

## **Cultivating Imagination: Leading Towards a Just Future Transcript for Episode 7**

### **Envisioning Ecologies of Resiliencies: Story, Community, & Awakening Imaginative Possibilities with Lori Driussi and Christina Velasco**

#### **Stephen Hurley:**

So we are back for another episode of the *Cultivating Imagination* podcast. Our regular co-hosts are with us. Ready to go? Gillian Judson, Meaghan Dougherty and Maeghan, I'm going to throw it over to you to introduce our guests in this episode. You did such a great job last time, I think you've got the job now.

#### **Meaghan Dougherty:**

Thanks so much. We're just so excited to have two amazing scholars joining us today. We have Lori Driussi, who's currently an independent educational consultant and also a faculty associate at Simon Fraser University here in BC. Lori's an educator and a lifelong learner, and she's held a variety of roles in public schools, everything from classroom teacher learning support teacher, head teacher, principal, and in 2010, she opened the University Highlands Elementary in Burnaby, BC, a Learning in Depth school. So a lot of experience with imagination. As a district literacy consultant for K to 12, she provides district direction and staff development for teachers and administrators. And as a professional learning liaison, she's collaborated with school based leaders and the board of education to revise school growth plans. So welcome Lori.

We also have Dr. Christina Velasco, who has an ED from East Carolina University. Christina has taught as a Spanish bilingual teacher for ten years. As also a school principal for nine years in the elementary division in San Francisco, Christina has led the Bay Area Writing Project and art professional development for teachers in the Bay Area and has served as an instructor in the Bay Area Writing Project summer writing camps for teachers. She's currently a supervisor leadership coach for principals in the San Francisco United School District and in her current role coaches principals and co-creates content for professional development that incorporates creativity, art, and play. Christina's research focuses on educational leaders and self care, and studies the structures and pedagogies to better support educational leaders who actively work for equity, excellence and social justice. Christina and her team work to retain BIPOC leaders and school leadership, so we're very grateful and honored to have both Lori and Christina joining us today. And I'll turn it back over to you, Stephen.

#### **Stephen Hurley:**

Well, thank you. And I'll remind people they will be able to find those biographies, those introductions on the *Cultivating Imagination* website, which we will reference later. I wanted to begin with Lori. Lori, we want to ask you about your current role and some of what your priorities are as a leader within that role. You have a lot of experience, and I know much of that comes to every role that you hold. But currently, what are you doing and what are some of those priorities in terms of leadership for you?

**Lori Driussi:**

Thank you, Stephen, and thanks for the invitation to be here. I'm super excited for this conversation this morning. When you read the bio, Meaghan, I thought, wow, I sound so busy. But really right now I'm kind of a retired educator, and I get to play in a lot of ponds and exercise a lot of my passions. So that's really great. And imagination is at the forefront of all of them, I'd say. Currently my leadership right now shows itself in my role as a faculty associate, where I mentor teacher candidates in their certification program. And I think the beauty of being at this part of my career is being able to mentor people who are really so focused on the technicalities of being educators. But I can see the power of the philosophizing around education and the power of imagination and the opportunity to take a breath and help those teacher candidates take a breath. And so I really enjoy doing that. I also, right now, am involved in some early learning programs in BC. So when you're working with four and five year olds, you see a lot of imagination and creativity and excitement and passion. And also I'm working with my partner on a project called Seeing the Water, where we run some workshops to help people explore their own identities and see how our stories impact ourselves and the people we work with. So I think in all of those aspects, my leadership role there is around the what "if-ing" and what is possible and the elevating the storytelling so that people can see themselves and others in new and different ways, which I think opens the space for considering other ways of doing business, which is timely just now in our current context.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Sure is. And we'll talk about how imagination might be able to help us in that timeliness. But before that, I wanted to turn to Christina and ask you the same question. Tell us about what you're doing now and as a leader, unofficial and official leadership roles, what are some of the priorities that you're holding in front of you?

**Christina Velasco:**

Again, it's just wonderful to connect across our beautiful country as well as in Canada, to have this conversation about what it means to do this work of imagining differently. I'm currently a supervisor in San Francisco Unified School District where I provide one to one leadership coaching to 17 new site administrators and assistant principals, and it's a two year coaching cycle and in addition to that, co-create professional development to support their work. So similar to Lori, I feel like instead of ponds, maybe I'm in different ecologies because I have schools that range from pre K, so you can think of students that are three years old all the way to high school. And the ecologies of schools in our district are so distinct. And I'd say my leadership priorities are really to support and retain school leaders in this work, especially leaders of color. We know that Lenwith and Jancy speak to the importance of school leaders and the role of retaining effective teachers. So the connection to Lori and talking about what it means to mentor new teachers as they start their career, I have a parallel process around what does it mean to mentor and coach and support leaders as they do that for their schools so that we can ensure the success of students and their outcomes? I am especially excited and privileged to do this work because I feel like someone that's done it for almost a decade in being a site leader, having time to pause and reflect and maybe do a little bit of what you all call some

rebellious ways of engaging, of how we think of school leadership now, instead of it just being certainly the work of doing the technical. But more importantly for us, it's about doing the transformational. And in order to do that, there's a lot of moments where leaders need to pause and to engage in praxis in ways of thinking about the work or imagining the work in ways that haven't been done before, especially in the context of what it means to be in public schools and to lead the effort of educating the whole child. So again, I see it as a privilege to have moments to pause and do some reflection to action with leaders, and to have moments to be creative with them about the possibilities of what it means to do the work so that they can, I think like in fractals, so they can do this work with their teachers, and then students certainly get to have that impact as well. So again, those have been our focus areas around what it means to sustain and retain and create ecologies of resiliency in this work.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Christina, before we get too far down the road of how you do that and how you imagine doing that, let's talk about that concept, that idea of imagination, and maybe some thoughts from you about how you explain imagination to yourself and how you might frame it for other people. It's a word that people use a lot, but let's dig into what it means to you.

**Christina Velasco:**

When I think about imagination, I think about an attitude. It's a spirit. It's a way of thinking of something not yet in existence, but something that you want to purposely call to be in existence or you want to see come to fruition. And so it requires a belief in what is not yet here, but could be possible. And the National Equity Project often uses this as an idea of thinking, of seeing. So, like how you see things that you want, how you envision something to be able to think about the possibility.

**Stephen Hurley:**

And, Lori, I know you probably want to add to that, but you may have a completely different conception.

**Lori Driussi:**

I think I have a little bit of a similar conception, actually, as Christina. I kind of want to pick up on what she said about a belief in the possible, because when I was thinking about how I might explain imagination or think about it, it just all felt a bit nebulous to me. And so I started to think of it more as a way of being or more of a process than a single thing. And it is a belief in the possible. I think it's in our nature to ask, what if? What if we could build wings and fly places? What if I used blue paint on this face? What if just every student and staff member in the school had a topic to study for several years? I've been thinking about a quote by Machado for a long time. "The road is made by walking", and I think that links to the belief in the possible that we create a road and a path and experience, and we consider what might be around the next corner, what we can't yet see while we're walking along. And it's taking those steps that actually already ground us in kind of an imaginative way of being. It's kind of the way we move around and we try a new flashlight, and we decide we're going to go around that corner, even if it's a

little bit scary and dark. And so this process, thinking of imagination, is really highlighted for me right now.

**Stephen Hurley:**

I wanted to pick up on that, and I'm thinking there are some people, like you and like Christina, like Meaghan and Gillian, who are thinking about imagination and consciously aware of the fact that they're asking those questions. What about the person who might be so tied up in their day in the list of things that they have to get completed before their head hits the pillow? Lori, what role does imagination have for them? Maybe unconsciously or under the surface. Is it still working?

**Lori Driussi:**

Yeah, that's such a good question. I believe that imagination is always working. And I think it's not just, like I said, one thing. It's about feeling, and it's about thinking, and it's about moving, and it's about doing. And it all comes together and creates this imaginative way of being or an openness to seeing possibility. And I know what it's like to live underneath the to do lists. And sometimes it can be hard to just take a pause. And I guess picking up on what Christina said around mentorship and leadership, at this point in my career, I have those moments, or I understand the importance of taking those moments to pause, to reflect, to consider. The to do list is never, ever done. And so what if I just stopped and took a breath and said to myself, what's the most important thing in front of me right now? And how might I like to approach that? That question, I think, allows us to open up a little bit in our thinking.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Christina, I wanted to go to you on that. You brought us into that type of process, that stop and breathe process, at the very beginning of our conversation, before we even pressed record. Tell us how you think about that.

**Christina Velasco:**

Well, I so appreciate that we are kind of hardwired to *do* in this society, and so it's very rare that someone says, let's just pause. Let's just slow down, or let's take a moment just to breathe. And I think that in the work that I researched and the work engaged in, after ten years of doing school leadership and just being an educator, I felt like no one really told me to slow down. And the only places I got that were when I was in a coaching session. Right. And I had an opportunity to do that and be mentored through that. And I had to learn and rewire to be able to sustain in the work of education. We had to create different spaces for this to happen. And so I think the slowing down has to be intentional. And so whether someone's probing you to do that or how you build in a new way of doing as a way of honoring the process of what it means to think differently or to imagine and to be creative, it's so important. And sometimes we engage through different ways to kind of slow down. And we were all forced to slow down during COVID. And that's the height of when I was doing my research around women in school leadership and what it meant to do self care. And right now, when I say I'm privileged to do this work with school leaders, that are just starting their career, they get to come to professional development once a month for a whole day. And we intentionally model this kind of pedagogy so that they can

experience it and so that they can also engage in it and they can bring it back to their own communities. One leader even said, this is like a spa day for my brain. And so, like, giving yourself just a little bit of room to be able to just be outside of what is your normal big checkoff list of things to do and lead and do the work, to have the room necessary to create and to play and to imagine differently the scenarios that we're deeply committed to and ingrained in the work of leading schools and supporting the livelihood and the well being of others.

**Stephen Hurley:**

That might be a good subtitle for this episode, a spa day for your brain. I wanted to ask both Christina and Lori, if they might take us a little bit into their process of looking out on your current landscape, what's in front of you in terms of challenges, or maybe even problems in your particular learning community, and maybe take us into your thinking about how your imaginative thinking on how those problems might at least be approached if not addressed. Lori, give us a sense of how you think about imagination in addressing some of the challenges that you face.

**Lori Driussi:**

Well, I could easily begin with a spa day for the brain, I mean, just that notion of being intentional about saying to people, let's take a breath together before we move forward or when things are really challenging to say, let's just step back for a second and take a minute with our own inner landscape. I think that really matters. And part of my work in mentorship is really helping people to see that taking that time and space is highly effective, and it will contribute to your productivity, because, as Christina said, we really are focused on the doing. I can think of an example. In my role as a faculty associate, we were considering the evaluation of student teachers and how we write reports or final evaluations that end up being used for hiring purposes for our student teachers once they complete the program. One of our colleagues brought up, what if these were written collaboratively with the student? And I thought, oh, what a great idea. Let's go for that. Let's try that. That sounds so interesting, and that's typical of me, to kind of jump right in and say, let's go for it. And then there was kind of this long list of really valid reasons why this might not work and, in fact, might not be beneficial for our teacher candidates in getting hired. You know, districts are looking for an authority like a faculty associate or a supervising teacher to provide that report. And if our student teachers are writing them collaboratively, then maybe they won't be as competitive and all of the kinds of things. And I really appreciated some of the people in the room who just said, well, let's just play that out. And I think it's the conversations where we play something out. Let's just run it down the road, walk the path, if you will, and see what it might look like. And then through that, start to create something maybe a little bit different, a little bit new. And I think that's just a really important thing for us to be doing and also asking the questions like, what's the story behind what we're doing? What's the purpose? What's the intention? How did this come to be? Why are most school days Monday to Friday, nine to three, all of those kinds of things, like what serves us best now? And what could it look like if we started to rearrange some structures to support what would serve us best in our current context? And then how could we take a couple of steps forward? And again, it's in that we make the road by walking. It's in that just stepping forward that I think possibilities open up, and that's where transformation lives.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Lori, what do you notice as a leader happens in a room when you open up that type of imaginative thinking through a question like, let's imagine this?

**Lori Driussi:**

Yes, I think for the most part, I see wide eyes. I hear passionate voices. I start to see sparkling eyes. I also see some frightened eyes in the room because to take a new direction can feel a little bit overwhelming, especially when you're shaking up structures and processes that have been around for a really long time. And given all the stakeholders in education and all the thoughts about what education and what teaching and what leadership should look like, I think it's easy for us to get a little bit nervous and want to just stay in our lane, right? Because that's a safe place to be. But really, once the conversations get going, when you say, look, we're not doing anything, we're not changing anything, we're just going to have a "what if" conversation, I feel like there's an excitement and a passion and what really matters to people, what really matters to teachers and their reasons for being educators, starts to come through in the conversation in a way that's different from how are we going to logistically make this happen.

**Stephen Hurley:**

That's pretty exciting. I want to be a fly on the wall or on the table. Christina, let's dive into your process and your thinking about working as a leader with some of the challenges that you have from an imaginative perspective?

**Christina Velasco:**

Sure. I was just thinking about the beauty of having that space to think differently and creatively. And sometimes that comes in moments where things are very constrained. And when I think about the public school system and budget cuts and San Francisco Unified right now, we are in the midst of that time of the year where you create your school plan and you rally your community to really prioritize how you're going to engage those resources to meet outcomes for your students in your community. And it is really bleak in terms of resources. So I think about those hard moments. Sometimes they're moments of possibility and moments where we can really engage in imagination, because sometimes we're forced to. And I can think of that in a creative way, and I can think about that as a way of, like, just surviving to get to thriving. And I feel like right now, one, one way that we do that with our school leaders is to, especially in their first and second years of school leadership, is to really take stock of the topographies of their schools. Right. What is the landscape? And also something Lori mentioned about the passion and the why people come into this work and their deep convictions to really serve historically vulnerable communities in a way to combat systemic oppression and to think about what it means to liberate and to be a co-conspirator in this work. And so one way we do that is having them to just literally vision, what do they want to see manifest in their leadership, and do workshops around, like, visioning and how they vision leading that work in their schools. And that's like the first summer when we get with them and sharing how those visions come to fruition. We often talk about small is all. And I often think about the agency when folks start a role, sometimes feeling that, how much can I really impact this big systemic thing? And so we often reground to say, you have lots of agency. I think that's the beauty of being a school leader.

You get to really craft that with the people in your building, and there's so much agency around what it can mean to revision and to put those beautiful images of how they see the school to life. And so I just wanted to mention that sometimes those moments of hard things that come can be opportunities. And I see that happening right now in our spaces. And then there are opportunities where we sometimes have to play and we have to just say, we're going to be silly. We're going to try to get out of our really logical brain to kind of get into a space to be more open to different ideas or possibilities. And so it's having leader sometimes in our professional developments, create sculptures out of Play Doh and think about what could that mean when you think about what does it mean to do this leadership work, know, engage in some drawing to kind of vision what that could look like or a skit or role play as a way of thinking differently. And so I think a combination of those things to kind of get us into a place to insert ourselves in a future space or space that maybe for some of our leaders, especially when I talk about the work we really are committed to with our BIPOC leaders, is places to insert themselves that they've been absent, when they haven't been seen. And so I see this as opportunities to continue to think about agency and to slow down enough to be able to see that and then to engage in different ways, to kind of get to a space to try to imagine differently and to hold on to the possibility and ways of impacting something that they want to see into their future.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Well, I have so many more questions for both of you, but I have two co-hosts here whose imaginations are firing on all cylinders. I know that. Gillian, you want to come in on this?

**Gillian Judson:**

I absolutely would. Thank you so much, Lori and Christina. I'm also writing notes madly here. A while back in our conversation, after you're talking about moving, for example, from technical to transformational ways of leading, I wrote down, well, how do you create the context in your leadership that allows or enables sort of catalyzing imagination? And you've answered it already in talking about employing story and roleplay and "what if" conversations and play and creating things and drawing things and changing context. So I'm hearing all the very practical ways in which you are cultivating, but it does lead me to think a little bit more, or wonder if you could speak to a little bit more about the importance of a community of support to do the work of imagination? Because we've been told in some of our other work that not all leaders feel comfortable employing imagination. As I believe you said, Lori, it can feel scary to go right a different direction when we're all used to going left, or it can feel scary to dissent or rebel against a very common policy. And from what we're understanding, not all leaders feel they have that privilege to enact imagination. Typical leaders, maybe strong, powerful, white male leaders, which has been very typical. Maybe they do. But some of our female leaders that we've interviewed have commented that they don't always feel they have that privilege that they can be spoken down to for talking about feeling or emotion, et cetera. So the comment is, how important is it for you to lead with imagination? How do you think community and community support is in that work? Maybe we can start with Lori. I realize that was a massive question, but I just feel like it needs to be addressed.

**Lori Driussi:**

Thanks for the question. Yeah, it's really good. I mean, the obvious statement is a community of support is very important. Just the notion of community and relationship and reciprocity and feeling safe with a group to bounce ideas off of. And I ask myself all the time, am I creating that kind of environment as a leader? And then where are my people? Where are my supports as well? And I want to actually say thank you to you, Gillian, and also Dr. Annabella Kant, who was a parent in the community I worked in at one of my schools and actually brought it to my attention and showed me a path to maybe bringing that to my school and what that could be like. So I had the support of Dr. Kent, I had the support of the beloved Dr. Egan, and also, Gillian, all the beautiful work that you were doing and supports you were putting out through social media and books and so on. I didn't know you at the time, but that was super helpful. So I think we do need to create those communities of support. And I do know what it's like to talk about imagination and emotion. The notion of perinkers has been really helpful and I have had people look at me like, yeah, those are the soft skills. That sounds great. And I think because I have a sense of agency and that comes from a privileged place as well. Yes, I'm a woman, but I'm also a white woman with an education and means and all of the things, I felt pretty strong in saying, you know what? I believe in this. I'm going to give it a try. And so I just started doing something. That was the year I started with LiD– Learning in Depth– in our school. And I started, I presented it to the staff. I said, I'd like to give this a shot. They all kind of looked at me like, oh, I don't know, Lori. It's a first year in a new school. There's a lot going on. And I said, I completely understand. Would you give me two students from each of your classes once a week for an hour so that I can just try this out and it might work and it might not. So I think coming back to know technical to transformational, having a community of support, I had that with Dr. Kant. I had that with my staff who said, sure, go ahead. I had a couple other colleagues that were on board and thought that was a really interesting idea. And so the road is made by walking. I just got on the road and I started and I shared a lot, and I think that invited others into the conversation. And to see that, you know what? You can really take a risk here. You can try something new. Look, our school principal's doing that, and look what's happening. And I'm not even sure now, Gillian, if I answered your question, I just got so excited about thinking about LiD and the wonderful things that happened when we did that.

**Gillian Judson:**

Oh, thank you, Lori. No, for those who aren't familiar with LiD, Learning In-Depth was Kieran Egan, who initially thought of this approach to learning, would say, it's a crazy idea. Why would we ever do it? And so the fact that Lori said, let's do it, and let's do it the first year of our school opening, it was an exciting time for sure. If anyone's interested in the Learning in Depth Project, you can google that. It should easily come up. But it was a very unclear question, full of thoughts and ideas. But I absolutely love how you've addressed it there.

Christina, what are your thoughts on the need specifically of support? I think we need support in leadership all the time. There's a reason we need mentoring, but specifically to speak, use and enact imagination and to use that language. What are your thoughts on support in that way?

**Christina Velasco:**



Absolutely. Well, I think one of the things that we intentionally did was to create the program I support, which is really engaging these new leaders in a cohorted, nested, collective experience and to be able to support them, to be able to feel prepared to interrupt inequities and to transform their schools. And so in order to do that, they need to experience that. And so they do that on a monthly basis as a collective for two years. And in the work that I researched, thinking about what it meant to be, particularly many women of color in my research work, leading schools and trying to interrupt, and again imagine differently the ways of doing school leadership. We're so void of those spaces as educational leaders. And so when we created this equity centered professional learning community, it was an opportunity for us to really show up as our full, authentic selves and a lot of the ways of connecting, to build this resilient ecology, what I call *espacio sano*, in my work, the sane space was to honor our authentic selves and our humanity and to be able to show up wholeheartedly and to honor that as women leaders, we could use our brain and our heart and our emotions to express and affirm and validate each other, so that when we are in other spaces, we have just that strength to be emboldened, to do on and create differently, to engage in more courageous conversations, and to push a little more, right, the ways of working. And so I think the work I'm doing with just leading on a monthly basis there, the other work I'm involved in, and that I find it to be really important for us to consider as ways of thinking about ecologies of resiliency, is how we use racial affinity space. And so in our district for the last five years, we have held some space in our all admin institutes and then throughout the year, to have leaders of color be in a space to speak to what it means to lead and the identities that they carry. And we call in racial affinity because of what we know. We need safe and brave spaces to show up authentically and to speak our truth to things that we experience, so that we can again be reinvigorated, to engage in the work of equity and be able to share that with others. And so I've been co-leading that work with others. I hold Mi Gente group in San Francisco as a way of supporting other Latino, Latina, and Latinax scholars and educators in our system to have a safe and brave space, to be authentically themselves and to, I think, imagine a different space that they don't get to have it on a daily basis. And it's not necessarily a spa day for the brain, but it's definitely a sacred space that I think that we have come to really find deep meaning and connection with. And it is an ecology of resiliency that allows us to have that space that I spoke of earlier, to re-engage and to imagine how we can continue to do the work to better support ourselves and support others. I call it the idea or the concept of "the me to the we," or when I think about the self care as collective care, because we have to tend to ourselves so that we can go and do that for others, right? And so having spaces like this matter, and we need more of them, we need to continue to imagine more of these spaces in our system.

**Gillian Judson:**

Thank you both for taking on my question/comment/ramble. I appreciate it immensely. I know I feel the same way about needing some kind of safe space, brave space, something where we have connections to enable each other in this work. It's one of the reasons Meaghan and I are working to create some kind of collective with all of the people that have been part of this podcast, and we invite other listeners and leaders interested to be part of it as well. Meaghan, I think you have another question for our guest today.

**Meaghan Dougherty:**

Yeah, thank you. I think it kind of builds off of this discussion of the collective and the power of community. But I'm still reeling, I guess, from the early discussions and the connections that you made, both of you talking about taking a breath and taking a pause and breathing. And when you talked about that, I really felt like, I think what Lori said, the shift from the technical to the transformational, I feel like that pause allows for us to engage the affective or kind of create this more embodied experience. I'm hearing a lot about kind of these spaces and bringing in your authentic self. And I'm curious about how can we help others engage the affective or experience that embodied experience. I'm just thinking, I feel like the system is such that we're so limited in what we're even able to imagine. How can we move people beyond their own experience to really open that up and engage the effective and I guess make anything possible? Christina, can we start with you?

**Christina Velasco:**

Yeah. I was thinking about the work of John Heron, and his framework is something we use in our professional development, in the ways that we model our professional development, as well as expect our leaders to consider agenda designs for the spaces and the professional development they lead in their school. And it starts with the affective and thinking about, we always say, well, what's the connector? How are you allowing folks to just get in that space so that they can honor the full selves that they're bringing and honor their humanity? And some of that starts with intentional connector ways of story swapping, holding space in a dyad just to release in constructivist listening their emotions of what they might have just experienced, whether that be excitement or fear or just big emotions. Right? The opportunity to engage first with that affective is critical to honor them as the humans coming into a space. And I think the power of listening is so important to this work in order to break maybe the barriers of someone that might not be able yet to get there or to activate their imagination. Sometimes you're inspired by someone else's story, or you're motivated by it, or you're prompted by it, right? And so I think the intention of starting with the affective and then moving to this imaginal, sometimes, like I had mentioned earlier, whether that's an image, a quote, a poem, a song, that is going to inactivate a different way of engaging in a topic, whether it be we're going to be talking today about planning your community meetings for your school. And let's share this imaginal of... you're in the driver's seat and you're the principal of the school and you're driving and you have all these people as passengers, and there are different stakeholders in your community that are guiding you. And here's your plan that you're trying to build as you're trying to get to your destination of what you're trying to create as an outcome. And so things like that, right, where we can try to help everyone picture themselves in ways of learning through imaginings. And I think the biggest piece is I'm going to come back to saying time, because everyone always says we don't have enough time. We have an hour for this meeting. I'm like, it's such an invested way to continue to think about, again, one of the things that you all have shared with us is around engaging in the inner rebel and saying, you know what? We're going to give it this ten minutes because it's going to be an investment. We're going to break the rules of how we've always run this meeting to reimagine how we can engage differently as a team or as a community. And so it just takes boldness to be able to insert that as an important piece so that it can open up other spaces for folks to begin to do that. And the work, I think, of San Francisco Coalitions of Essential Schools

speaks to the three A's. This is work that sometimes we have to do alone. This is work that we do in affinity, and it's work that we also do across differences. And I think that in order to kind of create these ecologies, we need to do all three of those things. And a lot of times we're doing things across difference. And it's very rare that we have moments to kind of say, right now we're going to be very intentional about having some time for folks to speak to each other across an identity marker or to have opportunities for you to stop and pause and reflect and think and give you that time so that you can re-engage with us as a group. So, yeah, I believe deeply in the power of what it means to honor the humanity of people coming into spaces and to hold that as a starting point for connection.

**Meaghan Dougherty:**

That's lovely. Thank you so much. Lori. Tools you use for kind of creating, engaging the affective and expanding what may be possible.

**Lori Driussi:**

Christina, I just want to say thank you for that response. I am just kind of steeping myself in the ideas you shared around time. And I think about how relational the work is that we do. Learning and leading is a relational endeavor, and creating time and safe space for people to dig into their own feelings, emotions, ideas, stories. I think that time is so valuable for all the reasons you talked about and examples you gave. And I also think when we do that, when we engage the emotion, those things percolate over time. And so what we thought our to do list, what was on our to do list, and what was so necessary sometimes in these meetings, and that takes over our time and headspace. Engaging that emotion, I think, means that the things on the to do list actually get thought about longer, later, and then we get to come back to them in a way that's really practical when we need to be practical.

The question about the tools I use, I think I really focus on the "what if-ing," for sure, and the storytelling. I think when we bring our own stories and we allow others to share their stories, and we bring stories from other contexts into our conversations as points to think about and imagine about, I think the affect is automatically awakened. And I think it's when we awaken the possibility through our storytelling that we do see our humanity. And in seeing each other's humanity, the relational part comes to the fore. And I think that's when we can really move forward in imaginative ways. We open ourselves to considering new ways of thinking and doing and being. I ask myself and my groups often, what is the story here? What is underneath? What's happening right now? What does it feel like? What would it feel like if we did it this way? What would it feel like if we looked at it another way? I think those are the two tools I use the most, the "what if-ing" and the storytelling.

**Meaghan Dougherty:**

Thank you so much. And for the reminder of the relationality that we're always entangled with our leading and learning. Both of you talking about this time and space, it reminds me of this push towards slow ontologies and kind of getting out of that productivity cycle and this concept of rest as resistance. So I really am taking away a lot from your ideas about pausing and intentionality and coming back to. So thank you for that. I will turn it back over to Stephen.

**Stephen Hurley:**

I love that idea of rest as resistance, something I'm trying to nurture in my own family, but very difficult. I wanted to turn the conversation to this topic of social and ecological justice, which is kind of the grounding idea for this podcast. And I wanted to ask both Lori and Christina about what you think of, what you mean when you talk about social and ecological justice and how, and I'm not supposed to ask two questions. The rules of podcasting don't ask two questions. I'm going to ask a second question here. How can what we've been talking about, about nurturing imagination be brought into that conversation about social and ecological justice? Christina, I wondered if we might begin with you.

**Christina Velasco:**

Sure. When I think about social justice, I think about the work that we try to do in evoking anti-racist leaders and social justice leadership in our district. And it starts with that equity vision. So when we think about imaginings and thinking about cultivating imagination, what does it mean to... like, and I said we start our program in the summer thinking about what is your equity vision? And it requires leaders to systematically and iteratively enact and sustain that vision. And so it is about these cycles of pausing and to have practice to think about— Like before I take some more action, I need to slow down and see how is this impacting? What do I need to finesse? So I think about that. I think about Furman's definition, right, that social justice leadership involves identifying and undoing oppressive and unjust practices and really replacing them with more equitable and culturally appropriate ones. And it's in that replacing them that I would say we have to continue to cultivate imagination with our leaders and with our educators and with just, I think, everyone in our society of thinking about what can be. And our schools mirror our larger society. And I think about the ecological justice of what it means to recognize that we're all interconnected and what I might do, and this little preschool on this side of the city is going to impact what's going to happen across town at that high school at some point. And I think there is the power in our work. I think collectively in this podcast, I hope for those of you listening, that there's an opportunity for us to see how our interconnectedness can either rejuvenate and be places where we can regenerate, or it can be something that can cause harm and it can radiate harm. So I think the opportunity for us to think about what does it mean for us to hold awareness and to think about this bigger piece of interconnectedness as a way of thinking about social justice and ecological justice in the work of keeping us healthy and again, creating some sane espacio sanos so that we can provide again, spaces to attend to that individual and collective ways of attending to ourselves and to the ways that we want to see things happen for us and others is critical.

**Stephen Hurley:**

And, Lori, you may want to pick up on a couple of those threads or weave in a couple of your own.

**Lori Driussi:**

Yes. Thank you. Yes. This notion of relationship and how we are all connected, everything we do is connected. I really believe that we can move from performative to transformative when we

focus on the fact that we are all connected and that what we do, like Christina said, what we do over here really is going to matter in other places, too. Practically speaking, I just want to pick up a practical thread a little bit. We talk about equity and serving all learners and creating safe spaces for everyone, and it's a monumental task in schools. It's an important thing for us to work toward. I think we have a long way to go. Christina said something about humanizing, and I really believe we need to humanize some of our policies and practices as a way to get to that transformational space and open up or create an equity vision and then actually ask ourselves if that's the vision, what does that look like? And not just for me, not just from my perspective, but from the perspective of all the people who are in the room or not in the room, what do those behaviors look like? What would we do? How would we set up a space? And I think, you know, like my example would be, our district was one of the first in the province to set up a SOG policy, so everyone is welcome. You can't discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity. And I think that's a great policy, and those are words on paper. And it was a brave policy at the time. It met a lot of resistance. For me in my early career it suddenly gave me a sense of job security, but it didn't quell any of the discomfort I felt when colleagues or parents or students questioned my character because I was in a same sex partnership. It didn't quell my discomfort when people just didn't ask about my family because they weren't sure, maybe, about how to ask about my wife as opposed to asking about a husband. So I think when we say all are welcome, what explicitly and tangibly are we doing to show that welcome? And I think that requires imagination. We need to imagine what it's like for others. And the notion of just making some small moves to have big impact, I think is a really important way of considering how we can take a first step in that imaginative journey to turn something we imagine into something that's real for people.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Well, speaking of real, Lori, I have a final real question for both you and Christina. And maybe in 30 seconds. I know that's a challenge, but 30 seconds. What gives you hope in this work? Imagination itself is a positive word in most cases, but it's not always easy to do this work. So what gives you hope?

**Lori Driussi:**

Well, the shining eyes of every student I work with pre-K through adulthood, that's what gives me hope. The connections and imaginative natures of the students and colleagues I work with give me hope. That we have made great strides in our systems and in our policies and in our structures and our ways of thinking about education. That we are having this conversation is hopeful. And I think as long as we keep our attention on our interconnectedness, the relationality of the work that we do in educational spaces, that is always going to be hopeful. And I'm really grounded in the belief that we are always in a state of becoming. There is always possibility. It's not always easy, but in our relationships with the human and more-than-human world, we are ever changing, ever evolving, and the path is open. We can keep walking.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Christina, final word to you on hope.

**Christina Velasco:**

Oh, I love the image, Lori, of the hope in a child's eyes. And I think of that as I think about the hope that I see in leaders as they think about the possibilities that they can make impact and the ways that they do change lives. And I'm hopeful that I experienced someone that believed in me in thinking about how do you merge these ways of studying self care in educational leadership as a possibility for dissertation? That there's ways that people can think creatively and reimagine ways of working. And I feel inspired and hopeful that the educators that we have in our system and those that are getting ready to be in this work, that we have opportunities to create differently. Imagine. And I am very hopeful that people are seeing across this beautiful globe ways that we can deeply care for one another, even if we don't see each other. So I end the call with thinking about all of you that I have yet to meet and the ways that by just listening and by just hearing these stories, we can feel a sense of connection and endless possibility.

**Stephen Hurley:**

Well, Lori and Christina, Meaghan and Gillian, thank you all for this conversation. I'm inspired.