

## **Cultivating Imagination: Leading Towards a Just Future Transcript for Episode 4**

### **Cultivating Humanizing Spaces: Imagination and Authentic Leadership Connections with Moraima Machado Machado and Myra Quadros**

#### **Stephen Hurley:**

And welcome to another episode of cultivating imagination. I'm Stephen Hurley and along with Meaghan Dougherty and Gillian Judson, today we are happy to welcome Myra Quadros and Moraima Machado, two educators, two leaders from the west coast of the United States. They are connected on a number of fronts. Both have doctorates from East Carolina University and both are affiliated with the Leadership and Equity Institute for Educational Leadership. They both work as principals and in their doctoral work they highlight social justice and the role of story, connection and humanizing meaning. Welcome to all of you. Myra, let's begin with you. I wondered if you could start by telling us a little bit about your current role and some of the leadership priorities that you find yourself thinking about within that role.

#### **Myra Quadros:**

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. So, I currently am a school principal in San Francisco Unified and I am in a K-5 elementary school. Some of the priorities that I'm focusing on are making sure that all the adults in the school are moving in the same direction in service of all students. So that's not just the staff, but also the families and the adults. We are focused on making sure that all of our students are reading at grade level, that my school is art focused. So we have done a STEAM big A experience where instead of just focusing on art enrichments, we're also looking at STEAM, but with kind of art being our north star. And lastly, we are looking at the whole child and coming out of COVID, especially our current third graders didn't have kindergarten, so we're just making sure that current day we're paying attention to their SEL needs.

#### **Stephen Hurley:**

So all of that sounds like it's compelling, not only from the role of teacher and practitioner, but from the role or perspective of a leader.

#### **Myra Quadros:**

Thank you.

#### **Stephen Hurley:**

Moraima, let's ask you the same thing. Tell us about your current role and some of the things you're thinking about in terms of leadership.

#### **Moraima Machado:**

Hi. Yeah, my current role is a K-5 elementary principal and I have been a principal for 18 years. So every year when I'm coming back to the school, I'm thinking, like, what are the things that we

can do to support our students and families of color in this school? I have been for seven years, and one of my priorities this year has been learning abundantly. So, meaning that learning takes the place of knowing. And it is, for me, very important to support teachers, staff, all of the leaders in the school, to know that each one has a gift to give to the students. And that that gift comes in the sense of sharing who we are, as well as looking at what are our stories and how our stories can be a source of knowledge. So what I'm looking at, my priorities is uplifting the voices of all of the students and families of color, also supporting teachers to learn from students and families of color, and to being able to decolonize the practices that we have in our educational system that do not provide opportunities for our students to succeed in the current system that we have.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Well, thank you both for those introductions. You've already dropped a number of threads that it would be so easy to just jump in and pick up on, but I wanted to maybe turn the conversation towards imagination and cultivating imagination, which is the theme of this podcast. And Myra, when you think of imagination, as I know you do, what do you think of and how are you successful in explaining that to someone else? What is imagination to you?

**Myra Quadros:**

To me, imagination is sort of the foundation of anything we do. In fact, Einstein says it's the beginning of scientific research. And so I kind of lean into that, the opportunity to explore, to dream. But I do think in order to be able to imagine, you have to feel safe and you have to be able to take risks in order to be able to imagine. Not all of our students, not all of our spaces, adults and kids feel like they have the ability to be risk takers and to be able to dream as big as they could.

**Stephen Hurley:**

So why do you think that's important? Why do you think it's important to have that safe space?

**Myra Quadros:**

I think you can't fully imagine when you're not in a space where you can, like zones of regulation, talk about being in the grain, right? If you're not fully in a space where you can learn and be open and your authentic self, you can't fully be in a full imagination state. That's why it's important to build spaces where people do feel really comfortable and they have kindness, they have relationships, and that way they can fully be creative and imaginative.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Moraima, let's move to you, how would you describe imagination to someone who maybe didn't have a conception of imagination?

**Moraima Machado:**

So I love to use the idea from Gillian Judson in regards to the ability to envision the possible in all things, and this idea of possibility that we as human beings have, this opportunity to recreate our reality and to transform it. When I'm thinking about imagination, I think about ingenuity and

what it means to engage in that creative process in our workplaces. I think about Freire when he said this is the creative art of teaching, to be able to decompose that experience and to being able to reframe it every time so that we can really not forget the people that we serve and that we kind of reimagine those opportunities for students who are voiceless. I believe that imagination requires action and dialogue, and in dialogue is when we can reconstruct that reality. And I see it as what Gillian said, is that fertile soil is the soil that inspires you to do something different and something that you are just— Sometimes you feel that you cannot and that you just need to run to the left when other people are running to the right. But it's that idea of imagining, what if I do this? Then what could happen? And we engage often in the theory of actions, and we say, what if we do this? Then what will happen with our students? So that's how I see imagination, as a way for us to really live differently.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Right. Is that different than creativity for you?

**Moraima Machado:**

It's different than creativity, yeah. Because imagination is kind of the soil. Creativity is kind of the way to go about. But it's just like imagination takes context and takes the politics and takes more than just the creativity part. So I'm still wrestling with that.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Yeah. And we don't talk a lot about soil anymore. We talk about planting things and the quality of the seed. But soil and the nutrients and even the care of the soil is so important. You have me thinking about that, thinking out loud. Myra, I wanted to go back to you, and let's circle back to some of those leadership priorities that you have and those leadership challenges that are on your plate right now. How does imagination and your idea of imagination, how does that help you address and deal with some of those and take some of those opportunities?

**Myra Quadros:**

I think one of the biggest challenges in K-5 education— and Moraima definitely chime in if you agree or disagree— I think is just trying to get all of the instruction and core curriculum that we need to do to make sure that the kids are ready for state assessments, but also just ready to move on to the next grade. And so time is just such a challenge and also trying to offer the art enrichments and other creative experiences for students. And so I think that one way we try to counterbalance that is, or counteract that, is to push more creativity, arts, and other enrichment experiences within the core curriculum, using children's books and other materials that can offer opportunities for play and for creativity, so kids and teachers can have some more imagination in their learning.

**Stephen Hurley:**

So creating more space for that imagination.

**Myra Quadros:**

Yeah, but doing it within the core content.

**Stephen Hurley:**

So does that lead to maybe a different look for that core content? In walking into your school, would I notice something different because of an imaginative approach?

**Myra Quadros:**

Yes, I hope so. I think one thing we're focused on is writing with art integration. And so right now, our teachers are focused on nonfiction units. And so, for example, in second grade, the kids are learning about biographies, and they actually brought in a stuffy, and they're doing biographies on their stuffies. And then they're working with our ceramics teacher on doing portraits and sculptures of their stuffies. So it's a way to kind of incorporate imagination, creativity, art, but also getting those writing skills in.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Moraima, let's ask you the same question. When you look at some of the challenges as a school leader that you face, how are you bringing imagination to bear on those?

**Moraima Machado:**

Well, I agree with Myra. Some of the challenges that a leader faces in education is reality. The bureaucratic mindset, and when I think about the bureaucratic mindset has to go with the timing, with everything has to be in constraints, the scheduling, all of that. In our school, one of the challenges that we are trying to overcome is being able to see the Eurocentric curriculum that we have in our classroom that does not represent the families and the students that we serve. So when we look at our school, we are 65 Latinx, from the Latinx community, 25 black community. But the books that are from the publishers are not representing the experiences of the Latinx community or the black community. So we are really looking to always diversify our libraries and to being able to see how can we celebrate the students, how can we celebrate their experience? How can we celebrate the students that come from [illegible] and to being able to— That they see reflected in the walls in our school, that they see reflected in the environment that we create? How can we create affirming environments so that our students see that their experiences have a place in our school? And also, how do we engage with families so that they can tell us their stories, that they can really trust us enough to being able to share their immigration experiences.

And the schools not necessarily have a space for that because we are so into: Okay, students come, you are coming, and I need to teach you. So this whole idea that the students won't come to school empty and that we need to fill that with information is something that we are trying to resist and trying to do something different. It's not a school wide yet, but at least in little spaces, we are creating a different narrative for our students and families.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Moraima, do you find that you and your staff, and maybe even your students are starting to talk differently in terms of thinking imaginatively? Is the conversation different?

**Moraima Machado:**

I think the staff is looking more into what if, but not in all of the spaces that we have. Right. So in some of the spaces, when we are looking at family meetings, the teachers that participated in the project that I did in the school about family stories matter, they were the ones that started: what if we do our back to school night differently? What if we have, instead of having these literacy nights where we provide information to the student, what if we do it differently? So they start themselves to asking that question, and it's so beautiful to see when it's coming from the teachers and not just only the principal or a few leaders, you start seeing. It's like bubbles. It's like magic. So people said, yes, what about this? So you start seeing that, and I am visioning that this can transfer to other spaces as we continue. This idea of kind of having the garden of imagination continue in the school.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Right. And so imagination and the conversations around imagination can actually become contagious?

**Moraima Machado:**

Yes, it can.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Yeah. Gillian and Meaghan, you've been quiet, and I'm going to give you space to comment on anything you've heard or move the conversation forward. Meaghan, let's start with you.

**Meaghan Dougherty:**

Yeah. I'm just so inspired by all of the conversation, so much. So I want to thank you both for being here and for sharing about your ideas and your practices. And one thing I wanted to pick up on Moraima was talking about Freire's idea about deconstructing and reframing. And when I hear you talk about what you're doing with this "what if-ing" in your school, I hear that in terms of your practice, deconstructing kind of these Eurocentric ideas and curriculum and materials and building something new. You mentioned the importance of kind of cultivating that sense of imagination, of "what if-ing" with all adults, not just people within the school, but kind of moving beyond the boundaries of the school and including families and communities. So I'm curious about how you do that kind of outside of the school. How do you cultivate imagination with other adults and engage them in this deconstructing and reframing process?

**Moraima Machado:**

When I'm thinking about deconstructing, I'm thinking about dialogue, and I'm thinking about authentic dialogue. And what I mean by authentic dialogue is the kind of dialogue that moves the thinking and reflection to action. When we engage in authentic dialogue, then we engage in horizontal relationship with the person that we are talking to. And the question that you're asking, how we engage others in this is in creating spaces for people to really engage in horizontal, not hierarchical conversations. And in education, there is always, like the positionality, right? Is the things about... you are the principal or you are the superintendent, or you are the assistant superintendent, or you are the director. When we are trying to decompose

and to really re-envision, and we really want to use imagination as the way to do it, we need to break down those walls that separate us from the community that we serve. And a way to do that is by really creating the space. And Myra did this work in her dissertation, too, with principals. And how do we, by sharing stories, by telling what is the things that we envision, then we can re envision what is happening. It's kind of in the circular, but it's definitely by engaging in dialogue and having those people at the table and seeing each other as equal partners and equal in the sense that we all have the wisdom to being able to address the situation that is in front of us. The idea of what are the people closest to the issue have answer to their own problems. All of that play, when you are trying to re envision the spaces that you work inside the school and outside the school as well, and how do we uplift the voices of the people that are voiceless right now in our society?

**Meaghan Dougherty:**

That kind of brings me back to what Myra was saying earlier about this need for these safe spaces and building space, almost seeing imagination as a privilege once those kind of immediate needs are being met. So I'm curious, Myra, you've done work on this. How do we build those safe spaces? How do we imagine those spaces together? How do we create safety for people to be able to risk and dream differently?

**Myra Quadros:**

So what the research says, and also what I do, is we're working on humanizing everybody in the space. So it's really asking questions where folks can authentically share stories and be vulnerable. And so if you can start building a relationship with somebody and find the commonalities versus the differences and really build empathy and love for one another, then everyone is way more open to trying new things that lead to, like I said, risk taking, because I think to truly be imaginative and creative, you have to be able to be your authentic self in that space. And so it starts with helping build down some of those barriers. As Moraima was talking, there's lots of folks who aren't at the table, but also folks have had really bad experiences in our education system. So it's trying to understand where they're coming from and then giving them an opportunity to share it, and then how can we make it better?

**Stephen Hurley:**

I have a question about that. I'm doing some work with Landon Mascarenez and Doannie Tran. They have a book called *The Open System*, and they're dealing with some of this creating. They call them breakthrough spaces. And I'm wondering, do you have to sometimes move outside of the physical school, building out into the community, to gain that trust and to build those relationships?

**Myra Quadros:**

I think sometimes that's a really good idea to go into the community, because a lot of us aren't from the communities of the students and families we serve. So the more you can learn about where the kids are from or what the family's experience, I think it's always a good idea. But you can also bring the community into the school space if you want to. But it's also getting your teachers and staff to want to make sure every student is seen and heard, as Moraima shared.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Gillian, I wanted to bring you in on this. I know that you have thoughts and comments and places you want to move this conversation.

**Gillian Judson:**

Yes, I have many questions, but I will limit them. Just wanted to pick up first, maybe, Myra, what you were saying. I love how you're talking about humanizing knowledge. And one thing I learned in working with Dr. Kieran Egan is he described humanizing of knowledge as one of the most powerful tools of imagination. He called it a cognitive tool because when you humanize the knowledge, which means you connect it to somebody's hopes, fears and passions, somebody's story, as you said, there's an emotional element in that, and all human beings can meet on this shared plane of emotion. So it's sort of that space where empathy happens or perspective taking can happen because we may not be able to say, "I never grew up in that space," or "I had a different immigration experience," whatever it might be. But I know what it means to feel worried that I belong. I know what it means to feel that my voice doesn't matter. So humanizing is a powerful, powerful tool. I wondered if you feel, because you started by talking about whole learning, the whole learner, being a real goal for you as a leader, do you see humanizing as one of the tools that enables you and your teachers to support the whole learner?

**Myra Quadros:**

Yeah, I mean, we tend to lean towards the SEL, social-emotional learning when we talk about that goal for us. So it's making sure that the students, they all come from very different spaces. And so we actually have a full time social worker on staff who does a lot of lessons just on how to play, how to share, how to communicate, how to advocate, and how to empathize. And so it really is for kids to make sure they have friends and that they have opportunities to really be their full, authentic selves. And also the adults can cultivate those spaces in the classroom again so they can fully learn, because if they're holding on to something that's inside or outside the school, they are not their best learners. So that's sort of what the goal is about at our school, is, how can we build this whole child? So the answer is yes, in terms of, we do a lot of tools so we can humanize the kids in a way that's beyond just them as academic learners.

**Moraima Machado:**

I wanted to add, in order to humanize the space, we need to be vulnerable, and we need to be able to see each other as humans. And even you say as human. Well, we are all humans. Yeah, but humanizing the space means that the students feel seen. So what Maya is talking about the social-emotional learning, it reminds me about when we invited the families and the families, we were putting the music from the countries of the families. One family came and said, oh, this is from my country. And then the family came and brought her phone, pulled out more music for other families to learn about the music from her country. So that was a beautiful way to humanize that space. That is not just only one way, but it's diverse, it's multiple. It's so many areas that we can bring into the classrooms and outside the classroom that bring the full humanity of the people that are around us. So that is the part that I wanted to add.

**Gillian Judson:**

I love that you added that, Moraima. I feel like it adds again to what I know already of your work. I have in front of me our book. Meaghan and I edited a book, as you know, *Cultivating Imagination and Leadership: Transforming Schools and Communities*. And it was really great to be able to include your leadership story, which is a little bit about your research and the work you did as a principal. And I just wanted to quote you because there's a really powerful way you begin that you said, "When we as members of communities of color enter the white dominated educational system, we are compelled to leave our culture at the door. There is no room for our voices." That is very powerful. And then you for me indicate that if you want, expect, hope that your teachers can lift up those voices, you as principal, as leader in that school, have a really strong role to play in helping that representation happen. So I wondered if you wanted to speak a little bit more about how you feel you can be the leader that supports the teachers in lifting up those voices in a climate that may not be very welcoming or conducive to that.

**Moraima Machado:**

I think as leaders we have the moral responsibility, and that moral responsibility comes to educating all of our students from who they are. And when I think about that for me, I'm thinking about, how do we welcome all of those voices? But you have to be strategic as a leader. You have to be able to know that. You have to provide spaces for teachers to practice what you are asking them to do. That's something that I learned in my research. It's something about PDs and professional development that say to teachers, practice storytelling or bring a student story, but you don't actually provide a space for the teachers to practice that themselves before they are asked to being able to do it with their students. So for me, it was so important to provide these parallel experiences between teachers before they were asked to implement storytelling and before they were asking stories from the students. Because the risk that could happen is that if you ask the students to bring the story and you don't do anything by just posting the walls and you don't have the opportunity for the students to engage in the dialogue and connecting to one another's stories, then you are in the risk of extracting information instead of just cultivating the community and uplifting everyone's voices. So there is this sense about using, I am coming from poems and we used I am coming from poems. But the difference is the part of the imagination is to start asking like, how do you feel when you heard that story? And how, by listening to the stories of others, it makes you feel. By doing that, students were able to start engaging in that process of "I see you and you see me. And our stories now become this solidarity that I know that you are coming from the same space as my family and we are all here in the US navigating this system." Of course, they don't put it in these words, but they say, just like, what is happening here? So that dissonance, but also seeing that the space that it is can see you and understand you as an immigrant, is so important. So how leaders can do that is by really creating those spaces for teachers to experience storytelling or experience the initiative that you want to bring. And then together you go into the classroom to see as a group, not just as an isolated experience or something that someone says that you need to do, but with the strong belief that this is why we are doing it and how we are doing it.

**Myra Quadros:**



Moraima, I was thinking about the school that I lead. I have a lot more students who are white as well as teachers who are white. And so it's sort of a challenge. Not sort of, it always is a challenge as a leader of color to interrupt what you're talking about. Right? Not what you're talking about, but to interrupt the inequities that you see regularly. So when a teacher does a prompt that centers in whiteness and then you know that it's going to potentially produce.... For example, "What'd you do over the weekend?" Right? Like the worst prompt ever, because then some of our kids are talking about going to these ski vacations while other kids did not. So how do you interrupt some of that or teach teachers how to cultivate better questions so that they're more centered in all students?

**Moraima Machado:**

Yeah. With that, I will lean into Friere, and one of the things that he invites us to do is to invite teachers and all of us as educators to be teachers and learners at the same time. So while there is this sense that when we come to school, we're coming to teach, so how to cultivate the experience that I'm coming to learn as well. So in spaces that are dominated by one culture than the other, how to create this curiosity and this sense of, we are here to learn from each other. And that is the difficulty to seeing that I'm only here to teach, but I'm not here to learn. And I think that is where the conversation goes in regards to how do we bring the stories? Even when it's homogeneous, in the sense that it's only white students who are in the space, there are differences in there. It's not necessarily one only experience. There are many stories that are inside that group. So that takes imagination.

**Meaghan Dougherty:**

I love that idea of teacher learners. That's such a strong idea to take forward. And it kind of brings me to what I was thinking about earlier. As you're talking about humanizing the space, and Myra's talking about this need to interrupt the inequities as they're coming up in practice, when you're humanizing these spaces, you're trying to create space for people to be authentic and take risks and share and be vulnerable. But when I hear you talk about that, I feel like that's asking a lot of you to do that yourselves in your attempts to humanize the space. For this imaginative process to be effective, you have to be vulnerable, you have to take risks. You have to really share your authentic self. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about what that's like as a leader.

**Myra Quadros:**

So, one way that I'm authentic is anything I ask a teacher to do in professional learning, I do with them. So we do a lot of personal narrative stories. So it could be an "I am" poem or a journey line or something in that lane. And so I model it. And so every time in front of the staff, I do share a piece of myself. So hopefully that they will open up and be more vulnerable with each other as well as with the community. And I center on our priority one, which is all adults moving in service together for all students. And so that only works if we have relationship and brave space.

**Meaghan Dougherty:**

Moraima, what is it like for you as a leader, having to put yourself out there in those ways?

**Moraima Machado:**

One of the things is that as Myra, sharing about myself and about my story is like a way to being able to model for the teachers about being vulnerable and being myself in the skin that I am in a space that not necessarily is built for people of color. So I'm a black woman, Latinx, and immigrant. I come in from Venezuela. And as you are listening to me, you're going to see this thick accent, right? So, going through sharing my story helps teachers to see the humanity in me as well as like, I'm a leader, but I'm also a human, and that itself creates that sense of how can I start? And I start providing spaces for them to share their stories with one another. But they see the leader, not just as this perfectionist sense of this leader is perfect. No, this leader is human. For that, I think it's important I share my story with families as well when we have family meetings, just because I believe stories teach us about the power of the possible and stories reunite us. So by using the stories as a text as well as a way for us to bond with one another, it creates this sense of kind of collective responsibility. So that is one of the things that I try to do consistently.

**Stephen Hurley:**

I'm wondering if we could turn the conversation to something that I know you're both passionate about. And that's the conversation in the action around justice. And this podcast is specifically focusing on social and ecological justice and asking the question about how imagination might help us to think about a plethora of issues that exist within those domains. How can imagination help us to think about those differently? And I would love to get your thoughts on that. Myra, how does imagination and your work in imagination help you to frame questions about social and ecological justice differently?

**Myra Quadros:**

Well, when I first started in my new school, I've been there now a year and a half, I actually shied away from these two areas, even though it's the lane that I did my dissertation work in, because I was nervous about how it would be received if I was all about racial and social justice equity in this lane. And what I learned was I wasn't being my authentic self and that I was assimilating to the space. And so in the last six months or so, I have centered social justice and realized that in not being my authentic self, I wasn't bringing in the communities that I really wanted to serve. So now I just say what I want to say, and I do what I want to do, and I make sure that the voices who know, Moraima talked about this earlier, the ones that don't always get heard and aren't the loudest, are the ones that we're paying attention and centering. And I'm also finding allies in the spaces, like in our parent community, as well as our teacher community, who focus on the same things that I want to focus on, which is making sure that all students have access to their learning. And I just wanted to add that my school is centered near Golden Gate Park. And so, you know, I live in the best city in the world, which is San Francisco. And so we get to have San Francisco as our playground and our learning. So that's really easy to center in terms of ecological justice, because the kids just go out. We're able to build all kinds of experiences for the kids because they just walk out the door.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Moraima, same question to you around social and ecological justice and the role of imagination in how you're thinking about that.

**Moraima Machado:**

So I think in the role of the equity leader, imagination is essential. Without imagination, the leader gets stuck in the bureaucratic minds of the system. As a leader, I always have all of the demands. I am accountable for so many stakeholders. The patents, the budget department, the assessment department, and all of that can become very technical. The work can become very technical and just, okay, I just finished the assessment for this. Now we are going into this, but without us tapping into the imagination, we are— And considering the “what if” we are not going to move into being this adaptive, transformational leader or transformative leader that we want to be? So I always think about, in situations like this, I start thinking like, I'm in the dance floor or I'm in the balcony. If I'm in the balcony, I can see what is happening in the dance floor. And then I can use my imagination and the imagination of the people that are my allies to being able to resist what is happening and to being able to create equitable outcomes for all of the students that are in the building. If we continue being in the dance floor and we are not moving beyond that, then we continue replicating what it had been happening. So I see it as essential for equity leaders to tap into the soil, the “what if?” And to being able to say, there is another way that we can do this, and we don't need to be, only do this because it's required. What are the things that are not required, but are important for the families and students that we serve? So that's how I see it.. the ecological part of equity.

**Gillian Judson:**

This is a big honor to.... I'm trying to close out a podcast that just has me, my mind running in all kinds of directions. This has just been such an honor. Getting an opportunity to speak with you both this morning. Having this much time with leaders during the school day is impossible. So I appreciate your time. I just wanted to ask a final question, and that is just how would you invite other leaders who aren't explicitly talking about imagination in their practice like you are? You've made it very clear that it's sort of an indispensable part of what you do and how you lead for social justice and ecological justice. So what might you suggest? Encourage leaders that want to bring imagination more centrally into their practice. How can they do that? And maybe we'll start with you, Myra.

**Myra Quadros:**

I would definitely have leaders start with personal narratives in their agendas, in any agenda, whether it's in front of families or students or specialty staff. We talked about from the beginning, you have to cultivate brave space and safe spaces. And so in order to do that, you want folks to come in with their authentic selves and so have people like talking about themselves and like sharing their stories, that there's a lot of really wonderful ways that can bring people to surface their personal stories, which could be through poems, art and other lanes that already produced creativity and imagination, and then you can build off of that. So that's my advice is to start there, because while it feels low level, it really can produce some beautiful experiences for the learners and the people in the spaces to be vulnerable.

**Gillian Judson:**

I love that. And I love how helpful you've both been so far in our session. Just bringing into practical terms, because for many people there's so much misunderstanding around imagination that we forget that it's just such a part of a fulsome life. So very helpful. We also know from talking to leaders that it can be scary doing imaginative things, talking about imagination. So we need to create support in that area. Moraima, how would you answer that question?

**Moraima Machado:**

The part about the stories that Myra shared is the foundation. I always want to tap in Myra's dissertation because she did an amazing work with leaders, building networks and bringing leaders together outside the school building. I don't know if Myra, you want to talk about that, but I found that inspirational because when you are sometimes in distant meetings, there is not necessarily the space there for you to talk about. How can you do the what if? But if you bring people outside of the organization and then have conversations about this, then magic starts happening. I believe that we all are in networks. We learn when we feel isolated, we tend to be able to shy away from our values and beliefs. But if we feel supported by others as well, and their stories empower us, then we can continue this work that again is demanding, but it's fulfilling when you feel that you have other minds that are similar to you doing the same work, even if that mind is in another country or is.... In our dissertation, we talked to people from different parts of the world and we were all tackling the same problems. So how can we network with other people? It's important for us to stay in the profession and to do the hard work of resisting a system that is not built for the people that we serve.

**Gillian Judson:**

Thank you so much, Moraima. I would love it if, Myra, if you'd just speak a little bit about your research. We didn't get to speak of it, and that would be a great way to conclude our podcast today.

**Myra Quadros:**

Cool, thanks. I studied a small group of principals who were tasked with improving outcomes for black students. So I was just studying whether with a mandate, if they were able to, what were they going to do and what did they need to do it? And so what I learned was that administrators, especially school leaders, feel super siloed and isolated and they can't actually just ask for help or say what they need unless they have a safe and brave space to do so. So I cultivated a community of practice, so, as Moraima said, a network. And after two and a half years together and really leaning in, we used Brene Brown's brave space norms and a lot of other research. We took the time to just learn who each other were. And then finally they were able to say, and also we were together through Covid, they were able to say that they needed help, but otherwise our district doesn't offer often an opportunity for just to say, you know what? I can't do this by myself. So that they were able to be vulnerable and then ask each other for help was super amazing. Anyway, I think that all those personal narratives and that storytelling and the

ability to just be their authentic selves really helped with them opening up to then finally do the work that we need to do for students.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Well, I would like to take this opportunity to thank both of you, Myra Quadros and Moraima Machado, for joining us today on *Cultivating Imagination*. Your insights, and I think your really grounded perspective on this is going to engage many, many listeners. So thank you for your time, thank you for your research, and thank you for being with us today.

**Moraima Machado:**

Thank you for having me.

**Myra Quadros:**

Yes, thank you for having us.