



Dr. Sean Lessard

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4.1 Research Statement

Early Research Goals

My research area of focus is Narrative Inquiry as both methodology and phenomenon under study. I have engaged in several Narrative Inquiry research studies including research in early school leaving, urban aboriginal youth experiences both in and outside of school places, urban aboriginal youth wellness in after-school programming, urban aboriginal family experiences when preparing for school and most recently transition within refugee families school experiences. These interests have led to opportunities to author and co-author a wide variety of publications around relational ethics, narrative inquiry as relational research methodology, urban aboriginal youth experience, familial curriculum and inter-generational knowledge spaces.

My research interests continue to expand as I am currently working closely with several First Nation communities in Saskatchewan and Alberta helping in the design of research studies around inter-generational learning experiences within community settings, in particular land-based teaching experiences. A large area of my research focus has been the co-construction of an afterschool inter-generational research space entitled Growing Young Movers Youth Development (www.growingyoungmovers.com). This research space and program has received national recognition and has served as a research and teaching hub where the youth, community and universities can learn from one another in a wellness space.



4.2 Scholarly Work Outline

2020 and beyond...

My research focus has continued to expand in particular around the areas of community-based research and indigenous youth wellness. I have created wellness hubs in Montreal Lake Cree Nation and Enoch Cree Nation which serve as research catalyst sites. Each hub has over 1 million in traditional federal/provincial grant funding yearly as well as key partnership grants with Everactive Schools, Spirit North and Moving Well Incorporated. The key to the wellness hub model is a co-design approach with community members and leadership part of the design process and implementation at all levels. Also notable is the cumulative effects in each wellness hub where I have started scholarship funds, bicycle and running shoe equipment co-ops, outfitted gymnasiums with weight rooms, purchased vehicle fleets and landbased outfitting sites. The wellness hub model specifically employs youth as well as community navigator and co-researchers to build community capacity. The wellness hub model has led to key strategic partnerships that I am designing and leading working with peers and colleagues in other fields such as Change Health and local doctors and nurses to engage in scientific and medical studies alongside youth and communities. My research plan has grown exponentially as I have launched land-based sites in Northern Saskatchewan and now require weekly visits to study and pilot test the phase 1 implementation of programming, which requires me to live on the land with the community as we design radical approaches to land and education wellness interventions. Most recently the team has returned from Alaska as we develop a research hub of wellness with communities in Alaska.

Implementation

My research plan started at the University of Regina in 2013 and it revolved around a partnership entitled Growing Young Movers Youth Development. I was able to obtain \$20,000 in startup funds to start a project working with indigenous youth in the core neighbourhoods. I looked at this as an opportunity to develop community-based relationships within Saskatchewan and specifically within Regina. At this point in my academic career, I wanted to start in a specific place where I could learn from the community and build relationships. The common theme in this emerging research plan and partnership was a commitment to youth in particular indigenous youth wellness. During the 2013 school year my colleagues and I laid the groundwork to develop Growing Young Movers Youth Development Incorporated. My primary function in this research hub was and continues to be in the development of strategic relationships with the community, designing programming, accessing funding opportunities and research dissemination.

Growing Young Movers

- ❖ [Click here](#) to access the video that explains the “why” behind the program

Related research grants:

S. Lessard and L. Schaefer, Growing Young Movers: Creating Cultural Connections Alongside Aboriginal Youth, \$40,000, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, August 2013 – May 2014.

S. Lessard, L. Schaefer, and B. Lewis, Growing Young Movers: Creating Cultural Connections Alongside Aboriginal Youth, \$6000, City of Regina Community Investment Grant, August 2013 – February 2014.

The early research process involved several key steps:

Phase I Mapping the landscape alongside community (thematic writing pieces)

- ❖ connecting with the community (Treaty 4, North Central Regina, Regina Public Schools)
- ❖ developing relationships with the community before research begins
- ❖ seeking guidance from traditional knowledge keepers to help us in the process (Noel Starblanket, Dustin Brass, Lori Poitras)
- ❖ seeking ethics through community before ethics through the institution
- ❖ framing the Growing Young Movers After School Project

Phase II Moving Slow in relationship

- ❖ co-designing inter-generational wellness programming with youth, community and schools
- ❖ seeking a safe space to begin the project
- ❖ listening to the community needs to determine age level, grade level and length and time of programming
- ❖ connecting with youth who wanted to participate as after school mentors
- ❖ developing a calendar and time line to begin programming



Phase III Programming Beginnings

- ❖ learning to listen to youth and the community
- ❖ open ended process that does not rush to outcomes
- ❖ minimum 2 year research commitment
- ❖ defining the difference between program and research

Phase IV Start up (Participants linking with researchers)

- ❖ start official programming twice a week after school
- ❖ three youth mentors (Grade 10) sign up that are identified by community
- ❖ program starts with grade 3 youth (participants = 4)
- ❖ developing a community rhythm outside of school
- ❖ continue to refine research questions(**What does it mean to live well?**)

Related research grants:

S. Lessard, L. Schaefer, and B. Lewis, Growing Young Movers Urban Aboriginal Programming, \$6000, Saskatchewan Sports & Recreation, August 2014 – August 2015.

S. Lessard, L. Schaefer, and B. Lewis, Growing Young Movers Urban Aboriginal Youth After School Initiative, \$25,000, AANDC, August 2014 – August 2015.

S. Lessard, L. Schaefer, and B. Lewis, Growing Young Movers: Creating Cultural Connections Alongside (Aboriginal Youth, \$6000, City of Regina Community Investment Grant, August 2014 – August 2015.

S. Lessard and L. Schaefer, A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Urban Aboriginal Youth and Their Families Outside of School Places, \$15,000, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, May 2014 to May 2015.



Phase V Finding a rhythm (resisting intervention)

- ❖ keep the research question(s) open not narrowed by program outcomes
- ❖ actively dismiss grant funding that is intervention focused and deficit laden
- ❖ expand research to home and families relations
- ❖ program expansion grade 3/4 classes and 5 Indigenous High School Mentors
- ❖ outreach programming Alberta, BC, Saskatchewan and Ontario (week long experiences)
- ❖ speaking engagements to re-route funding dollars to program needs (nutrition, shoes, transportation)

Phase VI In the midst of research relationships

- ❖ writing phase (3 articles peer reviewed, 2 articles magazines, interviews, podcasts)
- ❖ participants linked with researchers (Masters, Graduate students)
- ❖ Linking U of R Kinesiology, First Nations University, U of R Education, U of R Nursing
- ❖ linking the field to the academy
- ❖ volunteer participation for experiential has developed waiting list

S. Lessard and L. Schaefer, Growing Young Movers: Creating Cultural Connections Alongside Aboriginal Youth, \$50,000, Community Investment Fund/Funding Sponsor, August 2015 – June 2016.

Phase VII Program Growth (negotiating generalizing findings)

- ❖ interest from regions and communities across Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec
- ❖ beginning research conversations with La Ronge, Saskatchewan, File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, Enoch Cree Nation, Athabasca Tribal Council, Red Rock Indian Band, Saskatoon Catholic School, Saskatoon Public Schools, Montreal Lake Cree Nation, Prince Albert Grand Council, Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, National Hockey League Players Association, McGill University, Kahnawake
- ❖ formation of Growing Young Movers North and South (Saskatchewan)
- ❖ ethics received for Growing Young Movers North (Laronge, Saskatchewan)
- ❖ national recognition in Ottawa, Ontario INAC Innovations Grant Funds
- ❖ Indspire National Gathering Innovations

S. Lessard and L. Schaefer, Growing Young Movers “North” Emerging Research Partnership, \$50,000, AANDC, August, 2015 – August, 2016.

S. Lessard and L. Schaefer, Growing Young Movers Youth Development Research Hub, \$40,000, CIF funding, August, 2015 – June, 2016.

S. Lessard and L. Schaefer, Increasing Daily Physical Activity Within First Nations Communities, \$500,000, Nakoda Oyade Wellness Grant, August, 2015 – June, 2016
(\$50,000 research related direct funding for Growing Young Movers Youth Development)

Phase VIII Relational Ethics (Leaving in a good way)

- ❖ PhD Completed Brian Lewis
- ❖ writing and dissemination schedule developed
- ❖ masters student researching (what does it mean to be a teacher?)
- ❖ first cohort of youth mentors have completed grade 12 and started university and trades school
- ❖ new mentors begin training
- ❖ North and South Growing Young Movers Mentors Workshop Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
- ❖ \$150,000- \$200,000 in programming funds reinvested in community through youth bursaries and funding graduate students

S. Lessard, Growing Young Movers Youth Development North & South Research Hubs, \$50,000, Community Investment Fund, 2017 – 2018, year 1 of 1, \$50,000.

S. Lessard, Growing Young Movers Youth Development Inc. Move, Think, Learn Pilot Intervention, \$500,000, PHE Canada, Indigenous Northern Affairs Canada, September 2017 – March, 2018, year 1 of 1, \$500,000.

S. Lessard, Growing Young Movers Youth Development South, \$20,000, Scott Collegiate Partnership Grant, day month, 2017 – day month, 2018, year 1 of 1, \$20,000.

Related Research Partnerships

The research within Growing Young Movers Youth Development continues to evolve and with this, numerous agencies and researchers ask me to support their work and studies. I am becoming more careful about this as I recognize it is exciting to study in different areas however, it can become difficult to sustain focus. I have also learned in more complicated situations that people sometimes do not have your best interest when asking to support their work. I have been on several large grants where I worked hard, leveraged my relationships and took large amounts of time to help "colleagues" but as soon as the grant funding is successful they no longer need me as they have obtained funds. I am learning that I am more careful to put my name forward on large research collaborations.

I have assisted in writing, developing and co-creating the following research grants:

K. Caine, **S. Lessard**, M. Neyelle, D. Simmons, and T. Waterhouse, Hybridized Knowledge in Practice: Engaging Educated Northern Aboriginal Youth in Environmental Governance, \$74,609, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

L. J. Ferguson, T. McHugh, **S. Lessard**, and M. L. Humbert, Aboriginal Women Athletes' Flourishing in Sport, \$50,000, Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation Establishment Grant.

T. Katapally, **S. Lessard**, W. Linds, and J. Saskamoose, Mobilizing a Land-Based Culturally Appropriate Active Living Intervention Among Indigenous Youth, \$772,650, Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Research Projects and Partnerships

Although Growing Young Movers Youth Development has been a strategic focus, I continue to expand on some of the ideas that I am learning through research, study and partnerships. The general theme around children, youth and families exists in the work that I am pursuing. During the research within Growing Young Movers Youth Development, I have also worked strategically in adding to my knowledge and philosophical foundation through several Narrative Inquiry research projects. I have had the opportunity to work within a Narrative Inquiry research community that has supported my growth in writing research grants, designing studies and engaging in extensive field work.

Examples of research projects:

V. Caine, **S. Lessard**, D. J. Clandinin, H. Raymond, S. Garvis, and K. Toogood, Understanding Social Inclusion: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Refugee Families with Preschool Children, \$224,291, Social Sciences and Humanities Council, 1, Jan., 2017 – 31, December 2020, year 1 of 3, \$74,666.

J. Huber, D. J. Clandinin, V. Caine, S. Murphy, and **S. Lessard**, A Narrative Inquiry Into the Experiences of School Readiness of Aboriginal Families with Young Children, \$40,000, Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research, 1 Jan., 2015 – 31, December 2016.

Through each research study, areas of interest continue to evolve and more collaborations are becoming present. I have worked closely to engage with graduate students who can add to this body of work. Through my work within Narrative Inquiry as both a research method and phenomenon under study I continue to engage in the writing process. The opportunity to plan and engage in focused writing that adds to the body of knowledge has been a sustained focus that is connected to my overall research plan. Through Narrative Inquiry, I am also developing ideas in relation to place, synthesis with Elder knowledge as well as pedagogy. Narrative Inquiry continues to be a methodology that I am engaging in research with. It has opened up the spaces for me to work with various communities both philosophically but also pragmatically as we seek to establish and advocate for multiple ways of knowing within the current social structures that dominate and too often silence.

Articles and Books to be published:

“Field Notes” Lessard essays from the field

Narrative Inquiry and Indigenous Methodologies

Growing Young Movers Youth Development and teacher pedagogy

Most recent research grants:

Klein, D., **Lessard, S.**, Bailey, A.L., Wicklum, S.C., Ball, G.D., Boushel, R.C., Kennedy, M., Norman, M.E., Prado, C.M., Round, J., Storey, K.E., & Svreck, C. (2023-2027). *Healthy Fit and Strong - Changing the Story for Indigenous Youth and Young Adults*. Canadian Institutes of Health Research Operating Grant in Diabetes, Psychosocial Health, Prevention, and Self-Management. \$1,000,000 (FRN 187757).

Co-Principal Investigator/Knowledge User (2023-2027): *Healthy Fit and Strong - Changing the Story for Indigenous Youth and Young Adults*. Canadian Institutes of Health Research Operating Grant in Diabetes, Psychosocial Health, Prevention, and Self-Management. Applicant: Dr. Doug Klein, **Dr. Sean Lessard** Co-Investigators: Dr. Allan Bailey, Dr. Sonja Wicklum, Dr. Geoff Ball, Dr. Robert Boushel, Dr. Michael Kennedy, Dr. Moss Norma, Dr. Carla Prado, Dr. Jeff Round, Dr. Kate Storey, and Dr. Clark Svreck. Amount: \$1,000,000. (FRN 187757).

Schaefer, L(Co-PI). **Lessard, S(Co PI)**., Ferguson, L., Storey, K., Hunter, L., & Torrence, B., (2022-2025). *Mitho Miskawawin* Together Partnership. Social Science Humanities Research Council, Race Gender and Diversity Initiative. \$500,000

2021 Dubnewick, M, **Lessard, S.**, Hopper T., & Lewis, B. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, SSHRC \$65,156 Insight Development Grant (2021-2023) *Title: Stories to lead by: Attending to Indigenous youth as they compose their lives as leaders*

2021 Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, SHRF\$119,786 Establishment Grant (2021-2024) *Title: Stories to lead by: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of Indigenous youth as they compose their lives as wellness leaders, Research Team: Dubnewick, M (PI), Lessard, S.*, Hopper T., & Lewis, B.

***Ranked #1 by socio-health, systems, clinical committee**

***SHRF Excellence Award Recipient for top grant application**

2021 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, SSHRC \$61,860 Insight Development Grant (2021-2023) *Title: Living relationally in afterschool wellness programming: Experiences of Indigenous youth* *Research Team: Hopper, T. (PI), McHugh, T-L., Lessard, S.*, & Dubnewick, M (**Co-Applicant**)

2023-2025 James Smith First Nation Community Wellness Response to Violence, \$1,500,000, Federal Government of Canada Justice Department, **Lessard, S., Lead Researcher.**

2022-2025 Montreal Lake Cree Nation, Bill C-92 Child Welfare Study Bringing Our Children Home Mitho-Waskaywaywin, \$1,000,000, **Lessard, S., Lead Researcher**

2022-2023 – Poundmaker Cree Nation Research Elders approach to Landbased Practices, \$500,000 Education Partnership Program EPP, **Lessard, S., Lead Researcher**

2020-2024 – Montreal Lake Cree Nation Research Wellness Hub \$500,000 Education Partnership Program EPP, **Lessard, S., Lead Researcher**

Jordan's Principle Research on Land Based Curriculum Development Inclusive Models and Practices \$300,000, **Lessard, S., Lead Researcher**

2020 – 2022 Enoch Cree Nation Regional Education Agreement Wellness Hub \$600,000, **Lessard, S., Lead Researcher**

2020 – 2022 Thunderchild Cree Nation, Regional Education Agreement Landbased Education, \$230,000, **Lessard, S., Lead Researcher**

2021 Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, SHRF \$10,000

Research Connections Truth and Action Grant (2022) *Title:* Stories of pride: A participatory youth-led creation *Research Team:* Dubnewick, M (PI), **Lessard, S.,** Hopper T., & Lewis, B.

2021 Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) Operating Grant: HIV/AIDS and STBBI Community-based Research (2021- 2024) \$450,000 *Title:* Learning the lay of the lands: Nurturing STBBI prevention with Cowessess First Nation youth *Research Team:* Kelsey, R. (PI), Delorme, D., Kîsikâw Piyêsis, M., Daschuk, J., Dubnewick, M. (Co-investigator), **Lessard, S.,** Riehl, G., & Bird-Naytowhow, K.

2021 Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, SHRF\$119,786

Establishment Grant (2021-2024) *Title:* Stories to lead by: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of Indigenous youth as they compose their lives as wellness leaders. *Research Team:* Dubnewick, M (PI), **Lessard, S.,** Hopper T., & Lewis, B.

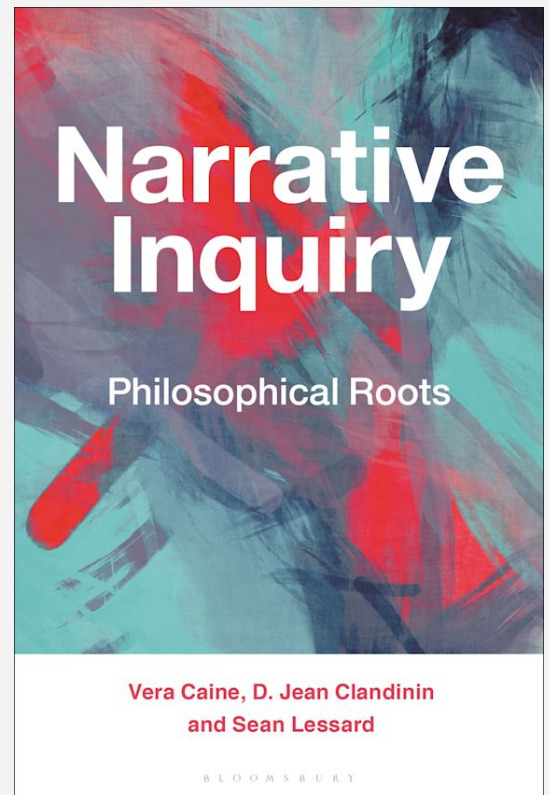
2021 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, SSHRC \$65,156 Insight Development Grant (2021-2023) *Title:* Stories to lead by: Attending to Indigenous youth as they compose their lives as leaders

Research Team: Dubnewick, M (PI), **Lessard, S.,** Hopper T., & Lewis, B.

4.3 Scholarly Work Dossier

Clandinin, D.J., Caine, V., and **Lessard, S.** (2021). *Narrative Inquiry: Philosophical Roots*. Bloomsbury Academic, 256 pp.

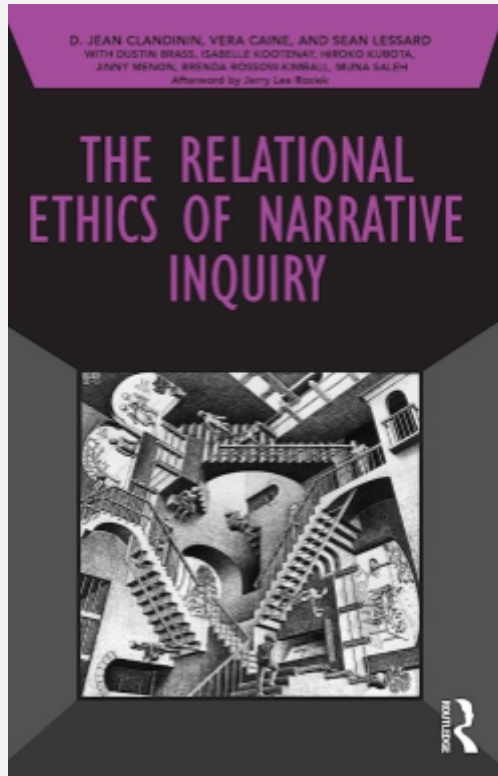
This published work was a two year process of collaborative research and writing with monthly writing retreats. This was a collaboration with Dr. Jean Clandinin and Dr. Vera Caine where we looked back over the course of Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology. One of the critiques of narrative research in general is that it is not theoretical enough. This writing process required us re-turning to the philosophical roots of Narrative Inquiry where we drew the theoretical lines to early philosophers, so the reader and future researchers could make connections more clearly and more theoretically grounded.



We drew on Hannah Arendt's early work as well as carefully considering Pratt and Mckenna's work on American Philosophy and Native Pragmatism. We also developed a methodological notebook grounded in a research study with Syrian refugee families as they prepared for Kindergarten in Canadian school contexts. This book is important and provides much needed addition to the field for both students and scholars. My plan is to teach from this book and it is my grounding work with graduate students in the present. There is a significant gap in the field and this book addresses the gap directly and will continue to push Narrative Inquiry forward in good ways drawing out new studies, new ideas and innovations in the field that are rooted in philosophy.

4.4 Scholarly Work Dossier

Clandinin, D.J., Caine, V., and **Lessard, S.** (2017). *The Relational Ethics in Narrative Inquiry*. New York: Routledge, 220 pp.



Click the photo for a sample of this text.

Relational ethics in the field of research at times is outright dismissed and should always be at the heart of the commitments within the field as well as within what we teach in the academy. As an Indigenous researcher I drew on Wilson's work early in my graduate studies, as a narrative researcher we discussed often how it needed to be more clear regarding the commitments relationally in this type of research. This book was an early collaboration and one that I draw on heavily as I continue to engage in what I call "slow research". I wrote in this piece how we are often measured by efficiencies in the academy, and it teaches us to

move quickly and efficiently, which is the opposite effect I am trying to achieve in my life work both in the field and in my everyday, nuanced living.

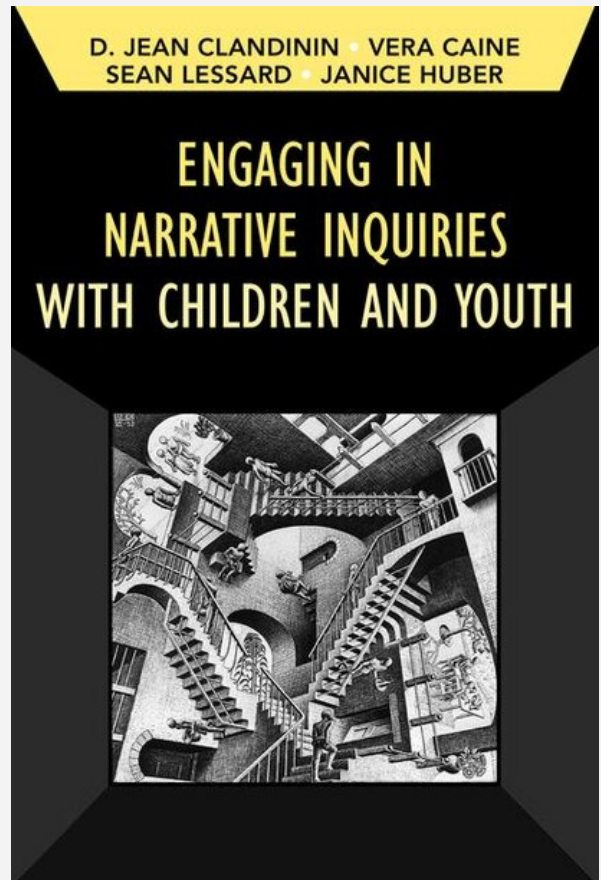
I work alongside community and the careful work, the most important is the relational ethics at the heart of what I do and how I engage. The "slow research" is like a cup of tea that is steeping, that is more joyful and when we let it sit for a while and bring the colors and the flavor out more fully. Sitting down and moving slow in relation is the work that I believe in and the work that I committed to do that is grounded in the ethics of relations. Relational ethics continues to be re-storied in my life and within my research and the meaning continues to take shape in forward looking ways.

4.5 Scholarly Work Dossier

Clandinin, D.J., Caine, V., and **Lessard, S.**, Huber, J. (2016). *Engaging in Narrative Inquiries with Children and Youth*. New York: Routledge, 238 pp.

This was the first co-authored book that I wrote and was rooted in the work around Indigenous youth as well as young people who had left school before graduating in Alberta. This early work continues to have meaning and is an excellent case study for researchers and students that outlines an approach to consider Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology. It looks back at a SSHRC funded study and carefully explores the beginning parts of a research study including the ethics involved in the process as well as the mechanical details of engaging both with the institution and the community in a research study. It is a great starting point that I read over with graduate students.

In particular, it explores a detailed field with youth, which brings different contexts to consider in the field. I look back fondly at my early writing and how I have continued to grow and make meaning as a researcher who works with children, youth and families across the world.



Click the photo for a sample of this text.

4.6 Scholarly Work Dossier

Lewis, B., Schafer, L., **Lessard, S.**, & Koch, J. (2022). At risk? A narrative inquiry into the experiences of urban Indigenous youth in an after-school wellness program. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, section Physical Education and Pedagogy.*

While I was a beginning scholar at the University of Regina over eleven years ago I was provided seed money from a private donor who witnessed me speaking at a keynote engagement about indigenous youth wellness. I was provided \$20,000 to do something “dynamic” with indigenous youth in the City of Regina. That was the literal ask of me, which I helped in the co-design and founding principles of a program called Growing Young Movers. My colleagues specifically Brian Lewis and I developed an inter-generational after-school program where we mentored and paid high school youth to engage in play with elementary youth 5 days a week. We started small and eventually grew the program over time. The beginning narrative accounts are within this article. We created an inter-generational research space that continues to thrive in the core neighbourhood of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

This program has employed hundreds of indigenous youth, drawn thousands of kids into active weekly play, has contributed to community based research and brought in over 1 million dollars in grants for children, youth and families. It has physically and spiritually been a touchstone for my life and research work, and it is now embedded in the Regina Public School Board as a class (leadership pathway) and curriculum offering, as well as a direct partnership link to the City of Regina and the University of Regina.



Click the photo to access the Growing Young Movers program.

4.7 Scholarly Work Dossier

Lessard, S., Whiskeyjack, F., Kootenay, I., Caine, V., & Clandinin, D.J. (2020). Working with Indigenous Elders in Narrative Inquiry: Reflections and Key Considerations, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(2), p. 93-108. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419898498>.

I wanted to write in a different way, one that went back and shared the stories and the ideas of elder friends along the way. I learned early in my life and career that elders' time can often be cut short. I have lost many elder friends over time, and so I wanted to sit and write with them about life and research and how they helped shape the research that we have engaged with them in. We wrote and developed our relationship where they are both now published authors in other books that we have written with them. This article particularly honours Elder Francis Whiskeyjack and Elder Isabelle Kootenay and the ways they think of “re-search”. By co-creating a relational space, I was trying to show and animate the many important lessons along the way, and that this involves much more than just “finding an elder” or writing down TRC ties. This is a meaningful touchstone article that I continue to draw on in my life and career. It is one of my proudest works because I did it with my elder friends.

