

Vidya Shah ([00:00:10](#)):

Hello and welcome. My name is Dr. Vidya Shah and I'm an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University. Welcome to another episode of the UnLeading Project. UnLeading asks us to question common sense assumptions of leadership, to explore what is silenced and experiences of leaders and enactments of leadership, define connections between seemingly disparate ideas and disconnections between ideas that have been normalized. It asks us to bring our minds, our bodies, our hands and our spirits to this work. Our podcast today is on critical spirituality in leadership. We consider the merging of critical approaches to leadership with spiritual approaches. What do we mean by critical approaches? Well, by critical, we mean the critique and disruption of existing structures and practices that perpetuate oppression of historically marginalized groups. And by the spiritual, we draw on a very broad definition that speaks to connectedness, belongingness, identifications, wellbeing, love, peaceful coexistence with nature and among other groups. Those are the words of George Dei. And by spirituality, we remove beyond this notion of sort of secular colonial individual conceptions that position religion as bad and spirituality as good. In this way, we are questioning ideas of residual and normative Christian practices, and we are questioning concepts such as systemic faithism. We have an outstanding group of panelists from different faith groups, from different religious affiliations, from different spiritual backgrounds and with different worldviews. For a full list of their bios and contact information, please check out the UnLeading webpage at www.yorku.ca/edu/unleading. As we do with all of our podcasts, we're going to begin today with a speaker to help us frame the discussion and to explore some of these questions and pose some wonderings. It's my great privilege to welcome to the podcast, Hiren Mistry, educator, scholar, writer, speaker and human rights advocate. Hiren, we're so excited to have you here today. Welcome.

Hiren Mistry ([00:02:34](#)):

Thank you, Vidya. It is my privilege to open up tonight's discussion about critical spirituality in leadership by addressing some major concepts, contradictions and perspectives on this important conjunction of ideas and practices. To help frame this opening, I've been asked to offer some reflections on how Christian hegemony, coloniality and neoliberal logics limit the possibilities of the spiritual in leadership. I've also been asked to reflect on how I would describe the key elements and expressions of critical spirituality in leadership, but I do believe our esteemed panel will take the lead on that. As a way into these important questions and to help situate the tensions and possibilities our panelists speak about, I actually would like to open up with an anecdote. 25 years ago, I came back to Trent University after spending 6 months in India, living with my cousins, uncles and aunts, and my grandparents hometowns. I had taken a year out to clear my head and my understanding of my roots before finishing my last year of university and completing my B.Ed. It was a luxury and I took it because I knew that opportunity would not come back anytime soon. Prior to leaving for India, I had a political awakening, particularly during my third year of my BA. It helped to clarify my values and goals as a second generation racialized immigrant in Canada. And that was to fight for the advancement of equality of all Canadians, particularly those who are underserved. The summer of violence of 1992, after the public display police brutality against Rodney King coincided with the first year of my BA. Thereafter, my immersion in critical sociology, cultural studies and philosophy during my next 3 years at Trent, also coincided with working with activist organizations in Toronto and Peterborough. These experiences gave me a sense of identity, collectivity and purpose in the world. I was against oppression and for the creation of space and opportunities of all Canadians, especially those on the margins and especially those in educational spaces. But after I came back from India in 1996, I saw and experienced the world differently. I had a spiritual and cultural awakening while I was in India, and whenever it turned to Toronto and Trent, I wanted to bring all parts of me, my Hindu Gujarati selves into the life I created as an activist before leaving Canada. When I

returned, I openly identified as a Hindu. I talked about activism, but also the limitations of Western sociology at capturing the essence and meaning of Hindu traditions, formal and informal I was exposed to, which also soothed my soul and it grounded me incredibly. I wore these new found insights openly and my professors, and many of my activist peers who knew me prior to leaving, viewed me with suspicion and with criticism. Their distance from me and response signaled my first experience of the tension of spirituality and leadership and activism. It was hard. Before I left Trent, I ended up writing a piece in the local university magazine entitled, Entrapment and the Secular Discourse of Racism, about how the theories, strategies and stance as a political activism, occluded people like me from seeing what spiritual and religious people like me had to offer the movement. It also masks this theory of racism and anti-racism that was secular. It occluded how Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in particular, were using their networks and spiritual resources as buffers against economic exclusion and racism. The intellectual and political closure I experienced from activists led me to leave activism actually for many years.

Hiren Mistry ([00:06:17](#)):

This experience highlights some of the tensions of advancing spirituality within critical leadership, particularly ways in which Christianity, coloniality and neoliberalism in some extents define and limit the possibilities. And some of which I'll extend on for a couple more minutes. Number one, on Christianity, there's a strong shadow of Christianity and the history of public schools in Ontario and this ethos and its cultural forms continue today in policy, practice and school culture. Contributing factors, also how educators and staff see and understand religion. In Peel, the staff census revealed that the majority of employees identify as Christian, followed only by the religious nones or those with no religious affiliation. This raises questions about the received understanding that public schools are indeed secular spaces. Indeed, Christian celebrations in schools annually expose this tension too. In some schools, Christmas becomes a flashpoint of competing values, old versus new, tradition versus new ways of imagining inviting community and belonging and competing visions of multiculturalism, cohesion or specific normative values that set up expectations for BIPOC people, to behave in order for society to be civil and safe versus notions of unruly or dangerous pluralism. Still reflecting on Christianity, the received understanding of Christian fellowship continues to shape how religious identity, grace and social activism are understood and accepted in social institutions. This extends to public schools too. There is no doubt that Christian churches have a long history of advancing social reform movements in Canada and beyond. From Tommy Douglas to the role of Church organizations and sponsoring and assisting refugees, and the tradition of charity work for the poor and marginalized. But squaring this reality with the history of missionary work past and present, and conceptually how Christianity continues to define the limits of what is seen as acceptable forms of religiosity in schools--Particularly viewed in the debates around Friday prayer, religious wear, dietary restrictions, and non-Christian holy days.

Hiren Mistry ([00:08:20](#)):

The increased presence of non-Christian students and families throughout the GTA continue to demonstrate the tension of the secular and the presence of Christian norms and values in schools. Colonialism continues to cast a shadow on Indigenous cultures and ways of being throughout the world. While the first wave of colonists set out to settle, conquer and exploit Indigenous lands, the second and third wave of colonists came in the form of missionaries, linguists and anthropologists. Many comb through the global south, looking for clues about the origins of humanity, with European civilization had presumably eclipsed and they were looking for the vestiges, the human past and the cultures and communities they had conquered. This set up the conditions for the colonized to see themselves as less than, as infantile, as heathen, as barbarian. This dynamic set up conditions also, for revivalist movements, particularly with the 19th century to set up visions of what it means to be Hindu, Sikh,

Muslim or Jewish for example, which have caused at least 2 generations to experience violence at spiritual, emotional and material levels. What was at stake was the inherent plurality within these traditions that became lost in the diaspora or at least minimized and policed. This raises questions about how religious and spiritual ways of knowing in schools and communities and how they are recognized and honoured have been affected by colonialism. Lastly, neoliberal logics, mindfulness, yoga and the consumption of holistic practices as programs for self-improvement, empowerment, borrowing from Hinduism, Buddhism, Indigenous ways of knowing, in Kabbalah have proliferated in and out of educational spaces. But what are the connections of commitments beyond the refreshed and awakened individual? There has been an upsurge in what Salon calls spiritual meritocracy. To quote, "Spiritual meritocracy is the implicit idea here that our professional and financial growth depends on our spiritual merit, not in our presence or absence, social structures and biases. We are told that if we are grateful enough, we put enough happy energy into the universe then we'll be rewarded with the material wealth and earthly pleasures." Think, The Secret, we are told that actually we can have it all a rich, spiritual life leading to a material life. This kind of neoliberal spiritualism continues to exist and extend in our mindfulness programs through many schools. So all 3 in conclusion, Christianity, coloniality and neoliberal logics opens up space and sets constraints for critical spirituality in school leadership, including how these are allowed to show up in activism, as my opening anecdote, hopefully refers to. The reflections of the panelists will undoubtedly touch on and extend on some of these ideas, these tensions and contradictions and give them further life.

Vidya Shah ([00:11:10](#)):

Hiren, thank you so much. That was so beautiful and I really appreciate the anecdote at the beginning. I totally see myself in that and think about how hard it's been for me personally to feel like I live in 2 different worlds, the spiritual world and the activist world, that at times speak to each other and at times don't. It's only when the body is calling for an integration of those 2 things deeply, that I had to listen and listen well. Thank you for that and for naming the ways in which Christian hegemony and coloniality, and neo-liberalism operate to silence and erase any plurality and difference. Such an important framing for our discussion today, so thank you so much for that. I'm really excited to extend this conversation and to extend some of the ideas that Hiren has shared with our wonderful panelists. I'll introduce them to you now, and we'd love to hear a little bit about them. First off, welcome Ixchel Bennett.

Ixchel Bennett ([00:12:08](#)):

Hi everyone, thank you for having me here. I'm really glad to be with an amazing group of people. I mean, already feeling the energy around us, even though we're here virtually. I am Indigenous Nahua/Zapoteca from Tenochtitlán (Mexico City). I was born and raised in Mexico and immigrated to Canada about 32 years ago. I've had different leadership positions throughout my career. I've been in education for the past 16 years and anything from teacher to special education teacher, working for the ministries, as a student work study teacher. Then I was also seconded at York and then I participated and supported the first Indigenous teacher education program at York University called WABAAN. Now I'm a vice principal in the only dual track school in TDSB. I think that's about it, thanks.

Vidya Shah ([00:13:11](#)):

Thank you so much, Ixchel and welcome. Next, I'd like to welcome jeewan chanicka.

jeewan chanicka ([00:13:16](#)):

Hi everyone, I'm happy to be here and be on such an amazing panel of distinguished speakers. I'm a superintendent for a growing international school system based out of Dubai. My work around critical spirituality and learning has really evolved from coming from a very mixed family of Hindu and Christians. I chose Islam and then subsequently, would find out about some of my own Indigenous roots and traversing as an organizer within social justice and activist work. It was really about considering who I was in that space and what I was working towards and my own relationship with myself and the people around me. Thank you.

Vidya Shah ([00:14:11](#)):

Thank you so much, jeewan and welcome. Next I'd like to welcome Fiona Gardner. Welcome Fiona.

Fiona Gardner ([00:14:17](#)):

Thank you and I'm really appreciating being part of this panel as well. How wonderful to find people with similar interests. So, I'm Australian, a White Australian woman. I migrated from Scotland with my family when I was 9. That's why I don't sound Australian, if you're thinking that's strange. My background is in social work and I've worked in social work, including in some leadership positions, for about 20 years and then moved to work at a university teaching social work. I think my experience reflects a bit about what Vidya was saying about having my spiritual and religious life and feeling quite separate from my work life. In social work, really, there is such a reluctance to include the spiritual and/or religious in your practice, particularly in Australia, but I think in other parts of the world as well. What led me into looking more deeply at critical spirituality was an experience very early on in my work here at the university. I had a group of students in a skills class, and part of the expectation was that people would talk about why they were interested in social work. After the class, a young man, who's a Christian, came to see me to say, Fiona, being a Christian is a really important part of this for me, but I really don't want to talk about this in the class. I think that if I do admit, admit was the word he used to being Christian, people will see me as being part of the patriarchy and they just will not want to know me. It's interesting how in terms of other people's experience and I've had other students say similar things, even though Australia is similar in terms of the predominant view being theoretically secular, but actually quite Christian. For these students, being Christian is seemed to be quite unacceptable. Several of them said things like if only I was Buddhist that would be better. That's what got me interested in this.

Vidya Shah ([00:16:35](#)):

That's so interesting, thank you, Fiona. I'm thinking about how long it took me to start talking about spirituality in my professional life, even though it's been such a big part of my life for so many years. So thank you for sharing that. And last, but certainly not least, Bruce Rodrigues, welcome.

Bruce Rodrigues ([00:16:52](#)):

Thanks Vidya. I too, am excited to be part of this esteemed panel. My pronouns are he/him and identify as a South Asian male. I've spent my entire career of over 35 years in educational circles in various positions. Just briefly, I'm really looking forward to my new learning this evening as we interchange ideas with this panel and thank you to Hiren for his introductory comments. So look forward to the conversation.

Vidya Shah ([00:17:22](#)):

Thank you so much, Bruce, we're so happy that you're here. Building on what Hiren has shared in the beginning in terms of the merging of the critical and the spiritual and the new worlds that emerge in the

mix of the critical and the spiritual. I'd love to hear how each of you sort of think about what does this work look like in your everyday practice? In thinking about critical spirituality in leadership in particular, what does that look like? Fiona, maybe we'll start with you.

Fiona Gardner ([00:17:49](#)):

Look, I think for me, this is a lot about trying to name this in the space that I'm in. I work in a very large university, big bureaucracy, and I think for me, it's about trying to name some of the assumptions, the values that underpin what we're doing and the way that we're working. Now, that's partly about doing that in the space with other people, but it's also about trying to be conscious of the values and beliefs that I'm operating from. Some of this can sound quite secular. For example, it can be about a belief in what kind of change is possible. So what kind of change is possible from me, how can I see things differently? How can I not make the kinds of assumptions that might be getting in the way for myself and to other people, but also looking at what are the assumptions that are part of how the organization operates and how is that influenced by the general culture, the social structures in which we are all operating. Sometimes it's about people's ability to express who they are and certainly that obvious examples of that would be around spirituality. Going back to my story really about the student who came to me feeling they couldn't talk about who they are as a Christian, wanting to say, this is not good. How do we do something about this? I think that experience got me to challenge myself about my allowing, I suppose, of that kind of narrative of not including spirituality, to be part of how we operated in our social work course and to say, where is the space for this? How do we make this more explicit? But it also comes out, I think in other things like my assumptions about what is possible to change and how I can be an agent for change. Now, I mean that in quite small ways, not necessarily big dramatic ways. An easy example of that for me would be very early on also in my career. A student was about to, I think be excluded from the course and she had a lot of personal issues really that made it difficult for her to participate. At that time I was quite daunted by the rules and regulations of the university. It seemed impossible really to get any kind of change, but I thought, well, I just really have to advocate for this student. I have to try. I went to talk to the administrative people who said, initially, said no, this is absolutely impossible, but when I told them the story of the student, suddenly it became possible for things to be different. I think that was a really good lesson for me of shifting from my assumption of this is too difficult, I can't achieve change here to saying, I always have to come from an assumption or belief that change is possible. I think for me, that's part of my personal self, as well as my professional self to say, if we're really looking for what's meaningful for people, if we're really valuing each person and their sense of possibility, then we have to act in ways that are looking for socially just change. That's part of my way of working with critical spirituality.

Vidya Shah ([00:21:40](#)):

Thank you so much, Fiona. And Ixchel, I know that you had some thoughts on this question.

Ixchel Bennett ([00:21:45](#)):

Yes, thank you. Thank you, Fiona for sharing. When I think about critical spirituality in leadership, I really think about the whole in self, right? With a "W" and with a "h". I really think about how am I engaging in this leadership role physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually and that spirituality for me has really transformed over the years. The more that I got to know who I am and where I'm from and what are my stories, that's when I really got to know my inner teacher. I also want to talk about ego because in leadership, there's a lot of ego that happens. I don't think ego has something that is negative, but I think it's a part of who we are and I also think that by being a spiritual well-being, you talk to your ego and you acknowledge your ego, but at the same time, ego could be a negative force into your leadership. I think

this is what really happens a lot sometimes in the positions that we are in school boards, where the acronyms after your name or your position or your title, it really determines into who you are. I think about that today as we all introduced ourselves. We introduce ourselves first with what we do, our physical aspect, what we're working on. But really, and I think this is something that I want to change for myself, do we say, I introduce myself as an aunt, right? An auntie, I introduce myself as a partner, I introduce myself as a daughter, which also, in the role of family, those are the first positions of leadership that we have. The first positions of leadership that we learned from and that we learned with. Now, as I'm thinking about this question, even more, I'm thinking about, how we even introduce ourselves sometimes really demonstrates part of our ego that is not negative per se, but also we need to make room for the spiritual well-being of who we are. Some people introduce themselves with their faith. For me, I mean, faith has been very controversial in my personal life because I was born and raised a Catholic Christian, but it wasn't by choice and it wasn't from my parents by choice either. I shared the story about how my name is Ixchel, it's pronounced, (eeks-chell), it's an Indigenous Mayan name. When my parents went to baptize me in the church because that's something that you had to do in Mexico, the priest said, we're not going to name her Ixchel. And my parents are asking, well, why not? And they said, well, because it's not a Christian name. So the priest is the one that named me with my middle name to have a Christian name and my middle name is Maria. I only learned about that story in my 30s and I asked my mother, how come you never told me about this? She said, well, you never asked. One of the things I've also learned is that my own spirituality, my critical spirituality is I really have to ask more questions about who I am and where I'm from and what are my stories because that really helps me take off that peel of that onion and learn more about myself. At the same time, it's painful, right? It's hurtful to know that this colonial history that we have continues to have an impact today, without even knowing that even in your name, it's impregnated with what has happened. When it comes to schooling, I also think we, all of us work in colonial spaces where colonial violence continues, whether we realize it or not. This is why I think it's integral to bring critical spirituality into our schooling, into ourselves. It all starts with the self and the who am I has an educator, who am I as a leader? Who am I as the vice-principal, who am I in whatever role we're in because that really determines what we think, what we say, what we feel and what we do. That's something that's very challenging, but at the same time is, I find that it's very rewarding and it's ongoing. It's an ongoing battle within yourself that you're living through, which is, I like to say this expression, which is painfully good at times.

Vidya Shah ([00:26:35](#)):

Thank you so much for that, Ixchel. As you ended with that piece around painfully good. I just feel like so much of this work is also about naming where we are falling short for ourselves, normalizing that we are imperfect and that there is beauty to that. And normalizing instead of having to put on a front as to who we are, put on images as to who we are, as you said, to peel it back and to see what happens there. Thank you so much for sharing that. jeewan, I think you had some thoughts on this question as well.

jeewan chanicka ([00:27:08](#)):

Yeah, thanks everyone for the thoughts so far. I think there's a few things that I keep thinking about as an educator, it was around, how do we accept and think about the whole child who was in front of us or when I was an administrator, how do I support the staff or the communities that I was charged to serve? Of course, all of this is happening at the same time while I'm thinking about who I am and my own sense of purpose and why I do what I do. For as long as I've been in education over the last 20 years, most of the educators who I found that were committed to really trying to help children be successful, in spite of significant barriers that they face, all in some way had some sort of spiritual anchoring. But, it was interesting how none of us would ever really be able to talk about it, widely in the circles that we were

in, except when we were together. So, that was something. And I guess as somebody who grew up as a child, I went to a Hindu elementary school and a Catholic secondary school and somewhere in that journey, I became Muslim. This idea of multiplicity of truths, right- that people come to the world as they are. And as they see and they understand who they are in the context of that. For me, there was this deep question about who am I? Islam really encourages you to think about your own personal relationship with the creator and to think about what service to others. That's shared by many faiths and spiritual ways of knowing, but there's a lot of, it was also like, informed by constantly being the Other, as Muslim walking into spaces to where I was always the Other, there was never a space to pray. There was always like, I couldn't eat the food. I would often find myself speaking on behalf of multiple people, whether it was, Hindus, who wouldn't eat meat or for Jewish people who wouldn't eat food that was mixed, all of those pieces. So then you'd have these conversations about, well, we're a secular school system and really, we're not. All of the structures of schooling are organized around a Christian calendar. They're organized around Christian beliefs and values.

jeewan chanicka ([00:29:48](#)):

There's this whole piece where secularism is used as a guise to mask a Christian hegemonic reality in one way, and/or to speak about secularism as if it's not a system of knowing, a way of knowing that's constructed in a particular way. So that was one whole piece where you're constantly battling the sense that religiosity and/or spirituality is a bad thing, right? It's somehow backwards and my own evolution as I grew, it was also as I was doing social justice work, it was going into spaces where the conception of religion was often conflated with also all things patriarchal, all things negative. That story that Hiren shared at the beginning really resonated because you're constantly battling with these pieces in yourself as you're going in and trying to figure out well, who am I in the process of all of that? And then, you add to that, as I got older, also finding out about my own Indigenous ancestry, which was veiled because of colonization and indentureship and all those pieces where we lost our names. Being able to find out all of that. And I remember a couple of years ago, I was sitting with an Elder, his name is Dave Cusheen out at Turtle Lodge. I said to him, I don't know how to keep doing this work without being angry all of the time because I get people coming to me with all the trauma and the really, really tragic ways that the system doesn't support them. And he asked me this one question, and I would say that it's been one of the most profound questions that I've been asked in many years. He was like, well, how can you come at it from a place of love? That really baffled me at the time. This idea of love and then what does that mean in my own personal journey, in my own sense of self and how I do the work that I do in order to be done in good service to others. I think those are a few things that are important and significant have been from me in my own journey around what we're calling critical spirituality.

Vidya Shah ([00:32:20](#)):

Thank you so much for those thoughts, jeewan, such a great conversation. Bruce, I'm interested in your thoughts on this question as well.

Bruce Rodrigues ([00:32:28](#)):

Thanks Vidya, and thanks to the 3 before me, in terms of jeewan and Ixchel and Fiona. Not much of what they said resonated with my own personal story, as well as my own professional sort of journey and story so I try to kind of move to a practical sort of piece in terms of how it is that I take critical spirituality and sort of immerse it into everyday practice perhaps. For me, it can extend from the mundane to the most profound and spirituality for me does not often equate to that notion of pious platitudes or pious piffle, but calls us more to that sense of being attentive to the experiences of the divine in our life. That could be from the simplicity of stillness, to the admiration of magnificent grandeur of nature, but perhaps the

most mundane for me is the ability to sort of adopt a stance of gratitude. How do I do this as a leader each day and make, other than just saying it, how do I kind of actually do it? I begin each day with 1 or 2 notes of genuine thanks to individuals who have made a difference for me from the day before. I try to kind of start the day that way to kind of make sure that my spirituality is immersed in terms of my practice. And again, one of the things that the others had mentioned around the stories of people, I think, as a leader, one of the things that we're called to do is to be an even keel because in leadership, you need to be able to listen to not just hear. To do that, I think you need to bring your whole self to work and Ixchel talked about that as well. People come to share their stories, their stories of pain, their stories of joy, of confusion, of discernment and we need to be with them through their experience. Oftentimes, it's happening literally in real time, one after another, and that sense of being an even keel, being able to kind of listen and not kind of judge in any particular way. I find that they're not coming seeking advice, but often just coming seeking a listening ear and each story happens to be sacred. It kind of has that that place of importance in terms of what it is that we're doing in our daily lives. Finally, I think you need to embrace the interior life. What I found in my journey is repeatedly that we are manipulated into paying attention to the immediate, especially as leaders, that sense of how do you do budget? How do you schedule? Those sorts of things. I believe that these are things that we will learn in time. However, as I look across the province, certainly, even the globe, I noticed that leaders begin their formal leadership careers much earlier and are staying longer. My question often to leaders and myself around that is what will sustain them in their ability to navigate those times? I think that what's going to sustain them is the interior life, that place of reflection, that place of personal forgiveness, that place of passion and deep self-love. I think these are the things that we need to spend time on in our everyday practice, if we're really to kind of engage with critical spirituality.

Vidya Shah ([00:35:44](#)):

Thank you so much, Bruce. The interior speaks so much to me, how much is happening in there that we are aware of, that we're not aware of. The importance of self-awareness in this work and almost sort of being and doing, and then watching the being and the doing for me, have been really important practices as well. Thank you so much for sharing that. And as we think about this, I'm interested in what your thoughts are as a panel on how does critical spirituality disrupt our ideas of schooling, of leadership and what challenges do you face in sort of leading from this vantage point? So maybe Ixchel, we'll start with you.

Ixchel Bennett ([00:36:31](#)):

Yes, that's a really good question. You know, disrupting, for me, that was the keyword, how do we disrupt our ideas of schooling and leadership with critical spirituality? I have to say it's not easy. It's not that easy because we all have different worldviews. We all have different histories and stories. This question actually made me think about my childhood and just quickly a story. I grew up in circles and what that means is that every time we had to make a big family decision, my dad would sit us down, the whole family, I have four brothers and we would all sit down and my dad would make a discussion of, this is what we're talking about. Then, we would take turns and share our thoughts and feelings and questions and we were really encouraged to critically think and not just agree with what was being said. But also, with being in mind that it's not a debate club in that circle. And when we came to Canada, I remember I was 8 years old. My younger brother was 3, my oldest brother was 18, 17 and 16. My dad sat us down in the circle and said we were going to move to Canada and he told us the advantages and disadvantages, and he made us commit to some things that we would do when we came here. I really recall that because it was one of the most important conversations that I can remember I had with my family. It had a really big impact, and now as a leader I see engaging in and having relationships with the Anishinaabe

people here from Tkaronto, the Ojibwe people, the Cree, Métis, Mi'kmaq and many other nations. When I saw that they also lead in circles, that's something that brought me even closer with my relationship with them because even though we're all from Turtle Island, we have very distinct ways of being and doing and knowledge. But also, there's a lot of similarities. In my teaching practice, not realizing that it was circles or if there's a name for it, I realized that I've always led in circles. We always had class discussions even from kindergarten to post-secondary education, especially when we were engaging in really hard conversations. When I was teaching at York, we would engage in the courses that I taught were all equity-based and Indigenous education, Indigenous sovereignty, and self-determination, and there were really challenging in the sense that a lot of students just did not know what they didn't know, and they were challenging their own ideas and thinking, and circles really provided that space.

Ixchel Bennett ([00:39:32](#)):

Now moving forward as a leader and the vice principal in my school, there's another vice principal that I work with and a principal, and they both identify as a White, male, cisgender. Being in a dual-track school it was really important for me to have those circles back and to really engage in that conversation and not follow that hierarchy, that Western construct of hierarchy, where one is the leader and the other just follows, which I find very individualistic. I wanted more of a collective approach and one thing that I've reached out to the Urban Indigenous Education Centres, asking them if we can have an Elder that can engage with us to help us both walk in a good way as Indigenous and non-Indigenous administrators. We're in our second week of that and to me that is a way that I disrupt this idea of leadership. Even though we have other leaders in our system like superintendents, it was really important for me to have an Indigenous Elder in their conversation and that's something that we have. That's something that I learned from Indigenous peoples here from Tkaronto. I've also offered this in the way that we lead PD, professional development. Even though we're virtually online I say, this is a sharing circle and here are the norms that we're going to go by. The way that we do PD now today was the first day that we started with a session of 6 is that we're journaling, right? So making that space for journaling too, I think it's very important. I know that at first, staff was expecting something else, they were expecting here's a professional development. I started with the learning goals and it was more of a one-way conversation, which is what I've been used to before. But in this case, we left moments and for silence, we agreed that silence is another member of the group. We left time for journaling, right? Journaling can signify in different ways. It could be writing, it could be drawing a picture and we just really wanted to engage and start with that spirituality in the circle. We encourage others to bring that into the circle and so far it's been great. Then the way with dealing with conflicts because working in the board, you're dealing with a lot of unions. I find that way, there's no spirituality in a place for union when we're having a discussion with a member. One thing that even though we do, it is times that it's necessary and the staff member has the complete 100% right to bring a union representative. One thing that I've suggested several times is I invite staff members and say, would you welcome a circle where we can just share our thoughts and feelings where we can be open and honest, and where we can hear each other out. It's not about correcting or fixing or saving or saying what's wrong, but really collectively together engage in on this conversation about where there's issues, where there's that discrepancy of worldviews. Some staff have said, yes, let's go ahead, some staff prefer to have a union rep, which is fine, but I've noticed that it's a different way and people are not used to it. But I do hope that one day we, instead of having those meetings, what if we were to share that vocabulary to say, let's have a conversation together about X, Y, or Z right? When we lead in a circle, there's, Like I mentioned before, there's no hierarchy. Everyone is in an equal playing field where each individual is acknowledged by the gifts that they bring and it's not just one person in the room is held responsible for holding the conversation, but everyone is responsible for that. I think that's what I wanted to share, thank you.

Vidya Shah ([00:43:49](#)):

Thank you so much, Ixchel, that means a lot as a way to think about how we can really think about the role of spirituality and how we might relate to each other differently in opportunities of building positive relationships. Especially, when there's conflict, especially when it's difficult, especially when fear and nerves and all kinds of insecurities are arising. How can we centre different parts of ourselves in that conversation I think is such an important part of this. Thank you so much for sharing that. I'd love to hear from Fiona on this question as well.

Fiona Gardner ([00:44:30](#)):

I was really impressed with what you were saying, Ixchel. It fits, I think for me with part of how I like to work as well. One of the things that came out of thinking about critical spirituality for me, was how to encourage people to think about learning as being part of a community of learners. So in a classroom, wherever I can, I really want to set it up so that we're saying, how can we learn from each other rather than me being seen as the teacher expert with people as the, as the learners. Part of that for me, I think is about how do you convey your really deep sense and belief of the value of each person at a very fundamental level, absolutely what you were saying about all of who they are and how do you encourage that kind of attitude and expectation in the classroom. I think it does come back so much to modeling that behaviour and also being prepared to be as vulnerable as you are asking students to be. One of the ways that I like to work and it's interesting following on from what you were saying is about working in circles, reflective circles or reflective groups where people share a particular experience, often an experience that they've found challenging, puzzling, difficult, in some way, and that they would like to explore in a deeper way, including, so why is this meaningful for me? How does it fit with my values and my deepest beliefs. But part of what I do, if I'm asking students to be doing this or any group that I'm working with really is to model that myself first. So, to take an experience of my own and to invite the group, to help me to more deeply come to an understanding of that. What I find in that process and I guess I should say that it is really important to set that up with clear expectations about mutual respect and valuing. This is not a space for judgments or criticisms. This is a space for relishing and celebrating the very different ways that we can be. What I find in that space is firstly, I always learn a lot myself. The people that I'm working with are able to help me explore my own experience in ways that is meaningful to me, but it also opens up the space so that other people feel more able to share more deeply. I guess what my hope is that in that space that the students that I've talked about that sometimes the Christian students, but more often are now in our classes, students from a variety of religious backgrounds, as well as people with very different spiritual experiences, also feel able to share about those.

Vidya Shah ([00:47:58](#)):

Thank you so much, Fiona. Thank you. jeewan, I know that you had some thoughts on this question.

jeewan chanicka ([00:48:04](#)):

From my own self, I think, and thank you to the other panelists. Maybe if I think about it from the sense of my own self as an individual as well as the collective nature of our work, there's a few things that I think about. One, and I know a few people mentioned it is this idea of the ego and addressing the ego and the self. In terms of from a critical spirituality place and leadership, it's who am I as the leader, do I always need to be right? What does it mean to lead in a way where I'm trying to uphold and affirm the voices of the people that I serve, their dignity, and be able to come to some sort of collective approach

to what we do. In that work, it's also meant for me really going deep into the many different identities that I hold and understand I'm both in terms of the power relations place in a colonial construct, as well as how those sites of identity can be both places of power, as well as trauma. And to really think about what it means to engage in the healing work that's necessary for my own self, with the understanding that if I'm not whole and continually working on myself and my healing, then I can't actually attend to the people and the communities that I'm in service to. The other way, the other thing has been around understanding this idea of truth and understanding that there really is this a multiplicity of truths. And people hold belief systems and ways of knowing, and they're deeply important and sacred and need to be honoured from the place in which people come just as I understand that from my own self.

jeewan chanicka ([00:50:11](#)):

Another way has been in the sense of otherness that I've experienced as someone who holds multiple identities and in my own body and thinking about those experiences in relation to one, how I may be doing that to others. A really quick example would be as someone who identifies as, a cisgendered male making decisions on behalf of trans-identifying students, how am I in a position of power thinking about what's necessary for those students and families to be able to support them well. In so doing this and it really ties to understanding the way that a White supremacy works in societies, understanding how these identities that we hold, how they operate in terms of power structures and power dynamics. So understanding not only myself and my own ego and that work, but understanding who I am and the power that I hold in a colonial construct in a society that gives me power for some things, and that would try to remove that power for other things. So that then extends to things like, how do I develop my own sense of learning and knowing, and reflecting critical practice to have courageous conversations, brave conversations, where we're not going to always settle everything where it's not always going to be touchy feely, but to create a space where we can hold the space through deep relationships in order to be able to say, you know what we may not yet be able to resolve this, but we're committed to each other in a deep way to be able to do that. That means at another level, the necessity for critical friends, for as a research practitioner, being able to tap into multiple types of critical pedagogies that will help me to really reflect and refine my practice and to really critique myself and to think about what organizational structures, what are the ways that we need to lead differently, that then becomes a with and for each other. I think, one of the other key pieces is what is leadership as stewardship mean? What does it mean to not be leading in a way where we're trying to own things and resources, but to be able to be effective stewards of it. Along with having a connection to the land and all of those pieces that are connected. I think for me, those are definitely some of the ways it's shaped my own leadership and the ways that I continue to reflect and think about it, and I will say, I have not landed on it. It's constantly evolving and I would say shifting and shaping as I move along.

Vidya Shah ([00:53:31](#)):

Thank you so much Jeewan and for naming some of those tensions. There's often an assumption that this work is pretty and is warm and fuzzy and it's not always. It is often, I think, in many ways develops our capacity to live and lead and learn in paradox intention in times of conflict and to challenge this binary that it's either good or bad, that it's either conflict or free of conflict, that it's either positive or negative, but to see in any situation emerging and a mixing of all of those pieces. So thank you so much. One of the things that I've been thinking about is speaking to both what you and Fiona were sharing about affirming the inherent dignity of each individual person. I'm also thinking about how we hold that intention with folks, for whom when systems of oppression are called out colonialism, White supremacy, patriarchy or cisheteropatriarchy, how do we hold it intention when it feels as though it is an assault to

the dignity of a person to name the systems of oppression in intention with actually affirming the dignity of each person? Bruce, what are your thoughts on that?

Bruce Rodrigues ([00:54:51](#)):

The whole notion of disruption for me speaks to the need to change our language and to really sort of be conscious of how it is that we speak. Just as an example, I think if we call the wick of a candle, a wick, the only thing that we'll do with it is burn it. But if we call it a string, I think that if you find yourself in difficulty camping or something like that and you cut yourself, you'll take the time to shave the wax off and actually use it to save your life in some cases. I think that as we move in these circles of critical spirituality and disruption, if we continue to call school school, I think we will continue to try and kind of do and be the way that we've always done in been for the last many, many centuries. And so it's important and incumbent upon us as leaders to try and kind of understand what that change of language looks like, and what is it that we as leaders want for our students in this time and space. To your point, particularly Vidya, in terms of I recall going up north in one of my escapades when I was with government and talking to them about some of the provincial assessment pieces that we do. I recall people up there saying it's very difficult for us up here when you people start to kind of create questions that say, and use names like, Rajeev or Olga or whatever. Our kids would much prefer Peter and Mary. So this whole notion that somehow or another that these names confuse or othered have not really sort of settled into that place of what we want for our students in terms of those attitudes towards global competencies. And in many cases, if we're still speaking the language of for our students of 21st century learning and leading, we're probably about 21 years behind. We need to embrace that sense of global competencies and here, we often will find sometimes state old ideas of knowing, doing and being, White folks that have kind of led and talked to us about these particular ideas for a long period of time. And we're confronted, I think, with a moral imperative to your question in particular, to disrupt the current safe track that leaders travel. When speaking of global competencies, we tend to stay the course with identifying skills, such as creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, you know, character, education, citizenship, those sorts of things. Why is it that we miss colonialism, Critical Race Theory, White fragility, White supremacy, spiritual ways of knowing. How come those skills in terms of trying to understand those particular skills aren't part of the "cadre" of those skills that students necessarily need to know in a globally competent world? I think we ought to consider this notion of how we disrupt as a tripod, that sense of knowledge that needs to be part of an educational system. I think that in that sense of knowledge that needs to be part, let's debate on what knowledge ought to entail. It may not be Shakespeare and classical music and Renaissance art. It may well be reggae, steel drums, Indigenous art, African literature and they don't need to be mutually exclusive. How about the skills we may need that are most importantly, and one of the skills I think that we're going to need eventually that might be most important is ethical action. That sense of tripod between trying to identify and disrupt the knowledge that we need, the skill components that we need and how do we kind of get students to really move to ethical action. We can debate what ethical means, but clearly the need for students to move to action to that place of being able to disrupt from a standpoint of social justice. That really is that place of formative virtue, when in fact we get to that place of habitual disruption in order to move to a place of justice, we really become people of virtue. So that would be my sense of how we can disrupt very, sort of, practically.

Vidya Shah ([00:58:53](#)):

And, you know, as you were speaking, it sort of lends nicely into our third question. Our third question really being one of possibilities. What possibilities emerge from centering critical spirituality in leadership? What do we hope that leaders might take away from this conversation and what do we hope

they might engage in, or practice as people that are aware of and committed to and believe that there's a place for critical spirituality in leadership? So maybe we'll actually begin with jeewan on this question.

jeewan chanicka ([00:59:27](#)):

Thanks Vidya, I think I want to answer this in 2 different ways. One, from the work that we need to do on ourselves. I mentioned before that the many different identities that we hold, especially when we think about it in a colonial construct is it's effectively you're navigating these power relations pieces. Those identities have become so important for us to go into, to be able to do a lot of the healing work because often they've been sources of trauma, whether we're racialized or as women, as Black people and people who are in the intersections of all of those. The other part of that is as we do that healing work and this may sound a little bit controversial, if it's taken out of context. But, it's as we heal those parts of ourselves and we come into them and to who we're meant to be in the fullness of ourselves, which is ideally what should be happening to children when they're on the landscapes of schools, it then becomes about the dissolution of those identities. How sometimes the boundaries or the very hard lines that may be drawn around them may actually be restrictive. That's something that I've really been working through in my own self as I try to do this work and really focus on the personal self. I think that as leaders it's not ever, I'm not by no means saying that we should dissolve all identities and then become not talk about it. I'm saying we absolutely need to go into them, understand them, heal from, the trauma, live up to them and love those parts of ourselves. And then, begin to think about what is it beyond those specific things. With regards to the possibilities in terms of how we move forward as leaders, I mean, one of the things that Sayema and I were talking about with regards to this is that for example, and this again is upheld and other ways of knowing as Muslims, you understand that leadership is about being in service to others. And often as people navigate secular systems, especially in our Western context where this idea of individuality and individualism is promoted sometimes at the cost of the collective, often people feel like they need to erase or negate those parts of themselves. Much like the story that Fiona shared earlier where people feel like I can't bring all of who I am. I think there's this opportunity to challenge that discourse, to be able to do that. I think one other tension that I just want to name is that as we work, we talk about students being able to bring their whole selves and staff and speaking up in moments of oppression when we see it, is also understanding how the system at times can hurt people when they do. From a critical spirituality place really being able to think about how we help people to anchor into one another. Like I was talking about where those tensions are, be able to raise them in our ways so that people don't need to feel like if they speak up, they're going to be harmed.

Vidya Shah ([01:03:04](#)):

Thank you so much, jeewan. Fiona, what are your thoughts on this question, I'd love to hear them.

Fiona Gardner ([01:03:08](#)):

Well gosh, there's so much that people have said already that I'm resonating with. I thought I would just say briefly for me, I think I want to say the two, you started off with the two things that I think the ways of being and the ways of doing are important for me. I think there is a lot in this for me about us paying attention as leaders to who we are and to our being selves, so that we are kind of modeling, I suppose, the way that we want to live this out. To demonstrate even some of those things about how can I constructively raise this issue and what do I do if it's really difficult for me. How can I model to people it's possible to do this and it will be manageable, it will be okay. But probably what I'm more want to talk about is one of the things that I have found really helpful that's worked in this space is trying to structure in places where this kind of conversation can happen. I think for most people who work in education and

certainly for most people who work in social work as well, life is so busy that it is hard to find spaces to open up these kinds of conversations. One of the things that I've been involved in recently is working in schools to build what are called reflective circles. These are built into the time that people would have for things like what would be called staff meetings here. There's small groups, maximum of 6 people, and the time is allocated by the school. There is some training about how to do these, but essentially they're very similar actually, well, in some ways to what Ixchel was saying about a circle, but there is a structure to how to do this. People would come and share an experience of something that's been difficult for them at school, a specific experience and work through a series of questions that are really to help them think about where am I with this? Where has my reaction come from and how to connect into where we were before, how does my reaction connect to my experience of who I am spiritually, who I am in my community and the kind of expectations there are from my school as an organization and from the community that I live in. How do I need to be aware of my own position, perhaps of privilege that influences how I experienced this position and what does that mean for me then, if I come to see my understanding differently, how do I need to act differently from the position of social justice? So just a really brief example. One of the principals actually in one of these groups, who's happy for me to use this example, had a particular reaction to a parent that she felt was an unhelpful reaction, and it was partly around, it was a mother who was not behaving in the way that she thought a mother should be acting. As she went through this process, she said, now I'm coming to see that so much of my reaction is about my assumptions of being a mother and those assumptions are partly influenced by who I am as a Catholic woman. They're also come from who I am as a Catholic woman who has been privileged, as a White person and who has not experienced the kinds of oppression, of marginalization that this person has. Where she got to then was a real shift in her understanding of her reaction, but also of how she needed to engage with this particular parent. Also, what that meant for how perhaps she was perpetuating some ways of acting that were unhelpful generally in the system. That started a process of thinking about how do we need to be as a school being different in these kinds of ways too. Now, that is a painful process to be and I could have used a story talking about this of my own experience of being in this same place in one of these kinds of reflective circles. It is about being prepared to say, and this is a really hard thing to say, I am part of being, in the language you use before Vidya, part of a system of oppression, that can be really unhelpful to other people. I need to be as a leader facilitating ways for myself and for other people to come to the ouch, ouch, ouch moments of this, but then to be able to connect with our sense of who we are at a more fundamental level, an open affirming spirituality, that means we can move beyond that to saying, well, where do we go with this now in a way that can be life changing for us and also for the others that we work with.

Vidya Shah ([01:08:58](#)):

I'm also interested in as you're sharing, there's so many great ways of thinking about how we do this work and the importance of witnessing I think, is something that's really standing out for me both witnessing of other and witnessing of self and the power of that in transformative work and transformative change. I think at times about I've in my sort of meditation practice have been sitting with this question of, how does the violence and the trauma that live in me, how does that get replicated out in the world, sort of mirrored out in the world, rippled out into the world? Oftentimes, we think of that in the affirmative and think about how does the joy and the compassion and the humility ripple out into the world, but simultaneously, as you're naming this piece around witnessing, just making me think about all of ourselves, how all parts of us might be mirrored out in the world, might be reflected in the spaces that we're in and reflected back to us, perhaps. Thank you so much for sharing that. I'd love to hear from Ixchel on this question as well, possibilities and what you'd like people to take away.

Ixchel Bennett ([01:10:12](#)):

What I'm thinking about is relationships. I find we hear that a lot, it's all about building relationships, it's all about building relationship. It truly is. It is about building relationships and relationships take time and time also takes patience. I find that in our busy world of education, patience is not always at the forefront. It's always quick, quick, fast, fast, get things done. I think that's why we miss in building those respectful relationships because we're too rushed. I really, would recommend to take the time, be patient and build those relationships. And one question that I ask is, how do leaders create relationships based on respect and reciprocity? Because when those relationships come there's responsibilities, but those relationships that we need to take reciprocal, right? We talked a lot about here about language, how language is very important and instead of saying, what's staff good at or what are they not good at? I do like to change that vocabulary and to say, what gifts do we bring in the table? What do we have to offer? When we changed the words to gifts, instead of saying, what we're good at or what we're not good at, because it's very binary, I feel that it engages and it creates a space for spirituality where we can have our whole self come into that space because classroom spaces have been very violent. They've been hurting students, they continue to hurt students with the way we're sharing pedagogical approaches. I think I'm gonna end it with it's all about building relationships, which takes time and patience, which is not an easy thing to do in our field when we know that there's a lot of work to do.

Vidya Shah ([01:12:14](#)):

Thank you so much, Ixchel, for naming that and naming what happens in classrooms when this doesn't get centred, so thank you. Bruce, would love to hear your thoughts on this.

Bruce Rodrigues ([01:12:26](#)):

I think what's my hope that leaders might take away from this conversation is that I hope that they interrogate systemic practices and ways of knowing that we take for granted. We sometimes identify them as status quo, things like, positioning our points of entry to conversation and leadership in a Judeo-Christian, White centred manner. Others have talked about circles and I too want to affirm that I think that in leadership, it is so much easier to dance in circles than to climb ladders. It just makes so much more sense as to how we kind of navigate that space, especially the space of disruption. I think that what I'd like leaders to take away is that they ought to kind of lead in disrupting and dismantling systems that support and promote systemic injustices. Look at who is not succeeding and move through an equity lens and not an equality one to really kind of raise those, especially students, but also others in terms of being able to disrupt those places. Disrupt the hiring practices in your institutions, what does experience really look like from a culturally sensitive lens and not just sort of talk about meritocracy in a very kind of, again, very White, sort of colonial sense. Finally, I think I'd like to end with simply by saying that I think it's important for leaders to embrace the journey motif. This work is not a trip, it doesn't have an end destination and it doesn't last a short time. It is truly a journey that we are walking and I think, as difficult as things get, one of the things that I often try to remember is that what's my job as a leader. In the end from a spiritual sort of context that lies deep within me, it's really to walk each other home and whatever home holds for you in that metaphor. And in staying with the metaphor to think about, who walked you home when you were really young, when it was difficult and you were bruised because someone attacked you either physically or emotionally, who was it that you walked home with? Was it your sister, your brother, the friend, the parent, the grandparent, the person that put their arm around you and recall telling them, as I recall telling them at times what happens to me, they would often say just by putting their simple arm around me, it's going to be okay. That, we're going to walk this together and I'm going to be here. That really kind of resonated with me that sense of safety that it brought when

people kind of were able to walk with me and even reinforcing that what had happened was wrong, but that you will be okay. For leaders, at this time in space, who walks you home now, how can there be more attention to walking each other home? What do we need to do in our deepest selves to really kind of embrace one another on this journey and find ourselves really moving along together. That really speaks to me about my deepest sense of spirituality as a leader.

Vidya Shah ([01:15:41](#)):

Oh Bruce, I just loved that whole metaphor and I've heard it the other way in so many ways that we educate children away from themselves, that we educate people away from themselves, but what might it mean for leadership to educate us towards ourselves, to lead us towards ourselves? I think that's such a powerful metaphor and to do that with each other on a journey, that's beautiful. Thank you so much. And Jeewan, I think you had some final thoughts on this question.

Jeewan Chanicka ([01:16:11](#)):

Two quick things that I wanted to add and one is, as we're all talking about this idea of relationships and especially, I'm speaking as someone who has been an organizer and what would be identified as social justice spaces. How can we come at this work and education, we live it all the time, from a place of love, not like loving and being aware of and understanding that we have to act to help those who are oppressed, but to be able to also hold a space to be in relationship with the ones who may be implicated in the harm. That's a hard thing to do because it's not about giving people a pass, but it is about being able to see the humanity in people and to be able to hold a space so that we can get to some form of true justice, true solidarity. We learn from the Elders here that can be no reconciliation without truth, but before you even do that, you have to have those relationships. The other piece is I think that we are at a moment in history and at a time where we have the opportunity to really rethink and transform how we talk about schooling and thinking about schools and school processes. If we were to be able to interrupt a lot of the colonial constructs that we have now, to think about the possibilities of a truly inclusive space, then what we would be doing is creating "cadres" of leaders through the faculty. We would think about hiring and promotion processes that honour competencies that actually allows for people to bring their full self, bring it, be it, do it, be all you can be in a way that upholds one another and upholds those multiple truths. I think that that is we are at such a powerful moment if we can get to the place of being able to hold those tensions and relationship and be committed to working it out, seeing each other's humanity and understanding too, that this is an intergenerational project. We may not solve it in our lifetime, but we can definitely move the bar far enough so that our kids aren't having these conversations 20 years from now.

Vidya Shah ([01:18:50](#)):

Thank you so much, Jeewan. This has been such a wonderfully rich panel and I want to really thank all of you for your thoughts and for your comments. I'd love to hear from Hiren, who's been listening in on these discussions and has some final thoughts to share with us as we close.

Hiren Mistry ([01:19:10](#)):

Thank you, thank you everybody for your incredible insights. As I listened to you, as I reflected on what you were saying, there are so many interesting themes that came to life. The one thing that has come to bear was that we are not human beings, we are human becomings and that notion of fluidity really ran through all of your narratives. That itself, I found was it was a highly productive, yet disruptive idea that smacks in the face of the linearity, the hierarchies, the org charts, and the sense of false logics that are a

lot of our education systems are premised on. If we peer beneath the surface, there's so much more that's going on. In terms of letting us look what it looks like, we heard from Bruce about embracing the interior life, from Jeewan, we heard much about the importance of doing this work with love, from Ixchel, we heard about the importance of being able to recognize the whole self, both the capital W and also, capital H, and from Fiona, being able to identify assumptions normatively on the ground that get in the way of people bringing their full selves, their spiritual selves to organizations. When we heard about disruption further, we talked about reframing how we think about leadership, how we talk about it, what are the words we use, leadership as stewardship, global competencies as naming White supremacy and being able to bear witness to our full selves in community and with ourselves. We think about possibility, many themes emerged. Holding tension, and holding the tension so there is space for relations to exist because that is where productive work is done. We heard that it could be actually considered egotistical that we could fix the system in one career. This is intergenerational work and that requires healing of self, of all the fissures within us, being able to witness what is around us, also, what is within us. All in the effort to always be able to walk students and families home and not take them away from that. Wrapped around all of this, again, is the notion of love and wholeness. I've taken so much away from today's conversation and I'm very thankful to be able to have the opportunity to weave these final ideas together because they are truly, truly profound.

Vidya Shah ([01:21:37](#)):

Hiren, that was so beautiful. I had a little something prepared for the end, but it feels so insignificant at this point cause I'm just still thinking of and feeling into what you said and how you captured this conversation. It was so beautiful, thank you so much. I'm just filled with so much hope and fullness in listening to you all and into thinking about what becomes possible when we lead in this way. I'm thinking about this notion of bringing our full selves to this work and the multiplicities of ourselves. I think about how hard it is at times for me personally, and for others to bring our messy selves and our complicated selves and our scared selves and even sometimes how hard it is to bring our sacred selves and our joyous selves to this work. I also think about as folks were sharing today that in language and in expressions and in silenced ways of being and knowing, we miss so much. There's a lot of folks today that have talked about challenging individual notions of leadership and centring relational and collective ways of thinking. I think about notions, like Ubuntu, the Afrocentric notion of Ubuntu, or the Indigenous notion of all my relations or the Buddhist notion of intervening. All sort of similar concepts that talk about the idea that we are made up of one another. And what might that look like if we were to really centre this idea that we are made up of each other, that we co-constitute each other, what would education look like then? What would leadership look like then? How might we engage and relate differently when we don't see ourselves as separate beings, but that we see ourselves as co-constitutive and that harming others is actually harming ourselves. I hope at some point self-awareness and healing are considered leadership competencies that we can feel into and work into. With so much tremendous gratitude for you, Hiren and for opening and for closing us this evening, tremendous gratitude for the panelists who shared personal stories and enactments and challenges in this work. To all of the listeners who are engaging now and well into the future. We thank you for coming along with us on this journey, on this UnLeading journey. We're not really sure where it's going to lead, but we know it's a journey worth taking nonetheless. You have been listening to another episode of the UnLeading project. My name is Vidya Shah. Thank you for listening. [inaudible] [inaudible].