

# From Collapse to Relationality Improv: High School Stories in Motion for Justice

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*Youth live storied lives (made up of intersecting stories of school, home, peers, and other aspects of lived experience). Therefore, the ways in which youth construct and tell their high school stories are vital for understanding their experiences as first authors (primary creators, constructors, and tellers of their own stories) and protagonists (as active agents of these stories). This paper examines the physical and metaphorical movements that a research team experienced when constructing and sharing their high school narratives related to youth engagement in social justice educational change. Team members went from engaging restricted movements (which we, authors, have called collapse, truncation, or formulaic motions) to expanded motions (designated relationality improv, malleable formations, and the languages of the arts). This transformation reflected members becoming first authors of and meaningful protagonists in their high school stories of social justice and democratic educational change. For educators and researchers striving to support youth voice and engagement in educational change, an emphasis on movement (within youths' story construction and telling processes) affords valuable openings to support youth in identifying and claiming their agency, engagement and change-making in high school.*

*Les jeunes vivent des vies bien remplies, composées de récits qui s'entrecroisent et qui touchent l'école, le foyer, les pairs et d'autres aspects de leur vécu. Les façons dont les jeunes construisent et racontent leurs histoires à l'école secondaire sont donc des éléments essentiels pour comprendre leurs expériences de premiers auteurs (créateurs principaux, constructeurs et raconteurs de leurs propres histoires) et de protagonistes (agents actifs de ces récits). Cet article examine les gestes physiques et métaphoriques qu'a connus une équipe de chercheurs lors de la construction et du partage de leurs récits au secondaire portant sur l'engagement des jeunes dans la justice sociale. Les membres de l'équipe ont commencé par des gestes limités (ce que nous, les auteurs, appelons effondrement, troncature ou mouvement mécanique) et ont évolué vers des gestes élargis (que l'on nomme l'improvisation de la relationnalité, les formations malléables et les langues des arts). Cette transformation reflétait l'évolution des membres pour devenir d'abord les auteurs de récits du secondaire sur la justice sociale et le changement éducationnel démocratique, et ensuite les protagonistes de ces histoires. Pour les enseignants et les chercheurs qui appuient la voix et l'engagement des jeunes dans le changement dans l'éducation, le fait de cibler le mouvement au sein de la construction et la narration des récits par les jeunes offre d'importantes possibilités pour appuyer les jeunes tant dans l'identification et la revendication de leur pouvoir et leur implication que dans les changements qu'ils effectuent à l'école secondaire.*

Schooling's influence on youths' lives, particularly marginalized youths', is profound. Schools' governance, culture, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, both exercises and constrains possibilities for democracy and social justice. Central to understanding youths' experience of schools' possibilities and constraints and their engagement with educational issues are their high school stories—their lived experiences of school in their own words. Stories can be cogent personal and social tools for youth to critically examine their schooling, and to give voice to experiences and visions of democracy and justice in rich, particularized ways. A key issue for educators and researchers to consider is how such potential story richness might unfold: what storytelling processes support youth to become active agents in and first authors of their stories in relation to democracy and justice in school? High school youth, particularly marginalized youth, do not often share such stories. This paper explores processes of storying high school—specifically of constructing (i.e., composing; creating by choosing and assembling topics, plots, time periods, emphases) and telling (i.e., sharing, voicing) high school stories. The paper particularly emphasizes movement in these processes as one way of fostering social justice and democracy in school. Movement further has transformative potential in terms of how educators and researchers can support youth to become protagonists in and first authors of their high school stories with a specific emphasis on youth voice, vision, and engagement in educational change (as protagonists, youth are central active agents in the stories; as first authors, youth are the primary constructors and tellers of their stories).

A youth-adult participatory action research (PAR) team studying youths' experiences, perceptions and visions of social justice and democracy in high school (including ourselves as authors of this paper) decided to begin the research by constructing and sharing their high school narratives with each other on the topic of youth engagement in educational change. The team's central goals in choosing a storytelling approach were to “practice what we preach” (i.e., to explore our own stories before recruiting youth participants to share theirs in later phases of the research), to build team trust and rapport via the sharing of our personal school stories, and to examine our own knowledge and experience of youth engagement in school. Our experience of the storying processes (e.g., constructing and telling our high school stories) revealed significant shared team experiences and insights. Specifically, all team members felt surprised that we found the process difficult and messy. While we did not consider ourselves experts on our research topic, we each brought valuable knowledge and experience on the subject and perhaps assumed that storytelling would not be too challenging. Central to our difficulties were experiences of literally and metaphorically feeling constricted during the story process. In contrast, and perhaps often in response to this constriction, each of us engaged in movement, whether literal (e.g., using hands to sculpt clay) or metaphorical (e.g., using expressions like “off on the fly”) movement. We wanted to experience the movement in our stories and relay this movement during storytelling. Many team members further realized that they were passionate about keeping their stories in motion to ensure their high school stories could be told in varied and ongoing ways. Movement was felt, seen and talked about as a group and we came to realize that the various movements happening during the storying processes were as important as our story content. We agreed that the emergent movements in our stories reflected transformation, supporting us to become first authors and protagonists of our high school stories, a positioning we had not felt previously. The team (as a group and individual team members) moved from a restricted range of motion in relation to our educational stories (whether characterized by *collapse*, *truncation*, or *formulaic motions*) to our expanded ranges of motion (via *relationality improv*, *malleable formations*, and *moving through the languages of the arts*).

Our insights as a team into the significance of our story processes led to the group decision to transcribe and analyze relevant material (the story construction and telling had been video and/or audio taped in accordance with the PAR study objective of examining the research process). Such analysis would provide further insight into our experiences of movement in relation to becoming first authors of and protagonists in our school lives/stories. The substantial time needed to complete a thorough data analysis and the need to keep the larger PAR project moving forward led the team to empowering us, as two team members (Morgan and Kate, the authors of this paper), to concertedly explore the movement within the data and to share the results with and receive feedback from team members (which did occur; feedback was positive). It was also understood that any team member was free to join the analysis and writing process at any time (on two occasions a team member joined us). The present paper shares the analysis of the storying processes. It provides some members' story content where it helps elucidate the analysis of the story processes; an analysis of the content of members' stories is the topic of a separate paper.

### **Literature Review**

This paper connects team members' story processes to three areas of literature: 1) educational research on student experiences and narratives; 2) research on movement as a cultural metaphor and key feature of contemporary, Western culture, including education; and 3) postmodern, transformative and arts-informed narrative perspectives. Our analysis draws from specific viewpoints within these three areas of scholarship.

Thiessen and Cook-Sather (2007) indicate that studies of students' school experiences are significant, documenting, for instance, the impact of "what students do in school, how schools influence the development of students, how students address the challenges and circumstances of successive waves of school reform, and how students make sense of, adapt to, and even improve the unique and complex world of school" (p. 1). The study of student narratives is increasingly central in current complex and unequal educational contexts (see Bell, 2010; Freidus, 2008). As Cammona and Luschen (2014) state, "Among social justice educators, the call to narrate, craft, share, and explore critical stories...has gained urgency in recent years" amidst growing educational inequalities (p. 7). Students can use stories to portray themselves as whole persons in complex, shifting socio-political educational landscapes, which thereby give greater insight into students' situated, lived experiences of inequalities. For example, in Bell's (2010) social justice storytelling project, she engages high school students in the critical exploration of racial narratives via four types of stories she refers to as stock, concealed, resistance, and emerging/transforming stories with the goal of challenging racism. Lushen (2014) works with students to explore the opportunities and challenges of digital storytelling in order to "develop critical consciousness about how institutional structures, policies, and relations of power impact students' experiences of schooling" (p. 131). This paper contributes to scholarship on social justice student narratives through our exploration of high school story processes (as they relate to youth voice and vision in educational change) through the lens of movement. Specifically, we contend that these movements can be transformative, supporting youth to become authors of and agents in their high school stories and thus enhancing youths' view of themselves as (potential) educational change agents.

Stories are shaped by "the broader stories of the culture in which we live" (Morgan, 2000, p. 9). As such, a social justice oriented exploration of movement in high school story processes

needs to be situated within the movement of the realities of students' socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts. Youth are growing up in an increasingly moving world via international immigration, refugee crises, mass media, big data, car culture, global travel, consumerism, and unfettered global capitalism (Cresswell, 2006; Giroux, 2008). Movement has become a key cultural metaphor and central experience of contemporary life. Some of the discourses focused on contemporary movement include the "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006), the diaspora literatures (Brazier & Manner, 2003), the "slow movement" (Honore, 2004), and other movement concepts such as social theorist Bauman's "liquid life" and "liquid fear" (Bauman, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006; Deuze, 2006). The "spatial turn" in the social sciences and humanities and more recently its off-shoot, the "new mobility studies", has been concerned, for instance, with how movements—actions, expressions, chosen routes, interactions with material and social space—reveal individuals' and groups' relationships to their cultural and social world (Cresswell 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Gardner (2008) states, "The power of movement to change our lives and contexts has never been more profound" (p. 14). Referring to today's "cult of speed", Honoré (2004) connects the high rates of youth treated for anxiety to this fast pace. He indicates that "Fast and Slow do more than just describe a rate of change. They are shorthand for ways of being, or philosophies of life" (Honoré, 2004, p. 14). Honoré further writes, "Fast is busy, controlling, aggressive, hurried, analytical, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, quantity-over-quality. Slow is the opposite: calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, quality-over-quantity (Honoré, 2004, p. 14); he argues a hurried pace and its associated values negatively impact children and youth.

With similar concern for youth, Giroux (2008, 2012, 2017) connects speed directly to neo-liberalism and its commodification of life, including the commodification of youth. This commodification is "speeding up the flows of work, leisure, knowledge, [education] and everyday life" and "it spawns a new kind of violence in which the flow of money replaces the flow of thoughtfulness, atomization replaces the notion of shared solidarity ... privatization seeks to erase all notions of the public good" (Kennedy, 2017). Greater speed is tied to controlled, scripted and restricted motions imposed by an unfettered global marketplace where priority is given to market needs (e.g., efficiency, productivity, standardization, accountability, profit, unrestrained access), rather than to the public good (e.g. the just distribution of wealth and resources, democracy; a clean environment; access to quality housing, health care, education, and jobs). Giroux (2008, 2012) contends that youth, and in particular, youth marginalized by low socio-economic status and race, have the most to lose from neo-liberal values and its practices (or movements). Apparent are the complexities and contradictions related to movements' freedoms (e.g., flow of information) and constraints (e.g., youth commodified to fit the marketplace) that are facing youth/students as they navigate contemporary life. Education, moreover, resides within and is shaped by the mobilities of our local and global landscapes. As Gardner argues (2008), educators need "to create openings for students to better understand their lives within ... [the complexities of our moving] contexts and to encounter learning environments that reflect understandings of life as fluid" (p. 15). As such, movement metaphors and the study of movement in students' storying processes need increasing attention in educational theory and practice if education is to be relevant to students' lives-in-motion.

Britzman (1998) sees education as a dynamic concept made from a strange combination of movements (p. 12). Davies, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2015) explore four moments of education at play in today's schools—standardized, authentic, democratic citizenship and systemic sustainable. They elucidate the teaching perspectives and practices and the particular socio-

cultural, political-economic influences shaping each of these four moments in education, to relay, in effect, a diverse array of educational movements. Theorizing a “pedagogy of movement” for teaching and learning, Gardner (2008) attends to the “diverse mobilities” of students’ lives, while offering the possibility of transformative learning in education which engages issues of student agency, creativity, justice, and democracy. Gardner makes a distinction between movement “that is a lived, felt relation rather than something that is performed, routinized, or disconnected from self” (p. 19). “Movements of critical reflection, creativity, and building on students’ strengths and unique fluidities can become constricted” (Gardner, 2008, p. 19) within models of education which reflect and support a neo-liberal global marketplace (e.g., standardized, outcome driven, behavioral, linear, stage-based, and efficiency). Here, standardized testing, textbook learning and logical-linear emphases in high school take priority over more holistic, transformative learning approaches to curriculum and pedagogy that are more in tune with students being active first authors of and protagonists in their high school narratives. Gardner (2008) argues that “When movement becomes an embodied lived relation ... deeply held patterns and styles of movement in education become shaken, subverted and transformed” (p. 19).

Educational movements in an increasingly mobile world that fail to “teach” for democracy, diversity or social justice are problematic and illustrate the need for languages of movement (in education) that support student agency, creativity, justice and democracy. Davies (2004) moves in this direction; drawing from complexity science, he proposes teaching terms, such as “occasioning” and “improvising”. These terms reside in organic, responsive and relational movements that invite student voice, engagement and agency. Improvisation, for instance, “is more organic and about attending and adapting to the specifics and the needs that actually present themselves in the classroom” (Davies, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2015, p. 75).

Youths’ movements in response to the complex mobilities of our moving world (both inside and outside the classroom) are “expressions of [their] beliefs and strategies for handling...[themselves] in [school and] the world” (Linden, as cited in Gardner, 2008, p. 12). Through movements (or a lack thereof), youth can support or subvert the spaces through which they move, thus revealing their values, beliefs and struggle for agency in their high school social world. Educators and researchers can benefit youth by inviting and supporting them to relay and critically examine the movements in their stories of democracy, social justice, high school and community. Researchers and educators can find support for this work in arts-informed narrative research perspectives within a postmodern context (Elliott, 2011; Estrella & Forinash, 2007; Leitch, 2006) and studies making connections between stories and transformative learning (Cammona & Luschen, 2014; Soliger, Fox & Irana, 2008; Tyler & Swartz, 2013).

Postmodernism acknowledges multiple, emergent, messy, and unfinished stories and those without a linear beginning-middle-end (Boje 2011; Tyler & Swartz, 2012). Boje’s (2011) concept of antenarrative provides one example of this kind of movement, highlighting how stories can “morph and coalesce” (p. 1) within the story and beyond it, in line with “emergent living stories” (p. 3). Here “a living story web can become dialogic, can be pluralistic, can be co-generative in a self-organizing way” (Boje, 2011, p. 10). Just as students live multistoried lives via their different roles, activities and facets of life (Morgan, 2000) so, too, should students be invited to engage multistoried movements in constructing and telling their stories. After all, no single story of movement can “encapsulate” a person’s life (White & Epton, 1990).

Meanwhile, arts-based narratives are particularly effective at capturing movement in stories. The arts can support individuals to access and share subjective experiences and difficult

moments of transition and upheaval (McAdams et al., 2001, as cited in Elliott, 2011). Arts-based narratives also guide movement into new ways of storytelling and thus into new ways of knowing (one's life and experiences). As Leitch (2006) reveals, "to date there has been little recognition in education of the importance of embodied knowledge" but arts-based narrative can provide a corrective: "Writing and traditional forms of inquiry do not completely convey the sense of felt embodied knowledge in the same way that an image, a poem, a sculpture or a play does" (Leitch, 2006, p. 552). Furthermore, arts-based approaches' transformative potential for educational and social justice is clear. Elliott (2011) indicates, in the words of Leavy (2009), that arts-informed inquiry "is particularly suited for 'accessing subjugated voices, challenging stereotypes and dominant ideology'" (Leavy, 2009, as cited in Elliott, 2011, p. 98). Meanwhile, Estrella and Forinash (2007) state that "narrative inquiry and arts-based research have allowed us to explore the marginalized, controversial, and disruptive perspectives that have often been lost in more traditional research methodologies" (p. 377), and they further propose that "narrative and arts-based approaches to research offer the possibility of disruption to the dominant discourses within theory and research" (p. 376-377).

The construction and telling of stories further connects to themes of transformative learning. For Tyler and Swartz (2012), the relationship between storyteller and listener is vital for transformation. The story comes from "the right context and the quality of listening," which creates "energetic negotiation between teller and story" (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 465). This new dynamic "forces the old linear narrative to fall apart," creating a more complex story, a change in the storyteller, and the story's potential deeper meanings (p. 465).

This section examined three areas of scholarship to illustrate movement's significance within societal and educational landscapes. The literature has yet to relate such movements to high school storying processes related to youth engagement in educational change (specifically to themes of democracy and justice), as this paper does. This paper argues that educators and researchers striving to support youth can engage scholarship from postmodern, arts-based, and transformative learning perspectives to help youth engage movement in their educational stories and to see themselves as protagonists in and first authors of these stories. Postmodern perspectives enable youth to have multiple, messy, changing stories that reflect their lived lives (so, for example, in postmodern stories, youth can legitimately recognize themselves as protagonists). Arts-based approaches support educators and researchers to support marginalized youth to become central agents and primary creators of their stories and to elicit alternative (i.e., non-academic; personal; unheard) stories. Transformative learning gives view to the movements across youths' personal experiences and their contexts and relationships.

### **Method and Methodology**

The introduction outlined our research team's rationale for constructing and telling our own high school narratives on our research topic of youth engagement in educational change. The introduction also provided the team's reasons for analyzing the data collected on our storying processes. This section outlines our method and methodology during the first year (when we created and told our stories) of a 5-year mixed methods educational PAR study on youths' perspectives, experiences, and visions of youth engagement in social justice and educational change in high school. During the first year, a 16-member youth-adult team was formed comprised of 10 youth (some completing high school and others having completed high school within the previous one to two years), an educational administrator, two teachers, two

community youth workers, a school counsellor, a graduate researcher and a university professor in a Faculty of Education. All members had either experienced barriers in high school and/or had experience working with youth facing educational challenges. All members held a shared interest in expanding youth voice and engagement in educational change. Our subjectivities as members varied in terms of age, financial means, level of formal education, job status, heritage/ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, family configuration, lifestyle, geographical location (rural/urban), and migration. Team members were recruited by word-of-mouth and posters. Recruitment focused on a youth organization (engaged in advocacy/social change and outreach/service provision for marginalized youth) and an alternative educational center for youth returning to finish their high school credits (having left high school prior to graduation). During year one, team activities included team community-building activities, learning about PAR, research and democratic teamwork, discussing an overview of the research, applying for ethics approval and constructing and sharing our educational stories related to our research topic. During year two, due to the large size of the group and the commitment required of PAR, our 16-member PAR team evolved into a 6-member core youth-adult PAR team (comprised of three youth, two teachers and an education professor), which was responsible to coordinate and carry out the facets of the research; the remaining 10-members served as the PAR support team providing input and support to the core group and research across the 5-year project. During the PAR study, youth participants (between 15 and 25 years) in community and educational settings were recruited to share their views on youth engagement in educational change via a survey, interview, focus group, and/or creative workshop.

The team's storytelling processes were a main focus of our year 1 activities. These processes involved: 1) *story construction* in which members chose to use an arts-based method (with the exception of one member who created a PowerPoint presentation) to relay their educational story; 2) *storytelling circles* in which each member orally shared their educational story, showed their creative piece and talked about their story construction process; this was then followed by whole group discussion; and 3) *reflection on story experience* in which each team member shared their experiences of constructing and telling their stories (at a separate, later time to the storytelling circles).

During the story construction process, members chose their story content and medium of creative representation (e.g., visual art, text). The team encouraged each other to start from where we were (emotionally, academically, professionally, etc.) and to choose our own direction for our story of youth engagement in school. While the team developed initial questions to support member reflection (e.g., how might you have considered yourself a change agent in high school? what experiences did you have in school related to issues of justice?), they were optional guides. Given team members' age diversity, some members told current educational stories and others stories from decades ago. While participation was optional, all team members chose to create and tell their story. Over the course of 4.5 months, members met 12 times at the community-based alternative educational center (mentioned above). These gatherings were unstructured spaces, which allowed members to construct their story in a self-led, organic, personalized manner. At times, members informally shared their stories in progress and offered each other verbal and practical supports as needed and requested, thereby creating a sense of mutuality and team building. Smaller groups also met informally (at team members' homes) to discuss and work on their stories. To varying degrees—depending on individual preferences and work schedules—team members also did significant work on their own. Members were offered artistic supports (e.g., painting instruction) if they wanted to gain a specific skill relevant to their

story process; no members chose such support(s). No one was expected to be an artist. Members decided to create arts-based stories because of the arts' capacity to support exploration, expression, flexibility, meaningfulness, and multi-modality. Members were also drawn to the arts based on passion, curiosity, ability (e.g., in music, pottery) and a desire to avoid academic formats. Examples of members' artistic story forms include: clay sculptures, rap poetry, a photo story, a story collage on the cut-out form of a member's body, a heavy metal song expressing school experiences and a vision for the future, a game comprised of story cards, and a scrapbook with unbound pages that could be arranged into any order.

During the storytelling circles, members shared their stories during a full-day gathering at an ecological center and two half-day gatherings in two educational settings over the course of a month. Members chose when they shared their story and took the time they needed to share and discuss their account with the group. The storyteller and listeners expressed various emotions (passion, sadness/pain/tears, joy/laughter, and frustration/anger). Having breaks together, sharing food, and socializing were a part of these circles. The group affirmed it would honour and keep confidential each member's story. Group sharing, discussion, and questions naturally followed members' storytelling. Members expressed how they were moved by the other's story. During discussion, members responded with their own experiences, inquired about arts-based processes, and critically examined stories to further elucidate student agency, injustices, and change needed in high school. Morgan facilitated as needed to ensure members felt comfortable, had opportunities to share, and could collectively address issues related to the group process. Members' reflection on their storying experiences occurred weeks later; small groups came together, allowing each member to discuss their experience (e.g., how it felt, what they learned). The team generated and collected multiple forms of data, including members' arts-informed story constructions (e.g., poems, collages), team meeting/gathering notes, and transcripts of storytelling circles and reflection on story experiences, which had been video- and audio-recorded.

We (Morgan and Kate) then explored and analyzed the movement within and across members' story processes. This examination drew from hermeneutic inquiry, specifically, "Contemporary hermeneutics in social inquiry [seeks] ... to understand the world of lived experience from the perspective of those who live it, and specifically understand how meaning is constructed and embodied in the language and actions of social actors (Bleicher, 1980; Polkinghorne, 1983, 1988; Stigliano, 1989)" (Gibson, 2011, p. 47). Meaning is a mutually negotiated act of interpretation and dialogue between the researcher and participants and between the researcher and the texts (Schwandt, 2001). Central to our process was the hermeneutic circle process of moving between the parts and the whole of the data to create understandings (Gadamer, 1975) of movement. We engage in multiple engagements with the data leading to increasingly sophisticated understandings (Gibson, 2011). Through this ongoing process, we developed and re-developed tentative insights/themes on team members' story movements, reflecting an emergent, organic hermeneutic process. We first worked separately, immersing ourselves in the transcripts and identifying key themes/insights related to movement. Through dialogue we shared our tentative insights/themes and their specific links to the data. We noticed considerable overlap between these two sets of insights/themes; this allowed us to combine the two sets into a third set that better reflected the movement within and across team members' stories data. We then returned to the transcripts to further deepen understanding of movement in members' stories. Here we (re)examined the identified insights/themes within and across team members' stories and looked again at the data as a

whole to identify new insights/themes of movement. This process led to adding more insights/themes and to better refinement/clarity of insights/themes, which in turn, led to a natural clustering of insights/themes into “restrictive” and “expansive” movements. We then returned to the data set again to place our focus on the restricted range of movements that group members started with and the expansive movement/strategies that team members created/used to work through restriction and to ignite/express story movement, unfolding and authenticity. This led to greater identification and understanding of team members’ literal and metaphoric movements, and again, to a return to the data to examine these different movements more carefully. From the scope of these back and forth analyses we identified three restrictive (collapse, truncation, and formulaic motions) and three expanded (relationality improv, malleable formations, and moving through the languages of the arts) movements. These findings were then cross-checked by both of us before writing up the findings.

## **Findings**

Data analyses revealed experiences of restricted and expanded motions within our storying processes. In this section, we begin by describing three restrictive motions: collapse, truncation, and formulaic motions. We then define three expanded ranges of movement: relationality improv, malleable formations, and moving through the languages of the arts. Each team member is identified via a pseudonym in the findings section.

### **Restricted Range of Motion**

Most team members experienced a restricted range of motion early in the storying process. *Collapse (without motion)* describes initial reactions of not knowing and/or feeling we even had an educational story to tell or value. *Truncated motions* occurred when we articulated fragmented engagement with our educational stories. *Formulaic motions* were when we relayed experiencing scripted, rigid movements in our high school stories. These restricted ranges of motion revealed a lack of active engagement and sense of agency/authorship related to our high school stories. Our stories felt too stagnant or distant from our daily awareness or priorities. While King (2003) says, “The truth about stories is that’s all we are” (p. 122) many team members realized that, at the beginning of the research process, their relationship to their stories initially felt more impaired than rich, alive or full-bodied. Feeling initially caught in truncated movements made it difficult for members to share their school experiences and consider how they made a difference in high school (e.g., as agents of educational change).

**Collapse: Not feeling we have a story to construct, tell and/or value.** Members’ feeling that they did not have an educational story of value to create or tell comprised a form of collapse. For instance, despite having his powerful story to share about navigating high school as a gay youth, Jason was in a place of collapse, lacking movement; he was ready to back down from telling his story to the group:

Everyone has these like amazing stories. And of how they overcame things and how like things affected them and good things and bad things ... And I just think ... like what do I have to contribute to this, what experiences have I gone through to really contribute to this group.

Across experiences of collapse was a sense of uncertainty about our own educational story

and our role as its primary author (in other words, “what experience have I gone through to really contribute to this group”). For many members, facing school inequities and challenges was initially cast as something simply to be endured, not worth talking about. In several members’ words, “This is just the way school was” or “It’s what you had to endure” to get through school. Reflecting on her story experiences, Emma, for instance, identified “giving way” (a form of collapse) to pervasive adultist notions that young people’s voices, perspectives, and experiences do not matter, stating “At first I didn’t take my story seriously because I think as a society we’re taught to think ... our experience as children is irrelevant”.

Even when actively sharing our educational stories (often for the first time), many of us had experiences of physical, mental, and/or emotional collapse. Many team members expressed being “taken aback”, “surprised”, or “caught off guard” by their experiences of immobility. Team members’ experiences of collapse in our story processes revealed in visceral ways how unprecedented, challenging, complex, personal, raw, and/or courageous it felt to construct and tell our high school story. Several team members reflected on a sense of collapse when they tried to narrate the harms and inequities they faced in high school; the (re-)engagement with stories of schooling (and suffering) could feel overwhelming. Other members’ stories relayed immobility when considering ways they did make a positive difference in school, but how such contributions were dismissed. In particular, some members reported that teachers/administrators (in their school) had viewed youths’ educational change efforts as “causing trouble” (e.g., when standing up for a friend being mistreated by a teacher or challenging the curriculum or pedagogy) or as outside educators’ view of student leadership (which was, for example, limited to activities like being on student council or being an “A” student).

The findings show youth articulating and critically exploring experiences of collapse is vital to them moving out of stagnation. Jason, for instance, came up against and (re)negotiated, in dialogue with the team, fears that his story would hold no value when compared to other people’s stories. Through the team’s support, he did go on to share his story, moving away from his moment of collapse. Emma, meanwhile, was able to identify, critique, and move beyond the larger socio-political and educational forces of adultism impeding her story sharing.

**Truncated motions: Being cut-off from our educational stories.** As team members beginning to share our stories, many of our movements felt truncated. Our range of movement was often limited and uncoordinated, because of the ways we felt cut off (e.g., detached, isolated) from facets of our stories (e.g., details, depth) and/or our story as whole.

Adele felt that her story process gave her the opportunity to move into the depths of her educational story. These “digging deep” motions invited her to harness a new range of motion in telling her high school story. She explicitly articulated how in school, she lacked opportunities to share stories and get to the heart of emotional/personal issues:

I don’t think we’re [students] invited to share our stories in school...because you know how often do you really sit down and really have a heart to heart with somebody in school. We all have our tiffs and stuff with school that we may say this happened to me and I don’t like this person now but you never really get down to why you feel that way ... what particular incident influenced that. It’s just like you never get to that deep conversation.

Adele’s story led to team discussion about how high school culture did not nurture “heart to hearts” or meaningful discussions of “why you feel that way”. We reflected, for the first time for

many of us, on the dominant, taken-for-granted school narrative of the non-personal, non-political, and non-emotional student. As a result of these norms, many of us were not used to “get[ting] to that deep conversation”. We were uncertain of how to flesh out these new, deeper aspects of our stories and quickly adopted thinner narratives that stayed more on the surface (with the “tiffs” and discussion of “this happened to me and I don’t like this person now”). Our movements toward deeper personal, social, cultural, and political stories were challenging and often initially truncated. Moving towards thicker, deeper narratives of our authentic experience, felt, in part, for some members, like “breaking a school rule”. As with collapse, moments of challenge or transgression were important to our team’s growing awareness of the hidden educational norms that were still shaping (i.e., truncating) us.

An inter-related form of truncation included *not considering our educational story as a greater whole*. Marie recognized her story lacked “richness” until she stopped separating facets of school (e.g., curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, school environment) and started actively weaving them together: “when I brought the pieces together I realized I did make a difference [in school] .... I wasn’t sure of this at the start”.

While truncated stories are often recounted, their lack of dexterity, full-bodied(ness), and/or possibility can be disappointing to create and listen to. While collectively noting that all stories are partial and ongoing, some members indicated they felt more “voice” or sense of “truth” in their educational experience when moving into more depth and/or breadth when constructing their story. After embodying these new expansive motions, members used words like “relieved” or “satisfied”.

Reflecting on truncation can impact schooling. For example, as a team, we discussed being expected to know high school subject areas (e.g., to get below the surface of math and English), yet we were not encouraged to “dig deep” to know, talk about, and/or author our high school stories (i.e., our personal experiences of high school). A couple of members reflected that this tension seemed “ironic” given that students learn real-world skills and knowledge not only in traditional school subjects, but also by connecting with their lived stories; after all, high school wrought challenges (e.g., emotional turmoil, lack of belonging, unfairness), and often hard-won accomplishments (e.g., finally “passing math class”, “standing up to my teacher”) that are better understood through constructing and telling one’s story. Truncated stories are the ones often “told” in school and that many of us had adopted about ourselves during high school. Such dominant surface stories simply blamed the student for any challenges they faced. Deeper movements would support students to more fully grasp their challenges and accomplishments.

The team’s experiences with truncation, moreover, influenced year 2 of the research project, teaching us the importance of developing youth participant interviews, focus groups and surveys that explicitly invited research participants to draw on their experiences of youth engagement in educational change. Without this active invitation, participants may have felt truncated in their sharing like some of the team had felt.

**Formulaic motions: Playing it safe stories.** Unpracticed in sharing our high school stories, the instinct to hide and protect our stories rather than give them voice seeped into many of our initial story construction attempts. Several of us created formulaic stories that allowed us to “play it safe” or “go through the motions”. One formulaic story was as follows:

Well, there were some good times and bad times in high school. You know, everyone goes through this as a student. I am happy to be out of there, and I guess there is really not much more to tell ‘cause there is nothing really special about my story.

Formulaic stories restricted our range of movement in our educational stories. In formulaic stories, members included content and form that fit within existing safe, acceptable high school narrative scripts. For example, in Canadian society, high school is seen as a necessity—a means to an end (a job, university, college)—that must be survived. Like a template, formulaic stories are planned and controlled to fit within the lines—they are logical, linear, tidied, abbreviated accounts. Many team members recounted formulaic motions in school, using phrases such as, “survive the system”, “fit the mould”, “don’t rock the boat”, “keep in line”, “do the time”, “jump through the hoops”, and be part of a “one-size-fits-all” operation. Some members pointed out that their initial storytelling motions were similar to survival strategies they employed to get through high school.

During our storytelling, many of us recounted “scrapping” versions of our narratives because they were “crap” or too focused on “playing it safe”. Such stories were not moving or powerful to construct or hear because they felt sterilized, without much life. Emma made this link directly. She described coming to the group with her story construction—a two-page essay—and realizing it was “shielded” and “even boring”. Able to laugh at herself, she explained,

when I came to the retreat with my two pages ... of what I remember from that year and write it up, the good, the bad, the ugly, and all that. And I did that but it wasn’t ... it was still really shielded [Emma creates a barrier with her hands] and it was really, it was even boring and I didn’t think it was really a good summary.

In her speech and physical actions, Emma recognized a lack of movement. Underpinning these restrictive, formulaic motions were members’ attempts to keep the messiness, uncertainty, and emotions of our high school experiences at bay, to shield them from ourselves and from the group. In such formulaic stories, high school challenges (e.g., inequality, stress), and/or attempts to make a difference via acts of resistance often became silenced or minimized. As Marie reflected, “I wasn’t considering the activism of my thoughts and the small ways I resisted inequities in school. I hesitated to include them, at first, because maybe somehow I was moving too much outside the lines.”

Team members shared experiences of restricted movement as story authors—we felt truncated, formulaic, or even collapsed, as has been outlined. Yet, it was also the case (for many of us) that our experiences of limited movement stirred and awakened our desire for greater mobility. As was shown, members moved from recognizing they had stayed safe or familiar in constructing their initial stories to entertaining the possibility of moving into stories’ depths, vulnerability and critical consciousness. Members realized that they had the opportunity to move beyond truncated stories to claim story details, interconnections and wholes. Team members saw the possibility of moving out of collapse (feeling immobilized) to taking their story seriously and believing it may be of value to others.

### **Expanded Range of Movement**

As our storying processes continued to organically unfold, members had a growing awareness (individually and collectively) that our stories lived in movement and had to stay in motion. Implicitly and explicitly, group members began creating ways to represent and engage movement in their stories and to ensure that their stories stayed in motion. Individuals began

organically expanding and claiming a range of literal and metaphorical movements unanticipated at the beginning of their story process. For example, numerous members incorporated physical movements when sharing their stories. One member used his hands like instruments playing in rhythm to the song he had created about his educational experience. Another member got up and literally danced with her story (which she portrayed on a life-sized cardboard cut-out of herself). Group members participated in *relationality improv* by spontaneously drawing off the group's energy and dialogue to inspire new, unanticipated storytelling. Members created *malleable formations* by constructing narrative forms that were physically and/or narratively flexible (such as creating a deck of story cards meant to be continuously shuffled and thereby unbound by typical linear educational narratives). Many members also *moved through the languages of the arts* by using arts-informed methods (sculpting, song-writing). Through the arts, they drew from multiple ways of knowing (e.g., kinesthetic, subconscious, intuitive), expanding their range of exploration and expression. The literal and metaphorical movements of relationality improv, malleable formations, and the languages of the arts supported team members to move more fully into their high school stories so they could better explore and represent challenges, inequities, accomplishments, and the ways they made a difference as students.

**Relationality improv.** Various group members engaged in relationality improv by spontaneously moving with the group's energy and conversations to engage new, unanticipated tellings of their own stories. Relationality improv involved: drawing on the group's energy to build on ("riff off" of) others' ideas, being spontaneous, or going "off on the fly" (being in the "now", in the present and in relation to others). For instance, as they told their stories aloud, some group members found themselves moving in relationality improv with the group. In doing so, they found themselves unexpectedly re-authoring (expanding and shifting) their story on the spot. For instance, through Emma's relationality improv, she spontaneously constructed her educational narrative in the moment, in dialogue with the group; she went "off on the fly", which is a more free-wheeling narrative strategy than her original, formulaic story on "two typed pages". By pulling from the group's energy, openness, and honesty to reach more fully within herself and more fully towards others, Emma was moved to "say more", including "the bad stuff that you've never told", and thus be more honest and complex in her educational narrative.

Meanwhile, Louise fully embraced movements of relationality improv during her storytelling. Louise moved in relation to the uniqueness of each group member, telling her story collage differently to each person because people were "going to connect with different things and umm you know different things will make them like light up or make them sad or whatever. So no matter how many times I tell the story it's always going to be different." Through these relational narrating gestures, Louise connected with individuals and their particular experiences. For Louise, this kind of relating led to insight and transformation: "the process of thinking about the problems made me realize umm like opened my eyes to other things I was facing that I didn't really realize that I was facing so you know it continuously evolves and it continuously grows." Relationality improv thus became transformative storytelling for Louise, challenging and enhancing her understanding of herself, school and the difference she made in high school.

**Malleable forms.** Members also constructed distinctly flexible and changeable representations of stories. These malleable formations involved creating story forms that literally and physically moved via, for example, the ripping and moving of scrapbook pages. With malleable formations, team members' literal movements reflected and supported

metaphorical motions. For example, group members often disrupted chronologies of beginnings, middles, and ends normally used to construct educational narratives (e.g., “I studied, then I got an A, and, as a result, my teacher was happy”) when such scripts were limiting. When linear stories presuppose an ending to a story that continues to unfold and that demands a single storyline, they override the intersecting stories (of school, work, family, love, etc.) that make up actual lived lives. Louise, for example, described how such divisions existed in her own experience and other team members’ (in her words, “you’re kinda expected to close the door on your personal life when you get there” [to school]), while envisioning a more integrated, caring educational system: she has a “longing for more caring for people in the school system and in society in general.”

Ada, meanwhile, created a life-sized cardboard cut-out of herself so that she could move, namely dance, with herself, with this life-sized embodiment of her educational story. Her changing relationship with her body is at the heart of her life and educational story. She identified the benefits of movement: she changed from not knowing she had a body—drawing herself as a stick person who was all head—to being embedded in movement, to bringing herself alive in this moment of (dancing) movement. As she danced with “herself”, she explained her story: “So the idea here is embracing me and my life, right, but it’s like dance with me you know, me and my shadow ... doing my story on a body is friggin important to me. Cause I’m only just learning to embrace this vessel that I have to live you know.” During her storytelling Ada moved into reflection, recognizing the contextual restrictions previously put on her movements by society and the education system. The research group—and specifically the storytelling processes—created a rare space in which these vital and fundamental movements can happen.

Further emphasizing the power of malleable formations was the fact that they were a particularly popular form with the team; other examples included Claire’s unbound visual scrapbook, Kelly’s collage scrapbook with ripped up and rearranged sheets, and Marie’s story cards, whereby team members responded to the cards, constructing their own stories in relation to hers. Malleable forms challenged dominant story mediums, supporting team members to tell their own story, their own way—a gesture that empowers individuals and is, this paper argues, meaningfully linked to voice and justice.

**Moving through the languages of the arts.** The strategy of moving through the languages of the arts refers to members Mark and Laura engaging their talents and dexterities as artists—a musician and potter, respectively—to construct and communicate their stories. Mark and Laura used arts-informed narratives to expand their stories’ movements of exploration, experimentation, and expression. Via these strategies, they tapped into multiple ways of knowing (e.g., intuitive, subconscious, emotional, spiritual).

Through her story construction (clay sculptures) and storytelling, Laura embodied and recognized movement. Laura’s clay sculptures showed that moving through the languages of the arts was freeing; as she relayed, one of her sculptures “looked like something wanting to get out.” The arts can be a powerful story-sharing medium as one does not need to put the story into words or explain what exactly is “getting out”. Stories relayed through the arts can be partial, tentative works-in-progress, thus reflecting an educational-life-in-progress. The arts can support one to break out of one way of knowing one’s self or one’s story. By offering multiple ways of knowing, movement has the potential to be personally and educationally transformative.

Mark showed how an arts-informed modality can lead to unplanned, embodied movements and thus to being the movement. When Mark started describing his story process, he was emphatically not in a place of collapse, since he physically acted out the creation of his song-

story, embodying movement by drumming his fingers on the armchair and moving his head to the rhythm. Through music, an educational narrative can be on the move, emerging from a previously dark or stagnated place: Mark composed the song by “thinking ahh about feelings I had in school and just kinda letting my hands go like what’s going to come out?”. Mark was also committed to relating to his audience, drawing them into his educational story, and thereby emotionally moving them through music: “I wanted to do that so that people could really focus on it and be like, ‘Yeah I understand and feel the angst,’ ‘cause that’s what it’s all about. The whole song is just ahh angst and just negative feelings kinda interpreted into this really fast, like upbeat, you know kinda fast” song. Through music, Mark was also moving from his problematic experience of school into his vision for education, as he explained:

And at the end of this song, and at the end of this conflict, it kinda like warms up and it’s got this sad kinda feeling to it .... And hopefully have people hear that and hear like, yeah like you know like feel what school should be like, like feel those majors. This is what my vision is, you know, this is what, this is what school should feel like. This is what it should feel from the sound.

Mark thus identified the benefits of locating movement, since it enabled him to connect with others, describe the need for change, and articulate a better educational system.

### **Discussion**

Youth live storied lives (comprised of intersecting stories of school, home, peers, etc.). Therefore, the ways in which youth construct and tell their high school stories is vital for understanding their experiences as authors (empowered primary creators/constructors, and tellers of their own stories) and protagonists (central active agents) of these stories. The exploration of team members’ literal and metaphorical movements in their storying processes became openings to explore youth engagement in educational change in their high school stories.

We (the authors) found that members’ accessing, creation, and expression of movement became a transformative process. “Transformation...itself is particularly tied to a notion of movement. It is a desire for change which entails movement. Even its ‘trans’ is a concern with traversing” (Gardner, 2008, p. 12). The lens of movement showed how team members shifted from feeling that they had no, few, and/or “not significant enough” stories to construct or tell to creating and embodying stories imbued with meaning and empowered self-expression related to high school change. Through this process, team members began to move in ways that felt “more like themselves” within the context of their moving lives and worlds. These more “in tune” movements, in turn, supported them to create and tell stories that moved (e.g., awakened, touched) them, and they sought to move with (i.e., more “preferred narratives”, [White & Epston, 1990]).

Importantly, this process of transformative movement, in and of itself, we argue, is a form of youth engagement in educational change. Educators cannot expect students to be empowered social justice agents in school if they cannot voice (i.e., story) themselves as protagonists and primary authors of their educational stories. How can youth become democratic agents without being in touch with the complexities and movements of their own high school stories and experiences of social justice in educational settings? For educators and researchers striving to support youth voice and engagement in social justice educational change, attention to

movement (within storying processes) valuably supports such transformative goals. Transformative mobilities support youth to move away from literal and metaphorical movements that are subordinating/marginalizing/constraining and towards varied motions that foster ongoing agency.

“Movements are expressions of beliefs and strategies for handling ourselves in the world” (Linden, as cited in Gardner, 2008, p. 12), revealing individuals’ and groups’ relationships to their cultural and social world (Cresswell 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006). This perspective is pervasive in the “new mobility studies” (Sheller & Urry, 2006), “slow movement” approaches (Honoré, 2004) and in the work of other theorists reflecting on movement, such as Giroux (2012), Bauman (2005) and Gardner (2008). Initially, team members’ existing movements (or even a lack of movement), which we, the authors, called collapse, truncation, or formulaic motions, restricted them in becoming first authors of and protagonists in their high school stories. While this restriction was unpleasant, experiencing it was significant. Restriction fostered members’ awareness of where they were starting (e.g., having little narrative voice/power related to school). Members’ discomfort, moreover, supported their critical examination of restrictive schooling beliefs, strategies and contexts. Felt-experiences of collapse, truncation and formulaic motions unveiled dominant school values, strategies, and narratives; for example, the feeling of collapse from being taught to individualize and simply “blame myself” for not graduating (as Louise indicated); the creation of additional “collapse” experiences when only certain student leadership stories are valued (e.g., adult-sanctioned and supervised activities like serving on student council, as Marie’s story showed); the lesson not to get “too deep” about what is happening to you in school, leading to formulaic stories (as Adele shared); and the separation of home and school life, leading to truncated stories (as Louise powerfully recounted). By locating restrictive movements in their stories, youth in high school have opportunities to create movement and to thus change beliefs, strategies, and socio-cultural contexts that restrict their voice and agency. Educators thus need to provide openings for students to share experiences of restricted movement.

Team members’ experiences of restricted movement (and underlying values and strategies) led them towards more expansive motions. Via our analysis, we, the authors, named these expanded movements relationality improv, malleable formations, and the languages of the arts. For instance, while Laura embodied intuitively expansive movements (e.g., her hands moved instinctively in the clay), Kelly and Emma explicitly shifted to malleable formations in reaction to being confined (they ripped up their academically rigid stories to create more mobile stories). Some members’ expanded movements arose strongly during story construction via their physical movements (e.g., clay that mimicked movement; the ripping up of a scrapbook). Others’ sense of restriction dissolved into expansion during the storytelling circles (e.g., hearing others’ authentic stories freed them to openly share theirs as did Emma, Adele, and Jason). Both story construction and telling were key in expanding members’ sense of their stories’ meaningfulness and mobility and in supporting them to become first authors and protagonists in their high school stories.

Just as Gardner’s (2008) “pedagogy of movement” views transformative learning as movements that are “a lived, felt relation rather than something that is performed, routinized, or disconnected from self” (p. 19), team members moved towards mobilities of “lived, felt relation[s].” They relayed values and strategies of “critical reflection, creativity, and building on...strengths and unique fluidities” (Gardner, 2008, p. 19) and highlighted the social justice facets of their high school stories. For instance, team members’ range of movements often

supported them to identify moments of everyday leadership, not usually acknowledged by the school system (as Marie did) or to identify and critique injustice in the school system (as did various members, including Emma and Louise).

Languages of movement (relayed during the storying processes) can invite youth to become creators of and agents in their stories of youth engagement in educational change. Languages of movement are flexible, supporting youth to articulate their own, particular, complex experiences and visions of democracy and justice in education. This paper “gave language” to three expanded movements. It thus extends conversations on movement engaged by theorists like Davies (2004), who borrows the terms, “occasioning” and “improvising”, from complexity science to describe teaching and Boje (2011), who languages how stories “morph and coalesce” (p. 1) and “can be co-generative” (p. 10). “Languages of movement” contribute to expanding youths’ and educators’ understanding of story mobilities, an understanding that can be expansive and transformative for youth in their authoring of high school stories for educational change. Moreover, languages of movement need to become reminders for educators and researchers to listen to and value the movements of youths’ stories.

Our team’s story processes supported members’ expanded movements. Youth team members commented on the importance of having an intergenerational team, as it showed them that adults had experienced injustices and had desired school change, too. Combining organic, non-prescriptive storying processes with a loosely supportive structure was valuable. Members had freedom in their choice of materials used; topics/experience chosen; timeline followed; and when, where, and with whom they chose to work. Creating their own path was like a “rite of passage” as members moved naturally towards their new roles as first authors and story protagonists, rather than being made into authors and protagonists via a step-by-step, prescribed curriculum. At the same time, fostering movement through phases (story construction to storytelling circles to reflection on story experience) supported members to feel a sense of connectedness to our team storying community.

Storying high school experience through the lenses and languages of movement (with a particular focus on democracy, social justice and educational change) can become a transformative process for youth. Languages of movement can support youth to embody and share their experiences of and visions for justice and democracy in school within the mobilities of their particularized contexts and storied lives. In doing so, youth gain a better understanding of themselves as potential agents of educational change.

We conclude by sharing two team members’ response to this paper. Ada, an adult member, shared:

Okay, the movements talked about in the paper definitely fit for me ... I became my first author and protagonist because of this whole, messy process we went through .... In reading the paper transformation also occurred ... I felt a new softness ... a level of compassion towards my story by reading about it through the filter of movement ... it’s like, maybe, this kind of filter gives us that.

Louise, a youth team member, stated:

I really enjoyed the paper. It gave validity and form to the whole experience of struggling with and telling and reading my story. I loved the three movements within each category ... putting language to our profound, complex processes that occurred over the time of working on our stories makes it all feel valuable. It really puts into perspective, for me, the potential and possibility for students and

young people to be given the space and opportunity to become the authors and protagonists of their high school stories. That it IS possible, when in fact, many of us did not even think we had a story to tell when we started this whole process. That's amazing!

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