# Resisting Concepts as Starting Points in a High School Leadership Pathway Alongside Indigenous Youth

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## Abstract

This writing draws on an ongoing narrative inquiry with 10 Indigenous youth as they negotiated their lives within a high school leadership pathway. Our research demonstrates the need to resist starting in concepts as an intentional shift to being and becoming wakeful to storied lives on and off school landscapes. Three resonant threads are highlighted as we listened across the youths' lives. These threads are framed as pathways the youth asked us to consider in terms of reimagining schools as places of unfolding kinship, reimagining schools beyond notions of becoming responsible adults, and reimagining in-between spaces as landscapes that matter.

## Pathways to Beginning: Overview

When we began this work, we held wonders of how Indigenous youth composed their identities and sustained their lives on and off school landscapes. For some on our research team, they had lived intimately alongside the Indigenous youth who became part of our research for several years prior as teachers within the high school (Brian Lewis, Tamara Ryba, Brett Kannenberg). For others on our research team, they had a historical and ongoing connection to the Growing Young Movers (GYM) after-school program and the youth since its inception over a decade ago (Sean Lessard and Brian Lewis) (Lewis, 2018). While some of us (Michael Dubnewick and Tristan Hopper) had only recently taken up appointments as professors at the University of Regina and had just begun to step into the midst of the high school landscape, GYM, and the lives of the Indigenous youth they eventually came to know. As a community engaged in research, we each came to this work wanting to better understand and attend to the experiences of the Indigenous youth who were part of the Leadership Pathway in ways where we could wonder less about how to fit the youth within the school landscape, and more towards how we could imagine the school landscape better fitting and attending to the lives of the youth. Given that the Leadership Pathway was intentionally created in ways to reimagine how schools could be structured to better support the lives of youth as they navigate school landscapes, our work and time alongside the youth allowed us to better understand the ongoing life-making of the youth as they navigated the Leadership Pathway.

Growing Young Movers (GYM) grew out of previous research with Indigenous youth (Lewis, 2018; Lessard, 2015; Lessard et al., 2015) and was designed to acknowledge and respect the innate leadership skills of Indigenous high school students while attending to aspects of employment and transitions. GYM began as an intergenerational after-school program where high school youth co-facilitate play-based programming for younger children. The location of GYM has shifted over the years and has worked with

numerous communities in a variety of ways. Currently, the GYM afterschool program occurs in an urban-located community high school in Regina. While previous GYM afterschool programming was not integrated within the curriculum, GYM after-school programming is now integrated within the high school curriculum as part of the Leadership Pathway. High school students within the Leadership Pathway are in grade-specific cohorts (grades 10, 11, and 12) during school hours and then transition to working as paid mentors for children from neighboring elementary schools within the GYM after-school program. The Leadership Pathway is the first of its kind in Saskatchewan in terms of integrating school-based education (i.e., credited curricula in areas of leadership, cultural arts, land-based education, outdoor education, and physical education) with employment through a nonprofit organization (i.e., GYM). While the partnership between GYM and the community high school provides opportunities to reimagine how schools can be structured to be more attentive and respectful towards the youths' ongoing life-making, we are also aware of bumping points that exist as these two landscapes become embedded and enmeshed.

## Wakeful to Multiple Storied Landscapes: Locating How After-School Programs Are Embedded in Dominant Stories of School and Recreation

Since GYM's beginnings, those part of the nonprofit youth program have continuously framed and negotiated an everyday practice where Indigenous youth are known as knowledge holders (Lewis et al., 2022; Schaefer et al., 2017). As noted in their prior work, this framing of youth as knowledge holders often bumps against dominant institutional narratives of school that position youth as passive recipients who are in need of knowledge and/or fixing. Huber at al. (2011) theoretically conceptualized that youth negotiate two worlds of curriculum making, the familial curriculum-making world and the school or institutional curriculum-making world. What becomes troubling as youth navigate both worlds is how their knowledge is positioned and valued in each of these worlds. Lessard's (2015) work demonstrated how Indigenous youths' familial knowledge is often discounted as school/institutional curriculum takes precedence. While we were wakeful to how after-school programs have been conceptualized as an extension of the institutional curriculum-making worlds, we were also wakeful to how GYM, the Leadership Pathway, and the youth also negotiated their lives amidst dominant interventionist logics of programmed recreation and wellness.

Recently scholars, including Sharpe et al. (2022), have begun to show how dominant interventionist logics construct youth who have been labelled "at-risk" as docile bodies in-need of fixing, with after-school youth programming being positioned as an effective tool to change youth into healthy and ideal neoliberal citizens. This type of programming logic has been especially true for Indigenous youth, where sport and recreation programming have historically been, and continue to be, used as a form of colonial assimilation (Forsyth, 2013; Forsyth & Giles, 2013; Paraschak, 2013; Norman et al., 2018). One of the everyday sites in which this is most prevalent, and often least contested (given the feel-good nature), is wellness-based programming that focuses on leadership development.

Giles and colleagues' work over the last several years (Galipeau & Giles, 2014; Gartner-Manzon & Giles, 2016; Rose & Giles, 2007) critically analyzed how Alberta's Future Leaders Program (AFL), a summer

sport/recreation/arts program dedicated to Indigenous youth leadership development, lacked meaningful engagement with Indigenous approaches to leadership. While the intentions of AFL are to work with Indigenous communities, they noted that these programs function in a way that thrusts Euro-Canadian values and approaches of leadership upon Indigenous youth by outside experts looking to skill-up youth. In turn, this creates an environment where Indigenous youth are taught Euro-Canadian leadership skills to navigate their worlds. Their research demonstrated how programs like AFL do very little to shift our understanding of how the multitude of ways leadership can be composed in the lives of Indigenous youth and their communities. Further, such programs explicitly undermine Indigenous ways of knowing and the familial knowledge of youth by discounting their lived experiences and how they come to programs as knowledge holders.

## Towards Thinking Narratively: Resisting Beginning With Concepts of Leadership as a Starting Point

As we came together as a research team, we began our work wakeful to how the dominant stories of school and the interventionist logics of recreation often positioned research with Indigenous youth from the starting point of aiming to demonstrate and/or deconstruct the effectiveness of innovative curriculum and program pathways. Within the context of the Leadership Pathway, GYM, and the community high school, those dominant plotlines of research would have positioned our starting point of inquiry beginning and ending within the concept of leadership. Beginning with concepts of leadership would have grounded our inquiry in questions about whether the Leadership Pathway was creating integrated links between curriculum content and practical leadership skills within the youth. As a community engaged in research, we felt these bumping points as we lived alongside the youth in concrete, everyday ways:

> Whenever I think of Wilt and those moments we got to know each other I am always transported to the first days and weeks in which our lives were introduced. Our knowing of each other began on the court as we shot hoops with children from the neighbouring elementary schools. On those days, as we dribbled, passed and shot, I was slowly introduced to who Wilt was and who he was becoming. I watched as groupings of children would excitedly form around Wilt each day with basketballs in hand. I watched as elbows went out wide, knees would bend, and with sudden propulsions of their bodies the children would fling balls into the air that ricocheted off backboards, grazed the baskets netting, and bounced towards the nearby exit doors. And in those moments, I also watched as Wilt retrieved stray shots, and gently bounced balls back. When moments presented, he would take his own shot. Confidently, the ball would arc and find its way into the netting. I watched as the little ones turned to Wilt. Wilt would slowly show them how to gather their feet, or dribble the ball—patiently beginning with two hands, then moving to one, before gathering his feet again to take a shot. I watched as they would mimic his movements. One dribble, feet scuffle, second dribble, feet scuffle, control with two hands. One dribble, feet scuffle, second dribble, feet scuffle, control with two hands. As shots bounced off rims and hit backboards collective gasps would ensue. When shots found their way into the hoop a collective roar would ensue, as if that basket made was more of a collective accomplishment than an individual achievement. (Michael, field text, 10/28/2020)

As we turn to Michael's condensed field texts from his early beginnings alongside Wilt, we are wakeful to how dominant plotlines could, and have shaped, our attentiveness to Wilt's ongoing life-making. It would be easy for us to begin with the concept(s) of leadership. For Michael, he often found himself

negotiating this plotline of beginning and returning to the concept(s) of leadership. Part of this ongoing negotiation was that was/is a dominant plotline of research. Another part of Michael's ongoing negotiation was how he was nested in communities where content and concepts framed people's coming together. This occurred through his position as an instructor and professor in university classrooms where he had previously taught leadership courses within an interdisciplinary leadership college during his doctorate and currently taught an introductory leadership course in his faculty. In both of these places, lives were framed around content and classrooms became places where Michael felt pressures to teach students theories, models, and practices of leadership (such as trait approach, leader member-exchange theory, servant leadership) that were often cited in introductory leadership texts (Northouse, 2022) over attending to the ongoing life-making in relation to concepts and content. As he engaged with these courses as an instructor, he often asked learners to explain leadership concepts, apply concepts to their own lived experiences or to examples in their broader social worlds. In many ways it could have been easy for Michael to continue these plotlines of beginning with concepts first and seeing or showing it through experience within the youth who were part of the Leadership Pathway. It would be easy to demonstrate how Wilt's approach to mentoring children exemplified a specific type of "personal power" discussed in leadership texts as "referent power" as children in the community often showed deep identification towards Wilt as a likeable role model. From this point as research team, we could further show how he developed these likeable, adored relationships and how that allowed Wilt to positively influence the children in the community towards a goal. Or we could discuss more pivotal approaches to leadership such as Blanchard's (1985) situational leadership model. The situational leadership model advocated that effective leadership requires that people adapt how directive or supportive they are depending on the needs (i.e., competency and commitments) of their followers. If we were to begin with the concept of situational leadership we would draw, and examine, how Wilt shifted his approach to leadership in relation to followers' competency and motivation. We could examine and show how he adapted as a leader from more directive to supportive depending on the needs of his followers and the situation (i.e., when being with children in GYM vs. when being on the high school basketball team). As we engaged in our research with the youth, we knew that if we lived the plotline of beginning and ending our research inquiry from the concept of leadership we would reduce their ongoing life-making to concepts of leadership. It is Caine and colleagues' (2022) writing that provides clarity on the need to resist starting with concepts in narrative inquiry:

> If we start with a concept, for example, identity or community or imagination or some other concept, the concept is unfolded, followed through to its complexities and, perhaps, to the ways the concept is lived in experience. It is the concept that provides the organizing frame. The concept is privileged, placed as the starting point for understanding experience. As narrative inquirers, our task is quite a different one. We cannot figure out the concept first and then see 'it' in experience. We start in the experience, at the outset seeing the messy interwoven threads, knowing each is important and needs to be addressed. But, as we pull one thread of an experience, we always know the rest of experience is present. (Caine et al., 2022, p. 2)

Stated another way, by starting with concepts researchers degrade the epistemic status of experience. By resisting concepts and attending to youths' stories, we may be able to reimagine school and after-school places as spaces that offer possibilities to become attentive to youth's diverse and unfolding lives in ways where their lives and learning are embedded (Clandinin, 2010).

## Methodology

Narrative inquiry (as defined by Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is a methodology that understands experience as a storied phenomenon and that people's storied experiences are embedded and negotiated within social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives. As Connelly and Clandinin wrote (2006):

> Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry came out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 477)

As a relational research methodology, narrative inquiry seeks to position the researcher(s) as part of the inquiry where researcher(s) and participant(s) live alongside one another over time. At the heart of all narrative inquiries is an attentiveness to developing collaborative processes that allow researchers and participants/communities to live in relationally ethical ways (Clandinin et al., 2018). As narrative inquirers our attention shifts towards our relationships between people, and the responsiveness that occurs in our encounters as lives come together over time. As Clandinin (2013) explained, "experience is seen as a narrative composition; that is, experience itself is an embodied narrative life composition. Narrative is not, as some would have it, merely an analytical or representational device" (p. 38). This attentiveness to experience as an embodied narrative life composition grounded our work. As a community committed to the methodological commitments of narrative inquiry, we were reminded of our responsibilities to being and becoming attentive the ongoing life-making we were part of as we developed relationships with each of the youth. Below we provide a more practical accounting of how we engaged in our process of living alongside 10 Indigenous youth who participated in GYM and the Leadership Pathway within the community high school context.

## Engaging in Narrative Inquiry

Within this section, we outline how we engaged in a narrative inquiry with 10 Indigenous youth who were part of the Leadership Pathway. As an overview, our research engaged in the following processes: (a) inquiring into our own autobiographical beginnings, (b) developing an ongoing response community and living alongside youth, (c) writing, negotiating, and thinking across the narrative accounts. This process we discuss more below. Prior to this, we do feel there is a need to briefly provide some context. Our research began in spring 2020 and continued throughout the 2020/21 school year and into the 2021/22 school year. During this time 10 Indigenous youth participated in our research through in-person and virtual research conversations (depending on location of research team member and health procedures relating to COVID-19). It should be noted that while we write this work as "finished," for several on our research team (i.e., Michael Dubnewick, Tristan Hopper, Sean Lessard, and Brian Lewis) this research is ongoing and for others (i.e., Brett Kannenberg and Tamara Ryba) their commitments to

the youth are also ongoing within their roles as teachers, thus this writing is very much "for now" (Clandinin et al., 2018).

## *Autobiographical Beginnings*

As we began imagining our research alongside the Indigenous youth, we were cautious of moving too quickly. Given that several members of our research team had previously engaged in narrative inquiries, we knew the importance of narrative beginnings, or autobiographical inquiries, as a way to locate ourselves and inquire into our own stories in relation to our research puzzle so we did not overlay or silence the lives of the youth (Dubnewick et al., 2018). As our research team gathered in the early stages of our work, we shared stories and experiences of navigating schools and our current involvements with/in schools, we inquired into our stories of leadership and our relation to programmed recreation, wellness and after-school activities. As our research team shared, we drew annals, or chronicles, of our lives. As we did, we learned of different stories of school, some rurally located, others urban. We inquired into and unpacked dominant stories of school that reduced the complexity that lived within schools to pre-prescribed knowledge and outcomes, and we discussed the tensions of living otherwise as educators as we each shared stories of negotiating school landscapes. We inquired into our own roles and how they youth may story us in certain ways (i.e., as teachers or as people/researchers from outside the community). We wondered how we could know ourselves differently and open possibilities to be known in the lives of youth differently as we (re)negotiated entry (Dubnewick et al., 2021).

## *An Ongoing Response Community and Living Alongside*

As we collaboratively inquired into our narrative beginnings, we slowly developed a response community that we turned back to throughout the inquiry. While, we did not frame our response community during those early moments of our work as "spaces of appearance" as Caine et al. (2021) recently conceptualized. We now understand that within our response community we, at times, were asking each other to reveal ourselves to ourselves and to each other in ways that we could open possibilities to restory our relational responsibilities, not only individually but also within the worlds of the youth we lived alongside.

Given each of our locations and negotiations of who we were in the lives of the youth, we each negotiated relationships with the one to two youth. Over the course of the research project, our research team had four conversations with each of the 10 Indigenous youth who were part of the study and several on the research team lived alongside youth in the GYM after-school program on a weekly and/or daily basis. After each of these conversations we returned to our response community. Sometimes that meant meeting at the university, other times at the community high school, and other days at city parks as we walked, talked, video-called people in, and shared tentative written accounts. These were important gatherings as we continually turned to how we were thinking narratively and engaging in responsive ways with the youth as their life-making become more visible to us.

### *Writing, Negotiating, and Think Across the Narrative Accounts*

As we lived alongside the youth in school and after-school places, engaged in research conversations, and discussed in our response community, we collectively moved towards writing narrative accounts for each of the Indigenous youth. Writing narrative accounts were a way for us to give an account, or a representation, of the unfolding of lives of both the youth as well as the research team as their lives become visible to each other. In narrative inquiry the writing of narrative accounts is a way to be accountable and responsible to those people we work with, in this case the Indigenous high school youth. As a community coming together in this work, individual narrative accounts also became a valuable process to ensure we were not reducing the diverse experiences and life-making of each of the youth to an essentialized, or singular account. In addition to writing these accounts, each researcher shared their accounts with the youth as a way to develop mutuality and ask if we listened and/or travelled (Lugones, 1987) well. Once these narrative accounts were written and negotiated, we came together to share across the accounts and inquire into possible resonant threads, which we discuss below.

## Resonant Threads as We Lived Alongside Indigenous Youth in a Leadership Pathway

We want to reiterate this research aims to resist the plotline of storying our work as an evaluation of GYM and the Leadership Pathway as an effective intervention or innovative curricula approach that has the potential to skill-up youth and get through school. Rather, our interests and wonders sit in "thinking with" the stories youth shared with us, in ways that they prompted us to consider different stories for how we can imagine and structure schools in more sustaining ways. As Morris (2002) wrote:

> The concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as of allowing narrative to work on us. (p. 196)

From this vantage, the resonant threads shared are less about creating neat and orderly themes across the narrative accounts and are more about providing threads for the reader to sense how the youths' lives shaped our personal and social stories of school. This led us to framing our resonant threads as pathways that the youth asked us to consider.

### *Thread to Reimagine Schools as Places of Unfolding Kinship*

As shared in the introduction, GYM and the Leadership Pathway were conceptualized from prior research and community experience (Lessard, 2015; Lewis, 2018; Schaefer et al., 2017) with an intergenerational approach. For example, high school youth would be paid to mentor and co-facilitate the after-school GYM program for children from the surrounding elementary schools each day. Grade 12 high school youth would also mentor incoming grades 10 and 11 high school youth within the Leadership Pathway at the community high school. The youth also had mentors within GYM, like Brian or Knowledge Keeper Joseph Naytowhow. While the GYM program and Leadership Pathway was structured with this intent from the beginning, the value of understanding how these relational threads sustained youth as they

navigated the broader school landscape became clearer as we lived alongside the youth. To show what we mean, we turn to Maya's conversation with Michael:

*"When I started working for GYM*
*I didn't have any role models and stuff.*
*I kind of didn't have that much hope for my future.*
*I was kind of down at the time when I started GYM.*
*And I was like…I didn't have any role models or guides.*

*When Brian started talking about being a role model to the kids*
*I thought about my childhood.*
*I was like—It would have been nice*
*And even things I'm going through at this moment*
*It would be nice to have a role model*
*Or somebody there just for support.*
*Or somebody that understands.*
*Or somebody that's just like—they don't have to ask me what's wrong,*
*They'll just be there when I need them.*
*It would be nice to have that.*

*I thought about the kids at GYM*
*I thought about the way I grew up*
*I was thinking it would be nice…*
*It probably means a lot to them when they have a role model*
*To look up to—who is there for them—*
*they can feel supported by and comfortable around.*

*So, I thought about that, and I was like:*
*'I want to be a good role model for them*
*I want to be somebody who positively influences the community'*
*It [GYM] has been a catalyst.*

*I hold connections to a high value just because it's really important to me now*
*I always wanted closer connections with my family.*
*Now when I experience a good connection,*
*I'll do anything to keep it safe.*

*GYM is like a sacred space*
*I wish I had that when I was younger."*

*(Michael, reconstructed research conversation,[1] 01/26/2021)*

As Michael lived alongside Maya, it was clear that relationships mattered to how they sustained their ongoing life-making as they navigated different worlds. It mattered in deep and visceral ways for Maya. As Maya's words animate, those connections and relationships mattered in ways that she wanted to and would protect. While Maya knew of the importance of relationships in sustaining her ongoing life-making, she also draws our attention to how she imagines this being true for the children who were a part of GYM. As we read Maya's words again, we are pulled into those feelings of being there for each other. As we do, we consider how the GYM after-school program was a consistent space where intergenerational relationships sat at the heart of how the program was structured and how the youth

storied the program in their lives. In this way a sense of narrative coherence lived between the personal stories of Maya and the social stories of GYM. Another youth, Norval, succinctly stated, "kinship, I think is a better word" when naming his experience within GYM. It is Norval, Maya and the eight other youth that asked us to reimagine how we name and understand schools as places of unfolding kinship.

### *Thread to Reimagine Schools Beyond Notions of Becoming Responsible Adults:*

Hearing each of the youths' complex lives made visible the layers of responsibility that the youth engaged with across multiple landscapes. As we listened to their experiences, and shared across the narrative accounts, we began to question the singular notion of schools as places to teach students how to become increasingly responsible adults. While we do not want to discount the value of becoming responsible, we did begin to wonder how that framing of school landscapes arrogantly perceived the lives of youth without attempting to travelling to the worlds of youth to understand how their living was full of continuous compositions of responsibility in ways that were silenced on school landscapes (Lugones, 1987). In many ways, lists of responsibility seemed to sit on the edges of the school landscape, silenced in favor of a different understanding of what it meant to be and become responsible (to curriculum).

*A small list of silenced responsibilities*

- *"I started looking after my siblings and little cousins at a young age"*
- *"I am up very early in the morning to make sure they are awake"*
- *"I have to make breakfast"*
- *"And get them to school"*
- *"Things are crazy at home right now"*
- *"I am their support…I just really try and take care of them"*
- *"I had to take on such a big responsibility of one kid, and then another, and then another, over time"*
- *"COVID's been tough—I tried doing my work at home, but that wasn't an option for me"*
- *"I care for the younger generations, because you never know. Because some kids could be going through stuff like how I was, or something."*
- *"Living within a survival mindset"*

*(Assemblage of reconstructed field texts[2])*

The words above represent only a small list of responsibilities that cut across the youths' lives. Paralleling Clandinin's (2010) research with youth who left school early, many of the youth we came to know shared how they balanced numerous and conflicting responsibilities. As the youth shifted between and across multiple worlds of responsibility, we began to wonder how schools responded in ways that allowed the youth to sustain their ongoing life-making outside of limited notions of responsibility. In listening to the youth, we began to hear stories of experience that shifted our understanding of how spaces of becoming and living playfully mattered within the youths' lives as several shared that they "had to grow up faster" and become responsible at a young age. As lived in the GYM after-school space each day and week, it was as if this space supported the becoming of being a different someone on the broader school and community landscape. As youth moved and played with children, it was shared with us that GYM was experienced as a "distraction from life," "to feel like a kid," or as a place to "release the stress during the games," or as another youth shared; "Whenever I play with the little kids, it's really fun, because they are there to play with you. I always enjoy seeing the kids, and I always feel like if I had a bad day at school or just a bad night, and I just forget about it and hang out with the kids. And sometimes I am sad, but I'm not usually sad at GYM anymore…I'm a total different person there [at GYM]" (Tamara, research conversation). As we think

with the many words the youth shared, we begin to consider the value of supporting threads on, and off, school landscapes for youth to be and become playful as children and youth.

### *Thread to Reimagine In-Between Spaces as Landscapes That Matter*

In Murphy et al.'s (2012) research they show us the tensions experienced by children and their families as they negotiate familial curriculum-making worlds and school curriculum-making worlds. As they draw us into their stories of experience alongside a child and their mother, we feel those tensions of how familial curriculum-making worlds were and commonly are arrogantly perceived as unresponsive and inadequate, with the school curriculum-making world positioned as superior. As we read their work, we found ourselves drawn to their forward-looking threads which turned towards wondering about the "possibilities of in-between spaces where children can inquire into their embodied tensions as they world travel each day, each week, each month, each year between the two curriculum-making worlds of home and community, and school" (p. 230).

As we sit in their wonders, we considered our own experiences alongside the youth and how GYM was in very literal and metaphorical ways positioned as an in-between space. In the literal sense, we each felt that as our lives transitioned each day within the community school building. A building that was physically structured in a way where the second floor was designated as the high school and the lower, or main floor, was positioned as more of a community centre. In the lower floor you stepped into a grand, glass foyer with municipal offices, two multipurpose gymnasiums, a cafeteria, a public library, and a variety of school and community rooms all adjacent. Each day, teachers and high school youth travelled from the upper floor of the high school and the school curriculum-making worlds that lived in those spaces, down the wide staircase, into the foyer, and into the multipurpose room in which the GYM after-school program resided. As a research team we wondered about that literal and metaphorical travel that the youth and teachers experienced each day, each week, each month, and each year.

We each asked the youth how they experienced these literal and metaphorical transitions, those feelings of who they were, how they were known, and who they could become when the bell rang and they made their way down the stairs and into the multipurpose room for GYM. In many ways, we wondered how GYM was named in the lives of youth as it sat in what we, as a research team, conceptualized as the borderlands of school and community-familial worlds. For us a research team, we experienced and named GYM as a place of liminality within our lives as there was a sense of uncertainty and unease to the plotlines of who we were and how our lives could come together. We wondered if our storying of GYM as a place of liminality was coherent within the youth's lives as they navigated GYM as a place on the school landscape, yet at the same time off the school landscape. Much like other narrative inquirers (e.g., Clandinin et al., 2018; Davis & Murphy, 2016; Huber et al., 2003) who drew on Heilbrun's[3] (1999) work on liminality, we were drawn to considering the educative possibilities of liminal places where youth could story themselves and their relations differently, with strength. As we each turned to the youth to inquire into their experiences of transition, the value and potential naming of GYM as an in-between liminal place became clearer as Michael sat down with Maya, one of the youths:

*A prompt on school and GYM, are they experienced differently…?*

*"School is more like memorizing things.*
*You're not actually learning for your experience…*
*Maybe I'm supposed to do something with all this information, but I don't know what it is!*

*We talk for a while*
*Discussions on school feeling pointless*
*As a place that pulled them away from their strengths*

*"it's like... all the people in high school they have to meet certain requirements to reach their dreams, so they're so worried about reaching those requirements, and if they're good enough for their jobs that they want to have in the future.*
*It's like... That they kind of think about that too much. And then it takes their attention away from their strengths and everything that they accomplished. And sometimes they just need a reminder of how much hard work they actually did up until that moment. And to not worry so much or stress so much about getting the right requirements and stuff for the future."*

*"In GYM it doesn't feel like that"*

(*Michael, Reconstructed research conversation, 03/20/2021)*

While this is only one of many of our conversations, Maya articulated that GYM was experienced outside of what her, and many of the youth, knew and associated with the school curriculum-making world. GYM was experienced and named differently in their lives, and for many they named themselves differently in those spaces, as brothers, kin, teachers, role models, and friends. As we turn towards thinking with what Maya shared with Michael, we are reminded of how significant in-between spaces were for the youth as their lives and learning were experienced as embedded.

## Conclusion: Threads of Continued Wonder

As we consider the significance of in-between spaces in the lives of the youth, we also turn towards ourselves as a community engaged in this work. In beginning this writing, we discussed how each of us were located in the youth's lives in different ways. Some of us were positioned as teachers, others as after-school community programmers, and others as researchers from the university. While the youth turned our attentiveness towards the value of in-between spaces to reimagine who one is and who one is becoming, as a community of researchers we similarly turned towards the significance of in-between space to reimagine who we were and were becoming in each other's lives. In doing this, we each found ourselves attempting to negotiate and understand our relational responsibilities as we lived alongside the youth. For some that meant meeting on the outdoor basketball court, for others it was through after-school play, sitting down for a meal, or travelling together to different landscapes such as the halls of the university. In travelling to places, we became attentive to the complexity of the youths' lives as they lived on different landscapes. As we state this, we return back to the many moments Michael had alongside Wilt as he played basketball with children from the neighboring elementary schools. With each dribble, pass, and shot we are reminded to stay grounded in becoming attentive to the unfolding lives within these borderland spaces of school and community so we do not reduce life-making of youth, like Wilt,

to predetermined concepts such as leadership. As we began this work, we noted our tensions of resisting starting in concepts of leadership. Now, as we continue to live in the midst of this work, we remind ourselves to resist reproducing research and practice that begins and ends in concepts.

## Notes

1. Within this research we turned to a variety of field texts as a way attend to the multiple ways people live and tell of their experiences (Clandinin, 2013). For us that meant: composing field notes of our experiences living alongside (reflective journaling of our observations, experiences, and wonders), *art*-full annals (creative drawings and accounts that opened space for the research team and the youth to draw, write, and share memories, events, and stories within their lives), and research conversations (multiple transcribed interviews with each youth). The term *reconstructed research conversations* signify the where of the specific field text (i.e., research conversations) and acknowledges that we, as researchers, were not separate or disembodied recorders of experience, but actively part of the experience itself.

2. The process of creating this *assemblage of reconstructed field texts* developed out of questions of how do we show and tell how becoming responsible adults was storied and experienced by the youth on the school landscape. Each of the sentences in the *assemblage of reconstructed field texts* are from the youth, stated in research conversations, written through annals, or shared in the field. As we listened across the youth, we each began to hear stories of the diverse responsibilities that existed in the youth's lives. We also began to wonder how these responsibilities were silenced on the school landscape as becoming responsible adults was framed around becoming responsible and accountable to content and curriculum. The final research text was a way for us to show that process of silencing that was experienced by the youth on the school landscape for the reader. With each phrase shared we hope the reader notices the font becoming smaller, harder to read, and ultimately less visible. Our hope is that this form of (re)presentation shows the reader how the youths storying of being and becoming responsible was delegitimized and ultimately silenced amidst the narrow ways in which responsibility was framed on the school landscape. We also hope that you as a reader have a sense of wanting to read the miniscule text and feeling the strain of being able to read more; this strain was also present for those who lived as teachers within our research community, as they too negotiated dominant stories of being and becoming responsible to curriculum.

3. Heilbrun (1999) described liminality as, "the word 'limen' means 'threshold,' and to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing" (p. 3).

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