

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 21:

"The Dignity Index and UNITE"

Join the conversation as Tami Pyfer and Stacey DeWitt discuss the importance of local voices in education policy and explore ways in which the Dignity Index impacts conflict and leadership.



MEET TAMI PYFER:

Tami Pyfer is the Vice President of External Affairs for UNITE – a nonprofit organization that promotes national unity and solidarity across differences. Tami also serves as Chief of Staff to UNITE President and CEO, Tim Shriver, and is the Utah Project Lead for the Dignity Index initiative. Before joining UNITE, Tami served as Education Policy Advisor to former Utah Governor Gary Herbert, where she was involved in state-level education policy development, coalition building, and stakeholder engagement. She held local and state elected office for 12 years, including 4 years on the Utah State Board of Education. Tami's professional training is in Special Education and before her appointment to serve on the Governor's executive team she worked at Utah State University, teaching coursework and supervising student teachers in the Special Education teacher preparation program. Tami and her husband Aaron are the parents of 5 children, and grandparents of 10.



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 FOR BEFORE AND DURING THE LISTENING

BEFORE YOU LISTEN:

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

AS YOU LISTEN:

1. What current policies might be different if a greater diversity of voices had been present during the decision-making process?
2. How does this discussion change or add to your understanding of "dignity"?
3. Reflect on difficult conversations you have had. Where would your language have fallen on the Dignity Index?

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 our 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

Relisten to one or all of the powerful moments. Use the [podcast notes](#) to find the powerful moments with time stamps. Then write about your own perspective, experience and insights.

- How does 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?

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES: TRUSTED CIRCLE

Tami asserts that UNITE is not about creating sameness; instead, UNITE draws attention to the necessity of diverse perspectives when making choices and treating others with dignity (10:00). Further, she illustrates how close relationships with people from different perspectives can lessen contempt by “putting a face” to a nameless “they” (26:31, 37:00). Without differing points of view, your environment is at risk for becoming an “echo chamber” that reinforces confirmation bias (GCFGlobal). Reflect on the diversity of experience, identity, and thought from those closest to you. To guide your thinking, consider the Circle of Trust exercise summarized below (Menzies, 2018):

- Create a list of the 6-10 people whom you trust and interact with the most. You may record their initials down one side of a piece of paper.
- Consider several identity markers and place a tick next to the people who are similar to you in that dimension. For example, if you are White, draw a line next to anyone in your trusted circle who is White. If you are in your mid-forties, make a mark next to anyone else in your age bracket. Some identity markers you may consider include gender, nationality, heritage, language, age, race, professional or educational background, family, religion, sexuality, political beliefs, dis/ability, etc.
- Reflect on what you noticed during the exercise. Consider writing or recording an audio of your reflection to aid in the development of your thinking. How did you feel throughout the process? What perspectives do you encounter regularly in your trusted circle? What points of view are absent or underrepresented? In what ways might the makeup of your trusted circle impact your thinking and decision making? What does this mean for you?

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES: MIRRORS AND WINDOWS

Books, movies, and shows can also serve as mirrors of our own experiences or windows into the lives of others (Bishop, 1990). Reflect on the diversity of books, movies, and shows with which you regularly engage. Does the media you consume reflect your beliefs and experiences as well as open your eyes to other ways of being in the world? What about the books, movies, and shows that you use as teaching resources or recommend to others? Consider creating a personal reading/watch list to help expose you to new perspectives. Resources such as [Social Justice Books](#), an organization that curates lists of authentic texts at various reading levels by topic and identity, can aid in the creation of your list.

SEEING OURSELVES IN OTHERS

While discussing level eight on the Dignity Index, Tami points out the importance of seeing the humanity in others. Consider the following three quotes from the podcast:

Bishop Tutu, he just says ‘I see myself in everyone [...] I can see part of myself, the humanity, I can see it in them.’ (54:46)

There but for the grace of God go I. (55:08)

In contempt, we see ourselves above others. In dignity, we see ourselves in others. (55:22)

What did you think and feel when you heard and read these lines? Write or record a brief reflection. To move your thinking toward action, contemplate the following scenarios below (remember, this does not mean you should look past evil (32:55); you should still prioritize your emotional and physical safety when in conflict and when recalling traumatic experiences):

- Think of a time you disagreed with, got upset with, or thought negatively about someone. This can be an individual you know personally or someone you heard about in the news or media.

- If reasonable to do so, try to separate the person from the disagreement. What idea did you disagree on? What belief struck you emotionally? Where would you have scored your own language and thinking on the Dignity Index at that moment?
- If safe to do so, try to see yourself in the other person, listing any commonalities you have. If you aren't sure, what could you do to discover something you have in common? What might change if you discover shared histories, beliefs, or interests?

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE BUILDING DEEPER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND THE LEARNING

GO DEEPER WITH THE PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Individually, make note of a key moment in the podcast, identifying a quote if possible. Key moments could be ideas that resonated with you, statements that you didn't agree with, or portions that left you with questions. If it would help you recall specific sections, reference the Powerful Moments in the podcast notes. Consider using the Final Word protocol (Fischer-Mueller & Thompson-Grove) described below to discuss key moments in small groups:

- Select one group member to share their key moment and explain why they chose it.
- Group members should listen and take a moment to reflect before responding one at a time. In their brief (one-minute) responses, group members should acknowledge the speaker's reaction, offer a different perspective on the topic, ask the speaker clarifying questions, or draw connections to their own reactions.
- Finally, the original speaker gets the last word to briefly reflect on how their thinking might have changed, respond to questions, or draw attention to an aspect they want to think about further.
- Repeat the process until all group members have shared and discussed their key moments.

GO DEEPER WITH THE DIGNITY INDEX

Tami describes the eight levels of the Dignity Index in detail, recognizing that it's human nature for our speech and thoughts to move up and down the index. Explore the Dignity Index in greater depth by dividing into eight groups, assigning each a level from the Dignity Index. It may be helpful to print the [descriptors](#) and distribute one to each group. If you do not have enough participants for at least three people in every group, consider using only four groups by combining levels one and two, three and four, five and six, seven and eight. The World Café protocol (The World Café, 2023) may be helpful for building knowledge across a variety of perspectives:

- Ask each group to select one member to be the table "host."
- The host reads the assigned Dignity Index scorecard to ignite conversation. Groups discuss the following, making notes and illustrations on chart paper:
What are your reactions or feelings regarding this level?
Is this level easy or difficult to enter? How so?

What past scenarios from the news, a shared experience, or your personal life contained language that would score in this category? Share as much as you feel comfortable doing.

What strategies could help someone move their thoughts and language into or out of this level?

- After 10-15 minutes, ask all group members except the hosts to choose a different level (these can also be assigned).
- The table host rereads the descriptor for the new group and briefly outlines what was previously discussed, referencing the chart paper. Groups should then continue discussing the questions, offering new perspectives, making connections to their previous group's conversation, and adding notes and illustrations to the chart paper.
- Repeat the process so that everyone discusses three to four levels. You may consider closing with a full group reflection to offer participants an opportunity to react to the activity.

EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE TAKING ACTION

REACHING OUT

Having worked in education and politics, Tami recognizes the need for hearing unique perspectives and bringing local school administrators and teachers to the decision-making table. She suggests assigning teacher liaisons and says that your legislator should have someone local on speed dial (16:15). Reflect on the extent to which you or your organization are involved in the making of policies that govern your practice. What gaps in understanding and communication do you think exist between your organization and policymakers? You may need to begin by researching the board members, policy advisors, and legislators in your organization, district, city, or state.

Alternatively, you may need to spend time reflecting on the policies you create and the voices present in your own decision-making process. In schools, for example, the student and staff perspectives are all too often absent from policymaking. What key voices should be brought to the table for upcoming decisions?

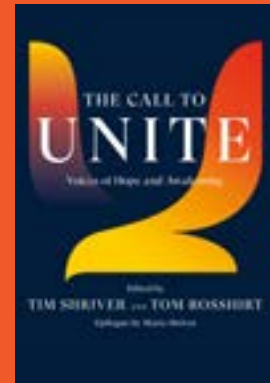
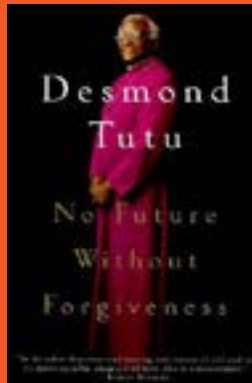
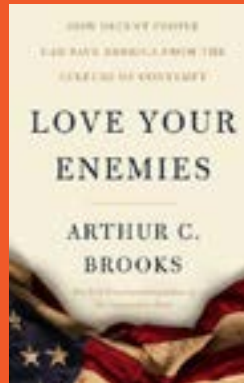
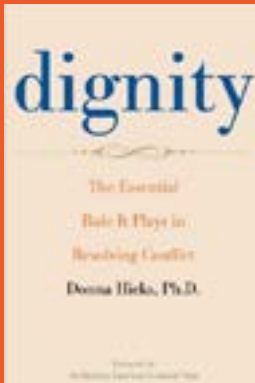
With your colleagues, develop an action plan for how you can communicate your local perspective to policymakers or how you can include missing voices in your own decision making. Remember, no action is too small if you are effecting positive change.

ELEMENTS OF DIGNITY IN ACTION

The Dignity Index website provides [10 elements of dignity](#) (Hicks, 2011). With a group of peers or colleagues, read through the 10 elements and discuss which ones are the easiest or most difficult for you to practice. Then, consider where dignity does or doesn't appear in the spaces you occupy, whether that be classrooms, boardrooms, online forums, social media platforms, or elsewhere. Which of the 10 elements are missing from your space? Whose perspectives would you need to hear to fully answer that question?

With your group, develop action items around two of the elements of dignity that you can implement the next time you are in your space. For example, if you find that acknowledgement is lacking in your space, you may come up with ways to display active listening. If independence is missing, you may look for areas where you could release some control or empower others to act. Encourage your group members to follow through with the action items, just do so with dignity!

INDEPENDENT READING AND BOOK CLUB RECOMMENDATIONS



RELEVANT RESOURCES:

- Learn more about [UNITE](#)
- Learn more about [The Dignity Index](#), including:
 - [How to disagree with dignity](#)
 - [The dignity descriptors](#)
 - [Phrases that promote dignity](#)
 - [Questions for further discussion](#)
- Read more by [Dr. Donna Hicks](#) and listen to her Tedx Talk
- Learn more about [Archbishop Tutu](#)
- Read more by [Arthur Brooks](#)
- Explore booklists curated by [Social Justice Books](#)

REFERENCES:

- [Bishop, R. \(1990\). Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. Reading is Fundamental](#)
- [Fischer-Mueller, J. & Thompson-Grove, G. \(n.d.\). Final Word. Center for Leadership & Educational Equity: The New Home of School Reform Initiative](#)
- [GCFGlobal. \(n.d.\). What is an echo chamber?](#)
- [Hicks, D. \(2011\) The 10 Elements of Dignity. The Dignity Index.](#)
- [Menzies, F. \(2018, Aug 16\). 'A-Ha' Activities for Unconscious Bias Training. Include-Empower.com.](#)
- [The World Café. \(2023\). World Café Method.](#)

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