Vidya Shah (00:00:02):

Welcome to another season of the Unleading podcast series. We are plunging into important ideas around what it means to lead, who can lead and what it means to lead in ways that create more, just more humane, more loving, educational, and community spaces for all. Unleading invites us to consider who we are as leaders in relation to students, families, communities, and our colleagues. This in relation, this idea of being made up of one another, that is known by some as interconnectedness by others, as Ubuntu by others, as All My Relations by others as inter being and more invites us to consider who we are and who we might be as leaders. When we see ourselves as extensions of one another. What does it mean to lead in ways that are in deep solidarity to stand for each other as though we are part of the same community as though we are family, we're going to delve into this and so much more today with dynamic speakers who span multiple positionalities geographies and lived realities. If you want to know more about the panelists, you can find their full bios and contact information on the Unleading webpage: https://www.yorku.ca/edu/unleading/

Vidya Shah (00:01:33):

This podcast is titled leading through solidarities, and we're going to be speaking about the tensions, the complicities and the complexities of solidarity in leadership work, as well as opportunities for collective liberation that emerge through these solidarities. This topic highlights the intersectional nature of multiple systems of oppression settler colonialism, anti-black racism, other racisms, caste, imperialism, Islamophobia, transphobia, homophobia, and more, and the relational nature of racialization within a system of white supremacy and settler colonialism. Our conversations will engage us in reflexive inquiry as we consider who we need to be as leaders so that we may lead for solidarities and cross racial solidarities, but also how we apply our understandings of the complexities of this work, to what we do with communities in our schools and in academies. We have the amazing Dr. Whitnee Garrett Walker with us today to frame this important discussion. Dr. Garrett Walker is an assistant professor in educational leadership and policy at the Ontario Institute for studies and education at the university of Toronto. And she's deeply grounded in community and love for making education and this world a more loving and just place. I had the chance to hear her opening words. And I can't wait for you all to hear this as well. It is sheer fire. Welcome Dr. Whitnee Garrett Walker.

Whitnee Garrett Walker. (00:03:10):

I enter this space as wife to J., mama to Cadence, Daughter of Danette and James, Granddaughter of Barbara, Reggie, Michael, Virgina, and James; Sister to James, A.J., Jewel and Makayla; Auntie to James, London and Jameson; Friend and comrade to many. I enter this space as a Black, Indigenous and Queer cisgender woman, where my family and I are proud registered members of the Natchitoches Tribe of Louisiana. I enter this space as a person who has spent more than 14 years working in community and formal based education as an advocate, secondary history and special education teacher, and school administrator in urban public schools in San Jose, Oakland, and San Francisco, California, United States... As a scholar practitioner, I have always felt a deep disconnect between those in the academy and those in schools. Then after much reading and building, I learned that theory and practice need each other, just as we need breath and blood to live. Praxis , the combination of theory and practice, according to Paulo Freire is a necessary starting point for collective liberation. Before I jump into why this is from a personal perspective, there is a quote that grounds my offerings today about thein the fact that we need for both theory and practice to attain educational freedom. This quote is from Teaching to Transgress, written by none other than bell hooks. “I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory

then, a location for healing." I too have learned to engage theory as a site for healing, for it was in theory that I found a home as both a practitioner and a scholar, not the physical location of the school or institution in and of itself. Given this, to learned more about what was happening around me, such as.. Why Black, Indigenous, and youth of colour, youth who were neurodivergent or, houseless, but had brilliant and vulnerable minds , were treated as villains, in organizations that claimed to care for them. I also wondered how I, a teacher and school administrator, was being held to such ambitious standards to transform their learning environments and experiences while being treated in the exact same way. Yet with more supposed authority. It felt like I was going mad. Whenever I opened my mouth to resist, to explain, to gather, or to collaborate I was often met with such red tape as if I was trying to change the world…, but I was. And I did for a small few, but I paid for it, with PTSD, aAnxiety and attempted spiritual murder. A kind of lynching that only I could cut the rope from around my neck and have enough humility and vulnerability within me, to thank the tree. Because trees never gave their consent to participate in such acts. I enter this conversation deeply knowledgeable yet committed to learning more about the experiences of school leaders in my new Ontario context. I know that folx, specifically practitioners, may thinkmaytend to think that academics tend to remaintend remain within the ivory tower and speak an untranslatable alien tongue, but in reality, theory and practice are required to break the chains that exist in our hearts, minds and spirits because one directly informs and breathesbreaths into the other. We cannot be so divorced from theory as practitioners because it is theory that helps us make sense of our experiences and reminds us that we are not alone. When I think about the words Solidarity, Collective liberation, unity, equity, I also think about Love, co-conspiratorship, decolonization, and collective freedom-dreaming into action. I begin this talk with these words for the simple fact that it my job as the opening speaker to both ground and prepare us for the work of my comrades on this panel, as well as the work ahead of us as a community. These actions of Love, co conspiratorship, decolonization and collective freedom dreaming into action are not just words, but a song, a breath of wind, a dance, a subversive and windy map to a destination that my ancestors knew we could reach. Below In my opening speech, I aim to briefly outline the ways in which Love, Co-conspiratorship, decolonization, and collective freedom-dreaming into action, are necessary to attain educational freedom. The need for decolonization is necessary because colonization is the root of all evil that fuels white supremacy and white supremacy culture on a global level. When folx talk about the need to decolonize, they often want to continue ways of thinking, being and engaging that are rooted in colonization as racism, sexism, xenophobia, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, homophobia, transphobia, imperialism and capitalism. These are all symptoms and consequences of colonization. When my Indigenous relatives call for decolonization, it is calling for us all to un-know the many ways that the convergence of systems and structures of oppression impact our hearts, minds, bodies and the land on which we stand. This requires the ability to release fear and , domination, as well as a deep understanding that while decolonization is messy, thebut the goal is clear. As Eve Tuck so fiercely stated, "Decolonization is not a metaphor." It is not a description for harmony and restoration., Iit is the foundation of abolition, solidarity, and what Jeff Duncan Andrade calls, critical hope. Decolonizing educational leadership is attainable. Decolonizing educational leadership requires that we intentionally break free from what we know and have come to believe in our field. If decolonization requires us to think about what is possible vs what exists, we must operate from the space of possibility, not within the confines thatof the boxes, labels, gerrymandering, politics and funding structures, put before us. The types of schools that we need, canNOT exist because of our reliance on harmful colonial forms of domination. My colleagues Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang tell us in Decolonization is not a Metaphor: Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society, "Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights-based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an '"and'". It is an elsewhere." We must un-know and we must not be afraid to un-learn. We must not be afraid to be 'called in' especially when our fear and colonized ways of thinking and being, are showing. It is this space of possibility and

acceptance that will guide us to become grounded in love as mutual respect for the sanctity of all land, life and learning. It is not my intention to treat decolonization as a trivialas trivial choice, but it is a choice.. The only choice we have. bell hooks tells us in All about Love: “There is nothing that creates more confusion about love in the minds and hearts of children than unkind and/or cruel punishment meted out by the grown-ups they have been taught they should love and respect. Such children learn early on to question the meaning of love, to yearn for love even as they doubt it exists.” Love is a sacred practice and is reserved for people who are determined to see the light in themselves, those around them, and in the earth. We have a responsibility to support our youth and ourselves in harnessing this love. Currently, we have been taught and are teaching youth the exact opposite of love. By not teaching students to find power in themselves, we are teaching them to find solace and complacency in accepting domination from those with authority. This dominant way of existing is inextricably linked to whiteness and white supremacy culture in schools. When we intentionally teach and lead with our educational communities by being grounded in love, we cultivate the soil of each wildseed we’ve planted, including those passed. These are the seeds of resistance, and from each seedling, births a generation of those who know how to resist without losing themselves or each other because of trust, commitment, respect and collective responsibility they have built with one another. CO- conspiratorship, as Dr. Bettina love discusses in her critically acclaimed book, “We want to do more than survive,” is truly grounded in the simple, yet highly complex understanding that you need me to get free just like I need you. To break this down further, everyone has a bit of privilege that is accessible based on context and social location. As a cisgender woman, I have the privilege to wake up each day and feeling affirmed in various ways in society, based onaccording to my gender identity, in society. While this issue is more complex than capitalism and materialism, it also has a great deal to do with our ability to constantly ring the alarm aboutof the need for equity and inclusion forof our 2Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary, gender-non-conforming and gender-expansive relatives. To be clear, CO- conspirators are not just white cis-heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian people. CO- conspirators are folx who have a bit of social, financial, religious, educational, able-bodied privilege, which can be any and everyone, in any given situation. Instead of being asked to be an ally or asked to help, CO- conspirators are aware and are always ready to act, receive feedback, clear space and be in community. This is the key difference between allyship and co-conspiratorship. In the context of educational justice, it is SO important for new and continuing educators to learn about co-conspiratorship and how to show up for folx who do not look like them or experience the world as they do, because this will deeply impact the ability to see the members of a learning community as whole and not in need of saving. In educational leadership, we must be asking ourselves: -How will you show up for your colleagues w/ less privilege than you have? Do you understand the complex experiences of those with multiple marginalized identities? -How will you show up for and with them? Whose voices are being silenced in your curriculum? Who is being pushed out of your learning community instead of being intentionally welcomed in? So much of the conversation about allyship is about having to MAKE a call to allies. Folx of colour needing to call white folx, Trans people needing to call on cis folks, when, we should all be in the room, ready to show up! Remember, tThe room is not always a physical space., Tthink beyond it. As Dr. Bettina Love says often, “Llet go of some of that privilege;, it will always come back to you.” And so I ask, how can we make co-conspirators out of our teachers, out of parents, children, our eEducational assistants, our teachers, and our school district and board members? How can we make co-conspiratorship a part of who we are as the Greater Toronto Area? How can we bring cCo- conspiratorship into the fold of how we prepare educators for the fight of educational freedom? Freedom Dreams as Reality: Collective freedom dreaming into reality is all about the balance of knowing we need to burn it down, but leaving space to have a shared dream of what the old harmful spaces and ways of knowing will be replaced with. We cannot dream with the tools we are currently using because they are focused on what’s in front of us, not what is to come. RDG Kelley, noted scholar and author of Freedom Dreams writes: “Trying to envision “somewhere in advance of nowhere,”

as poet Jayne Cortez puts it, is an extremely difficult task, yet it is a matter of great urgency. Without new visions we don't know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics but a process that can and must transform us." Collective freedom dreaming into action is about being grounded in all that I've named in this short speech; decolonization, love, and CO- conspiratorship, and we cannot have one without the other. We often get sidetracked and deeply focused on our critique of what currently exists without discussing our ability to dream and create a new world. If we are all focused on fighting for liberation, who will be left to dream? Who will be left to create the new world? How will the youth lead this work? So my final question to you is, how and who are you standing with in your audacious freedom dreams?

Vidya Shah (00:18:07):

Wow, thank you so much, Dr. Garrett Walker for planting seeds of resistance for fierce love, for collective liberation, for freedom dreaming for all of it. This is such a beautiful invitation into this conversation. And we look forward to hearing from you again at the end, uh, when you give us a little summary of what it is you're hearing. I am so excited for this conversation, this idea of dreaming together, this idea of tearing down together, what hasn't worked for so long for so many, what does it mean to create a new, what do we need to, to, to tear down in order to create and build a new, and how do we do that together? And how do we do that with love and justice and humanity and fierce love. Um, as Dr. Garrett Walker was sharing at the center of what it is that we're thinking and dreaming of together. I'm so excited folks to introduce you to an amazing panel that, uh, is gonna take up these questions and more, I'd like to introduce you to Maya Bhardwaj. Maya is a queer south Asian Indian American organizer, activist, musician, artist, and scholar at the university of Pretoria and South Africa whose work focuses on defeating racial capitalism and cisheteropatriarchy, welcome Maya,

Maya Bhardwaj (00:19:29):

Hey, Vidya and all, thanks for having me. I'm looking forward to this conversation

Vidya Shah (00:19:33):

And I'd like to introduce you as well. To Joy Henderson. Joy is a community member who actively refuses participation in colonial systems of uncaring and disconnect learning from a practice of radical care and community honed by aunties, mothers, and grannys and region park. Welcome joy.

Joy Henderson (00:19:52):

Thank you for having me. I'm so happy to be here. I'm excited to talk to everyone.

Vidya Shah (00:19:56):

and I'm excited to welcome Michelle Peek. Michelle is a white settler, Italian, French, and British facilitator artist and curious human living with ADHD and depression, as well as the executive director of art, not shame whose work is focused on the capacity of creative expression to build community, speak back to inequity and generate the deep healing needed in this work and world together. Welcome Michelle.

Michelle Peek (00:20:22):

Thank you, Vidya. Thanks so much for having me

Vidya Shah (00:20:23):

And Sayema Chowdhury. Sayema Is a, a mother daughter partner and lifelong learner and educator. She has an interest in supporting mental health and wellbeing from community and anti-racist perspectives and is committed to community through anti-oppressive education and learning. Welcome Sayema.

Sayema Chowdhury (00:20:42):

Very excited to be part of this amazing panel.

Vidya Shah (00:20:45):

So folks, let's dive right into this. This is, uh, Ooh, I feel the energy it's already brewing. There are so many thoughts that are in my mind already, but I'm gonna hold my tongue until, until it's time. I'd love to hear from all of you. The first question that we have, um, at the start of all of the podcasts is really this question of what does it mean, or what does it look like to lead through solidarities in your everyday practice? So what does it mean? What is, if, if you were to sort of paint a picture for folks around what that might look like, or, or what that involves, how would you describe that? Joy, I'd love to hear from you,

Joy Henderson (00:21:21):

For sure. I think for me, a lot of it is asking why, why is it done this way? Who are we leaving out? It's asking the questions just that, you know, no one is really bothered to ask or think of and pointing out that like we aren't including everyone's voices that are unheard, that are processes are exclusive. Um, I disrupt a lot. That's part of what I do, you know, whether I do it on Twitter, whether I do it in my day to day life, um, it's just, you know, and something that I've kind of done since I was a child, I was always asking why, why, why, why? And, you know, very annoying to many people. Uh, but also the other part of that for me, is building relationships. And it's so important to, you know, just connect with people and, you know, whether it be, you know, online, whether it be in person, whether it be with young people, I'm a child and youth care practitioner and part of my role is to, you know, particularly with an education is to work with young people, connect with them and, you know, often try to, you know, find a way for them to fit into an educational system that is not meant for them. And so, and that requires a lot of relationship building to so that they feel safe. And I feel that when we enter spaces where people are feel safe to be vulnerable, you know, there's also that capacity for love to grow. And so, um, I also always try to enter spaces, being vulnerable, which isn't always easy, but when I'm in a space, you know, such as this, for example, you know, it's a step, but it's also, you know, that, um, willingness to say: here is me. Um, you know, and hopefully that opens up, you know, more vulnerabilities and more just capacity to meet each other where we're at, um, compassionately and, you know, wholy and that's kind of how I do it day to day.

Vidya Shah (00:23:31):

I just love that Joy. And I, I love the practice of showing up fully. Um, uh, and we know that that's different for different people in different bodies, but just the, the idea of showing up fully in a space, um, I think does something to that space. And it, it allows for, it allows for people to show up themselves in that space. And I love the way that you show up. So, thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for being here. Michelle would love to hear from you on this question. What does cross racial solidarity look like as a, as an everyday practice for you?

Michelle Peek (00:24:04):

I have the benefit of going after joy. So I feel like you just gave so many beautiful nuggets there that I just wanna pick up on. I'm not sure that I'm really adding too much, but, um, that question of why someone, this, I can't take credit for this. A friend of mine said that often in her facilitative practice, she asks, when she's thinking about, like, let's say something comes up in a group setting and it's, it's, it's some, it's some kind of harm that that has happened. Um, how you respond before you respond, you think, who, and what does this serve? And so that question of who and what does this serve, I think is, is one that I, I don't mean serve in a, in a servant sense. I mean, like, what does it allow? What does it enable? What does it perpetuate? Um, or what does it disrupt? And so I think that works. And when you think of sort of like a stance or position of solidarity, I think it's the same question as why, but it's like, like, why is this? Who is it for? You know, it, it helps both in terms of the outward look at systems, but also sort of inward for my own, for my own way that I be in a space, you know, like is my response right now kind of trauma forward and serving my own ego or serving a need for validation or serving whatever. Um, or is it, or is it, you know, in the service of this greater project or work or whatever reason we are together in this space. So it kind of, it, it works in both ways to sort of ask that question or hold that question.

Michelle Peek (00:25:28):

Another piece around being in solidarity. I think that I, that I try and, and work toward is just this like constant commitment to process. Yeah. Just knowing that it's, it's not really ever done. There's no place I'm aiming for necessarily. And at the same time like that, um, one of our principles in the work that we do is that everyone is exactly who they need to be, but they don't have access to what they need. They, they don't all have access to what they need. So it's, it's this, yeah. This idea of like, we don't, we're not trying to fix or, or save ourselves or others. We have, we have this deep inner wisdom and strength, and we don't all have access, um, to the, to the supports and relations that we need. Um, and so how do we sort of facilitate and make room always for that access?

Michelle Peek (00:26:11):

And then the last thing I would just say is like, what I think what video said enjoy what also mentioned just like space for the whole human. Like, I don't know how to be in solidarity if we can't allow space for the whole human, which does not mean excusing bad behavior or having no accountability. It just means, I mean, obvious maybe with the name of my organization, art not shame. It means it's, it's trying to do this without, without shame for what makes us human while still holding accountability for, for ourselves interactions and responsibility for ourselves and each other.

Vidya Shah (00:26:44):

I just love that, Michelle, thank you so much. And this idea of, we're not trying to like, even the term empowerment when people say they wanna empower somebody else. I really don't like that term. Like we can't, what does that mean? How do you empower somebody else? How do you, what does that, it's such a patronizing patriarchal way of thinking about, uh, who, who we are. So this, this idea that we all have, what we need and the conditions can create greater access to meeting those needs. it's such a, such an empowering way to think about it. <laugh> thank you, Michelle. Thanks so much for sharing. Maya would love to hear from you on this question. What is cross racial solidarity and, and solidarity look like in general for you as a leadership practice?

Maya Bhardwaj (00:27:26):

Yeah, I mean, I think that I have, um, some thoughts about solidarity and then some thoughts specifically about this idea of leadership. And maybe it's useful to start with the second part. Um, as we're thinking

about what solidarity looks like in practice or in practice. So folks have talked already about the importance of being in right relationship with folks in one's own community or in other communities about asking the right questions, figuring out how to show up. And I think a lot of pieces of work, sorry, please, excuse their construction noise outside. It's just New York life. Um, I think a lot of that actually doesn't look like, or maybe doesn't feel like what we're conditioned to think of as leadership. It's not necessarily the sexy pieces of getting up on the mic or the megaphone or showing up on a media interview or leading our community in a way where people naturally follow.

Maya Bhardwaj (00:28:27):

In fact, I think a lot of the work of doing solidarity is letting go of the idea of being a leader and instead doing what needs to be done. I think, you know, the articulation of movements as leaderful is when that's really beautiful. I think about Ella Baker's articulation of how communities don't need strong leaders, if we're equipped to have, we should do and work with each other in, in strong ways. And so I think when I'm considering what solidarity looks like, it often looks like moving away from leadership and moving into collective action in terms of like specifically what that looks like. So, um, I'm originally from Detroit, but I'm currently based between South Africa and London primarily right now. Um, and I think one really great example of solidarity that's coming to mind, uh, for me is the anti-immigration and anti-raids response groups that are information across the UK. Um, and so similarly to in, um, other countries in north America or in the global north where, uh, you know, we have violence systems of border enforcement that often descend on communities and disappear people. The same things are, are happening in, in both the UK and in South Africa. And so one really great example of solidarity, I think is recently when there was a raid in PECA the community in the south of London, um, friends of mine sent out a call saying, listen, immigration vans are here. We need people to show up to block this van from moving to support this, these families that are being targeted and to show that we're not gonna accept people from our communities being disappeared. And most of the people who showed up were documented people we're often British citizens. And so in that moment, you know, it's not necessarily in their own individual self-interest and they're not necessarily leading in any particular way, right.

Maya Bhardwaj (00:30:27):

They're just showing up to make sure that people don't get taken out of their communities who are potentially in precarious documentation statuses in this colonial country. Uh, and folks really, uh, through, down against the, against the polices and against the immigration officials, right? Like there were some moments of violence where people put their bodies on the line and people were willing to do that, cuz they were recognizing what solidarity meant in that moment. And it was that, um, moment of confrontation with the opposition. So I think that solidarity and I think, um, that kind of like leadership and leadership also means working in coordination with the other leaders in our community, right. We're putting out these calls, we're sharing about their own targeting. Um, so I think that's one example of what solidarity in action looks like to me and how we can be thinking about leaderful or perhaps even leaderless movements as we're doing this work.

Vidya Shah (00:31:21):

Thank you so much, Maya. And I love this idea of leaderfull and leaderless simultaneously and, and you know, the very concept I think of how in many spaces leadership has been defined is actually the opposite of solidarity. And I think, you know, this is, this is such an important theme that has come up in quite a few of the podcast around leadership being a collective of individuals, of ideas, of things, working together, the more than human working together towards something. Um, and that it actually is about decentering any one individual as the face of, you know, any sort of movement and what you were

saying earlier about that. It's not the, it's not the fancy interview or, you know, book or whatever that sort of gives people cred, you know, some sort of credibility. It reminds me of this poem by Elwood Jimmy and Vanessa Andreotti and the poems titled "Wanna be an ally." There's a stanza in it that I'm just gonna read, cuz it it's. My favorite stands in the whole in the whole poem, but it says, "offer your energy to peel potatoes, to wash the dishes, scrub the toilets, to drive the truck, to care for the babies, to entertain the kids, to separate the trash, to do the laundry, to feed the elders, to clean the mess, to buy the food, to fill the tank, to write the grant proposal, to pay the tab and the bail". And I think I just wanna, I, I just wanna hold up this piece that you're sharing around, you know, it's not the fancy stuff and if we aren't as leaders committed to the work that needs to be done to move this forward, including including the toilets and we're not actually doing the work of solidarity. Thank you so much for sharing that Maya. Sayema, I would love to hear from you, your thoughts on this.

Sayema Chowdhury (00:33:11):

Um, I'm not gonna add too too much because, um, my esteemed colleagues here have really, spoken to, um, the nuts and bolts of what it means to be in solidarity. The one thing that I will add is, and add as, as an added thought, is that for me, a lot of the time, the idea of being in solidarity is to be in a state of being unsettled. And I think that that's been touched upon by, um, my colleagues here in different ways and shapes and forms, but just offer a little bit of clarity to it. Um, Jodi Dean in 2008 wrote that, um, "solidarity has to move doubt out into its foundations, building from an awareness of and sensitivity to the limits of understanding". And so for me, um, what that really means is that, um, I think that, and I love that this is like flowing from the, you know, what does it mean to be a leader comment that just preceded this, but really, um, a lot of the time in colonial models of leadership, we are kind of given these, um, depictions of the leader, holding all the power and having all the answers and making choices and being firm in that. And, um, there is no space for community consultation and there is no space for doubt. And there is no space for humility and humility is really the main thing that I wanna focus on. Um, in terms of solidarity to understand that we are all limited because we are part of a collective community and we don't operate in silos. Um, and so of course, if we are all connected, then there are limitations to any single person in the knowledge that they hold and the understandings that they hold. Um, so that idea of being unsettled and constantly checking ourselves and checking our privileges and checking the limitations of our knowledge and asking ourselves how much do I really know and who do I need to go to to learn more? And what connections am I missing and what, and why am I missing these connections? Like why do I not have these connections? Right. Do I talked about all these building, these connections you're right. Like why do we not have these connections and not taking that as a, I'm a horrible person, cuz I don't have these connections, but to be like, you know what, I don't have these connections and I need to think about that. I need to fill in the gap. I think that's a critical piece of being in solidarity. The idea that you have the ability to understand that you have limitations that are upon you and that's okay because it's not about you. <laugh>, it's not about your own ego and it's not about what you think is best. It's about what is best for everybody and how we work together collectively to achieve that.

Vidya Shah (00:35:48):

I love that Sayema. I love that. That it's not about you like how the world would be such a different place. If we realized that it's just not about us, that there's something bigger happening that we can step into that we can be part of. And part of decentering the individual person in this space, recognizing that we're part of a larger collective, that we're part of a larger ecosystem of, of human. And non-human that we're part of larger spaces entirely. This, this idea of it's just not about us is such a scary, but also liberating place to be, to experience what, what, what that's like and to see what comes from from that where many more of us can step into that. It's just not about us. Thank you for sharing that. So beautiful folks.

As we, as we think about this, you know, one of the things that we, that we like to do, um, in Unleading is ask ourselves, what are we, what are we collectively refusing with this idea of leading through and with, and as soar. So for this question, the question is how do we collectively refuse the White settler state and our ideas of schooling and leadership? What challenges do you face in leading this way? So unearthing some of the challenges that we face in, in, uh, leading in ways that are, uh, a refusal to the white settler state. So I'd love to hear, I, I'd love to hear from you all on this and Michelle, maybe we'll start with you

Michelle Peek (00:37:20):

For sure. Um, and I think my initial thoughts kind of lean more in the, you know, how might our ideas of schooling and learning change. Um, if we collectively refuse. So yeah, forgive me if I'm taking this a bit on a tangent, but when I think about how, you know, the white settler state, white supremacy, colonization, these, all of these systems work to kind of sever relations within ourselves, between each other, within ourselves, between ourselves and nature. Um, they actively refuse the idea that we are all already made up of one another. How might learning spaces be a place where we can, I mean, for some, for some folks it's already there, that's already the reality for others. It's reremembering for others, it's learning, but how, how, and in what ways can we be in relation and how with one another with that in mind?

Michelle Peek (00:38:14):

And so when I'll just sort of give, I, I might be taking it a bit off here, but in terms of what the context of my own work, where we run, um, or we hold art spaces, community spaces, the belief that we hold is that we all have this unique creative expression, brilliance, wisdom in our bodies, in our brains. And so when we say something like, you know, it's, it's not, it's not, I was thinking about that phrase of like, it's not personal, it's not about us and it's deeply personal means like you're still invited to bring that, that piece that you bring, right? It, it just means it's, it's, it's not centering you and, and the ego, but sort of to bring it back. So we all have this, the, this within us and how we store it, access it, experience it and retrieve it is different. And that is gonna be based on our brain chemistry, our experience with trauma and oppression, our experience or experiences with racism ex. And I think that where we operate from is that the art allows us different ways to access those pieces, that wisdom, that history, that brilliance, that, that unique creativity that we all have. Um, and when I'm talking about, I will bring this back to the question, but when I'm talking about even the arts, like, I don't mean the professional arts like that is this deeply colonial space. I don't mean even, you know, charities and nonprofits. These are all deeply colonial spaces. I'm talking about creative expression and play like that birthright that we have as a friend of mine, puts it like the earth creates and we are of the earth. And, and we all have this birthright to create that birthright that we have to create and express and, and get at our inner life. So the, the arts to me is one way and that when I say the arts, I'm talking about it in that much more broad way that we can work back against the severing that happens through whiteness, through colonization and start that process of, uh, uh, you know, what Whitnee or sorry, what Dr. Garrett Walker was speaking to of transforming of dreaming and creating together. And art is just like, and that's just one vehicle, right? I'm so curious and about, you know, other ways of being that already are, you know, they already are excited. Like, what is ceremony? What is breathwork, what is shared meals? What is embodied practices? And so I think, yeah, the, one of the ways in which I think about how to push back in the is in the, how we learn and the, what we learn. So the, how we learn is the sort of like creating these containers where the whole human, I think a lot of what everyone said about what it is even to the, in solidarity, like all of those sort of ways of holding space for people, creating containers that, that break that open, you know, creating a community agreement, like what happens in a space when you walk, when you go around the room and you don't assume that nobody has needs, everybody has needs.

Michelle Peek (00:40:51):

And then what happens when needs that we, that are stated out loud conflict with one another. Now you have a community who can create the conditions for holding that together and holding that tension as opposed to a, you know, a traditional classroom where there's a very, you know, clear value system behind the way we teach to learn the way we disseminate information, what counts as information. So what if the, the premises that like we are, that the wisdom is in the room, in the bodies, in the people, in the unique gifts, and how do we create the container to sort of undo some of that condition that makes us feel that, that we don't have it. And then in terms of the, what, you know, if we're, if we're valuing more like, you know, the art of peeling, the potatoes in solidarity, as opposed to having a fancy title or the, you know, the art of grieving within, for one another, um, as opposed to producing,

Vidya Shah (00:41:38):

I just love that Michelle, thank you so much. Yes. The wisdom is in the body. Uh, and assuming that, and assuming that it's there and it's present in all of us, um, I, I just love that. I love that, uh, Joy. I'd love to hear from you on this question. I'd love to hear from you. How do we collectively refuse the white settler state and our ideas of schooling and leadership, and what challenges do you face in leading this way?

Joy Henderson (00:42:02):

I think I'm gonna start with the second part, because that's how my brain works. <laugh> so, uh, I think, you know, the challenges I'm finding these days is a lack of generosity. A lack of, I know, as like Whitnee said, um, being in a space of operating of what is possible, and we're all coming at this from different spaces and Michelle touched on, you know, coming from a place of trauma and are we operating from that place versus, you know, and I haven't fully articulated this in my brain yet, but like just like operating from a place of trauma versus operating from what a place is possible. And so, um, and I'm finding this challenge a lot and it's really bugging me <laugh> so, and, um, I don't know, Patty Krawec in her book, um, becoming Kin, I'm just gonna reference this, you know, she mentioned, you know, as an indigenous peoples, we operated from a place of generosity.

Joy Henderson (00:43:05):

Right. And that is not to defaulted, you know, cuz often we'll say, oh, you know, our ancestors should have like turned away, like, you know, the colonizers and such. Right. But like the generosity was not the problem. Right. It was how it was abused. Right. And so, and we've had that happen so much that, of course we instinctively like just kind of claw back and like, oh my gosh. Right. And so it's really difficult ad frustrating that we don't feel safe enough to operate from that space. But I really feel that it is necessary to kind of enter bravely into spaces of generosity and particularly in education, like, you know, there's so much, um, gate keeping in a way, right? Like even with like, you know, how we involve the community, right. Like I see unions and educational groups, you know, whether it's like, we're all siloed off. Right. And so like, NYCs are in QPI teachers have their own elementary teachers have their own union. Right. And it's just like, we don't cross collaborate and it's very frustrating and it's a lack of generosity in sharing space, sharing knowledge, sharing how we operate and work within education together. And it's holding us back. Right. And it's holding us, it's keeping us away from dismantling white settler colonialism. Right. And additionally, just like collectively understanding that we're all products. I think this goes to the first part of your question. I hope <laugh> so, but we're all products of white settler colonialism. Right. And so, you know, one of my things that I like to do on Twitter a bit is like, you know, say to like, you know, black folks, like, you know, you're not settlers. Right. And so, and people are like, oh my gosh. Right? I'm like, no, we are all products of settler colonialism in different ways. Right. And so I kind of like limit it to

my own lens just because that's what I'm comfortable and I know of, but like when you expand it right. And so the diaspora is my pronounce it. Right. I hope so. Um, you know are also involved, um, and have been affected by settler colonialism. Right. And so therefore, you know, kind of, I feel it's important to kind of open that concept up so that we can like, you know, include people under the umbrella and how they're differently affected, you know, it doesn't necessarily mean that we've all the same way affected <laugh>. And so, but, um, you know, it also creates that collective community that kinship that yes, we've all been really harmed by this concept in different ways, even within, you know, the state that we know as Canada.

Joy Henderson (00:45:49):

And then we can also then examine, use it to examine how we approach things in education. Like how do we treat young people? Right. We don't treat them as, you know, educational partners, even though it's their bodies. Like it really schools should be centered around them versus the staff or, you know, the admin or whoever. Right. And so, and you know, but the way it's built, obviously we have to kind of, you know, work around these systems. But you know, it's really frustrating that, you know, it's not centered around children and that's part of like the settler colonial project that we are here. And so for me, you know, just how do we collectively refuse it? We recognize that we are all part of it and we make space and we are being generous to people to have that space and, you know, open the tent up.

Joy Henderson (00:46:43):

And you know, that also includes space for holding people accountable for when they are creating harm, but also that space to, um, you know, make mistakes too. Right. And so, and I don't, you know, some mistakes are like pretty like grievous. And so, but also, you know, we're always like on this, um, path where it's like, you know, if we make a mistake, oh my gosh, you're getting punished. And we start this from very, very early. Right. You know, whether it's through detention, whether it's when I was a kid, we had to stand on a chair when we were, when we like, you know, yeah. When we got out of line, we had to stand on a chair in grade two. It was like, really this bizarre I'm terrified of Heights. Um, but yeah, so like we create this lack of space to truly explore and make mistakes and then how to be loving, you know, held accountable lovingly so that they're able to say and make repair, you know, wholly and lovingly through, you know, community measures and such. So, and we don't have a framework for that. So I'm kind of all over the place too. Um, I have ADHD as well, so, um, but that's how I'm arriving. And so, but I will digress. That's kinda all I have to say. <laugh>

Vidya Shah (00:47:56):

I love that Joy. Thank you so much. And what I, what I love about how you're sharing is the way in which we're holding the tension and the paradox between our common humanity and similarities that we might experience under a particular system of oppression and the different ways that it affects us all and to not, to not lose sight of the, of, of the nuances and of the ways in which we, um, in which we are all affected by this differently, because there's, there's such importance in that. I think about the work of, um, uh, Nishant Upadhyay who is a scholar, uh, formerly from Toronto and now, now in the us. And he speaks about uneasy soar, right? And it's this idea of not moving too fast to similarities and instead staying with the, the complexities and staying with the complicities in how we, how we engage with, with one another. Thank you so much for sharing that Sayema. I'd love to hear from you on this question.

Sayema Chowdhury (00:48:52):

I'm gonna start with, uh, kind of the outer and then I'll move towards the inner. Um, so I've been thinking about this quite a bit. Um, and I think that, um, number one in terms of refusal is to really, um, engage in thinking and understanding, um, about the widespread impacts of colonization worldwide and how it has shaped, as Joy said, it's impacted all of us, but how it's really, um, impacted on a global level and how those narratives, um, that have, um, taken place continue to impact generations throughout. And I say that, for example, as I've just recently come to awarenesses around, you know, I am of south Asian descent, South Asia was under British colonization. Uh, the schooling that my parents experienced and my grandparents experienced are all British schooling systems. They're all colonial, um, systems. And so even working through what is an original teaching for me and what is a teaching that has been tainted by that colonial, um, you know, uh, lens is something that I'm working, uh, to deconstruct and to understand, um, even narratives about other aspects of my identity, you know, being a Muslim and invisible Muslim woman, um, you know, what narratives are being told to me that are from my faith versus that are being told to me from a colonial perspective, like these are things that I'm working throughout.

Sayema Chowdhury (00:50:22):

So really understanding that many of the narratives that we are working with, um, in our present day have been shaped through colonization and colonial impacts and really thinking about the global impact of that and how everything is interconnected is one way I think that I'm working towards, uh, resisting those narratives. Uh, the second part of that is thinking about my own complicity, um, in aspects of oppressive systems that have been set up through colonization. So whether that be looking at settler colonialism and my role in that and furthering the settler colonial project, um, or whether that be in, um, being socializing into, you know, what is called a quote unquote third space of racialized, but not black, um, and how that feeds into anti-black racism. Um, so what is my role in understanding how I come into that space? Uh, what kind of social factors have been set up for me to, for people to read my body, um, and how my body is being used very intentionally for the purpose of oppression of other people's. Um, so that's another way that I am trying to understand more so that I can refuse those narratives that are set up for oppression. And so I can understand how I can, um, actively not partake in that oppression. Um, because again, we are all implicated whether we recognize it or not. So the issue becomes how do we then learn to recognize? Um, and then with that, I think comes a lot of, uh, inner healing and inner work that needs to be done to understand, uh, the roles that we play in the bodies that we have and what traumas have been inflicted upon us and how it is that we have been used inflict trauma upon others, and to refuse all of this as a collective. And I think we can only do this like that part of refusing. So what do you do with that?

Sayema Chowdhury (00:52:17):

So, you know, you have all these awarenesses and that's why I said, you start with the outer, but then what do you do with that? Do you sit in? You know, shame, guilt, oh my goodness, no, like that's not helpful. Um, you need to then learn to do better and you can only learn to do better by building those relationships and by being in community and by working together collectively to say, okay, you know, we, we are in these circumstances, so how do we move past it together? How can we do better? Um, and how do we reimagine those possibilities together, um, as a collective. Um, and then the last part of this, and I don't know whether I should say this or not, but there's a, you know, what barriers, the part of the question was, what barriers do we face is I think that, um, it builds within you a constant sense of doubt, um, in terms of who you are and whether you are quote unquote good enough, because there is that constant play of like, you are doing all this inner work, but you know, at the end of the day, somebody is still judging you from the outside. And, you know, that comes down back to the ego aspect that we

talked about earlier and refusing that, um, looking yourself for ego. And so, you know, I always joke that like, I'm constantly trying to adult, I was trying to, you know, I'm doing adulting. I don't know what that means. <laugh> like, I don't feel like I'm doing it in a way that, um, has been shown to me on the media. Or my mom always says to me, aren't you gonna buy a suit? Like you're a professional, aren't you gonna buy a suit? And I'm like, I'm never, I have a suit I'm never wearing it. It's like, it's just not, it's not who I am. It's not authentic to who I am and the person that I am. And so I think it has to come down to really thinking about, um, and, you know, that's, and this is all part with being, uh, part of, of course, intertwined being, uh, involved with the healing and the aspect of being in collective community, but really, um, being a confident affirmed and proud of who you are and what you bring, including those limitations that you bring, that you turn towards your community and your relationships to help you to fill so that you can become more whole and then offer a more hell self to the larger collective.

Vidya Shah (00:54:15):

Thank you so much for sharing that Sayema and for your own personal journey with this. You know, I think that we don't, we don't hear about our, our journeys into learning about the ways in which our systems, our families are, our experiences have been colonized and, you know, coming to know that, and, and this idea of being told stories about us and having to sift through what is actually, you know, what is our families and community stories and what are other stories? I think that's such a, such an important inquiry, but it's also deeply painful. You know, thinking about all the ways and I I'll speak for me here, just in thinking about all the ways and all the things that I've been told and taught that are untruths, that, that, you know, coming to a place where I can allow those untruths to, to actually turn into fuel for fighting back against narratives that are told about us for very particular purposes.

Vidya Shah (00:55:11):

You know, what you said about your body being used in particular ways for, and, and knowing that and knowing how to knowing how to navigate that I think is such an important skill. And it, you know, it's, it's hard on the one hand because we wanna, we wanna feel that we've, you know, I, I, I think about this often in terms of, you know, folks getting various positions now, and, and we wanna feel that we, that we earned it, that we worked hard, that we, and at the same time, our bodies are often put in particular positions that have nothing to do with us that have to do with serving some larger, larger, you know, system of, uh, of the white settler state that, that needs us there to act in certain ways, or to do certain things. Um, and that's a real mind trip, uh, and a heart trip too. Thank you for sharing all this Sayema and, you know, folks, this, this idea of, of challenges that we face, or even, you know, collectively refusing often means that we're taking an intersectional approach to leadership and to leading and to leaderful ways of being a leaderless ways of being, um, as Maya was sharing earlier. But this notion of, of, of, of an intersectional approach, uh, is so, so much at the root of this conversation. So Maya would love to hear from you, your, your, your thoughts about what does it mean to take an intersectional approach to leading through solidarities.

Maya Bhardwaj (00:56:38):

It's beautiful to see the development in my conversations about intersectionality within movement work. Uh, I really love the quote of, you know, if our feminism isn't intersectional, it's not feminism. And I think, uh, it's really beautiful that we're recognizing that like systems transformation and solidarity and collaboration and powerful movement work requires, uh, an analysis of the variety of conditions that shape our society in our worlds and recognizing the ways that that affects us in different ways. However, I think like oftentimes we have blindness around particular intersections of oppression and, and power and privilege, right? So I think for example, ableism is something that really pervades our movement

work, whether it's within education, justice, or housing, you know, the variety of work that, that we all do to make this a better world. Uh, and I think for me, like listening to folks that talking about the intersections of disability justice with other pieces of movement work is, is really critical.

Maya Bhardwaj (00:57:42):

I think another space where for, particularly for the communities that I come out of, um, in the south Asian diaspora, where we often have a blind spot is around, um, caste and the intersection of caste with class and colorism and, um, gender based violence and a variety of other things. So it's not enough for us to, you know, be talking about our identities as oppressed people and that we're leading movements. But I think there's a concept, uh, around positionality where we have different spaces of power and privilege, depending on what groups we're present in, how power is flowing in a particular moment and a particular space. And I think that's really useful to think about, like, what does it mean to have a holistic analysis of, uh, what it takes to change systems? And, you know, I think that like the forces that we're fighting are doing this already, right? Like global capital for, for example, is targeting people based on every possible space of, um, asserting dominance. So it's really important that we are thinking about how this is showing up in different spaces, different places, and forming like a coherent way of fighting back, uh, based on that. And, you know, I think that can be as simple as taking a look around the rooms that we're in, when we're at a planning meeting or we are at a rally or whatever, and figuring out like, do I need to be the one holding space right now? Or is there somebody that I can also be bringing alongside me? Or is there something that needs to get done in this space that isn't getting done? And what are, are the dynamics around that, you know, like little things like who's taking notes or who's doing the childcare in a space, or who's the one setting up food or taking down the meeting afterwards? I think those often show the different intersections of power and privilege in even in our movement spaces.

Vidya Shah (00:59:37):

Thank you so much, Maya, thank you so much. Uh, what you're sharing makes me think about, you know, <laugh> for how long white supremacy and settler colonialism and CI hetero patriarchy have have operated intersectionally, you know, they have, they have been doing, they have been doing that work and, and doing it really well in a really organized way. And, uh, and what we're asking for here is, um, is thinking about intersectionality differently to center. The ways that we can, that we can take down, uh, those pieces. I, you know, I think this is really, really an important conversation and I, I wanna just name, you know, you were sharing about your work with castism and, and just to, you know, for, for folks I know in, in Ontario and, and definitely elsewhere, we've been having growing conversations about in a post George Floyd era, the place and space of south Asians, sort of speaking about anti-black racism in, in our communities. And I really wanna just highlight and, and hold up your work and Thimori's work around the importance of centering caste in this conversation and, and others as well. It's been such an interesting learning journey for me too, to, uh, to have this conversation as sort of a settler here in T'karonto, who has been thinking about these, these ideas and cast has played a part in my family, you know, and even between my parents and, and just watching myself, not even make the connections between anti-black racism and anti castism in such explicit ways, and to have them as sort of separate ideas in my mind, or in, in my space and what that enabled in me, you know, like the, the conversations that I didn't have to have, the spaces that I didn't need to go, um, because, because they were two separate things and, and what it invites in me in this internal reckoning, when I do see them as deeply connected, uh, forms of oppression. So I just wanna thank you and others who are really calling us in as south Asians to see the connections and to ask ourselves how we benefit from not seeing those connections, what gets allowed and enabled by not seeing them. So just a, a shout out to you wanna thank you to you for that. Maya

Maya Bhardwaj (01:01:52):

Just wanna say quickly that my work is mostly signal boosting, the amazing organizing of primarily femmes and queer people. Um, as somebody who holds caste privilege, I think it's important to recognize that like I'm really learning from the work of folks who are directly impacted and figuring out how to be an ally and co-conspirator in those spaces as well.

Vidya Shah (01:02:13):

Love that, love that. Thank you so much. So I'd love to hear from Sayema on this question

Sayema Chowdhury (01:02:19):

In thinking about the role of intersectionality. One of the things that first comes to mind is the idea that the institutions that we work and operate, play in quote unquote, play in, um, they are colonial institutions. And so I first wanna recognize that they are equity sparse spaces, and when we don't take an intersectional approach or a collective approach, um, then we are actually, sometimes it leads to competition in these spaces of identities and by engaging in competition in those spaces, what we are actually doing is we are complicit in those systems of coloniality and oppression. So that's one thing that I always think about, um, whenever, um, we kind of might have the tendency to engage in that competition for that space by not taking intersectional approaches. Um, the other thing with intersectional approaches when it comes to solidarity is I think that it allows us to really keep the focus on the systems of oppression that we are all trying to combat collectively that are at the root of, um, many of the challenges that we are facing.

Sayema Chowdhury (01:03:25):

And as Joy had mentioned before, and as others have mentioned the panel already, um, you know, we know that, uh, uh, colonization, um, and the oppressions that have come with that in terms of the racism, the homophobia, the, you know, all the things that have been mentioned, um, when we keep our eye on, you know, that's what we are trying to combat over here and that is the root cause of what has led to many of these ways that, uh, we experience, uh, oppressions. I think that intersectionality allows us to keep that focus. Now having said that, I think we also have to be cautious because we can't just say, okay, and now we are all suffering the same way together because we've also been impacted differently depending on what our collection of identities are. So, um, I think intersectionality offers amazing opportunities for us to come together to share, uh, what are micro differences are in terms of the the way that we experience oppression.

Sayema Chowdhury (01:04:25):

Um, but it also allows us to come together to a space to understand that we don't need to compete together, um, because there's also collective liberation. If, if you know, I don't have a particular, um, identity that another person does have, and then, and they are receiving services that they should be receiving. When I, uh, look at my identity as, as part of a collective humanity, then I understand that that's liberation for all of us, right? So that's, um, kind of a, looking at a more community perspective. And, you know, I just wanna pull from black feminist work that says, you know, the idea of as we climb, we lift, um, it's that idea that, um, when we, even, when we are looking towards, you know, particular intersections of identities that are maybe collective collected within myself, um, I do recognize that if I'm gonna make any forward movements, I'm always thinking to, to myself in solidarity with all my brothers, sisters in humanity to say, how is this gonna benefit everybody else as well? How is this gonna create better spaces for all?

Vidya Shah (01:05:26):

Thank you so much Sayema. And it it's opening up this conversation around, again, like leadership being intergenerational leadership, being, uh, a collective of the human and more than human and idea. Like it's this idea of really thinking about the possibilities that emerge when we aren't operating in a mind frame of sort of the singular separate autonomous individual leader, but instead thinking about the connected collective movement of all kinds of things that are leading towards something, it makes me think about as well. I remember, um, listening to a podcast recently by the, uh, liberatory leadership collective, I believe. And it was some folks from this collective speaking, and they were speaking about this idea of even among themselves as executive directors of organizations, what it means to operate from a place of, um, of collaboration and cooperation, where they're actually sharing, you know, funding sources, they're sharing ideas, they're trying to better, uh, each other and they're collective spaces because it's not a competition.

Vidya Shah (01:06:37):

It's a, it's a recognition that the work that they're doing is part of something much greater than that. This idea of decentering the quote unquote individual leader, and like resting in this much more expansive vision of what it means to be, and act, and move and live and lead towards collective liberation means that we can share things that we must share things, means that as Joy was saying earlier, we must be generous with each other because there's a bigger thing that we're working towards. It's not simply, you know, the optics of who we are and, you know, do we look good and are we the best at this? And are we right? And all of the nonsense ego things that keep us separate and fragmented and, and in harm and in trauma, because we cannot be in community and we cannot belong to one another, and we cannot love on each other when we are spending all of our time, trying to distinguish ourselves from each other, trying to maintain this sort of separate identity. And so what you're sharing just really makes me think about models of, of leading and leadership that share that care that now I'm thinking about, you know, dish with one spoon, wampum belt covenants around sharing and caring deeply and only taking what we need and, you know, what does it mean to actually do that? it's, it's exciting. It's exciting. Joy would love to hear from you on this question, intersectional approaches to this work.

Joy Henderson (01:08:01):

It's interesting. Cuz I had a thought and you know, just after hearing Samma, you know, it's just like, okay, thought new thought. Right. <laugh> and so I just like, and I just, I think about like, you know, in terms of like colonialism and what have you, like, they want us fragmented, they want us segmented. They want us like, you know, the scarce and the scarcity mindset. Right. And it's, you know, I'm thinking back to like one of the first slave revolts, um, back in 1526. And so, and you know, the colonialists had like, you know, enslaved people and they revolted with the help of the local indigenous people, which was believed to be the Peedee nation. And since then, you know, this colonialists are like, Nope, they're not cooperating anymore. Anyway, anyhow, we are going to do everything in our power to, um, basically, you know, keep Black and Indigenous people apart.

Joy Henderson (01:08:59):

And, you know, and as an Afro Indigenous person, particularly in the last, you know, few weeks, it's become very clear how deeply, you know, uh, colonialism has entered both like black and indigenous folks in that like, you know, we can't collaborate the way we should be in my opinion, anyhow. Um, but you know, with that loving generosity, right. And the violence that's kind of been, um, enacted on Afro Indigenous communities, which are like, you know, a very intersected identity of, you know, two very

marginalized nations within, you know, this, um, colonial project called north America. Right. It's just, it's kind of blown my mind just at how well colonialism has worked and got us into the scarcity mindset and you know, not working together much to the point where, you know, and we see it like, you know, I mean I would just kind of diverge into education just because I originally was gonna speak just kind of about like, you know, disability and how like, you know, it is not incorporated and almost most of our movements, I guess now just like, oh, we have created this whole like event, oh shoot, we have to have interpreters.

Joy Henderson (01:10:12):

Right. And so it's like, no, like disability needs to be built in from the bottom up. Right. And you know, this is a thing intersectional approaches need to be built from the bottom up. It needs to be our foundation of all we do. And we don't do that enough. We're kind of like adding on, oh shoot. What about the Black community? Oh, shoot. What about like, you know, the Muslim community? Like, it's just like, no, like we need to kind of be working in collaborating from the get go and, you know, as a disabled person, you know, it's just, it's been very interesting to see the shift, you know, during the pandemic and now after the pandemic, how quickly we're moving back to in person without like, you know, even like, um, mask or anything. Right. And you see that in schools and such, and just kind of a lack of like care or, um, understanding of what the issues are. And particularly, really for like students and, you know, staff who are in the buildings. Right. And so on. It's like, and we're the fact that we're not like, you know, screaming, bloody murder about this like from the get go kind of tells me like, okay, we're not necessarily, um, working from that intersectional approach, um, to handle the issues that are going to affect, you know, people who...we're not using our privilege to help those who are severely marginalized by these systems. Right. And it's super frustrating. <laugh> so, uh, you know, just as someone who is occupying like multiple intersections of identity and seeing it play out within our communities, within our education system, within, you know, the buildings that we occupy,

Vidya Shah (01:11:54):

Thank you so much Joy, you know, it as you were sharing at the beginning, it makes me think about how many soar were intentionally erased. You know, I'm now learning about soar between south Asian and black communities. And I wasn't taught that growing up. I, you know it is, it's really interesting the ways in which in you were, you were talking about the black community and black communities and indigenous communities solidarities that have existed there and, and how many we may not have known about. And also the tensions that exist between our communities that we may also want to at time silence, because we know that that playing into sort of dividing, conquer mentality is exactly what white supremacy wants of us. And so this tension of like wanting to protect in some way, and at the same time, learning about solidarities it's a confusing place to be at times, but I think such an important, such an important conversation.

Vidya Shah (01:12:49):

And I love this idea around, you know, starting with and centering, you know, in, in our disability justice podcast, we had a lot of conversations around how often conversations around white supremacy. Um, and anti-racism in general leave out disability justice. And at times perpetuate, uh, very ableist, uh, structures that that will inevitably harm, uh, Black and Indigenous children, more so than other, you know, than, than, than other child. So it's just, it's this place of, we cannot do this work without taking an intersectional approach. And similarly, as we leave, you know, as we leave out as, as, um, Dr. Garrett Walker shared in her beginning, um, if we're not thinking of intersectionalities between queer communities and racialized communities and disabled communities, like if we're not looking at those

intersections, we are essentially leaving out so many people who identify that way. And so it begs the question, you know, where does it end?

Vidya Shah (01:13:52):

Like it, it, it, which is a really beautiful way of understanding interconnectedness through intersectionality that we can't, we can't actually address, anything without really taking into account everybody who identifies in those ways and the ways in which systems of oppression need each other to survive. It's a, it's a, a really important, I think, reorient reorientation to how we think about this work. And I think for so many schools and school boards, this idea of being siloed, you know, you have this department, that's looking at this, you have like mental health departments that, that that's looking at this, you have safe and caring schools. That's looking at this, all of these departments that are so separate and siloed. It, it does not create the conditions to actually address these pieces intersectionally, uh, and, and does such harm to, to children and to families and communities as a result. Ooh folks, okay. We are moving and shaking. And as we move into our last question here, I'd love to hear from you all about the possibilities of this work. What does this work enable? What possibilities emerge in leading through soar? I know for me, it's been a tremendous amount of joy, and I'd love to hear from all of you, how you sort of think about this and how you come to this and Joy maybe we'll start with you.

Joy Henderson (01:15:06):

It's funny. I was thinking about this. And so, um, last week I met Whitnee Garrett Walker, and we spent like, you know, 20 minutes of our first meeting, wandering around Queen's park, trying to find each other, <laugh> laughing at each other on the phone. And then, uh, you know, but you know, we were Twitter friends first, and then we met to coconspire, but afterwards Whitney said, you know, you're my family now, you're my kin. And I'm like, and you're my kin. Right? And the possibilities are kinship, right? It's about family. It's about, you know, and I mean, like, we're both Afro indigenous queer people, you know, parents who live in the same city, but, you know, we also have, you know, vastly different, you know, upbringings and experiences within our lives, obviously just, you know, just from geography alone. Right. And so, but it's about kinship.

Joy Henderson (01:16:03):

I mean, the possibilities are endless, right? The possibilities are, you know, even like, just when you think of your own family and you say to, you know, your kids, your partners, your siblings, like, what are we gonna do today? Right. You know, you have a free day, what are we gonna do? And it's like endless, right. But it's the same, like, and I can't even possibly conceive of all of the possibilities because they are so wide and wonderful, but I know that that feeling that I have with kinship, it makes you feel invincible. It makes you feel like anything is possible. I remember growing up in Regent park and this was during the Mike Harris years and a bunch of low income, racialized aunties and mothers got a house center built during Mike Harris years. Right. Just through, you know, this mission that transcended all our different identities, but that we needed healthcare. And we needed a building that actually, you know, addressed our healthcare needs. Right. And it's a large health center. It's still there. It's standing Parliament and Dunas, and it's a testament. And it's always something that I think about, of what can be done when we transcend, you know, um, what colonialism has imposed upon us. And, you know, when we become kin and I keep on plugging this book Becoming Kin, I swear, I'm not getting paid for it, but it's just, I read it at left a mark. Um, but yeah, that's what we need to eventually do. We kind of need to move out of the scarcity and out of the silos, which I put in chat that I hate so much, and we need to recognize and honor our differences, but we also need to kind of find a way to, you know, cross those bridges, huh?

Joy Henderson (01:17:49):

That's a old metaphor, but, um, cross them so that we can become, can and work together to create <laugh> the wonders things that we can create. And I'm like, I feel like the Dr. Seuss book, I mean, he's terrible, but like, you know, I keep on thinking of that book that was forced upon us in children, but you know, the message is there. We can create so much wondrous. I broke the swearing barrier, but I I'm excited about it. I truly am. So that's why I'm swearing. And so I'll let someone else be excited. <laugh>

Vidya Shah (01:18:22):

I just love that joy. I love that. I love that. Thank you so much for sharing. Michelle would love to hear from you on this question. Possibilities that, that open up and emerge.

Michelle Peek (01:18:31):

Once again, after going, going after Joy is like a blessing <laugh> um, you're reminding me of this word kinship. Like I, I <laugh>, my story is that I, I did a PhD and wrote about kinship. It nearly killed me. I did not know that I had ADHD at the time. It was my space of shame and self deprecation and not enoughness. But the gift was that I, I got to think into the possibilities of kinship and I, and I was looking at like how we define kinship is so important to this conversation, like kinship as understood through, you know, a Western human rights model is a collapsing of differences and, and, and making everyone the same, um, kinship has understood through like queer kinship or chosen family is, is a whole other thing. Um, kinship is understood by the, what I happened to focus on was the Kanaka Maoli of, uh, Hawaii, um, is about the flow of water from mountain to sea and the kinship relations that, that embeds and the, and the both spiritual cosmological and, and also sort of like familial practical food systems, all of those things.

Michelle Peek (01:19:42):

So like all of this to me comes back to, I don't mean to simplify it, but like this, this, this severing that tries to, and maybe this is my bias to where it's a brain that sees connections everywhere, but like this severing that, that doesn't want us to be connected. Um, and if kinship is actually much broader than that, what, what becomes possible. And I know for myself, like, even in the friendships that I've like Vidya, and I wrote a paper on cross racial solidarity, specifically around how, you know, how whiteness comes in between two friends between two people in a friendship and how we, we both perpetuate or, or are not seeing it, or, um, but what has been made possible is a greater access to myself, through friendships, where again, that like the whole humanity is honored and welcomed and held and through silliness and joy and teasing. And like, I, you know, I am Whitey in the group and I get called on. And that gift of being called on is one that I know is like deeply, deeply embedded in love. And I know it's family. Right? Cause only family is gonna do that for you. <laugh> and it's yeah, I, there, there's just something so beautiful and, um, I, I don't really need to make it all like sunshine and rainbows. It's also hard work, right? Like family is hard chosen or not. Um, but we show up for family, um, and we know that our survival is codependent with and on family.

Vidya Shah (01:21:13):

Thank you, Michelle. Thank you so much. I love the YT reference. It's gotta make it into the podcast in some way. That's awesome. Uh, Sayema would love to hear from you on this question, possibilities that emerge.

Sayema Chowdhury (01:21:25):

Yeah. The possibilities that can emerge are, I think are endless and I'm picking up on the excitement and the beautiful thoughts that have been shared here by Joy and Michelle already, uh, kinship, the idea of collective humanity coming together. The idea of dreaming Dr. Whitnee Garrett-Walker spoke about this, um, in her opening. Um, I think a lot of the time, if we're not in solidarity with each other, then we're doing, trying to do this work alone and we can't do this work alone. It, it takes away our humanity. It creates, you know, PTSD as she, as she, uh, spoke to at the beginning. Um, and in order for us to be full and to continue to dream of better ways of doing things and in order for us to sustain each other ourselves and each other, uh, we need to come together in solidarity.

Sayema Chowdhury (01:22:15):

And I think from a leadership perspective, it really does a lot to alleviate, you know, um, in the opening statements, it was mentioned like, you know, as a school administrator you're expected to solve and be responsive to everybody's needs, it's not possible for one person to know how to do that. So that pressure that, um, is often created by these systems of hierarchical systems where it's like you're expected to hold all the answers, that idea of solidarity and working in solidarity with your communities and understanding that there's collective leadership working with the parents' students and fellow educators within your communities. It really opens doors to understanding and alleviating that pressure on yourself to understanding like, you know what, I don't have to have a single answer. We can dream of an answer together. We can come together. And it supports not only that, you know, quote unquote leader, whoever holds the title's mental health and wellbeing, but also the collective mental health and wellbeing of everyone because there's voice and there's collaboration and there's authenticity in reaching solutions. And so, um, you know, lots and lots of amazing possibilities when we think about, uh, working through leadership possibilities and solidarities.

Vidya Shah (01:23:30):

Thank you so much, Simon. Thank you. And last, but certainly not least, Maya would love to hear from you on this question.

Maya Bhardwaj (01:23:36):

I really resonate with a lot of what's been shared and, uh, I think like a lot of it has been, has been shared already, but I think the, the piece is about kinship and remaking the way that we relate with each other is so important. And I think, uh, you know, ultimately solidarity is a vehicle for total transformation of the way that we live, right? The way that we relate to our land, to each other, whether we think about ourselves in relationship with our home spaces, uh, or whether that's, you know, something to commodify and extract from the way that we think about what, what jobs are, are worthy, what labor is worthy, what people are worthy of being, uh, listened to. Um, and, you know, I think solidarity, and then the possibilities that emerge from genuine solidarity are the possibilities of like living in a world that feels good.

Maya Bhardwaj (01:24:36):

That's not falling apart from climate crisis and late stage capitalism and violence. Uh it's um, the possibility of imagining like what a utopia could look like in, in our lives and then doing the work to get towards that and practicing it in our movements, thinking about our organizing and activism as practice for that total transformation, because all of this is made up all of these systems that we have, have been created by humans. And there's also other systems that have been created by humans and by, you know, the planet that we live on and the other living things that we're also in relationship with. So I think

solidarity for me provides a way to think about what else could we make up? What else could we dream up? What, what do we wanna live in and what would that look like? Uh, and then figuring that out together in conversation and in relationship with each other.

Vidya Shah (01:25:33):

Mm, thank you so much. Thank you. And, uh, Michelle, I know that you wanted to add one more piece, so I'll just, uh, I'll just call on you.

Michelle Peek (01:25:42):

I was just gonna say, uh, I had meant to also just like, I know Vidya and I, you and I have talked about how fucked up there I did it Joy <laugh> I broke it with you. Um, how fucked up white kinship is. Right. You know, like I say, that like kinship based in a system of whiteness, I don't mean white people in families. I mean, kinship that is based on anti-Blackness that is based on anti-Indigeneity that is based on sameness and punishment and not enoughness like, or on the other side of that, um, charity or, or paternalism. And it seems like both auctions, at least in, in the ways that I've been conditioned in white supremacy, don't really, they both preclude real liberation and solidarity because one, in both instances, it's predicated on a fundamental divide and inequity. And also just to bring back to, I think what Joy said in the beginning, that, that it means that some people though, some people very much have the real option to opt out because of privilege, but that we are all actually affected by this, whether we want to acknowledge that or not, um, in drastically inequitable ways, but we are and that is also part of, I think, working towards liberation.

Vidya Shah (01:26:59):

Thank you so much for adding that piece in, you know, it, it's often surprising to me that, you know, white folks, settlers, abled folks, uh, you know, CIS folks, straight folks, men, you know, this idea of doing this kind of work is often seen as such a threat to their very existence in the world. And it, it always boggles my mind that what this work is offering is actually greater openness and space and kinship and belonging for even them. And we don't think of it that way and not to center. <laugh> all of those areas of privilege, but it's just such a farce that there's greater belonging and there's greater, you know, uh there's a better life, uh, the way that things currently are. And, and I love this, I love this idea that we, that we have created these systems and we can create different systems.

Vidya Shah (01:27:53):

And we are, those, those systems actually do exist in small places and alternative spaces and in all of the work that you all are doing, um, and how do we build, how do we co-construct and build that, um, and continue to be aware of, of all of the complicities and the complexities of, of that work as we do. So what a conversation, oh my goodness. I wanna thank you all so much for just really showing up today in all of your questions and brilliance and invitations for us to think about what it really means to lead in and through and for solidarity. And I wanna just take a moment and hold up a couple of pieces that are really resonating with me from, from what each of you shared. Joy, when you, when you shared or asked the question, are we operating from a place of trauma? And then you asked, are we operating from a place of what is possible? It makes me think about the fact that for, for me, at least so often I'm operating from both a place of trauma and a place of possibility. And sometimes that trauma opens up a possibility, but the importance of being aware of what is up for me when I'm leading is such an important question, because it invites me into some more choice into some more spaciousness, uh, to think about who I am and how I'm leading in that moment. And I wanna also thank you for introducing us to the work for

those of, uh, of, of you that haven't had a chance to, to read Becoming Kin, um, and Patty Krawec work, and this idea, this invitation, again, to operate from a place of generosity and that as you paraphrase, uh, Patty's work in saying that generosity itself is not the problem.

Vidya Shah (01:29:44):

It's how it's been abused, uh, especially in indigenous settler relations, that's the problem. And so while it might be difficult and frustrating and what, and while it might not feel safe, how do we enter into spaces with generosity nonetheless? And finally, I wanna thank you for naming that we're all differently affected by systems of oppression like colonialism and settler colonialism. And it's in, it's an understanding that, uh, that there's a relation between how we've been affected that these are interconnected ideas and experiences and expressions of colonialism, and settler colonialism that we can actually use that knowledge to examine how we pro approach things in education and in community. And I think about how that relational approach to being differently affected by systems of oppression, how, how much that can do to really help us stay out of this divide and conquer mentality, uh, oppression, Olympics, all of the ways in which we have been taught and which we've been socialized to be pit against one another thinking about this as being relationally affected and differently affected, and not, not sweeping everything over with one brush as though we've all been affected, and that's it really naming the nuances and the differences, um, but understanding that we've all been affected by these systems.

Vidya Shah (01:31:07):

So thank you so much Joy. And Maya, I wanna hold up, uh, this idea of what you shared about a lot of the work of soar is really letting go of the idea of being a leader and instead just doing more of what needs to be done, and that might not be glorious, and that might not be, you know, something that deserves some special award. It might just be the work that needs to be done. And I just love that. I love that. Uh, and also the invitation to move away from the concept of leadership and move into this idea of collective action and that it's from this place of collective action that we might see solidarity as both leaderfulland leaderless. Leaderful in the sense that we are all leaders in our own ways and leaderless in the sense that there's not one central leader, um, that we're all taking on different roles at different times.

Vidya Shah (01:31:59):

And I also wanna thank you, Maya, for your, um, reminder about the fact that we can't do solidarity work without an intersectional lens, that if our feminism isn't intersectional it isn't feminism. And all of these ideas help, help remind us that we are complex people with changing dynamic fluid identities. And I just love the invitation to see, you know, when we can see ourselves as intersectional, when we can see our systems as intersectional our communities as, as intersectional, what that might offer by way of solidarity. And who are we leaving out when we say, you know, fill in the blank group, who, who is left out of our understanding of that. And Michelle, I wanna really hold up, uh, ideas that you've shared about the idea that this work is deeply personal and simultaneously it's not about us at all. And that paradox is such a beautiful paradox that invites us into deep internal interrogation of who we are in relation to others in relation to the more than human in relation to the environments that we are, are in so that we can decenter ourselves so that we can make it not, not about us. Um, and, and more about the collective and the invitation to think about the kind of containers that we need to create, where more of our wholeness can show up more of our creativity and our expression and our joy and our questions, and our complexities can show up and spaces that help us break ourselves open again and again, into greater expressions of who we might be. I'm grateful for the distinctions that you're making

for us in our conceptions of kinship. And that for so many of us, we've been socialized into a kinship that forces us to sever from ourselves, from each other, forces us to stay, uh, disconnected and fragmented, and your invitation to think about notions of kinship from many indigenous communities that are broader, that are, that are deeply interconnected that see ourselves as made up of one another, what becomes possible when that is our understanding of kinship, what becomes possible in terms of having greater access to ourselves and welcoming and honoring all parts of ourselves and making space for the wisdom and the joy, but also the silliness and the teasing and all that rich goodness that comes when we can bring more of ourselves into a space.

Vidya Shah (01:34:34):

and Sayema I want to thank you for inviting us to continuously unsettle ourselves and constantly checking, checking ourselves and the limitations of our knowledge. And in doing that, it, it, you know as others have said, it, it, it, decenters this idea that there's one leader that has to know all and be all. And it invites us to say, who do I need to learn from where do I need to learn from what are some of the gaps that I wanna fill? Um, and, and, and therefore we need others. We need others in order to, um, fill some of these gaps that as a collective, we can hold inviting us to, you know, check our egos that it's not about our egos. It's about, it's about collective action. And I wanna also, uh, thank you Sayema for talking about the importance of intergenerational trauma, uh, intergenerational work that needs to be done the importance of healing, um, and asking ourselves, how might we center healing in a way that doesn't continue to inflict trauma on others? How do we do the work of, of healing as necessary for solidarity building so that we can, we can show up in ways that are, that are inviting others to actually attend to their trauma as well. So I want to really thank you all for these beautiful insights for ways in which you are, um, showing up in the world. Thank you. Thank you for this conversations. They Dr. Whitnee Garrett-Walker, thank you for your introduction and your beautiful words to open us up into this conversation and to the listeners. Thank you once again, for being part of this journey with us, for trying to think about, and be in the questions of solidarity, to be in the questions of unsettling, to be in the questions of unle, you have been listening to another episode of the unleashing podcast season two until next time.