# Re-Imagining School to Work Transition Through a Relational Ontology

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Dominant discourse on the transition from post-secondary education to work portrays transition as a linear and discrete event that can be assessed by pre-determined outcome measures. This portrayal assumes a neoliberal construction of the student as commodity; through the educational process, the student gains skills and competencies and holds a credential with exchange value. The student is then responsible for competing for desirable positions, commensurate with their education. The success of the student in transitioning is measured by primarily financial outcomes. Recognizing that transition is important economically, both for the individual and collectively, research emphasizes identifying the predictors of successful transition and evaluating various interventions that maximize successful transition.

My exploration of how social service workers, working in a relational field from an ethics of care, navigate transition helps illuminate a reconceptualization of transition as an entangled and ongoing phenomenon. Drawing from critical narrative inquiry, I engaged in a series of in-depth interviews with social service workers who considered themselves new to the field. These conversations demonstrated the complex trajectories involving school and work, varying definitions of 'success', and the ongoing nature of transition to complicate existing understandings. I restory the narratives of two participants to demonstrate these complexities of transition for social service workers. I then explore transition as an entangled phenomenon, within a relational ontology, to explore the implications of this retheorizing for students, educators, and educational institutions. This retheorizing moves away from individual responsibility and a deficit-focused model of intervention to understand transition in its nuanced complexity. This ontological shift has significant implications for the responsibility we have to,

and for, one another. In thinking transition differently, there is potentiality to respond differently, and to create the world anew.

## Neoliberal Understandings of Transition

Neoliberal conceptualization of school-to-work transition assumes that students progress along an educational trajectory to a transition point and then complete a transition which can be assessed as successful or unsuccessful, based on pre-determined outcome measures (e.g., employment, income level). An individual student is successful in their transition if they obtain employment that is commensurate with their educational credential as measured by income. As transition is assumed to be a linear and distinct event, much of the literature focuses on the barriers to successful transition for various populations of students and deriving evidence of effective interventions for improving transition outcomes. This deficit-focused perspective is driven by the view that "unsuccessful" transition will have negative consequences for the individual student and society, more broadly. Individually, unsuccessful transition is associated with unemployment, under-employment, or precarious work. Societally, unsuccessful transition means the lack of an educated and employed public, which, according to human capital theory, results in being less competitive globally. The literature uses a narrow conceptualization of "success" in assessing transition, looking primarily at financial indicators (e.g., income). Therefore, the exploration of "unsuccessful" transition is limited to individual and social economic consequences.

Given the potential negative consequences of an unsuccessful transition, much of the literature focuses on identifying the personal characteristics of students that influence transition and examining strategies and interventions that may improve transition outcomes, like career development programs (e.g., Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012), or mentorship and

apprenticeship models (e.g., Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor, & Detwiler, 2014; Lang, 2010; Ogbuanya & Chukwuedo, 2017). Researchers use statistical analyses to identify the personal characteristics (including psychological traits, family structure, socio-economic status, etc.) of students who have transitioned to work to determine the predictors of more positive or negative transition experiences (e.g., Yang, Yaung, Noh, Jang, & Lee, 2017; Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2003). In keeping with neoliberal ideals of competition and responsibility, this dominant view of transition emphasizes the student's responsibility to commodify themselves as a marketable "bundle of skills" to sell their labour (Urciuoli, 2008, p. 211). Commodification promotes skills as discrete units of knowledge that one obtains through education and holds in relation to productive job performance; these skills involve internalizing ideals of a disciplined worker, including being self-directed, self-improving, and competing for social mobility (Urciuoli, 2008). Transition literature examines how students vary in their capacity to effectively commodify themselves based on individual, family, and social characteristics. As such, interventions are created that encourage students to internalize neoliberal expectations of the ideal worker. In examining career development and job placement programs, Hull (1993) and Valadez (2000) found these interventions emphasized socializing students into a more "professionalized identity" - one that is racialized, classed, and gendered - rather than providing new knowledge, skills, or understanding. Consistent with neoliberal ideology, these interventions emphasized personal responsibility in the need to work hard and project a positive and professional image, while failing to account for labour market reality, societal constraints, inequity, and other obstacles faced by the students transitioning into the workforce.

Although students are encouraged to work hard and obtain appropriate credentials to successfully transition into the workforce, labour market realities do not support the dominant discourse. As stated by Deil-Amen and DeLuca (2010):

> Highly skilled technical labor does not dominate the labor market, and the stable pattern of less than a third of jobs requiring a postsecondary credential is predicted to continue into the foreseeable future. Further, nearly half of the fastest growing occupations require less than a bachelor's (BA) degree. (p. 27).

There is widening disparity in labour market opportunities, as growth is occurring in bottom-tier and top-tier jobs but not in the middle (Ireland, 2015). The implications of this U-shaped growth pattern are growth in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs and the number of working poor; racialized employment opportunities with Black, Latino and immigrant workers concentrated in the bottom-tiers; greater disparity between rich and poor and a diminishing middle class; and less opportunity for workers to progress into better positions (Ireland, 2015). Existing literature on transition examines individual characteristics and effective interventions to maximize successful transition, without critically examining if the labour market can support such transitions.

In this study, I seek to complexify existing understandings of transition, to move beyond neoliberal understandings of transition as the responsibility of a commodified student whose success is measured in purely financial terms. To do so, I explore the transition experiences of social service workers. Social service workers, in my study, work with marginalized children, youth, adults, and families who are vulnerable to multiple barriers, including trauma, substance use, mental health concerns, cognitive delays, criminal justice involvement, homelessness, and other related challenges. Coming from various academic disciplines (including social work, child and youth care, human services, and other humanities and social sciences), social service

workers are often employed in not-for-profit organizations and engage in front-line work with clients in the community. As social service work is very challenging, underfunded, and precarious, I was interested in how social service workers experience their transition from post-secondary education to work. Given hegemonic definitions of success are framed in financial terms, I was interested in how success may be retheorized by those working from an ethics of care. I wanted to know how social service workers made sense of neoliberal expectations of the ideal worker and what tensions they experienced in their transition.

## Social Service Workers – Navigating the Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work

To explore how social service workers navigate the transition from post-secondary education to work, I engaged in a series of interviews with participants who identified themselves as new to the field of social service work. This recruitment process was the first tension, in a series of tensions, that helped illuminate the complexity of the transition phenomenon and catalyzed my retheorizing of transition.

In keeping with existing scholarship on newly qualified social workers (as a professionalized field distinct from social service work), I had originally defined "new to the field" as being employed in related work for one year or less. In initial discussions with potential participants, I recognized that *feeling* new to the field was more essential to their transition experience than time spent in their position. In my attempts to determine suitability for participation, I had implemented criteria that was widely used in transition scholarship. I had inadvertently taken on neoliberal understandings of transition from the literature, without critically questioning the assumptions embedded in that literature. My initial conversations with

prospective participants illuminated the importance of viewing “new to the field” as an individual experience, influenced by several factors.

Drawing from critical narrative inquiry, I engaged in a series of interviews with five participants who considered themselves new to social service work. Critical narrative inquiry recognizes that an individual’s process of meaning making is unique and dynamic; the identity of the narrator and their story is under ongoing development (Chase, 2005). As Clandinin (2013) explains, individual experience is contextualized within a complex life; narrative inquiry seeks to thoroughly explore experience within its wider context, without essentializing the narrative. I examine the individual experiences of the participants as a means to examine and deconstruct existing discursive arrangements; as Davies (2003) describes, “the primary focus of poststructuralist analyses is on discourse, and on shifting patterns of discursive practices, rather than on the specificity of the individuals who take up those discourse and make them live” (p. 147). The research, participants, and researcher are situated in discourse and theory and thus, are under constant construction (Bridges-Rhoads & Van Cleave, 2014); the participants are not constructed as fixed, stable, coherent, and knowable (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The narrative of individual experience is explored within the social, cultural, political, historical, and institutional narratives in which it occurs; dialectically, macro-level narratives shape and influence individual experience as the individual constructs and affects macro-level narratives (Clandinin, 2013). A narrative can be disruptive in its ability to demonstrate the social, cultural, historical, and political constraints that limit an individual’s range of options for construction of self and reality (Chase, 2005). A narrative can also promote social justice by highlighting the creativity and complexity of how people construct themselves within their world, despite these powerful constraints, pointing to new possibilities for living in the world.

Through a series of semi-structured interviews, participants and I co-constructed narrative accounts (Clandinin, 2013). Our initial interview, discussing current employment, academic trajectory, and transition, was audio recorded. From the audio recording, I created a written narrative account; this account included the participant's story as well as my thoughts and reactions to their story. I then shared the narrative account with the participant at the next interview, which prompted future discussion into areas of interest, restorying, and dialogue on how we were making meaning of one another's contributions. This conversation would then give rise to the next narrative account to be shared at the subsequent meeting.

From the series of interviews with the participants, I have chosen to share the stories of two participants to illustrate the complexity of transition and to demonstrate how retheorizing transition through a relational ontology may be helpful in communicating the complexity and nuance of the phenomenon. The stories, as shared here, are compilations of several narrative accounts (in keeping with Clandinin, 2013) which were written from audio recordings of our conversations. The stories below are my restorying of our co-created narrative accounts. In creating these narratives, for the purposes of highlighting aspects of the transition experience, I have engaged in a boundary-making process, determining what to include and exclude in this discussion. I recognize that, given the dynamic nature of the participants and their stories, that these boundaries could be continually reconfigured to shape the phenomenon of transition.

**Carolyn**

> *During her studies, Carolyn started her degree in history then really enjoyed geography. It was here she learned about social injustice. She was learning about injustice on a grand scale but wanted to know how to work with people who were oppressed and suffering. She applied for social work because she thought it may provide*

*answers; Carolyn said, looking back, she was idealistic in her thinking and wanted to save the world.*

*Upon graduation, Carolyn wanted to work with those who face the most significant challenges. Her initial job was working at a drop-in centre for women on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. She struggled with this position, feeling like she wasn't able to use her relational skills and that her role was gatekeeping who was able to receive service. She came to a humbling realization that perhaps social service work was not what she wanted to do and moved into ministry work. Though this time, Carolyn was unsure if this was what she wanted to do. She noted that she felt a hopefulness about work involving children and youth but wasn't exactly sure what that may look like occupationally.*

*Carolyn went to Uganda for six months to work as a social worker, helping street kids through advocacy work and starting a girls' empowerment group. While she had to navigate cultural and language challenges, she said it was a phenomenal experience that allowed her to put her values into practice. Carolyn returned from Uganda and got a job working in a crisis shelter for youth.*

*Although she has worked in relational fields for four years, Carolyn still feels very new to social service work. She says she is still figuring it out. Carolyn associated transition with anxiety and has experienced transition after graduating from post-secondary, when she returned from Uganda, and when she returned to social service work at her current position. She said she is still trying to think through her next steps and where she wants to go. She says she feels a little bit in between. Uncertain.*

*She noted that she feels ambivalence about what her future may hold. She has questions about what it means to be a professional, if she wants to return to school, what is next for her. Despite uncertainty and ambivalence, Carolyn feels pressure to compete. She said she compares herself to her peers and feels that she should be further ahead. In Western societies, she notes, there is always a feeling of not doing enough, not being enough. Carolyn said she intentionally works on those thoughts, reflecting, and learning how to be grateful. She notes that working with youth in crisis is incredibly humbling; she recognizes how much she has been given. She is very grateful but it is still a struggle to remember and not get caught up in those feelings of competition and insecurity. She says it is easy to fall back into the pattern of competition without even recognizing it. Carolyn tries not to focus on what is next and tries to appreciate that nothing she does is time wasted towards an ultimate goal; it all helps her become who she is. She is trying to value her time; to stop and enjoy life. She thinks that perspective makes for a more positive and fulfilling life but she still has messages of not being enough. It is hard to feel satisfied with who you are and what you are doing.*

*Carolyn wants to do something that brings meaning to her life. She wants to have the freedom and flexibility to learn skills, to teach others, to advocate, to share with others; to be a source of inspiration. The main thing for Carolyn is that her life will better the lives of others; that is her core value. She wants to understand people. To care for people. To be a genuine practitioner.*

**Alison**

*Alison is working part-time at a resource centre for youth who struggle with substance use, mental health concerns, and homelessness. She works part-time while she attends*

*her final year of her Bachelor of Social Work program; working is financially necessary but working in the field allows Alison to put what she is learning in school into practice. She emphasized the need to move beyond theory to think about how what she is learning can have real implications for the people she works with. Alison has a degree in social anthropology but found that she was not able to do the kind of work she wanted to do with that degree; she wanted to do relational work that was more social justice oriented. She noted her current job fits better with her approach to practice. She recognizes that any time services are funded through the government there is tension to get clients well enough that they no longer require services but that the resource centre works from a harm reduction perspective that doesn't push clients into interventions that they aren't asking for.*

*Alison talks about recognizing the power she has as a social service worker and being intentional about going into her work to serve, not as the expert. She says this reduces the focus from something overwhelming – complex societal problems and social injustice – to what she can do, in this moment, for this specific youth. She sees her role as being present, so she can see clients and attend to them.*

*She discusses the pressures she feels from others in relation to her work and her own career. Alison feels that people outside of the social service field feel that social service workers aren't doing enough. Social problems like mental health and substance are becoming more prevalent and she feels that the perception is that front-line workers should be fixing things; she notes that there is only so much social service workers can do. Alison also discusses pressure in her own career – she notes she doesn't consider herself a professional because in society, front-line work is not respected as a profession.*

*She was asked by her family why she would return to school to make less money than she would with her initial degree. Alison feels pressure to compete and meet others' expectations of where she should be financially at her age. She recognizes that even though she has tried to resist these expectations, she has also internalized them and has difficulty determining what she wants. She is challenged internally whether to pursue better paying, more stable positions with the government or work in grassroots organizations that align with her values but are often precarious. She questions how much you can really disrupt the status quo from the inside. Alison notes her education isn't so much about getting a specific job, it is about how she wants to live her life.*

*Alison discussed finishing her degree in the upcoming year and needing to find work. She said after her first degree she went to India as she couldn't move directly from post-secondary to work. She said she feels like she is constantly transitioning. Alison said she is excited to gain experience and improve her practice. She feels like she is made to feel like she has failed at transitioning into being an adult; Alison states that she has done great things in her life and is very proud of where she is, but she forgets that all the time.*

## Examining Transition

The narratives of Carolyn and Alison are helpful in demonstrating how dominant discourse on transition from post-secondary education to work may be overly simplistic, or incongruent with the experience of social service workers. Drawing from these narratives, I demonstrate the complexity of transition trajectories, varying definitions of 'success', and the ongoing nature of transition to complicate existing understandings. Then I can explore transition as an entangled phenomenon, within a relational ontology.

**The Complexity of Transition Trajectories**

Transition from post-secondary education to work emphasizes moving from being a 'student' to being a 'worker'; once this transition has occurred, it is assessed by primarily financial indicators. As seen in Carolyn and Alison's narratives, the trajectory involving school and work is complex and individual. Carolyn entered social service work after completing her degree but found it wasn't what she had imagined it to be. She then engaged in ministry work, and an international internship, before returning to a front-line, social service position. She recognized that there were similarities in the work she was doing – in terms of building meaningful relationships with those she was working with as a foundational aspect of the work – but that she still felt new to the field. She recognized that she felt like she was in transition after graduation, after returning from Uganda, and upon starting her social service position; she described this as being in between. Alison was attending school full-time while working part-time in the field. She had engaged in practicum learning and emphasized the importance of being able to put theory into practice and recognizing the impact of your work on those you serve. Alison was working on a second baccalaureate degree, even though her initial degree did enable her to obtain social service work positions. Alison's decision to return to post-secondary to achieve a similar credential is not unique; Finnie (2004) found that while an increasing number of graduated students returned for additional credentials (e.g., moving from a baccalaureate degree to a master's degree), there were also "relatively high rates of 'non-progression'", in that those with a credential returned to school for credentials at the same level or lower level as their current credential (Finnie, 2004, p. 44). Alison explained that obtaining her social work degree was important for her to gain the skills she thought was necessary to be an effective practitioner.

Many students take a more circuitous route to employment and/or work and attend school simultaneously. This shows that transition is not always a linear and progressive process and that many students may not be represented by research that delineates school and work into two distinct stages (i.e., school and work).

**Defining Successful Transition**

When transition is defined in economic terms, it reduces the complex intentions and motivations involved in pursuing various employment. In the literature, successful transition means obtaining employment that is commensurate with your educational credential, which is often measured by income. Successful transition, from this perspective, is important for individual social and economic mobility and societally, to remain competitive globally. However, as seen in Carolyn and Alison's narratives, the primary focus for students transitioning into the workforce is not always on obtaining a well-paying position. Carolyn talked about the importance of building relationships with clients, of not just being a gatekeeper for service. Carolyn discussed her desire to connect with others, to positively impact their lives, and to ensure her life had a positive impact on the wider world. Alison discussed the challenges with working in positions that are congruent with her values, recognizing these positions are usually precarious. Alison returned to school, although her initial transition could be assessed as successful. Alison was able to obtain the type of work she wanted to do but didn't feel that she had the skills and understanding to do that work in the way she wanted. Her family questioned her choices, measuring her success in financial terms; they didn't understand why she would invest the time, energy, and money into additional education to obtain a position where she would make less than with her original degree. For Alison, income wasn't a key consideration in her transition. She returned to school so she could work towards social justice, so she could truly

see clients and attend to them in meaningful ways. Both Carolyn and Alison saw their social service work as part of their life purpose. They sought work that gave their lives meaning, purpose, and connection. Carolyn and Alison are influenced by and internalizing various and competing discourses on what it means to be successful. Both Carolyn and Alison talked about the pressures they felt to compete, to measure themselves by neoliberal standards of success. They both discussed how prevalent these messages are and how they are left feeling like they haven't done enough. That they aren't enough. They talked about intentionally questioning neoliberal values and trying to be grateful and appreciate where they are in their lives, rather than asking what is next.

For Carolyn and Alison, and perhaps students in non-market-oriented disciplines more generally, successful transition means obtaining a position that is congruent with your values and allows you to do meaningful work with those who are oppressed. For them, social service work fits within a broader framework of who they are as people and how they choose to live their lives.

**Transition as Dynamic and Ongoing**

Transition is usually viewed as a distinct event that can be completed and assessed. Students complete post-secondary, transition, and then become workers in their field. In some literature, transition is seen as a process that includes orienting and acclimating to a position and becoming acculturated into the work. Based on discussions with participants and my understanding of the participants themselves as continually constituted, I see transition as a dynamic and ongoing process.

Alison's discussion of serving clients, rather than entering the relationship as expert, seems to highlight the dynamic and ongoing nature of transition. Serving clients and being, what Carolyn calls a genuine practitioner, involves being present and attending to the client in the moment. This involves humility, the desire to understand, and the courage to be in a place of uncertainty. There is a willingness to recognize that both practitioner and client are continually being constituted and that each develops in this reciprocal relationship. The practitioner is constantly learning and developing as a person, which influences their relational practice. Recognizing that being an effective practitioner involves being present and open, in a place of uncertainty, takes courage. Especially when, as Carolyn and Alison have noted, their effectiveness is questioned as social service workers are asked why they have not resolved societal inequities and injustice. It takes courage to recognize uncertainty as a strength and an asset, in an environment where the need for certainty is assumed and valued. Social service workers navigate their relationships from this place of courage and uncertainty, being open and humble to the complexity of their encounters. Practically, this involves respecting and collaborating with clients and trying to diminish power differentials in the working relationship. Transition into the social service role is an ongoing performance of multiple identities, depending on the encounter. Working in a complex field, with changing client needs, knowledge, models, and funding, is a continual transition.

This state of continual transition is *becoming*. Becoming is an unfinalizable process, involving the "replacement of static conceptions of things through the creation of dynamic conceptions of processes in continual transition" (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). This process of continual transition is not distinct to human life but involves all living and non-living elements:

> Becoming is thus not a capacity inherited by life, an evolutionary outcome or consequence, but is the very principle of matter itself, with its possibilities of linkage with the living, with its possibilities of mutual transformation, with its inherent and unstable volatility (Grosz, 2005, p. 10).

All matter is becoming; living and non-living elements are created as new possibilities, in "mutual transformation" (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). Potentiality exists in becoming; it is not important what one was or what one became. According to Deleuze and Guattari (2005),

> Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. (p. 238).

Deleuze and Guattari (2005) go on to explain that "a becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification…To become is not to progress or regress along a series" (p. 237-238). In other words, becoming is not a series of steps towards an end point, or a regression away from a finalized identification; it is not a path between two points. Becoming is not an attribute of an individual and it is not a linear process between a start point and an end point. Becoming, as a concept, helps demonstrate the complexity of the transition from post-secondary education to work. In her narrative, Alison recognizes that her transition is not complete; she is constantly transitioning. She is becoming. Unlike transition, as a distinct stage with a finalizable goal, becoming is being. The idea of constant transition – becoming – allows her to recognize that she has done a lot of important things in her life and feel proud of where she is. Similarly, in describing her work in social services, Carolyn said she felt in-between and was still figuring it out. This demonstrates that the transition from school to working in social services is becoming. Social service work involves multiple relational becomings, within a field which is also dynamic and becoming. This demonstrates the complexity and dynamism of the phenomenon of

transition. This shift in thinking emphasizes the ongoing nature of transition into and throughout social service practice. Not only are social service workers constantly transitioning, so are their clients, colleagues, agencies, funding agents, conceptualizations of need areas (like addiction, mental health, homelessness), frameworks for delivering service, and other related aspects of social service work.

## The Entangled Phenomenon of Transition

Transition is a dynamic, ongoing process involving many components that are constantly in flux. Rather than view transition as a linear and distinct process that is navigated by a student/worker, transition can be viewed as an entangled phenomenon. This highlights the various elements that constitute the transition experience and have meaningful implications for students, educators, and educational institutions.

I draw on the concept of entanglement from Barad's (2007) onto-ethico-epistemology of agential realism. Barad (2007) refutes the humanist concept of a fixed, aware, and knowing subject who moves through time and space, making decisions on how to act within their environment. Instead, Barad believes we, as human beings, come into existence and knowing in entanglement with material and discursive forces. That is, we exist in relation with other human and non-human, material entities. In entanglement, human and non-human agents intra-act as inseparable and integral parts of an indistinguishable whole. The human and non-human entities that make up the entanglement are in their own process of becoming and intra-act, rather than inter-act, because they do not exist independently of one another. The entities co-constitute in the entanglement, in the encounter. Entanglements are dynamic, shifting, and each element can be reconstituted into various entanglements, depending upon the boundaries enacted. Infinite arrangements of entanglements exist within a phenomenon and thus, the phenomenon can be

defined and explored in various ways. Barad (2007) discusses agential cuts as the boundaries enacted, defining and producing certain phenomenon. The phenomenon can be reconsidered, or recreated, through various agential cuts. That is, the phenomenon does not exist independently as something to be studied, examined, and explored; it is created through the agential cuts used to define its parameters – what the phenomenon is and what it is not. What is made to matter, as Barad (2007) discusses, is determined through a boundary making process.

In the phenomenon of transition, there are a multitude of entangled elements, including but not limited to: students, competition, values, care, empathy, education, workers, labour market, neoliberal institutions, classrooms, connection, teachers, power, social service agencies and programs, meritocracy, purpose, expectations, financial ideals of success, hypercapitalism, violence, hunger, feeling "not enough", pressure, and precarity. These elements are inseparable and entangled in multiple ways. The phenomenon of transition is made of seemingly infinite combinations and arrangements of entanglements; these entanglements are dynamic and becoming. Transition, as a phenomenon, exists as an entanglement of many inseparable parts: me, my participants, their experiences, our conversations, discourses that construct and constrain, workspaces, culture, and educational institutions. But each of those elements is more than they appear: human bodies, gender, ethnicity, memories, histories, brothers, sisters, children, parents, students, workers, teachers, courses, hope, grades, practicum, experiences, credentials, desks, hot coffee, stress, gratification, relationship, connection, support, clients, success, colleagues, funding agents, peanut butter toast, a good life, cartoons, a warm jacket, and on and on. These elements, and more, come into being in intra-action.

Examining how transition works involves changing the unit of analysis from a stable subject (within a context of social, historical, cultural, economic, and institutional narratives), to

the phenomenon of transition. This shift to dynamic and changing entanglements opens different ways of understanding relationships and the complexity of lives. Thoughts, ideas, practice, discourse, and matter intra-act in entanglements, influencing not just what can be known but creating reality in each encounter. As Davies (2014) explains: "This idea of entanglement affects not just what is possible to see but what is possible to be and do, epistemologically, ontologically, and ethically." (p. 735). Ethically, recognizing the intra-action of performative agents in entanglement alters responsibility. According to Barad (2007; 2010; 2012), responsibility is a condition of existence. She argues that we are "constituted in response-ability" (Barad, 2012, p. 215); meaning we have the ability "to respond, to be responsible, (and) to take responsibility for that which we inherit" (Barad, 2010, p. 264). I have a responsibility and a response-ability (an ability to respond ethically and responsibly) in my connection with others. For Barad, responsibility is not a choice but a condition of interdependence; being responsible is recognizing and honouring the "stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being" (Barad, 2012, p. 217). Our condition of interdependence and our responsibility to, and for, one another has significant implications for students, educators, and educational institutions in their understanding of transition.

## Implications of Re-imagining Transition

Recognizing transition as a complex, entangled phenomenon has meaningful implications for students, educators, and educational institutions. I explore each below.

### Students

Understanding transition as an entangled phenomenon helps remove unnecessary and unhelpful pressure from students. Current examinations of transition highlight the responsibility

of the individual student to successfully transition. This pressure to get somewhere fast - although the destination is unclear and ever-changing – was expressed by Carolyn and Alison. They expressed feeling like they weren't doing enough, that they weren't enough. Encouraging students to understand transition as an entangled phenomenon could help students recognize discourses that are both constituting and constraining them. Recognizing the entangled nature of transition could help students see that there are various (often circuitous) trajectories involving school and work and no one right way to navigate these trajectories. Also, that for many students, successful transition is working in a position that provides purpose, meaning, and connection and could have positive impacts on others and the wider world. These messages are antithetical to neoliberal ideology that emphasizes competition, commodification, and the financial aspects of successful transition.

**Educators**

Recognizing that transition is not a stage in between post-secondary education and work but an ongoing process of becoming alters teaching and learning. I think teaching in intra-action would involve awareness of becoming and an openness to move and flow with the emergent ideas within the classroom. As a teacher, I go into each teaching/learning experience cognizant that the classroom experience, and the enacted curriculum, emerges through the intra-action of human (me, my students) and nonhuman (affective states, uncomfortable chairs, distraction, stress, classroom, whir of overhead projector, etc.) agents. I recognize that material elements of the classroom (and beyond) construct our intra-action. I explicitly challenge the idea (with my students) that I am in charge of what happens within the class and that I can adequately plan my lessons to work through prescribed curriculum to meet specific learning outcomes. Rather than only working towards institutionally-defined learning outcomes for each course (which need to

be standardized to similar courses at other institutions), I try to find new, thoughtful ways to explore learning; this exploration, for me, might involve be awake to learning in the moment (both mine and my students'), examining learning that happened in the past and can only be recognized retrospectively, and forecasting learning as it may happen in the future.

While it may be unrealistic to think ideas of teaching and learning could be completely transformed through an onto-epistemological shift, there may be molecular lines that can be altered or affected. Instead of trying to completely overhaul molar segmentarities, like teaching and learning, Barad (2007) articulates the importance and significance of remaking the world in each intra-action. As teacher, educators, and students, we have an important role in contributing to the remaking of the world, within our classrooms, in each moment. I can teach my students about relational practice by examining entanglements, intra-action, and becoming. I can explore with them how those concepts can be taken up as social service workers and what taking them up may mean for them and for those they work with. I can explore concepts and ideas diffractively, opening up new ways of thinking and new questions that can be asked, rather than presenting content as fact.

Working from a relational ontology alters how we teach students in social service fields specifically. As discussed in Preston and Aslett's (2014) work on activist pedagogy, students studying to enter social work, social service work, and other non-market oriented disciplines could benefit from smaller class sizes and regular faculty (as opposed to sessional instructors). Creating smaller classes with regular faculty promotes a relational environment where students and teachers can explore anti-oppressive practice in a politicized environment. Creating this learning environment promotes emergent pedagogy and intra-action. Examples of entanglement, becoming, and intra-action could be drawn from the course experience to teach students about

how working intra-actively with clients in their future may look. Teaching and learning in entanglement would involve awareness of becoming and an openness to move and flow with the emergent ideas within the classroom, rather than teaching towards pre-determined course outcomes.

### Educational Institutions

Educational institutions could recognize themselves as one performative agent in the entanglement of transition. As such, the focus of educational institutions doesn't need to be on identifying and remedying deficits through interventions designed to maximize successful transitions. Instead, institutions can be involved in expanding understandings of transition. Institutions can promote varied trajectories involving school and work, and challenge the idea that education only provides exchange value in obtaining a lucrative career. Educational institutions can promote democratized work (Kincheloe, 1995) that is meaningful and promotes social justice. Practically, educational institutions can be transparent about labour market realities, overcredentialling, and academic inflation (Grubb, 1985). To change the way educational institutions examine and portray transition, there needs to be shift away from education as an arm of industry or as a training ground, to education as a learning environment that promotes democratized work.

## Transition Re-Imagined

An assumption underlying much of the transition literature is that education and the labour market are meritocracies that reward individual agency and hard work and that "success" can be measured by income or earning potential. Based on these assumptions, researchers examining transition seek to maximize "successful" transitions through various interventions and

supports. As seen in the narratives of social service workers, participants do not discuss transition as a distinct stage that is completed and can be assessed as successful/unsuccessful; the narratives highlighted continual transition. This demonstrates that the period of transition is not distinct but can be ongoing, as the social service worker, their complex clients, the agencies in which they operate, and macro level factors (like political climate, societal awareness and acceptance, and economic realities) are all dynamic and in constant transition - becoming.

Re-imagining transition as an emergent and ongoing process challenges neoliberal expectations of transition that constrain students and educational institutions. Transition is not dependent upon student motivation or hard work, nor the targeted interventions provided by post-secondary institutions; instead, transition is a complex entanglement of many human and material elements. Understanding the complexity of transition may help alleviate the responsibility placed on students and educational institutions, contextualizing their role within societal arrangements that limit opportunity. Recognizing the nuances of transition has significant implications for how we relate to one another and the responsibility we have to, and for, one another. In thinking transition differently, there is potentiality to respond differently, and to create the world anew.

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