

Message From the TODOS President December 2023

Colleagues,

We are approaching the end of another calendar year and in just a few days 2024 will be here.

I've been reminded of my experiences with the teachings of Gandhi over this past month. I taught a course in a summer institute called "Building Peaceful Communities" for over 10 years. The course that I taught was called "Towards a Curriculum of Community." The concept of community was primarily focused on school communities - such as classrooms, schools themselves, or communities that formed around schools - however, each student in the class worked to define the community that they wanted to focus on - such as the community of family or families, the communities we choose to be a part of (e.g. such as TODOS or other professional organizations or other structures that you are drawn to) and communities that we find ourselves in.

The summer institute was built on the teachings of [Gandhi](#). An early reading in my class was an [article](#) (Joshee, 2006) about a concept that featured prominently in Gandhi's teaching, the concept of Ahimsa (loosely translated to "non violence"). Learning about the concept of Ahimsa aligned with the concept of relationship that I'd grown up with in my Métis family. I share my experiences of reading and re-reading this article of Joshee's.

This quote from the article, "A commitment to ahimsa thus requires an appreciation of our common humanity and the connection between all living things. At the same time, we must recognize that the common life force is expressed in the world in myriad ways and that our task as people (and especially as teachers) is to understand, accept and support the diversity around us. **This insistence on both one and many rejects the either-or way in which we usually frame the world in favour of an approach that considers each-and.**" (Joshee, 2006, p. 7) always resonated with me as a mathematics educator and as a human.

As a mathematics educator I started to realize how the many ways that I had been taught mathematics firstly and then the ways that I'd been taught to teach mathematics were ways that were "either-or" ways - I remember my early learnings of algorithms where there was one way to add and/or subtract three-digit numbers; there was one way of factoring quadratic expressions (and in my teenage mind I always wondered why it was that way); there was one way of reproducing a geometric proof for proving the congruency of two triangles. This either-or way was baked into what I thought mathematics was through my university courses and teacher education program.

I never questioned mathematics, or perhaps school mathematics, until I started teaching and, over the years, becoming aware of the different ways that the humans who were called students in my classes were holding onto what they thought were the "either-or" ways of mathematics itself. In those moments I realized I had to learn more and as a high school teacher I started to attend professional development sessions that were geared to elementary/primary mathematics teaching. These sessions helped me to develop an awareness of the connectedness between the school curriculum and the ways that many mathematical concepts in the secondary school curriculum flowed from, and built upon, concepts studied in the elementary school curriculum. This also started to help me to question the "either-or" algorithms that I was taught as I began to focus on the concepts underlying the algorithms or procedures I came to realize that the concepts were much more diverse and complex than the algorithms or procedures implied.

My teaching experience and the experiences of the concept of ahimsa helped me to also frame the courses that I taught in mathematics teacher education to invite those humans who wish to be mathematics teachers to see the “each-and” within a space that might’ve been experienced as “either-or.” Each year I taught the course in the summer institute was a reminder for me to ask myself, “Florence, in what ways do you still take approaches that considers mathematics and mathematics teaching as “each-and” in your classes?”

The concept of ahimsa also shapes who I am as a human that has chosen to be a part of the TODOS community. While there are some aspects of life in the TODOS community that might seem as “either-or,” I believe that we are striving for “each-and” in order to build diverse, inclusive, equitable opportunities for humans to have access to and participate in high quality mathematics.

A quote from Gandhi on my course outline was “*You must be the change you wish to see in the world,*” and I invite you to reflect on what this quote might mean for **you** in the communities that you are a part of—your classrooms, schools, families, professional organizations, and other communities that you either have chosen to join or have found yourself in. How might the stance of ahimsa influence **you** within these communities?

I also wonder what would it mean for organizations such as TODOS to say, “*TODOS must be the change we wish to see in the world.*” In this the 20th Anniversary of TODOS, what “each-and” actions or structures might be created so that TODOS continues to work towards its mission and goals within the concept of ahimsa?

On a closing note, I want to acknowledge, with gratitude, the many humans that contribute to the TODOS mission in so many diverse ways. I don’t always know of all the many humans that contribute and all of the diverse ways they contribute. I so love it when I learn about something else that has happened as a result of a human that I’d not yet met. Each time that I hear of the stories of these humans I realize they are the realizing ahimsa and *the change they wish to see in the world.*

With respect and gratitude for all of the ways that each of you, as members of TODOS, contribute.

Florence Glanfield, President
TODOS: Mathematics or ALL

PS: I invite you to read further and learn about the ways that the concept of ahimsa has influenced others:

Amb, Manju Seth, 2020. Nelson Mandela’s umbilical bond with Mahatma Gandhi,
<https://bit.ly/3GVB7jK>

Little, Becky, 2021. How Martin Luther King Jr. took inspiration from Gandhi on nonviolence,
<https://bit.ly/3RQcUAP>

PPS: And, I encourage you to search for articles describing relationships between Julius Nyerere and Gandhi.

Reference:

Joshee, R. (2006). Ahimsa and teaching. *Connections*, 29(1), 6-13