

Defining | US

PODCAST LEARNING COMPANION

Our podcast companions expand learning beyond the walls of schools and organizations by bringing crucial conversations to the leaders, educators and organizations that matter. Use this guide to promote critical reflection, deeper discussion and meaningful connections among adults and youth around the topics that are Defining US.

VOICES OF CHANGE

A Podcast with Stacey DeWitt

INSIDE EPISODE 19:

“YMCA’s Bold Vision for the Future”

Join the conversation as Suzanne McCormick and Stacey DeWitt discuss Suzanne's bold vision for the future as the first woman to lead YMCA of the USA. Suzanne shares how the YMCA engages 11 million members nationwide annually and strengthens communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.

[DOWNLOAD THE TRANSCRIPT](#)



MEET SUZANNE MCCORMICK

Suzanne McCormick is the 15th person and first woman to lead YMCA of the USA (Y-USA), the national resource office for the Y - a leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Collectively, the nation's YMCAs engage 11 million members - 4 million of whom are under the age of 18 - annually. Suzanne became President and CEO of Y-USA in September 2021. She has 27 years of experience as a local and national executive leader in the nonprofit sector, most recently as U.S. President for United Way Worldwide and a member of its global management team. As President, Suzanne was responsible for helping the 1,100 United Ways across the U.S. build more resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities. Under her leadership, the United Way tackled community challenges with innovative, equitable and systemic solutions. She also served as the executive sponsor of United Way's Women United Global Leadership Council.



LISTENING AND REFLECTING

Use this learning companion to dive deeper into the episode topic, with suggestions for asynchronous listening, engagement and experiences that offer opportunities for reflection, connection and commitment.

WAYS TO LISTEN

Use the podcast transcript to increase engagement by following along and highlighting words, phrases, or concepts that stand out in the conversation. Take notes in the margin of reflections, connections and questions and consider these three methods for listening:

1. Open Listening - Listen to the podcast to simply notice and note the words, phrases and moments in the conversation that spark emotion and connections
2. Focused Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on the Moments that Matter using the time stamp and topics from the "Podcast Notes"
3. Reflective Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on critical self-reflection, using any or all the reflection questions below

CRITICAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU LISTEN:

1. What experiences have you had that connect to this topic?
2. What do you hope to learn from this episode?

AS YOU LISTEN:

1. Examine the bridges that have been built in your school or organization.
2. Which aspect(s) of identity are bridges being built around? Race? Ethnicity? Gender? Sexual orientation? Religion? Nationality? Values/beliefs?
3. How can you assist your youth and adults in building bridges with their peers and with each other?
4. What systems or supports can you put in place to help youth and adults continue to develop and sustain bridges with their peers and with each other?

AFTERWARDS:

1. What about this discussion resonated with you?
2. What questions or ideas would you like to explore further?
3. What conversations will you have, or immediate actions will you take, to create change in your own sphere of influence?

EXPERIENCES THAT ELEVATE THE LEARNING

The following experiences are intended for use with leaders, educators, parents and those working in educational organizations. The purpose is to promote critical reflection, connection and commitment toward action. They should be used and adapted based on the individuals, group dynamics and organizational context of the learning.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

Reflect on Important Moments in the Conversation

Use the timestamps within our [podcast notes](#) to find and re-listen to the most powerful moments in this episode, then write about your own perspective, experience and insights.

- How do your identity, experiences and knowledge influence your understanding of this topic?
- How does this topic connect with your current context?
- What are the implications to your practice?
- How will you continue the conversation in your school/community/organizations?

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Books can provide mirrors that reflect our experiences, or they can provide windows and sliding glass doors. Social justice is a term that is used quite often, but what is social justice? Who are we talking about when we discuss social justice and how can advocating for social justice impact our relationships with children, families and communities? Respond to each question in a journal and then review a definition for [social justice](#). If you are an educator, read [Social Justice Education is Essential](#) and the social justice standards for each grade. Discuss the standards with a colleague and create a plan to incorporate the social justice standards in your practice, at a grade/school/district level.

Consider the following questions:

- What opportunities do the social justice standards afford?
- How would you explain the importance of using the social justice standards to colleagues, families and students?
- What role can students and families play as you incorporate the social justice standards? Are there opportunities to collaborate with students and families during the planning phase?
- What systems will you put in place to support your continued use of the social justice standards?
- What will you use to assess your use of the standards?
- How will you know if the standards are leading to transformative learning experiences in your setting?
- What challenges do you anticipate as you implement the standards and how might you overcome those challenges?

MORE ON WINDOWS AND MIRRORS

In this conversation, there may have been ideas that resonate with you. These are called mirrors because they mirror our own experiential lens. Windows, on the other hand, provide learning opportunities and insights into the experiences and identities of others. After listening to the perspectives of the host and guest in this podcast, free write any mirrors or windows that came up for you.

WHO AM I?

Everyone has an identity made up of several aspects that make them unique. Who are you? What makes you, *you*? How does the world see you? Independently engage in the activity [Our Names and Our Place in the World](#) and then engage in the activity with a colleague. Create a plan to use the activity with students and consider pre-activities that you might need to do to make the lesson successful. This might include having each student create a name story with the help of their family. Name stories tell the story of our names. One good book to read with students is *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal. This picture book tells the story of Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela and how she got her long name. While the book is geared towards a younger age group, it can be used with anyone as an entry point to learn the narrative of each person's name. No matter the group, try sharing your name story to build community with others.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE BUILDING DEEPER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND THE LEARNING

GO DEEPER WITH THE PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Select moments in the podcast to discuss in a group. Use a protocol such as the [Four A's](#) (School Reform Initiative, 2017) to independently highlight and consider what assumptions informed the conversation, what you agreed with, what you would argue with, what you aspire to act on. Then in partners or small groups discuss responses to the Four A's. In the whole group, select a few partners/groups to share insights from the conversation.

GALLERY WALK POWERFUL MOMENTS IN THE CONVERSATION

A gallery walk is a great way to delve deeper into topics with large groups. Begin by writing the 7 categories/topics listed below on chart paper. Divide participants into 7 equal groups. Have each group relisten to their portion of the conversation, then chart important concepts, ideas, or questions for that portion of the podcast. After groups are finished, their charts should be displayed around the room. Participants should add, emphasize, or make connections with other groups' posters by adding phrases, words or symbols to the charts. As a whole group, reflect on the connections made around these powerful moments in the podcast:

- 1:08 Suzanne's experiences and the key things she's learned in changing times
- 3:20 The YMCA purpose and its impact on the community
- 6:40 The importance of "local solutions"
- 9:40 Suzanne's background and her motivator is for the work
- 14:50 We need a moment of reconciliation
- 19:10 The values of the YMCA
- 22:50 Suzanne's impact outlook for the YMCA in the future

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE TAKING ACTION

BUILDING BRIDGES

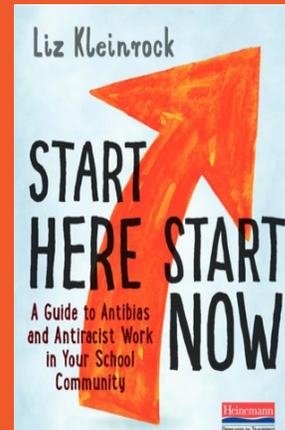
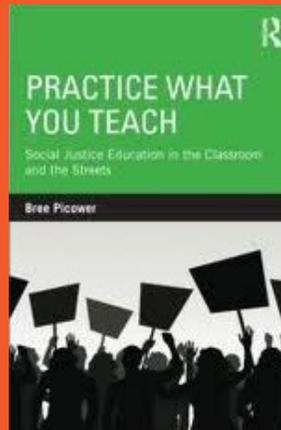
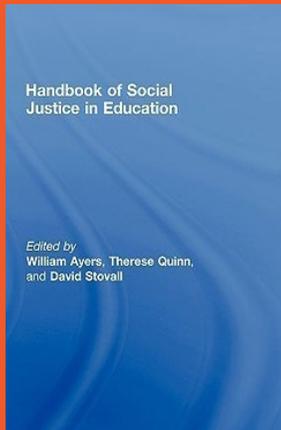
In this episode, Suzanne discusses the importance of building bridges despite our differences. How are you already building bridges in your classroom, school, organization, or community? Where can you find additional opportunities to build bridges? How can your local YMCA or other youth-serving organization support youth development in your school? Suzanne shared numerous ways that the YMCA supports children and communities inside their building and outside in the larger community. Consider the following:

1. In what ways are you already supporting the development of bridge building in your setting?
2. How can you work with your local YMCA or other youth-serving organization to support building bridges, social emotional development and/or mental health for your youth and adults?

FINDING YOUR LOCUS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Tackling issues related to identity, diversity and education can feel overwhelming. Instead of focusing on the greater issues, narrow your focus to the things you can influence. In small groups, challenge participants to think of their own locus of control and generate ideas for things that they can change as individuals and as teams to support more equitable solutions for students. Perhaps it is having critical conversations about assumptions and biases with those who have opposing ideas, creating a common understanding around the importance of diversity, designing opportunities to honor the diversity present in your classroom/school, or challenging yourself to continue learning and reflecting on the topic. No action is too small if it is moving in the direction of growth. Encourage staff to choose one step they will take within their own locus of responsibility.

INDEPENDENT READING AND BOOK CLUB RECOMMENDATIONS



RELEVANT RESOURCES:

- [Learn More About the YMCA](#)
- [My Equity Journey](#)
- [Ted Talk: We All Have the Power to Build Bridges](#)
- [National Geographic: Crossing Borders](#)

REFERENCES:

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