

Building Community¹

Building community is to create beyond what we've been socialized to know.²

Building community are acts of love, action and joy. We build community because we believe in our collective future.

Building community is essential for transformational learning. It is how we develop a critical consciousness that will frame how we understand problems, influence the insights we come to and ensure that innovation is rooted in human rights and dignity for all.

Building community is an act of **love**³. Love is what gives building community texture⁴. Love is a kind of complexity that honours and affirms the voices, stories and experiences of the people in the community. As educators we are implicated; implication that fuels what we create together.

Building community takes **action** to prove that another world is possible⁵. We are relentless. We move towards the discomfort and work our way through its complexity. It is how we transform our current models. It is how we build classroom and school communities that affirm and honour the brilliance of all learners - young and old.

Building community is **joy**⁶. It is how we go into the future: by liberating our imaginations to co-create a vision of what is possible and acting accordingly.

We engage in anti-racist, anti-oppressive community building with love, action and joy:

Because we **love**:

We bring our critical consciousness to de-center ourselves and our positionality

We center and affirm the lived experiences of identities that have been negatively impacted by existing systems of oppression

We bring our critical consciousness to our learning

We focus on problem solving that improves the community

When we do the work to de-center, we will center the voice of groups who have otherwise been silenced. Continuously developing our critical consciousness, allows us to be mindful of the work that must always be done. What we, as a community, center matters. What we center needs to affirm the beautiful, intersecting identities of its community members.

Our critical consciousness asks us to consider and act on the ways in which our conventional norms do not meet the needs of the community we are in. When we love, we are ever-evolving our models: it is active, questioning, and unafraid of the change.

Solving problems is an act of building community driven by love because we are not satisfied with the status quo. "When we are filled with love... injustice becomes intolerable."⁷ Because we love, we are implicated to come together to better our community.

¹ Co-written by Jaye-Alexiis Stephen, Josie Fung and Nogah Kornberg in conversations with I-Think Mentors.

² Chowdhury, Sayema. York U Faculty of Education FESI Webinar 1 – Designing with/for Criticality and Community. 19 August. 2020. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpHU_46TK0s&feature=youtu.be. 19 August. 2020.

³ bell hooks, *All about love: New Visions*. (New York: William Morrow, 2018).

⁴ Cheong, Nation. Conversation with Josie Fung and Nogah Kornberg. 26 August. 2020.

⁵ Arundhati Roy at the [World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu3t8Z-kavA). 27 January. 2003. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu3t8Z-kavA>.

⁶ Stephen, Jaye-Alexiis. Conversation with Josie Fung and Nogah Kornberg. Summer, 2020.

⁷ Channing, Austin (quoted by [CarlosHappyNPO](https://twitter.com/CarlosHappyNPO)). "When we are filled with love for other people, injustice becomes intolerable." ~ @austinchanning" 20 September. 2020. 10:49p.m. Tweet.

Because we take **action**:

We are showing that another world is possible

We, as those with power, can take action. When we take action, we are modeling, demonstrating and creating another world where every person can belong.

We wrestle with complexity

Change is complex and we must be willing to dive into that complexity. We need complexity to question individual bias, interpersonal struggles and institutional oppression. Without complexity, we will not be able to appreciate, acknowledge and affirm the identities and gifts that every individual brings.

We hold ourselves to the highest standards of impact

Building community is not easy. We will have conversations and do activities that feel uncomfortable. We co-create the space for feedback where community can hold us accountable for the impact we are creating.

We change

When we know better, we do better⁸. We celebrate the joy and process of change.

Because we are **joyful**:

We take action

Community building happens through process and in the journey, we find joy. You can't just learn and reflect. It is not enough. Building community is an intentional, continuous act. As we de-center, we center and affirm every identity and lived experience. We will not be perfect on this journey⁹. However hard, we will find joy because as we transform and build anew, we learn.

We stay accountable by seeking feedback

Being held accountable strengthens relationships, and through relationships We hold one another accountable. Building community is not a formula that can be applied, year over year. Actively seeking feedback from the community that we are working to build and from those with other perspectives ensures that the work of community building is ongoing and never ending.

We reflect

Taking meaningful action means that we take the time to reflect and learn. Reflection is core to a deeper understanding of our mindset, our choices and what we choose to prioritize and focus on. Reflection is how we integrate our learning into our actions. That it is never ending is why we must find joy in the process of reimagining and reinventing.

⁸ Angelou, Maya (quoted by Oprah Winfrey). "The Powerful Lesson Maya Angelou Taught Oprah." *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. 19 October. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-lifeclass/the-powerful-lesson-maya-angelou-taught-oprah-video>.

⁹ Kike Ojo-Thompson in interview with The Drake. "[5 Questions with: KOJO Institute Principal Consultant Kike Ojo-Thompson](#)." *The Drake*. 12 August. 2020.

Our Bibliography & Inspirations

Arundhati Roy

[World Social Forum in Porto Allegre, Brazil](#). 27 January. 2003.

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author, actress, and political activist who was best known for the award-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) and for her involvement in environmental and human rights clauses.

Austin Channing

Quoted by [CarlosHappyNPO](#). "When we are filled with love for other people, injustice becomes intolerable." ~ @austinchanning" 20 September. 2020. 10:49p.m. Tweet.

Austin Channing Brown is a bestselling author, public speaker, and producer. Her work centers the Black experience in America and engages a diverse audience in the work of racial justice.

bell hooks

[All about love: New Visions](#). (New York: William Morrow, 2018).

bell hooks is an acclaimed intellectual, feminist theorist, cultural critic, artist, and writer. hooks has authored over three dozen books and has published works that span several genres, including cultural criticism, personal memoirs, poetry collections, and children's books. Her writings cover topics of gender, race, class, spirituality, teaching, and the significance of media in contemporary culture.

Jaye-Alexiis Stephen

Alexiis Stephen is an educator and Instructional Program Leader for Equity and Inclusive Education at the Halton District School Board. Alexiis has a passion for Human Rights & Equity and believes in the power of relationships to shift towards transformational change. Beyond her systems level role, Alexiis has engaged in projects within the community, union and publishing sectors.

Kike Ojo-Thompson

"[5 Questions with: KOJO Institute Principal Consultant Kike Ojo-Thompson](#)." The Drake. 12 August. 2020.

Kike Ojo-Thompson is an award-winning expert on equity, inclusion and diversity. Kike speaks and facilitates workshops to create equitable outcomes. In addition to this work, she is a member of the Ontario Human Rights Community Advisory Committee, was formerly the senior facilitator for the province of Ontario's carding review team, and formerly project lead for One Vision One choice, a first-of-its-kind initiative tasked with address anti-Black racism in the child welfare system.

Maya Angelou

"The Powerful Lesson Maya Angelou Taught Oprah." *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. 19 October. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-life/class/the-powerful-lesson-maya-angelou-taught-oprah-video>

Maya Angelou is an American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist whose several volumes of autobiography explore the themes of economic, racial and sexual oppression.

Nation Cheong

Nation Cheong is a respected partnership builder, community animator, artist, musician, teacher and social change agent. Nation is the United Way's Vice President of Community Opportunities & Mobilization and oversees the implementation of the United Way's Youth Success Strategy working across government, partners, innovators and community agencies to tackle the employment challenges that over 80,000 youth face in the GTA. He has dedicated the last 20 years of his work to community development strategies with a focus on young people in communities across Toronto.

Sayema Chowdhury

[Designing for/with Criticality and Community](#)

Sayema Chowdhury is an educator and champion for all things equity, wellness and climate for learning. Sayema is currently employed by the Peel District School Board as a Climate for Learning and Working Resources Teacher. Here she supports 91 schools by working with school teams to implement and sustain board-supported work at the school level.