

## Session 3

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### Designing for Connection

My focus as a practicing architect has evolved from designing physical objects for people to designing environments and experiences that support health and celebrate the life of a place. This approach is equity-based, acknowledging that each individual, community, and place has its own set of needs, values, and potential. Health and life are directly related to the most basic human need: the need for connection.

Evolving Maslow's hierarchy of needs to current understanding, the most basic human needs are socio-emotional. To be healthy, an individual or organization needs to be valued, loved, and in relationship in order to receive the resources needed for life such as food, shelter, and safety. From this perspective, the cultural identity or shared values of a group arises out of connection with their environment.

Designing environments to support health and life starts with discovering these connections: the shared values of a place, the network of relationships, and opportunities to grow and evolve within their environment and available resources.

As a designer, lines of inquiry include understanding how connection can support the health of an organization? Celebrate the life of a place? What types of connections will be most meaningful? How can design connect people to their culture, lift up their culture? How can we connect people with the natural environment; the built environment; the daily rhythms of a place; the beauty or essence of a place; with resources to support the life of a place?

In this presentation, I'll share my experience exploring how design can support meaningful human connection using examples from my work:

- Starting and managing an urban K-8 school for the most vulnerable children of color, where student performance was measured using socio-emotional indicators instead of standardized test scores: their ability to love and be loved, form and hold relationships, value their culture, and their level of confidence and self-esteem;
- Designing a makerspace program for this school including a culturally-responsive curriculum and a workshop space to support their physical and emotional needs including altering mood;
- The design of learning environments, including one in India that celebrates a unique aspect of the school's life while improving their connection with the natural environment.
- Current work designing spaces to support the mental health of kids.