and the policies that inform the institutional structuring of pathways and transitions into adulthood"(p.94).

This work focuses less on the youth labour market and places more emphasis on the social construction of the transition process.

Most research appears to investigate the difficulties adolescent encounter when they make the transition to an adult life style (e.g., seeking employment, forming families, etc.) - the transition *into* something rather than the transition process *from* secondary schooling.³ The exceptions are studies that focus on high school drop-outs (Fine, 1991; Kelly & Gaskell, 1996). Fine's 1991 study examined the institutional policies and practices that enable, obscure, and legitimate the low-income urban students of colour who drop out of secondary school at a disproportionate rate. While the stories of these students offer insight into the experience of school leaving, they are not meant to uncover the transition experience. Instead, Fine asked:

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

Undoubtedly Fine raised some important issues that may play a part in the transition experience of grade 12 students in a

³ Other studies explore effective curriculum offerings to ensure post-secondary success, successful entry of adolescents into the job market (Gaskell & Lazerson, 1980; Glover & Marshall, 1993; Petersen, Leffert, & Hurrelmann, 1993), or the failure rate of first-year post-secondary students.

system "constantly negotiating inclusion and exclusion"(p.6).

Shifting the focus

Research on youth transition has, itself, undergone a transition in recent decades. Prior to the more recent focus on adolescent transition as a societal concern, interest focused on anthropological exploration of *rites of passage* in tribal societies. Belgian folklorist, Arnold van Gennep (1908, 1960), claimed that the life of any individual is a series of passages and argued that these transitions, whether from one life stage to another or from one occupation to another, are "implicit in the very fact of existence." In an attempt to classify rituals associated with changes in status within a society, van Gennep studied the rituals associated with the passages at significant times of transition in the life of individuals, in particular, passage into womanhood or manhood. From these studies, van Gennep theorized that there were three phases to all rituals accompanying life transitions: separation, transition, and incorporation (Kimball, in van Gennep, 1960, p.vii).

Observing life's passages

The notion that life's transitions are a three phase process originated with van Gennep's early analysis of ceremonies that accompany the decisive times or "life crises" in

an individual's life. He pointed out that when the activities associated with such ceremonies were examined, it was possible to distinguish the three phases he labelled separation, transition, and incorporation. According to van Gennep, although the structure of rites of passage theoretically includes the three phases, in specific instances the three phases are not equally important or equally elaborated (p.11).

Basing his own work on van Gennep's model, Victor Turner (1967, p.94) stated that all transitions are marked by three phases: separation, margin or *limen*,⁴ and aggregation. The separation phase comprises a detachment (symbolic or otherwise) from an earlier state in the social structure. In the third phase an individual is accepted into the new state with clearly defined rights, obligations, and ethical standards. Turner also suggested that at the mid-point of the transition process all "transitional beings" are "betwixt and between" all the recognized fixed points in space and time (p.97).⁵

While Turner's study focused on rites of passage in pre-industrial tribal societies, Bridges (1980, p.117) brought the

⁴ from the Latin, *limen* -- threshold

⁵ Terence Turner (1977, p.53) pointed out that while the validity of van Gennep's descriptive framework for the structure of rites of passage has been confirmed by subsequent research, the pattern which he identified has never been successfully accounted for in theoretical terms. Turner contended that with one or two exceptions, neither van Gennep nor subsequent investigators questioned "why the liminal rites should exhibit their peculiar characteristics" (1977, p.54). According to Turner, Victor Turner's work that focused on "rites of the liminal period and allied phenomena, constitutes the major exception."

notion of the liminal phase of transition forward to our urban post-industrialized society. Also referring to van Gennep's model, he suggested that the consciousness-altering techniques used in rites of passage "enhanced the natural tendency to see and understand the world differently in the gap between one life phase and the next" -- something that is missing in modern society. While there are limitations to both Turner's and Bridges' perspectives⁶ as descriptive frameworks for researching the "liminal experiences" of grade twelve students, there are a number of aspects of the notion of liminality as characterized by them that are relevant for understanding how adolescents experience the passage from secondary schooling to the adult world.

A somewhat different notion of liminality is described in Peter McLaren's (1986) *Schooling as a ritual performance: Towards a political economy of educational symbols and gestures*. McLaren used Turner's work (along with research from a variety of disciplines)⁷ for his theoretical framework in this study that examined schooling as a type of rite of passage (p.23). However, McLaren used the term 'liminal' stage to denote the transition between different states of interaction as opposed to a life transition. For example, he suggested students experience a

⁶ Both authors based their work on van Gennep's model of rites of passage although Turner's work came from the field of structural anthropology and Bridges' work explored how people currently make sense of transitions in everyday life.

⁷ McLaren (1986, p.9) acknowledged that some of these are only marginally or tenuously connected.

liminal stage between the types of interaction on the playground outside of class and the interaction when class commences. It is a transition from an appropriate manner of interaction in one context to one appropriate for a changed context.

As McLaren uses the term, liminality delineates a transition from one state or mode of behaviour to another, one that is short term and occurs repeatedly. On the other hand, Turner and Bridges employed the term to depict the middle phase in a transition from one stage to another on the life journey. Few life journey transitions are repeated and the few that may be are seldom repeated in a similar context. Consequently McLaren's notion of liminality, even though it is used in the context of public schooling, may not be useful as a perspective for understanding the liminal experiences of grade twelve students as they move through the liminal corridor.

The term, *liminality*, is also applied in other contexts to denote the time between one condition and another. Bettis (1996) suggested that the term addresses the uncertainty of the economic and social context in which a group of urban students exist. The current economy is "betwixt and between the old and new social and economic orders" (p.106) and the concept of liminality was a useful construct for exploring how students perceived their economic futures. While Bettis used *liminality* as a framework and interviewed students about the future, she did not focus on the liminal phase of adolescent transition into adulthood. Her study examined how students perceived their

future given that society itself is in the liminal phase of making the transition to a postindustrial society.

Although not writing of the phases of transition, in particular the liminal phase, but in keeping with the notion of the transformation that takes place (as suggested by van Gennep, 1908, 1960; Turner, 1967; and Bridges, 1980), Mahadi (1996, p. xvii), in the preface to a collection of essays related to the notion of transition, argues that as adolescents make the transition into adulthood, they "must undergo a second birth, must be born of their culture, their community, their elders." Mahadi also maintains that, throughout human history, rites of passage have served humanity well and that, even today, the young have a desire for rites and rituals at puberty and at the end of adolescence. She argues that, if possible, "we need wise men and women ready to provide perspectives and meaning for the responsibilities ahead" (p.xvi) for a rite of passage can be "one of the major moments in the transmission of culture, if celebrated in a constructive way with mentors and elders" (p.-xvi). While Mahadi was speaking specifically of the transition at puberty rather than at the end of adolescence, it could be argued that as young people make the transition into adulthood, the guidance of wise men and women is even more important.

Yet, according to Grof (1996, p.6), our culture is one of few in history that does not embrace rites of passage. While it may be argued that our culture is rich in celebrations of youth passages (e.g., birthday parties, end of school year celebra-

tions, etc.), there are few ritualized practices through which the community and elders help the young cope with this major transition. Instead, transition to adulthood is considered a process whereby young people progress from partial dependence on parents to independence (Irwin, 1995, p.2) -- a societal concern and an economic issue -- and the transitional experiences of the individuals most fundamentally concerned are not of primary interest.

It should be noted that the two approaches to research on youth transition -- transition as a societal concern or transition as personal transformation -- do, in fact, overlap since all youth transitions affect both the individual and the society. However, the focus shifts from the individual to the society as one moves from one body of literature to the other. Nonetheless, while the body of literature concerned with transition as a societal concern provided important background information, it was the literature on transition as transformation that contributed meaningful insights into the experience of the transition process and provided a conceptual framework for my study.

Being 'Betwixt and between': the liminal period

Liminality, or threshold to a new life, is a concept Turner (1977, p.36) "borrowed" from van Gennep who used the term *limen* to denote the midpoint of the transition process.⁸ Turner (1967,

⁸ Turner (1977, p.37) contended that in the case of protracted rites of passage the *limen* or threshold is a very

p.93), whose basic model of society is that of a "structure of positions," viewed the liminal period as important because of its implications for a general theory of sociocultural processes (1977, p.36). According to Turner, rites of passage indicating transitions between states designating legal or social status can be found in all societies.⁹ Transition from one state to another is "a process, a becoming, . . . even a transformation"¹⁰ (1967, p.94). During the period of liminality, which Turner viewed as an interstructural situation, the "passenger" or "liminary" (1977, p.37) progresses through a sphere that has few or none of the characteristics of the past or coming state (1967, p.94). Liminalities "are 'being grown' into a new postliminal state of being" (p.37).

I sometimes talk about the liminal phase being dominantly in the subjunctive mood of culture, the mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire--depending on which of the trinity of cognition, affect, and conation is situationally dominant. . . .liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and

long threshold, almost a corridor. The notion of a corridor may better characterize the liminal experiences of grade twelve students.

⁹ According to Lloyd Warner (1959, p.303, cited in Turner, 1967, p.94), the most salient type of rites of passage usually accompany one's journey through life punctuating "the critical moments of transition which all societies ritualize and publicly mark with suitable observances to impress the significance of the individual and the group on living members of the community" (in Turner, 1967, p.94).

¹⁰ In both van Gennep's and Turner's work the focus was on ritual that was intended to bring about the personal transformation of the individual during the life transition.

structures, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to the postliminal existence. (Turner, 1986, p.42)¹¹

Turner also pointed out that rites of passage are not confined only to decisive times or "culturally defined life-crises" but may concern passage into a newly achieved status (1967, pp.94-95).

Working with adults experiencing a time of transition in their lives, Bridges (1980, p.17) suggested that the middle or liminal phase of transition "is a time of lostness and emptiness before 'life' resumes an intelligible pattern and direction." Accordingly, it is meant to be a "moratorium from the conventional activity of our everyday existence"(p.114). Bridges (p.130) suggested that the liminal phase, the phase of transition that the modern world pays least attention to, is a time of reorientation. He asserted that at present we treat transition as though it were a matter of some kind of adjustment rather than an opportunity for reflecting to become more aware of the natural transition process. Bridges pointed out that the old "consciousness-altering techniques" that were part of traditional rites of passage did not actually create a different reality for those in transition but "only enhanced the natural tendency to see and understand the world differently in the gap

¹¹ Terence Turner (1977, p.54) argued that Victor Turner's central contribution to the theoretical understanding of liminal phase and structure of rites of passage lies in his emphasis upon the relatively unstructured, undefined, potential of the qualities which he identified as distinctive features of liminal phenomena.

between one life phase and the next" (p.117). Within the liminal phase there is a degree of chaos that is, in fact, "a primal state of pure energy"(p.117) as yet unshaped by purpose and identification (p.118).

Uncovering assumptions intrinsic to the liminal phase

Turner's (1967) notion of liminality predominantly focused on rites of passage or initiation rites. According to Turner initiation rites best exemplify transition since they have well marked and protracted liminal phases (p.95). Liminality is the interstructural phase of the transition process and subjects passing through this phase are "betwixt and between". That is, members of the society operating within the states or social statuses on either side of this phase have more clearly understood identities but during the liminal phase, subjects or liminaries have no clear status or identity and are structurally "invisible"(p.95). They are in the process of being transformed (94) and are represented by symbols that give "outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process" (p.96). Further, the state of the liminary is ambiguous since the liminal phase "has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state"(p.94).

Turner argued that during the liminal phase of the transition, liminaries are "undifferentiated raw material"(p.98) who "have nothing . . . no status, property, insignia, secular

clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows" (pp.98-99) [italics in original]. Turner's emphasis on the structurelessness of the liminal phase and the disconnecting of the liminary from the actual transition process suggests that the actual transition, particularly that in rites of passage, is something that is controlled, orchestrated, and finally bestowed on the liminaries by others rather than something that, in fact, is a passage.

Further, Turner's model suggests that the transition process is a *movement through* a corridor between structures rather than an *experience of* a transition. Although he contended that the symbols used during the transition visibly represent an inward process, his description of the liminal phase suggests that the transition is an awarding of a new 'outer' status rather than an actual inner transformation. Therefore, during the liminal phase, the subject or liminary is a detached being to whom things are 'being done'. In Turner's description of events, liminaries perform certain rituals after which other members of the society will view them differently. Turner assumed that members undergoing these rituals are inwardly transformed as a result of the performance.

On the other hand, Turner did make some connection of the liminary to the transition process in his depiction of *communitas* and *flow* where he described the sense of communion between liminaries and their holistic sensation of acting with total involvement. As well, he spoke of the special connections

that develop between liminaries "which persist after the rites are over, even into old age"(p.101). However, these connections do not relate to the experience of the actual passage but rather to a bonding between those undergoing the transition process. Turner presented a view of the liminal phase of transition as an unstructured corridor that others move the liminary along to facilitate the liminaries' entry into the next state or status. This suggests that transition is not an experience on the life journey but a ritual designed by others during which liminaries perform set tasks and are assumed to undergo inner transformation.

Acknowledging limitations of rites of passage for present study

The underlying assumption in rites of passage is that by performing certain rituals people are transformed, that this transition is brought about by tasks set by others, and through the endorsement of others the individual has indeed been transformed. Turner (1977, p.37) wrote of "the words or phrases which indicate [the liminaries] are 'being grown' into a new postliminal state of being." This assumption -- that individual change is realized not through deepened understanding and reflection but is mandated by others -- brings into question the relevancy of these rituals when exploring the transition experiences of adolescents. As McLaren (1986, p.16) points out, "rituals do not serve solely as some type of sacerdotal stilts or metaphysical

protheses that celebrants can spiritually strap on to assist them in their scramble towards the sublime." Further, McLaren states, there is "a theoretical scepticism" regarding "the appropriateness of applying conceptual advances gathered from anthropologists studying rituals of pre-literate societies to societies existing in complex industrial settings"(19), a valid criticism given the post-industrial society in which we now live. If the notion of ritual as a vehicle for transition is in question, can the term "liminal experiences" be applied to the experiences of adolescents as they make the transition from secondary schooling to the adult world?

In addition, as Kimbal (1960, *in* Van Gennep, 1960, p.vii) pointed out, the major source of van Gennep's inspiration came from the tradition of positivism - "the insistence that general laws of social process should be derived from empirical observation rather than from metaphysical speculation." Can an understanding of the experience of transition be gained through observation? How can the ontological and epistemological positions of positivism inherent in rites of passage be adapted to examine the constructed understandings of adolescents?

The structuralist notion that rites of passage can govern and explain how adolescents experience the transition from secondary school to the adult world may be inappropriate as a descriptive framework for gaining an understanding of how adolescents gradually construct their 'liminal experiences' of grade twelve. Although "structuralism encompasses a vast range

of human experience"(Gibson, 1984, p.6), related to the central conception of structuralism is the assumption that elements cannot be subtracted from the whole,¹² that the individual can be explained only in reference to the whole structure and is thus a subsidiary to it¹³, and of the primacy of synchronic analysis (pp.8-10). In addition, according to Gibson's view of structuralism, structures constitute the origin and direct the flow of change (p.11). Individual constructions of experience and diachronic analysis extract elements of the liminal phase from the whole. Is it possible to extricate from rites of passage the notion of liminality and some of the elements Turner attributed to it in order to understand the transition experiences of adolescents?

The answer may lie in the fact that, as stated above, there is a range of understandings of structuralist frameworks (Gaboriau, 1970; Goldmann, 1970; Lane, 1970; Pinar, 1994; Sarup, 1988). Among them, Goldmann's notion of a structuralist framework is useful. Goldmann (1970, p.98) argued that structures are created patterns of behaviour which people retain for a long time in order to solve similar problems. These structures must be adapted a little each time and the individual must relinquish the idea of an ideal solution. According to

¹²Lane (1970, p.14) noted that probably the most distinctive feature of the structuralist method is the emphasis it gives to wholes, to totalities.

¹³ Sarup (1988, p.1) recounted that Levi-Strauss stated the ultimate goal of human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him.

Goldmann (1970, p.100), all human reality is made up of overlapping structures and every structure fulfils a function within a larger structure. It is what these structures have in common rather than what separates them that allows us to understand certain patterns. If from an infinite possibility of choices people choose only one particular structural configuration, it is because of the need to express certain things (p.104).

What Goldmann described can be labelled 'schemata' -- those mental constructs through which a particular perception is taken up into a category. The "overlapping structures" within the notion of liminality, rather than being "elements that cannot be subtracted from the whole" (Gibson, 1984), become structures or constructs that allow us to understand certain patterns or discover something -- a heuristic.¹⁴

Using the notion of liminality as a heuristic

Although Turner's notion of liminality was originally developed to explain the midpoint in traditional rites of passage rituals within pre-industrial tribal societies, there are elements of the notion that can be extracted as heuristics,

¹⁴Lane (1970, p.26) noted that some sociologists use structure as a heuristic device but "for the majority structure does not serve as an initial organizing principle that can be discarded as the phenomena come to be coherently arranged. On the contrary, it is the ultimate form in which the phenomena are presented."

valuable in attempting to understand adolescents' transitional experiences. Turner's characterization of the liminal phase in itself is useful as is Bridges' depiction. Both Turner and Bridges emphasized that the liminal phase is a time of reflection and reorientation. This is one aspect of liminality that may be revealed in adolescents' constructions of their experiences. As well, the notions of 'sacra', 'communitas' and 'flow' as outlined by Turner may be useful as a heuristic framework when co-constructing understandings of liminality.

Turner claimed that sacra are "the heart of the liminal matter" (1967, p.102). He described them as the things that are shown or otherwise conveyed to those in transition as a way of guiding the passage and preparing the liminary for the postliminal state. According to Turner, the knowledge obtained in the liminal period is intended to change the innermost nature of the liminary, "impressing him [sic], as a seal impresses wax, with the characteristics" of the postliminal state (p.102). To follow Turner's archetype precisely would limit the investigation of sacra within adolescents' liminal experiences to those things presented to the students. But what of those things within their own individual experiences that they interpret as objects that reveal the nature of their culture? What of those things not purposefully presented by others that provide opportunities for students to reflect on their culture and society -- the fundamental purpose of sacra? What are the diverse ways in which these things are interpreted and how do they contribute to

the liminal experiences of adolescents? In fact, what constitutes a liminal experience? By holding to the notion that reflecting on 'sacra' is part of the liminal experience, I may be more receptive to the myriad of ways in which students make sense of the transition from secondary schooling to the adult world.

Another element that may be useful as a heuristic is 'communitas' which Turner interpreted as a level of communication, even communion, between liminaries (1977, p.47). He likened this to the bond that develops between classmates in a college or academy, a bond that resurfaces at reunions. In my preliminary study, a number of grade twelve students spoke of new connections with their classmates, connections that had not been part of their schooling experiences during the previous years. How do students' interpret these connections? Is this what Turner describes as communitas? In what ways is it part of their liminal experiences? Is this a shared experience and what are the various ways in which 'communitas' surfaces during the liminal phase?

Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi's work, Turner defined 'flow' as a time when action and awareness merge, a "holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement" (p.48). He also commented that group experience may lead to the selection of certain symbols to serve as flow-elicitors (p.52).¹⁵ Is it

¹⁵ Turner (1977, p.52) noted that in all societies "flow" symbols are most likely to be found in association with beginnings and transitions.

through *communitas* that these symbols are selected? What are the various ways students construct meaning through these flow-elicitors? Are there instances that grade twelve students might describe as moments of total involvement and do they interpret these times as liminal experiences? What understandings do students have of the notion of flow-elicitors and how might the group experience contribute to their selection?

The notion of liminality, viewed not as a structure into which the experiences of adolescents encountering one of life's passages can be stowed for future analysis but as a heuristic that opens possibilities, embodies Turner's concept of the subjunctive mood. As noted above, liminality as a heuristic reveals "the mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire" (Turner, 1986, p.42). It provides, as Bridges suggested the old "consciousness-altering techniques" did, an occasion "to see and understand the world differently in the gap between one life phase and the next" (1980, p.117). The degree of chaos within the liminal phase that Bridges referred to as being as yet unshaped by purpose and identification (p.118) compels us to seek out heuristics that invite reflection.

This truncated, synoptic account of Turner's (1967), Bridges' (1980), and others' perspectives of the liminal phase of transition provided a scattering of ideas that contributed to my descriptive framework for understanding the liminal experiences of students (although I acknowledge that seeking a framework

from which to inquire into adolescents' individual liminal experiences appears problematic, even inconsistent). That aside, three further aspects of liminality were also useful in piecing together an alternate perspective of liminality in an attempt to understand the liminal experiences of grade twelve students. These were *sacra* (Turner, 1967, p.102), "communitas" and "flow"; the latter two from Turner's 1977 study of liminality in what he terms *posttribal societies*.

These notions helped reveal other aspects of the transition phase as grade twelve students interacted to construct their understandings of their liminal experiences. *Sacra* are communicated through exhibitions, actions, and instructions, that is, by what is shown, what is done, and what is said. Although in the cultures described by Turner, *sacra* are frequently distorted and exaggerated, their purpose is to provide liminaries opportunities to reflect on their culture and society. As Turner pointed out, liminality is the realm of "primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence"(p.106). As for *communitas* and *flow*, Turner speculated that "certain kinds of liminality may be conducive to the emergence of *communitas*"(1977, p.47). As noted earlier, *communitas* is a common bond that develops between the liminaries. The notion of "flow" involves a merging of action and awareness (p.51) as does *communitas*. However, although in Turner's view *communitas* is a kind of shared flow, he questioned parts of Csikszent-

mihalyi's conception of flow.¹⁶ According to Turner, *communitas*, like flow, "involves a merging of action and awareness, an egoless state that has its own rewards" but does not require "formal rules" as Csikszentmihalyi suggested (p.51). Turner also proposed that group experience may lead to the selection of certain symbols to serve as flow-elicitors (p.52). An "holistic sensation", awareness, group selection of flow-elicitors, and shared communication were all aspects of my heuristic used in reflecting about liminality among students.

Questioning the use of the conceptual framework:

It would be reasonable to question the appropriateness of applying a conceptual framework gathered from anthropologists studying rituals of pre-literate societies to small groups existing within an institutional context in a complex post-industrial setting. In addition, the notion of liminality as a midpoint in the transition between societal structures is a structuralist perspective of how we move along our life journey, hardly a position conducive to understanding how individuals make sense of their own transitional experiences. How helpful can the work of van Gennep, Turner, Bridges, and others be when co-constructing understandings of adolescent experiences?

¹⁶ For example, Turner contended that while people may be aware of what they are doing, they cannot be aware that they are aware for to do so creates a self-consciousness that causes the 'doer' to stumble. He also disagreed "that flow requires 'formal rules' and circumscription in space and time as preconditions."

On the other hand, as Bridges (1980, pp.87-88) pointed out, the traditional rites of passage show a remarkable understanding of the inner processes of transition. As a result, these rituals "can provide us with names for the elements of our own experience that are distressing and perplexing because they are otherwise nameless." It is when we take these named elements and use them as heuristics that we see the worth of the notion of liminality when attempting to gain an understanding of the passage from grade twelve to the adult world.

Does the notion of transition first suggested by van Gennep and later expanded by Turner and Bridges provide an appropriate heuristic device for understanding the liminal experiences of grade twelve student? To some extent, yes. Granted such a perspective might suggest a postpositivist epistemology which is antithetical to a constructivist position where ontological and methodological assumptions focus on constructed realities. However, as McLaren (1989, p.14) points out, we interpret reality through the particular lens, paradigm, or model with which we choose to focus our investigative and analytical perceptions. Turner and others who have explored the notion of life's passages, and in particular its midpoint -- the liminal phase -- have provided us with ideas that serve as worthwhile heuristics in our own explorations. For that reason Turner's perspective of liminality is worthwhile when attempting to co-construct an understanding of the liminal experiences of grade twelve students.

But what are the experiences which appear to represent the transition process from secondary schooling to the adult world? What meanings does this passage hold for adolescents? And how could I, as an adult outsider, gain some understanding of the "liminal experiences" of grade twelve students?

CHAPTER 3:

ENTRY INTO THE LANDSCAPE

As I prepared to enter the field I was reminded of Jansen and Peshkin's (1992. p.720) contention that "qualitative researchers . . . are so palpably present that they cannot delude themselves that who they are will not make a difference in the outcome of their study." And so I reflected on who I am and the ways in which being "palpably present" would make a difference in my inquiry. I considered when and how, as a participant-observer, my "Subjective 'I's'" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) might emerge and reveal themselves in the research process. Since my subjectivity "narrows what I see and shapes what I make of what I see" (Peshkin, 1988c, p.278), how, I wondered, could it be possible that my subjectivity "can be seen as virtuous" as Peshkin (1988a) claimed? Given that in participation-observation researchers are "immersed in the lives of others whose behavior and beliefs are the essence of their data," how would interviewing and participant observation threaten or elicit the presence of the other? When re-presenting the meaning of adolescents' experiences of schooling, how could I safeguard against confusing their stories with the reconstructed understandings of my own high school graduation year, the graduation experiences of my children, or the stereotypical

model that is part of our mythology? To address some of these issues, I explored the option of adopting a research methodology framed by a constructivist paradigm in the hope that my subjectivity -- that "unique configuration of [my] personal qualities joined to the data collect[ed]" (Peshkin, 1988a, p.18) -- would help reveal a narrative that more accurately represented the meaning of the schooling experiences of a group of grade twelve students.

Choosing a Constructivist Paradigm

Schwandt (1994, p.118) argued that the particular meanings of *constructivist*, *constructivism*, *interpretivist*, and *interpretivism* are shaped by the intent of their users and "are best regarded as sensitizing concepts." My goal, a goal shared by advocates of these concepts (p.118), was to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it.¹ The world of lived experience is constructed by social actors. Constructivists, who challenge notions of objectivism, empirical realism, objective truth, and essentialism (p.125), presuppose the social, dialogic nature of inquiry and are deeply committed to the view that "knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind" (p.125). An integral

¹ A similar notion can be found in van Manen's (1984, p.37) definition of phenomenological research as the study of lived experience, the experience as it is lived rather than as it is conceptualized, categorized, or theorized about.

tenet of constructivism is that the interactivity between the researcher and researched should be recognized and the participants' subjectivity be explicated and explored (Lincoln, 1990, p.78). Schwandt (1994, p.128) described Guba and Lincoln's constructivist paradigm as "a wide-ranging eclectic framework" in which they assume that the inquirer cannot be disentangled from the observed and "findings or outcomes of inquiry are themselves a literal creation or construction of the inquiry process."

One of the properties of constructivism, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989, in Schwandt, 1994, p.129) is that it is an attempt to make sense of or interpret experience. Through interaction, multiple "knowledges" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.113) are constructed.² The epistemological position of constructivist inquiry holds that "knowledge is created in interaction among investigator and respondents" (p.111). Further, the central focus of the constructivist paradigm is not the abstraction (reduction) or approximation (modelling)

of a single reality but the presentation of those multiple, holistic, competing, and often conflictual realities of multiple stakeholders and research participants (including the inquirer's). (Lincoln, 1990, p.73)

The notion that realities are apprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions that are

² Since knowledge is constructed through interaction, Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.113) pointed out that such constructions are "subject to continuous revision, with changes most likely to occur when relatively different constructions are brought into juxtaposition in a dialectical context."

socially and experientially based, as well as local and specific in nature, is an essential element in defining the ontological presuppositions of the constructivist inquiry paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110). Whereas the "relativist" is committed to the view that all differing and contradictory views are correct, the "realist" is committed to the view that only one view can be correct (Phillips, 1990, p.41). Relativists argue that "to expect ontological objectivity as a methodological consequence of the work of research science is unthinkable" (Trifonas, 1995, p.89). Opponents of the relativist view often dismiss relativism as little more than "rank subjectivity," implying "that relative judgments are only private and idiosyncratic, possibly irrational, and perhaps even unbridled fantasy" (Guba, 1992, p.18).

But how could there be only one reality of the final year of secondary schooling? I knew that, for a myriad of reasons, each student would experience his or her final year of secondary schooling differently. Would the experiences of one student be closer to 'the truth' than those of another? As Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.111) pointed out, "constructions are not more or less 'true,' in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated." Further, constructions are "subject to continuous revision, with changes most likely to occur when relatively different constructions are brought into

juxtaposition in a dialectical context"(p.113). The findings created in any inquiry are relative to the particular inquirer and to the particular context in which the inquiry was carried out (Guba, 1992, p.19). In other words, constructivists take a relativist position at both the ontological level and at the epistemological level. I realized that, as a researcher, I would gain in my understanding of the complexities of adolescents' experiences of schooling by accepting the multiple realities constructed and reconstructed in that dialectical context rather than holding to the notion that only one reality was true.

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.111) pointed out that "the variable and personal nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction *between and among* investigator and respondents." Therefore, fundamental to understanding the multiple realities of grade twelve students was the interactive linking of me, as the adult outsider, and the students, as we worked together to create the "findings." As a researcher, I was actively engaged in "facilitating the 'multivoice' reconstructions of [my] own constructions as well as those of all [the students]"(p.115). As varying constructions were brought into juxtaposition, all of us formulated more informed and sophisticated constructions and became aware of the content and meaning of competing constructions. Consequently I was

actively involved in the co-constructions rather than an "objective" outsider.

This level of researcher involvement is rejected by some such as Phillips (1990, p.43) who maintained that, like the notion of truth, the notion of objectivity "is a regulative ideal that underlies all inquiry." While he acknowledged that the objectivity of an inquiry does not guarantee that the truth has been revealed, Phillips contended that if we abandon such notions as objectivity and truth, it does not make sense to make inquiries. Since an assumption of the constructivist paradigm is that the inquirer cannot be disentangled from the observed and since the outcomes of the inquiry are a literal creation of all the participants (including the inquirer), the notion of subjectivity inherent in the constructivist paradigm demanded further exploration.

Revealing the presence of self in the research process

Much has been written about the influence of the researcher in qualitative inquiries (Bruner, 1993; Eisner, 1991; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Jansen & Peshkin, 1992; Peshkin, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c; Phillips, 1990; Roman & Apple, 1990). Scholars offer varying definitions of subjectivity and there is little agreement on how researchers should respond

to its effect in inquiry (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p.703). It has been argued (Peshkin, 1988c, p.267) that subjectivity imperils the researcher's faithful presentation of a phenomenon because it leads to "emphases and omissions that result in skewed portrayals." Phillips' (1990, p.24) contention that ". . . if we hold that a biased or personally loaded viewpoint is as good as a viewpoint supported by carefully gathered evidence, we are undermining the very point of human inquiry" would support that conviction. Phillips further argued that "objectivity" is a label or "stamp of approval" used for inquiries that are "prized because of the great care and responsiveness with which they are carried out" and our "aim should be to move in the direction that will earn a full stamp of approval"(p.35). In an attempt to overcome problems of subjectivity, some researchers, believing that "personalization undermines objectivity" (Eisner, 1991, p.45), have sought procedural objectivity in an attempt to depersonalize their presence in the works they created.³ Evidence of the hegemony of objectivity is the fact that in the educational research community, "discourse traditions are intended to create the illusion that we have provided an ontologically objective mirror image of what is really out there"(p.45).

However, the position that qualified, competent observers can accurately and objectively uncover the meanings of their subject's life experiences has come under attack (Denzin & Lin-

³ Eisner (in Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p.697) pointed out that agreement on procedures to eliminate judgment would still offer no guarantees on reality.

coln, 1994a, p.12; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.6). Poststructuralists and postmodernists argue that there are no objective observations, that "any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a, p.12). Bruner (1993, p.2) is even more direct, "The idea of a scientific, supposedly objective account is not only a cliché, it is an impossibility." As Eisner (1991, p.46) pointed out in discussing the impossibility of achieving ontological objectivity, our "perception of the world is influenced by skill, point of view, focus, language, and framework." In other words "what we come to see depends on what we seek"(p.46). Clearly, my subjectivity -- my point of view which is conditioned by my personal characteristics -- affected the results of my investigation.

As Bernstein (1988, p.36, in Guba, 1992, p.18) stated:

The idea of a basic dichotomy between the subjective and the objective; the conception of knowledge as being a correct representation of what is objective; the conviction that human reason can completely free itself of bias, prejudice, and tradition; the idea of a universal method by which we can first secure firm foundations of knowledge and then build the edifice of a universal science; the belief that by the power of self-reflection we can transcend our historical context and horizon and know things as they really are in themselves--all of these concepts [can be] subjected to sustained criticism.

Rather than engage in futile attempts to eliminate the ways in which I, as a researcher, affected my inquiry, my focus was on understanding the ramifications of my influence.

Peshkin (1988a, p.17) suggested that although social scientists acknowledge that subjectivity is invariably present

in their research, they are not necessarily conscious of it. He contended that researchers should be meaningfully attentive to their own subjectivity. In his own research he actively sought his own subjectivity by monitoring himself to sense how he was feeling, looking for the emergence of negative and positive feelings, being aware of the experiences he wanted to avoid, and recognizing when he felt moved to act in roles beyond those necessary to fulfil his research needs. The results of his "subjectivity audit"(p.18) were contained in a list of six "Subjective-I's": the Ethnic-Maintenance I; the Community-Maintenance I; the E-Pluribus-Unum I; the Justice-Seeking I; the Pedagogical-Meliorist I; and the Nonresearch Human I (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, pp.104-105).

While Peshkin's Subjective-I's provide a useful framework for other researchers grappling with the enabling and disabling potential of their own subjectivity, each of the Subjective-I's examines feelings that emerge in the field. They do not draw attention to the "I's" that are rooted in the assumptions and biases of each of us. Peshkin's Subjective-I's do not expose the Subjective-I that determined such things as my research interests, the particular questions I pursued, and the influences of my own unique set of prior experiences.⁴ It is likely that the

⁴ For example, in Peshkin's Subjective-I's there does not appear to be a space where he examined how previous experiences might influence his inquiry or why "his Jewish self" (1992, p.104) was curious about how ethnicity operated in the lives of students and parents in a Christian fundamentalist school. What were the assumptions, biases, and personal concerns motivating this research interest? Is it not likely that they 'narrowed' and shaped how he interpreted what he saw? However, in another

assumptions, biases, and personal concerns motivating this research interest 'narrowed' and shaped how I interpreted what I saw. Gaskell (1988) reminded us that the views of the researcher inevitably affect the study.⁵

To try to do *value free* or *unbiased* research is simply to conceal, or try to conceal, the implicit point of view in the questions that are asked and the search for evidence. Researchers would do better to make clear why the problem is framed as it is, to justify the framework they are using, and to place it among competing concerns with the relevant issue. (1988, p.409)[*italics in original*]

As an adult outsider attempting to gain understanding of how adolescents experienced their final year of secondary schooling before embarking on a new phase of their lives, a

article (1988c, p.268), Peshkin did recognize that the choice of topic is "a starting point for the interplay of subjectivity in social science inquiry." To further illustrate this, he quoted Shulamit Reinhartz' reflection that "In the subtle matter of selecting a research problem and site, the researcher's conscious and unconscious needs seek fulfillment" (Reinhartz, 1979, p.141, in Peshkin, 1988c, p.268). On the other hand, in the same article he commented, from an academic perspective from which he is personally distanced, on the growing Christian fundamentalist movement in America. As well, elsewhere (in Deyhle, D., Hess, G., Jr., & LeCompte, M, 1992, p.624) Peshkin acknowledged that he used his religious affiliation to negotiate entry into the fundamentalist Christian community. Nonetheless, in articles outlining his notion of the "Subjective-I," Peshkin did not relate his personal interest in inquiry into a Christian fundamentalist school - "a starting point for the interplay of subjectivity" -- to any of the "Subjective-I's".

⁵ Gaskell (1988) described Erickson's (1979) study (partly funded by the British Columbia Ministry of Education) in which he concluded that private schools were better schools. Gaskell (1988, p.409) pointed out that Erickson, a known advocate of independent schools, "set out to show that what he had observed informally, what led him to prefer private schools, could be demonstrated formally by social science research." In Gaskell's (1988, p.409) view, Erickson engaged in "selective research for facts that [bore] out his argument."

phase in which their life course decisions would be characterized by a greater freedom of choice, it was important that I acknowledged the personal concerns that inspired my interest and the experiences that might have coloured my understandings. Although I was not aware of it at the time, the seeds of this inquiry were planted when I was investigating the pedagogical practices of a homeschooling support group as the research component of my Master of Arts Degree. I could not help but notice the seamlessness of the transition for the young people as they moved from adolescence to adulthood. What was different, I wondered. The seeds were further nourished when, several years later, I worked as a researcher on a national project to study student engagement. From my conversations with grade twelve students at that time, more questions arose about the transition from secondary school to adulthood. Their comments made me reflect upon my own high school graduation and what it had been like to leave the structure that had been a defining part of my life. I wondered if, given the distance in time from my own graduation, the transition from secondary schooling to the adult world had a more seamless quality today than it had in previous generations.

Now, far removed in age from these adolescents, in some respects I also am embarking on a new phase in my life. Upon completion of my doctorate degree I too will make life course decisions. It was essential that I be diligent to ensure that I did not interpret the students' stories through the lenses of my

own trepidations and uncertainties or positive convictions about how the future will unfold. In addition, having been a classroom teacher for a number of years, it was also important that I make every effort to take off my 'teacher glasses' and be cognizant of the potential for interpreting students' schooling experiences from a teacher's perspective. As well, as I listened to the stories of these students and as the research relationship deepened over the course of the year, I had to be aware of the possibility of making connections to the graduation year experiences of my own children and taking on the role of 'mother' instead of listener and co-constructor. At the very least I needed to be aware of all these personal presences as I reflected on the experiences of a group of grade twelve students. Therefore, to Peshkin's list of Subjective I's I added at least one more Subjective I -- a more personal or "Private I."

Appreciating subjectivity as a virtue

The concern over researchers' subjectivity is frequently addressed by scholars from various fields (LeCompte, 1987; Agar, 1980; Ginsberg & Matthews, n.d.; Rubin, 1981; all in Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, pp.705-10). Taking a position opposite to the standard emphasis on objectivity, Stade (1981) argued that inquiry "should rely more on personal experience and personal meaning as its data, and more on participant observation and introspection as its method" (in Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p.704).

He believed that "relevance" is enhanced as researchers participate in the lives of participants in the inquiry thereby learning about their perspectives as well as their behaviours. According to Stade, our subjectivity can bring our observations and interpretations more in line with what participants perceive. Smith (1980) voiced concern that the personal emotions of researchers can distort their perceptions. In her own work, Smith became aware that prior experiences in a similar setting resulted in nostalgic and fantasized memories that affected her research (In Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p.705). On the other hand, following another study, Smith believed that emotional reactions can also enhance the accuracy of an account. Therefore, Smith urged researchers to reflectively examine their emotional reactions to research events. In her view, "Personalistic bias, though affective in nature, is neither random nor wholly explicable, and may either distort the truth or help find one" (p.705).

According to Peshkin (1988c, p.267), the issue is not whether subjectivity is a persisting aspect of social inquiry, rather, the issue is "subjectivity's variable nature at the hands of the very same researcher." Our biases -- our Subjective-I's -- germinate in the fertile ground of our personal and professional history. Which of the Subjective-I's, all stemming from my socio-economic class, statuses, gender, values, and experiences, would emerge in the inquiry?

Quid percipitur, runs the Thomistic adage, *per modum*

perci-pientis percipitur: Whatever is perceived is perceived through the character of the one who perceives. (Michael Novak, in Peshkin, 1988c, p.267)

Our subjectivity not only shapes what we perceive but, as stated above, is there at work even before we begin to formulate our question. Peshkin (1988c, p.269) pointed out that our research topic derives from personal inclinations and we cannot claim to set aside our personal orientations at the end of the study any more than we did at the beginning or thereafter. As inquirers, we bring our biases or inclinations to our research. That they will interact with the focus of our study is unavoidable (p.278).

But does this mean that our prejudices so dominate our work that what we see is solely in our own beholding eye? I think not. Granted my biases and prejudices, moulded by my experiences of my own colour, status, gender, and ethnicity as well as by my experiences as a teacher, mother and student, were present in the interactions with grade twelve students as we constructed our understandings. The inescapable fact of my presence meant that I would be present to make choices. "Choices equal subjectivity at work" (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p.721).

However, while my subjectivity was one basis for my distinctiveness, it was not a unique distinctiveness, peculiar solely to me (Peshkin, 1988c, p.278). Otherwise, my work would be marked by idiosyncrasy that located what I had seen exclusively in my eyes (pp.278-79). On the other hand, if, as Peshkin (p.280) pointed out, all researchers were alike, we

would all tell the same story about the same phenomenon. By virtue of my subjectivity, "I tell the story I am moved to tell." However, I could not claim to re-present the experiences of a group of grade twelve students if I did not present as accurately as possible their constructions. If my work is to be accepted, what I saw must be "squared with the real or imagined perceptions of others" (p.279). Trustworthiness will be judged by readers (in particular, the participants themselves) who personally ascertain the fit between what they read and what they know and have experienced (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, in Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p.717).

If a virtue is defined as a good quality, an advantage, then I agree with Peshkin's notion of "virtuous subjectivity." I believe that my subjectivity -- that "unique configuration of [my] personal qualities joined to the data [I] collect[ed]" (Peshkin, 1988a, p.18) -- was an advantage. On the other hand, a methodology situated within the constructivist paradigm required on-going reflection on my Subjective-I's lest my advantage become the Others'⁶ disadvantage.

Having chosen my research methodology, it was time to enter the field.

⁶Although the term *Other* implies some distinct reality that can be 'found' through inquiry -- which is contrary to the constructivist paradigm and therefore less than satisfactory -- I have used the term intermittently throughout this text. Terms such as *respondent*, *subject*, and even *participant* do not capture the interactive nature of the relationship in emergent-paradigm inquiries either. We are in need of a term less cumbersome than *co-constructor* to describe the people with whom we construct understandings in our inquiries.

Choosing the site

Applying to the Research Office of a large school district in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia for access to a secondary school for research purposes, I met with the director, Dr. Susan Graham.⁷ I was interested in this particular school district for two reasons. First, although the district was growing rapidly, the population was relatively stable. Since the study was to take place over the whole school year, I wanted to find a school where very few students were likely to leave the school during the study. The second reason had more to do with logistics. Since I expected to spend a great deal of time at the school, I needed access to a site where inordinate amounts of time would not be consumed sitting in rush hour traffic. The school I had in mind would allow for easy access for brief on-site appointments and, since I was somewhat familiar with the area, would help me provide a more in-depth context for the study.

Not only was Dr. Graham receptive to my research question, but she provided guidance in the kinds of documentation that the receiving principal would favour. She also spoke with the principal on my behalf. Although the principal of the school I had in mind denied me access to her school, Bob Lee, the principal of Eagle Spirit Secondary School, a school of Dr. Graham's

⁷ All proper names -- students, teachers, staff, administrators, and the school itself -- used in the study are pseudonyms. Several of the students in the discussion group chose their own pseudonyms; all others were randomly selected.

choosing, was most welcoming.

Eagle Spirit Secondary School is a suburban secondary school which, at the time of the study, served 1357 grade 8 to 12, predominantly caucasian, students. Of those, 265 were registered in grade 12. The socio-economic status of the school population has been, and remains, upper middle class. Approximately 15% of the student population was classed as ESL (English as a Second Language), and of those students, approximately 90% were Taiwanese -- estimated at an 8% increase over the previous year. Only 10 to 15 of the student population were First Nations People. There were 36 international students⁸ attending Eagle Spirit Secondary. The school had a staff of 85, approximately 10% of whom were part time. The school operated on a semester system and, as well as standard curricular courses, offered the International Baccalaureate Program, a Cafeteria Program, a district Alternate Program and a Ministry of Education sponsored Co-Op Program.⁹

Nestled in a residential area, Eagle Spirit Secondary School is, nonetheless, only a few blocks from the commercial area of the community. Next to the school is a large recreational facility. On the other side of the school is an

⁸ At the time of this study, there were 90 international students attending school in this district. Over one third were attending Eagle Spirit Secondary. Each student paid \$11,500 per year and fees were expected to increase by \$1000 the following year.

⁹ The Co-Op Program is designed for grade 11 and 12 students. It is a regular academic program but focuses in a particular academic area plus work experience in that area.

elementary school. Behind is a wooded area where students, not allowed to smoke on the school grounds, congregate. The facility, like many current schools in this province, is a predominantly two storey building that sprawls on the school grounds. The school has one wing in which the two floors are at a half storey different level from the main section of the school. Shop classes are housed in another wing of the school extending beyond the gymnasiums.

Other than the classrooms, most of which are locked other than at class time, students have few places to congregate. The main section of the school is built around a central open courtyard with a conversation pit. Given the frequent inclement weather, it is not used for large portions of the school year. Off the cafeteria, one section of the quadrangle has a large open breezeway where students often congregate but during the winter, it is too cold for all but the most hardy. There is some talk of closing it in so that students could make more use of it but no definite plans.

The cafeteria is very small and seats only a small fraction of the student population. Cafeteria students, under the direction of the Cafeteria Program Head, Wilf Mackenzie, prepare hot meals. Most students buy their food from the cafeteria and then sit on the floor along the corridors to eat lunch.¹⁰ Several traditional long cafeteria tables with benches take up one

¹⁰ A large number of senior students leave the campus during the lunch period.

section of the room. Other seating is provided by a few tables and white vinyl patio chairs which are stacked along one wall after the lunch hour. During class time, students on a 'spare' often come here to visit or study.

Eagle Spirit Secondary School is the result of an amalgamation of two schools -- a senior secondary and a junior secondary feeder school -- with not particularly compatible philosophies and resulting school cultures.¹¹ Although the amalgamation occurred a decade ago, tensions for some of the staff are not far below the surface. The senior secondary had a reputation (deserved or otherwise) of being an elite school where it was assumed that students would go on to university. There was a high drop out/failure rate and many students in the latter category simply moved to a nearby secondary school and completed their schooling there. The junior secondary school had a reputation (again, deserved or otherwise) of being a 'tough' school and served a somewhat less affluent population.

The merger was not a happy union -- especially for the staff of the junior secondary school. There had been earlier tensions because the senior secondary staff felt that the junior secondary school was not adequately preparing students for

¹¹ Siskin (1994, p.39) describes how teachers who participate in formal or informal networks influence the school. She argues that understanding the teaching workplace as socially constructed focuses attention on the active side of construction. "Context features thus become not determining factors, but rather a set of constraining and enabling conditions within which individuals actively and collectively shape the meaning, and the practice, of teaching."

senior secondary school. On the other hand, the junior secondary school staff felt that the senior secondary school was too hard on the students. The merger exacerbated these tensions as neither faction wanted to see any of their power diminished. Fervent disputes erupted over such issues as whether or not the junior secondary section of the amalgamated school could continue to hold "graduation" ceremonies when students completed grade 10 and whether the new school team would carry the name of the junior secondary school team or the senior secondary school team. Hard feelings were intensified when, sometime later, the school was downsized and a number of staff were moved. Teachers were passionate about where they wanted to be placed and some of those who remained at the school were less-than-'happy-campers'.

The competing philosophies and underlying tensions are still apparent and contribute to the culture of Eagle Spirit Secondary School. In the staffroom, the divisions are obvious. Field notes from one of my early visits to Eagle Spirit Secondary reveal much.

I wander into the staff room at lunch time. A number of teachers sit at the several tables on one side of the room. On the other side, sofas and chairs have been placed to form a large circle. Although not all the chairs are filled, without a doubt, it is the domain of the group of men sitting there. The closeness of the group is clearly evident and they pay no attention to others in the room. Annabeth, a relative newcomer to the staff, volunteers that the group "does not seem to feel part of the staff." The group publishes its own newsletter laden "with sexist comments" and they run a sports pool. While "occasionally they will take in newcomers," for the most part, it is a group that harbours "lingering animosity from the amalgamation years ago." (field notes, January 5, 1998)

Since the group is made up for the most part of men from the junior secondary staff, it exacerbates a tension found in many secondary schools. As in other educational institutions, certain programs have higher status for staff as well as students.¹² Siskin (1994, p.180) notes that "by virtue of the subject they teach, teachers bring the distinct perspectives, procedures, values, and discourses of their fields into the school--and sometimes into conflict." Given that 'the group' at Eagle Spirit Secondary, composed of men who, for the most part, teach entry level core subjects, Physical Education, or elective courses, also sit together at staff meetings, their influence on

¹² The question of which subjects have the most status has been pursued by a number of analysts (e.g., Bernstein (1973), Foucault (1972), and Young (1971) cited in Siskin (1994, p.120). Goodson (1988b:179)) described the "preferential treatment of academic subjects." Hargreaves (1990b, p.306) noted that "the higher-status subjects, most notably the 'academic' subjects, . . . are more likely to be made compulsory than the lower-status, practical subjects." Goodson (1988b, 1987 cited in Siskin, 1994, p.120) also pointed out that "status is neither permanent nor natural, but rather the temporary result of larger political and cultural processes in which schooling is embedded."

the context of the school should not be underestimated. They have found other ways to regain some of the status and power lost through amalgamation.

The principal of Eagle Spirit Secondary, Bob Lee, was most enthusiastic about the study and was always very accommodating, arranging for classroom visits, finding spaces for meetings, willingly giving up his time to answer any questions I might have, and encouraging teachers to participate all the while apologizing for not doing more. He also arranged with Diane Taylor, the Grade 12 Counsellor, to be my liaison throughout the study. The office staff were always very helpful and greeted me warmly on all my many visits to the school.

This, then, was the context in which I explored the transitional experiences of a group of grade 12 students.

Seeking co-constructed understandings

It has been argued that all social research is a form of participant observation since it is not possible to study the social world without being a part of it. In keeping with that notion and since my inquiry was framed by a constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes naturalistic inquiry, being a part of the secondary school experiences of grade twelve students in a number of ways was essential. While my inquiry embodied an emergent research design, naturalistic observation, surveys, discussion groups, and individual interviews were all important

components of my research methodology. However, group discussions and in-depth interviews¹³ were the predominant data collection techniques as students and I worked together in the co-construction of our understanding of the experience of grade twelve. As well, these interviews led me to see things differently in my observations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.118).

Adler and Adler (1994, p.378) suggest that qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic. It occurs in the natural context of the event, among those who would naturally be participating, and traces the natural stream of everyday life. Consequently it has the advantage of providing access to the "phenomenological complexity of the world, where connections, correlations, and causes can be witnessed as and how they unfold"(p.378). Yet, according to Adler and Adler, qualitative observation has not been dealt with in methodological literature. They claim that it "has remained a stepchild to its more widely recognized offshoot: participant observation"(p.378).

As do others, I define *participant observation* not as a

¹³ Based on Merton, Fiske, and Kendall's (1956) discussion of focused interviews, Mischler (1986, p.99) stated that among the criteria for effective and productive focused interviews are **depth** -- the subject has the opportunity "to describe the affective, cognitive, and evaluative meanings of the situation and the degree of their involvement in it'" and **personal context** -- the attributes and prior experiences of the subject are brought out during the interview to provide the situation with distinctive meanings.

particular research technique but as "a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researchers" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p.249). However, like many terms, *participant observation* has a range of definitions. Sometimes a distinction is made between participation observation -- researchers playing an established participant role in the inquiry -- and non-participation observation. But this seems to imply that the non-participant observer plays no recognized role in the inquiry process. In recent decades, practitioners' attitudes have shifted toward greater involvement or even membership roles in the research setting. Adler and Adler (1994, p.379) suggest that as naturalistic social scientists moved into a variety of membership roles, three membership roles appear to dominate: the complete-member-researcher, the active-member-researcher, and the peripheral-member-researcher, and that "the current span of observational research roles includes some combinations of these two typologies."

As an adult outsider significantly separated by age from grade twelve students, the role of complete membership in the secondary school setting was impossible, the role of active membership, improbable.¹⁴ While the notion of peripheral member-

¹⁴ The term 'age' is used here as a surrogate measure for a number of social, psychological, and physical characteristics. However, as I use the term I am reminded of Dryden's (1995:07) comment that during his study he felt like one of the students, "older, but not the three times older I was. I felt enough like them that it never occurred to me that [the students] wouldn't see me as I saw myself." While the role of active membership was improbable, I frequently had to remind myself that my own understanding of the grade 12 experience was from another time.

ship initially appeared too removed from the life-world of adolescents, the role did provide an opportunity "to observe and interact closely enough with the students to establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership"(p.380). For that reason, it offered the research stance that provided opportunities for on-going co-constructions of the experiences of grade twelve. More importantly, a feminist ethic of caring seemed to strengthen the observational inquiry for it required "the formation of a long-term trusting relationship between the observer and the observed" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b, p.354).

In addition, although observational research is susceptible to bias from the inquirer's subjective interpretations of situations, the interactive nature of peripheral membership continually presented opportunities to gather students' quotes thereby enriching the observational data and deepening my understanding of how students experienced their final year of secondary schooling. Given the naturalness and nondirection of the observer role, "observational methods embody the least potential for generating *observer effects*" (Adler & Adler, 1994, p.282). This, along with the interactivity of the inquiry relationship, increased the significance of the peripheral-member-researcher role in the study.

As stated above, included in the methodological spectrum of this study were "more member-articulated strategies"(p.389) such as depth interviewing and group interviews. This was in keeping

with the epistemological position of constructivist inquiry which holds that "knowledge is created in interaction among investigator and respondents" and that through interaction multiple "knowledges" are constructed.

Beginning in October, I began meeting with a group of grade 12 students. To recruit volunteers to participate in a discussion group, I visited all of the grade 12 classrooms in two different blocks.¹⁵ I explained the nature of the study and asked those who were interested to come to a meeting the following week. As well, a notice asking for volunteers was read with the daily announcements over the P.A. system and displayed on the hall monitors for three days prior to the preliminary informational meeting. I had envisioned a core group of twenty students who would meet every two weeks throughout the school year. The reality was somewhat different. While there were approximately twenty students in the discussion group, attendance at each session ranged from six to ten and the composition of the group was seldom the same. The total number of students in the group was approximately 20 to 24 although, other than a small core group, attendance varied from session to session with some students coming less frequently and weekly attendance seldom exceeded 12. Membership in the group was comprised predominantly of full time or partial IB students.¹⁶

¹⁵ Visiting the classrooms in two blocks was an attempt to make contact with all students since many students have a 'spare' block in their senior year.

¹⁶ While the text identifies the program in which some students are enrolled, not all students are so identified. For

While other students were invited to join the group, the predominance of IB students may have discouraged greater participation by students in other programs although that concern was never articulated. For example, at least seven members of the Cafeteria Program were interested in joining the group but, since they are required to work in the cafeteria through the lunch hour until clean-up is complete (usually about 1:30 p.m.), they were unable to join the noon hour group. In December, students in the discussion group asked if we could meet every week instead of every other week. While this made it easier for students to remember that it was 'discussion group day,' it was a substantial time commitment and likely accounted for the 'revolving' nature of the group. Volunteers were asked to obtain informed parental consent.

The discussion group was an important component of data collection. Since the study was framed within an emergent research design, input from the students was essential as we worked together in the co-construction of our understanding of the experience of grade 12. The discussion group was set up so that students could direct the focus of the conversation in order to better reflect their own experiences although I occasionally raised questions. Members not only offered

two reasons: first, in some cases, students are not registered in a program but are taking one or more courses in it and therefore associate with other students in the program; second, although pseudonyms have been used for all participants in this study, many students were very candid in their conversations and I was concerned that connecting them with a particular program might threaten their anonymity.

suggestions for discussion topics but were asked to encourage input from students outside of the group in order to provide a deeper understanding of the liminal experiences of grade 12. As well, I asked for input from the group for questions for the survey. Many of the students in the discussion group were also individually interviewed at least once during the school year.¹⁷

Unstructured group discussions proved a valuable technique for the construction of multiple knowledges. Although usually associated with marketing research (Fontana & Frey, 1994), the unstructured question format and the informal, spontaneous setting of the group interview engendered rapport and increased trust within the group. The group discussions facilitated brainstorming as the students and I worked together to explore the topic and to construct their understanding of the grade twelve experience. As a result, discussions were data rich and flexible, stimulating to respondents, were recall aiding, and were cumulative and elaborative (p.365).

This type of discussion group was not, however, without problems. Although infrequent, the emerging group culture occasionally interfered with individual expression as the group was dominated by students with an IB focus. It was not apparent that 'group-think' was the outcome and, for the most part, any problems were lessened since the group interviews were augmented

¹⁷ From a total of 35 interviews, 12 of the students who participated in the discussion group agreed to be interviewed. Some others said they were too busy; others just did not sign up for an interview.

with individual in-depth interviews. Individual interviews facilitated exploring sensitive topics and, to a large extent, eliminated the problem of group culture and group domination.

The individual interviews were an even more valuable component of my data collection (although I had originally believed the reverse would be the case). To recruit volunteers, I once again visited all of the grade 12 classrooms in two separate blocks. Going to the classrooms gave me the opportunity to connect with students who were outside the regular academic program and who were not inclined to make the time commitment to an on-going discussion group. At a follow-up visit, volunteers signed up for an interview time. I left informed consent forms with students who voiced an interest in being interviewed and asked that they bring the signed copies along to the interview.

Most of the interviews were conducted during class time and the opportunity to miss class, I suspect, was an added incentive to sign up for an interview. Several interviews were conducted during the lunch hour but most students were reluctant to give up their free time especially since most students leave the campus over the lunch hour. In total, 35 students were individually interviewed between March 2 and May 14, 1998. While I began the interviews with prepared questions, each interview took on its own flavour as the students and I worked together to explore their experiences of grade 12. Most interviews were one half to one hour long. Several were considerably longer and conducted over two or more sessions. Since the discussions were

not limited to their experiences within the structure of the institution, conversations often became very personal. Those interviews that took place over more than one session were with students who seemed to need to talk to someone about what was going on in their lives outside of the school structure.

The essence of the unstructured interview lies in the inquirer-participant interaction -- that "establishment of a human-to-human relation" with the other and "the desire to understand rather than explain" (p.366). Fontana and Frey point out that since the goal of unstructured interviewing is understanding, it is essential that the inquirer establish rapport, to put him- or herself in the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their perspective. On the other hand, while obviously close rapport with the students opened doors to more informed research, there was always the potential for problems if, as noted above, I began to identify too closely with any of them.

Inquirer influence was potentially a problem as it is in all research techniques so assumptions and premises needed to be made as clear as possible. Gender, in particular, influenced the inquiry. Denzin (1989a, in Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.369) argues that "gender filters knowledge." Since the interview took place "within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic society in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones" (p.369), I believe my gender made a difference. Feminist researchers have suggested ways to circumvent the traditional

interviewing paradigm. Oakley (1981, in Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.370) argued that interviewing is a masculine paradigm which is embedded in a masculine culture and stresses masculine traits. At the same time it excludes from interviewing traits that are culturally viewed as feminine, such as sensitivity and emotionality.

In gendered interviewing, the inquirer may reject such outdated techniques as non-involvement in the conversational interaction and instead may engage in a "real" conversation with "give and take" and empathetic understanding. Fontana and Frey suggested that this makes the interview more honest, morally sound, and reliable (1994, p.371). Not only are participants treated as a co-constructor of understanding as they express personal feelings, the interview presents a more "realistic" picture. In addition, unstructured conversations outside of the interview situation are important to "establish rapport and immerse oneself in the situation, while gathering a store of 'tacit knowledge'" (p.371) about the group.

In addition to the discussion group and interviews, data were collected through several other means. Two questionnaires, one in January (at the end of the first semester) and one in May (near the end of the second semester), were distributed to all grade twelve students. Completion of the questionnaires was voluntary. The questionnaires were intended to provide data that would situate the discussion topics and interview questions within the broader context of the entire graduating class. Once

again I visited each grade twelve classroom, explained the questionnaire and distributed copies to each student. In all but one case, the classroom teachers allowed students time at the beginning of the period to complete the questionnaires. I returned just before the end of the period to collect those questionnaires that had been completed. For the second term questionnaire, the process was repeated. One hundred fourteen of the January surveys were returned; ninety-one of the May surveys. These data collections were supplemented throughout the year by grade twelve classroom observations and observations at school extra-curricular events to provide additional information for discussion, interview topics and context. Informal discussions with the grade 12 counsellor, administrators, and teachers, all sensitive to the school experiences of the grade 12 students, contributed additional context information. Finally, document analysis of all newsletters and other print material, and the curriculum materials/textbooks rounded out the data collection procedures. Supplementary data were used as feedback in discussion and interview topics.

As I began writing the text, sections were given to the discussion group for feedback. When Chapter 4 was complete, copies were given to four members of the discussion group for circulation within the group and one copy was given to another student who had not been part of the group. All offered their feedback either over the telephone or in person. In telephone conversations with five students who had been interviewed, I

read them the sections of their interviews and the context in which those quotes were used in the text and invited feedback.

Re-presenting the co-constructed understandings

The topic of subjectivity not only raises questions about the conduct of research but also about the presentation of findings. Age, gender, and relationship to institutional structures influence not only what is learned but subsequently what is presented. Our attention is drawn to "the reflexive, problematic, and, at times, contradictory nature of data" and the "tremendous, if unspoken influence of the researcher as an author" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.372). And Bruner (1993, p.6) pointed out, any act of representing the "Other" is "inherently political" and he reminded us that there is a danger "in putting the personal so deeply back into the text that it dominates." On the other hand, it is "possible to be evocative, to express feelings, ours and theirs, and to capture the drama of social life." That does not mean that such stories are fictional (i.e., false or not real) or that our text avoids accountability. Rather, it means that, as Eisner (1991, p.20) described, "cadence, image, and innuendo grab and hold us and provide images through which we can enter into the scene vicariously."

Other writers also draw attention to concerns about the ways in which we present our findings. Jansen and Peshkin (1992, p.712) stated that "description and representation are not taken

for granted anymore: The concern is with how the text is constructed, how the position of the author figures into the written account, and how 'the subject-object distinction' (Van Maanen, 1988, p.34) plays out in different textual styles." These same issues were addressed by Lincoln (1990, p.83) who pointed out that the problems that plague constructivism are radically different from those encountered by conventional postpositivist researchers. Among the problems typically faced by emergent-paradigm inquirers are the faithful representation of multiple, constructed, and often conflicting realities and the necessity to maintain anonymity while using extensive, word-for-word, natural language quotations. On the other hand, Hargreaves (1996, p.16) maintains that we must re-present voices critically and contextually and that while this "will entail sacrificing some of the richness and complexity of each individual voice . . . it will add much to our understanding" Rosaldo (1989, p.21) would likely have supported the notion of sacrificing 'richness and complexity' since he pointed out that there was a growing realization that the "objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects" and that they themselves can have a voice (in Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p.713). My challenge, when representing the students' constructions as well as my own, was to create a text that presented both inquirer and participant as having active creative selves (Bruner, 1993, p.6). For as Eisner (1991, p.28) pointed out, language not only shapes, focuses, and directs our attention, it transforms our

experience in the process of making it public. And this underscores significant ethical issues.

Deyhle, Hess, Jr., and LeCompte (1992, p.636) argued that since researchers assess ethical responsibility differently and from different perspectives, different ethical conclusions can be reached. An inquirer assessing ethical responsibility from a covenantal ethic position,¹⁸ for example, acknowledges the indebtedness of one to another and holds that her or his paramount responsibility is to the participants in an inquiry. The ethical perspective with which an inquirer is most comfortable will be compatible with the understanding of qualitative research with which he or she most closely identifies (p.611). The ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions associated with my constructivist paradigm are in harmony with the beliefs of the Covenantal Ethics perspective.

As stated above, I am arguing that an inquiry framed by a constructivist paradigm with its emphasis on face-to-face interaction and an epistemological position of co-constructed knowledge provided greater access to the multiple realities of the experiences of grade twelve students. However, what I chose to tell was a highly constructive act on my part, depending on the

¹⁸ William May (1980) synthesized ethical positions into five theories of moral behaviour: the Teleological Ethic, the Utilitarian Ethic, the Categorical Imperative, Critical Theory and Advocacy, and Covenantal Ethics (in Deyhle, Hess, Jr., & LeCompte, 1992, pp.602-609). Deyhle, Hess, Jr., and LeCompte (1992, p.614) suggest that if researchers examine their own lives they will find that one of the ethical frameworks characteristically dominates their work.

stories I wished to convey about the students and myself as an inquirer. In my text, the students' words represent their constructions but my interpretation of their words is my construction and therein lies the danger. Richardson (1992, p.131) reminded us that when we write our text

. . . we use our authority and privileges to talk about the people we study. No matter how we stage the text, we--the authors--are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values.

When we enter into a research relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories with us, there is "the potential to shape their lived, told, relived, and retold stories as well as our own" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.422). The variable and personal nature of social construction underlies this dilemma. Re-presenting the experiences of grade twelve students in a way that does not speak for them but rather allows them their own voices was facilitated by a Covenantal perspective. Since no two experiences are ever alike I am aware that "the kind of text [I] create[ed] makes the difference, and that difference is epistemic" (Eisner, 1991, p.22).

My experiences of adolescence have been reconstructed repeatedly through the filters of my adult experiences which are a reflection of my colour, status, gender, ethnicity, and history. My adolescent experiences are not the adolescent experiences of today. I am a woman who struggled to adulthood when "frozen identities" (Fine, 1994, p.80) were the order of the

day, before notions of self-determination or gender equity came into vogue. With little effort I remember the times I wanted to tell men to stop speaking for me. Long before people spoke of 'finding voice' I realized I was silenced. I believe it was critical that I reflected on those times and let them become a part of my "virtuous subjectivity" as I attempted to re-present the voices of a group of students as they constructed their own understandings of the experiences of grade twelve.

In re-presenting their stories, I "need[ed] to consider the voice that is heard and the voice that is not heard" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.424). If I included the voices of students in such a way that they spoke their stories of triumph but not their stories of despair, or conversely, if I embraced their stories of despair but denied their stories of triumph, if I included the voice of a student in such a way that the context of the research text obscured or silenced important parts of that voice, or if, for whatever reason, I included some and not others,¹⁹ I then relegated students to the position of "objects of analysis" and denied them their voices as "analyzing subjects." The story that follows is an attempt to give voices to those students as they experienced the liminality of grade twelve.

¹⁹ I am aware that all voices of the graduating class at Eagle Spirit Secondary are not re-presented in this work. Obviously not all students chose to participate in the discussion group sessions, interviews, or two surveys. One can only speculate as to their reasons and how their voices might have changed this study.

CHAPTER 4

IN THE MIDST OF LIMINALITY:

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN THE ENDING AND THE BEGINNING

This year has been the oddest year for me. I don't feel very "in" to school like I used to be. It's a great concern for me, but I don't seem to take it nearly as seriously as I have in the past. The fervour that I once had for school work has seemed to diminish greatly and I don't know how to get it back. I'm not sure why that fervour is gone -- maybe because my life has gotten insanely busy or maybe I've just gotten bored. (Survey 048)

The "oddest year for me." The student who wrote those words inadvertently captured this last year of secondary schooling, a year filled with ambiguities and possibilities. By definition, grade twelve is a year of transition -- with graduation comes an ending of the high school years and a beginning of whatever comes next. It is also, by definition, a year of liminality, a year of being 'betwixt and between.'

Although there are many common experiences during this passage, not all students experience this liminal time in the same way or share the common experiences at the same time or to the same degree. Every student's passage is unique. But within this year of change, the many stories from the Eagle Spirit Secondary grade twelve students reflect a mixture of uncertainty and fear intermingled with hope and celebration. Within this year of waiting, the stories tell of times of pressure, despair,

confusion and loss. Many stories also mark moments of pride and personal growth and reflection along the passage.

But what do the stories reveal about the liminal experience? Initial themes or major aspects of the liminal experience begin to emerge during the interviews and discussion group sessions and are often used to guide subsequent interviews. By the end of the year, as I immerse myself in the stories and field notes, seven central themes emerge to reveal how this group of grade twelve students experience the time of liminality as they prepare to cross the threshold from secondary school to the adult world. Although each of the themes has more than one dimension, the major components of the grade twelve liminal experience can be identified as 1) Arriving, 2) Waiting, 3) Being pressed, 4) Reflecting, 5) Hoping, 6) Leaving, and 7) Celebrating -- each experienced in different ways and at different times.

While there is no one pattern to the way in which students experience this time of liminality, because of the time frame within which the institution operates, the experience can be framed temporarily -- the passage begins in September and ends with graduation in June. For that reason, I have chosen to order the themes of liminality as I moved through the school year with the students. Like the school year itself, we begin in September and move toward graduation. To highlight the shared experiences, I have taken the liberty of "moving" some of their stories from the time frames in which I heard them into the seven themes of

liminality.

Although each passage is unique, there is a discernible movement through the various aspects of liminality, beginning with the feeling of arriving and ending with celebrating. While the stories in between do not all follow a precise chronological order, for some the feeling of waiting begins early in the year and, for many, the feeling of being pressed begins to gain momentum by the middle of the school year. Although the aspect of reflecting is situation specific and is therefore an experience not necessarily connected to the time frame of the grade twelve school year, the tendency to 'look back' is heightened as the end draws nearer and plans for the future, by necessity, must become firmer. As the end of the year approaches, many students experience a new hopefulness as their future plans begin to take shape and, finally, at the end of the year, feelings of separation and detachment surface briefly before the focus shifts to celebrating. Although the stories that follow are fragments of many personal journeys, they are presented to illuminate the liminal experience of the passage from grade twelve.

Arriving: "I made it!"

For the students at Eagle Spirit, there are several constituents found within the notion of 'arriving.' For some, arriving is a sense of coming into a time and place of heightened import-

ance, a sense of a new status or power.

"I made it!" says Julia, "I did come out alive. I remember in grade five talking to my friends, God we are never going to get there! And now we're here - it's like a total accomplishment"(interview 012).

As Jason (interview 033) explains, "You're the big 'G' -- when you come to the school in grade eight, you are back down to the bottom of the ladder and now you are back up again." Although, for others, the arrival is not always everything that had been anticipated: "It's not what I expected at all," says Rod (interview 017). "I expected to come in and be on top of the stuff. I waited all my life to be able to boss all the little kids around like I was, and you get there and it's not the same -- they [won't] be bossed around. It's always a challenge," he says, "some kids will give in and they'll play along with you and some kids will be the hard-ass."

While not speaking specifically of the power that comes with having reached grade twelve, Wendy (interview 023) suggests that grade twelve is "unique [because] people have more trust in you, people look at you differently. They look up to you." Not that she finds this change easy to understand: "It's like why now? I am the same person as just a year ago. There is nothing different about me."

There are other expectations of what it is going to be like once you finally make it to grade twelve. "I was told before I got into grade 12 that grade 12 is just slack, you just breeze

by, there's no work involved," says Bruce (interview 014). "I thought, well, that's good, I can't wait to get into grade 12. I get to grade 12, uh... there's a lot of work to do!"

As the year begins, connection to the experience of grade twelve, for some, is a mixture of surprise at having made it this far, a satisfaction in having made it to 'the top of the ladder,' and a sense that it does not seem to be what had been anticipated.

Part of the elation over having made it to the top of the ladder is the sense of arriving at a doorway or entry into something much bigger. In our conversation, Bruce explains that for a lot of people, grade twelve could be seen as a threshold because "their life is finally starting. For some who are going straight into post-secondary, it could be a threshold or it could not be. For myself, I think it is, simply because I've been waiting for it for so long." [Is it a threshold to the adult world, I ask.] "I don't think so. It's to freedom" (interview 014).

Although, even in reaching the threshold, there can be a feeling of disenchantment, of arriving at a place that is not as had been anticipated. As Glynis describes it: "I suppose [grade twelve] is a threshold but it is a really boring threshold . . . because you wait your entire life. It is like one of those movies everyone says 'it is so good, it is so good, I laughed, I cried, I loved it, it was so beautiful' -- then you go and see it and you are all worked up and you think, this is good but not

that good" (interview 015).

While few students portray grade twelve as a threshold, other comments, in fact, do describe just such a passing over to something new, something different. On the survey, students are asked if they feel as if they are crossing a threshold in their lives. "Not really," replies one student. "So much lies ahead. What's behind is nothing"(survey 047). "No," writes another, "I feel like I have just finished something that needed to be done and now I am going on with my life" (survey 069). These comments, and "I am just passing into another stage of my life and graduation is just a barrier to be overcome" (survey 005), describe a crossing of a threshold just as much as the response: "Yes. The real world begins" (survey 019).

What comes through in these comments is a sense that what has been is not 'the real world.' For some there is a sense that life -- their 'real' life -- will begin when this passage is over. "That's what happened to my sister," Claude (interview 027) tells me.

That's when she started having a lot of fun. I can't wait to get to University if it is anything like what it was for [her] - I can't wait. I think everyone wants to get out of here regardless what they are doing. Some people just hate school and they just want to go to work full time at Boston Pizza. Some of my friends think of school non-stop - they want to go to University. Everyone wants to get out of here - that's what I think. Regardless of their goals, they just want to get out of here. I don't see it as a waste of time but I also want to get out.

As well as finally arriving at an ending and a threshold to something new, for many there is a sense of arriving at a dangerous place, a place where consequential decisions loom, a place fraught with uncertainty.

At the first discussion group session, I explain to students that I am interested in how they are experiencing this time in their lives. I tell them that while I don't want to influence them with any comments about my own grade twelve experiences, I do remember that on graduation night I felt as if I had come to the edge of a cliff.

Glynis: "That is soooo weird. I was just talking to someone the other day and we were saying the same thing. Like before there was always the grade twelves to be there and show the way and now there was just us and it's like we're standing at the edge of a cliff and there's nothing there."

Drudi [one of the boys]: "Maybe they are at the bottom of the cliff and their dead bodies will cushion our fall when we go over the edge." (from field notes, October 2, 1997)

While Drudi's comments are said in jest, I wonder how many students experience a sense of impending danger such as indicated by one student survey response: "[grade twelve is] not

really a threshold but a brick wall" (survey 003).

It is interesting to note that far more students express concerns about crossing the threshold to the future when completing the surveys than do those in face-to-face interviews. When asked to describe how prepared they feel to undertake their plans for the future and to describe one concern they have about leaving secondary school, the level of concern changes only slightly from the January survey to the May survey. In January many still do not have specific plans and comments range from, "I feel that it will be a challenge but not so much that I won't be able to handle it" (survey 111A), to "Extremely unprepared. I'm afraid of leaving high school and not being successful. Ending up nowhere, doing nothing" (survey 112A). By May most have chosen the direction of their new beginning -- postsecondary schooling. However, while one student responds that s/he feels "overconfident" (survey 071) most responses still speak of confusion and uncertainty. "I have no idea what I want to do and honestly don't feel prepared at all," writes one student (survey 031), while another states: "I'm frightened that the decisions I make will set my life in stone" (survey 042). "I'm not sure I'm ready emotionally for the real world," confides another (survey 084). Perhaps the anonymity of the survey permits a kind of freedom from putting on a display of confidence -- a confidence that, for some, is shaky at best.

Briana describes this time as knowing there is a huge fork in the road but not knowing when she is coming to it (from field

notes, March 5, 1998). "No one can make the decision except me and that makes it even harder," says Rachael (interview 001). The turmoil is exacerbated by the belief that present decisions permanently determine the future. As Cherie describes it:

[It's] definitely scary, all the changes, that if you made one wrong mistake, your whole life will go down in front of you. It's scary because I feel like I'm choosing my future, basically, and I'm choosing after school, after all my homework's done and I have maybe half an hour to decide all these different things, what program, what faculty, which university I'm going to, and it's all rushed and what am I going to do if I make a wrong choice. It's a big transition and it puts a lot of responsibility on me. I guess that's the whole point of becoming an adult with all this responsibility, but it weighs pretty heavy, and with all the implications that these choices have for your future, it's hard. . . . It's kind of the first steps we're taking [toward being an adult], especially the wide range of choices we're facing. I know that whatever you're going to do changes your life forever, even small, small things are going to change your life forever; but right now you have to start thinking long term. Before it was kind of like 'am I going to go out on Friday night?' but now it's 'am I going to go into this faculty at UBC or that one?' and it's going to change your life so much and there's so much stress put on you. At the same time you still have all the teenager things to deal with. It's kind of like a turning year where you're just getting introduced to all the big choices you have to deal with. . . . [I feel vulnerable] in that I do not want to make the wrong choice. There are so many options and I don't know what to do. Go to school, not go to school, go to work, travel. I am trying to think of years down the road and not make the wrong choice. [Is there pressure about not making the wrong choice?] Um... yes, sort of. I want to be successful. I want to make the right choice whatever that is. (Cherie, interview 003)

During our conversations I ask each student, "Can you think of a metaphor for this time of your life?" It seems that in many ways, most days are much like school days have been over the

past few years, others are more stressful. Perhaps a metaphor will illuminate the experience. Over the many conversations we construct several.

One of the images we talk about centres on grade twelve being like arriving at the station after a long train trip. Someone adds that, as you are nearing the station, you realize that you have not been given directions -- you know where you want to go but no one will tell you how to get there. "It is like the last stop before you get off for your actual life," says Wendy (interview 023). "You have been going since kindergarten building up to Grade 12. Everyone says 'oh, you'll be so excited when you get there.' They build up this big expectation and when you get here it's just... [long pause]... I don't understand it." I ask Wendy what it is like to 'pull into the station.' "You get off then you can go anywhere from there. If you can find your way there then you can get there but other than that you are just kind of stuck. [Grade 12] tells you where to go but not how to get there. It says 'OK meet me here' but it doesn't give you directions on how to get there."

When I ask him to describe what grade twelve is like, Jeff says that the best word would be "'scared' because you don't know what you really want." He adds that he is not really ready to graduate because "high school is your safety-net" (interview 009). "I feel like I'm going to become a number," writes one student (survey 051) and from another conversation "[at university] you are just another face, . . . grade twelve is a huge

change, a turning point in your life It is almost like losing your parents. That's scary" (interview 012). On the other hand, not everyone experiences this loss. ". . . it's just the beginning," writes one student on the survey, "I think you start to realize who you really are and what your character is after high school"(survey 035).

However, as Tara explains, "It's like the big-time end. There is nothing, no schedule saying do this on time. You have to figure everything out"(interview 024). Comments from the survey echo Jeff's and Tara's trepidation. "It seems like I'm taking a big step forward and going into the real world where I'm not prepared" (survey 075) and "I feel like I have to start all over again since all my experiences will be new to me. It makes me feel scared and uneasy"(survey 043).

Other responses to the questions about crossing a threshold and feeling prepared speak of being in a space where previous certainties are no longer part of their reality: " . . . for 13 years I've had a regular routine with no choices but now I've lots of decisions and an uncertain future before me" (survey 031); "Up to now, my whole life has been a big routine. I'm afraid of not having a set routine in my life and of taking on new large, responsibilities" (survey 045); and ". . . the fabric of my life is being resewn entirely. The routine of 12 years of school is gone"(survey 054). The fact that "you can't come here any more" is a scary thought, explains Crystal. "You can't wake up [thinking] do I want to go to school or not -- I have to go

to work" (interview 018). One student sums it up as, "It doesn't hit you (well, me, anyway) until the last week of May when you feel like high school is over and you are now in full charge of your life"(survey 027). As Julia says, "There is a little part not ready. . . . The kid, the little girl, is scared. It's like the curtain comes down and you want to stay behind the curtain"(interview 012).

[cartoon]

used with permission

Although there is considerable trepidation about arriving at the end of the line, there is also a strong sense of having reached a goal. Todd explains how he never really had given grade twelve much thought, not really considered whether or not he would graduate: "School was a hard place for me to be. . . now I'm glad that I stuck it out"(interview 013). As Megan (interview 034) explains, ". . . we've come 13 years, and that's a long way."

While Wendy, Todd, and Megan speak of arriving at the end

of something, other metaphors emphasize the space between the end and the new beginning, a time of waiting. One metaphor we construct in our conversations likens this time to that of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Another that has resonance for many is being in a bubble-dome tennis court and being caught in the air space between the enclosed court (high school) and the exit or entrance (leading to the outside world). All of the metaphors speak of a mixture of uncertainty and anticipation of what comes next, of a time of waiting for the next stage of the life journey to begin, of being 'betwixt and between.'

Waiting: "a slushy area, like getting ready for something"

At a discussion group session near the end of October we are still trying to think of ways to describe what it is like to be in grade 12. After chatting about the events of the past week, the conversation turns back to the task at hand.

Ed: "I don't really have time to think about those kinds of things." [and when you think about them now? I ask] "Grade 12 is kind of a slush area."

Phaedra: "Yeah, a slushy area, like getting ready for something."

Nicole: "Yeah, getting ready, but it's uncertain. People ask what you're going to do with your life and you say you don't know and they say 'How can you not

know, you're in grade 12?" (from field notes, October 29, 1997)

Early in the school year, the confusion over how best to deal with this "slushy" time of life becomes apparent. Although no one seems able to explain exactly what is creating the confusion, the conversations often focus on not knowing exactly how to deal with emotions and uncertainty. "I'm just crying all the time and I don't know what it is," laments Rachael, "and I just feel ridiculous because there's nothing happening." Phaedra and Erina echo the feeling.

Could you describe this time in your life, I ask Julia. "It is a challenge," she says, "because there are so many twists and turns, you never know what is going to happen. Like tomorrow I could win a big scholarship or get nothing. I have no idea." Adding to the challenge is how you are perceived by others: "It is kids and adults -- we are not kids and we are not adults."

As I listen to Julia, Ed's and Phaedra's metaphor of a "slushy" time comes back to me and I think how apt it is. Slush is neither rain nor snow, a little of each, but with an identity that is less than clear, somewhere between the two. Certainly this is in keeping with Turner's (1997, p.94) contention that during the period of liminality, the person in transition passes through a sphere that has few of the characteristics of the past or coming state. There is a degree of chaos as yet unshaped by purpose and identification. This time of waiting for the new

beginning is a time for reflection, when the ideas, facts, and sentiments previously bound up in configurations and unthinkingly accepted are resolved. As some of the students seek to establish their new identity there is some consideration of what it means to be successful in our society.

In October, I ask people in the discussion group for some suggestions about questions for the survey to be handed out to all the grade 12 students at Eagle Spirit. "What about something that asks about what they think of their future?" suggests Phaedra. She says that it seems as if by grade 12 the future is already set for many students, that what they're like in grade 12 is what they're going to be like for the rest of their lives. Like they know if they are going to be successful or if they are going to end up working at McDonald's. I ask if she means do people feel optimistic about their future. It's not quite what she means and I wonder how I can word a question on the questionnaire that seems so negative, that appears to have so little hope for that notion of upward mobility, so highly regarded in our society. (from field notes, October 29, 1997)

As students consider what it means to be successful and wait for the next stage in their life, there is also a sense of

marking time, waiting for a clearer vision of the future. Many students at Eagle Spirit describe a waiting that speaks of putting in time until someone unlocks the future for them or until the end finally comes.

In mid-September, I enter the waiting room of the counselling centre, a functional but not terribly inviting room with offices off it. The walls are decorated with posters advertising various universities and scholarships. A rack holds a number of brochures about local college offerings and health issues. Next to the two filing cabinets are an almost empty bookcase and a display rack holding several magazines. The only other pieces of furniture include a small, worn couch with wooden arms and legs, three more utilitarian office chairs, and two padded chrome chairs -- all set in a horseshoe with a small round, very worn, end table in the centre. On the table is a mason canning jar filled with fresh roses. Three students wait for counsellors. I ask the young man if he will be graduating in June. "Hopefully," he tells me. While he is uncertain of his plans, he shows little concern about the future. His dad wants him to go to university but he's not sure he could do that. Instead, he tells me, he will do computers like his brother or go into stocks and bonds like his dad.

Later that morning I sit in on a Law 12 class where students sit in rows and show little enthusiasm for being there. As we move on to another class, Dianne Taylor, the grade 12 counsellor, tells me that these students are taking this course as an elective, one that is less challenging than some of the other courses. The boy from the counselling suite is in this class. (from field notes, September 16, 1997)

As I think about the waiting room and my conversation with the young man, it strikes me how uninviting and barren the waiting room is, how different the furnishings are from those in the staffroom. There is a sense of tokenism here both in the furnishings and the directions to the future. As I reflect on this, I wonder how likely it is that the young man will find the way to his future here. By the same token, how likely is he to find the key in a classroom where students and teacher are putting in time? Like sitting in a not particularly inviting waiting room, is the young man sitting in class simply waiting - - waiting for the ending? And if so, what new beginning will the ending bring? More importantly, how does he experience this waiting? Does his seeming nonchalance belie feelings of pressure to decide on his future path?

Being pressed: "Why is there so much pressure?"

The pressure that the grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit describe has several sources. The sources seem rooted in both the present and the future -- pressure to make the 'right' decisions about the future and the subsequent pressure of what will become of them if they make the 'wrong' decision; pressure from the perceived expectations of others; pressure from the work load and the need to achieve scholarship level marks; and pressure from family problems. Often students are unable to pinpoint the main source of their pressure and, instead, speak of feeling overwhelmed by it all, offering a litany of 'problems' in support.

What kinds of questions should I ask students in order to understand what this time is like, I ask people at one of the discussion group sessions.

"What about pressure from peers?" offers Nicole. She says there is a lot of pressure from peers, about university, etc. Also, while everyone here [in the group] is worried about what university they will be accepted at, some are worried about whether or not they will graduate.

Phaedra and Nicole talk about the pressures of school work, family commitments, and trying to maintain a social life. Phaedra says she can't avoid thinking about boys.

Ed: "I don't have a social life, it's been totally ripped out." Being in IB, his life has been totally restructured he says. "It's like an old building that is smashed and rebuilt." I ask if it is smashed and totally torn down and rebuilt or renovated. He says smashed and rebuilt.

Nicole: "There's so much pressure."

Erina: "Right now there's the extended essay, then in February I have to apply for university and hopefully I'll get accepted. I keep hoping that next semester will be better."

Phaedra: "I've been thinking that it's never going to be better, that life is always going to be like this."

As the session ends, I remind everyone that we will meet in two weeks, same time, same place. Ed writes it down in his daytimer. Phaedra teases Ed about his daytimer and Ed says that he couldn't manage life without it, that it goes everywhere with him. Phaedra says that she really must find her own daytimer. What does an ever-present daytimer say about the experience of grade twelve, I wonder. (from field notes, October 29, 1997)

Is the daytimer one way some students try to control the constant 'pressure and stress' -- a common complaint for most of

the grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit Secondary? On the other hand, one cannot help but wonder if, in fact, the ever present daytimer merely increases the everyday stress. As well, what many experience as pressure is not grounded in the busyness of today, but is grounded in the necessity to make decisions. For some that pressure comes from what is perceived as lack of choice about the future or of being pushed along toward certain decisions.

In January, Patrick, during the discussion group session, blurts out, "Does anyone else feel pressured about deciding about the rest of their lives? Why is there so much pressure? At the point of grade 12 you have to decide what you want to do. It is not that I'm not ready, I just don't want to do the same thing as everyone else. Maybe I'm wrong, but university seems to be the only choice"(from field notes, January 15, 1998).

Several months later, when I remind Patrick of his earlier comments, he says that, at that point, "I honestly felt that I had no alternatives. If I wanted to do anything with my life, it had to be university. I was so frustrated; everything I said I didn't want to do, I had to do. That really frustrated me. I don't want to be the same as everybody else"(interview 022).

This feeling of having no choice about the future is closely connected to what some see as the added pressure of the expectations of others. Even in the midst of the socializing and routines that are part of the grade twelve experience, these perceived pressures are not far below the surface.

It is the last discussion group session for October and we begin with a boisterous free-for-all about the Hallowe'en Dance two days earlier. Drudi went dressed as "Barbie" -- complete with blonde wig and a dress stuffed to produce a very large bust. He is thoroughly disgusted at "the way some of the guys kept coming up to him and groping [his] chest." The girls exchange knowing looks.

Other than being fondled when dressed as a woman, what kinds of pressures are you going through, I ask. Patrick says that he feels no pressure. Someone else comments that he doesn't do anything, that's why. "I do so," he replies with mock seriousness, "I represent all the procrastinators at the school and it's a very tough job."

Jane says that people expect a lot more of you when you're in grade twelve, expect you to pay for things. "They" are parents, it seems.

As the talk turns to expectations of parents, Glynis says that her mother has always treated her as an equal. Now that she is closer to actually being an equal, Glynis says that her mother cannot handle it.

Everyone talks of how they are being pulled in two directions. "There's pressure from the universities," says Rachael. "Good grades are no

longer enough." Universities say they want "well rounded" students so extra-curricular activities are important. High marks are really important. Parents complain that students are doing too much -- that "you shouldn't be doing this to yourself," says Jane, "but then they say you should be doing more" so you will get into a good university.

Rachael's comment is that students haven't been given enough instruction on how to manage stress.
(from field notes, October 30, 1998)

Sometimes, perhaps looking for something other than their own uncertainties to blame, students see the workload and the need to maintain top grades as the only source of the pressure. "I'd be lying if I said it wasn't getting to me," says Ed, during our conversation (interview 002). He reminds me about the talk, in an earlier discussion group session, of the 'slushy period.'

Well, the news is the slushy period is over. Big Time. With a crash. I received back a review of my draft for my essay (which I thought was my good copy) and basically have been told that it's a piece of trash. Maybe not in those words. So I have to go home after school today and do it again. . . . I don't have enough time. I wish there were 36 hours in the day.

Ed is particularly worried about scholarships as money is not plentiful in his family and he doesn't want to let his parents down. "My mom, specifically. She's done so much for me that if I

gave anything less than 100% I'd be letting her down. . . . [What are you looking forward to next year, I ask.] What am I really looking forward to? I can't think of anything." In the midst of assignment deadlines and the ever-present daytimer, Ed does not notice that much of his feeling pressed is intensified by his uncertainties about how he will manage on the other side of the threshold.

That is not to say that most students are not feeling overwhelmed by the pressure of examinations and assignments.

During a discussion group session, La Shondra says that her whole life revolves around studying at the moment, although she adds that she has gotten to the point that she just doesn't care any more. "You know," she says, "I'm going to look back twenty years from now and I'm not going to know what mark I got."

Glynis comments that she has "never, ever, in [her] whole life worried about an exam. I've never studied for an exam... [long pause] .. that might explain the reason why I'm failing and going to summer school!! ... [pause]... But I've never failed an exam before. If I'm going to fail, I just don't do it."

The rest of the group is each caught up in his or her own feelings of stress and do not react to Glynis' remarks nor are they really responding to each other. La Shondra comments that "nobody cares [about the

marks you get] that's the sad part." (from field notes, March 19, 1998)

School related pressures aside, as I listen to the students' stories, I am often taken aback by the problems in their lives, how much they have to deal with. For many, the pressure of deadlines and the inner turmoil associated with having to make the "right" decision that will determine the door that opens on the other side of the threshold is exacerbated by family problems. As I reflect on how this might affect the liminal experience, I wonder how having to assume too much responsibility too young changes the transition into adulthood?

Frequently those who do not have close contact with adolescents in this age bracket view young people as fun-seeking teenagers with few responsibilities. Often, even those who do have close contact with young people have the stereotypical attitude that young people today have it too easy. At least this is what many of the students suggest in our conversations.

Yet the notion of the fun-seeking irresponsible teenager is far removed from Rachael's experiences. Since her parents' somewhat acrimonious divorce, Rachael alternates living with her mother and father and, as a result, 'parents' her younger brother. Just as she alternates her home base, she alternates between seeing her responsibilities as a burden and a blessing.

I used to get angry that I couldn't go out at night, or when others went out to a movie I'd have to bring my brother along. When you're 13 or 14 you don't want

to do that because it's not cool. You want to talk about boys and you can't do that because your little brother's there and what if he tells your mom. Or I'd have to stay home with him. But as the years go on, like now I bring him. . . . I don't mind so much, and I've grown to love and appreciate him more. We still fight and get on each others nerves but we have such a strong foundation at the bottom. I don't think he realizes it so much. I'm kind of glad for him, but I'm kind of sad, too, that I had to take so much responsibility when I was young because I didn't have the freedom of being able to do kid things a lot. [what did you miss? I ask] I don't know; maybe it's not even missing something but the added stress of trying to juggle everything. Even when my dad was gone recently, I had so many assignments due for English, I had piles and piles of English work, but my brother's science fair was coming up and he'd gotten to the 'I don't want to do it, I hate science.' So I'd come home at 4 or 4:30 because I'd taken this calculus course, make sure he'd eaten, cook dinner for him, work with him on his science fair project, try to motivate him, make these models, make sure he's done his other homework, make sure he's happy because I don't want him to get depressed because he misses my mom (he hasn't seen her in 8 months), put him to bed and it's like 10:30 and I still have to do my homework. I wasn't finishing homework until like 4 in the morning. This went on for 10 days, while my dad was gone, because the science fair was coming and I had to go to the library with my brother and Mr. Webster, my English teacher, was asking "what's going on with you? You look like you've been hit over the head with a ton of bricks!" . . . Everyone in the family [has so much stress right now], except my brother, I don't want him to have any, I'll take that off him. He shouldn't have any. [why shouldn't he? I ask] He's a very sensitive child. I'm not as much, you kind of grow up with it and learn the hard way, you take on responsibility and you're spared the brunt of it. He's very sensitive, . . . I try to protect him as much as I can. (interview 001)

Or Crystal who, a couple of years earlier, lost her grandfather to cancer and who, since then, has had more responsibilities than many. Crystal tells me she was very close to her grandfather and it was very difficult "watching him die

everyday. I was with him everyday until the day he died." She goes on to explain how her family situation exacerbated her pain.

My parents split up just before that. Divorcing. There was a girl who was threatening me. I dropped out of school for 2 months, dealing with depression, everything was falling apart. Then just last year I felt I don't want this for myself, I want to do something for myself. Watching someone die makes you realize you don't know when it is going to end. For a year they told him he had a cold; then they told him he had cancer and he died two months later. You don't know how much time you have, you better enjoy it. [at a time when you really needed people around you to support you, your family was breaking up. It must have been a double "whammy," I comment] My Dad lived in [a nearby community], my Mom would every weekend go and stay with her boyfriend until really late. I would stay at home by myself. Instead of going out with my friends I would sit at the window in the living room and stare out in space. If my Mom was at home I would just argue with her because she wasn't there, she wanted to have fun, she wanted someone there for her, she didn't want to be with the kids and worry about how they felt. [so on the weekends you are by yourself?] Yes. It makes you grow up. . . . [My dad and I] would get into a big argument and he would blame me for my Mom leaving and everything. I basically raised my brother, I'm like his mother. I'm there when he comes home, I'm there in the morning getting him ready, I take him to do everything, I'm the dominant figure in his life, I discipline him. [so when do you get a turn? When does Crystal get to be a kid?] I had to grow up way too fast. . . .

How do you feel now, I ask. "I just want to have fun, my kid is coming out. I want to have fun, get my career going. I don't want to have anyone else to worry about"(interview 018).

Dealing with the family problems, Crystal describes a downward spiral from which she has managed to pull herself up. It was the kind of turning point that many students describe as

part of the liminal experience.

Reflecting: "After a while you realize"

In our conversation, I ask Sean (interview 032) if he has changed since grade eleven. He describes a number of events in his life and speaks of "a metamorphosis," a transformation, that has taken place over the past year. It is the kind of change Crystal describes. When Sean and Crystal look back, both see themselves differently than they did previously.

Turner (1967, p.94) contended that transition is "a process, a becoming, . . . even a transformation." This view is similar to Mahadi's (1996, p.xvii) notion that during the transformation transition into adulthood, [young people] "must undergo a second birth, must be born of their culture, their community, their elders." To pursue this idea further, I ask other students if there has been a turning point in their lives during the past year, a time when they began to, perhaps, see themselves differently.

In our conversations, not all students are able to describe such a turning point. For some students the turning point, although part of the transition process, comes before the beginning of grade twelve. Most describe a process that has been happening over a period of time although, in looking back, they are able to identify an event or situation that triggered it. For some it is connected to the death of someone important in

their lives. For others, it is the ending of a relationship. For more than a few, the turning point has come about because of the necessity to change a lifestyle that included near or actual brushes with the law. Whatever the catalyst, almost all of the students describe a new feeling of self-respect.

When I ask Todd if he has changed since last year, he says that he has matured (interview 013). I ask him what he means by that. "Last year I was getting into trouble, going out and causing trouble, getting into trouble with the police and this year I'm in grade twelve, graduating, and getting on with my life. Growing up a little bit." Todd tells me that he changed because of his mother, that he realized he did not want to keep hurting her. Was there one incident that was a turning point, I ask. "It was gradual. I was being kicked out of school, out of my house. I started losing everything, the respect of my friends and stuff." Was it scary, I ask. "It is scary. You don't know what to expect next. You are in your house one day then boom! You're living on the street." When he made the decision to change, he started coming to school more, started respecting himself and others. How do the changes and your options for the future make you feel, I ask. "A great deal of self-respect," he replies.

Rod tells me that grade twelve is a "reality check" (interview 017) because "in grade twelve you can't screw around or you don't graduate and it screws up everything." He says that he has grown up a lot since last year. "All the little pranks and stuff

I pulled, all of a sudden weren't so funny any more." When did you start changing, I ask.

The change for me occurred in the middle of grade eleven. I wasn't, I don't know how you could put it, the most kind person. I got arrested and when I went through that I finally realized [it]. . . . Oh, yes; it was a reality check. I went from being a kid one day to possibly going to jail as an adult. I'm totally clean now. [What did this mean for you, I ask.] Total ditching of my friends. I talk to them occasionally but I don't go out in [that community] any more. I kind of miss it because it was so much fun but then again it got me into so much shit. [What makes you feel good about yourself, I ask.] Staying out of trouble. It's harder than you think, it really is. I've grown up since I was four years old thinking that if you found four dollars on the ground because some guy dropped it, you picked it up and walked the other way instead of 'sir, you dropped something.' [I think you like who you've become, I suggest.] Yeah, I'm proud of myself.

Sophie would probably agree with Todd that it is "harder than you think" to stay out of trouble. Her problems began as teenage rebellion - "I wanted to be this big, cool teenager when I was 13, 14, so I tried everything" -- and escalated until she moved out of her parents' home when she was in grade eleven (interview 031). She got into "such massive fights" with her parents and she thought "I have some rights, no one can tell me what to do and I was so stupid about it that I just thought, I can move out, I can work, I'm so smart." Life was a whirlwind of parties, alcohol, men, and drugs. She and her room mate

drank a flat [40 beer] between the two of us every night, did lots of coke. My tolerance level went up and up and up. My friends that I had before said,

'what are you doing? Look at yourself! You're going crazy! You sleep until three every day, go to bed at seven [in the morning]. Like this is going stupid.' Kerry reamed me out up and down, said 'you are turning into a plum and a bum because you gained so much weight drinking alcohol and eating McDonald's.' I was having so much fun I didn't realize how bad everything was really going. I kind of look back on it and I don't regret it because it was fun for a while but I'm glad that I stopped. I don't even hang out with my old friends any more because they're just not doing so good with themselves now. We hung out with the dealers and they were the cool guys in town and I was really proud of myself, walking around thinking I was so smart, so cool, but it really isn't. After a while you realize that it's not so fun any more and it's a dirty drug . . . and it leads up to worse. . . .

As grade twelve began, Sophie's parents invited her to move back home -- with some house rules to adhere to. She agreed and has made an effort to turn her life around.

It's been about a year since I have done coke. I get along with my parents. I've been getting everything going for myself. I don't drink other than a couple of drinks in a bar on the weekend but I don't do drugs, I don't smoke any more, don't smoke pot. I guess I changed a lot over the last while. I just looked at the way I was, and it wasn't what I wanted to be. [My parents] said come on home, so I had to try harder. Now that I'm trying harder, I like it. People know me as a partier and someone who hangs out with older people and they're shocked that I don't do drugs or smoke and I kind of like that.

Bruce had also been a rebellious teen. To this day he does not know how much his parents knew about his lifestyle. He tells me that the change has been almost a two year process. He stopped drinking, smoking, and doing drugs but, he says, "I still had the attitude"(interview 014). When I ask him what brought about the change, he tells me that "a major, major part"

of it was "the respect I have for my parents and it hurt me to see them hurt for me and I didn't enjoy putting them through that." Bruce changed his lifestyle completely and now waits for graduation so he can serve two years in the field as a missionary.

When I ask Megan if she has changed since last year she says, "I think probably I actually have now that I think about it. I can't pinpoint a time and say this is when I changed but I think I'm just more understanding about life and how things can be there and be gone so quick"(interview 034).

While Megan cannot identify when the turning point took place, many students at Eagle Spirit are able to connect the inner changes they have experienced with the death of a family member or friend. Wendy (interview 023) tells me about a 15 year-old friend who, on a recent weekend, ran away from her foster home along with two other young people. They stole a car so they could go camping for the weekend and it ended in Wendy's friend's death. Wendy tells me that she thinks about her friend, the fact that no one wanted her -- not her parents or grandparents, that no one would take her in and "it makes me appreciate my life more, to be more cautious when I'm out driving with my friends. I've been appreciating things around me more, watching everything around me. I'm doing that a lot since I heard."

La Shondra tells me that her turning point was not really connected to any particular event, that it was just a change in

her self-perception. She tells me that she got to know herself a lot better but that the changes began before the beginning of grade eleven when her brother was in a serious car accident.

That probably was a really big threshold for me. After that I really changed my point of view . . . I realized that my teenage immortality didn't exist because someone I loved that much [almost died]. I was really depressed . . . I wasn't doing too well but from that I really learned a lot and I guess it was a slow transition . . . because of a catalyst I grew up. Everyone has their own situations. (interview 005)

La Shondra goes on to explain that the inner changes brought changes in friendships - "I tended to drop some of the ones I didn't think were healthy for me" -- and even in the music she listened to and the way she dressed. She concludes by saying that she is probably still going through a transition, "but that was probably the main thing, my attitude change, change of friends, more ambitious, looking forward to my future."

A number of students describe how they changed when they ended a long term relationship. Jason tells me that he realized that when he was with his girlfriend, she was his main priority and everything else was second. "When we broke up, I was lost. I guess lost is the only way to term it. So this year I've sort of realized that I have to come first and my life has to come first and everyone else is second"(interview 033). Others, such as Heather, realized that their relationships were actually draining them (interview 004). After listening to this part of her story, I comment that she seems to be more 'in touch' with who she is and ask her what brought that about. "I broke up with

my boyfriend. Should have done it earlier. I would agree, agree, agree and then I would think, no, I don't think that at all."

Patrick's recent illness has had a profound impact on him. He has been away from school now for two and a half months. On a recent visit to the school he says that it was a bit of a shock "because everyone looked a lot older... it was like they were not the same people as they were 2 months ago or 2 1/2 months ago, they seemed older. . . . something about Ed makes him seem older and more tired or something. It seems that I once belonged to this group but now -- at that point when we split two and a half months ago they went forward and I stayed where I was"(interview 022).

I tell Patrick that, while I do not question what he is feeling, I wonder if, in fact, the opposite might not be true since he has had very difficult things to deal with recently. Previously, Patrick had been very laid back. When I ask him if he would like the 'old Patrick' back, he says that he does

not regret becoming who I am. There is nothing I can do about it. I can't wave a magic wand and convert to who I was and more over I wouldn't want to do that. I am happy with who I am, I am happy with the progression over these last couple of months.... no I do not think I would change. It is more a case of moving forward but moving forward in a different direction Instead of being on an academic path and worrying about school, I had to deal with myself a lot more. I had a lot of time to think, to look at where I am. It has forced me to concentrate on who I am as a person, as a student My life has kind of slowed down, and that gives me the chance to appreciate everything around me and a chance to explore my life even further. (interview 022)

While few students have to deal with the devastating

effects of an extended illness, as La Shondra says, everyone has their own situations. For some students the inner changes are brought about by reassessing their goals in light of their academic achievement.

Ed tells me that when he was in grade ten he thought he would become an aeronautical engineer, and then he realized how much work it would be and the kind of marks he would need. He began to think that he was striving for an impossible goal. He explains that

when I saw that I wasn't getting marks that were good enough in Chemistry even though I was working very hard every night and still not understanding even though everyone else was, I got out of the course and took History instead. I'm not going to say it saved my life, but it was a huge decision to make and my whole outlook changed. It changed then because I didn't know what I was going to do and towards the end of the year I started realizing that business was probably what I was going to do. Over the summer I thought more and more that I was going to go into business. The decision period for me occurred probably in the time frame between when I realized what work aeronautical engineering would entail and the end of grade 11. That was when the decision was made. For me, there's a respectability to going into business, to being a successful businessman. For me, success (oh, God, I can't believe it's come to this) is power, prestige, wealth. (interview 002)

Julia's inner changes also came about because of concerns about academic achievement. Julia tells me that she always felt that she had to be perfect, that she needed to get good grades for her parents' love (interview 012), although deep down she knew that they really didn't care if she failed as long as she was trying. She would go to work after school, go home and work

for eight hours and then go to bed. She did that every night and ended up with straight As. "I ended up in the hospital because of it," she tells me, "it was so weird." How did your parents feel about you pushing yourself so much, I ask.

At first when I was kind of hiding that I was studying so much, they were so proud of me and then they realized it and they were kind of mad that I was doing it. Then I realized that if they were going to hate me for getting good grades, what was the point. It was like a whirlwind. I didn't know when to stop it. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. I wasn't the same person, I was weird. No one I knew would have recognized me.

Julia now does two to three hours of homework every night and gets more sleep but she still worries about her studies. She worries that "if I stop studying now I could lose the opportunity to get scholarships, then have to work a thousand times harder and I can't afford to work any more than I am now." While Julia has changed her behaviour, she is still working on the inner changes that will bring self-acceptance.

For most of the students, the inner changes have opened up possibilities for their future that they had not previously seen. While there is a sense that Ed, who had wanted to be an aeronautical engineer, and Patrick, who had wanted to join the American Navy, have settled on their second choices, others speak enthusiastically of possibilities they had not previously considered. As Kareena exclaims, "I can do anything I want to do" (interview 021).

Hoping: "a setback . . . means you go in a different direction"

In his description of the middle or liminal phase of the transition process, Victor Turner (1986, p.42) used such phrases as "the mood of maybe, might be, . . . desire." For many of the grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit Secondary, that "mood of maybe" is coloured with optimism. We are now midway through the second semester and while plans are not firm, when conversations with some of the students turn to considering the future, the 'maybes' now speak of open choice rather than uncertain futures. Here they speak optimistically of definite possibilities even when those possibilities are undefined, unexplored, unclear.

Embedded in the liminal experience of grade twelve is the feeling of hope for the future although, like other aspects of liminality, students experience hope in different ways. For some students, feeling optimistic or hopeful about the future comes easily as they have made careful plans and are very realistic about what the future might bring. Sometimes those plans have come from the parents and students, not knowing what else to do, have adopted them as their own. Others put the future on hold and make somewhat temporary plans, speaking convincingly that the future will unfold as it should and "there will be something" that opens up. For others, their feelings of hope are coloured by varying degrees of wishful thinking - "I might....," "maybe I'll, " with little or no planning to set things in motion. For still others, feeling hopeful seems set in the kind of certainty that can be found only in dreams and fantasy.

Finally, as graduation approaches, for those who have been clinging to wishful thinking that has been couched in optimistic phrases, hope takes on a new meaning. Hope now looks for a way to deal with reality.

Todd does not plan to attend university, but he is highly optimistic about the future. He does not have definite plans for after graduation, but wants to go into a three-year apprenticeship program in the culinary arts, perhaps working in either Banff or Whistler. He's talking to Chef who has connections from working in restaurants and hotels. Before he considered the apprenticeship program, he thought he might join the coast guard because he was in Sea Cadets for 3 years and has always been really interested in the water, but Chef has been a strong personal influence on him. As well, many of his friends are working at Whistler and he would rather be with his friends. He does not think his change of plans has changed him in any way because "I have the same drive. I had a goal and I was going for it; now I have a different goal and I'm going for that." What happens if your plans do not work out, I ask. "There might be a setback but that just means you go in a different direction. You have to deal with it the best you can" (interview 013).

On the other hand, Crystal's plans for the year following graduation are firm. She is going to apprentice in hairdressing in July. For the past four or five years she has been doing her sister's hair and her sister suggested that she become a hairdresser. About two years ago she began working in a shop and

entered the co-op program. She has 500 hours to complete on the 1500 hour program. At that point she will be a licensed hairdresser. While some of her friends plan to travel after graduation Crystal plans to "work, work, work for the first three or four years and then buy all this stuff when I've got some money. You can't enjoy [travelling] when you're young, you have no money to enjoy it. I'm going to work and get that money, then enjoy it"(interview 018).

Others are equally certain of where their future lies. "I definitely want to go to university, SFU or UBC. I am already in at Kwantlen . . . I've got that to fall back on. [My goal] was teaching . . . but now I'm thinking of journalism," says Sandy (interview 011) and, from a survey response, "[I feel] extremely prepared and optimistic! I don't think you can fail if you are doing something you enjoy"(student survey 047).

While her plans are still somewhat open, Tara has applied to Douglas College, where she "thinks" she wants to go. At the moment she would like to go into business, marketing or management, but it might change. She has been interested in marketing for about six months. It was really a process of elimination since she is not interested in the sciences or arts and teaching does not appeal to her. Most of all, Tara would like to take a break in her schooling but her parents feel that if they had had the opportunity to go on in school they would not have had to work so hard in their adult lives. "So it must be the answer -- know what I mean?" asks Tara (interview 024).

It seems parents are a strong influence on the decision to attend university. "My mother has influenced me the most. She has influenced me by telling what I am going to do," writes one student (survey 064A), and another states, "They said if I didn't go to college I would be thrown out" (survey 071). Teachers do not seem to have the same influence on students' decision to attend postsecondary institutions: "[they] just tell me to get a post-secondary education, but don't have any advice for those without \$ to borrow and be in debt," comments a student (survey 006). Yet in a discussion group session, Rachael comments, "Teachers have a huge role in shaping kids. Grade twelve teachers may influence life decisions"(from field notes, February 5, 1998).

The advice, wherever it comes from, seems to be well taken, however. On the survey in May, almost three quarters of the students say they are going on to post-secondary education; almost two thirds have had those plans less than one year. As Graduation Day approaches, the time of possibilities turns into decision time. On the surveys, many students also say that their parents feel that university is "the answer." However, the students do not say whether or not they personally view going to university with optimism. A student (survey 063A) who is headed for university or college next year but with no definite plans, writes "My mother wants -- really wants -- me to go and do something with my life." Another writes "[My mom] instilled her beliefs in me at a very young age. By attending university I

will be able (hopefully) to gain the knowledge required in order to obtain a satisfying job with which I will be able to support myself"(survey 057A). A student (030A) writes, "my parents always just expected this [going to university] of me." When asked if parents have been an influence on future plans, another student who plans to attend university next year responds, "Greatly. I've chosen a path she wished she could've done"(survey 070).

Even though plans appear to be in place, they are not always well thought through. On the student survey at the end of January, one student responds that she/he is planning to "attend a post-secondary educational institution, possibly through a sports scholarship" (student survey 009A). It is not clear whether or not the student has submitted applications and accompanying videos to prospective institutions, something that most students who hope to be awarded a sports scholarship do in grade 11.¹ In fact, the majority of students indicate that they plan to attend a post secondary institution in the year following graduation, although many have not registered, nor do they have specific plans as to where they will apply or the courses they might take.

¹ For example, Karla, a very focused and confident student, has been awarded a full softball scholarship at a university in the United States. She has been playing softball since grade 4 and now plays on a local team that is "probably going to the Nationals this year." She sent her videos to several universities in early January. "Most sent them in grade 11 but mine didn't get done . . . your team has a whole portfolio that we are able to use. You send it down there, they call you back or you call them" (student interview #025).

Heather finds this push to attend university difficult to understand. In our conversation she reminds me that I had asked people in the discussion group why they were going on to post-secondary education and some had responded, 'well, what else am I going to do?' "That attitude just floors me," says Heather,

I mean, why would you go to school when there's so much else out there? and I think they do it just they don't know, I mean, they have been in school for 12 years. I think they just do it because either everyone else is or all their friends are or they feel that they have to because everyone else is. I don't see it. I don't see that as an immature attitude but I see it as really short sighted. Some people are afraid that when they get out of school they will have so much fun they won't go back to school. The point is, if you don't go back after a couple of years, you probably never were intended to go in the first place.
(interview 004)

Seeing post-secondary schooling as some kind of key to the future even when you have no specific plans seems common. Wendy is planning to go to Kwantlen College to take general studies although she has not registered. She wants to be a flight attendant. She is not certain what the educational requirements are but she thinks you just need to have completed grade twelve. Her mom had recently drawn Wendy's attention to an advertisement in the newspaper that said applicants need to have "OK looks, good height, good hygiene, good personal skills and talk two languages." I ask Wendy if she speaks two languages. "Yes, French and English. I was in French Immersion for six years. I have lost a lot of it but you know those tapes you can get, I'm going to get those so I can pick it up again." Until Wendy saw

the ad in the paper, she was thinking of going into designing, clothes or interior, or teaching it (interview 023).

One could argue that seeing a future of yet to be selected possibilities is a way to put the future on hold. At some point the future will look after itself, things will fall into place. A way of saying that whatever obstacles there are to accomplishing plans, they will be overcome, are not insurmountable, and are to be considered tomorrow. I ask Jeff how he feels about next year. "Pretty cool," he says and then goes on to say that he and his buddy are going to go up to Whistler for a year for snowboarding. When I ask if he hopes to become a professional, he says that he "doesn't know, we just want to move up there and see how we do. I was hoping to come back and go to BCIT and become an electrical technician for airplanes, but I don't know." He has a job in a grocery store for the coming year. His biggest concern?

. . . that I won't want to come back after that year, but I have to because I need more education if I'm going to be successful. [what does success mean, I ask] Having a good job, doing what you love, I guess. [partly money and partly satisfaction?] Yeah. If you've got money you've got power that's how I feel. You just have to have money. (interview 009)

Kareena also plans to take a year off school to stay at Whistler, work in a restaurant, and snowboard. She and three friends will share a condo owned by the parents of one of the girls. Later she will continue her education at Kwantlen with a future in education (interview 021).

Seeing the future as endless possibilities also helps get

through, to wait out, the todays. Glynis is not going to graduate with her friends. She is two credits short. Glynis speaks with her version of a British accent -- something she has acquired over the past few weeks. She dresses almost totally in black. Last year was a year of turmoil as she dealt with a mother who moves in and out of manic depression. Glynis is angry, angry with herself, angry with her peers, angry with the system. She is angry because everyone knows for certain what she should be doing but no one cares about what she wants. Teachers, friends, people, society, all expect things of you, she tells me. In her mind, having all this education is a waste of time. "I could have learned everything in this school at home reading books which I do all the time anyway." Where will you be in ten years, I ask her.

Either making films, both sides of the camera. Writing. Directing, acting. Definitely painting. I'll be in a little local theatre. Or else I will be in a big movie and be famous. I'll live in a house, a farm house on Salt Spring, White Rock, or Nelson. I will have plenty of friends, I'll always have friends but only really, really good friends. I'll have a big huge yard with an orchard, a garden. And my mother will live close by because she is a gardener. I'll be really busy. I will be pregnant or expecting to become pregnant, not at 28 but by the time I'm 30. I'm not worried. I'll be famous by the time I'm 38. (interview 015)

In her world where possibilities are certainties, Glynis sees herself as, out of necessity, being very mature, the one who always had to be diplomatic. She had to "sit there and not cry" when her mother was hitting her because then it would just get worse. "I never really had a chance to be a kid," she tells

me. Later in our conversation, when I mention that I sense she wants to prove something and ask what she wants to prove, Glynis replies, "That I'm not my mother. I think it all comes back to my mother." What she does not want to be seems to be Glynis' only certainty.

In many ways, Glynis' future plans are orchestrated by her present circumstances. While the circumstances vary considerably, this is true for some other students as well.

I talk with Patrick about metaphors for thresholds and opening and closing doors. We talk about how doors allow us to experience entering something as well as leaving something, how a solid door forces us to use our imagination about what is on the other side while a glass door allows us to be in two places at once since it shows us what is on the other side even before we open it.² Thinking about the door to the future, he tells me he honestly does not know what is in store for him since his recent extended illness has put his graduation in jeopardy.

If it happens this year or next year, it is still a big 'what if.' The two doors -- graduate or not graduate - they're both wooden doors because I don't know what is beyond them. I don't know which one I can open yet. There is no path for sure that I can take. Right now there is nothing for sure in my life. (interview 022)

Tara and I talk about this time of decisions. She tells me

² This discussion was based ideas from Richard Lang's article, "The dwelling door: A phenomenological exploration of transition" in *Exploring the Lived World: Readings in Phenomenological Psychology*.

how her best friend had wanted to go to school in the States and become a doctor but because her grades have gone down she will not be able to get into a school in the States (interview 024). Now her friend is looking at going to Kwantlen College or Douglas College. Tara's boyfriend had wanted to be in the military doing financial work. Now he has decided to go to either Kwantlen or Douglas as well. Tara says, "Everyone is totally, at the last minute, thinking, 'I don't really want to do that.' Everyone changes their mind in the end," she says. Tara explains that it is as if people think to themselves, 'If I can't do that, then I'll just go there,'" reminding me of Todd's comment that "a setback means you go in a different direction." Tara goes on to say, "We are all figuring out that we don't know what we want to do and it's scary. We're all in the same boat. At least we know that everyone is feeling what you're feeling." Later in our conversation, Tara mentions that she knows people who graduated several years earlier and they still do not have jobs. She wonders if, in five years, she will be like that. "I thought I would know what I wanted to do," she adds.

In May I pay another visit to the Career Centre. Sharon Thompson, the Career Centre clerk, mentions that after I left yesterday a grade twelve female student came into the Centre to check on the requirements for nursing. The student said to Sharon, "I think I really screwed up. I don't have Chemistry

and I think I need it." She and Sharon checked the program and all post-secondary institutions require Chemistry 11 for their nursing programs. Sharon tells me that she asked the student when she had last done the Choices program and the students answered, "Last fall." Sharon tells me that, on further questioning, it appears the student had also completed the Choices program in grade ten but said that she didn't know what she wanted to do at that stage. Sharon looks somewhat frustrated as she tells me that when she asked the student if, when she did the program last fall, she had not seen that Chemistry 11 was a requirement, the student had replied, "I was really just screwing around and not really paying attention." Now we are three weeks from graduation and the student needs Chemistry 11. I ask Sharon what the student is going to do. "If she is not 19, she can come back in September to take it, if the class is not full; she can take it at Kwantlen; or (if she wants to work hard) take it at summer school. Either way, her plans are on hold." As I wonder how the student might be feeling, Sharon tells me that another student has just been in to check about archaeology, to find out about the requirements for the various post-secondary institutions and which ones offer archaeology. When Sharon tells her that most institutions have been accepting

applications since last fall, the student says that it's okay, she might take a year off anyway. As I leave the Centre, I wonder what part having no plans this close to graduation plays in the transition from and the ending of secondary schooling (from field notes, May 14, 1998).

We are nearing the end now and over the past couple of weeks there has been a definite change in how students are feeling about this time in their lives. La Shondra says that grade twelve is like a journey to Disneyland - it's fun but sometimes you stand in line for a long time and the ride turns out to be disappointing. Graduation is quickly approaching and some students become more aware that this phase of their life journey is coming to an end. Soon they will leave behind friends, routines, and an identity.

Leaving: "it's not my place . . . any more"

Although students have been waiting with varying degrees of patience for the end to finally arrive, the month of May brings mixed emotions. It is difficult to stay focused on assignments and exams when a future that will bring new friends, new freedoms, new opportunities is so near. "I want to be out of my comfort zone," says Heather when I ask her how she feels about leaving. She is anxious to break old habits, not see the same

people all the time. "I really want to separate myself," she adds. Another student (survey 020A) is even more emphatic: "Been there, done that. In a rush to get out." "Can't wait to get out," states another (survey 005A), a response reiterated by several others.

Yet intermingled with thoughts of the future is the realization that things are going to be left behind. With the leaving comes a sense of loss -- loss of friends, loss of comfortable routines, loss of freedom from responsibility. For some, the physical leaving at the end of June will be a formality, for they are no longer connected to this place. At a discussion group session, someone comments that Alex Webster, the English teacher, has told students that this is the most dangerous time because their minds are elsewhere. La Shondra, however, dismisses this with the comment, "He's just messing with our heads" (from field notes, May 4, 1998).

Chad (interview 032) is one of the students who has mixed emotions about leaving. He is glad to be "getting out of this school, moving on." On the other hand, he tells me that, "a lot of my friends will probably be gone and I'm not sure if I'll ever talk to them again. I have some friends I've had since grade six and while we don't talk that much, when we do, we have a really great time. That's the kind of thing I'm going to miss." Chad's feelings are echoed by Sandy, who comments that she is "ready to move on with [her] life and meet new people," but she will be sorry to see "the people I know just go, not see

them any more"(interview 011). As graduation nears, Sandy wishes that she had "talked to more people, gotten to know them better, earlier" and now the opportunity is lost. Similarly, Glynis comments that she "has started talking to all these people [she's] been ignoring for five years" (from field notes, June 4, 1998).

Also feeling the impending loss of friends, Tara (interview 024) comments, "I have gone to this school for five years. Some of these people I have gone to school with since kindergarten, and I don't know them. I know their parents and where they live, but I don't know them. I have had a couple of classes with them over the years but ... [pause]... it's sad."

Those students who are going away to university in the fall are leaving more than friends. With graduation comes the realization that they are also leaving home and family. Cherie, whose parents are divorced, tells me that she will be glad to get away from all the fighting in the family, but adds that she will be sad to lose her relationship with her dad. "I know I can hop on a bus for two and a half hours," she says, "but when I am focused on school there probably won't be time. I'm scared to lose my relationship with my mom. I feel like I'm losing a part of myself because you don't grow up with someone and then move on without leaving a part of you behind"(interview 003). Sandy (interview 011) speaks for all whose leaving is bringing feelings of loss when she says, "A chapter in your life is closing."

The feeling that he will soon be leaving important things behind is described by Drudi when he says that he is "not sorry to see things change, [he's] sorry to see things go." [What will you be sorry to see go, I ask.] "Well, my friends, being a big fish in a small pond, there is so much more I can do here. I can do it in university but it won't be here. I was honestly considering failing and coming back for just another year. Then it would be an easy breeze through, increase my grades and do all the things I want to do. The list is very long"(interview 010).

For Rachael, the feeling is more one of something slipping away. "I have a feeling that this year is going to pass by and I won't even remember it," she says (interview 001). "It's just not a significant year for me." In order to create memories, she says that she has "started a box of stupid things like movie stubs and stuff I've done this year so I have things to remind myself that the year actually happened."

La Shondra says that high school represents friends more than education because she has known most of the people in the school for "a good eight, nine years"(interview 005). Thinking about leaving and losing those friendships, she says, " . . . you say you're going to see them and write once a week, but I know it's not going to happen." The one thing she is not going to lose is the memories. "You may lose contact," she says, "but you're never going to lose memories."

Concern over leaving friends is mentioned frequently in response to the survey question, "What concerns do you have

about next year?" " . . . it feels weird," comments one student (survey 080), "because we know we will never do these things again with the same people." Another (survey 079A) sums it up with the comment, " . . . having people you know leave to go to other schools sucks!"

It is not just leaving behind the friendships that makes this time of the passage difficult. Students are also leaving behind a routine that has structured their lives for the past thirteen years. As Megan says,

It's kind of like you've come this far and you've done all this work pretty much for nothing. [Does it feel anticlimactic, I ask] Yeah! I thought it was going to be way more exciting. Everybody hypes it up so much. It's exciting leaving high school but this is the routine I've had for so long, and even though it's not a good routine, but...[pause]... I don't know, I'm kind of scared to be out of it.

Wendy (interview 023) is also looking forward to breaking the routine. "I'm looking forward to [graduation] just so I can get out of this routine. I've kind of been ready for a while. I went to graduation last year with a friend and that was kind of my graduation."

As the month of June approaches, the desire to leave behind high school and its routines intensifies. In our conversation, Claude (interview 027) tells me, "I want to get out of here as soon as possible. This time right now means nothing to me. I have fun, I go out with my friends, see movies, go for a drive, play hockey. I want to go to University. I want to get out of here. It's like a day-to-day basis, do my homework, study for a

test, come back, do my test, do more homework and that's the way it has been going." There is a sense that it is time for it to be over, a feeling that is echoed by Bruce (interview 014) who tells me that he will be "glad to be out." Graduation itself is not such a big deal, he says, "just the fact that we're getting out is the biggest deal for me. . . . some people will be sad to leave, but I won't, I'll just be glad to finally be gone." Another student (survey 073A) sums it up by writing, "I'm so glad high school is almost over. I'm so sick of it."

As anxious as students are to leave school and cross the threshold into adulthood, for some there is the realization that the life of a student and its routines, as boring as they have become, offer a kind of freedom. When I ask Bruce (interview 014) to talk about some of the things he will be sorry to leave behind, he says,

I say that in the future I'll be getting a lot more freedom but with that freedom comes a lot more responsibility, that's what I'll be sorry to lose. I think that right now, to be honest with you, is the best time in my life. I have a lot of freedom for a teenager, simply because I'm an older teenager, but I still don't have the responsibilities of putting food on the table and buying clothes. I have limited responsibilities. I have a car and I have to pay for the gas and maintenance, but still, I don't have the huge responsibilities. That's what I'll probably be sad to see go.

Many students tell me that, mentally, they have already left school. In my conversation with Patrick (interview 022), we talk about how his illness may extend his schooling. It becomes

apparent that Patrick is mentally finished with the notion of schooling as he has known it for many years. "Yes," he says, "it is dragging on and on. . . . it's like 'oh it should be over by now.' I have been in grade 11 and 12 all my life. [The transition bridge has been too long for you, I comment.] I'm done, I'm done, leave me alone already! It's totally it!"

As Glynis tells me, " . . . I am not really supposed to be here It's not my place; it's out there, not here. Not any more. It used to be"(interview 015). On another occasion, during a discussion group session, she says, "I'm so tired of being here." Ed adds, "I'm not turned off enough to not come; I've been doing this all my life and I'll just keep doing this and trying my best" (from field notes, May 4, 1998).

For many of these students schooling is over. It is "done," as Patrick says. The only part of the leaving left is graduation and the celebrating.

Celebrating: "sort of like the final goodbye"

This year of liminality, of being in passage, is coming to an end. That is not to say that the feeling of being 'betwixt and between' is over for everyone, but the school year is soon ending. The feelings of waiting and uncertainty are, for the moment, set aside. Now the focus is on graduation and how that will be celebrated. Just as the passage has been unique to each student, graduation is a personal experience in the midst of the

celebrations shared by almost the entire graduating class.

Comments from the students about the celebration run the gamut from too much -- partying, alcohol, money spent, emphasis given -- to too little -- planning, grad spirit, consultation with students. Here and there are voiced regrets of those who will not be a part of it. Some will be celebrating the ending and the leaving; some, the new beginning. Many are simply celebrating because it is part of the ritual of passing over the threshold between high school and adulthood. For most students the Grad Dance and the After-Grad parties are what they have been waiting for. Dresses have been bought, limos rented. It is going to be a night to remember.

"It's going to be awesome!" says La Shondra (interview 005) when I ask her to tell me about graduation. Although she is proud that she is graduating and of the scholarships she will be receiving, she sees commencement as more for her family; for her, the ceremony is more a preliminary to higher education. The part of grad that La Shondra is looking forward to is the celebrating - "the banquet and the dance and the after grad, not the dry grad," which she plans to go to for awhile. "It's definitely a celebration for sure," she tells me. During the summer, she and her friends are planning a camping trip but grad is "sort of like the final goodbye to all my friends in high school, not all of them, I'll see a few of them over the next year, but there's going to be a lot of people that I won't see until the 10th year reunion." Since she is an emotional person,

it will be pretty hard, she tells me, "but I know I'm going to be really happy as well."

Megan, too, is excited about grad although "from about grade 8 to maybe the beginning of grade 12" she was not going to go to grad, it just was not important (interview 034).

I wasn't going to do it because I never stayed at one school. I knew the people at the schools but not really. When I came back here I've known two or three of the people since I was in grade 1 so it's kind of like I'm back with the people I should be graduating with and it makes me happy that I can be with those people especially since I even lived with one of them when I moved back here - she's just an amazing person -- and I'm just so happy to be graduating with her, just to see her that day is going to make me so happy I can't wait. Jenny talked me into going to grad this year. She said it will be so much fun and we'll get all dressed up and I thought about it and I thought, sure, why not? I'll go. Grad is kinda about celebrating, in a way, I mean, we've come 13 years and that's a long way. I'm not going to commencement. Getting a piece of paper that says I've done something means nothing to me. Knowing that I did it and being able to say I did it, means something. A piece of paper saying that you've completed grade 12 means nothing. I'm not going to After Grad. I don't know many people at this school, I know the Caf kids and I know some of the Band kids. I have to say the Cafeteria kids feel like family. We're all together in a little group, the same with the Band kids, so all the Caf kids are going together and we're going to rent RVs and we're going camping at Todd's mom's. She just bought 13 acres in Merritt and we're going there for two days. Those are the people that I want to spend my time with. Probably some of them I won't ever see again.

Tara (interview 024) says she is "so excited!" about graduation and then lists all the events: the commencement Friday night, then the banquet at noon with the parents on Saturday,

the dance, and then after that the dry-Grad. The ceremony is not really important to her, she tells me. Her whole family is going to be there "but other than that it is no big deal." At the banquet she is sitting with her parents and a few good friends with their parents. She explains that a lot of people sit at one end and their parents are at the other end of the room. Tara does not understand this since this is for the parents. Do you have your dress already, I ask. "Yes, I got it in October. It was really expensive. It was in the mall where I work so I went in and sort of paid it off. It hasn't been fitted yet because it took me a long time to find shoes." When I ask Tara why she thinks the Grad dance and everything is such a big deal, she says, "I don't think it is for the guys as much. Everyone is saying, have you got your dress? do you have your hair appointment? ... The guys just go and rent a tux -- they wear it and take it back. For us the shoes have to match the dress, jewelry. I'm so excited, it's like, let's go! I am excited about getting my dress on, getting my hair done, putting my make-up on, going and having dinner then I don't know... being with all my friends and stuff. It is kind of like everyone is doing it. I am so excited about the day," and then, almost as an afterthought, "but I don't think it is going to be that big a deal."

Tara tells me that she is not renting a limo. I ask her about the purpose in renting a limo. "I don't know because it costs like \$150.00 per person for 6 hours. I can't see the point

in it. You are going to be somewhere and they'll just be outside. They are going to drive you from here to Langley and Langley to here, that's it." Tara's boyfriend's dad works for a car-dealership so he is just going to lend them a sports car for the night. Her boyfriend is going to drive it. Some people want to drink in their limo, she explains, but since she is going to Dry Grad, she will not be drinking anyway. Half of Tara's friends "don't want to go to Dry Grad, half of them are going to go to see if it is fun." When I mention that I have not heard much about grad preparation, Tara agrees and says, "We have a pretty bad Grad Rep. It is just the way our school is. I think she was so overwhelmed with the job so we only had a couple Grad events. I tried many times to help her out but... We have our Grad meetings every Tuesday but we don't have a lot of committees. I hope it is a good turnout." Remembering the number of students who have said they are not going to Dry Grad, I ask Tara how many tickets have been sold to date. Only sixty, is the response, out of 280 grads. The committee is hoping to sell at least 150 tickets. Perhaps people are waiting to see who else is going, I suggest. "Ya!! It is so frustrating, I get mad at people."

When I ask Crystal to tell me about graduation, she lights up and says how excited she is (interview 018). "My Mom is making my dress, like a ball gown, it's a very exciting time." What is exciting about it, I ask. "It's 5 years coming to a close. Everyone is going away. It's going to be like one big

reunion almost. A lot of us have known each other for so long." When I mention to Crystal that as others have described their ball gowns I was reminded of women choosing a wedding gown and preparing for a wedding day, her comment was, "it's almost like that you know."

Part of Crystal's excitement stems from the fact that she is "the first one to graduate in our house, my sister didn't graduate so my parents are really excited. That's all they've been talking about since I got back here. It's good for my Mom." How important is this to you, I ask. "It gives me a really great sense of pride, accomplishment knowing that I did it. At first I didn't think I would make it, grade 10, grade 11 - I just didn't care. I was scared so it is really exciting. I can't stop thinking about it"(interview 018).

Todd (interview 013) who tells me that graduation "is going to be great!" also describes how parental pride is adding to the celebrating.

My mom is ecstatic! She is so proud of me. She is planning all these things for this one weekend - she's going to have a brunch, a dinner... she's going to do all this. It's wow! I haven't even graduated yet! Grad's going to be great. I'll be graduating with a great group of people. [how important is the grad ceremony to you?] It is important, I guess, but it is more for my mother. To see her sitting there with a camera or whatever, big grin on her face, I can see tears coming down her face -- I know it. It's more for her. The Graduating and getting out of school is for me. The actual ceremony is not important to me, I just want to be with my friends.

While the graduation events -- commencement, banquet, dance

(or Grad), 'dry' after-grad -- are usually 'lumped together,' conversations reveal a personal grouping of selected events that makes "Grad" mean different things to different people. Although most await the event with great anticipation, for many, graduation is viewed with a mixture of cynicism and anticipation; regret and relief. The cynicism surfaces during some of the discussions of the graduation events -- the events are "lamo," the grad rep is inept, there is no school spirit, grad is just an opportunity to party, people spend way too much money, it is all over-rated. As I listen, I wonder how much of the cynicism stems from a long-anticipated event that is not living up to inflated expectations; how much of the dissatisfaction being laid at the feet of the grad rep stems from those same inflated expectations.

When I ask Beth (interview 035) to tell me about the grad activities, she says that "there really haven't been any. I'm really disappointed in my grad rep this year," and she adds, "and I know a lot of other people are." What kinds of activities have been planned, I ask. "The activities are pretty much just the parties, and going out and having a good time," she explains. Beth is going to Grad, the banquet, and commencement. As well, she has bought a ticket for Dry Grad. We talk about Dry Grad and how a lot of people are going to go for a while then go off to what many refer to as 'Wet Grad.' When I mention that I have heard stories about awesome prizes available to those who stay until the end, Beth says that it is just "a bribe" and she

really has not heard much about Dry Grad.

I find really no one announces things. I think it's lack of enthusiasm in general. People are procrastinating and then at the last, things just happen and that's not really a good thing. There's no spirit about grad, whatsoever, this year. Last year they had a lot of spirit. They went to a basketball game, a hockey game, went bowling, went ice skating. This year we haven't done anything. We went to a basketball game but it wasn't really great. The turnout wasn't good and no one really went together, like a couple of groups went together and then the rest just showed up. It would have been better if we'd taken a bus out there as a grad class instead of going out own way. We went bowling one day and it was just horrible. People were drinking inside the bowling alley. It was not what I expected. I don't think it's giving the school a bad reputation, but if you're going to do stuff like that, don't do it there, do it before or after, not in the alley. There is nothing planned so far for the Wet Aftergrad but there will be -- parties where the grads go, in someone's back yard or we may rent a field. It will be organized by certain students who just get fed up and say, 'This is what's going on.' (interview 035)

Wendy (interview 023) also claims to "have no idea what is going on with Grad." She tells me that she has not been informed about anything, although, when I ask if grad is important to her, "No, not really," is her reply. She is happy about the diploma "but the whole Grad stuff, the dinner, the dance, it is nothing new to me, I'm used to it," she says. Wendy says that she did that when she was in grade eleven so "it is no big deal." Some of her friends are really excited about graduation and, as a result, she feels like an outsider. Wendy is going to grad and to the Dry Grad. Do you plan to just stay for the first hour and then go elsewhere or will you stay for the whole event, I ask. "I will probably stay for the whole thing. I don't see the point to going out after Grad to party or whatever and

getting totally drunk. Why not just stay and have fun and stay in one place instead of going all around." Wendy tells me that her friends are going to stay at the Dry Grad for a couple hours then they are going to leave. Do they see the partying as part of Graduation, I ask. "Yes." How significant is the ceremony to you, I ask. "Getting the diploma and everything will be more significant than anything else," she says. "I'll be happy that I have actually gone through the 12 years of school." Then she pauses.... "And then I go back to school so..." she adds, laughing.

Jason tells me that, "compared to other years, our grad class is really disjointed and, I guess, much more cliquy" (interview 033). He thinks perhaps it is because there are well defined social groups at Eagle Spirit that just do not mix well. Given his somewhat negative comments, I am surprised when he says that he is going to grad and thinks it will be fun; especially surprised when he adds that, when he was younger, he had thought it was pointless. Jason is not planning to go to Dry Grad, thinks most people are not going to go. "From what I've heard," he says, "they're not going to sell tickets at the door and I think that's a fatal mistake because I think there's going to be about 20 people who go and if they don't sell tickets at the door, no one's going to go." Jason and his friends have decided that they will go to the banquet and then go to parties "or whatever," but if they "got bored" they would go to the Dry Grad with the prizes and games. Perhaps, I suggest, the reason

you cannot buy tickets at the door is because you cannot go to Dry Grad if you have been drinking and many students who go somewhere else first will have been drinking. "Probably," agrees Jason, "but what's the point of holding something if no one's going to go?" Jason does not drink - "a personal choice" -- but does not think there should be a separate Dry Grad -- just Grad. In his opinion, no one is going to decide not to drink just so they can go to Dry Grad.

"I think the whole grad thing is a pretty good excuse for a lot of people to go out and get drunk and have a good time, their one last fling where they can booze it up with their friends and take whatever narcotic substance they can find to get high with their friends for one last time but then everyone will go their separate ways and meet new friends at SFU or wherever they're going to go," says Ed (interview 002). "I don't think very many will maintain contact with anyone from high school after grad," he adds. How do you feel about that, I ask. "I don't feel any regret about that," he comments, "I know I'm moving on."

Although a little less cynical than Ed, Cherie is not particularly excited about graduation. She tells me that she is not looking forward to it and, besides, there "is so much put on money -- like the most expensive dress" (interview 003). She recognizes that a lot of that is "created by yourself" but she is not going to get caught up in it. "Maybe last year I would have spent \$100 on getting my nails done and my hair but I'm not

going to do it," she states firmly. Cherie is one of the few students looking forward to commencement "where people who have worked hard all year get awarded or recognized for what they've done, rather than the next night or the next week, at grad, where the girl with the richest daddy shows up with the most expensive dress and makes a big deal out of it."

Because some people "make a big deal out of it," Heather is no longer "exactly sure what [graduation] means" to her (interview 004). She is "not particularly looking forward to grad." She tells me that at the beginning of the year she was really excited about it but as the year went on, it has begun to feel just like any other year. "This is my tiny, small life right now, with school and friends, and all that," she explains, "and next year it's going to be totally different. And all these people are getting all hyped up about \$400 dresses and things like that and the limo and something kind of changed in me and I kind of shut it all out." The only reason she is looking forward to graduation at all is so that she can "get out of this routine." Heather tells me that she has been ready for that for some time since she went, with a friend, to graduation last year. "That was kind of my graduation," she says, "like it could be October now because for the last seven months nothing's happened."

"It's not really a big deal for me. I can't see spending all kinds of money," Jeff (interview 009) tells me. Who is making it a big deal, I ask. "Most of my friends are making a

huge deal of it, spending thousands of dollars on limos, grad stuff." I ask if he is going to grad. "Ya, but I'm not going to spend all that money," he states firmly. Why do you think some people are making such a big deal of it, I ask. "I have no idea," Jeff says, "a milestone, I guess. [you don't agree?] Ya, but I'm not going to spend money on it." Do those spending a lot of money, have a lot to start with, I ask. "Some have saved, a lot just have it," is his reply. The school makes it into a big deal, too, as far as Jeff is concerned.

On the other hand, amidst the talk of celebrating, when we talk about graduation as a milestone on the life journey, some voice regrets -- some because they will not be graduating with their friends, others because of missed opportunities.

Some students realize that graduation is a turning point and that, if they do not graduate, their plans are on hold. Graduation is "very important" to Rod (interview 017). "It shows you can be an adult," he tells me. He describes himself as "one of those half-assed people that can go out and build half a motorcycle, want to ride it, and not have the energy to build it and not care." So graduation is important because "most people I know, don't [graduate from high school]." As well, Rod is very aware of how much is riding on graduation.

If I don't graduate this year I say goodbye to a lot of things; if I don't graduate on time I don't get bonds from my grandmother; if I don't graduate on time I don't get a car; if I don't graduate on time I lose a lot of benefits from my parents. I can't complain, I've just got to graduate. I failed English 12 first semester. This semester I was taking it again from the

same teacher and I told him that I just can't do this and he said, 'sorry, I'm the only teacher, goodbye, see you later, have a nice semester.' So I went to talk to Mr. Cartier and to see if I could write the Communications 12 exam and he said, 'sure, talk to Mr. Nevins' and this will give me my English 12 to graduate.

Sophie, too, is feeling the pressure about graduation. She knows that, as much as she might want to, she will not graduate (interview 031). She admits that her attendance is "so bad" and she is "kind of disappointed in [her]self" but when she promises herself she will go to school, "it seems, at the time, school's so unimportant." She goes on to say,

I feel like I'm just stuck here so bad. It's just such a waste of time, getting stuck in a place just for a graduation certificate. I'm going to talk to all the principals, if I can, just to see if they'll let me graduate anyway. I'll tell them that's all I want. Of course, they'll bring up the whole conversation that everyone else has to do this and that but I'll try to think of some argument if I can.

Sophie especially feels "bad for [her] parents because this is [her] second try." But even if she goes "to every single class for the rest of the semester, [does] every bit of homework," she doubts that she would pass math. And, anyway, "I don't think I could even go to every single class for a month, especially with grad coming. I have a wicked grad planned. I don't think I could do it." Sophie and her best friend, Kerry, are not taking dates to grad because they would be too embarrassed to take guys who graduated four years ago to a grade twelve graduation. During our conversation she relates a discussion she had with the vice principal during which he asked her what she wanted to get out

of high school. "To graduate," she told him. "That's all you want -- the certificate?" "Yup," Sophie replied. She goes on to say that she knows he wanted her to say 'I'm learning skills for the future' because Mr. Nevins said to her, "No, you want to learn!" "No, I want to graduate!" Sophie tells me that, although "it's kind of fun," she does not care about learning; she just wants "to graduate so that down the road I won't have all this extra stuff to take before I can actually go on to school." Actually Sophie's pursuit of a graduation certificate is not about education; it is about saving face.

. . . if I didn't graduate I don't think anyone would really know. I'd still go to commencement because they just give you a piece of paper. Because that would be the worst of it. I'd be embarrassed to walk around and have people say, 'Oh, she didn't graduate,' because I look at other girls my age or older who didn't graduate and I think, 'God, you live in [this community]! We're not in [a neighbouring community] -- you should graduate!'

In a conversation in early May, Sam had said that graduation "is kind of sad"(interview 029). He had said also that while it is a little like crossing a threshold, really it is "a party, I guess, like New Year's. It is not important as to what I do next year. If it didn't happen it would not be the end of the world." On Graduation Night, I see no one who looks as if they would agree with Sam. In the general pandemonium, there is much laughter and many hugs along with faces that glow with obvious pride. Suddenly all of the uncertainty voiced over the past year has been traded in for celebrating the ending and

anticipating, with certainty, the future.

This is the last discussion group session. It is the week after graduation. Classes end in five days. Talk today is about graduation. La Shondra says that she "spent \$700 and it was worth it. I looked awesome," she says. "If I'm going to spend that much money I want to look great for more than a couple of hours," she says. La Shonda danced with her dad at Grad. "He told me how proud they are of me. I've always gotten As but it was good to hear that it has meant something to them."

Phaedra describes the banquet and dance as being "unreal." She goes on to explain that everyone looked like they were wearing a mask, pretending to be someone else. "I felt uncomfortable," she adds.

Ed explains how his dad couldn't come to grad since "he is on the verge of bankruptcy." His mom had offered to pay for his ticket from Ontario but his dad declined, saying there were other expenses involved in attending. Ed says, "I accepted it," adding, "I was disappointed." As I listen, I think again how Ed works so hard to maintain control. He does not mention his scholarship.

The fact that her dad came up made it a very special evening for Briana. Adding to it all, she

tells us, her mom and dad talked about things that were never resolved in the past. It is obvious that this was a healing time in her family -- that in itself is cause for celebration, I think to myself.

The Valedictory Address becomes a topic for discussion. Ken, who has known Vincent (the Class Valedictorian) since English 9, says, "Good for Vincent." He adds that everyone knows that Vincent has no social skills and is not an interesting speaker. All agree that there was nothing memorable about the speech. No one can think of one memorable phrase they've come away with.

As I listen to the post-mortem on Graduation 1998, I think about hopes, dreams, and expectations. Other than La Shondra, who "looked awesome" and Briana, whose family connected, how many will remember it as a time of unmet expectations and unfulfilled dreams, I wonder. The bell has gone and it is time to vacate the room where we have met over the past year. Everyone seems reluctant. We agree to meet over the summer. I say that I will spring for pizza. They choose the place. We don't seem to be able to let go of the bonds that have been formed (from field notes, June 11, 1998).

A year of liminality is coming to an end for this group of

students. For them, it has been a year about passages and thresholds, the transition from secondary schooling to the adult world. Unlike traditional 'rites of passage' where each young person undergoes a similar experience, the liminal time for these grade twelve students is a personal passage, unique to the individual. However, collectively, their stories tell of a year of anticipation, of reflection, of uncertainty, of excitement, of sadness, laughter, loss, and despair. Most of all, their stories tell of a year of waiting, a year sometimes lived with hope, often times with anxiety. From their stories, the seven themes of liminality emanate: arriving, waiting, being pressed, reflecting, hoping, leaving, and celebrating.

Many students begin the year in September with excitement about arriving, having finally "made it." Then the waiting begins. "I'd leave right now if it weren't for graduation," writes one student (survey 085A). As the reality of the final year of schooling sets in, some students begin to recognize they are about to cross a threshold in their lives - "I feel that it is a large step towards growing up. A step into the deep pool of responsibility. You either sink or swim from here," writes one student (survey 055). By midway through the year, students increasingly feel pressed -- to make the "right" decision, to get high marks, to begin moving toward making their tentative plans a reality. Reflecting and re-evaluating is part of the entire liminal experience but seems to intensify in the latter half of the year. As the end of the year approaches, the

previously tentative plans become firmer and students begin to face the future with hope. Just before graduation, the realization that they will be leaving friends and familiar structures and routines begins to sink in. Finally, all energy is focused on celebrating the end of this extended passage. As one student describes it, "Graduating is like being at the beginning of a race and the starting pistol has just been fired!" (survey 044).

As I reflect on my time with grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit Secondary, on how they have experienced this liminal time in their lives, I reflect, too, on the situations and structures that helped shape this experience. Although this time of liminality is unique to each student, what role does the institution and its personnel, curriculum, and rituals play in the liminal experience? In what ways do parents and society, in general, contribute to this passage along the life journey?

CHAPTER 5:
FROM THE OUTSIDE IN:
INFLUENCING THE BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

Although each student's experience of the liminal phase of the passage between secondary school and the adult world is unique, there are a number of influences that interact over the year to contribute to the common experiences. These are reflected in the ways in which students describe their liminal experiences. Many of these have been explored in Chapter 4 -- times of celebration, feelings of uncertainty, hope, and a sense of loss, to name four.

Often factors that influence those liminal experiences stem from the ways in which people and institutions deal with adolescents as they pass from secondary schooling to the adult world. From my conversations with the students, four spheres of influence can be discerned: expectations, the institution, *sacra*, and *communitas* and flow.¹ Elements of these four areas of influence combine in different ways to produce spheres or circles of

¹ Although I have identified four significant spheres or areas of influence, it would be naive to suggest that these are the only factors that play a role in how students experience this phase of the life journey. However, the spheres of influence I am describing figured prominently in my conversations with the students. It should be noted also that since the various influences on the liminal experience are so intertwined, it is often difficult to completely separate out the various influences. That said, the delineation of the identified four spheres of influence is useful in understanding how students experience this passage in their lives.

influence that move toward the individual, influence that ebbs and flows throughout the year affecting liminal experiences in different ways.² Because these spheres of influence resonate significantly throughout their stories, it is not possible to understand how the grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit experienced this time in their lives without exploring the ways in which these spheres of influence impact on liminal experiences. That exploration follows.

Spheres of influence

One notable sphere of influence comes in the form of the perceived or articulated expectations of others. The expectations may be those of the students themselves but most frequently they are the expectations of parents, teachers, the broader society, and, occasionally, friends. These expectations have to do with the decisions students are making about the future. Often the expectations are transmitted by the use of words like 'should' or phrases like "if you don't . . ." as predictions are made about what the future holds for students. The impact of these expectations is noticeable in the pressure

² Reflecting upon the degree to which these elements impact upon individual students, the image of the ripples created when a stone is thrown into a pond comes to mind. Rather than the ripples moving out from the centre, they move toward the centre. I could imagine each student in the centre with the ripples coming toward him or her. The size of the circle and the intensity of the ripples means that different students are influenced in ways that are unique to the individual.

and uncertainty that students feel.

Another factor, usually cloaked in the normalcy of long established beliefs and practices, originates with the structure of the institution and its rituals, and/or from society through the media. Included in this sphere of influence are the routines of the school, the courses available to students, the attitudes of school personnel, and the rituals associated with graduation. The emphasis in the media on the celebratory aspect of graduation reflects and reinforces many of these institutional practices and beliefs. An important component of this sphere of influence is the status that students have within the institution. The ways in which this sphere of influence impacts on the liminal experience is apparent in my conversations with grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit Secondary.

While one might naturally expect such factors as parents and rituals to impact on the liminal experiences of grade twelve students, another factor that significantly contributes to the liminal experience is less often considered -- the *sacra* communicated to students throughout the liminal phase of their transition from secondary schooling. As outlined earlier in this work, Turner (1967, p.102) described *sacra*, "the heart of the liminal matter," as the things that are shown or otherwise conveyed to those in transition as a way of guiding the passage and preparing the liminary for the post-liminal state. Meant to provide those in transition with opportunities to reflect on their culture and society, *sacra* are intended to reveal the

culture to the liminary and to change the inner-most nature of the person in transition.³ Although Turner noted that *sacra* included actions as well as instructions and exhibitions, he did not include in his notion of *sacra* those things not intentionally presented -- those unspoken ideas and messages often referred to in education as the hidden curriculum.⁴ This raises a further question about what liminaries, or in this case students, internalize as things that reveal the dominant culture. Exploring the notion of *sacra* is useful in uncovering how this sphere of influence contributes to liminality.

Turner (1967, 1977) also outlined two other aspects of liminality - '*communitas*,' and '*flow*.' *Communitas*, as described by Turner, is the communion between liminaries, the new connections that are formed during the transition stage. *Flow* is that "holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement," a time when action and awareness merge. Although *flow* may be transmitted and shared through *communitas*, ultimately it stems from an inner response. While these two aspects of the liminal experience are evident in the data collected at Eagle Spirit

³ While it can be argued that transmission of *sacra* is inherent in both the expectations of others and the institution, I am suggesting that what students select from the array of ideas presented to them determines its inclusion in this category.

⁴ Here the term curriculum is used in its broadest sense. Rather than referring to the formal curriculum presented in school, it is related to the notion of pedagogy as guiding a young person to maturity and includes those '*lessons*' learned from the unintentional actions of others especially when those actions imply a message other than the one intended.

Secondary School, their influence on the liminal experiences of students is apparent predominantly toward the end of the liminal phase of the transition. In particular, as the school year ends, it is possible to identify what Turner describes as "flow-elicitors."

Given the individuality of liminal experiences, obviously not all elements or factors have the same influence on all students, for just as the liminal experience itself is unique, so, too, is the degree to which the spheres of influence impact upon passage through this liminal time in students' lives. That being said, in order to uncover how students experience this time in their lives, it is useful to examine their stories and co-constructed descriptions in an attempt to understand the ways in which these spheres of influence contribute to the liminal experience. In doing so it becomes apparent that expectations, the institution, *sacra*, and *communitas* and flow contribute significantly to the liminal experiences of grade twelve students.

Developing an explorative framework

Since the purpose of this exploration is to explicate the liminal experiences of the students, when thinking about a framework to uncover the role of various influences on those experiences, the importance of expectations to the transition experience becomes clear. Reflecting on my conversations with

the students at Eagle Spirit Secondary, it becomes apparent that, within the first few months of grade twelve, expectations are playing a major role in their liminal experiences. In their comments during the discussion group sessions, many students speak of their own expectations, the expectations of their parents, the school, universities, and their peers. Later these comments are reinforced in the survey and interview comments. In exploring the role of expectations in the students' transition stories, a number of questions can be considered. In what ways do expectations impact, both negatively and positively, on the liminal experience? In what ways do the students' own expectations combine with the expectations of others? Are there times of the school year when expectations are a more significant influence on the liminal experience?⁵ Using these questions to explore the ways in which students' own expectations, as well as the expectations of others, contribute to their liminal experiences helps to uncover one aspect of the passage from secondary school.

A second and equally provocative component of the liminal experience becomes apparent when students talk about their feelings about school. During the student interviews, in the discussion group conversations, and on the surveys, students speak of their relationships with teachers and administrators as

⁵ While students also spoke of what they perceived to be the expectations of the broader society, I have elected to include those expectations with *sacra* since they appear to be an aspect of the messages conveyed to young people through the media and what might be referred to as "common knowledge."

well as the structure of the institution itself and its rituals.⁶ What impact do these components of their daily life have on their liminal experiences? In what ways does the formal curriculum impact upon this time in students' lives? What are some ways in which their relationships with teachers and administrators enhance or detract from their liminal experiences? How do the routines of schooling and the structure of the institution itself contribute to their passage into adulthood? An exploration of the role of the school, its personnel, and institutional rituals in this passage can render an evocative portrayal of the liminal experiences of grade twelve.

Sacra provide the framework for the third exploration in my examination of the liminal experiences of the students at Eagle Spirit. Using Turner's notion of *sacra* to develop this framework, *sacra* is seen as those ideas and messages that are presented, intentionally or otherwise, by parents, peers, the institution, and the media and which, in turn, influence the ways in which students experience this time in their lives. As stated above, this includes the unintentional messages that students infer about their present as well as future place in the world. What do these messages tell students about confidence in the

⁶ While it could be argued that comments about schooling and its rituals from the broader society are clearly associated with ideas conveyed to students and therefore should be included as part of the *sacra* overlay, I have elected to include those comments as part of the exploration of the institutional sphere of influence since their impact reinforces long held beliefs about the institution.

future? About success? About failure? As students prepare to enter adulthood, what do these messages tell students about the beliefs and values shared by many in the broader society? How do these messages affect their liminal experiences? Clearly, it is sometimes difficult to completely separate *sacra* from the expectations of others and the structure of the institution. However, given that *sacra* are rooted in the messages given to those in transition in order to prepare them for the next stage in life, it is important to consider this sphere of influence separately.

The final explorative frame is developed around the notions of 'communitas' and 'flow.' While it could be argued that these last two notions described by Turner do not have the same degree of influence on the grade twelve liminal experience as do some other components (for example *sacra*), *comunitas* and *flow* are an important component of the exploration. In particular, they are helpful when examining how peer relationships influence liminal experiences and identifying those symbols selected by students as "flow-elicitors." In addition, they are important for their potential as the basis of long lasting memories of the liminal experience.

As stated previously, rather than having a direct influence on the liminal experience, the above outlined components generate circles or spheres of influence, spheres of influence that ebb and flow throughout the school year. Undeniably these circles sometimes overlap. However, the four explorative frames of expectations, structure of the institution, *sacra*, and

communitas and flow provide a useful heuristic for understanding the stories of the grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit Secondary as they describe how they experience this time of liminality.

Exploring how expectations influence liminal experiences

While students do not, themselves, identify the influences that colour or contribute to their liminal experiences, their comments provide insights into this aspect of liminality. For example, even as students begin their final year of secondary schooling, the influence of expectations on the liminal experience is evident.

As described in the previous chapter, many students enter the year with very clear expectations about what grade twelve is going to be like. As Heather (interview 004) says, "it isn't anything like my ideal, what I thought it was going to be like, at all." These expectations are often built upon "folk lore" about adolescent life. La Shonda (interview 005) says that, when she was younger,

I basically pictured my grade twelve year as an episode from Degrassi High⁷ . . . [but it is like you

⁷ a Canadian television program that began in 1986. It followed a group of teenagers from junior high through to their senior high school years. Although the program ran for only five seasons, it is currently shown around the world. Now considered a cult program, by 2000, more than 40 web sites devoted to the show had been created by fans around the world. A 1999 reunion show taped in Toronto drew fans from as far away as San Francisco -- an indication of the impact the series had on teens and twenty-somethings who grew up with the show (Atherton, 2001,

think] when you turn sixteen you will automatically have this cherry red Mustang parked outside of your door but then you get there and discover you're driving your mom's station wagon. That's reality.

Expectations and reality. Sandy (interview 011) thought that when she got into grade twelve, "everything would be perfect, . . . I would have a car," she laughs when she adds, "I would be taller.... and have a huge group of friends. We would be partying all the time." Sandy realizes now that that is not who she is, that she does not like to party all the time, and, while she does not have a car, she does have the friends she wants.

Some students begin the year expecting to 'be on top' in the pecking order: they expect that younger students will show them more respect, that they will have a new, higher status and a changed relationship with teachers. The fact that their expectations and the reality of grade twelve do not always coincide, colours the early phase of the liminal experience. Not noticing that they are beginning an ending, many students enter the year with the expectation that this is the beginning of something new, a new status and with it a new way of being in the world. What many find is that, for the most part, there is little change in their status (with younger students or with teachers) and the days are much like all the other days for the past twelve years. As Drudi (interview 010) says, " . . . you want everyone to bow down to you. Which used to be the case but I

February 19, p.B11).

have seen grade 8s telling off Grade 12s! Literally twice their size! Society has changed." True, there are a few students who would agree with Bruce (interview 014) who says that because "teachers are realizing that students are becoming adults . . . they treat us differently. They talk to us as people where before they would talk to us as inferior people, like you're inferior to me so I don't have to listen to you." However, for the most part, students begin the year with the let-down feeling that often comes with unmet expectations about how a long-awaited time will unfold.

Although not everyone has a let-down feeling about their status as senior students, others have expectations about the work load in grade twelve. Some, like Bruce (interview 014), had been led to believe that the work load in grade twelve would be much lighter than in other years. He found out otherwise. Some are pleasantly surprised. Megan (interview 034) began worrying about grade twelve when she was in grade ten; worrying that it was "a huge deal" but "it's been so easy, so easy." Beth (interview 035) also found grade twelve "easier than I thought it would be." For Megan and Beth, their expectations were the opposite of what they found and, rather than feeling let-down, their self-confidence increased. This increase in self-confidence cannot help but have a positive influence on the liminal phase of the transition from secondary schooling to the adult world, cannot help but foster positive feelings about the future.

Another aspect of how students' expectations influence their experience of grade twelve was revealed in a discussion group conversation early in the year. Talking about the choices students make in grade twelve, Rachael comments, "It depends on the kind of lifestyle you want . . . what you expect for yourself" (from field notes, January 5, 1998). The role that their own expectations play in the transition from secondary school was inherent in Phaedra's suggestion that a question on the student survey be framed around the fact that by grade twelve the future is already set for students, that what they are like now is what they are going to be like for the rest of their lives, that students know whether or not they are going to be successful in the future (from field notes, October 16, 1997). That this is a deep-seated conviction shared by many is illustrated when, six months later, Jane comments, "You become the person you're going to be, in grade twelve" (from field notes, April 2, 1998).

The idea that the successes you have to date experienced are indicative of the level of success you can expect in the future must be reassuring for those students who have been "winners" in a system that rewards high academic achievement. As one student (survey 049A) said, "I feel quite prepared for my plans because I have always done well in high school." On the other hand, what of those who struggle or do not meet curriculum expectations? As Patrick comments, "Every failing grade is like one more nail in the coffin" (from field notes, November 13,

1997).

Glynis, Sophie, and Sean are three of the people who will not be walking across the platform on commencement night. They are among the number of students who have not earned the required 52 credits. Although each of them describes their feelings about graduating differently, there is a sense that each has not lived up to expectations -- their own or others. Sophie (interview 031) wants desperately to graduate. She feels sorry for her parents as she feels she has let them down. After all, this is her "second try." As well, she is embarrassed because she sees herself as living in a "good" area where everyone graduates from high school. She has tried to bargain with the administration in the hopes that she will be able to graduate but, so far, to no avail. She thinks that, if she could just participate in the commencement ceremonies, no one would know that she has not actually graduated, no one would know that the "piece of paper" that she received was blank. Time is running out as we approach the final six weeks of school. Sophie is feeling the pressure of unmet expectations -- hers and others.

Although our conversation is a lesson in contradictions, Glynis (interview 015), on the other hand, has struck a defensive pose as a way of dealing with unmet expectations. One minute our conversation focuses on how

I'm frustrated with myself. If I had not had all those problems [with my mother] in grade eleven, I wouldn't be where I am. I needed to start with a clean slate but in grade twelve I didn't feel like I had a clean

slate because I was already behind and had to catch up in the grade eleven courses I had screwed up. I just felt like what's the use, here I am, I don't feel like fixing it, it's not that important to me.

She then argues that what she is angry about is that no one cared about what she wanted, that all everyone cared about was what she should be doing.

I don't care about [graduation]! I don't want it! So why is everyone shoving it on me. [Who is shoving it on you, I ask.] My teachers, my friends, people, society, everything is expected of us. I feel that we don't get to do what we want.

Later in our conversation, Glynis says, "I don't have a lot of expectations of people and a lot of people.... no, I have expectations of what the world should be or could be and other people have expectations of what I should be. They have expectations of what I should be and I have expectations of what the world could be." Then she adds, "My mother always wanted me to be myself yet she had her expectations." I sense a crack in Glynis' defensive pose when she concedes, "I thought I would graduate," then quickly adds, "but I never thought it would be the most important thing."

Sean (interview 032) speaks vaguely of salvaging his secondary schooling, a plan, I sense, that is driven by unmet, although unarticulated, expectations. Although he has no definite plans, he talks of a teaching career or perhaps something where he works with young people. He tells me he is going to come back in September to finish off English 11 and English 12. "It doesn't feel too great because it is something I

should have passed." This year, Sean is attending "regular school" as well as night school for Math 11A and Socials 11. Even though Sean has problems with English - "It's the structure of the writing I have trouble with. I have all these ideas but..." -- he expects to graduate next year and eventually go to university. To a large extent, Sean's liminal experiences are on hold. Around him, his friends are graduating but it will be at least another year before Sean accumulates the necessary credits.

And what of those students who will accumulate the necessary credits to graduate but who have struggled and compromised in order to maintain passing grades, especially if those compromises have meant selecting less challenging courses in order to graduate? Do some of these students see themselves moving into a lifetime of settling for less? Was the student (survey 044A) who commented, "I won't ever get a good job. I didn't get good enough marks in high school to go into the classes I want to go to in college," anticipating a life of settling for less than expected? It is difficult to say whether or not Ed (interview 002) would agree that he has compromised in his career decisions. He expected to become an aeronautical engineer, but the reality of his grades forced him to reflect on those expectations about his future. His expectations have been changed and he now speaks positively of pursuing a career in business after obtaining a post-secondary degree. Perhaps because of his earlier disappointment, Ed has

readjusted his expectations to fit the reality of the situation. As a result, he is extremely focused on excellence in his new career choice. He believes that the more adaptable a person is to the system, the more successful you are. This self-imposed pressure has a great impact on how Ed experiences this in liminal experiences as evidenced in his comment:

I don't give myself much slack. I can spend too much time doing stupid things like that. I get some pleasure out of jogging but I don't have time for things like extra curricular activities, besides student council. I can't afford it. I don't have enough time. I wish there were 36 hours in the day. Sometimes I take a little time at night. But tonight I'm not expecting to go to bed before one and I get up at 5:30.

Ed is determined to be 'successful' and sets his expectations accordingly.

While students' own expectations no doubt take shape as they see themselves reflected in others eyes, envisioning a future based on the successes or failures in thirteen years of schooling can only add to the uncertainty and pressure students speak about. What part do expectations about the future play in the January survey (112A) comment, "I'm afraid of . . . not being successful. Ending up nowhere, doing nothing." I am reminded of the young man who I saw waiting in the counselling suite and, later, saw sitting with other obviously disengaged students in the "less challenging" Law 12 class. I remember that he said his father wanted him to go to university but that he did not think he could do that. I wonder what part his own expectations for the future have played in the decisions he has

made and the part this is playing in this time of liminality.

Expectations about the future and, in particular, expectations about knowing what you are going to do with your life by the time you reach grade twelve are expectations that are held by both students and adults. Tara (interview 024) tells me,

I know people who have gone to this school and graduated when I was in grade eight. And what are they doing now? They went to different schools and they still don't have a job. And it is like, in five years from now, [am I] going to be like that? I thought I would know what I wanted to do.

"'What are you going to do with your life?' people ask you," says Val, "and you say you don't know and they say 'How can you not know, you're in grade twelve!' There's so much pressure" (from field notes October 16, 1997). In these two comments, there is a sense that students perceive there is some grand narrative expectation that they are supposed to live out. Glynis says, "Education is about conforming to everybody else, it's about expectations" (from field notes January 22, 1998). Yet no one has told them precisely what the grand narrative expectation is nor how to live up to it. Just that it has to do with being successful. As Glynis comments, "It feels like everyone is against you when you don't do well" (from field notes January 22, 1998).

Students describe it as pressure but what they are experiencing is the confusion inherent in what they perceive as unspoken expectations that appear impossible to meet.

In other conversations, also, the expectations of others

are apparent. Although not specifically named as expectations, what students describe are the feelings brought about by their own and others' expectations. At the mid-October discussion group meeting, when talk turns to the kinds of survey questions that would uncover influences contributing to the ways in which students experience this part of their life journey, Val comments that there is a lot of pressure from peers about university (from field notes October 16, 1997). Although she cannot explain exactly what is creating the pressure, her comment perhaps connects with a later comment by Heather (interview 004) that people go to university "because either everyone else is or all their friends are or they feel that they have to because everyone else is." This idea is reflected also in Sophie's (interview 031) comments about why 'everyone' says they are going to university next year: " . . . you want to say that. Your parents want you to go and you want to say that because everyone has a really smart friend that you kind of want to top."

Also in the discussion group conversations, the expectations of parents frequently surface. Sometimes the expectations are embedded in a seemingly innocuous comment, such as Jane's that parents expect a lot of you, that they expect you to pay for things now (from field notes, October 30, 1997). In her comment there is a sense that students are now expected to assume adult responsibilities, responsibilities that she, as a young person, feels unprepared to take on. As I reflect on her

comment, I am reminded of Julia's comment (interview 012) that there is a little part of her that is "not ready . . . is scared."

Other ways in which parents influence the liminal experiences of grade twelve students have to do with their expectations about students' post-secondary choices. Tara (interview 024), who wants to take some time off to travel, says that her parents keep saying "go to school, go to school. If you don't go to school, you're paying rent!" Some students seem resigned to having to live up to their parents expectations. As one student (survey 091A) who plans to attend university put it, "It just seems like something I'm supposed to do" Another student (survey 030A), also university bound, explained, "My parents have always just expected this of me." Family expectations are also at the heart of Cherie's (interview 003) comments:

As far as the family [is concerned] I was the quiet one. I was the academic one. I was the smart one. My brother didn't graduate until he was 20 so there was no real hope for him to be super successful in his life . . . so right there it creates an image that I have to fulfil. My mom says the same thing and my grandma sees me as the perfect one and it's always been that way and I don't think it's ever going to stop. I'm just realizing that now and I've thought about that this year, about what am I doing, what are my expectations but because of them building me up to be that person or setting that image in my own mind, I feel that I have to go to university and I have to get a degree. I might have to go to medical school so I can be better than the average university grad. Now it's become something of my own. I think I've made it a part of me. I feel that I have to do that to satisfy myself now as well. That's not necessarily a bad

thing, it's just the way it is.

Frequently students comment that their parents expect them to attend university even though the students themselves either do not want to follow that path or know that their grades are not high enough for acceptance into university. Jeff (interview 009) says that he just wants to have a job that he wants to do but his father wants him to become an accountant. "There's no way," says Jeff. His dad "is an accountant, kind of, used to be and [his] sister's in accounting." I am again reminded of my visit to the counselling suite and the young man I met in the waiting room. He has no firm plans although his father wants him to go to university. He says he is not sure he could do that. Does knowing that he cannot live up to his father's expectations make him reluctant to make a decision about choosing a different path?

The way in which expectations influence the liminal experience varies from student to student. If the expectations come from the students themselves, there is often a time of readjustment as expectations come head to head with reality. While some students experience a let-down feeling, others quickly switch their focus to their newest expectation. Although there are a few exceptions (Ed being one of them), students' own expectations seldom produce a high degree of stress.

This is not always the case when the expectations are those of others. Some students feel as if they are under enormous pressure -- a pressure that intensifies and decreases at various

times of the year. As deadlines for scholarship and university admission applications approach, expectations about getting into 'the best' universities heighten and the pressure increases. As commencement nears, it rises again. Between times, the pressure to make the right decision, to do what others expect you to do, is lessened but never disappears. Val's comments and those of a student who responded to the survey (survey 030A) depict the pressure students feel to meet parents' expectations. Some students, like Cherie adopt parental expectations as their own. Others approach the expectations of others with a feeling of resignation, perhaps as a way to decrease, or altogether eliminate, the pressure. Still others, such as Glynis, work to convince themselves that they do not care, that they are going to rise above the petty expectations of others.

The sphere of influence created by expectations has a significant impact upon the liminal experiences of the grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit Secondary. During this in-between time, students may re-evaluate their goals as they begin to realize that their expectations are likely to be unfulfilled. They may resign themselves to fulfilling the expectations of others. However students deal with expectations, most experience a change in the way they see themselves or the way in which they see their future.

Exploring how the institution influences liminal experiences

Given the number of hours each day that students spend either in the classroom or involved in school related matters (including homework), the institution cannot help but impact significantly on the liminal experiences of grade twelve students. The influence of the institution emanates from several different sources, among which are: the routines and rituals of the institution, the relationships between students and teachers, the attitudes of administrators and other non-teaching personnel, and the courses offered and chosen. As with expectations, these aspects of the institution are often intertwined (e.g., the structure of the institution may determine the courses offered and regulate, or at least colour, the relationships between students and teachers). How these various aspects of the institution impact on the students' liminal experiences varies from student to student.

To begin an exploration of the ways in which the institution impacts on students' liminal experiences, it is important to briefly look at the structure and purpose of the secondary school. In somewhat oversimplified terms,⁸ the purpose of secondary schooling is to educate, socialize, and otherwise pedagogically support adolescents on their journey to adulthood. The intended outcome of this endeavour is to produce young adults capable of becoming productive members of society. But

⁸ terms that admittedly do not address all aspects of secondary schooling

given that adolescence, or youth, is an historical construct (Irwin, 1995, p.3) closely linked to the period of time between childhood and financial independence, and given that the weakening of the labour market has prolonged transition into adulthood (see chapter 2), secondary school becomes a place where, for some grade twelve students, life is on hold, a place that exacerbates the feeling that you are waiting for the future. Willis (1985, In Irwin, 1995, p.20) described it as a "frozen transition."

This is certainly true for the many students who already have mentally left this stage of their lives and are merely putting in time while they wait for graduation. "Can't wait to get out of here and start my life," writes a student (survey 005A) in January. "This time right now means nothing to me," comments Claude (interview 027). "I've been ready to graduate since last year," says Rachael (interview 001). "I'm so glad high school is almost over - I'm so sick of it!" writes another student (073A) on the January survey. "Mentally I've finished . . ." says La Shonda, although "I'm still physically here, writing my exams to try to get the best marks I can to get scholarships" (from field notes, March 26, 1998). In May, Sam (interview 029) tells me that he has been ready to be finished for over six months. The hardest part of school now, according to Bruce (interview 014), is coming every day.

Part of this feeling of disconnectedness stems from the fact that many students are increasingly involved, at least on a

part-time basis, in a world that does not include school. A large number of students have part time jobs, some more than one. In this other world, they are treated as adults, given adult responsibilities.⁹ Here, in the institutional setting, a place of attendance checks and late slips¹⁰, they usually are not. It is little wonder that many feel that their 'real' life begins once they leave high school, that what currently is has less and less importance in their lives. As one student (survey 019) puts it, when you are out of school, "The real world begins." While it can be argued that students choose to stay in school in order to ensure a more financially secure future, it is also true that, because of this extended schooling phase in their lives, many students are "held back and shielded from the adult world" (Brown, 1980, p.9), the real world.

As students come closer to feeling that they have 'mentally' left school, there is a gradual change in the way students speak of the institution. From the survey comments and my many conversations throughout the year, I sense, for many grade twelve students, a growing 'love-hate' relationship with

⁹ Often these responsibilities include such things as opening and/or closing the business for the day, working without supervision, supervising other personnel, having the combination to the safe, and other managerial responsibilities.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that many students who admit to a somewhat irregular attendance record, claim that they never miss work or arrive there late. While it can be argued that employees know that such behaviour would result in dismissal, there seems to be more at play here than fear of losing one's job since students often speak with pride of the responsibilities they carry out in the workplace.

the institution. While many still appreciate the structure and routine that school provides in their lives, others are beginning to feel the incongruity of having to follow rules and regulations meant to facilitate the management of children while being told that they have to begin making adult decisions. As I reflect on this I am reminded of Lang's (1984) contention that our home is our second body and I wonder if, for young people, school is not also a second body. If so, it appears that many of the students have outgrown this second body, that this body no longer fits.

Evidence that many grade twelve students have outgrown the structure of the institution comes through in various conversations. Patrick (interview 022) comments that "you are at a point in your life where you think you are an adult and everybody else thinks you are a kid." This feeling is further highlighted when, in a discussion group conversation, talk turns to how school makes you feel impotent, how school keeps you down. It is not just that "some teachers treat you like you are a little kid," but that it does not allow you to be creative (from field notes, May 6, 1998). On the surveys, a number of students write that, other than teaching them discipline, the school has not prepared them for life as an adult. As one student (survey 003) puts it, "Everything I've learned has been from outside of the school, from talking to other adults and learning from them." Jason (interview 033) goes so far as to say, "I think our school system needs to be changed. We're working to complete high

school instead of preparing for our future and I think it's supposed to be the other way around For those of us who know what we want to do, we're wasting an incredible amount of time." Few feel that school is still an important part of their lives which, for some, results in mixed feelings of both empowerment and abandonment -- empowerment because of the decisions they make for the future and abandonment because they feel the school has not lived up to its mission.

Perhaps, it could be argued, students are idealistic and naive and that these feelings of disillusionment are a natural part of growing up and learning that institutions cannot always meet the expectations of the people they serve and are made up of individuals with varying degrees of commitment. This view that a necessary part of growing up, as well as the transition inherent in that process, is to re-evaluate our perceptions would be supported by Turner's contention that during the liminal phase young people "are 'being grown' into a new post-liminal state of being"(1977, p.37). It also could be argued, then, that there needs to be a range of support for students within the institution such as the spiritual guides and mentors provided to young people in pre-industrialized societies. Perhaps this is what one student (survey 075) has in mind when, in response to the question about how school could better prepare students for the next phase in their lives, he/she writes, "Not be so hard on students and try to understand them more." For, at a time when grade twelve students are faced with

uncertainty and pressure, lack of support from the people who structure the day-to-day routines of school, cannot help but have a negative impact on the liminal experience.

As I reflect on this, I am reminded of a conversation with one of the secretaries in the office at Eagle Spirit Secondary. I have just finished a number of interviews during which I listen as students speak of the turmoil in their family lives. Coming out into the main office for a break, I mention to Greta that I am astonished at how difficult life is for many students. She catches me off guard with her reply. Even though she deals with these students on a daily basis and is likely privy to personal information about them that most are not, she responds with the usual comments about choices and how difficult life had been for her but she had had to make hard choices. As I listen to her I wonder how many more adults in this school feel the same way? How many feel that, for those students who are struggling, it's just a matter of getting your act together? How many are oblivious to the emotional stress that many students are under? And how is this experienced by students? (from field notes, May 14, 1998)

From my conversations with students, it becomes apparent that the ways in which the personnel of the institution impact upon the liminal experience are often directly connected to the student/teacher relationship. At a time when many students are experiencing feelings of uncertainty and pressure, few seem to feel that their teachers are 'there' for them. Infrequently some

speak glowingly of teachers who have been very supportive. La Shonda (interview 005) speaks of Alex Webster, her English teacher, and Ashley Gorham, her History teacher, who "sort of set a fire in my heart for history." But one is left wondering whether or not she would have felt the same if she had not shared their passion for those subjects. On the other hand, Jim Martin, another English teacher, has been instrumental in encouraging Jeff (interview 009), a student who tells me he is good with his hands, to go on the BCIT after graduation to become an electrical technician for airplanes.

However, without naming specific teachers, many students do not feel that teachers are supportive. Crystal says,

I don't know, it's not really the courses it is the way the teacher treats you, the way they put it to you, see who you are, judge you and everything One teacher, whose name I would rather not mention, didn't take me seriously because me and a couple of friends don't put ourselves out academically and he feels that who your friends will be, you'll be like that. If you ask for help, this teacher will not help you. [He has actually said that, I ask.] Ya. I've told other teachers and they say, 'you don't know how much that hurts us to hear that because there are teachers who love their job.' It makes [them] look bad. If you don't like your job why are you doing it? Don't make us feel like garbage and feel down on what we are going to do in life. [Teachers] are supposed to help get us to know what we want to in our life, not put us down.

Crystal's feelings are echoed by another student (survey 084) who, commenting about teachers, writes, "All but one make me want to be a better person. That one makes me feel like nothing." Jason (interview 033) comments that while some

teachers fill the role of a mentor, "some, I think, are just waiting for their retirement so they can get a full pension and they have no care for the job at all," a feeling echoed by a number of other students.

Two people students should feel are 'there' for them are the counsellor and the principal yet, even here, many did not feel supported. Rod (interview 017) says that he can't speak for all the students, but he doesn't feel that he has received support from the administration at the school. He admits that when he does not like a teacher, he has a tendency to show it, so he

can understand the teacher's attitude. They're there to teach and they get paid to teach you but they're not there to cop an attitude toward you, at all. They're not there to sit on their high horse and go 'I'm teacher, do what I say.' When you go to see the principal about it he doesn't understand at all, he just says, 'you should listen to your teachers'-- end of discussion. [Rod tells me that he does not like the way things are dealt with at school.] If you get in trouble, Mr. Lee calls the parents and the parents come in to talk. I think if it can't be dealt with between the person and Mr. Lee, okay, then bring the parents in but just notifying the parents so you get in shit, that's not the way, that's going to solve nothing at all, it's just going to open a whole can of worms at home that you just don't really want to deal with.

At a time when students are being told that they are about to enter the adult world, the institution still relies on the parents to enforce the policies and rules set up to manage children.

In a very candid discussion group session in January, students, stressed out over semester finals and university

applications, voice a litany of complaints. While it can be argued that these complaints stem from their own angst over exams, there is group consensus about information not being passed on to students in time, undue emphasis on attendance, having to "nag" about getting reference letters in time, and lengthy waits while the person they are waiting to see converses on the telephone with a friend. One student bitterly comments, "Ms Taylor is more interested in her golf swing than she is in students." In all, the general feeling of the group is that staff members, who because of their position should be viewed with respect, seem more interested in their personal lives or own agendas than in being there for students (from field notes January 8, 1998).¹¹

While, other than students' comments, there is no evidence to support their claim that teachers are more interested in their personal lives than they are in students, my observations in various classrooms and the school in general do suggest that, even with grade twelve students, some teachers hold firmly to the power that their position offers and are not eager to share that power with these 'near-adults.' In a Science classroom where almost all students are extremely attentive and hard-working during the lesson, a teacher threatens to "hold" these grade twelve students at the lunch bell because they are not

¹¹ One week after this conversation, the counsellor, Diane Taylor, told me that she knows "all the students in the group and has a really good rapport with them." Needless to say, given the conversation outlined above, I was surprised by her comment (from field notes, January 15, 1998).

paying attention when, near the end of the period, an endless stream of announcements comes over the P.A. system (from field notes, February 10, 1998).

In another, a modified English class, the students are marginally engaged -- some are eating and drinking, some talking, some simply stare into space, a few take notes. When a student asks a question, before responding the teacher says sarcastically, "It's amazing that I can hear you when Tina and Lisa are talking to each other so close to me. Amazing!" Yet a few minutes later when another student complains that she is not getting any help, the teacher says firmly but with a smile, "Be careful what you say. I'm really sensitive." There is an air of good-natured bantering and students seem to enjoy the back and forth, yet there is a definite sense that the teacher holds the power and sets the rules about what he can say and what others are allowed to say. This perception is reinforced when near the end of the period, a student on academic probation asks to have her contract signed. The teacher looks at it and reads aloud, "Application," then says to the student, "you don't even know what that means!" "Yes, I do!" the student responds. The teacher continues, "It doesn't mean carrying coffee around, it means actually doing some work!" (from field notes January 19, 1998).

While in many grade twelve classrooms students are taken seriously and treated with respect, that is not so in all cases. From my observations, it appears that the higher a student's academic level of achievement, the more respect they receive

from teachers. Teachers do not appear to take into consideration the fact that students, who are not hard working, may be dealing with other problems in their lives. For the most part, academic achievement and good work habits determine how students are treated. This observation is supported by the difference in comments about teachers made by IB students and 'regular' students. For the most part, IB students claim that teachers treat them differently, a claim that is supported by a comment from one student (survey 020) who writes, "Make teachers [be] involved with every student, not just IB students." Cherie (interview 03) a partial IB¹² student, says that "in other courses, I don't think the teachers respect you as much." There is a sense that the university-bound students in these classes are dedicated and hard working with clearly defined goals, therefore are deserving of respect. In other classes, such as the business class Crystal describes, the modified English class and the previously mentioned "less challenging" Law 12 class, students are not taken as seriously and many students along with many teachers "put in time" until the end, neither seeming to really want to be there.

At the other end of the spectrum is Wilf Mackenzie, better known as 'Chef' to students in the Cafeteria Program. In every interview with students from the Cafeteria Program, students sing his praises. Todd (interview 013) tells me that Chef has

¹² Some students, not enrolled in the full International Baccalaureate Program, may register for one or two classes if their marks are high enough and space allows.

had a lot of influence on him. "When I see him teaching in a classroom, he gets frustrated with kids but at the same time, he loves it. It's great to see him." I ask Rod (interview 017) if any teachers have been an influence on him. "No," he says, "they pretty much did their job. They didn't go out of their way to show me the joys. It was more here is some stuff, this is what you learn, do it, and like me or not, you've got to be here. [However,] Chef takes his time and shows you, spends time with you. [It's] a more personal relationship." Chef has been an influence, "in a big way," on Rod. In our conversation, Rod goes on to say that Chef "does whatever he can to help you out in any possible way, shape, or form. He's an all round nice guy. He understands where us teens are coming from, surprisingly enough It's like family down there Without Chef things pretty much wouldn't get done and we wouldn't have a program." Perhaps Megan (interview 034) speaks for all of Chef's students. "If I hadn't gone into Cafeteria, I probably wouldn't be here," says Megan (interview 034). I ask her if Chef is like a spiritual guide or mentor and she replies,

For sure. Anything you need he'll give you or try to give you -- whether it's mental health or physical health. I had a friend pass away last November and all through that time Chef just wanted to know that I was okay and he would say 'just go back to the bakery section and sit by yourself and have your time,' and I think that was the best thing for me. He doesn't work on a class basis but individually works with you. Once you get to know him and know where he's coming from it's no problem to discuss anything with him, he's a very trustful guy. He'll put energy out to help anybody who goes to him wanting to get help. He's there to make people feel good about themselves. I have to say he's kept me in school this year. At the

beginning of the year it was kind of hard I have to say the Cafeteria kids feel like family At the beginning of the year I wasn't into letting people know how I was feeling because I wasn't secure with what was going on and Chef said, so many times, 'come in, even if it's not your block, and you can sit in my office, or you can cook, do whatever you want.' And that's what I did. I think that's what kept me in school because I was at the point that I just didn't want to be here anymore because for some of the teachers at this school, school is strictly school and do the work and you'll get your mark. If you're interested in the subject and put the energy out, you'll get it back, but if you're not... Every school should have a Chef. Yesterday he told me, 'we'll have to sit down and talk about what you want to do next year. What do you want to do?' He wants everyone to have goals to accomplish and be happy. He's helped many people get through culinary school. A student from last year had financial problems and he gave her the money. I'm sure she'll pay him back, but to do that for somebody is amazing, to have someone not have what they need to get where they want to go and to give it to them, that's amazing.

There can be little doubt that Chef, acting as a spiritual guide and mentor, has a significant impact on the liminal experiences of students fortunate enough to be part of the Cafeteria 'family' circle.

The impact of the institution on the liminal experience extends beyond the relationships between students and teachers. As part of the structure of the institution, rituals play an important role. For grade twelve students, the most important rituals have to do with graduation. While students may celebrate in ways not connected to the institution, the public face of commencement/graduation is controlled by the school. Not only does the school determine who will graduate,¹³ it sets the tone

¹³ While the Ministry of Education determines that students need 52 academic credits to graduate, outside of the provincial government final exams, the individual school determines students' grades and therefore who will receive credits for

for the rituals surrounding this milestone in students' lives.

It is the day before graduation and I am meeting with the 'regulars' in the discussion group. After preliminary banter, the talk turns to Commencement. Vincent Cheung has been chosen Class Valedictorian, not by the students, but by the Principal and the Grade 12 Counsellor. At first, most cannot put name and face together. Finally someone identifies Vincent as "that computer geek" and the others make comments of recognition. Several in the group voice their disapproval. It seems Vincent was chosen because he is the 'best' student. However, several point out that Vincent has no social skills and is not even going to Grad. The Class Valedictorian, someone who is supposed to speak for all the grads, according to the students, has announced, "I am doing my duty by giving my speech but I don't care about anything else." Mixed in with the grumbling is the comment that the definition of Class Valedictorian should be revisited. "This is representative of how this school has worked for a long time," is the final comment on the subject. (from field notes, June 4, 1998)

Obviously students feel that something in which they should have had some input, has once again been decided by those in power. As one student (survey 056) states, "I think the gradu-

courses.

ation activities . . . should be planned more for what the students want to do, not the staff." In view of the fact that so many students tell me that they feel little connection to the commencement ceremony and have little or no interest in it -- a fairly commonly held view that, surely, has not escaped the attention of teachers and administrators -- it seems strange that student input has been ignored.

It is June 5, 1998, Grad Night, 6:45 p.m. When I arrive at the church that has been rented for the Eagle Spirit Commencement Ceremonies, I cannot help but notice that the negative feelings voiced over the past several months seem to have disappeared. The Commencement Ceremonies are being held in the sanctuary of a local church since there is no space at Eagle Spirit Secondary large enough to accommodate such a sizable crowd even though each graduate has been limited to three guest invitations.

As I arrive for the ceremonies, graduates are milling about on the parking lot. Everyone is in a celebratory mood as families take photos of the grads dressed in their caps and gowns. Although it was printed in the various grad newsletters (and also noted on the program) that, out of respect for the church, there was to be no smoking on the premises, including the grounds, I notice one girl (who looks like she may be about 19 and not one of the grade twelves I recognize) smoking on the parking lot.

Even though most students said they felt that Commencement was not something they were looking forward to, most seem very excited. Phaedra is wearing small white flowers tucked behind her ears. Since it is a very warm evening, a few are wearing shorts under their gowns. There is much laughter, many hugs, an almost visible sense of bonding. Perhaps, I think, the excitement is contagious. Many of the students with whom I have developed a close relationship over the course of this study -- Phaedra, La Shonda, Jane, Ed, Drudi, Erina, Cherie, Briana, Rachael, Heather (to name a few) -- greet me warmly and we hug. They seem delighted that I am here to share this moment with them. I am presenting one of the scholarships tonight and, as I watch them, I cannot help but hope that one of them will be the recipient. I realize that, after spending a year together, I almost feel as if some of them are my own children (so much for the 'objective researcher'!).

Inside, some family members have been here since 6:00 to 'reserve' seats for other family members. Diane Taylor, the Grade 12 Counsellor, and Rochelle Bayfield, the Vice Principal, are busy arranging last minute details. The Senior Jazz Band is entertaining the waiting crowd. It strikes me that there is something strangely incongruous about the Jazz Band and

the red, white, and blue helium-filled balloons under the large "I am the vine, and you are the branches" banner to the left of the stage. Other than the alternating blue and white letters that spell out 'Eagle Spirit Grad', there are no other decorations or flowers. It occurs to me that this is strange, given the profusion of flowers in gardens right now. There does not seem to have been much attempt to make this space their own. I wonder if that was a requirement of the church or an excuse on the part of the organizers. As the thought crosses my mind, I wonder, too, if the cynicism of some of the grads has been contagious.

Looking at the program, I notice that of the 270 grade twelve students, only 247 are listed as graduates. I notice, too, that Sean, Sophie, and Patrick are not listed. I reflect back on our conversations and wonder what they are feeling tonight. Obviously, Sophie's bargaining and cajoling did not pay off this time. Given her comments about not wanting anyone to know if she did not graduate, I wonder what she is doing this evening. And Glynis? It occurs to me that Chad seemed reconciled to his fate but surely Patrick, now recovered from his lengthy illness, must be feeling a sense of loss since none of this was his doing.

Finally, the evening begins. After the staff

enters, to applause, the graduates file in, in pairs, to the sounds of Pomp and Circumstance. As I listen, I wonder how many graduates over the years have processed into their commencement ceremonies to this tune. The selection is played over and over, with pauses in between, since no one has thought to tape the music to have it run continuously until all of the graduates have entered. I am not sure why but it is strangely disruptive.

After the singing of O Canada, Principal Bob Lee gives the Opening Remarks. He tells students that all of their experiences at Eagle Spirit Secondary have been a means for learning about themselves. After congratulating the students on their accomplishments, he leaves the students with five things to think about: "Know, value and appreciate yourself; choose your mistakes; choose to be present and fully alive in this moment; be kind;" and finally, "take risks."

The usual greetings are offered by district personnel, followed by the presentation of awards and scholarships. Seventy students share in scholarships worth over \$40,000. As the names are called, most of the students in the discussion group receive scholarships of varying amounts, a number of them more than one. A number of other students with whom I've been in conversation over the past few months are also called

forward. Ed, who was worried about not receiving a scholarship, receives one for \$500 and I know that he will be disappointed that it is not more substantial. I am delighted that Cherie is the recipient of the scholarship that I am presenting.

Vincent Cheung, the Class Valedictorian, wins a scholarship worth \$18,000 (over four years), awards from both the Math and Science Departments, and the Governor-General's Bronze Medal. He rises to give his Valedictory Address. He thanks the administration and teachers at Eagle Spirit as well as his parents and grandparents for "their devotion" over the years. The remainder of his speech is about "the valuable tools and training" and extra-curricular experiences students have received during their time at the school. He concludes with remarks that students should not neglect their humanity as they move out into the world. As I listen to his speech, it occurs to me that this is a very good speech for a public speaking competition but offers little connection to how the students have experienced their final year of secondary schooling. There is nothing that speaks of memories, of highlights of the year, of personal connections. I cannot help but remember the comments made by various people in the discussion group.

After a musical presentation, the graduates are

presented. I join several staff members taking turns calling out the names and reading a short message about each graduate that parents have submitted in advance. Is anyone really listening, I wonder. Some graduates are greeted with loud cheers, whistles and applause; others subdued, polite applause. Naomi, victim of a recent car accident, is wheeled across the platform in her wheel chair and receives a standing ovation from fellow students. As students cross the platform, receive handshakes and certificates, it is obvious that, for many, this moment is something to be celebrated. And then it is over. Caps fly everywhere. Ken Nevins, one of the vice principals, wears a cap from one of the students.

The Recessional is over very quickly and students are milling about, greeting friends and family, shouting to be heard over the loud din -- Ed and his mother; Jane, Phaedra, La Shonda, Drudi, and Ken; Kareena and Crystal; Briana and her dad -- not a trace of the cynicism so apparent at the last discussion group session. (from field notes, June 5, 1998)

When it is over, I reflect on the ritual itself. I cannot help but notice how similar it is to every high school commencement ceremony I have ever attended, including my own all those years ago. I am struck by how little the ceremony has to do with students. Certainly many students, over the past several months,

have contended that commencement was for the parents not for the students. Megan (interview 034) tells me "I'm not going to commencement. Getting a piece of paper that says I've done something means nothing to me. Knowing that I did it and being able to say I did it, means something. A piece of paper saying that you've completed grade 12 means nothing." Yet in this space tonight, students are truly living in the moment. Is it that, in the end, it really does not matter that the institution controls this ritual and students have little or no input? It appears that students suddenly get caught up in all those traditional, 'tried and true' pieces of this ritual and forget their claims that commencement is really for the parents. It appears that the feelings of disconnectedness common in those days leading up to commencement -- feelings that may have a negative influence on liminality -- are replaced, that evening, by feelings of connectedness -- feelings that may have a positive influence on liminality.

Another way in which the institution impacts upon the transitional experiences of grade twelve students is through the courses offered. For some students, it is a matter of the unavailability of programs that will lead to their career first choice. At her previous school, Megan (interview 034) had taken fashion courses and Spanish. Her goal was to become a fashion designer. Eagle Spirit Secondary does not offer either fashion courses or Spanish so Megan switched to the Cafeteria Program. This fall, Megan plans to enrol in the one year baking course at

Vancouver City College although she does not have definite plans about where that might lead and still speaks optimistically of a career in fashion designing.

It is not just the courses offered but the lack of flexibility with course requirements that some students find frustrating as there is little consideration of students prior knowledge. Wendy (interview 023) tells me that she will be glad to be out of school and be able to do what she wants, not what the school thinks she should do. The school puts you in things without asking you, they just put you in it, she tells me. Wendy wanted to take Sewing 12 since she learned to sew when she was eleven years old. She has even sewn wedding gowns. When I ask her why she is not taking Sewing 12, Wendy tells me it is because the school will not let her. In Sewing 11, she is making "the little things that [she] has already done. I'm used to making formals and stuff. I made my brother a tuxedo vest and bow tie and now I'm making him a jacket. I'm used to making hard things. Now I'm making little shirts and stuff. [There was no consideration of the fact that you already know how to sew well? I ask.] No. My parents came in and said, 'well, look at what she has made,' and it was 'don't care, she's taking this.' They see one thing and one thing only." What could have been a positive experience for Wendy as she worked on her grad gown is a semester of putting in time.

Along with the courses offered, the content of the courses also has an impact on how students experience this 'waiting'

time. Sophie (interview 031) tells me that school prepares you for going to school and that "the reason you have to take all these courses is just to learn to do essays and just to actually go to class." Sophie, who is almost nineteen, is frustrated with school. "I'm this close to just pitching it this year," she tells me.

Do you want to know what I'm learning right now in my science and technology class? There are sixteen year olds in the class. We read for 15 minutes and then we study words. We read a word sheet and answer questions or watch a movie. I'm learning nothing. In cooking class I'm learning [to cook] different things In math, it's just like 'duh' to me. It just seems like everything I'm learning is so stupid to me. I'm doing it anyway but I don't see the point It's just that kids who aren't doing well have so many options. There's always a dumber class you can take but those dumber classes are actually pointless. The kids in this school who are going to actually learn something are the kids in IB or some of the regular classes where they're actually doing work but all the dumber classes, you learn nothing, it's just to get you by. Maybe all those kids should go into work experience.

The one course that has the most impact on the liminal experiences of grade twelve students is a compulsory course. While various students hold strong views about different courses that they may not like or be struggling with, the course about which students save their most vitriolic comments is the CAPP (Career and Personal Planning) course -- a course whose title suggests that it is meant to prepare students for post-secondary life. When asked on the survey about the courses that have prepared them for life after graduation, one student (045A) responds, " . . . certainly not CAPP!" Another (survey 052A)

puts it even more bluntly, " . . . CAPP is crap!" "CAPP doesn't do anything for you. It's a waste of time and it takes up time and gives you less options for classes," writes another student (survey 068). Perhaps the comments by this student (survey 005) sum up the feelings of most grade twelve students about the CAPP course: "CAPP is a useless course taught by bafoons [sic]. The fact that it is a required course makes me nautious [sic] and the idea that it could keep me from graduating makes me angry."

Heather (interview 004) tells me that she does not think students have been prepared for grade twelve whether in the area of course selection or life in general. "Every second day of the last semester of grade 11 we had CAPP and that's the perfect opportunity to learn different things and [instead] it's a waste of time. [does school miss out on an opportunity, I ask] I think so. We need more hands on things. Lots of people learn out of textbooks but lots of people don't. School only teaches you book smarts, life teaches you common sense. I've learned that it's common sense you need for life."

The idea that the school misses out on an opportunity to teach students about life is echoed by a number of students who tell me that the CAPP course could have been helpful if it had been better planned and point out several areas in which the course does not meet their needs. One student (survey 114A) suggests it should include a "money planning course, a course that prepares you for living on your own, affording everything, preparing you for real life situations." "Have courses on every-

day life things like balancing a chequebook, how mortgages work, etc., and other things adults deal with," writes another student (survey 080). "Hold courses on independence and how a person should start off after grade 12," writes still another (024). Although work experience is part of the grade eleven CAPP course, many students think that work experience is one of the things that would help them be better prepared for life after secondary school. One student (survey 022) suggests, "Give all students work experience, not just Co-op students." Another (survey 037) says simply, "Mandatory co-op."

While a certain amount of the anxiety students feel as they move through the liminal phase of their transition from secondary school is to be expected, there is no doubt that many students do not feel that they are prepared to deal with everyday adult life. While the grade twelve CAPP program does include such things as making career choices and writing resumes, students do not appear to feel prepared for life on their own. School should "teach [students] more about what they actually need to know in life," writes a student (survey 003) in May -- a statement that implies school should offer more than academic support. In earlier times, young people learned these things by being part of the adult world through a more gradual transition process, not one that has the artificiality of a ritual at the end of years of being "shielded from the adult world."¹⁴

¹⁴ it is interesting to note that the argument could be made that young people grow up much faster today, sexually mature

Certainly it can be argued that students have access to the Choices Program in the Career Centre as well as counsellors to help them make career choices,¹⁵ although many do not feel they have the information to make the 'right' decisions for their future. But it may not be information they lack. Given the many less than flattering comments about school personnel, it seems more likely that, although they may not realize it, students do not feel they have the guidance they need to be confident about their decisions. And this is part of their anxiety about not being prepared to deal with life in the adult world.

"How might the school system better prepare secondary students for leaving school?" question number six on the survey asks. "Be a little more creative and spirited. Let us leave with hope and positivity, not worries and pessimism," responds one student (survey 010). This highlights that fine line between treating grade twelve students as children and assuming they should be responsible enough to make adult decisions. From my many conversations throughout the year and from the survey comments, it would appear that many students feel that, for the most part, the institution and its personnel, namely teaching staff, are not 'there' for them when they need understanding and

earlier, have far more privileges and material goods than previous generations. Yet, other than those adolescents who have responsibilities in the work place, they are not seen as 'ready' for a place in the adult world.

¹⁵ However, it should be noted that a number of students completing the two surveys complained that they did not have any information about courses needed for particular jobs or post-secondary institution requirements.

support. With some exceptions, namely those students who excel academically and those who are fortunate enough to have Chef as their mentor, a large number of students seem to feel abandoned by the institution they have come to depend upon for thirteen years. While disconnecting, whether from the institution or parents, is part of the process of adolescent transition, the perception of lack of support creates a somewhat negative impact on the liminal experiences of these grade twelve students.

Exploring how *sacra* influences liminal experiences

Sacra, the things that are shown or otherwise conveyed to those in transition as a way of guiding the passage and preparing them for the post-liminal state, are transmitted in a number of ways. *Sacra* provide those in transition with opportunities to reflect on their culture and society, revealing the culture to the liminary and changing the inner-most nature of the person in transition. For adolescents, the messages are conveyed not only through the instructions of those already part of the adult world but through their actions as well. Certainly the expectations of others are intended to guide young people toward successful adult life. The institution, also, through its course offerings, rituals, and relationships presents a picture of what it means to be successful in life in the adult world. The media, too, tell students how certain pathways will lead to acceptance in the adult world.

But what is presented and what is received or understood may be vastly different. For example, referring to the conversations about student/teacher relationships recounted previously, it is most unlikely that teachers intentionally conveyed negative messages to students. Yet, in a number of situations, this is exactly what was received. When these actions are seen as *sacra*, what messages are conveyed to students about the adult world? For some students these particular *sacra* raise questions about whether or not they are capable of being successful as adults and, in a time already coloured by uncertainty, some do not feel hopeful about the future. As well, since *sacra* are intended to prepare a young person for life in the adult world, will these students take into their adult life, the idea that most teachers do not care about students and are only interested, as several students claim, in their pay cheques and pensions? If so, as adults will they be supportive of increasing funding for education should that need arise? As parents, will they be supportive of their children's teachers? And will these particular *sacra* then be passed to their children?

Another of the messages conveyed through the institution is that, if you do not go to university, you will not be successful in life. "Make students feel that university is not a pressure and the 'most significant issue.' Let students feel free to make their own decisions without post-secondary being the ultimate 'right' choice if you want to be successful." Heather (interview

004) tells me that when she first told her teachers that she was not going to university, they asked, "'why not?' not as in, 'what's wrong with you,' but almost; like why are you getting such good grades if you aren't going to use them . . . The attitude is that you must be failing or you would be going to university." "There is too much pressure about attending universities," writes one student (survey 013). Crystal (interview 018) tells me that, if you are not academically inclined, people

think we will never do anything with our lives We're just out to have a good time We all do work hard in our own way; some of us are more academic than others. I am not a good academic person but I have other talents. It may not look like we're working hard but in our own way we are working extremely hard A lot of people don't take me seriously because I am not a very academic person.

That idea that anything other than university is of lesser importance is inherent in Jeff's (interview 009) comments when he says, "I never really wanted to go to university. I always wanted to learn a trade, not go into the big things. [big things? I ask] Doctor, dentist. I want to work on cars, electronics." Jeff and many other students receive the sacra that only academically inclined people are taken seriously. Implicit in this message about the adult world is the message that there is only one pathway to being successful as an adult. Implicit also is the message that those men and women who work in the trades and services necessary to maintain the society are not doing "the big things."

Certainly these sacra present the message that the adult world is far more 'black and white' than it is, that there is a right way to do things. This is a message frequently reinforced by the media, as the following newspaper editorial attests. "When is a grad not a grad" reads the headline of the editorial in *The Chilliwack Progress* (June 8, 1999, p. A4). The writer is upset that all members of the grade twelve class of one of the local secondary schools have taken part in the graduation ceremonies. "It is wrong," is the pronouncement. "It is a dishonour to the students who did study, learn, and pass the challenges of 12 years of school, to allow those who did not, to walk across that hallowed stage. They didn't earn it. Not yet." As I read this, I note that many secondary schools are now calling the end of grade twelve ceremony 'School Leaving' rather than 'Commencement' and I think of Sophie and others who may not be graduating but are leaving. In School Leaving ceremonies, 'the piece of paper' coveted so desperately by Sophie, does not proclaim that the student is graduating but that he or she is a member of the graduating class.

But what is the message in an editorial such as the above? The writer at *The Chilliwack Progress* says that it tells students they can put little effort into school but still "be disguised as a graduate." The argument is that such an approach does not prepare students for "the proverbial 'real world'." The final contention made in the editorial is that "we need to create a true Commencement for our young adults where they

actually are starting another phase of life." Is the transition from secondary schooling to the adult world tainted or somehow diminished without that "piece of paper," as so many of the graduates referred to graduation? Does this mean that those less academically inclined students who have completed thirteen years of schooling but not acquired the necessary credits to graduate are not prepared for the 'real world?'

It is during my conversations with students about graduation that the idea of the messages about the adult world become especially evident.

It is early May and this particular day, many of the regulars in the discussion group have other commitments. As well, our regular meeting space is in use, so the five girls and I move around until we find an empty room. This is really informal and we don't bother to put the desks in a circle as we usually do. We are just kind of grouped together, some sitting on top of the desks, others sitting backwards in the desks. Graduation is less than a month away. The discussion begins with comments about school and how school makes you feel impotent, how teachers treat you like an adult one minute and a child the next, how "school keeps you down" and graduation will bring freedom. As talk turns to graduation, I ask how most people feel about the whole idea of graduation. Perhaps because none of the guys are here, the

discussion is open and frank. Erina and Rachael tell me of girls they know who are planning to lose their virginity on Graduation Night. The boyfriends of these girls have rented hotel rooms and bought champagne. The rooms will be lit with candles. When I ask why, Briana says that it is one night that the girls don't have to be home all night and they want losing their virginity to be a special occasion, something planned, rather than a sudden moment of passion. As I listen, I reflect on the number of girls who, in the interviews, have talked about finding the perfect dress ("like a ball gown"), the shoes that match, the hair and nail appointments, and I comment that it almost sounds like some people are planning a wedding and wedding night without the actual wedding ceremony. There is a general agreement that, for some, this is what it is like. Listening to the discussion, I cannot help but wonder if this is one more of the inflated expectations surrounding graduation. Where, exactly, does this fit in the transition from adolescence to adulthood? (from field notes, May 6, 1998)

As I reflect on this conversation, I remember that every year the large daily newspapers feature articles and photographs of young women from various secondary schools shopping for the 'perfect' graduation gown along with young men renting tuxedos

and limos. Recently an organization has undertaken the task of ensuring that young women of limited means can afford a gown like everyone else. I remember also that in previous times young girls from families of wealth and position made their debut into the adult world. The events that were part of this ritual included teas and parties. As well, the 'perfect' ball gown was an important part of being presented to society. While this ritual was not part of the lives of those girls outside of this circle, it was something that many girls dreamed of even though it was not part of their reality. I remember also that, in many families, a young woman's wedding replaced the debut as a ritual connected with a girl's transition into adulthood.

How do the rituals around graduation impact on the liminal experiences of grade twelve students, I wonder. In a world more sensitive to stereotyping gender roles, a world that has moved beyond seeing women as property, a world of 'frozen transition,' what rituals do young women seek that will be a sign that they have moved into the adult world? For some young women, is losing one's virginity (in a setting that includes candle light and champagne) seen as a ritual to signify entrance into adulthood?

Exploring how *communitas* and flow influence liminal experiences

A fourth sphere of influence in the liminal experiences of grade twelve students originates in the connections that are formed between those in transition -- *communitas*. Turner (1967,

1977) described *communitas* as the communion between liminaries. Also within this fourth sphere of influence is flow, those moments of total involvement when action and awareness merge. It would appear that some of the highlights of the liminal experiences are those moments of flow, which are turned into memories through *communitas*. Although flow may be transmitted and shared through *communitas*, ultimately flow stems from an inner response. As noted earlier, the influence of *communitas* and flow is evident predominantly toward the end of the liminal phase of the transition from secondary schooling to the adult world. In particular, it is noticeable as graduation approaches and the school year ends. During this time, it is possible to identify what Turner describes as "flow-elicitors."

Early in the school year, there is little evidence of particular connections being formed between students, other than those formed in some cases because people are in the same program. In particular, students in the IB Program have activities outside of school time that encourage a solidarity within the group. Teachers of IB subjects usually join in these activities. Similarly, students in the Cafeteria Program come together for out-of-school activities although, while Chef sometimes helps with the organization of these activities, he does not attend. However, for the most part, since school days this year are much like the ones in previous years, early in the school year, friends are no more or less important than in other years. Into the second semester, this seems to change.

While the influence of friends on the liminal phase varies from student to student (as with all aspects of liminality), conversations with the students reveal a noticeable change in the desire to make connections once we are into the second semester. In April, Wendy (interview 023) tells me that "friends are more important now [than they were in grade 11]. I guess maybe because we'll be graduating We won't be seeing one another, and it is like the last chance to be with them all." Before this year, says Crystal (interview 018), "I didn't really care about having friends. But this year is my last year of high school and I want friends when I'm out of high school. I have become really close to them." Todd (interview 013), also, notes the change that has taken place. "Last year I had a couple of close friends and the rest were just acquaintances that I would see out on the weekend. My acquaintances are now friends; we have a good time together." Bruce (interview 009) tells me that you get to know your friends a lot more in grade twelve. "Before they were [people] I grew up with, went to parties with once in a while but now I am always with them. We have done so many things in groups -- camping, fishing, things like that." As if to explain why friendships are different this year, he comments, "We might not see one another for a long time," then adds, "We took our friends for granted before." Acquaintances, once taken for granted, become friends as the end nears. That longing to make more permanent connections seems to extend beyond one's immediate social circle.

At a discussion group session, students lament the fact that, in this school where there are so many different programs,¹⁶ it is impossible to bring the grad class together. Glynis notes that at her previous school, where there are fewer programs, everyone was really "together." Both La Shonda and Glynis note that they have found themselves becoming friends with others in the grad class. "People I wouldn't even have talked to before," says Glynis. The problem is, says, La Shonda, "everyone is so spread out" (from field notes, April 2, 1998).

The lack of unity in the grad class is a comment that is repeated many times in both the interviews and on the surveys. A student (survey 043) writes, "I think that the [grad] activities would be a lot more fun if our grad class was more of a unit and more enthusiastic than it is." Another (survey 062) comments, "Our grad class does not have enough spirit and most grad activities have been a waste of time because of it." During my conversation with Sandy, I mention that other students have told me that the grad class is not very unified. She agrees, saying, "People don't mingle. They stay in their own little groups."

In our conversations, students frequently indicate that their friends are becoming more important than they were in the past, although this is not the case with all students. There seems to be both a pulling away from friends -- becoming more of 'your own person' -- and a coming together -- seeking the support that peers can offer. Julia (interview 012) says that

¹⁶ e.g., IB, Cafeteria, Co-op, etc.

last year she had really good friends, "but this year everyone is kind of spreading apart." On the other hand, her friends are becoming increasingly important to her. As she explains, "Your friends are the only ones who are going to be there. The teachers aren't going to be there but my friends will be. So I'm kind of sticking with them."

Students begin 'sticking together' partly because of the support this brings during this time of uncertainty. The idea that friends become more important in your last year of high school because, after this year, you may be living on your own and it will be friends who are around next year, not family, is echoed by several students, including Sam (interview 029). As Tara (024) explains, "We're all in the same boat. At least you know that everyone is feeling what you're feeling." She further comments that she is sorry that she didn't get to know more people. Perhaps she thinks that a larger circle of friends would offer even more support.

Students seem to look for ways to connect to their peers in an effort to establish something that will last longer than the dwindling school year. Yet, strangely enough, graduation activities, which one might view as a rallying event for student connections, are both a connecting and a disconnecting event. Sandy (interview 011), who is on the Grad Committee, says that the committee has "tried to get people to do activities, not parties but activities, and that didn't happen and that was disappointing." To Sandy, grad is important because it is a

chance to get "everyone together for a last time before we all go our separate ways." On the other hand, students tell me that, unlike other years and at other schools, no grad events have been planned this year. "Last year they had a lot of spirit," says Beth (interview 035). "They went to a basketball game, a hockey game, went bowling, went ice skating. This year we went to a basketball game but . . . the turnout wasn't great. We went bowling one day and it was horrible." She does not mention other events that the Grad Committee has tried to initiate.

What I hear in our conversations is a sense that students are feeling as if something important is slipping away, a sense that connections must be made before it is too late. As a result, graduation becomes the focal point for connecting. Graduation is to be the culminating moment that will live on in remembered friendships. On the survey, a student (070) writes that the plans for graduation are "pathetic, we're summing up the last 5 years in one evening." To the same question, another student (025) replies, "[It's] o.k., but I have too many expectations that it will probably not live up to."

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, it is at graduation that I see evidence of flow, as described by Turner (1967, 1977). While there are obviously moments throughout the year when individuals are totally involved, when action and awareness merge, these are moments few others witness. However, Commencement Night is the first time I see almost the entire graduating class exhibiting flow. Thoughts that this is an event for the parents only have

vanished. All of the negative comments about the ceremonies uttered over the past several months are history. Now is the moment of arriving in a new place, of celebrating, of feeling confident. Now is the moment of recognizing that you have made it, you have grasped the brass ring. On the faces of the students I see none of the uncertainty voiced in our conversations. Instead beaming faces reflect pride. As students greet each other there is the sense of belonging that many have been searching for all semester. By accident or design, graduation becomes a flow-elicitor.

The rituals of graduation serve as the flow-elicitors that create or bring into being the shared moment. That graduation is a *moment* of flow is further evidenced when, several days after graduation, talk of graduation is less enthusiastic as students 'objectively' explore the events. The moment is gone, to be relived only in memory or at reunions.

Reflecting on the spheres of influence

Throughout the school year, the four spheres of influence: expectations, the institution, *sacra*, and *communitas* and flow combine in different ways to produce spheres or circles of influence affecting liminal experiences in different ways. These spheres of influence resonate throughout the stories of the grade twelve students at Eagle Spirit Secondary.

Expectations may be those of the students themselves but

most frequently they are the expectations of parents, teachers, the broader society, and, occasionally, friends. These expectations impact on the decisions students make about the future and are often transmitted by the use of words like 'should' or phrases like "if you don't" Expectations underlie much of the pressure and uncertainty that students feel during the liminal phase.

Partly because school is such a large part of the students' day, the institution and its rituals impact significantly on the liminal experiences during adolescent transition. The routines of the school, courses available, attitudes of school personnel, and rituals associated with graduation all have a direct influence on how students experience this time in their lives. The media reflects and reinforces many of the institutional practices and beliefs. The status that students have within the institution plays an important role in how students experience liminality. Another factor that significantly contributes to the liminal experience is the *sacra* communicated to students. These messages conveyed to students to prepare them for adult life *include* those things not intentionally presented -- those unspoken ideas and messages students interpret for themselves.

Two other aspects of liminality that impact on students' experience of this time - 'communitas' and 'flow' -- are evident in the second half of the school year. Connections between students become an important part of their transition and many

students actively seek out those connections. Graduation becomes the culminating moment -- those moments of flow, of total involvement, when action and awareness merge -- and, it would appear, the rituals surrounding graduation become flow-elicitors. As stated repeatedly, liminal experiences are an individual experience and therefore all elements or factors do not have the same influence on all students. However, the four spheres of influence provide a useful frame for uncovering how students experience this time in their lives. By exploring liminal experiences through expectations, the institution, *sacra*, and *communitas* and flow, the influence of the four spheres becomes apparent.

CHAPTER 6:
CROSSING THE BRIDGE: THE MYTHS AND REALITY
OF GRADUATION AND ENDINGS

This Bridge

This bridge will only take you halfway there
To those mysterious lands you long to see:
Through gypsy camps and swirling Arab fairs
And moonlit woods where unicorns run free.
So come and walk awhile with me and share
The twisting trails and wondrous worlds I've known.
But this bridge will only take you halfway there --
The last few steps you'll have to take alone.

Shel Silverstein

As I reflect on the grade twelve students from Eagle Spirit Secondary who are crossing this bridge, I, along with them, feel a range of emotions. This past year has been an interesting journey for all of us and these students have helped me come to a new understanding of what it is like to be crossing the threshold into adulthood, in particular, as the 1990s end. I share their excitement at having reached the end of this part of their journey, but I, too, feel a sense of loss since I have come to know some of these young adults well over the past year and will miss them and wonder about them as they move on with their lives. As I watch them move forward, I reflect back on the year.

I was with these students when they arrived at the beginning of their grade twelve journey -- a time of elation

mixed with disappointment. It was understandable that many of them would be excited about having reached grade twelve. For at least two thirds of their lives, they have been attending school. After this last year of secondary schooling, they will be faced with new choices, new beginnings. What a feeling of triumph! As Julia (interview 012) said, "I made it! . . . it's like a total accomplishment." Others, too, expressed pride in having reached this milestone on their life journey. Many spoke of having waited their 'entire life' for this moment.

But perhaps years of anticipation are destined to end in at least a measure of deflation. For it seems that, mixed with the feelings of pride and excitement, many students felt that the importance of the accomplishment, at least as they saw it, was not recognized by others -- others in the school community did not acknowledge their newly acquired status. Some complained that the younger students did not 'look up' to them; others that teachers treated them as they always had. After all this time they had finally climbed to the top of the ladder; yet it did not *feel* any different.

What is behind the disappointment, I wonder. Why is this so important to many students? Why do all the years of achievement fail to bring satisfaction, or, at least, why is there a feeling that something is missing? Surely it is more than the fact that grade eight students do not show respect. Surely it is not just the power differentiation in the teacher/student relationship -- something that has always been a part of their schooling years.

Besides, while many students spoke of this 'let-down' feeling, not everyone did, although there did not seem to be a pattern among those who did and those who did not. Students who were unsure of their plans for the future talked of feeling disappointed, as did those who had firm plans. Turner (1967, p.94) said that transition is a "process, a becoming, . . . even a transformation" and that those in transition "are 'being grown' into a new postliminal state of being"(1967, p.37). Is the disappointment experienced by the grade twelve students related to that transformation? Is it that many grade twelve students, like many people of all ages, form an opinion of who they are but need that view of self to be reflected back to them by others within their circles of interaction? And is this opinion related to how they visualise their new status in the adult world?

These and other questions run through my mind although it is difficult to know for certain any of the answers. What is apparent, however, is the sense that many grade twelve students begin the year with the feeling that there was supposed to be more to it than this. As Glynis (interview 015) said, " . . . this is good, but not that good." I am reminded of a Peggy Lee song from many years ago that asked the question, "Is this all there is?" It occurs to me that the media, the institution, and adults outside of the school community play an important role in how students view themselves in their final year of secondary schooling. The message from the media seems clear: your senior

years of high school are the best of your life. Several students spoke of their earlier expectations of what it would be like to be in grade twelve - "an episode from *Degrassi High*" is how La Shonda (interview 005) described the vision she had had when she was younger. As unrealistic as that may have been, it was clear: grade twelve was going to be a time of adult privileges and freedoms but few responsibilities. Even before students reached grade twelve, they began to realize that their senior years would not be like those of the characters portrayed in the media but many still held on to the hope that life would, at least, be different than it had been. Reality told a different story.

The message from the institution seemed less clear. Many students commented on the fact that the school seemed to expect them to make adult decisions while, at the same time, it expected them to follow the institutional rules of attendance checks and late slips as they had when they were younger. Nor did the institution always take into account the pressures many students deal with outside of the school setting. As Sean (interview 032) commented, "School expects you to be there no matter what. They think school's the whole worry, not your family or problems." Sean was not the only student who spoke of family burdens (including parenting younger siblings) that frequently impacted on attendance or school performance. None of those who did seemed to feel that the school was willing to "cut them any slack" when it came to school rules. Yet, as several pointed out, school personnel would do that for colleagues or

other adults.¹ As one student (survey 075) remarked when asked how school could better prepare students for the transition from secondary schooling, "Not be so hard on students and try to understand them more."

On the other hand, most adults outside of the school community (with the exception of parents and other family members) treated the students as young adults, offering students both privileges and responsibilities. How do these mixed messages impact on the liminal experience, I wonder. For as long as most can remember, the institution has defined for many their level of ability or potential.² What do all of these messages tell students about the confidence others have in their ability to be responsible adults? In what ways do the messages contribute to the feelings of disappointment described by so many?

Although feeling 'let down' about the present, many still felt that their "real" life was finally about to start. While few described it as passing over a threshold, many talked of finishing something that needed to be done, of passing into another stage of life, of entering the real world. "So much lies

¹ Levin (1994, p.98) in an article that considers the treatment of students in schools, questions why the issue is so frequently overlooked. He contends that "To treat others as we would ourselves be treated is one of humanities oldest moral maxims; no institution should be more aware of it than the schools."

² This is borne out by the number of students who either based their future plans or altered current ones on the marks they achieved during secondary school.

ahead," wrote one student (survey 047), "what's behind is nothing." "Graduation is just a barrier to be overcome," wrote another (survey 005).

Yet there was a sense that crossing the bridge to their 'real' life brings them to a dangerous place, a place of uncertainty, a place where the wrong decision is 'forever.' Why, I wonder, in a time when few people stay with the same job long enough to receive the proverbial gold watch, a time of lifelong learning and multiple careers, do the students who are about to enter adulthood feel that the decisions they make now will determine the rest of their lives, that those decisions "will set [their lives] in stone"(survey 042)?

Why, too, did more students seem more willing to write about those feelings than speak them aloud? Was it simply the anonymity that a survey afforded that a face-to-face conversation did not? Or was it that students who wrote of their fears felt as if they were alone? What part does all the talk about the 'necessity' of a post-secondary education play in these feelings, I wonder. If students' own expectations had led to disappointment about their final year of schooling, the expectations of others about post-secondary education created a different kind of feeling -- frustration.

Many students, both on paper and in person, voiced the concern that they felt pressured by the view that a post-secondary education is the only avenue to a successful future. What would happen if adults involved with students in transition from

secondary schooling helped young people explore all options (including no further formal schooling at present)? How would the liminal period of the transition from secondary schooling be changed if adults provided the space for young people to voice their concerns, to talk about how disconcerting it is to realize you are leaving behind the only structure you have known for thirteen years?³ Bridges (1980, pp.91-92) remarked that the reason people in transition experience confusion is not fear of the future, "but rather the termination of the old life they had previously led." Many students voiced such concerns about leaving behind the familiar. "Your safety net," said Jeff (interview 009); " . . . almost like losing your parents," said Julia (interview 012).

That is not to say that all students spoke of moving into the future with trepidation. Many were very focused on their plans -- the student (survey 030A) whose parents have "always just expected" that s/he would attend university or Crystal (interview 018) who had 500 hours to complete before becoming a licensed hair dresser did not seem to be facing the future with uncertainty. Neither did Bruce (interview 014) who was anxiously waiting to begin training as a missionary. Obviously having firm plans eased concerns about what lies ahead.

But for those who were uncertain about the direction they wanted to follow, the future seemed to loom somewhat ominously,

³ Certainly this seemed important to the students in the discussion group and many of the students who were interviewed.

exacerbating the pressure many already felt. It was a pressure that started in the fall and increased as the year progressed - "People ask you what you're going to do with your life and you say you don't know and they say 'How can you not know, you're in grade 12?'" (Nicole, from field notes, October 29, 1997).

As the months passed, the number of students who decided to attend a post-secondary institution increased. It seemed as if those students needed an answer to 'the question.' While deciding to continue their education may have provided an answer, it is uncertain how many of the last minute decisions actually became the final answer. It is likely that many were waiting out the time, hoping that a vision of the future would become clearer.

Ed and Phaedra called this waiting time "a slushy area" in their lives (from field notes, October 29, 1997). Like slush, that mixture of rain and snow that is not clearly either one, this period of the life journey is a mixture of adolescence and adulthood. Turner (1967, p.94) contended that this was a time that had few of the characteristics of the past or the coming state. And Bridges (1980, p.96) noted that "most people in transition have the experience of not being quite sure of who they are anymore." As well, Bridges (1980, p.95) noted that events that "disengage us from the contexts in which we have known ourselves . . . break up the old cue-system which served to reinforce our roles and to pattern our behavior." This feeling of uncertain identity was borne out by the number of

students who spoke of being treated as a child one minute and an adult the next. The students themselves seemed less than certain where they fit in the two categories. Nor were they always certain as to whether that would change. "Sometimes I feel that the day after grad I'll be an adult and a different person. But other times I feel like nothing's going to change," wrote one student (survey 064).

Is there something about the way we educate young people that contributes to the uncertainty connected to moving into adulthood? Uncertainty is a feeling that seems common to young people as they leave secondary schooling. I reflect back on my own adolescent transition time and remember that, for several years after leaving secondary school, the uncertainty continued. I felt as if I was merely pretending to be an adult, that I knew how to be a teenager but not an adult. Other adults with whom I have spoken have said much the same thing. Why, I wonder. Could it be that when our society moved to a time of extended schooling, we made transition more difficult for young people than it had been when they were involved in the adult world throughout their lives? How was it different for young people when they were not separated from adult daily life for extended periods of time, associating only with other young people? Is being part of the daily lives of adults the reason why young people who are homeschooled appear to make a seamless transition into the adult world?⁴ How would secondary schooling look if, while completing

⁴ This is based on my own previous research into the pedagogical practices of a group of non-sectarian homeschooling

secondary school, young people increasingly spent more time in the 'adult' world and less time in the institutional setting? And who might pedagogically guide these young people? Do we need to return to a time of mentoring young people as Mahadi (1996) suggested when she said that " . . . we need wise men and women ready to provide perspectives and meaning for the responsibilities ahead"(1996, p.xvi).

As these questions come to mind, I am reminded of a comment made by several students over the course of the year when talking about our conversations. The general feeling was that what I was doing [the research project] was really important, that this kind of thing [the conversations and discussions] should be mandatory for all grade twelve students, although that comment was often followed with the realization that, if the conversations were mandatory, it probably would not work. But obviously the discussion group conversations (as well as the interviews) served a purpose for many students as I was often taken aback by how open and candid students were during our conversations. Ed's (interview 002) comment was that I had raised some interesting questions. "It's kind of helpful for me, actually, believe it or not, getting some of this stuff out into the open, admitting to some of this stuff that I've been hiding from myself. It's part of a step I can take towards eliminating problems I've been having."

My perception that our conversations were mutually benefi-
parents as well as literature related to homeschooling families.

cial was reinforced by a comment Phaedra made when we met for lunch a number of months after the study ended. When I mentioned that, throughout my time at Eagle Spirit, I had felt honoured by the way in which students had confided in me, she replied, "You were not our mother, but you mothered us by bringing us food and making sure we had lunch. You were not our teacher, but you were somehow connected to school. You were someone we could talk to and who listened to us" (from field notes, April 24, 1999).⁵ What is apparent in all of this is that during the liminal phase of transition students appear to need an outsider who listens without judging, someone who cares without controlling, a mentor. Shel Silverstein's evocative invitation, at the beginning of this chapter, speaks of guides and mentors. Certainly Chef served in that capacity for the Cafeteria students.

Was the young man waiting in the counselling suite looking for someone who would listen? My mind frequently returns to that scene. In some ways that waiting room became a metaphor for grade twelve. While a token effort had been made to give the space some degree of importance, it was not an inviting place. At a time when students struggle with changing identities, this space was institutional, not personal. It seemed to me that this was a place to be given information. It was not a place to

⁵ The importance of these conversations to the students was reiterated in a recent conversation with Rachael. Talking about the group she said that when those who participated in the discussion group sessions get together, even now, they often speak of "the free therapy sessions [they] had in grade twelve."

search for the future. It was a waiting place, a place where one did not want to stay, a place to be in limbo, a place that reinforced a waiting time. In some respects, so was grade twelve for many students.

If the counselling suite was a place to receive information for the future, many students did not say the same thing about the classroom. As the end of schooling neared, students increasingly voiced concerns that school had not prepared them for what lay ahead. In particular, CAPP (Career and Personal Planning) -- a course apparently designed to help students prepare for life in the adult world -- was the most reviled of all courses. Most thought it was a colossal waste of time, that it did not teach them how to deal with practical matters, and that, in fact, it missed an opportunity. Many said that they had learned the important things in life outside of school. For the most part, the students who thought school had taught them anything useful were those who said that their academic courses would prepare them for advanced courses, in the same subject areas, in their post-secondary education.

Many students voiced concerns that they would not know how to do everyday tasks in the adult world. Handling money matters (such as earning money, budgeting, writing cheques, applying for loans) loomed large for many students. Given the degree of anxiety about assuming responsibilities, it would appear that CAPP had, indeed, missed an opportunity. How might courses in 'everyday life' impact upon the liminal experiences, I wonder.

Would easing some of the concerns about how to handle responsibilities in the adult world make the transition a little less difficult? If students had practical information about dealing with life situations, other than how to write résumés, would the future seem less ominous for some? Certainly, it would not be possible to anticipate all of the life situations students might encounter in the future. On the other hand, it seems that students in transition feel a strong need to be better prepared for adult life and that 'preparedness' is many faceted and not solely related to courses required for further education.

During the months I waited out this liminal time with the students, we frequently reflected on what it means to travel this part of the life journey. We talked of looking back, of turning points, of changing identities, and of leaving behind old ideas. Bridges (1908, p.98) wrote that a person in transition often goes through a feeling of disenchantment -- a time when "the subtle strands of assumption and expectation" that tie a person to the old world are broken. Further, he contended that disenchantment "is the signal that things are moving into transition"(1980, p.101).

While not all students spoke of an event during this liminal time that caused them to see themselves or the world differently, many described a time near the end of grade eleven or the beginning of grade twelve when they left behind some old patterns and attitudes. For some it was the ending of an important relationship or the death of someone important in their

lives. For others it was a brush with the law and/or the realization that their behaviour was hurting people they cared about. For still others, it was an assessment of academic achievement, sometimes followed by a re-evaluation of career goals. For Patrick, it was an extended serious illness that cost him his graduation and caused him to rethink what is important in life. As La Shonda (interview 005) said, "everyone has their own situations."

It is not clear whether or not young people in transition need to be able to identify a turning point that allows them to see themselves differently. Nor is it clear whether or not students would identify a turning point in their lives if they were not asked to do so. However, those students who reflected back on the past year and a half and who spoke of an event or series of events that brought about a change in attitude were among the students who spoke with the most confidence of the future. It seemed that, as with Janus, the Roman god of the doorway, being able to look back as well as forward, offered a clearer view of the future.

Whether students had a clear view of the future or not, as the year progressed, their feelings about leaving school began to change. There were moments of wanting to get the most out of grade twelve before it was over, to get to know as many of the other graduate students as possible. Glynis spoke of starting to "talk to all these people that [she'd] been ignoring for five years" (from field notes, June 4, 1998). Many spoke sadly about

the friends that would be lost when everyone left the routines of secondary schooling. As La Shonda (interview 005) said, " . . . you say that you are going to see them and write once a week, but I know it's not going to happen."

Mixed with a feeling that friends, old and new, were about to be lost was a feeling of disconnection, a feeling of disengagement. Many commented that they were *so* ready to leave, that it should be over by now. As Glynis (interview 015) commented, "It's not my place . . . anymore." This disengagement is an important turning point for students for as the end of the old system nears, they are forced to devise a new one. Bridges (1980, p.96) wrote that "with disengagement, an inexorable process of change begins," although he also noted the importance of support during the change process. What kind of support do we, as a society, offer students during this period of disengagement, I wonder.

As much as grade twelve students began to 'mentally' leave secondary schooling, the one area of their school lives in which they re-connected was grad. Even though many voiced mixed feelings about the activities, some even questioning whether or not they would participate, in the end, most students were caught up in the moment. It was the one time throughout the year that I saw students completely engaged, seemingly unconcerned about pressures, about leaving the known and heading into the unknown. In the end, all of the uncertainty and fear seemed to give way to celebration.

It is true that I can speak only of those students who actually attended the events. Perhaps those who stayed away, for whatever reason, would tell a different story. Nor can I say that this moment of what Turner (1967, 1977) described as "flow" was never evident at other times when I was not there. But I can say that, when the grade twelve students gathered for the graduation activities, the building was filled with a palpable energy that was not apparent at other times during the year.

However, this energy may, in fact, be just one facet of this somewhat double-edged celebration. For, if the waiting room was a metaphor for the liminality of grade twelve, graduation could be seen as a symbol of the ambiguity in this life journey transition. The competing conceptions of what graduation represents are apparent in the graduation activities and the talk about them. With the exception of the students who began making graduation plans many months in advance, most students were ambivalent when talking about graduation. When they did, they spoke of it as a celebration of life changes. Yet, from the institution's perspective, graduation seemed to be about achievement and honours and an optimistic future. The message was clear: the highly successful are celebrated and praised; others provide the backdrop for the event. As usual, the prevailing message in the media continues to be mixed -- on the one hand, graduation is the celebration of an ending, on the other, graduation is the acknowledgement of achievement and a higher status. Mostly, however, the media perpetuates the myth

that graduation is predominantly an exciting, elaborate (and costly) celebration -- a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Given that many adults, in reflecting on their own high school graduation, also speak of it as a time of confusion and anxiety, it seems strange that the prevailing narrative of secondary school graduation portrays it as an exciting, optimistic, and very positive time in the lives of adolescents. This interpretation of graduation is further promoted every spring when the media features stories about grade twelve students buying ball gowns, renting tuxedos and limousines, and worrying about dates for the big night. Missing from the narrative are the stories of confusion and anxiety, as evident in the following newspaper article:

Lisa Love's entire 17 years of life have been leading up to this one all-important date on the calendar. Graduation. And it promises to be a remarkable 24 hours on June 29. The day will start with a history exam, follow with a hair appointment, lead into a formal banquet and dance, then culminate with an all-night gathering at Dry Grad. Diligent study and last-minute cramming aside, for Lisa, much of the frenzy about graduation began in February and March - the start of the official Search for the Perfect Dress . . . The perfect earrings and necklace are yet to be found. They must be something simple. Perhaps pearls. (Lett, 1999, June 8, p.A7)⁶

The problem is, by focusing on the celebration itself, it is

⁶ Such articles are not uncommon. In a full page spread entitled "The Prom Queens" in *The Vancouver Sun*, Virginia Leeming (2000, February 15, p.F1) wrote, "Should she wear a full-skirted ball gown or opt for something sexy and figure-hugging? Will satin do the trick or would taffeta be best? For Grade 12 graduates of 2000, the question of what to wear on grad night is all important."

easy to see the end of secondary schooling as a time for celebrating endings and new beginnings, losing sight of the fact that, by its very nature, this is a time of passage, of transition, of liminality. True, for many, grade twelve is a time of celebration and ritual. However, it is also a time of contradiction and paradoxes: optimism mixed with apprehension, confidence often overshadowed by doubt, independence sometimes tinged with a sense of loss, a combination of jubilation, pressure, pride, reflection, and uncertainty. When others place the spotlight predominantly on the celebrations, it devalues the inner turmoil that many adolescents experience at this time. How would the liminal experience be changed, I wonder, if the narratives of graduation included stories of uncertainty and loss. Would knowing that they are not alone provide a measure of support for those students crossing the bridge to adulthood? As I reflect back on my time with the students at Eagle Spirit Secondary seeking to understand how grade twelve students experience the transition from secondary school to the adult world, one thing becomes obvious -- the importance of time. Temporality is a central feature of narrative thinking (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.29). Graduation is an event that most adults have experienced in the past. It is an event that most children will eventually experience. As well, the participants, the grade twelve students, each bring their own history and expectations of the future to the prolonged event. All of these aspects of temporality impact on how students

experience this time in their lives since, although it is their experience, others contribute to it.

However, in this case, it is more than thinking of an event as an expression of something that "has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future"(p. 29). While that is certainly true of liminal experiences, it is equally as, if not more, important to think temporally about adolescent transition from secondary school to the adult world within the context of a moment in history. The liminal experiences of grade twelve students at the end of the 1990s are vastly different from those of earlier generations just as they will differ considerably from those of students who come after them. For, as noted earlier, "'normal' paths to adulthood" (Wallace, 1987, in Irwin, 1995, p.21) established during full employment in the 1950s and 1960s are no longer possible. While there may have been fewer choices for students, such as myself, who graduated several decades ago, no one doubted that they would find employment, with or without a post-secondary education. We all believed (and statistics supported that belief) that, with hard work, most would succeed and, with careful management, many would own their own homes. When my own children graduated, there were far more choices (especially for women), and, while education was known to impact upon future employment, few would not find steady employment.

But, as the 1990s ended, there was less certainty about future employment beyond part-time entry-level jobs. Many stu-

dents with whom I spoke fear they will not find suitable employment and, as a result, will not have a secure future. Perhaps this is why so many students have bought into the notion that, unless they graduate from university, they will 'never amount to anything' -- an expectation that is unrealistic for many. No wonder students felt anxious about the future! Where in this narrative are the trades-people, the people in the service industry, the caregivers, to name only some.

As educators, many of us come from that time when the future was less uncertain. If we are to truly walk pedagogically with those young adults who are making the transition to the adult world as the twenty-first century begins, we must leave behind our own preconceived notions about success and see the world in the students' "time." We must help them see that they live in a time of change where the decisions you make today may not work tomorrow; where most people will have multiple careers in their lifetime; where education is not just a university degree but means lifelong learning; where, at times, one may have to be flexible enough to create his or her own employment. In other words, we need to prepare them for life in their time, not ours. And this does not just mean an increase in computer technology courses. Perhaps we also need to ask these young adults what they need as they prepare to leave secondary schooling instead of only looking at our own experiences and telling them what they should know/have/do.⁷ Perhaps we need to walk

⁷ Brady (1996, p.253) in an article arguing that we should be educating young people for "life as it is lived," maintains that

pedagogically beside students rather than always in front of them.

This study sought to uncover how students in the late 1990s experience the liminality of grade twelve. It explored how students in an upper-middle class secondary school in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area experience this time in their lives. Listening to the stories of these students, it became clear that grade twelve is a mixture of myth and reality. In telling the co-constructed stories of these young adults, I have endeavoured to separate the myths of the grand narratives told about the final year of secondary schooling from the realities of the personal narratives of the students. I have tried to tell the stories that, too often, have been and continue to be obscured by the loud voices telling the grand narrative.

At the time of the study, the student population of Eagle Spirit Secondary was predominantly Caucasian although there were already signs that this was rapidly changing.⁸ Further study is needed in schools with an ethnically diverse population, as well as schools with a less affluent population, in order to determine whether or not those students experience less or more uncertainty, and also the factors that may contribute to those

"We teach what we think is important, and we think it is important because it is what we were taught."

⁸ The senior grades at Eagle Spirit Secondary were still predominantly Caucasian at the time of this study. However, a growing Asian population in grades 8, 9, and 10 will undoubtedly impact on how students in this secondary school experience the liminal phase of the transition to adulthood.

differences. As well, further study is required in schools that offer some form of mentorship program and/or more practical life-skill programs. Such data would prove useful in developing curricula that lessened students' uncertainties and anxieties about their future -- uncertainties that frequently lead to depression in the first year after secondary school graduation.⁹

As I reflect on what I have learned about crossing the bridge to adulthood in the late 1990s, it occurs to me that we, as a society, need to acknowledge that the liminality of grade twelve is a time of transformations as well as endings, that students are undergoing the unsettling process of redefining themselves, that they are leaving behind the old cue-system which has served to reinforce their roles and to pattern their behavior. We need to look for ways to support these young adults during this time of uncertainty.

When adults undergo transitional times as a result of job loss, marriage breakdown, death of a partner, or life-altering illness, we offer support and expect them to take time to

⁹ A study conducted by Gladstone and Koenig (1994) found that although adolescent and adult females have consistently been found to experience depression at twice the rate of males, a notable exception was the college population where equal rates of depression were reported for males and females. However, by their nature, such studies do not include those students who do not attend post-secondary institutions in the year following graduation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that large numbers of young people spend the first year after school leaving isolating themselves from others, sleeping excessively or struggling with insomnia, overeating, and "staring at the walls" -- all reported to be classic signs of clinical depression.

adjust. The liminal phase of the transition process is a time of uncertainty. We know that it takes time to redefine ourselves.

One "Executive in Passage" wrote:

As I moved forward, I entered a period of confusion, disorientation, and chaos. But some inner sense of rightness kept pulling me on. Finally, after a torturously difficult time, I was delivered into a new way of life--one filled with inner quiet, joy, and renewed success--an experience I can only describe as "uncommon fulfilment." This is . . . a remarkable journey. The story is mine, but the passage is universal. (Marrs, 1990, in Mahadi, 1996, p.xv)

He could have been writing about adolescent transition from secondary schooling to the adult world. If we understand that adults in transition need our support and compassion, do adolescents crossing the bridge to adulthood deserve less?

CHAPTER 7:

BEYOND LIMINALITY: NEW BEGINNINGS

After being so closely connected with these students during their final year of secondary schooling, it seemed 'only natural' that I would keep in touch with as many of them as possible. During the summer after graduation, I met twice with six of the discussion group for conversation and pizza. Mostly the contact has been in the form of long telephone conversations. Several times I met with one of the members for lunch or long brisk walks followed by bottomless cups of coffee. Those with whom I have not had personal contact are usually mentioned in the on-going dialogue with the various former students or in conversations with their parents. Some members of the discussion group and I are planning to meet for another pizza night this summer where we will once again 'catch up' on everyone's news. Since, from early in the study, all of the students became more than 'subjects' (yet not exactly friends because our situations were so different), I have wondered about them, worried about them, and hoped their transition into the adult world was not filled with too many obstacles. It occurred to me that others, too, might wonder. Hence, a chapter seemed appropriate.

There is a saying that suggests, "Life is what happens when

you had other plans." Some of the students who were part of the graduating class at Eagle Spirit Secondary during the time of this investigation would, no doubt, agree. For others, the plans they made as they neared the end of grade twelve are still intact. Although it has not been possible to contact all of the young people who were part of the study, recent contact with a number of the former students has provided snapshots of their lives since we last met as a group or in interview conversations.

Phaedra is in her third year at university. As well as her studies, an important part of her academic life revolves around the student newspaper. She has contributed numerous articles and this year she is the culture editor at the paper. Recently she prepared and presented an opinion piece on CBC Radio which won a listener's choice award. She is currently working on two projects. With a professor and a poet, she is working on an anthology of mixed race (half Asian) writing. A publisher has been found for the project. Under the support of the Asian-Canadian Writers Workshop, Phaedra has completed two chapters of an autobiographical novel. While still in grade twelve, Phaedra planned to be a lawyer although she says that "deep down" she knew she wanted to write, wanted to communicate somehow, and she is moving steadily in that direction.

After setting aside his plans to become an aeronautical engineer, Ed decided to follow a career in business. Since leaving Eagle Spirit, he has been attending a university in

Ontario. His friends say that if Ed seemed like a workaholic in high school, he is even worse now. He is currently enrolled in a prestigious school of business at the university, completing an honours business degree. After graduation, Ed hopes to follow a career in investment banking and financial consulting. Eventually he would like to work in the area of business process redesign, perhaps for a regional airline. In a recent conversation, Ed voiced concern that, although he has an 'A' average, his marks will not be high enough to find the kind of work he wants. Obviously Ed has not lost his drive for perfection since leaving secondary school.

As for Rachael's current career plans, "reality plays into it," she said recently. While still at Eagle Spirit, Rachael was torn between going into law and following her first love -- acting. Now in her third year at the university, she is in the International Relations Program completing her B.A. with a minor in political science. At the time of this writing, she was preparing to leave for a conference in Washington, DC. The conference is modelled after NATO and will be good experience as will the other two conferences she is attending this year. But drama still calls. Last year she appeared in a theatre production at the university and, after graduation next year, Rachael is considering moving to Bombay, India, where she has contacts, to work in independent film. However, sometimes we have to choose between our first love and what seems prudent, and combining law and political science seems very practical.

La Shonda is also in the International Relations Program at the university. She and Rachael do not have any classes together since La Shonda's minor is Russian. After graduation next year, she and her boyfriend hope to go to Russia to teach English for two years. Their long-range plans are to return to Canada to complete a Master of Arts in Russian and Slavic studies. La Shonda is considering two options for her Masters -- combining law and Russian politics or Russian politics and literary influences. In some respects, La Shonda's current career goals are not all that different from those she had in grade twelve. At that time she was considering a career teaching university level History or English Literature. She is still interested in history and literature -- she just switched languages.

Cherie is another of the members of the discussion group who is very focussed on her career goals. She is in third year Engineering at the university and is currently completing an eight month co-op program in Ottawa for one of the top telecommunications companies in the world. Last summer she completed another co-op program with a company in the west. But life is not all work. Cherie is currently training for her second marathon race -- the 44 km Nation's Capital Marathon. After graduation Cherie hopes to work at designing medical or physical rehabilitation equipment. She remains focused on the goals she set in grade twelve.

Briana entered university after graduation, planning to complete a degree in English. The year after graduation, she and

her high school sweetheart -- a young man who was almost finished his degree in philosophy -- married. Briana completed another term at the university before the two of them moved to Alberta. Until this past October, Briana worked at a resort. At the time I write this, Briana has just given birth to "a beautiful baby boy." Recently she began submitting poems and short stories for publication. While continuing to write, she is also learning to speak, read, and write Norwegian and plans to finish her undergraduate degree then work toward her Master's and Ph.D. degrees in English. Her eventual goal is to teach at a university. Although she wanted to be a writer when she was in grade twelve, Briana says that "deep down" she knew that she "wanted to do something academic."

Although thoroughly convinced that he wanted to be a doctor who combined western medicine with alternate medicine, Drudi has chosen a path that surprises some of his friends. After two years at a college, he is now attending university. A couple of months ago, he talked of becoming a high school geography teacher because he loves Geography. However, he says, "History does not like [him]." Since it is the stories that interest him most, he is thinking of doing a Master's degree in psychology and becoming a high school counsellor. Obviously, Drudi is still exploring his options.

Glynis is also exploring her options at the moment. After grade twelve, she toured around the province for over a year with a theatre group that gave presentations to school children.

The productions focussed on issues important to young people (e.g., drugs and racial tensions, etc.). The group was under the auspices of the Attorney General's Office. Eventually artistic differences between the group and the ministry arose. When her contract was up, Glynis chose not to renew it. Currently she is living in a small community on the Sunshine Coast and talking about going to Wilderness School. She has always been interested in the outdoors and thinks she would like to take children on wilderness outings.

Because of his extended illness, Patrick did not graduate with his friends at Eagle Spirit. The following year, he attended a secondary school in a nearby town, picking up the one semester he needed in order to accumulate the necessary credits. Before graduation, Patrick had considered joining the U.S. Navy although what he really wanted to do was attend university to study drama. His parents were not prepared to financially support that decision, so Patrick moved to Saskatchewan to attend Christian Bible College, a decision his parents supported. He has been there for the past two years and recently (at the end of December) was married.

Unable to afford university when she first graduated, Kerry was not certain of the career path she wanted to follow. She had considered training as a massage therapist but thought the field was becoming overcrowded. Before coming to Eagle Spirit Secondary, she had attended a Fine Arts High School. When I first met Kerry, she was in the Co-op Program studying tourism. As gradu-

ation loomed, she thought she would work for a while and perhaps take Spanish and some computer courses at night school. The one thing she knew for certain was that, later in life, she did not want to look back on her life and say, "When I was young, I didn't do that" (interview 030). When I spoke with Kerry a year after graduation, she was still thinking of going back to school but had no definite plans -- journalism, perhaps. Everyone kept suggesting jobs that would offer some kind of security but she was looking for a career path that would tap into her creative side. At the time, she was working in a showroom but was bored with her job. Shortly after our conversation, Kerry struck up a conversation in a bar with a man who offered her a job as his assistant. Since that time Kerry has been working long hours as the Personal Assistant to the Director of Catering Services at a large suburban hotel and is taking courses in Business Management at the British Columbia Institute of Technology in the evenings. Some months ago, in a conversation during which Kerry and I looked back on her graduation year, she said, "It was a time of anxiety. You just don't know what you want to do, what you're supposed to do, and where the money is supposed to come from" (from field notes, May 27, 2000). Now, Kerry is happy with the career path she is presently following although, as I write this, she is struggling with a life decision dilemma. Recently engaged to be married to a young man who has found work in Edmonton, should she stay here until they are married in a few years or move to Alberta now? Here, she contributes to the

support of her family and she feels guilty at the thought of not doing so. There, she would be financially secure, not have to work, and would be able to go to university, which has been her dream. If she moves to Alberta to live with her fiancé, her mother will likely not speak to her for several years but she really loves this man. If she moves to Alberta, she will be better off financially but will she be able to tap into her creative side or will that be lost forever? Kerry tells me that she is at a crossroad and does not know which way to turn. From our conversation, it is obvious that she is experiencing the liminal phase in another of the transitions on her life journey.

Making the transition into adulthood was not an easy passage for Sophie. I remember how desperately Sophie wanted to graduate with her classmates and how that just did not happen. In a recent conversation she told me that the night of Commencement she arranged to work so that everyone would think that she had not been able to make the ceremony, but no one would know that she had not graduated. Immediately following grade twelve, Sophie held a variety of jobs, none of which proved to be long term. Less than a year after her final year of secondary school, Sophie met a young man and became pregnant. This proved to be a turning point in her life. While she and her boyfriend had previously partied hard, he told Sophie, "partying is not what I'm about and if that's what you want, you will have to find someone else." She now says, "A lot of who I am has to do with James." Sophie turned her life around and is now a

'stay-at-home-mom' to her "beautiful" one-year-old Samantha. Remembering how disappointed she had been about not graduating from high school, I was delighted to hear that, while she was pregnant, she attended a nearby college and completed her grade twelve. Finally, she has that cherished certificate! Eventually Sophie would like to have more children. In the meantime, she plans to take a Career Planning Course in May of this year and begin working toward her as-yet-to-be-determined future goals. While she has thought about a career in nursing, after attending an information session, she realizes that she has a lot of upgrading to do before that could become a reality. Whatever her goals turn out to be, Sophie has come a long way -- in her voice you can hear a new confidence, a feeling that she is finally becoming comfortable with herself.

As grade twelve was coming to an end, Bruce was waiting to leave to serve as a missionary, expecting to begin his training within a few months. He did not leave as soon as he had expected and worked here for a large clothing retailer, working his way up to assistant manager. Just over a year ago, he finally was able to begin his training for the mission field. When I spoke with his mother recently, she said that he is doing very well, serving his time near the headquarters of the church. Bruce has a little more than a year of service left and the family hopes that he will return to this area and continue on with his schooling. While still in grade twelve, Bruce had talked of becoming a Chartered Financial Planner when he finished serving

with the church. That still appears to be an option.

Thanks to a scholarship, Rod was able to carry through with his plans to successfully complete the full culinary course at Vancouver City College when he graduated from Eagle Spirit Secondary. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to find full-time work as a chef in this area, and after facing the prospect of several part-time jobs, Rod made the decision to move to Alberta where he is currently working at laying fibre optics for the oil industry. While he is pleased to be working full-time, he is waiting and hoping to eventually find employment doing what he loves best -- working as a chef. When I spoke with Rod's mother recently, she said that Rod was greatly affected by the sudden death of his friend and mentor, Chef, this past December.

Like people of all ages, some of these young people have had to adjust their plans when confronted with life's often unexpected events. As Rachael said, "reality plays into it." I am reminded, also, of Rod's comment (interview 013) when he was in grade twelve, "There might be a set-back but that just means you go in a different direction. You have to deal with it the best you can." When I think about these young people with whom I had the privilege to work, I think about how many of the students who took part in the study worried that they would not be successful as adults and I am reminded that there are many different kinds of success, most of which have nothing to do with the success that translated into scholarships and awards on

Graduation Night or money and prestige since.¹ All the young adults who 'made it' through the liminal time of grade twelve, who crossed the bridge to adulthood, and who are working to make sense of their lives are the success stories of the Eagle Spirit Graduating Class of 1998. Now, if only we could help all students believe this while they are experiencing the liminal phase of grade twelve!

¹ As Nel Noddings (1992, p.34) pointed out, " . . . success comes in many forms and calls on many capacities."

EPILOGUE

As I reflect on this year-long study and the people with whom I became connected, I am reminded once again of Peshkin's (1992, p.720) contention that "qualitative researchers . . . are so palpably present that they cannot delude themselves that who they are will not make a difference in the outcome of their study." Before I entered the field, I considered when and how my "Subjective-I's" (Peshkin, 1988a, p.18) might emerge. I considered my own high school graduation and those of my three children; my forthcoming graduation and resulting transition from graduate school to another stage on my life journey; my years as a teacher; and my life-long career as a mother and, in recent years, grandmother and thought about how those various roles might affect my research. I was aware that my "Subjective-I" was moulded from my experiences as a mother and teacher of young children, from my own experiences as a female student in male-dominated institutions, and from my spiritual beliefs. And while Peshkin (1988c, p. 278) was correct that my subjectivity narrowed what I saw and shaped what I made of what I saw, I believe that my subjectivity "can be seen as virtuous" (Peshkin, 1988a) given the purpose of this study -- to explore how students experience this 'in-between' time of their lives.

Before I began working with the students, I realized there might be times when, in conversation, I would be swept back to

my own seventeen-year-old uncertainty or the angst (that translated into often, at the time, seemingly unreasonable behaviour) of my three children as they experienced the liminality of grade twelve and I tried to prepare for those times. However, I must admit that there were times in the discussion group or in the interviews that I had to remind myself that, as much as the students' stories *seemed* the same as my own, our experiences were separated by several decades -- decades that changed the context and, therefore, the experiences considerably since the challenges the students at Eagle Spirit faced were very different from my own.¹ How did this connection affect my research? I believe that, although my experiences were not theirs, the fact that their stories triggered memories of my own seventeen-year-old uncertain and changing identity allowed me to hear their voices with greater clarity than if I had heard them as a dispassionate researcher. To paraphrase an earlier quote (Peshkin, 1988c, p.280), I have told the stories I was moved to tell.

Another component of my "Subjective-I" that I believe had a "virtuous" effect on this study had to do with my experiences as a mother and elementary school teacher. As a result of those experiences, it never occurred to me not to bring muffins or pizza to the discussion group sessions after I noticed that

¹ I was reminded of Ken Dryden's (1995, p.7) comments that, when doing his research in a high school, he "felt like a student. Older, but not the three times older [he] was. [He] felt enough like them that it never occurred to [him] that they wouldn't see [him] as [he] saw [him]self."

several students were going without lunch because they had left home in a rush in the morning and did not have money to buy something from the cafeteria. First and foremost, I cared about whether or not the students were 'alright' -- just as I had done with my own children and young students in the elementary classroom. As a result, we ate together, laughed together, and sometimes cried together. In retrospect, I believe that this created a bond between me and the students that resulted in a relationship based on trust allowing them the freedom to speak openly.

A second aspect of this study I have reflected upon has to do with my use of Turner's (1967) notion of liminality. I reconsidered the usefulness of a notion of transition borne out of examination of traditional rites of passage. Was such a notion a useful heuristic for me? In its original form, probably not. But like most heuristics, while the core of the idea remained, this one fell away as a new, more contemporary, vision evolved. As a result of this study, I believe that students graduating from secondary school do pass through a period of liminality, a time of confusion and uncertain identities as did the liminaries in Turner's work. On the other hand, Turner also stated that initiation rites exemplify transition since they have well marked and protracted liminal phases (1967, p.95). However, in the context of the end of the twentieth century, the liminal period is, perhaps, less easy to define since, for some students it begins earlier than for others. As well, for some students, the liminal time extends beyond graduation well into the first year of

living in the adult world. In this respect, Bridges' (1980) work, which was based on Turner's work and which explored how adults experience the various transitions in their lives was, perhaps, more useful.

While Turner's notion of *sacra* is still useful when exploring the liminal experiences of grade twelve students, it, too, has evolved into a 'version' that is more appropriate for 1990-2000. For Turner, *sacra* were those things that were shown to liminaries to prepare them for life in the adult world. Since we live in a less closed society than did those in Turner's early studies, my notion of *sacra* is also less restricted and far broader in scope. For the students in this study, often the things that were shown to them from which they garnered a view of the adult world were in the form of hidden messages or unintentional meanings. For example, the intentions of many adults with whom the students interacted were likely far different from the meanings students took from them. As well, *sacra* are less easily defined. How can we know which of the thousands of messages young people receive about the adult world through movies, television, newspapers, the internet, retail outlets, music, professional sports, etc., are the ones which they will take in to prepare themselves for life in the adult world? Are they all *sacra*? While we cannot know that, it is likely that those messages are stronger than many of the ones adults believe they are passing on in such places as the classroom, the school newsletter, or the principal's

commencement address. As well, in our global society, *sacra* are no longer situation specific. That is, messages from the larger community may have more influence than many of those we pass on within our own community. All this is to say that, while Turner's notion of *sacra*, in its original form, may not be appropriate for the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is still a useful heuristic when considering the many messages we pass on to young people as a way of preparing them for life in the adult world.

Finally, on reading this study some might find fault with the fact that, at times, it seems critical of many of the adults in the lives of these students. In response, I would like to point out that this study was meant to re-present the voices of the students as they talked about this time in their lives. I have tried to tell their stories in a way that honoured their experiences. To soften their criticism, to filter it through an adult mind-set, to point out the "error" of their thinking, would have made their stories someone else's, not theirs.

And so, as I reflect on this time in my life and the lives of these students, I am left with regrets that I did not hear more of their stories but a feeling of satisfaction that I have tried to honour their experiences. I think about all the voices I did hear at Eagle Spirit Secondary School. I think about Sean, sensitive, more than a little lost, who did not fit the mould for what society considers a "successful student." I think about Sophie who could not bring herself to go to school for more than

two days in a row and who, as a result, was dismissed for not being serious about school. And Rod, trying to clean up his act so that he did not end up in jail. And Glynis, unable to focus on school because she was parenting an emotionally ill mother instead of being parented. And Patrick and Matt and Jeff and so many others. Most of those I think about were not the "stars" of the school and the pressure felt by many of them was a kind of violence in itself. The students who stayed in my mind were not the students who were paraded out at commencement to show the world what a good job our school system is doing, although certainly many of those are still my friends. Instead, the students who have stayed with me are the students who were trying desperately to find a place, to be recognized. These were the students for whom "the slushy time" seemed to be a lonely time.

I am reminded of a children's story my aunt, Josie Beall, used to tell in which the last line was "that's all any of us ever wants: to be seen, to be known, and to be loved." And as I think about the students of the Graduating Class of 1998 at Eagle Spirit Secondary and write the last words to this study, I wonder what the words to the story say about the experience of being in grade 12. What they say about the transitional experience. What bearing they have on the in-between "slushy time" as young people move toward adulthood. I believe it is worth considering.

REFERENCES

- Adler, P.A. & Adler, P. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 377-392. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Atkinson, P. & Hammersley, M. (1994). Ethnography and participant observation. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 248-261. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Atherton, T. (2001). Cult Television. *The Vancouver Sun*. February 19, p. B11
- Bellamy, L.A. (1992). *Paths on life's way: Destinations, determinants, and decisions in the transitions from high school*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Department of Administrative, Adult, and Higher Education, University of British Columbia.
- Bettis, P.J. (1996). Urban students, liminality, and the postindustrial context. *Sociology of Education*, 69, pp. 105-125.
- Bridges, W. (1980). *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Brown, B.F., Director, National Commission on Youth. (1980). *The transition of youth to adulthood: A bridge too long*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Bruner, E. (1993). The ethnographic self and the personal self. In P. Benson (Ed.), *Anthropology and Literature*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Buchmann, M. (1989). *The script of life in modern society: Entry into adulthood in a changing world*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 413-427. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Coleman, J.S. & Husén, T. (1985). *Becoming adult in a changing society*. Paris, France: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

- Connelly, F.M. & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of Experience and Narrative. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), pp. 2-14.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994a). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N.E. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 1-17. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994b). Part IV: Methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. In N.E. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 353-360. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deyhle, D.L., Hess, G.A., Jr., & LeCompte, M.d. (1992). Approaching ethical issues for qualitative researchers in education. In G. Jansen & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education*, 597-641. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Dryden, K. (1995). *In school: Our kids, our teachers, our classrooms*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Eisner, E.W. (1997). The promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. *Educational Researcher*, 26(6), pp. 4-10.
- Eisner, E.W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York: Macmillan.
- Eurich, A.C. (Ed.), (1981). *Major Transitions in the Human Life Cycle*. Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath.
- Fine, M. (1991). *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphen: Re-inventing self and others in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 70-82. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. (1994). Interviewing: The art of science. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 361-376. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gaboriau, M. (1970). Structural anthropology and history, In Lane, M. (1970). (Ed.). *Introduction to struturalism*, .156-69. New York: Basic Books.
- Gaskell, J. (1988). Policy research and politics. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 34 (4), pp. 403-17.

- Gaskell, J. & Lazerson, M. (1980). Between school and work: Perspectives of working class youth. *Interchange on Educational Policy*, 11 (3), pp. 80-96.
- Gladstone, T.R.G. & Koenig, L.J. (1994). Sex differences in depression across the high school to college transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 23(6), pp. 643-669.
- Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Glover, R.W. & Marshall, R. (1993). Improving the school-to-work transition of American adolescents. *Teachers College Record*, 94(3), pp. 588-609.
- Grof, C. (1996). Rites of passage: A necessary step toward whole-ness, In L.C. Mahadi, N.G. Christopher, & M. Meade. (1996). (Eds.) *Crossroads: A quest for contemporary rites of passage*, 3-15. Chicago: Open Court.
- Greene, A.L. (1990). Great expectations: Constructions of the life course during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 19(4), 289-306.
- Guba, E.G. (1992). Relativism. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22(1), pp. 17-23.
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 413-427. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hamburg, D.A. & Takanishi, R. (1989). Preparing for life: The critical transition of adolescence. *American Psychologist*. 44(5). pp. 825-827.
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, A. (1996). Revisiting Voice, *Educational Researcher*. 25(1), pp. 12-19.
- Holmes, G.R. (1995). *Helping teenagers into adulthood: A guide for the next generation*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Irwin, S. (1995). *Rights of passage: Social change and the transition from youth to adulthood*. Leeds, England: University of Leeds Press.
- Jansen, G. & Peshkin, A. (1992). Subjectivity in qualitative research. In G. Jansen & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education*, 681-725. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

- Kelly, D.M. & Gaskell, J. (1996). (Eds.). *Debating dropouts: New policy perspectives*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kerckhoff, A.C. (1990). *Getting started: Transition to adulthood in Great Britain*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lane, M. (1970). Introduction. In Lane, M. (1970). (Ed.). *Introduction to structuralism*. 11-39. New York: Basic Books.
- Lang, R. (1984). The dwelling door: A phenomenological exploration of transition, In Aanstoos, C.M. (1984). (Ed.). *Exploring the lived world: Readings in phenomenological psychology*, 137-150. Carrollton, GA: West Georgia College.
- Leeming, V. (2000). The Prom Queens, *The Vancouver Sun*. February 15, p. F1.
- Lett, P. (1999). Prom Prep. *The Chilliwack Progress*. June 8, 1987, A7.
- Lincoln, Y.S. (1990). The Making of a constructivist: A remembrance of transformations past. In E.G. Guba (Ed.), *The paradigm dialog*, 67-87. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mahadi, L.C., Christopher, N.G., & Meade, M. (1996). (Eds.). *The quest for contemporary rites of passage*. Chicago: Open Court.
- McLaren, P. (1993, 1986). *Schooling as a ritual performance*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Merganaghan, P. (1995). *Targeting transitions: Marketing to consumers during life changes*. Ithaca, NY: American Demographic Books.
- Mishler, E.G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Moore, S.F. & Myerhoff, B.G. (1986). Secular ritual: Forms and meanings. Introduction to *Secular ritual*. Moore & Myerhoff, eds). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum. pp. 3-24.
- Noddings, Nel. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Peshkin, A. (1985). Virtuous subjectivity: In the participant-observer's I's. In D.N. Berg & K.K. Smith (Eds.), *Exploring clinical methods for social research*, 267-281. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Peshkin, A. (1988a). In search of subjectivity - one's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17 (7), pp. 17-22.
- Peshkin, A. (1988b). Understanding complexity: A gift of qualitative inquiry. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 19, pp. 416-424.
- Peshkin, A. (1988c). Virtuous subjectivity: I the participant observer's I's. In D.N. Berg & K.K. Smith. (Eds.), *The self in social inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Peshkin, A. (1992). The relationship between culture and curriculum: A many fitting thing. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum*. 465-485. New York: Macmillan.
- Petersen, A.C., Leffert, N., & Hurrelmann, K. (1993). Adolescence and schooling in Germany and the United States: A comparison of peer socialization to adulthood. *Teachers College Record*, 94(3), pp. 611-628.
- Phillips, D.C. (1990). Subjectivity and objectivity: An objective inquiry. In Eisner, E.W. & Peshkin, A. (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in Education: The continuing debate*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Phillips, D.C. (1995). The good, bad, and the ugly: The many faces of constructivism. *Educational Researcher*, 24(7), pp. 5-12.
- Pinar, W.F. (1988). Time, place, and voice: curriculum theory and the historical moment. In *Contemporary curriculum discourses*. Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarsbrick.
- Pinar, W.F., Reynolds, W.M., Slattery, P. & Taubman, P.M. (1995). *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Richardson, L. (1992). The consequences of poetic representation: Writing the Other, rewriting the Self. In C. Ellis & M.G. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on lived experience*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Robitaille, D.F., Oberg, A.A., Overgaard, V.J., & McBurney, J.T. (May, 1988). *Curriculum in the Schools of British Columbia, Commissioned Papers: Volume 3*. British Columbia Royal Commission on Education.
- Roman, L.G. & Apple, M.W. (1990). (Eds.). *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Rosenbaum, J.E. (1996). Policy uses of research on the high school-to-work transition. *Sociology of Education, Extra Issue 1996*, pp. 102-122.
- Sarup, M. (1988). *An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism*. New York: Harvester Wheasheas
- Schwandt, T.A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretist approaches to human inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. 118-137. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Silverstein, Shel. (1981). *A light in the attic*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Siskin, L.S. (1994). *Realms of knowledge: Academic departments in secondary schools*. London: Falmer Press.
- Sullivan, Commissioner B.M. (1988). *Royal Commission on Education: A Legacy for Learners: Summary of Findings, 1988*. Victoria, British Columbia: Province of British Columbia.
- Taylor, M.C., Boss, M.W., Bédard, R., Thubault, C.J., & Evans, K. (1990). Variables related to the transition of youth from school to work. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 24(3), pp. 154-164.
- Tesch, R. (1987). Emerging themes: The researcher's experience. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 5(3), pp. 230-241.
- Trifonas, P. (1995). Objectivity, subjectivity, and relativism: The case for qualitative methodologies in educational research. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 29(1), pp. 81-101.
- Turner, T.S. (1977). Transformation, hierarchy, and transcendence: A reformulation of Van Gennep's model of the structure of rites of passage. In *Secular ritual*. (Moore & Myerhoff, eds.) Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum. pp. 53-70.
- Turner, V.W. (1986). An essay on the anthropology of experience. In Turner, V.W. & Bruner, E.M. (Eds.). (1986). *The anthropology of experience*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. pp. 33-44.
- Turner, V.W. (1986). Dewey, Dilthey, and drama: An essay in the anthropology of experience. In V.W. Turner & E. Bruner (Eds.), *The anthropology of experience*, 3-30. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

- Turner, V.W. (1967). Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites of passage. In *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*, 93-111. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V.W. (1977). Variations on a theme of liminality. In S.F. Moore & B.G. Myerhoff (Eds.), *Secular ritual*, 36-52. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, Assen.
- van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*, (Translated by M. Vizedom & G. Caffee). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario: Althouse Press.
- "When is a grad not a grad?" *The Chilliwack Progress*, June 8, 1999, p. A4.
- Wyn, J. & White, R. (1997). *Rethinking Youth*. London: Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

4. What are your thoughts about the graduation activities?

5. As you reach the end of grade 12, do you feel as if you are crossing a threshold in your life? Why or why not?

6. In what ways has your schooling prepared you for the next phase in your life?

7. How might the school system better prepare secondary students for leaving school?

8. What concerns do you have about next year? _____

9. Other information you think might be useful to the study.

Thank you for your help.