Ben Ostermeier (BO): Alright, well hello everyone! It is November 20th, 2018 and I am speaking with Chad Milner today. And, how are you Chad?

Chad Milner (CM): I'm good, how are you?

BO: I'm good! So, first I want to ask how did you first get involved with the Young People's Project?

CM: Yeah, so I was an Algebra Project student in middle school. That's how my involvement in the Alliance network, and since the early 90s/late 80s, and went off to college, and when I got back I worked as a math teacher and also did some work in the technology sector. Then, in 2006, I came to YPP for our first NSF informal science education grant, which was focusing around building out our training network and expanding our work to additional program cities. So, that's when I came on board, and I worked initially in Boston helping to build out the Boston site and also helped supporting the trainer of trainings core model that we worked on during that time, and from there I transitioned to a role with the central organization or national organization, but mostly focused on sort of operations, but then also media/communications technology needs as well as in the interim serving as a PI on a coding literacy grant which ran for three and a half to four years. So, that's been my main entry point in involvement up until now.

BO: Got it. So what is it like launching a site as you did in Boston?

CM: So, it was really interesting, a very dynamic process. I'd say there is a lot of traditional legacy, more traditional community organizing elements where you are just trying to identify who your constituency is in the city, how does that align with your mission and your vision. But for us, we're really looking at servicing kids who are performing at or near the bottom quartile, which when you look at the sort of metrics on a national level, that comprises a pretty big percentage of the Boston public school students that we sent in at the time. So, that was sort of a broad population. So then from there it's kind of trying to figure out strategically which neighborhood areas we want to start with, so we did a lot of that type of work. Looking at what strategic partners you might want to work with, whether it is at the university level to try to establish relationships with college students, at high schools to recruit high school math literacy workers--which is an important part of our mode--and then also for outreach sites. So, typically though they're going to be after school programs, extended day programs, community centers, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs...so just trying to fit all those pieces together and figure out where they're going to physically be located in the city, and then what services you need to serve, and staffing. You need to build around that in order to have a successful program.

BO: Great. So, you served as the National Director of programs and are now the national director of media and technology. What is it like coordinating with local organizations with unique needs to achieve goals at the national level?

CM: Yes, so I think part of it is thinking about what the different needs are for different types of programs. So, for instance, YPP typically had two to three cities that it works in directly as part

of our/under our 5 1-2-3 umbrella, and traditionally those have been Greater Boston, Chicago, and Jackson. So those type of sites have one level of engagement and connection to the central office or central organization. Then we typically have some university based programs, so those are either directly or loosely affiliated with a college, we've had programs at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor or International in Miami, and then at Carbondale, where you are, with SIU and now Murphysville and Edwardsville. So, those are another layer or type of site. Then we've also had some community-based sites. In New York City we worked with a housing development called, an organization which lived inside the housing development, called the West Side Commons, or the Commons, and so that's sort of another example of a different structure for a YPP program site, and now what we have emerging is this Flagway league, which encompasses some of those original sites or program setups, but there's also places such as in DC where we just did a training where they're kind of working through the Washington teacher's union, and that's sort of the entryway to how we will develop teams that will compete, practice, play Flagway, that feed into the national tournament and network. In Idaho a similar situation, although not with a teacher's union, it's with a big picture learning school so I think just having the flexibility to think about what those different, what the needs of those different types of program partners and communities are, and how that can feed into kind of the overall vision or mission for YPP's work. And that then can kind of sit and relate to this emerging National Alliance that we've been talking about for a couple of years.

BO: Yeah. Okay, could you describe your experience with working on the project "Bridging Math Literacy and Media Creation?"

CM: Yeah, so that project started actually in I think 2009. It was an NSF ITEST division award and the goal of it was to look at, you know, how can we sort of translate our program model from working traditionally with math literacy to broadening it to a coding, STEM environment. For this particular grant, we focused in on coding, and we used a particular coding language called Scratch which was built and developed at MIT, and this was pretty early on in its lifecycle, it sort of has evolved since then and we focused on three YPP communities. We worked here in Boston, in Cambridge. We worked in Carbondale, in Illinois, and then we also worked in Mississippi, in Jackson. Those also represent three very different sort of demographic communities when you look at the spectrum of the type of students that are involved with YPP, so Greater Boston is more urban, black and Latino--some immigrant students as well. Carbondale, as you know, is a little more rural or semi-suburban, a larger number of white students. And then Jackson is deep south, urban but sort of urban sprawl and almost 100% African American. And, so, that was really great, to see kind of what some of the subtle or less subtle differences were in terms of population, and also just having different staff members who are not connected work on the same content, gave us some insight into what worked, what didn't work, how was it working, sort of what were the nuances there. So, yeah, that program ran for three years. We learned a ton, and we're still learning from that. We've incorporated coding into a lot of our core programming now. One of the high school students actually that was a participant in Boston is now our Greater Boston site director, Cliff Freeman, so again there was some sort of level of organic growth there too as well. So, yeah, overall it was a really great opportunity and very relevant, and in some ways it's really

becoming even more relevant, particularly in communities like Boston and New York and DC where a lot of the economy there has shifted to tech and to sciences, and even to areas that aren't exclusively tech. There is a tech workforce now that is occupying the working class and the professional class here. So, we're really trying to get students tapped into that who live in the cities and grew up here. I think that the bridging math and digital literacy was really our first foray into that type of work.

BO: Well, great! That sounds very exciting. So, you started off by talking about how you were a student who had Algebra Project curriculum. How did that experience as a student with the curriculum, how's that impacted or shaped your work with YPP now as a facilitator or director?

CM: Yeah, I mean, I think it's given it a type of continuity that I haven't seen in other parts of what my own personal life, but then also in other non-profit spaces and education spaces there tends to be these sort of micro-cultures around, like say, two to three years, or you might get a four to five year cycle if you're looking at, say, high school or middle school or even college where you know there's this piece of work that happens within that time period, which you know is an important time period particularly for young people when, you know, they are growing up, but there is also not sort of this long game that you see with the YPP/Algebra Project and associated Alliance, so I think I sort of experienced that first-hand, and thinking about kind of what does it mean to be a student going through this process, what does it mean to be a young adult kind of having had some other world experiences, and, you know, kind of coming back into and saying, okay, now what does it mean at this point now that I've "made it through," you know I've got through those hoops, what does it mean to, kind of, what have I learned from that, and what you know, what can I kind of contribute to the next generation coming up. Now, as getting sort of into more of an elder age, professional we'll say, elder, you know, I think it's kind of how do you continue to say, like, where can this model evolve, and can this community be strengthened, and like community of practice, so, yeah, I think for me it's been very informative I think that, again, the biggest element of it for me has been the idea of continuity, that this is a sort of a stayed effort, a sustained effort, that you know is not perfect in every moment, is not, you know, 100% effective, or you know, however you want to measure or talk about it, but that just in sort of its commitment is doing something that is unique in terms of how this country looks at education and, you know, and youth development, or community development, so again I'll say that longevity of just sustained effort, you know, and that's not even including the work that came before YPP and the Algebra Project...

BO: Sure

CM: ...that Bob was involved with, and I think just that for myself kind of coming from 12,13 to now. I mean, I'm 40, like, that's being like oh, this is what it looks like to watch a generation or generations kind of evolve, and here are some of the challenges that persist, and here are some of the external elements that change, whether it is political or economic, but that I think I can see now a little bit more why older generations, which is how they see the world and how they see the similarities, and the differences, and sort of the need to have this type of work going on.

BO: Yeah. So that may lead, probably leads into my next question, which is: what have you found most rewarding in working with the Young People's Project?

CM: Yes, I think I've touched on some of that, but I'd say just the ability to watch students kind of gain their own agency and sense of ownership over the work, the ability to see them through high school and college, and sometimes further, and how the work impacts how they see themselves, not just around math, but just around as leaders, organizers, students, role models. So I think, I really, that's a really powerful thing to see that. So, I've enjoyed that.

BO: Then conversely, what has been your greatest challenge in working with the Young People's Project and how did you deal with that challenge?

CM: Yeah, I think a lot of the challenge comes from being in a very unique space, and I say that in the sense that we're not an institution, we're not a school system or a city government. We're also not a church, or a university, or a school, but we're having, sort of working in that same space around, that intersects with institution, and so I think it's like we're creating a road as we're going, and you know I think having, for instance, the state resources, so we say we have a ten year plan. I mean nobody really talks in those terms now, it's kind of like here, here's some money for two to three years, can you get this deal to move from A to B? Oh great, you did it, now we're kind of on to the next thing. So, I think that has been a challenge in terms of just how do we find our place in the larger kind of space of institutions and entities that don't necessarily think on the same time frame that we're on. And then, yeah, I think that's kind of been the main, one of the main challenges I'd say that we face.

BO: Okay, and then the last question I have prepared is: how do you see the National Alliance and its member organizations challenging educational inequity and living up to the promise of "We the People"?

CM: Um, I think, I think the Alliance and YPP, we're asking for a ground up approach to the problem. And so, we're saying, you know, hey, we agree that the educational system in particular in this country needs to evolve. It needs to change, it needs to impact the students on the bottom who are not being serviced currently, who are not, you know, who might be, you know, you can, they might do this one thing or they might get through this task, but just overall there's like, there hasn't been a lot of movement on their ability to live up to and live into the meaningful careers or full citizenship that we sometimes reference. I think that the opportunities for the Alliance, and what we're really saying is that A: we want to do that, and B: we want to actually work with the affected communities and the affected young people who we say we're trying to have a positive impact on. So, we want them to take up a leadership role in solving that problem and in working on these challenges. I think that that's, I don't know if that answered your question...

BO: No, that's a great answer. Yeah, well, that's what I had prepared for today, Chad. Did you have anything else you wanted to say about your work with YPP?

CM: No, I think that was good. I appreciate your taking the time to talk to me.

BO: Well, thank you for taking the time to talk to me. This has been a great conversation, and I look forward to sharing it.