

Cultivating Imagination: Leading Towards a Just Future
Transcript for Episode 11

Leadership Re-imagined:
Fostering Emotional Connections and Justice Through Imagination

Stephen Hurley:

So here we are with a final episode in the *Cultivating Imagination* podcast series. I'm Stephen Hurley along with my two guides for this wonderful journey: Gillian Judson, Meaghan Dougherty. And Meaghan and Gillian, I have my party hat on. I've got a streamer hanging from my microphone. All in celebration of a wonderful ten, well, actually more than ten episodes in this series. Gillian, how are you feeling now that we've come to the end of this part of the conversation?

Gillian Judson:

I'm feeling good. It's been a project that just surpassed my expectations. I've got so many topics, themes, threads, feelings I want to follow up on, and it's just been such an honor and honestly a treat to get to sit with these amazing leaders and talk to them about these issues. So I'm thrilled.

Stephen Hurley:

Meaghan, how are you feeling?

Meaghan Dougherty:

I think I would echo what Gillian said. I'm just feeling really inspired, I would say is probably the best way. So many meaningful ideas, so many people who are doing amazing work and are committed to continuing to push that fight for eco and social justice. And I just feel like there's a lot of hope and momentum in the conversations that we're having, and I'm hoping that we can continue with that today.

Stephen Hurley:

I'm so glad that you decided to invite two people per episode as opposed to just one. I think the dynamic that was created and the energy that flowed back and forth in those conversations was something that I haven't experienced in a long time. So if you're doing another series, I would recommend carrying on with that same format.

Gillian Judson:

I totally agree. I think that dialogue was so generative and the folks that came together didn't yet know each other, and there was so many almost these resonances that create spaces for new learning and new talking. So it was really helpful doing it in that format.

Stephen Hurley:

I wanted to begin with a question that we often hear people ending a podcast with, and that is the question of "So what?" So we've heard all of this stuff. Why does this matter? And I thought

that would be a good starting point for our discussion today as we kind of look back on the past ten episodes. Gillian, why does this matter? Why is this important for our listeners? Why do you think this is going to resonate?

Gillian Judson:

I love starting with “So what?” Because if anybody is happening to join now and listen to this episode and want to be convinced that you should listen to the others, other eleven, I would encourage you to do so. It’s troubling to me, and this is one of the reasons we did this project in the first place, how misunderstood imagination is in many aspects of society specifically, and the focus we have is in leadership. And so there’s this misunderstanding around the real necessity of imagination to do imaginative work, but no, to do leadership work. But specifically, I think it’s because we’re living in a time where there’s really dominant narratives about how the world should be, how leadership should work. We have dominant, as I think Sandeep Kaur Glover said in hers, we have this capital “I” imagination, and it takes imagination to move out and think of other ways of doing things which is desperately needed in a time of injustice, social injustice, ecological injustice. And the thing is, we’re limited by our experiences. So we have these visions about school, and they are also limited. We need imagination to unlearn things that are unjust and envision what is not yet and move into those spaces. So for anybody who’s looking deeply at imagination, we’re seeing it isn’t optional. The “so what” is very, very significant in this case. Meaghan, what do you think?

Meaghan Dougherty:

I agree with everything you’re saying, and I think part of the “so what” for me is also recognizing that leadership work is so complex, and I think people may be doing the best that they can with the tools that they have within their teams and feeling like they’re putting in a lot of energy and effort to try to make things work and to try to pursue more just and equitable outcomes for their students and for their communities, but feeling like they’re kind of alone on an island doing that. And I think part of the “so what” for me is recognizing that there are a lot of people trying to do this work and doing this work well in different ways, coming at it from different angles. And there might be a lot of power and momentum in recognizing that imagination is happening, and it’s a key, integral part of so many people’s work in different roles. And for me, the “so what” then is how can we kind of capture that power in a way that helps everybody who’s kind of doing this work in a dispersed way.

Stephen Hurley:

And when you think of the, you know, the way that imagination is framed in many circles, it’s something almost sidelined. It’s okay if we get to that. That part, we can do the imagination stuff, and it’s almost synonymous, becomes synonymous with that idea of creativity. But what I heard from many of these episodes is that this act of imagination and intentional imagining is transformational. It’s not just creative, fun stuff. It is deeply transformational. And I found that to be very, very powerful. So what if I were bringing something forward? The reason you need to listen to that, if it’s not just about changing education or changing leadership, transformation is much deeper than that, goes much deeper.

Meaghan Dougherty:

I think that was something that really resonated from the speakers, was the idea that they're not necessarily enacting imagination in an intentional way, where we see people playing around with it or trying it on, where they're like, okay, yeah, we'll do some imaginative stuff, but then we got to get back to the real work, right? That transformation that you're talking about, Steven, is like, that's their authentic way of being, of seeing things, of approaching their interactions, of building their relationships, of envisioning, of making decisions, of conflict resolution. It's that transformation from kind of doing imaginative work to that being your being, the way that you approach kind of all aspects of your leadership.

Gillian Judson:

Absolutely echoing that, and being at the heart of your very being. And if you consider for a second that we need to lead into times that we just simply don't know yet, there's nothing more that humans have than imagination to move into that space of the unknown. As Pendleton-Jullian and Brown speak about in their writing and even in their podcast, it's the gap between what we know and what we don't know. And if we're seeking not to just tinker with a system that's unjust or tinker with a worldview and a way of living that's causing vast ecological crises, then we actually need to move into a space that literally doesn't make sense for us because it isn't what we know and it isn't what we know how to do. And so what does that mean? It doesn't just mean superficial visioning at a large macro level, although that is one part of it. It means community based conversations in which we're actually co-creating and co-growing spaces where we can think about a space that doesn't even exist yet. I just don't know how you do that work without imagination.

Stephen Hurley:

Gillian, part of this work, and part of the "so what" is getting people to feel that they can do this, giving them a sense of agency, I think, so that when they listen to an episode, they might look at their own context and say, hey, that's a small thing I could be doing here. How do you get people to move from that macro sense of changing the world to maybe just changing what happens in this building today?

Gillian Judson:

That is such a good question. And it's just part of the baggage that hangs around the term imagination. And I've done a lot of writing and thinking about this with Meaghan in the context of leadership as well, about how those misunderstandings about imagination and the limited time that comes to investing in imagination because we consider it to be optional and because we consider it to be the work of children. Fantasy untethered from reality. All these misunderstandings, a small fraction, Stephen, of what imagination is and does has been used to define the entire capacity, which is the great problem. And so one of the things we need to do then, to tap into that agency, is better understand how imagination helps us live our lives in the innovative ways that we do. We live in contexts that are constantly changing. We adapt, we modify, we improvise. Imagination is constantly at work in our improvisational lives, as Stephen Asma would say. And so slowing down, being willing to crack open these dominant misconceptions about what imagination is and thinking about it as adults, we can readily

recognize how we are imaginative and undoing this belief. That is, imagination is the capacity of a few people or a few greats, or you are not born with imagination. All human beings have imagination, and it is something we can cultivate. It is educatable. And so that was definitely a theme in here, and we'll talk a little bit later on about. So if it is all the things you say, it is educatable, accessible, doable, then what are the tools for that? So that's my long winded answer. Addressing misconception and then actually doing the work using tools.

Stephen Hurley:

So, Meaghan, you and Gillian have been working at this for a long time. And when you become an expert, or at least you develop a certain level of expertise, you may be surprised that you pick up new knowledge listening to other people talk. I want to ask what about what you already know was kind of reaffirmed or solidified in terms of what you've been thinking about over these many years? That's a big question. I know.

Meaghan Dougherty:

That's a great question. And I think because our focus is really on justice, on the pursuit of justice, on fighting for justice, one thing that stood out for me across the speakers and was something that Gillian and I have been exploring as well in other contexts, is the idea of imagination as a privilege and recognizing that there needs to be some level of safety inherent for people to be able to imagine, to be able to really think beyond their immediate circumstances, beyond their immediate survival needs. So that's something we've been kind of exploring in other contexts as well. And it's interesting to hear that coming from a number of different people in different roles, in different contexts about the need to create that safety for people. So there is capacity for people to imagine. There is the ability for them to stop and pause. We heard a lot about pausing and taking a breath and being able to approach kind of these novel situations or new encounters with that imaginative lens. And we also recognize that it's not going to be received the same way by everybody. So we've talked in other contexts about when people are condescending about the use of imagination. So we've recognized with some of our research currently that people are kind of dismissing people's use of imagination depending on who they are, right? So we need to kind of build that agency, build that strength and connection and ability to imagine in a safe space where it's not going to be dismissed or laughed away or seen as, you know, because you're young, because you're new to the field, because you're female, because you're this, because you're that you're going to be doing these kinds of things. It's recognizing that it's an integral skill capacity, and an essential aspect of all of our leadership roles.

Gillian Judson:

We were reaffirmed in our understanding of the role of imagination in humanizing relational leadership, in empathy, in understanding who we're working with, in informing legitimate, authentic relationships rather than sort of relationships formed for the purpose of achieving a specific goal. But if you're seeking to understand the stories of the people you serve and the stories of those people in your educational communities, then you're storytelling and you're story listening and you're appreciating other people's perspectives within a space that it's only imagination that offers that space of taking on or meeting someone in a space of shared

experience. So we really heard that it's vital for the work. We might call it empathy. Without imagination, there is no empathy. As Maxine Green has said, however, in the stories of these leaders, they rely on imagination and storytelling and story listening and co-creating shared stories to connect, join, and work with others. So that was a positive thing. The only other thing I might bring up is a little bit of warning that, speaking of imagination may sound positive, but it's often a shared and deeply entrenched imagination of how schools are and how things work that is exactly what we have to surpass, because the system we have now is the result of a particular kind of imagination. So it's how can imagination actually break through, put cracks into, help unlearn some of the dominant ideas of ways of being, schooling, so that all students flourish and that both the human and the more-than-human worlds thrive as well.

Stephen Hurley:

Can you give us an example of how maybe imagination can be used to maintain or even further solidify that status quo?

Gillian Judson:

Well, this goes back to our safety net, really. I mean, if you're envisioning what could be possible for a school or district, and you're just reaffirming the practices and the processes that are currently in place, even though, well, they don't support all learners, but they are the, you know, they're the way we do things here. And you envision how you might do those in a way that might seem superficially different, but underlying that you're not actually addressing the process or the policy that doesn't actually work for all students. That would be an example of reimagining, having mental imagery around the same thing again, versus say "what if-ing" and challenging and rebelling against the way we've always done it kind of language. And there's been, I know in Sean Blenkinsop's session, he talked about the need for dissonating, the need for challenging the status quo. And in other work he's done, he talks about the rebel teacher in really changing the system from the ground up. And so there's different ways we could safely repeat what's going on in a school, but we could also use tools of imagination, such as the sense of rebellion, such as challenging the status quo, such as looking for rhythms and patterns within a system that don't work for everyone. We can use those tools to unlearn and maybe create a space for something different.

Stephen Hurley:

So I'm thinking of some schools here in Ontario who decided to delay the start of the school day for adolescents, for teenagers. So they're going to move the bells. They're going to, instead of starting at 8:00 they're going to start at 9:30, but kids would have to stay until 5:30. Let's say it sounded imaginative, but they're still holding kids to this idea of seat time is the important thing. Would that be an example of what you're talking about?

Gillian Judson:

I think that's interesting. We're still, we're just tinkering. Remember the book, Tyack, I think, was *Tinkering toward Utopia* in educational change. So I see that as a larger conversation. But I also think that those small changes can suddenly shift things so that they lead to bigger changes. We know from COVID it sometimes takes a virus, it takes an emergency, a crisis to make those

changes, but then people are suddenly able to see how the thing that was never possible is possible.

Stephen Hurley:

Meaghan, you wanted to weigh in on that.

Meaghan Dougherty:

Yeah, I think that a number of speakers did a really nice job of talking about the ways that imagination could be problematic. So not just seeing imagination as this kind of silver bullet and this amazing way of freeing ourselves from the oppressive systems that we're living within, but recognizing that it is also, like Gillian's saying, part of those systems. Its potential has created those systems. I think Michael Datura and Rob Hopkins both talked about that. And Sandeep did a lovely job with her kind of distinction between that large "I" imagination, which is really for me, and this is not using her words, but for me, that is what Gillian's talking about with the tinkering, right. We're going to be imaginative within the same systems that currently exist. We're going to create some flexibility or change within the same oppressive systems and moving from that into the small "i" imagination, where they're "what if-ing" beyond the limits of those systems, seeking to push beyond those existing understandings of what should be. And I don't think with that distinction that necessarily means that you're going to be doing something that, you know, just completely transforms the entire system. Most of the speakers talked a lot about, like, micropolitics. How did they enact meaningful change? How do they enact imaginative processes within their own context? How do they do small "i" imagination, in Sandeep's words, in ways that really has impact for their school, for their students, for their communities. So there's still that possibility to be very imaginative beyond the structures of the system in that small kind of system of influence or that context of influence. I think it was Myra who said it, but someone said, small is all. And I think that's something that sticks with me as well. It's these small acts of true imagination pushing beyond the oppressive elements of the system that can create that kind of tidal wave of change for people.

Stephen Hurley:

Gillian, that sparked something in your imagination.

Gillian Judson:

It definitely did. And I think that all of these leaders, whether they came out and said, we met, we model this, we show this in the way we engage with our communities. But they do. They're asking the "what if" questions. They're challenging the status quo, living and leading in ways that show that they are constantly sort of tipping into the what is possible, what is best for our community, and what is possible in that work. And they model it for the people they're leading.

Stephen Hurley:

Gillian, at what point— and maybe this is the role of imagination— at what point is it necessary to see that what we're bumping up against are actually flexible boundaries, and they're not carved in stone, they're not as solid as we might think?

Gillian Judson:

It's a good question. I think it all depends on the context. Imagination can be very clearly thwarted in environments that don't allow risk taking, that penalize failure, that penalize initiatives that don't initially work out as planned. And then there's another context where the environment supports trying things in new ways. And therefore, one might find you do something a different way. There's benefits to it, there's challenges to it, but that isn't a fail. That is a new way of thinking. It's a movement in the right direction. But all of this to say that when we're doing this work as leaders, we require a community of people around us that appreciate imagination and acknowledge its role as much as we do. So we're not chastised for trying things that are not yet known or different, and therefore seem strange and unacceptable and impossible. But we're surrounded by people that realize our intention for using imagination, our intention for talking about it, our intention for pushing up against what is typically done. And so that support in community is super important not only to help us as leaders, but as many talked about, it's through the collective conversation that the new ideas that can break away from a dominant story come up.

Stephen Hurley:

And we're going to have a chance in a few minutes to talk about some of the new ideas that emerged from this particular series. I wanted to go to something that I know is near and dear to both of your hearts, and that's the tools of imagination, those cognitive tools that your work is steeped in. Let's talk about what we heard in terms of those concrete tools that people either implicitly or explicitly talked about. Gillian, did you want to start us off?

Gillian Judson:

It is something, it was at the heart of this work. And our goal is to not only address misunderstandings about imagination, but then bring it down to earth. And we've spoken in other places how we'd like people to think. Not about imagination as in the clouds and glitter and unicorns. But it's the soil and the soil of imagination out of which all creativity and innovations grow, can be cultivated. And so Kieran Egan's work on imaginative education, he articulated, based on many years of investigating the nature of human beings' imaginative lives, the different tools we use to emotionally and imaginatively connect with our communities and the world around us. And these are tools of language, tools like story and images and rhythms and patterns and heroic qualities. And his work for many years, all of his career, related to teaching and pedagogy. And how do you use those tools to make anything you're teaching more like a good, engaging story, not fiction, but an emotionally shaped way of teaching a topic. So what we've been doing is saying, well, these aren't just tools for teachers. These are tools that are creations of cultures that are used all the time, far beyond the walls of a classroom. And so then how is it that leaders use story specifically? How is it that they identify trends and patterns to notice changes? How is it that they use metaphors or change context or evoke vivid mental imagery? These are tools that help us move from what is to a different space. Meaghan, did you want to say more about that?

Meaghan Dougherty:

When you're talking, it just kind of resonates for me about the conversation about imagination having either positive or potentially negative outcomes as well. I feel kind of the same way about cognitive tools. And part of that, I think, is when we're talking about using these cognitive tools, it really is like Gillian saying, creating that affective connection to the content, to the process, to the discussion, to the engagement. So we have some sort of emotional connection in that encounter which we don't, I mean, honestly, normally talk about when we're talking about leadership, right? That will, we want to have these emotional connections with one another. But to do that in a meaningful way, in a way that's not just performative or putting the tools to work for your own benefit, you do need to come as your authentic self. There is this element of knowing oneself and being reflective and being open and vulnerable to the ideas of other people to really establish that effective connection. So I think of this in the same kind of ways. Like, we've had leaders in the past ask us like, oh, how can I use XYZ cognitive tool to get my team on board with this policy? Or how can I use this cognitive tool to, you know, motivate people to do this? And we're kind of like, well, we understand what you're saying in that, but really it's about how do you bring yourself into that encounter in an authentic and meaningful way that allows for that affective connection. So the cognitive tool is one way of doing that, but you need to come kind of, you know, from a good place in terms of enacting those tools for them to really realize their potential.

Stephen Hurley:

I think, you know, it's really interesting you say that. As I was listening to Victor and Jade's episode, again, a thought came to mind. And I know because I write these little thought bubbles in my notes, and it reminded me of, there was a Roman Catholic bishop who became a cardinal, John Henry Newman. And his motto that he chose, he had to choose a motto for his cardinalship was *cor ad cor loquitur*, which is Latin for "heart speaks to heart". And as you're talking, Meaghan, I'm thinking that that is, if I could, if I could substitute imagination for heart and imagination speaking to imagination. I may be wrong on this, but it seems to me that the act of framing stories and embodying those stories and using metaphor is itself an act of imagination. But it speaks to a part of me that wouldn't be spoken to otherwise. So it's almost imagination speaking to imagination.

Gillian Judson:

I would agree. I mean, this is kind of going to the perfinder notion, the idea that we never just think. We perceive and we feel and we think at the same time. And that was a term initially used by David Kress, an educational psychologist in the U.S. So what does it mean to lead as a perfinder for perfinders, when we are always feeling in these interactions? And so in education, lesson planning, unit planning, unfortunately, we don't always go into thinking about how we want to create a space for learning for students with "what's the emotional connection entering it?" As Kieran Egan would say, with affective alertness. Oftentimes we have our objective-driven approaches and we work our way back very logically from there to decide how we should break the topic down to teach students. And we all know that this is all based on a method of building refrigerators, steel goods, effectively. However, last time I checked, children are not refrigerators. The people we're leading in our communities are not refrigerators. So how does

heart speak to heart? How does imagination speak to imagination? It's through these tools, for sure.

Stephen Hurley:

I'm wondering, and Meaghan, you were just talking about the fact that people may come to you and say, well, how do I build a story to sell this initiative or to get people on board with this? If it's not that type of training and development for leaders, what is it? Is it more of an immersion in the tools or the use of the tools? How do you cultivate this in leaders?

Meaghan Dougherty:

I think that's a great question. And I love that idea of heart to heart speaking from heart to heart, or listening from heart to heart as well. Just in relation to that, I feel like that's something that really, truly allows for our "what if-ing" to open up. Because like Gillian was saying earlier, we're only able to imagine within kind of our own understanding. It's really through having those heartfelt connections, those empathic connections with other people, through that storytelling, story-listening, that we're able to see things from different perspectives and open up really what's possible in relation to that. So I think that that motto is lovely, and I really like that idea. In relation to cultivating that kind of process for leaders, I really do feel like it needs to start from within, from a reflective process of identifying. And Gillian mentioned earlier, this idea of unlearning. And I think that's usually a good place to start with any learning. When we're talking about things like decolonization or equity or justice, we need to unlearn some of those dominant narratives or these dominant ideas about leadership. So for me, I think if listening to this, I was a leader thinking, well, I do want to start practicing using these cognitive tools. I do want to try to enact imagination more in my leadership. I would look at the process of unlearning kind of those dominant ideas about what you think leadership is. Vidya Shah, who was one of the earlier podcasts— amazing— has a podcast series herself about unlearning. So the same kind of idea about unique kind of disrupting and reimagining what leadership looks like. And I think that reflective process of unlearning what we're expecting of ourselves is a really key process, and we're doing some work with that as well in educational leadership, seeing how students involved in educational leadership programs actually go through that process of unlearning what they think leadership is and how we can most effectively facilitate that unlearning.

Stephen Hurley:

Meaghan, do we need to bring in the idea of vulnerability in this? If you're talking about heartfelt and empathy and those affective domains, is vulnerability an inevitable. I don't know if it's a prerequisite or whether it comes along the way.

Meaghan Dougherty:

I think, like Gillian had said earlier, you have to be in a safe space where you're willing to put your authentic self forward and you're willing to make mistakes, and you're willing to honestly and openly listen to other people's experience, and you're willing to collaborate in true ways. And I think that definitely requires an element of vulnerability. And I think that's kind of one of the shifts that we see most prevalently when we're talking to students about their ideas of leadership over their education. They seem to kind of reconceptualize leadership from someone

who knows everything, who's able to facilitate all of these processes, who's able to do these things to someone who's willing to be in that space of not knowing, who's willing to ask questions, who's willing to bring in people from other areas to really substantiate their own understanding. And so it's a kind of distinct shift in terms of what leadership looks like, where we're not looking at that kind of dominant, authoritative leader, but looking at someone who's willing to be vulnerable and has the strength to do that in meaningful ways, that open up possibility for their educational ecosystems.

Gillian Judson:

If you haven't picked up already, Meaghan and I are definitely people who think about leadership relationally, and that it's less about the leader and more about the shared spaces between leaders and followers and community members where leadership emerges. And so within that relational space of leadership, we have a very different take on imagination. And so you might come to this podcast series thinking, okay, I need to be that leader, that charismatic, transformational leader who uses imagination as just sort of a shining star. And it's not that individual leaders can't and don't need to have a connection to their own imagination and understand how to engage that of others. But the real magic happens in those shared spaces of imagination where leaders do not have the shining response and answer. And so creating— I think it was Myra and Moraima who spoke about those brave spaces living— creating those brave spaces as leaders, where we're not saying it's this charismatic leader saving the day, but using imagination together in a community is the most powerful way to move forward.

Stephen Hurley:

Yeah. And that also came out in Victor and Jade's talk about that collective imagination and using, again, that imagination and those processes in community development, which is something that surprised me a little. What surprised me that I was surprised by it, but I always— I tend to think of imagination as something that's in me, and it's like a personal thing and not a collective thing.

Gillian Judson:

In that same vein, it's a very Western, Eurocentric thing to think about imagination as that human possession, the capacity to imagine. And it's definitely one we're speaking about it in the context of the human world. But Haudenosaunee scholarship, Jo Sheridan and Longboat, I'm sorry, I don't have the full reference, speak about imagination as actually a capacity of the earth itself, a way of drawing in and connecting. So there's so much more we can learn about this. And I know, to be totally honest, when I began studying imagination in the context of pedagogy, and then, I don't know how many years ago now, a long time ago, I started thinking about leadership. I thought, you know, where does imagination fit in? It must fit in, in this notion of the charismatic leader, right? But that's not my— It doesn't align with my beliefs about where true, impactful, transformational leadership occurs. And now I see imagination as actually a shared capacity when it's going to be most powerful.

Meaghan Dougherty:

Yeah, I think that idea of imagination as an asset or a characteristic or a skill that someone individually holds within them also kind of creates an easy dismissal, oh, I'm not that imaginative, or I'm not that person. Right. We'll leave that for people who are more imaginative. It really, it's just another example of trait-centered leadership theories. And when we're talking about leadership generally, relational leadership, we're not talking necessarily about specific roles in educational institutions or in the community. We're talking about those people who, through their connections with others, are able to lead new processes or come up with new ideas. And it doesn't have to be specific people and specific roles in those contexts. So that idea of it relationally emerging is very important to us, and that kind of fits with that idea of needing to be authentic. When you're talking about, you know, something that's coming out of relationship, you need to be bringing your authentic self into that relational encounter for those possibilities to emerge.

Stephen Hurley:

I wanted to move to some of the new ideas that emerge for you as imagination scholars and practitioners, and some new ideas that folks coming to the series might, might find themselves encountering.

Gillian Judson:

Sure, this is a theme that Meaghan's alluded to already, and not even alluded– has discussed, is that need to look within. And so I think this was a theme across the podcast, but centrally brought out in the work of Sandeep Kaur Glover, is that there's an embodied aspect of imagination. So we have to look within and find within some of the answers to the questions we're seeking. And I think that that's part of the challenge. We've already discussed how imagination tends to be marginalized. It's largely misunderstood. Well, in our society, we don't seem to have time or space to slow down and think and connect with the body. It's one of those things that isn't valued in a neoliberal society. But it's something we need to do as leaders, is to look within and to move from an embodied experience. Because when we talk about imagination, we are talking about always an emotional response, some affective piece. It's undeniable. And so that was very strong for me, is that when we're talking about imagination, we are also talking about embodiment.

Stephen Hurley:

Yeah. And I could almost feel– we couldn't see Sandeep, but I think she was dancing throughout the whole podcast. And I'm wondering, you have me wondering: imaginative responses, but also embodied provocations. I'm thinking it works at both ends of the spectrum.

Gillian Judson:

Absolutely. Absolutely. She spoke about needing to move her body before she can respond or engage. And so it's a fascinating dimension that I look forward to learning more about.

Stephen Hurley:

And Meaghan, what new ideas emerge for you?

Meaghan Dougherty:

I think one of the big pieces for me was around— going back to this idea of collective imagination— is the need for community, for support, for ideas, for encouragement. So we talked a lot about collective imagination in various contexts with different episode guests. And I think that's something that's really kind of sparked an interest in Gillian and I and figuring out how can we kind of help promote or facilitate this collective imagination in a way that helps people continue to fight for justice within their own spheres of influence. And how can we support one another in doing that. I don't like to rely on the Star Wars references, but I feel like this is an apt use of it in this case, where we have little areas of rebellion popping up across the galaxy, and we need someone to bring them together in a meaningful, coordinated collective.

Stephen Hurley:

Oh, yeah. Well, there you go. Heroics right there, Gillian.

Gillian Judson:

Well, what she said, of course, that was fabulous. But I think that that's part of how we wanted to close our podcast, which is the “now what”? We start with “so what?” And “now what?” And one of the things we want to do, building on these ideas, is bring together any leader of any capacity in education specifically, that wants to talk about how can we support each other in cultivating imagination for social and ecological justice. What do we need to do, and what can we do to support these little pockets of rebellion to come together and to really push the boundaries of what we do and say in leadership. So for me, the dream is that imagination is no longer something that causes people to roll their eyes. Or if there's a book study on imagination and leadership, it's not just a few folks that sign up, but many because they see it as a requirement. That's the goal. And so inviting folks together. We have a culminating event for our podcast happening on July 10 of this year, 2024. So if you happen to be listening to this, go to our project website and find out more about it. We invite all leaders who'd like to be part of this conversation. It's a virtual roundtable to sign up. So again, July 10 at 10:00 a.m. Pacific Standard Time. Please save the date. So that's one. Now, what action is coming together? Meaghan? What's another one?

Meaghan Dougherty:

I think it's related to yours, but just pulling on that idea of longing, I think it was Andy Hargraves who brought up that concept. And as a collective, through this roundtable, as kind of a starting place, we're hoping to really imagine what might be, what might be possible, envision something that we can have longing for, and then fight for that together in a kind of organized and connected way. So we're hoping through that engagement, the roundtable will involve, you know, discussions with people in various contexts and various areas throughout the world, creating some sense of where we want to go. What is this going to look like? Like, and how might we help support one another to continue to fight for that in meaningful ways?

Stephen Hurley:

Meaghan, I'm so glad you brought up that longing. And I know that Rob talked about it in his podcast as well. Rob Hopkins. And it struck me then, and it strikes me now, we talk about sort of that angst and that hand wringing and that sense of the end coming with our, our climate change conversations, but that basic human longing for something different, something better. And to me, longing entails a confidence that it's there, that it's attainable somehow. And so I'm glad you brought that up. Gillian, I saw your mic unmuted, so I knew you were going to want to—

Gillian Judson:

Yes. It's not about fear, because I think it's quite easy, don't get me wrong, to feel anxious about the state of the world and really disturbed by the educational system and how it really isn't supporting all learners. But this work, as far as I can tell, is really, really about hope. And it's about leveraging the goodness that is in humanity and letting that goodness and letting that vision for a just world. And I don't. I don't want to live in a world where my relationships are sustainable. So similarly with the natural world, with the more than human, I don't want a sustainable relationship. I want a thriving and flourishing one. So how do we move into that space? And I think it excites me. It doesn't depress me. It excites me. So what happens now is let's connect with others who feel that hope, who are willing to agitate, who are willing to dissonate and sort of practice courage, as George Theoharis said, practice courage as we disrupt what is. Those are clear next steps.

Stephen Hurley:

Meaghan, are you going to take us home with some words of hope?

Meaghan Dougherty:

I don't know about hope, but you're right. It was Rob Hopkins. I'm sorry about the idea about longing. And he mentioned the idea of longing from *The Little Prince*. And there's a quote from that book that says, if you want to build a ship, don't drum people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work. Teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea. And I think that's our hope. With the roundtable and bringing together a collective of leaders and scholars and educators who want to enact imagination towards just outcomes, we want people to be able to long for this new envisioned reality of what's possible and then collectively fight for that together.

Stephen Hurley:

There you have it. Ten episodes plus, plus this wrap up a wonderful series. Wonderful working with both of you. I really encourage people to listen to all ten episodes plus the plus. And I'm looking forward to see what happens and hear what happens next.

Meaghan Dougherty:

Thanks so much for everything, Stephen. It's just been a pleasure to get to spend time with you and talking about all these wonderful ideas. Thank you.

Gillian Judson:

I'm super grateful for my partner here, Meaghan, and I'm super grateful, Stephen, to get to work with you and be part of the VoicEd community as well. So woohoo!

Stephen Hurley:

Woohoo, indeed. I'm gonna take my hat off now.