

Vidya Shah: (00:00:11)

Welcome to season three and another episode of the Unleading Podcast. One of the major tensions that we've noticed in almost every Unleading Podcast that we've recorded is whether we should focus on reforming our current systems as they are towards more equitable outcomes, or whether we should fundamentally do away with those systems that have far too long harmed far too many, and build new systems that can make space for all people and the more than human world. And we've considered what might be possible when we challenge this binary between reform and abolition, and imagine maybe third or fourth or fifth spaces for living and learning and becoming and connecting. And while abolitionist perspectives are gaining awareness, we still don't really understand what it means and what its possibilities are, especially for leadership, learning, and living. And that's why I'm so excited for today's panel, where we have amazing folks doing this work who can share their perspectives on what it means to engage in abolitionist leadership towards restoration, love, and liberation. So, in this podcast, we dive into the logics of carcerality that are deeply entrenched in schooling and society. These are logics of dehumanization that deem some people disposable, guilty, and dangerous to protect the claimed innocence and supposed safety of others. We invite you to join us in this conversation and think about how it impacts your spaces, whether you are in classrooms or school districts, whether you are in the nonprofit sector or the for-profit sector, wherever you may find yourself in, especially in community spaces, we really invite you to engage with these ideas and these logics. And as we especially try to challenge these false binaries between good and bad, between pure and evil, between right and wrong, and open up possibilities again for really restoration, community, love, and liberation for all. I remember first learning about abolition as a framework for thinking, and being, and living, and academic-ing, really, and fighting for something else. It had me reflecting on how I conceived of punishment, of fear, of teaching and learning, of justice, of compliance, of banking models of education, of the fundamental purposes of schooling and carceral assistance, and the ways in which the very logics behind these systems are deeply interwoven into who we are and how we relate to each other. It also had me thinking about the disproportionate ways in which particular people are punished, disciplined, and surveyed, people seen as culpable and guilty, unteachable, while others are seen as pure and in need of protection. And it makes me think about the ways in which in many locations and institutions, truths are fabricated, information is hidden, accusations are made, all for the protection of some and the punishment of others. And I have to say, I have learned so much from the people on this panel in their online and in-person work, in the communities that they are part of, in the academy and education, including Aurra Startup. And Aurra Startup is a PhD student in education at York University, and her research delves into how the conceptualization of restorative justice influences its application and practice in school and community-based settings. As a service coordinator with Community Justice Initiatives in Kitchener, Aurra bridges theory and practice, supporting individuals and communities affected by experiences of harm, and supports individuals with navigating their criminal legal system. And I have to say that I have

personally learned so much from her brilliance, from her passion, from her compassion, and the ways in which she's really trying to reimagine justice and reimagining restorative justice. Aurra is also a researcher on the Unleading Project, and I'm so grateful for her engagement with this work. Welcome, Aurra.

Aurra Startup: (00:04:06)

Thank you so much, Vidya. I'm so grateful to be here today, and thank you for that beautiful introduction. And I'm also so excited to be here with such amazing panelists. And hello, everyone. Hello, listeners. My name is Aurra Startup. I am a PhD student and practitioner in the field of restorative justice. And I guess to give you some context of how I ended up here, I'd say it started from a young age. I became quite aware of the surveillance and dehumanization perpetuated by the criminal legal system, the prison-industrial complex, and also in schools. And I'd say really that these observations and experiences, and also the experience of being kind of an extension of the folks that were in these systems, really shaped and continues to shape my commitments to embodying restorative practices and aspiring or dreaming towards transformative justice in abolition principles. And in my work on a daily basis, I see how carceral systems uphold and perpetuate cycles of violence and control, rather than offering avenues for genuine accountability or restoration, and most importantly, the lack of avenues towards healing. And my understanding is and orientations of this work have been shaped by folks like Angela Davis and Mariame Kaba, who really challenge us to rethink the foundations of justice. And I think this awareness also informs my work with community justice initiatives. As a service coordinator in the Restorative Responses to Harm and Crime Program, we walk alongside folks who have been affected by harm as well as those who have caused harm typically where the incident is tied to a criminal charge. And so every day, I learn more and more about restorative justice more broadly, restorative approaches to living and being in relationship with people and community, and thinking about what is needed to heal? What are we restoring? And sometimes, you know, it's restoring a sense of safety and community. Engagement in RRHC, is a voluntary process and depending on how the parties engage, a restorative dialogue can sometimes give space for people who have been harmed to share how the incident has impacted them, and among many other outcomes, it can offer a space for a person who has caused harm to understand their role in the incident and move towards taking accountability and making amends based on the identified needs. Within RRHC, we engage with both adults and youth, offering a range of programming that includes dialogue, conflict coaching, and indirect processes. This work has provided a space to critically reflect on how restorative justice operates within, alongside, and sometimes in opposition to existing systems. Through my day-to-day experiences, I witness both the challenges and the possibilities that emerge in this work. Today, I am grateful for the opportunity to join this panel and explore the question: What is abolitionist leadership? And I really think as a way to start, it's a framework that asks us to reimagine justice, that asks us to reimagine care and accountability in ways that mitigates harm rather than perpetuating it. I think abolition is not

only about tearing down oppressive systems, as many folks in the field often remind us. It's about dreaming together. It's about building something better together that's rooted in equity, that's rooted in care, and rooted in collective well-being. And that's quite different than what the systems today are rooted in. So we can think about the roots of control, punishment, and discipline, that exist and that form the foundation of carceral logics. And I think the first part of exploration, the question of what is abolitionist leadership? And when we talk about abolition, some of the things that might come to mind are dismantling prisons, police, schools, and these overall wider systems that can feel too ingrained in our daily lives to even think about change. And while abolition does challenge these systems, it's about imagining what true safety, and what true justice could look like if they were not tied to punishment. As a final outcome. And as Angela Davis reminds us, abolition requires a transformation in not only how society approaches justice, but also in how we conceptualize justice and what guides the actions that we take. So we can think about it like this: What if justice was not about punishment, but instead was about making sure that folks in community had what they needed to thrive? And from a larger scale, this could look like and would look like access to education, access to safe housing, access to education, access to culturally responsive health care and community support. And abolition asks us to dream of a world that prioritizes care over control and coming together to create these spaces. At its core, this is the essence of abolition. And I'd say at a micro level, abolitionist leadership requires an internal paradigm shift for us to move through the world with love, for us to move through the world with care for one another, and the desire to be connected to community and a desire for us to invest in building these pockets of justice, is maybe what we'll call them. And these pockets of justice, for example, community projects that might meet needs in smaller ways. Pockets of justice might be about having safe spaces that students feel that they can go to in a school. It's really about leading to disrupt carceral logics and instead investing our time into these alternative processes. But it's also important to note that abolition is not without critique. Many wonder how public safety can be maintained without police or without prison. And today we'll talk about this. Where research shows that punitive measures often fail to address the root causes of harm and instead perpetuate cycles of exclusion and punishment. And that's where abolitionists argue that true safety comes from addressing systemic issues and not through control or surveillance, but instead through taking the funds and investing them away from mechanisms of control, instead into education, into housing, mental health resources, all of which will create the foundations for thriving communities and spaces. And so to understand abolition, we might also need to think about, talk about the systems that we're working to change. And so part of this are systems that we call carceral logics. And these are systems of control rooted in surveillance, punishment, and exclusion. And these logics are deeply underpinned by white supremacy. And so one example of this is policing in Canada. So, the Northwest Mounted Police were established to displace Indigenous communities, and enforce colonial rule, and were essentially an extension of the government. And within this process or practice, it was not about safety. It was about the commodification of land

and the commodification of people. And if we fast forward to today, we continue to see this disproportionate harm towards Indigenous and Black communities and racialized communities within policing, within schooling, within the criminal legal system. It's so important also for us to name and talk about how these realities are manifesting in schools, right? One example of harsh disciplinary practices is the enforcement of zero-tolerance policies, such as suspensions for minor infractions like tardiness or dress code violations. In several school boards across Ontario, Black students have been suspended simply for wearing hoodies. Instead of addressing the root causes of student behaviour or offering services and support to meet unmet needs, these disciplinary measures often escalate minor incidents. This approach not only fails to resolve underlying issues but also creates additional barriers for students who may already be navigating significant challenges. Research consistently shows that punitive measures in schools in the U. S. and in Canada and beyond are disproportionately impacting Black Indigenous, and racialized students, pushing them away from educational opportunities and further embedding them within punitive systems. The data itself speaks volumes. For instance, Black students face expulsion rates around four times higher than the representation in the overall student population. And when we look at white students and when we look at East Asian students in these same school populations, they experience the lowest rates of expulsions. And so this shows a significant bias in disciplinary practices that is disproportionately impacting Black and Indigenous students. And this is a process of what many call the cradle-to-prison nexus or the school-to-prison pipeline. And it illustrates how disciplinary practices and their outcomes criminalize student behaviour, and this leads to increased suspensions, expulsions, and eventually connections to incarceration, predominantly of BIPOC disabled and undocumented youth, which instead of supporting young people in schools, it is instead normalizes the experience for young people to have a life intertwined with punitive systems. And so again, when we go back to the roots of what education or schooling in Canada was intended to do, we can see how these legacies continue today, because they're rooted in discriminatory practices. And so another system that's important for us to be mindful of is the prison industrial complex. And this refers to systems of power and profit that rely on surveillance, policing, and incarceration as advertised solutions to social, economic, and political issues, right? So it's not just about prisons. It's a network of governments, private industry, and institutions that profit from incarceration and profit especially from mass incarceration. In the U.S., mass incarceration policies like the war on drugs have disproportionately targeted Black Indigenous, and Latinx communities, driving the prison population to over 2.3 million people with about 4.5 million or more folks on probation or parole. While we think about these systems, it also requires us to think about abolition, and the conversation today also will explore what are the things that abolition is for, right? Frameworks like restorative justice and transformative justice can help us to imagine what this can look like. So, restorative justice, or RJ, focuses on repairing harm through processes like dialogue and deepening accountability. And so it asks us, how can we address harm in a way that offers space for healing or in a way that can restore a sense of safety and

community, for example? We also have transformative justice, or TJ, and this seeks to go a little bit deeper. This seeks to go outside of the systems and understand the root causes of harm, racism, poverty, and oppression, and begs the question of how can we dismantle these systems altogether. And really, all of these things are needed together in collaboration. We need restorative justice to consider how do we support folks while they continue to exist in these systems? We need transformative justice to think about what can an alternative look like, and we need abolition to think about dismantling, but also rebuilding together. And to be honest, even without all of the possibilities that I feel with abolition, I find myself hesitant at this point in time to fully embrace abolition. And it's not because I don't believe in its possibilities, but because I find myself caught between the hope of what abolition could be and the material barriers that make it difficult to fully embrace, almost this form of anticipatory grief. And that's where restorative justice comes in for me. It's a way to bridge the gap, even imperfectly. And I think also, you know, I struggle with this idea of tearing down systems while people are still inside of them. And sometimes RJ can feel like a way to blanket the fire. But I also recognize that RJ sometimes can be co-opted by those systems, making it just as flammable. So as I approach today's conversation with cautious hope grounded in challenges, I also seek glimmers of possibility in our work and so excited to explore these possibilities today. And so also when we think about abolitionist leadership, it's about asking if we can create something new. Abolitionist leaders do not hoard power; they share it. They seek to work alongside communities to build solutions, as we'll see in today's conversation. Abolitionist leaders invest in things that matter: education, mental health, housing. And relationships with folks and community. Abolitionist-oriented leaders seek to recognize that the first step in transforming these systems is transforming ourselves. And this type of leadership asks hard questions. It asks us to sit together in discomfort. It asks us to confront our own biases and to be mindful of when they are there, to imagine what is possible when we lead with love and care. And so we'll leave you with those pieces. I'll invite you, listener, to take a look at the written component. And it speaks to so many different pieces that are related to abolitionist leadership. But really, in essence, abolitionist leadership invites us to imagine a world where justice is not tied to harm, but instead tied to healing. And a world where every individual can thrive. And it's so important to note, this is not an easy path. But it's a necessary one. So thank you so much for joining us today. And we hope that this conversation sparked something for you. Perhaps a curiosity, a challenge, or even a new way of seeing the world. I'm so excited to hear all of the insights from panelists. Thank you so much.

Vidya Shah: (00:16:58)

All right, I just want to say thank you so much for that opening. And for bringing in so many different aspects of the financial aspects of this, the political aspects of this, the rootedness in white supremacy and colonialism, and making the connections between the prison and industrial complex, and schooling and other institutions, and really sort of centering this need for collective care and accountability and love. And especially for naming the

anticipatory grief that I think a lot of us are sitting with. You know, these beautiful places and ideas, and real possibilities that we are moving into. And the very deep grief that is sitting in our bellies that's saying, 'What if?' 'What if it doesn't happen fast enough?' 'What if it doesn't happen?' That is a real feeling that I want to just name and acknowledge and hold up as well. I want to really thank you again for just sharing in the way that you did, and your absolute commitment and brilliance in this work. And folks, we will hear back from Aurra towards the end of the podcast. Where she will share some highlights that she is taking away and inviting you to take away from today's conversation. And today's conversation is with an amazing group of people. And I can't wait to introduce them to you. I will read a little bit about them and introduce them briefly, but you can find their full bios, and their beautiful pictures and contact information on the Unleading website. At www.yorku.ca/edu/for_education/unleading. So I'd like to welcome into the space Dr. Dena Simmons. Dena is a lifelong learner, a truth-teller, an abolitionist from the Bronx, New York. She is the founder and executive director of LiberatED, an organization that centers radical love, healing, and justice in education and social and emotional learning, so that all children could live, learn, and thrive in the comfort of their own skin. She's also a visiting professor of the Institute for Racial Justice at Loyola University of Chicago. And she's the former assistant director of the Yale Center for Immigration. And she's the founder and executive director of the Institute for Racial Justice at Loyola University of Chicago. And she's the founder and executive director of the Institute for Immigration and Social and Emotional Intelligence, where she supported schools to use the power of emotions to create a more compassionate and just society. Welcome to the space, Dena.

Dena Simmons: (00:19:07)

Thank you.

Vidya Shah: (00:19:08)

And I'd like to introduce as well, Qui Alexander. And Qui Alexander is a queer, trans, Black Puerto Rican scholar, educator, and organizer currently based in Tkaronto. They are an assistant professor of gender, sexuality, and trans studies in curriculum and pedagogy at OISE U of T. And their work and scholarship centers queer, Black feminist praxis, pedagogies of abolitionist praxis, and the lived experience of Black trans folks, as well as mobilizing queer and trans ways of knowing. Welcome to the podcast, Qui.

Qui Alexander: (00:19:39)

Thank you so much.

Vidya Shah: (00:19:40)

Kamil is a first-generation immigrant and settler from Pakistan who identifies with various communities, including queer and Muslim. Passionate about mutual aid, resource distribution, and building communities of care, Kamil is an organizer of Community Fridge in

Kitchener in Ontario. He's also a photographer, a facilitator, a music enthusiast, a vegetarian, what, what, and a big fan of farmer's markets. Welcome, Kamil.

Kamil Ahmed: (00:20:08)

Thank you for having me.

Vidya Shah: (00:20:10)

And Skye Bowen. Welcome, Skye. Skye is a school administrator with over 20 years in education. She's a passionate leader and an advocate for equity and social justice, working in various roles within her school board. Skye provides training to educational and community leaders in restorative justice from an Afro-Indigenous, focusing on the power and possibilities to shift our thinking and praxis to ensure equitable approaches to restorative justice. She has been married for over 20 years and has three teenage boys, Dante, Justice, and Marcus. Welcome, Skye.

Skye Bowen: (00:20:43)

Thank you.

Vidya Shah: (00:20:45)

And prior to her doctoral studies, Subini Annamma was a special education teacher in public schools and youth prisons. Currently, she's an associate professor at Stanford University, where her research critically examines the mutually constitutive nature of racism and ableism by positioning multiple marginalized students as knowledge generators, exploring how they experience and resist intersectional injustice and imagine a liberatory education. You may know some of her work that's centered around DisCrit that has been transformative for so many schools here in Ontario. Welcome, Subini.

Subini Annamma: (00:21:21)

Thank you. Honored to be here today with this fire panel.

Vidya Shah: (00:21:25)

It really is a fire panel, folks. We, you should have seen the pre-conversation, it was fire, and we're going to, we're going to bring some of that fire today. One of the questions that I think, would really help listeners is to think about what abolitionist leadership looks like. So when we think about abolitionist leadership towards restoration, love, and liberation, what does that look like in your everyday practice as somebody who's engaging in this work? And Skye, I'd love to start with you in this question.

Skye Bowen: (00:21:53)

Sure. Thank you. You know, when I taught in youth corrections, one of the most powerful moments I had was when I was teaching a yoga class and there was music playing in the

background. And as these boys were doing, it was, were male young offenders who had committed high-risk crimes, and when we had started doing the exercise and the music's playing in the background, the electric slide song came on. And as it came on, you know, we're doing our yoga moves and one boy gets up and he just starts breaking out into the electric slide. And another boy gets up and starts doing the electric slide. And then all of us were up. And it was such a powerful moment of joy I will always remember. But the one thing that stood out from what one of the boys said when we did that is he was like, 'Miss, for just a moment, I didn't realize where I was. I actually was back in a place of joy.' And for me, that's what's transcended everything I do now with leadership. You know, when it comes to abolitionist leadership and what it can look like when it comes to love and liberation, it's the little things that often make a huge impact. Walking through the school every day, making eye contact with every student that I pass by saying, 'Hi', 'I see you.', 'How are you?' And being grateful to be in their space. I have the privilege to be in their space. Not that you have the privilege to be in mine. And so I really see abolitionist leadership about being about service. It really is the privilege and blessing to serve others, to really be empowered to do the little things, to allow students to feel that they are powerful, that they are capable, that they are loved, and that they are in a space that doesn't look like carceral spaces that they've been in in community. That the school is about that love and joy and liberation that they need. And so for that to happen for me as a leader, I have to be able to serve. I have to be authentic. I have to be vulnerable. I have to be humble in my role. And deconstruct what it really means to be a school and system leader. And know that it's not about me, but it's about being in a position of being able to serve others.

Vidya Shah: (00:23:52)

Skye, thank you so much for that. And thank you for starting us off in this way. And really inviting leaders, defined broadly, to think about who it is that we're leading for, what it is that we're leading for, and the ways in which so much of our leadership is sort of centered around our own sense of who we are in that space and maintaining that power. And I love what you're saying. That is really helping us flip that. What a beautiful story as well. Thank you for sharing. Subini, I'd love to hear from you as well on this question. What does abolitionist leadership look like to you?

Subini Annamma: (00:24:22)

Yeah. Vidya and Aurra know that when I was asked to be on this podcast, I originally was like, 'Are you sure?' Because I don't think of myself as a traditional leader because I've never been an administrator in an institution. And I, in fact, avoid those jobs when people have suggested that's my future. I am always like, 'Not it.' 'No, no, thank you.' Because I don't think I'm good at them. It's not because I think, I respect people who do them, but that's not my skill set. And I honestly feel like I've often failed. When I've been forced into traditional leadership roles. But I do love what Skye says about leadership being about service. And so that to me really resonated with like how to think about this. So in service, I have found

myself as part of communities creating spaces that we need for ourselves. So like within the academy, the Walkout Lab, which I direct under the leadership of the lab's brilliant manager, Jennifer Wilmot, has created a research fellowship for incarcerated youth. We train them, we hire them, we pay them to engage in participatory action research on issues of youth incarceration, because I really believe not only should my research focus on incarcerated youth, that any data that I analyze should be in relationship to incarcerated youth or people who can have access to that. So we recognize that their expertise comes from lived experience and we seek to learn from those who are often erased or demonized in the academy. And I also want to look outside the academy, right, because I'm a whole person. And I've been part of Black and Brown collectives of yoga teachers who teach classes specifically for Black and Brown people at the intersection of multiple oppressions. So those who are queer and disabled are centered in the class. I lead a run weekly for Black Girls Run that is part of a larger BGR in the Bay Area. So for me, it's about being part of multiple collectives who create the spaces we need and deserve as multiply marginalized communities. So that's how I engage service leadership. I want to make sure that the material realities of such folks in our communities, such as time, resources, and spaces, are dedicated to our communities, ones that did not exist before, the spaces and the time and the resources. And that's how I am in service of restoration, love, and liberation.

Vidya Shah: (00:26:52)

Thank you so much. And I love this idea of creating the communities that we need because I just don't think we can rely on institutions to create the kind of communities that we need. And I think that having the agency and the power, and then having resources directed to that, is such a powerful way for us to be, and to practice being together in ways that really, really center this love and liberation. Thank you so much, Subini. Dena, I'd love to hear from you. How do you see abolitionist leadership? What does that look like to you in your practice every day?

Dena Simmons: (00:27:24)

I've been so inspired by what my colleagues here have shared. And so I'm going to try to build off of what they've said. And so what we talked about, what I heard earlier was this idea of creating the communities we need. And so I come to this sitting with you all today after having left an institution of higher education, that felt very carceral to me. And I think what happens, and I don't think we talk about, when we talk about abolitionists, the way carcerality is weaved into institutions and built into the ways of being, doing, and the way things always have been, and the ways that we ingest it and then practice it. And so here I was in this toxic, carceral, Ivy League in the United States of America that everyone prays to like a god. And I left it because, I decided that I am my own institution and that together we are our own institution. And so I founded an organization called LiberatED, because I needed folks to know from the jump that we are about liberation. And so when I think about abolition, I think about liberation because it is, yes, fighting against something, fighting

against carcerality, fighting against policing and ending punishment and the reform and all of that, but I also want to dream. For me, abolition must also include what we are working toward and what we want and for ourselves and for our young people and for our communities, and so I built that with LiberatED. We center, as you shared in my bio, radical love. Like, love is in our mission. That is important. Love is transformative. What if we did everything with love? And that's part of abolition. And also, we also have to understand that the institutions that we have been taught to pray to like gods, also operate like businesses. And so we become reduced to products. And so for me, abolitionist leadership is about humanity and ensuring that I infuse humanity into the work that I do, the work and the research that I do, and that I engage in that. And part of being part of a community is listening. I do not have all the answers. And as part of my work at LiberatED, we ensure that listening is part of our work. We ensure that listening is part of our values. And so all of the research that we have done has included asking Black, Indigenous, people of color, asking them for the answers, asking them about their lived experiences, because as Subini said, they are experts too. They are a resource too. That is where genius and knowledge lie. And so we build everything from the community up. We identify as a community-generated organization. And so we want to continue to do that. So for me, it looks like, centering love, saying you love your colleagues. Wow, you could do that? Yes, you can. I do it to my colleagues. It's not, I tell every funder who comes to me, I don't work at the pace of white supremacy, because I'm not trying to kill myself for you to be rich off of me. And so part of my abolition is also, you know, breaking up with this need to produce at an urgent rate for someone else to make money off to exploit me. So no, I don't work at the pace of white supremacy. We center love, rest, care in our work. And we invest and we unapologetically center, affirm and lift up Black Indigenous, people of color ways of knowing, being and doing because that is what we need to be lifting up.

Vidya Shah: (00:31:08)

Wow. There's so much here that I am thinking about. One is the ways in which working, working in institutions that are carceral and all of them are, as you have shared, seeps into us and it takes such intentional work to just even be aware of the ways in which they seep into us. And I want to also really hold up this idea of not working at the pace of white supremacy. It is, I'm watching colleagues all around me, including myself, I've had to talk myself out of this multiple times and I probably will again, what are we producing for? Who are we producing for? And as you named it, we are producing for somebody else to make money off our backs. And that is not the kind of world that I want to live in and that's not the kind of body that I want to foster. And this last thing that what you shared that it's making me think about is the importance of feeling like in our bodies, like in our body systems, what that freedom and love feels like. And practicing, like I think about the work of Prentice Hemphill, who I will likely talk about in every single thing that I do, somatic justice practitioner, writer, beautiful human being. And they often talk about the importance of feeling these things in our body in embodied ways so that we know what it is that we're

fighting for. We know what it is that we're working towards. And so I just want to lift that up and say, thank you so much for sharing that. Such beautiful insights. And Kamil, I'd love to hear from you on this question as well.

Kamil Ahmed: (00:32:43)

To me, abolition is a pursuit, a journey that invites all of us into it as it relates to our collective benefit. And it is a journey towards transformation. It is not this thing that happens outside of us or just towards systems or just in some places, we are all implicated and invited into its imaginary. And to me, that begins with doing the difficult work of stepping into our relationship with ourselves, looking inwards into, as I say, our backpacks, which all of us carry and hold the myriad of components that make up our identity and experience, both given and earned. To step into this relationship to interrogate the pieces that we carry from where they came and how they show up, as well as what they tell us about why I am the way that I am. The pursuit of liberation begins with the liberation of ourselves. And that is a deep, meaningful relationship that drives our engagement with the land that we live on, the people that we live with, and the happenings that we engage with. And, you know, I'm inspired and moved by the words of Lilla Watson, who said, 'If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.'

Vidya Shah: (00:34:11)

Thank you so much, Kamil. And thank you for uplifting the words of Lilla Watson and the collective that she's part of, that helps us think through this idea that, you know, if we see ourselves as separate people, separate quote-unquote individuals, then any form of help or care is going to be rooted in charity, in saviorism, in pity, in, you know, all of these sort of frames that maintain really gross power asymmetries. But if we see ourselves literally as extensions of each other, as deeply interconnected and interdependent on one another, then there's no such thing as helping someone that doesn't simultaneously help ourselves because we are literally extensions of each other. So our liberation and our oppression are deeply bound up in one another. So I really appreciate that. It's a quote that I often use in presentations and classes. And I think it just says so much about possibilities for living in the future. And Qui, I'd love to hear from you on this question.

Qui Alexander: (00:35:19)

I once listened to Alexis Pauline Gumbs give a talk where she talked about the relationship between rage and love. And she talked about, you know, we have these, often rage fuels us to like go against something, right? Like we like hate the cops. So we like fight this, right? Like the rage towards this. But she was like, we have to also remember that that place actually comes out of love. Like we rage at the cops because we love Black people, right? We rage at the cops because we love queer people, right? Like there are these things that actually fuel why we resist against things. And that is a love of our people, of our

communities, of our ways of knowing. So I really resonated with like, you know, an abolitionist practice that centers love. And, you know, and I think that's really important. I think for me, some of what that means is moving differently in the institutions that I find myself in, right? And so, yeah, I love this idea of like, I'm not, I cannot orient my life in the academy to be based on producing for somebody else. Or like, you know, if I just kind of move the way that academics are trained to move, that's always going to be partial, right? And so, and I'm also not really interested in trying to repair something that was designed to not include me, right? And so for me, I have to think about my practice as like a harm reduction practice always, right? Like, my role is to figure out how to reduce the amount of harms that's happening to my communities. And that's where I can like leverage my power to kind of move differently, right? And so I think, you know, as a leader, whatever that means, like, I think for me being a leader is like someone that people look to or listen to and want to be in struggle with, not like 'I don't want to do this struggle, tell me what to do', but rather 'how do we figure out how to do that together?' And I think that abolition is, as much as it is a material project, it's also an intellectual project because I think there are so many mental hoops that get us to kind of say, this is why we can't deviate from these things. This is why we can't get rid of prisons. This is why we can't get rid of schools. These are why we have to keep these things here. They're so deeply ingrained. So I feel like in many parts of my life, I've had different parts of the work. I've done like much more material responses to things in my younger organizing. And I see now that I'm like, my job is really to try to get people to think differently. And if they start to think differently, that creates possibilities for them to do differently. So I'm always asking myself as a teacher or as a person who's in intellectual community, how do I share power? Am I more transparent? How do I practice repair? I think so much of a leader is like, you have to be okay with apologizing. You have to be okay with like, I'm a human, you're a human, we're gonna make mistakes. Humans cause each other harm, whether it's intentionally, or not. And so we spend so much time trying to avoid causing harm rather than growing the muscle that we need to repair when we do inevitably do it. So that for me is like, how do we be people forward in the things that we do? And so much of our jobs, as educators, scholars, intellectuals, is to kind of like produce and have a product. And so it's like, what does it mean to be process-oriented in our work? What does it mean to be people-oriented? So yeah, I'm thinking a lot about that. Like my job is less about the fact that I think like being an academic will change the world. Like it's more like, okay, cool. Like this means that I have access to some resources and I have access to places and spaces that I would not have, you know, if I didn't have letters behind my name or if I didn't work at a bougie university, right? And so the thing is, is that then I leverage those things the best that I can. And use them to reduce the amount of harm and support the communities that I actually care about and really try to encourage my students to do too, right? So I'm like, if you're here to save the kids, that's frankly not good enough, right? Like, what are you actually doing to shape and support the communities that you say that you care about? Right? And that part of our work is to figure that out. And not just like, yeah, you got to write a dissertation or whatever, but like there is a bigger purpose. So that,

and I, and I think as a whole person, like we were saying, like to be embodied in that, I have to also think about my purpose is much bigger than this job title. And so for me, being a leader that embraces abolition, liberation, and love is to be reoriented in my relationship to that job so that I can be in relationship to other people differently.

Vidya Shah: (00:40:27)

Oh, goodness. I love this. Thank you so much for sharing this, Qui. As you shared about people forward, it's really making me think that abolitionist work and leadership in particular is really about practicing being better humans. Like how do we, how do we be better humans with each other? How do we harm less, but also recover and with grace and apologize and be in conflict and it not be this thing that like, you know, really scares us, but that we can actually grow from like, it's actually the practice of being more human in relation to the more than human. And I think that I want to really thank you for, for as well, just naming the reorientation to the institutions that we work in, that who we are is so much bigger, cannot be possibly captured by some ridiculous metric system that tells us that we're worth it or not, that we are who we are spilling out into the world that cannot be contained by any institution. And I want to really honor that. And thank you for saying that, because I think so many of us get caught up in what the institution thinks of us and what our reputation is in the institution. And we forget that who we are is so much more than that. And, you know, it speaks as we're talking about speaking to, to some of the challenges that, that arise in this work. And I know that all of you in, in various ways are, are navigating multiple spaces and resisting in multiple ways. And I'd love for us to name what some of those challenges are in part, so that people could know what to expect or what might happen. And in part, so that we can start thinking about what it means to move through these challenges. And so, as we think about this, how does abolitionist leadership towards restoration, love, and liberation, how does it both disrupt sort of common sense ideas that we have? And also what challenges do you face from this standpoint? Dena, I'd love to hear from you first on this question.

Dena Simmons: (00:42:18)

You know, when I think about what we're disrupting is, and the idea of current schooling is that the distinction between schooling and education, right? And so there have been a lot of writings on, you know, schooling being more sort of carceral, like this is the control mechanism, and that the students don't have, are not empowered. Whereas education, there is a promise in education. There is hope in education. There is the opportunity for young people to be empowered. And so already just the idea of schooling is problematic. And then secondly, if we think about our current education system, both in Canada and the United States, you know, when Aurra was sharing some of the statistics about, you know, who gets access, who is surveilled? Who is surveilled? Think about that. Mostly Black Indigenous, students of color, students with learning disabilities, students who identify within the LGBTQI+ spectrum. And so, what we have are students who don't fit into the

status quo, who are constantly being surveilled. So, that is the reality. Yesterday, I gave a keynote and I always ask folks like, 'what does freedom mean to me?' And an educator says it's the absence of fear. And so, what does it mean to learn in the absence of fear? Ocean Vuong says that for Ocean, writer who wrote 'On Earth Were Briefly Gorgeous' said that 'Freedom is, is nothing but the distance between the hunter and its prey.' So, just thinking about the current education system as fearful, as being prey, both educators being prey, students being prey, and what does that mean for how one learns? And I've studied emotion. And when you feel scared or fearful or frightened, you actually can't be present. It's impossible. Why? Because you're thinking about impending danger. And what does your teacher say? Pay attention. They want you to be present, but it is impossible when you are learning in a state of fear, that is our current education system. Students, teachers are working on a state of fear. We have an anti-critical race theory movement in the United States that is trickling into Canada too, because I've been to Ontario, I sat in a car ride where this lady told me nothing but conspiracy theories. And so I know that there is a trickle down in all of North America. So then as we think about dreaming beyond the system of fear, this education system of fear, is how do we create places where students can feel free? And I do that work at LiberatED, at where it is in our mission. Like we want students to be able to live, learn and thrive in the comfort of their own skin. For me, that's freedom, right? At the edge of your skin, you feel free. And so how does education allow for everyone's authenticity? Where is there space for love and messiness and for belonging, not just fitting in, but the doing the work, the work of welcoming someone into a space, actually also interrogating the current power structures that exist within education. Because we also have to understand the current state of education is an education in whiteness. And so how do you make space for my blackness, for my immigrant-ness, for my Bronx-ness, because I'm from the Bronx, New York, for my curly-headedness? I mean, the reason why I said curly-headedness is because even the way my hair grows out my head is considered something to be penalized for. You know, people can't wear locks. They can't wear their hair certain ways, it's not considered professional. So these are all the many ways that just being Black is an opportunity to be penalized or surveilled. And so the question is, is how do we build communities of love, of healing, of dreaming, of radical imagination, a space where all students can really live, learn, and thrive in the comfort of their own skin? And the challenge that we're facing is that the work that I do, particularly in this space, of racial and social justice, in the space of healing, love, and social-emotional learning, that is currently part of the anti-CRT movement. So everything I do, even my existence as a Black woman, is under attack. And let me tell you what: Auntie Toni Morrison said, racism is a distraction, and I ain't paying them no mind. I'mma keep dreaming, and I'mma keep moving forward, because that's where my energy needs to be.

Vidya Shah: (00:46:49)

Wow. Thank you, Dena. I'm sitting in memories of K-12 spaces and higher education spaces that were filled with fear, as a student, as a teacher, and just really, really just noticing the

way that fear was so present in these spaces. And I just wanna, I just wanna say thank you for naming that. And I really invite folks to check out the work of LiberatED. If what you're looking for is classroom spaces, and school spaces, and schooling spaces, and community spaces, where that isn't how we operate, where that isn't the default and baseline, I'm so excited. I'm so excited by this work, and I wanna thank you for sharing that. Skye, I'd love to hear from you on this question. What are some of the challenges that you face in doing this work, and what are some of the ideas that you're trying to disrupt?

Skye Bowen: (00:47:38)

You know, I think about our systems, and when we talk about a racist, white supremacist, colonized system, that's what our school systems are. And sometimes people think, well, what exactly does that mean? What does it look like in schools? And I often am conflicted with the word tradition, because staff and schools will say, well, this is the way it's always been, and this works for me, and this benefits me, but who is 'me'? And one of the things I find really challenging in our systems is that idea of nobody wants to break what was comfortable for them, but not recognizing that that's under a white supremacist vision of how schooling works and operates. It wasn't based on, you know, the voices and the conversations happening with Black and Brown and queer identities. It wasn't based on that. It was based on what worked for them and those traditions. So one of the things I think is the most challenging when we're looking at disrupting what our systems are like right now is that notion of tradition, and that this is the way it always needs to be. People don't want to change because it's comfortable for them, and they don't understand that that discomfort can mean growth, and that discomfort can mean change in a positive direction that allows us to see the beauty and brilliance of those whose voices have been silenced and erased. But the challenge with it is that because we live in this system of colonization and a very authoritative leadership style, people want to be in these positions of power and authority to be able to use their authority on others, as opposed to empowering students and building from the student and community up, as opposed to a top-down approach. And so the resistance is heavy. I feel it personally as an administrator. I know teachers who are trying to do this great work are challenged with it. And so one of the big challenges is our own mental health, finding that balance of doing this work in meaningful ways. And one of the things that Dena had mentioned just about, you know, I'm not going to work at a pace of white supremacy, that really stuck with me because you're trying so hard to do this work. Even Qui was mentioning, you're trying to do this work because it is about love. But in doing that, how am I actually balancing my own well-being and personal well-being? And so the struggle is that mental health piece. How do we do this work authentically without literally hurting ourselves by what we are doing? I think that's a big challenge. And really trying to shift the narrative of looking at schooling as compliance and control, and instead looking at it as community, and care, and connection. And how do we transform our school, our classroom spaces, our school to actually do that without having our own mental health impacted? And so I personally struggle with that. I love being in education. I love students. And I love the

fact that I have the opportunity to be in this space. But at what cost to my own well-being and at what cost to my own family? And so I say that out to educators and administrators: Find that balance. Because the challenge of literally trying to break a system that is traditional in nature and it's always been this way, there is so much resistance. And I know some of my beautiful Black sisters who have done incredible work in our board, who have literally been silenced all the way through to the media in order to silence the work that was going forward, which was very progressive, and the harm that it's caused. And so we have to collectively come together in meaningful ways with those who are aware of these systemic imbalances and support each other. Really, support each other because this work is hard but it's also heart work. It's really heart work. And we need to understand that we need to preserve ourselves but we also need to care for others in ways that transforms the system and decolonizes our current schooling systems.

Vidya Shah: (00:51:37)

My goodness, Skye, there's so much that you said there that I'm just feeling so deeply in my bones. This idea of having to choose between the work or me is a constant struggle and I think one that white supremacy and colonialism have set up for us. Thank you so much for naming that. I think so many people doing this work are in this daily struggle. And also naming the importance of us doing this work together and collectivizing and standing with it because we can't do it as individuals in this space. It has to be more than that. I just want to say thank you, Skye, for sharing so honestly about what the struggles really are. I really appreciate it. Qui, I'd love to hear from you on this question.

Qui Alexander: (00:52:18)

I've had two big thoughts, one of which was kind of already reflected by Dena and Skye so wonderfully, this kind of decoupling of education and schooling I think is huge. I identify as a school abolitionist, which I feel like is a bold statement, considering I'm a professor of education. But yeah, I think that we can get rid of this shell that we have told that that is the only mechanism or institution in which education can exist. And we can still strive for collective learning in public space. I don't think we have to abandon that to say that actually we need to really redo schools and how we think. And I think one of the ways to get to that is to understand the relationship between schools and the prison industrial complex. And I think something that abolition offers is that I think a lot of times in educational research, people think about abolition only in regards to the school-to-prison pipeline discourse. But the reality is that a lot of abolitionist scholars are like, no, no, no, schools are actually fundamentally part of the PIC. They are both sites of socialization in this particular way. A socialization of what criminalization is in our society. One is for young people, and another one is for young people and adults. So there is something about understanding that relationship really, really clearly. And I think part of the work is to also as educators help other people understand that connection really clearly. So in the US and definitely also starting to show up in Canada too there are some people who say I should never be in front

of young people because I'm a trans person. That talking about being trans we can't even bring that up with schools. My existence should not be discussed in schools. People are literally having debates about that. So much of that is rooted in fear of the unknown. When I hear people spit off these conspiracy theories about people, I'm like, you don't actually know any trans people. You don't actually know any Black people. You don't actually know any Indigenous people. You don't actually know any disabled people. You don't actually know anyone that is in this category because if you had connection and love you might think about these you might be willing to think about these things differently. That's one big thing for me is the challenge of getting people to think differently about the entire relationship between criminalization and schools. Like you're saying, this tradition, this is how we've always done it and helping people recognize that that is a white supremacist frame. It's not broken. It was designed to work this way. So I think that is definitely a huge challenge in getting people to be willing to unlearn what they fundamentally know about the relationship between schools and prisons. I think the other big challenge that I really see is that unfortunately, in a society where so many people are hurting, people can take advantage of your abolitionist politic. I've seen it happen where oh, I know you won't call the cops. Right? And so people will come for me in a way that they will not come for other people because they know that my orientation, my politic, is to like I'm not going to go the punitive route. I'm going to avoid that as at all possible. And then people say, 'Oh, okay, I'm going to use that and kind of try to set up a gotcha to provoke me to interact in a way that they believe is carceral to say you're an abolitionist then why'd you do that? Right? So that is a real dynamic that happens. It's happened to me, in the classroom, in community. People will try to take advantage of the fact that you want to try to move differently in this space even though you and them both have been harmed by this space. Right? And so I think when to the mental health aspect too, for us, but also just we are a part of communities that are suffering structurally. Right? And that when you're always in survival mode, that's going to have an impact on how you're able to deal with conflict, how you're able to repair, how you're able to even show up to a restorative process, if you're able to. And when people don't have their needs met, that's how violence gets perpetuated. People are trying to meet unmet needs. So I think that's something to be mindful of, like there'll be moments as an abolitionist where I felt like I've had to be more principled than the people who interact with me because to stay committed to my politic meant that sometimes I had to be dug through the mud to stay committed to my politic. And I will say I'm grateful that sticking to integrity has always proved fruitful. You know, and even though I've experienced pain and suffering because of it, I think sticking with my integrity got me to the other side. But it's not for the light-hearted. It can be really just disruptive to one's life. It can be destabilizing. It can really make people be really clear about what they believe in their politics or not. And so it's not as simple as, yeah, we want to build a whole new world. That means that we have to stand on business in a way that we don't always have the capacity for or we don't know how to do. So I think that's a big challenge that people realize. It's like, cool, you want to say, 'You want to

be an abolitionist then there's some not so fun parts about it that you also have to stick with. Right? So, yeah.

Vidya Shah: (00:58:22)

I so appreciate you naming these pieces key because there can be a romanticization of this work and what you're sharing about the very real struggles in this work is so important. And as you were sharing about the integrity piece, it just makes me think about the fact that being socialized in and through white supremacy and colonialism demands and expects disingenuity. Like we're just expected to not live in integrity because you can't live in integrity in systems that are designed to tear us apart from ourselves and from each other. Almost like the I don't know, I'm feeling like a spiritual something going on here. Like just the fact that we're being called into deeper integrity between our hearts and our minds and something else up there. Like there's something in that that feels deeply spiritual to me. And so thank you for naming that and for naming the ways that also this work can be used against folks. Thank you, I appreciate that. Subini, we'd love to hear from you on this question, what some of the challenges are in this work and what are some of the discourses that you're trying to challenge?

Subini Annamma: (00:59:22)

Man, these panel members we just need to spend all day talking because I just have so many thoughts. So I'm going to try to organize them in two different little strands. One is that the ways that colonisation, white supremacy, racism, anti-blackness, cisheteropatriarchy, xenophobia, ableism, right? There are all these systems of oppression that are built into schooling, right? And the way that they are enacted is through carceral logics and practices. So where Black and Brown young people are all surveilled, labeled, and punished. And I always want to highlight the labeling piece here because I think we forget it sometimes. But labeling is a massive part of these carceral logics in that people start being labeled good and bad. They start being labeled disruptive and compliant. All these labels that schooling actually builds itself off of is part of those carceral logics. And then what we also have to realize is that those at the intersection of multiple oppressions are targeted for hyper surveillance, hyper labeling and hyper punishment. It's done at even higher rates. So if we're really going to be these abolitionist leaders, we have to center the voices and experiences of queer, disabled, undocumented, Black and Brown youth because the solutions tailored to them would necessitate the liberation of everyone else. Like as the Combahee River Collective teaches us. So I really do believe that. And that is not, again, about a stacking of identities. It's actually about thinking about the intersecting oppressions and how they land in our lives differently. And who gets targeted by those intersecting oppressions. So I really want us to think about the biggest challenges I think in education is getting folks to focus at the kids at the margins. Because we as educators, and I say we because I am part of this messy, messy, broken system. We all are, right? And one of the things we have to do is hold ourselves accountable. We all live in a system of capitalism. We all are part of the

exploitative processes that go on there. And we are part of this system because we have convinced ourselves that those kids at the margins are not our problem. That those kids are going to get the help they need in the segregated special education rooms. Those kids are going to get the help they need in the GSA club. Those kids that are going to get the help that they need in counseling offices. But what happens if we actually say those are our babies and we take responsibility for them? Because that would mean our pedagogical philosophy and practices have to change. We cannot rely on the exclusion or the erasure of queer, disabled, or undocumented Black and Brown youth, which is at the root of our carceral practices. So I really want to hold that as what happens when we actually look at the margins of the margins of our undocumented queer or disabled kids of color. And how does that change? And then I really want to touch on Qui's point because I feel like I'm really grappling with this a lot right now, which is this cannot be done in isolation. So educators, we don't expect you to fix it by yourself, people in the classroom. And as Mary Makeba says, everything we're doing is we're doing in community, right? So yes, love it. So we need to build communities of educators to take this work on. And I want to really hold on to Qui's point that this is being in community with each other is not easy. It is hard and it is messy. And it is painful. I am currently going through some stuff in my own institution with some students who I love, that is just absolutely painful. And so, I want to hold on to the fact that sometimes with our critical politic, we start confusing like whisper networks that were made to take down actually violent people with like gossip. We have to recognize that being in community with each other is hard. Kelly Hayes, who's an indigenous organizer and writer who has actually written with Mary Makeba but also does her own work, has a podcast Movement Memos which I highly suggest. But she discussed how it is often easier to take out our frustrations on systemic injustice on each other versus keeping them focused on the systems. And I really want us to think what that looks like. Because it is getting clearer and clearer that we are all hurting, and when we are hurting, we don't show up well with each other, and we are very likely to take it out on each other. And I think academics, we are really willing to throw each other under the bus when we don't live the exact same critical politic. And again, I say we, because I've done it too. Right? We gossip, we talk smack, but we also, like, everybody doesn't live our critical politics the same. So when is it, there's abuse and harm, and I am not talking about that. That needs to be called out. But just because we don't all live in the same place, we don't have to like each other, but how are we going to build with each other? Because that really is the thing that we're always trying to push on. And I just feel like we've kind of lost that a little bit. Or we are losing that in the way, again, that Qui is talking about, where we are being harmed. And it is hard to act with integrity all the time. And none of us will. And so, yes, there's also, like, how do we repair? But how do we not dispose of people, even if we decide we're not going to work together anymore? Can we not work with each other and still not dispose of people? I just really want us to start digging through some of these questions. Because we have to build bridges towards each other. If we're, like, I get it, I'm not asking you to be friends with the racist. I'm not asking you to be friends with, like, the people who are throwing the Klan rally at

Madison Square Garden. I'm saying what about us that are all on this side? How do we build together? How do we love each other? How do we recognize that even through our differences, we have something to share with each other?

Vidya Shah: (01:05:22)

It's so honest, Subini. It's so honest about the ways in which these politics play out. And you're making me think about the ways in which these systems that are so violent teach us to exist, in and only through violence. And then the violence that is in us then gets replicated out back in the world. And it's like the cycle of just literally cycling violence and the pain. You know, the pain that you spoke about when you're in spaces that you would, you know, you kind of let your guard down a little, you kind of ease up a little and all of a sudden something happens and it comes at you hard because you're not expecting it in that way. I want to really just say that I'm feeling all of what you're saying and really happy that you're naming it. How difficult this work can be and the kind of healing work that we need to continuously do in ourselves. The ways in which we continuously need to deal with things that we have been through and heal those parts of ourselves so that we're not taking them out on others as we talk about carceral logics, which is the hardest part. Thank you so much for naming that. And Kamil, I'd love to hear from you on this question as well. The challenges that you face in this work and some of the ideas that you're trying to disrupt.

Kamil Ahmed: (01:06:25)

What a brilliant question. I've named that abolition is a collective act towards transformation that demands the transformation of ourselves and looking inwards. And to me, that's also where the source of challenges emerge and come from, from my own pieces that I carry with me, that can present gifts as well as barriers to this collective journeying. I often find myself as someone who works within and around systems of justice, healing, accountability, and care, or at least as they perceive them to be. I find myself slipping into ways of being that were planted into me both before my arrival onto this planet as well as the years that I've spent on it. I find myself slipping into notions of ownership that I need to own something to measure my own value and worth as opposed to being a part of something that's meaningful. I find myself slipping into narratives of perfection as they relate to if something is not absolutely perfect then it is not worthy or it is not impactful, and that is the result of my own carryings and weight. And I find myself slipping into experiences of urgency and speed; I find myself moving faster than I'd like to. All of these things are symptoms and effects of colonial impact, and if I am to journey towards abolition, which is collective transformation, then I need to interrogate where in that journey I offer resistance and barriers from my own being and where I am not honoring what I perceive to be the work of restoration, love, and liberation. I would also add that sometimes I find myself slipping into measuring restoration, love, and liberation through the lenses of oppression as opposed to the lenses of abolition, which would invite me to measure my value as well as our collective value by the relationships we hold and not how much we are

able to tolerate each other or how little crime we are able to experience. To me, abolition is about stepping outside of these boxes, and that first requires us to step into ourselves to acknowledge what we bring into those spaces.

Vidya Shah: (01:09:08)

Kamil, thank you so much for giving voice to the slippages in the way that you have and the ways in which so much of our work is about undoing the vestiges and the ways in which colonialism lives in and through all of us. Thinking here of the words of Audre Lorde and the oppressor deep within all of us, that that being so much of the work that we need to do here. And I also really want to thank you for naming the importance of abolitionist leadership being one in which we focus on what we want and really sort of centering relationality and the power of relationality, and deepening our capacity to be in relation as opposed to simply thinking of what we don't want. That we don't want harm, that we don't want violence, that we don't want prison systems, etc. There's something really powerful in that shift and it leads us into our third question. About what are the possibilities that leading for abolition offer? And in what ways, like if we were to dream our way into abolition, if we were to dream our way into these spaces, what would it look like? What would it sound like? What would it feel like? And what do we want leaders to take away from this conversation? And so Skye, I'd love to start with you on this question.

Skye Bowen: (01:10:27)

Sure. I think for me, I think more specifically too about my own community and where I've grown up here, and so some of these things I think might apply even more to Canada than to the US, but I think there's some definite connections. You know, when I think about dreaming about, you know, schooling, education, what that could look like, one is that I would love to see more educators who are actually vested in the community that they have the privilege to serve and work in. And, you know, in our community where I live right now, there are more and more educators moving out of the area versus being here and it really impacts their vested interest in supporting students and community. And, you know, where I live, there is a lot of anti-Black racism, but I would say even greater is the exponential rise of anti-South Asian racism. And it's becoming more and more apparent and people are migrating out for all these reasons that they would say, whether it's traffic or other things, but there's definitely a deep-rooted understanding of anti-South Asian racism and anti-Black racism. And so it's almost like I want to teach here, but I'm not vested here because the community where I live is a better community, right? And nobody's going to flat out say that, but that's what it is, right? Because there are, if you served in the community that you were in, you'd have more of a vested interest and being a part of the school. And that's me dreaming. That's what I would love to see is more educators from the community that they're in. The other thing is in Canada in particular, extracurriculars are optional. Extracurriculars are a way to truly connect with students. So yes, you don't get paid in Canada for extracurriculars. You don't get paid extra to coach or do those things. And so I

think a number of staff and educators would say, 'Well, I don't need to,' but that's the way you really get to build meaningful relationships on top of what you're doing in the classroom. And even if it's the little things, I know people have their commitments and, you know, there's things that they have commitments to outside of school. So it could be once a week being involved in a club or something that you know is empowering our students to have their voices heard. And so I really wish that that was more of a priority for educators to see the value in it and how it connects with students. You know, for me, for sure, class sizes reduced. And I mean, this is, again, me dreaming. But the class sizes are so big that when we're wanting to talk about how do we connect with our students, how do we build those relationships, how do we create creative, culturally responsive programming that's deeply embedded into our curriculum and the fabric of our classroom space? One of the most powerful ways to do that is to reduce that class size so that you can envision the students having more of a vested role and voice in the classroom. And so in the same way, I think it's for administrators as well. The expectation now and the rise of things that we are trying to do to build those connections as it relates to equity and connecting with community is wonderful, but we're doing it with the exact same infrastructure that we had in a traditional white supremacist colonized schooling system. So we want to build these connections, we want to communicate with psychologists and social workers and bring families in and really try to figure out ways to support students. But we're doing it with the same number of teachers, the same number of administrators, and that is going to lead to burnout, because you cannot sustain a system like this in the same system that didn't serve and didn't empower students. So if we really want to do this work, we need to put in the money and financial time to increase our staffing and reduce costs. And the last thing I will say is, like Aurra, I am passionate about restorative justice. But I have a real problem when people say we're going to use restorative justice as an alternative to suspensions and expulsions. That is not restorative justice. Restorative justice, what we're looking at, is a way of being and who we are, it's how we talk, how we communicate, how we still connect when harm has happened, and how we invest in our entire community and family to make sure we are creating safe spaces of joy and belonging. That is not using it as a tool or an alternative to suspension and expulsion. That's not restorative justice. And so I would like to see how restorative justice is understood in an authentic way, deeply rooted in a connection and a love and a care for one another that goes beyond just doing something to do it, but doing it because we genuinely want to love and care for each other. And if we are doing that, if we are modeling that as leaders, if we are modeling what care and love and compassion looks like for our students, then even when we're dealing with things that are difficult, even when we're dealing with harm, the way that we respond shows a level of love, trust, compassion, and care that doesn't even make sense for most people. Because that's not the tradition of what we've done in the past. So those are the things I would love to see if I were to dream about schools that I think would help to transform where we are at today.

Vidya Shah: (01:15:47)

Skye, thank you so much for sharing this. What I so appreciate about your comments is that it actually is possible. These are steps that we can take to actually make this possible. That it's not some nebulous thing out there that we can't reach. Like it actually is about reduced class sizes. It actually is about people in classrooms who represent the kids in those classes. This is what it's about. And I really appreciate your point that we can't want these different systems, these different ways of being in the current model that we have, because the current model that we have was designed to fragment, to dispossess, to pit against each other. And so I really, really appreciate the really thoughtful and practical ways that you're offering listeners, and hopefully folks from the Ministries of Education are listening to this as well. Qui, I'd love to hear from you on this question.

Qui Alexander: (01:16:39)

Yeah, I think it was kind of echoing what was said before. I do think that there's like a spiritual part to this, right? I think, and it's not necessarily it's not about religion or like what you believe in, but more of like what does it mean to like be really clear about what your purpose as a human on this earth is, right? And my purpose is not to like work for capitalism and die. Like that's not that's, not what I was put on this earth for, you know? And so like just getting really clear about that and that like I think what becomes possible and what is like hopeful for people is to think about there are actually things in the everyday life that you can do to start to learn how to relate differently. And I think that it starts you know, in our most intimate relationships, and it ripples outwards, right? And so, you know, even to, you know, Subini's point of like, I don't have to like you to work with you. I think there's this ethic of like you know, it's like cool if I don't want you to sit at my table then you starve, right? And I think we have to have a politic of everybody eats. You just don't necessarily get to sit at my table, right? And so like that's a shift in orientation of relation and personality, right? Thinking about trust, I think, you know, a lot of people, I generally am a person who's like I'm trust-forward. I'll trust you until you give me a reason not to. And some people are like 'no, no, like that's a, you've got to earn my trust.' You've got to show up in a different way, right? And so I'm not saying that one is better than the other, right or wrong or anything, but I do think that there's, what is it, how do we in our everydayness and our everyday relations kind of shift how we kind of are like people forward, right? Humanity forward, compassion forward. So that for me would be a huge takeaway. I think sometimes people hear the word abolition and they're like, 'When the revolution comes,' like, and that there'll be this big sweeping thing in your whole life, you know. But like one, we have to not be afraid of a big sweeping thing because climate catastrophe is a very real thing. And I think a lot of people are acting like it's not going to happen here and it's going to, and it's kind of like the frog thing where the water's boiling and it's a little too late to jump, right? So part of it is we have to get more comfortable with change, like I have this poster back here. It's like 'Everything you touch, you change. Everything you change is you,' you know, like that, we have to have a different relationship with change. And I think that starts in our everyday lives with the people that we love the most, the people that we have the most rapport with, that

we can practice with, right? Like practicing conflict, practicing repair, practicing those things and then seeing how that shifts to the people that we work with, to the communities we're a part of, to the societies we live in, right? So yeah, I think the everydayness piece and the relationality piece is a way to start to plant a seed to do different and move differently, and I hope that people feel like that's a little bit more tangible than these kind of like big picture ideas. I think, you know, we're a drop in the ocean but the ocean is mighty, you know?

Vidya Shah: (01:20:10)

Qui, thank you for sharing this. It's making me think about the work of Adrienne Maree Brown and Emergent Strategy in particular, and this idea of practicing between ourselves and even with ourselves that ripples out into larger and larger circles. That it's the same quality of practicing change, practicing conflict, practicing repair that gets rippled out in these larger ways. Thank you for naming that. That is a very exciting possibility. I would love to hear from Kamil on this question. Kamil, what are some of the ways in which you are dreaming in this work? What possibilities emerge for you in this work? And what do you hope folks will take away from this conversation?

Kamil Ahmed: (01:20:57)

You know, I practice teachings around mutual aid, decentralized care, community justice, and community care, and as someone who's been in this space organizing within Waterloo Region for a while now, I have felt the impact of liminal spaces or third spaces. And I understand liminal and third spaces to be both spaces and experiences that evoke a level of creativity and imagination in us as it relates to what meeting needs looks like. Most of us understand meeting needs through systems of service provision or infrastructure that tells us what it looks like to meet needs. And then we try and box and separate our needs to be met through these scattered, often unequitable ways. And to me, when we step into relationship with each other in different ways, in ways that are non-punitive, in ways that are curious, in ways that are eager to exchange all that we know and understand all that we don't, I think it's in those spaces that we're able to break shackles, if I may say, and foster more expansive relationships with ourselves and each other and the land that we're on. And it's in that expansion that we can imagine and mobilize around what can be, but sometimes we can't see it until we step into those relationships. But for us to step into those relationships, we need to lead with love, and to me, love is an articulation of intentions. Intentions of curiosity, intentions of solidarity, and recognition of where we share in common all that we have at stake with each other.

Vidya Shah: (01:23:04)

Thank you so much, Kamil. And you know this invitation into expansion makes me think about abolitionist leadership as almost the conditions or almost the context for which we can practice being human with all of our frailties and all of our flaws and all of our possibilities and all of our gifts, that we can actually just be in the practice of what it means

to be human. And to your point about stepping into that, we actually have to step into these relationships. So in many ways, we don't know the worlds that we are creating. We don't know the paths that we are moving through until we actually get there. And there's something so intimately beautiful about that because it's almost as though we have to develop this deep sense of self-trust to be able to walk on paths or move on journeys or move through journeys that either have not been yet laid or have been forgotten and hidden and covered up, that we are uncovering with each step. So thank you so much for naming that. And Subini, I'd love to hear from you on this question.

Subini Annamma: (01:24:13)

I mean, I want to start with the foundation that my abolitionist politics will always start with the prison. And sometimes when I hear abolitionist educators, I'm so excited that you are an abolitionist educator and that you label yourself as such and you're thinking as such. And I want to know what is your relationship with the prison. And that's not to say that everyone needs to go work in prisons. But our conceptualization, our theorizing, our ideas have to be connected, to me. And that is, you know, like drawing from Angela Davis and some other folks who are helping me think through this. So for me, I focus on youth prisons, but adult ones too would be abolished. And if that were to happen, the entire school-prison nexus that Erica Meiners identified, and just to be clear what I mean by school-prison nexus, is a connected web of all the broken institutions that run on carceral logics that contribute to multiply marginalized Black and Brown youth being constructed as criminal. That was a mouthful, I know. But still, if prisons crumbled, that web would crumble. And that might mean including K-12 schools and institutions of higher ed would also crumble and be rebuilt. So I always want to say that second part, that it's reimagined. As David Stovall says, and Dena already referred to, K-12 schools might not exist in their current form, particularly of desks, of rows, of classrooms focused on subjects that have no relationship to each other. Those are the things we know are broken. They've been broken since the foundation. We know why school was created in that way, right, in the Industrial Revolution. We know that foundation was never meant for us, for Black and Brown people. It was never meant for those of us at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. So as Qui says, that is not to say education would no longer exist. It would mean it would be rebuilt to the needs of multiple learners, multiple experiences, connected and liberatory, right? Higher ed would no longer be invested in genocide, in creating bombs, and AI, and other environment and human killing pursuits. That would be a completely different world. Instead, it could focus on knowledge generation through community cultural wealth. Even early childhood would focus on helping young children understand the world more fully, like Akiea Gross does in Woke Kindergarten, right? We would cut the paths of carceral geographies that Ruth Wilson Gilmore identifies, and meet folks' needs for food, housing, and safety. Because if that happened, schools would not be asked to do the impossible, which is what we are doing right now when we pretend that schools can solve all society's problems and pretend to be the great equalizer. When really what schools are right now is the sorting and stratification

mechanisms of children. So instead, when people's needs are met, education could be something so much more powerful. And to be clear, yes, I want to rebuild, and I don't know exactly what that looks like, because it's not up to me to have that vision by myself. It is us in community that can dream something bigger, but we need to start by meeting people's needs, and we need to stop pretending education is going to do that on its own. And so if we actually met people's needs, our world could be, our education could be so much more powerful. It could be something that is a dream right now, because I think that is the thing that is missing from our society. And when that is missing, like people have said already, we are learning through fear, we are learning through want, we are learning through need, and all of that harms our learning.

Vidya Shah: (01:27:53)

Subini, I'm having so many thoughts and emotions listening to you speak, and really grateful for you naming the mass structural change that is required to allow schools to do what we know they can do. And I'm having this really strong emotion of wanting to live in this world that you are naming and that you are describing, and at the same time feeling so sad that the idea of meeting people's basic needs is such a political decision, or even something that we are questioning. And that that has been, that that is at the root of so much harm and violence that happens in the world. And to your point that many people want that for everyone else. And so just thinking about how particular decision makers have benefited off of not meeting everyone's needs in massive, massive ways. And so it's just, I'm sitting with the sadness of my gosh, this is simply about meeting people's needs. And why in this time, in this place, in this way, is that such a difficult concept, such a difficult practice to engage. But I want to thank you so much. I'm living into this world that you are imagining. And I appreciate you for sharing it in the way that you have. Qui, I know you had some thoughts on restorative justice that you wanted to speak to as well.

Qui Alexander: (01:29:14)

Yeah, I just was thinking about what Skye offered, and I really appreciated this kind of, hey, like we have to be mindful of how we're using this thing. And I think you know, in kind of like the abolitionist tradition I was kind of raised up in, was thinking about what might be the difference between something like restorative justice and transformative justice, right? And I think, you know, there's always these questions about like what are we restoring? Like if we have, particularly in schools, especially when it's tried to be used in schools, right, it's like what are we restoring? There are uneven power dynamics here. There is already structural pain and violence happening in this space, so what are we restoring to? And also, it's like, what does it mean to take an Indigenous practice and apply it in a place that doesn't have an Indigenous worldview, right? Including an Afro-Indigenous worldview, right? So it was kind of to the point you just said, Vidya, like this: What does it mean for us to, you know, meet people's needs? That's about our worldviews, right? That's about how we see who is worthy of care in our society, right? And we have a worldview of our society that it's to each his

own, right? And if you don't have your needs met, it's because you did something to fuck that up, as opposed to, you know, society has been structured for you not to get those needs met and values some like white male cis life over your life, right? If you don't fit in those categories. So for me thinking about transformative justice is not a slight to restorative justice, it's an extending of, in my opinion, of kind of thinking what does it mean to transform the conditions that created the harm in the first place? And if we did that to schools, that means we would really have to dismantle schools as we know them to be, because the school is what created the conditions for that harm to happen, right? And so to think about, yeah, what are the root causes that we're changing and I think, like, as we're struggling to change our worldview, we have to take that kind of transformative approach in our practice, right? And I do think that if we eventually get to a place where our worldview changes, we are able to use restorative justice in the way that it was intended, right? But now we're fighting this, we're fighting a different way of seeing the world and who is worthy and who is eligible to participate in alternative justice, right? So, yeah, I just wanted to kind of name that because I think people get frustrated. It's like, okay, we believe in RJ, it does all these things, and how come we're not seeing it work particularly in schools because we're just using it as an alternative to punishment when that's not really its intention? So, yeah, what does it mean for us to take more transformative approaches to that so we can get to a place where we can actually use RJ the way it was intended?

Vidya Shah: (01:32:09)

Such an important point, Qui. Thank you so much. And Dena, I know that you wanted to jump in on the restorative justice conversation as well.

Dena Simmons: (01:32:17)

Yes, I loved Qui's question about what are we restoring? And I think in education that oftentimes when you walk into a classroom and you're like, 'What is the purpose of this restoration circle, restorative circle?' is oftentimes folks are trying to restore what they consider order. And there's a conflation with order and control. And as a result, you end up using this mechanism that is not meant to be used as such to create order, to make sure folks know hierarchy in a very abusive way, which is why in the field of social-emotional learning where I do most of my research and practice, I said if we don't apply an abolitionist lens, a racial justice lens, into social-emotional learning, then it can very easily turn into white supremacy with a hug. And I think it's very important for folks to see that you may see a hug as something good for you, but we also have to understand that hugs can also suffocate. And so the same ways that we presented these things that are supposed to be good for us, they can actually be poison. They can actually be bad for us. And so I always caution people that you can have a restorative justice program. You can even have an anti-racist program. You can have an SEL program. If you are not using it the way that it should be used, which is to help us get along better, to facilitate freedom, belonging, and healing, it can be used to oppress. And I often tell people that you can have the best

culturally responsive program, but if you have a racist person teaching it, it's harmful. And so that's why everything that we do in education, as we think about abolition, needs to have abolition at the center and at the core, and it needs to be built into it. It needs to be practiced. We need to hold ourselves accountable. We need to have accountability buddies hold ourselves accountable so that we can ensure that we engage in the ways and not replicate white supremacy with a hug.

Vidya Shah: (01:34:25)

White supremacy with a hug. Really holding that up, and I know in Aurra's work as well, these are some of the topics that she's thinking through, the ways that whiteness plays out in restorative justice work, and I've had the privilege of learning so much from her. Thank you for sharing that, Dena. Subini, I'd love to hear your thoughts on this.

Subini Annamma: (01:34:46)

Sure, I just wanted to add like, you know, one of the things that I've really come to see is how convinced we are that certain people don't deserve access to certain things. I still remember, and this is in the Bay Area, you know, we're so liberal, we're so progressive, ha ha, that's not true. But side note, when there is an anti-racism program in schools, how often I go in and say, 'Great, and how is the special ed program participating in this?' Oh, special ed doesn't do this.' And then I follow up with, 'Great, so that means you don't have over-representation of Black and Brown kids in special ed?' 'Oh, we do. We do. Yeah, everybody does. We do too.' 'Right, so are you suggesting that Black and Brown children check their race at the door and become white disabled children in your classes?' 'Oh, no, we would never say that.' 'Of course, you wouldn't. But you are doing that with your programming, right?' And so, like, how do we? This is what I mean when I say: even folks who are moving, trying to move towards liberatory education, we have convinced ourselves that certain exclusions are necessary. And that convincing ourselves is participating in our own oppression. It's participating not only in the oppression of those young people that are being left out. And of course, don't get me wrong, white disabled children need anti-racism too. But when you are stripping Black and Brown children of their race and trying to teach them as if they are not Black and Brown children because their disability is all that matters, then we're in this place. So I just wanted to add that. Of course, everything everyone else has said is super valuable. And Skye, I really want to point out too that I don't, critiquing restorative justice overall is not critiquing how you engage it at your school because what you're describing is so much more robust than what most folks are doing. So I really want to just hold that too, that if folks are engaging in it in a relational way towards liberation, that is powerful. And I think that is exactly what you're describing. I just think that a lot of folks who are using the language of restorative justice are using it as Dena said, to only address suspensions, right? And there's nothing else. That's when I'm asking 'What are we restoring to?' Because that restoring to is assuming there is justice there to begin with. And to me, that's the issue. So I hope those notes make sense.

Vidya Shah: (01:37:08)

This is such a beautiful invitation, because Skye, I'd love to hear what this looks like in your buildings, what this looks like in your everyday practice.

Skye Bowne: (01:37:15)

Well, the first thing I will say that it is not is it's not some type of packaged training program that you can bring into a school and implement, and it's the exact same way for every student and every teacher. And that has been the challenge with it. You know, when Dena mentioned thinking about white supremacy with a hug, that has stuck with me for years, when she first came out and said that, because I saw that happening. And so it's not a structured program, and that's the easy way of doing it, and the traditional style of; this is a quick fix, this is something that we can profit off, this is something that can fit into a capitalist way of doing things, where you're not even including Black and Indigenous folks in those conversations, and that is very problematic. What I will say, the conversations that we have here is mostly modeled a lot even in what Maisha Winn shares in her framework, when she talks about history, justice, language, race, or I say identity matters. Those frameworks are really important to understand how we have conversations with folks, how we celebrate joy, how we deal with issues of harm, and issues are very complicated, they are very different, they are diverse from family to family, from experience to experience, and if we try to paint a picture of restoring everything back to whatever the norms of what folks think it should be, that's not restorative at all. And so I actually think of restorative being more liberating. I've had students come in here who are dealing with all sorts of stuff, swearing at me, yelling, and I know they have to let that out. But in a traditional restorative justice way, they might say, 'That's it, you've been disrespectful, you're getting suspended until you've met the conditions to come back and use this framework, you won't be able to come back into the building.' But I know that there's pain that's coming out of that expression, and I need to let that student let it out, in order that we can have some conversation about how we support, how do we help, how do we love, how do we care, even when these things are happening. And so really understanding that there isn't, if you are looking, if you are at a school and you're looking at buying some type of package to train you in restorative justice, I would really question that, because that's not what it's about.

Vidya Shah: (01:39:29)

Such important points. Thank you so much, Skye. And I have been following your work and deeply impacted by the ways in which you enact this every day, and so thank you. Thank you for sharing that. Dena, I'd love to hear your perspective on this question. What are the possibilities of abolitionist leadership, and what do you hope folks will take away from the conversation?

Dena Simmons: (01:39:51)

What I will add here is that what everyone has said is possible. And I think it's important for us to understand that nothing is impossible. Meeting people's needs is possible if we make it possible. And so how do we collectively come together to ensure that we can advocate and strive for what's possible to ensure that everyone's needs are met? I think about even the work that I'm doing at LiberatED, I think when we think about dreaming, we think a dream is so far away. We can live our dreams. And when I walked away from the Yale University, which I thought was a dream job, it wasn't my dream job, I thought it would be, but it's not. And that's because someone gave me a definition of success that wasn't mine. I had to define that for myself. And so when I walked away, I had the opportunity to build something new and to create an organization where our values, we have justice and love and healing in our mission, but our values are radical love, healing, abolition, justice, collective liberation, and listening. And I think it has been said here before that none of us can do this work alone. And this work of abolition and liberation is community work. It's a collective effort. And that requires us to pause. If we remember the gifts that we did get from the pause of sheltering in place during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a gift in stillness where we could think and we could hear our thoughts and we can reflect. And I had that opportunity to think and to hear my thoughts and reflect during that moment of stillness. And so one of the things that we can do is pause and be still before we just start running, running in this rat race of urgency so that we can listen, we can reflect, we can take note, and we can look back to move forward. And when I say look back to move forward, I'm thinking particularly as a Black person, I'm going to look back to my ancestral knowledge. And let me tell you what I know about Black folks and how that will help us move forward. I know that Black people who come from in this country and in the Caribbean, where I'm from, have come from enslavement. When I think of abolition, I think of abolition for slavery. We want to get rid of slavery. Black people have always made a way out of no way. And that's what gives me hope. And that reminds me of something that Loretta Ross said. She said, 'Hope is so vital to everything that we do. Because we can't be only defined by what we're against. We have to be defined by the world we build and want.' And so that's what I get to do every day with LiberatED. I also know that Black people have always had to operate in the liminal space between anti-Blackness and Black striving. That we've always had to be creative and subversive to survive. And that despite navigating violent contexts, we have dreamed of new worlds and ways of being. And that's why I'm here. I'm here because my ancestors believed in liberation. They've survived so that I can be here and live. And I also know that Black people are futurists. And we have always been able to envision futures beyond our realities. And so how do I tap into that in this moment where I create pause, so that we can build and not just react. Because sometimes when you're reacting, you're not reflecting, and you're not responding in the way that is the best to you. And so again I invite us to, as part of this work, is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our own humanity and others' humanities. To invite in people, to invite others in, and to listen and to understand that we can't hold this work alone, and that we are stronger together.

Vidya Shah: (01:44:00)

Ah, Dena, thank you so much. And thank you so much for ending us in this way. I, you know, it's funny, I'm asking these questions about possibility and it's not until you said it's actually possible, that I realized I didn't think it was actually possible until you just said it in that sort of way. And so thank you for holding up that mirror for me and I'm sure for others who are questioning whether or not this is really possible. You know, I want to just take a moment and say for listeners, you can't see what I can see on the Zoom screen here, but probably about five or six times somebody had their hand on their heart as they were speaking. And I think that just speaks to the kind of group that is here that I get to learn from and think with. And I am so tremendously grateful for, as Skye has shared, the heart work that you all do. And as Qui has shared, the intellectual work that is abolition. And I am so grateful for the ways in which you are willing to live this work, to be people who are worthy of calling yourselves abolitionist leaders, I think that there's something really powerful in that. And I have such great respect and admiration for that. And I want to really just take a moment and say thank you, thank you, thank you. This has been such a wonderful conversation. And I know that Aurra has been listening and has been thinking about what her takeaways are and what she invites you to take away as listeners in addition to all the wonderful things that were shared. So Aurra, I'll turn it over to you.

Aurra Startup: (01:45:28)

Wow. I really wish that folks listening to this today could come face-to-face with the love and care that is in this space with all of these amazing panelists. And to offer a closing in the best way that I can, abolition is more than dismantling carceral systems. It's about transformation. It is about reimagining this vision for justice, care, and community. And as our panelists shared, abolitionist leadership seeks to challenge entrenched systems of policing, surveillance, and punishment which continue to disproportionately impact equity-seeking communities. It seeks to confront the racism and colonial logics embedded in these structures and invites us to imagine a world where justice is not about control, but about care and collective well-being. At its heart, abolitionist leadership is about addressing the root causes of harm. Inequities in education, healthcare, housing, and mental health, and investing in community-centered solutions to create the foundation for thriving communities. Abolitionist leadership is not just theoretical; it's a practical framework for building systems rooted in accountability and shared care. It requires leaders to move from hierarchical control-based models to ones rooted in service, co-creation, and community care. And it's not just about dismantling oppressive systems, but about building new processes that center joy, that center healing, and collective liberation. Abolition as a practice also embraces frameworks like restorative justice and transformative justice. And so to end off, as Grace Lee Boggs wisely noted, transforming the world begins with transforming ourselves. Thank you so much for this conversation, and I hope it inspires you in the way that it has inspired me to dream boldly and act with the intention towards creating a just and equitable future. Thank you so much.

Vidya Shah: (01:47:28)

What a great place to end. Thank you, Aurra. Thank you for that and for really capturing such a beautiful conversation. Thank you again, once again, to all of our panelists for this wow, wow conversation. I will be taking this in and allowing it to just undo me again and again. This is, I'm very grateful, very grateful to be doing this work. Thank you all for joining in and joining us for another episode on the Unleashing Podcast. Looking forward to next time.