



KINSHIP DOJO

A Report on the
2024 Pilot

By Hannah Atkinson Renglich, February 2025

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Executive Summary

We are excited to extend a special invitation to you to join us for an immersive and embodied cohort experience to co-design a TNC space that brings our [Relationships, Belonging, and Anti-Oppression Charter](#) to life. We are calling this experiment the TNC “Kinship Dojo.” - from our initial TNC Kinship Dojo invite to TNC members

What is the TNC Kinship Dojo?

While TNC has a longstanding and deeply held practice of anti-oppression (as evidenced by its many [resources](#), [affinity groups](#), and generous [programming](#)), in 2024, the leadership decided it was time to experiment with new and different ways of engaging the TNC community in the work. This project is rooted in a passion for collective liberation, guided by the principles of disability justice to practice a different way of building community and belonging. The stated purpose of the Kinship Dojo, as an experimental space for anti-oppression practice, was that it would be for:

- imagining new ways of doing equity work together
- practicing embodying what we’ve been learning and unlearning
- building our muscles in community
- making use of what we have (resisting the desire for someone/something else to change)
- focusing attention on systems

Toronto Neighborhood Centres (TNC) piloted the “Kinship Dojo,” a creative new experiment in embodied equity, over the course of six months. With a cohort of 20 to 30 practitioners, a diverse group of guides and facilitators hosted six monthly sessions that included a catered lunch, followed by four hours of learning, reflection, and practice. This report attempts to capture a snapshot of the uniqueness of the pilot, shedding light on the context, approach, principles and values, content, essential elements, and participant voices.

The TNC Kinship Dojo was not simply a program or workshop; it was a living relational container, co-held by TNC and its community of co-learners. A dojo in this context is a place of practice—not just for technical skill but for cultivating a way of being, one attuned to kinship, accountability, and mutual becoming. It is a space for slowing down, unlearning, and composting extractive tendencies so that more generative, grounded ways of being together can emerge.

The term "kinship" here is expansive—it includes more-than-human relations, ancestral threads, institutional inheritances, and deep attention to the ways we are entangled. The Dojo was part of an evolving landscape where participants engage in reflexive, relational, and sometimes uncomfortable practices that bring collective patterns into awareness and make space for transformation.

What Did We Intend to Explore Through This Work?

The intention behind the Kinship Dojo was to co-create a space where participants could:

- Practice holding complexity, paradox, and tension
- Learn to listen beyond words—to silences, to bodies, to the more-than-human
- Engage in accountability without defaulting to shame or blame
- Explore how inherited institutional, cultural, and personal patterns influence how we relate
- Build capacity to be in difficult conversations and transformative conflict
- Remember and reweave a sense of place, ancestry, and purpose

Rather than delivering predefined outcomes, the Dojo functioned as a co-learning vessel—a terrain for mutual learning, where knowledge emerges from the field of relation.

Why Does This Matter for Community-Building?

Our inherited models of community-building are often deeply shaped by modernity's logic—transactional, individualistic, and efficiency-driven. In this context, aspects of our work can become extractive, performative, or unsustainable. The Kinship Dojo explored an alternative: a practice ground for re-patterning ourselves in ways that can sustain truly relational, reciprocal communities.

The Dojo supported participants to:

- Deepen their capacity to stay in discomfort rather than resolve it prematurely
- Move from relational fragility to relational integrity
- Recognize and disrupt internalized colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal habits of relating
- Reclaim joy, reverence, and imagination as part of community work

This matters because community-building that does not engage at the level of pattern, perception, and being is often shallow and unsustainable. The Dojo offered opportunities to weave depth back into our day-to-day efforts as we work together in community.

What Outcomes Did We Achieve Through This Pilot?

Outcomes were intentionally not framed as checklists or deliverables. However, several relational and developmental shifts were noted:

- Increased awareness among participants of how their positionalities shape relational dynamics
- Heightened ability to hold conflict and tension with curiosity rather than defensiveness
- Emergence of new language and shared metaphors for relational complexity
- A sense of belonging to a living inquiry, rather than to a fixed identity group
- Deeper commitments to ongoing relational practice, including outside the formal Dojo space

Participants expressed that they experienced the space as sacred, courageous, and unlike typical professional development spaces. The facilitators noted a collective movement toward deeper accountability, a softening of rigid identities, and a shared capacity for co-holding the field.

What Are Some Key Questions That Have Emerged?

Rather than offering closure, the Dojo has opened new lines of inquiry. Some questions that emerged include:

- How do we continue practicing kinship beyond facilitated containers?
- How can we introduce Dojo practices in more of our day-to-day work?
- What are we unwilling to let go of, and why?
- How do we hold difference without demanding resolution?
- What patterns do we reproduce even as we seek to undo them?
- What does collective accountability look like when no one is in charge?

These questions are guiding the next stages of Dojo work, inviting a community of practice, further iteration, deepening, and transformation.

The TNC Kinship Dojo was made possible by two of TNC's longstanding funders, the Maytree Foundation, and the Atkinson Foundation, and was co-created with an incredible group of people who cared for the Kinship Dojo experience: Parnika Celly - guide & facilitator; Stevie Hill - guide & facilitator; Chris Leonard - guide & facilitator; Maddie Marmor – facilitator; Fran Odette - guide & facilitator; Hannah Atkinson Renglich - lead consultant & facilitator.

Collectively, this group co-defined the parameters of the Kinship Dojo alongside TNC's co-executive directors, Sree Nallamothe and Rob Howarth and guided by TNC's Intersectionality Affinity Group, many of whom also became practitioners in the Kinship Dojo.

Context

Who

The Toronto Neighbourhood Centres (TNC) is an association of non-profit multi-service organizations dedicated to strengthening local neighbourhoods and enabling diverse communities to work together to promote justice and a healthy life for all. We share a vision of a Toronto that:

- Provides healthy and caring communities for all of its residents, especially those who are most vulnerable.
- Celebrates diversity, welcomes and supports people from across the globe.
- Enables all individuals in all sectors of society to participate fully in the processes that shape their communities.

Through the second half of 2024, TNC convened a group of facilitators, TNC member agency staff, and community members to intentionally build relational capacity through a “Kinship Dojo” pilot of practices that centre TNC’s disability justice and anti-oppression values.

The Kinship Dojo was guided by the TNC Intersectionality Affinity Group (weaving insights from many other TNC affinity group initiatives, and the training and learning/unlearning that staff have engaged in over the past seven years). Those who self-selected to participate in the pilot responded to the call for those who identify as:

- **Practitioners:** You are someone who has practices, who believes in the power of practice, who wants to practice more, who knows the value of practicing with others.
- **Collaborators:** You know that the work of equity is not an individual project, and are excited about working on solidarity, collective responsibility, and community care.
- **Relatives:** You are inspired by the interrelatedness of people, systems, and the living world, and understand yourself as belonging to this wide web of relations.

What

The set of 6 pilot sessions affectionately known as the “Kinship Dojo” offered space and time to practice anti-oppression values in a skillfully held environment of mutual accountability. Sessions occurred once a month, beginning with a catered lunch and followed by 4 hours of practice time, with the overarching goals of:

- strengthening capacities
- creating together
- exploring solidarity across hierarchies and disconnections

- giving space for questions
- growing through cycles of practice + reflection (praxis)
- taking healthy risks, leaving as different people

In the [informational sessions](#) offered prior to the launch, it was clarified that the Kinship Dojo would not be:

- an anti-oppression 101 training
- a place that will expect or demand performances of trauma
- a tourist destination, a resume builder, or a complicated recipe
- fully cooked

Why

While TNC has a longstanding and deeply held practice of anti-oppression (as evidenced by its many [resources](#), [affinity groups](#), and generous [programming](#)), in 2024, the leadership decided it was time to experiment with new and different ways of engaging the TNC community in the work. This project is rooted in a passion for collective liberation, guided by the principles of disability justice to practice a different way of building community and belonging. The stated purpose of the Kinship Dojo, as an experimental space for anti-oppression practice, was that it would be for:

- imagining new ways of doing equity work together
- practicing embodying what we've been learning and unlearning
- building our muscles in community
- making use of what we have
- focusing attention on systems

Approach

Intent

After many months of collaborative design between TNC's Co-Directors Sree Nallamothe and Rob Howarth and with the support of outside consultant Hannah Atkinson Renglich, the shared intention of a practice space for anti-oppression values coalesced into the concept of a Kinship Dojo.

Invitation

The following invitation went out to TNC member agency staff and several additional community members who the organizers thought might be interested in co-creation and trial of the Kinship Dojo concept:

Invitation:

We are excited to extend a special invitation to you to join us for an immersive and embodied cohort experience to co-design a TNC space that brings our [Relationships, Belonging, and Anti-Oppression Charter](#) to life. We are calling this experiment the "Kinship Dojo."

Dreamed up as an extension to our existing Disability Justice, Truth & Reconciliation, BIPOC and Calling in White People Affinity Groups, we draw inspiration from a rich history and array of traditions of embodying change. The Kinship Dojo is rooted in the idea that, as [Mia Birdsong](#) writes, "we get to the future we want by practicing it now." This ethos has deep roots in the practices of ordinary people striving to effect change, such as the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) in the US civil rights movement, [Theatre of the Oppressed](#) developed by Augusto Boal in Brazil, and the contemporary work of cultural somatics and somatic abolitionism.

We can count on racism and other systems of oppression to show up in our meetings because it's historically, institutionally, and culturally set up to happen. We think about its force like a powerful river current. No one might be swimming in the direction of the current - there might not be individuals who are interrupting or expressing harmful opinions - yet we are pulled along by the river. Even if you turn around, the river will still pull you in the direction of the current. Trying to move against the flow of the river is an active, consistent choice, and even so, one person swimming against the current of a very powerful river is an impossible

task. It takes a lot of people, linked together, creating group infrastructure that is strong enough to move against the current. [\[AORTA\]](#)

Though the Kinship Dojo is about embodiment, we will not be putting any bodies “on the line.” The Dojo will not demand or expect any performances of identity, trauma, or oppression. This does not deny that all of these things will exist in the space; however, our focus together will remain stubbornly on systems, solidarity, practices, and infrastructure for relationships and belonging. We reject binaries as we engage in this complex rehearsal together - including the binary of centering certain voices while silencing others. We are all victims of oppressive systems, albeit in different ways, and so we want to exercise our kindness, our imaginations, and our relationality to build power, agency, and courage to take with us into our lives, our workplaces, our communities, and the wider world.

Intent of this project:

Co-Design an on-going drop-in Kinship Dojo for TNC colleagues to put training into practice that builds our capacity to show up to support, sustain and resource each other in our efforts to challenge oppressive systems and model different ways of co-existing.

The project will convene a committed group of 30 colleagues over the course of 6 months for a monthly, in-person, practice-based set of experiences that will be hosted by a wonderful team of facilitators. We hope that the practical rehearsal and training space will deepen your capacity to show up for equity, solidarity, and embodied change in the workplace. Please note, priority for the spots will be given to staff at TNC member agencies.

This is for you if you:

- Have done a good amount of (un)learning, formally or informally, in anti-oppression
- Have a solid understanding of anti-oppression in the context of systems and structures
- Are engaged with exploring your privileges and the agency + responsibilities they require
- Have a natural urge to collaborate and connect with others
- Are able to give and receive constructive feedback
- Are committed to a continued real-world practice of solidarity work that requires courage and risk

- Are ready to bring your whole self into the work, drawing from your unique experiences to help inform our explorations

Commitments include:

- 6 in-person sessions, running 4 hrs each, from July - December 2024
- Engagement in the co-design and evaluation of the Kinship Dojo
- An on-going commitment to find ways to take back your (un)learnings to your organization to sustain this work, with the support of TNC's Kinship Dojo cohort

Why Kinship?

We are deeply interconnected and interdependent. In her book, "Becoming Kin," [Patty Krawec](#) details how settler colonialism has tried to force us into one particular way of living, but reminds us that the old ways of kinship can help us imagine a different future. She asks, what would it look like to remember that we are all related? How might we become better relatives to the land, to one another, and to Indigenous movements for solidarity? As [Akaya Windwood](#) says, "when I'm kind, I'm remembering that we are of a kind, we are kindred, and the question after that is what's best for all concerned here? It allows us to get creative, which is really different than 'what's the plan?'...Then we can imagine all new things."

Why a Dojo?

The word dōjō originates from Buddhism and in Japanese, where dō means 'way, pursuit' + jō means 'a place'. Initially, dōjō were adjunct to temples and were formal training places for any of the Japanese arts ending in "-dō", from the Chinese Dao, meaning "way" or "path". Sometimes meditation halls where Zen Buddhists practice zazen meditation were called dōjō. We are thinking of the space we are creating as a practice or training space for embodied equity, belonging, and right relations. It's with gratitude and respect that we call on the traditions of strengthening, training, pursuit, and practice as an inspiration for the spirit of our rehearsals for the world we want.

Principles & Values

The guiding values of the Kinship Dojo are elegantly contained in the its title. Kinship is about the inherent relatedness and interconnectedness we all share, while a dojo is a place of practice and training. The art of building relational capacity requires dedicated time, space, and practice, and therefore the evolution of the Kinship Dojo offered fertile ground for embodiment, experimentation, and play with the concepts that comprise anti-oppression.

In addition, six core values and principles were laid out clearly by the Kinship Dojo facilitation team at the outset of the first session, and revisited in different ways across the six-month pilot:

- Systems & Structures
- Power & Agency
- Responsibility & Reciprocity
- Relationship & Belonging
- Love & Care
- Conviviality & Dialogue

Content

The themes and practices for the Kinship Dojo both anchored and guided an iterative practice of co-design for the Kinship Dojo that began in early 2024 and carried on through until the final session in December 2024. The following subsections outline each element that contributed to the whole experience of the Kinship Dojo.

Session Themes

Using the grounding core values and principles of the Kinship Dojo, each session was uniquely and emergently crafted based on the shared experience of all sessions prior, including tensions, needs arising, interests, and gifts of the practitioners. The themes that the facilitator team designed and worked with throughout the pilot were as follows:

- Session 1:** Our Whole Selves
- Session 2:** Systems & Responsibilities
- Session 3:** Power & Agency
- Session 4:** Reciprocity & Dialogue
- Session 5:** Love & Care
- Session 6:** Conviviality

Key Practices

In addition to themes, the facilitator team emphasized the criticality of developing practices, given the useful metaphor of building muscles for action. Because practices take many shapes and forms, the facilitators encouraged and demonstrated many variations of the following practices, which all practitioners were encouraged to take up and explore in developing their own unique rhythms in their contexts:

- Practice of Hope (Agency)
- Practice of Joy (Resistance)
- Practice of Freedom
- Practice of Power (Belonging)
- Practice of Responsibility (Accountability)
- Practice of Love (Care)

Activities

A wide array of activities were introduced by facilitators and practitioners across the duration of the Kinship Dojo pilot, attempting to activate the popular educator's trifecta of the head, the heart, and the hands.

Every session, the facilitators ensured that there were opportunities for:

- every practitioner to speak their own name into the room and share about an item or story brought in from home
- an opening and a closing circle
- group discussions and small group conversations
- adequate break times to pause, recharge, and take care of personal needs
- somatic practices upon returning from breaks
- reflective time, which could include quiet thinking, writing, or artistic forms of expression
- linkages across sessions created by questions and prompts
- pausing the agenda to engage with tension, discomfort, or emerging energies

Somatics

One of the essential components of the Kinship Dojo was the scaffolding of somatic practices throughout the pilot, which intentionally built trust and confidence in reaching beyond the mind and increasingly toward full-bodied engagement. Somatics is a field of study and practice that focuses on the body as the central aspect of experiencing and understanding life. It emphasizes the connection between the mind and body, exploring how physical experiences, sensations, and movements influence emotions, thoughts, and overall well-being. Somatic practices often involve body awareness, movement, breath work, and mindfulness techniques to help individuals become more attuned to their bodily sensations and develop a deeper sense of self-awareness, healing, and integration.

In the early sessions, facilitators led breathing exercises, humming, guided meditations, mirroring activities, calming self-holds, and spoken mantras accompanied by hand gestures. With competence growing in experimentation beyond talking, the sessions progressed to incorporate body rhythms, call and response songs, and part singing with movement. By the final sessions, Theatre of the Oppressed games and activities were the primary mode of encounter for working through scenarios and bringing practitioners' learning to life.

Practitioners developed easy fluency in engaging their wholeness through embodied practices, deepening and rooting the many ideas and conversations that took place throughout the shared experience of the Kinship Dojo.

Essential Elements & Structures

Care

The Kinship Dojo was born of a deep ethic of care palpable in every session and organizing meeting, as it is omnipresent within the TNC network. This philosophical approach emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships, empathy, and compassion in ethical decision-making. It focuses on understanding and responding to the needs and well-being of others, rather than adhering strictly to abstract principles or rules. This perspective prioritizes the context and relationships involved in any given situation, advocating for care and responsibility in actions and interactions to foster mutual support and understanding.

As part of this practice of care, the Kinship Dojo pilot invitation went out widely across the TNC network, accompanied by an offer to join a taster information session, before applying via a short questionnaire. TNC received twenty-nine applications, and accepted all participants.

In the interim weeks between sessions, the facilitation team sent out three emails under the themes of “Reflect,” “Enjoy,” and “Prepare.” This communication rhythm helped to maintain the thread of connection across the six months of the pilot, reminding practitioners of their shared work and encouraging them to bring their practices into their workplaces in between sessions (as “actions,” another critical component of praxis).

One symbolic and important practice of care took place in the last session of the Kinship Dojo, in the form of a gift exchange. Each practitioner was invited to bring an item from home: “For our final centrepiece, please bring ONE gift to give away to another practitioner. Aligned with the disability justice politic of anti-capitalism, please don’t buy anything. This is a practice of generosity of spirit, and so please choose something that is not easy to let go of (as opposed to something you want to get rid of).” In the opening circle, each person told the story of the gift they brought, and in the closing circle, each person selected a gift to take home as a tangible memory of one another and of the entire Kinship Dojo experience.

While some acts of care were overt and well-discussed, like the gift exchange, others were subtler, such as having fresh flowers, candles, and tablecloths at every session. Facilitators ensured all practitioners received a special folder for Kinship Dojo materials, a journal for their reflective practice, and provided craft supplies, fidgets, and required materials for all activities, several arriving early for setting up and staying late to return the spaces to rights afterwards.

Imagination

The Kinship Dojo grew from a spirit of imagination, which is vital in community development today because it enables the co-creation and co-ownership of innovative and visionary solutions to address contemporary challenges. As Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, "what we imagine, we can become." By thinking beyond traditional approaches, people and communities can envision new possibilities, inspire collective action, and adapt to changing circumstances. Imagination fosters creativity and resilience, equipping communities to tackle complex issues with their deep-seated expertise in their own lives, and to co-create a more inclusive, equitable, and just future.

In an era characterized by rapid social, economic, and technological changes, traditional approaches may no longer be effective. By experimenting with new ideas and strategies, communities can identify what works best for their unique contexts, adapt to shifting circumstances, and foster resilience. Additionally, experimentation encourages collaboration, learning, and continuous improvement, ultimately leading to more inclusive, sustainable, and impactful community development initiatives.

The Toronto Neighbourhood Centres (TNC) is uniquely positioned to work experimentally - taking on inter-agency work through to its extensive network of community-based organizations and its deep-rooted and trusting connections within diverse communities. This network allows TNC to leverage a wide range of resources, expertise, and perspectives, fostering innovative approaches to address complex social issues. Additionally, TNC's collaborative culture and commitment to community empowerment enable it to effectively coordinate and implement inter-agency initiatives, creating more impactful and sustainable solutions for the communities it serves. The experimental nature of the Kinship Dojo arose within this important context, ultimately creating a very unique offering in the world of anti-oppression work.

Building on this foundation, it's essential to explore the role of emergent strategy in community initiatives like the Kinship Dojo. Emergent strategy is a concept popularized by adrienne maree brown, which focuses on adapting and evolving in response to changing circumstances and environments. It draws inspiration from nature, recognizing that small, interconnected actions can lead to significant, transformative outcomes.

Emergent strategy emphasizes collaboration, resilience, and intentionality, encouraging individuals and organizations to be flexible, responsive, and aligned with their values and long-term goals while navigating complex and dynamic systems. The emergent nature of the Kinship Dojo created both great opportunity for co-creation and adaptation throughout the pilot, as well as frustration among some participants that there was not a list of outcomes or deliverables available. In future iterations of the Kinship Dojo, facilitators may wish to emphasize the principle of emergent strategy at the outset in order to avoid confusion or misunderstanding for practitioners or member agencies sending them to participate.

Ritual

Rituals can provide structure, meaning, and a sense of belonging. They help mark important events, transitions, and milestones, fostering a sense of continuity and connection within cultural, social, spiritual, and personal traditions. Rituals can offer comfort, reduce stress, forge bonds, and create opportunities for reflection and personal growth.

Sharing food can often be an important ritual in community life, and was therefore an intentional priority at the Kinship Dojo. Each monthly session began with an optional (but highly encouraged) hour of lunch, provided at no cost to practitioners, with dairy-free, nut-free, halal and vegetarian options. Practitioners were encouraged to bring containers in order to bring home food remaining at the end of the day, and staff at host organizations were also encouraged to share in the meals and conviviality.

In addition to food, session openings and closings became important rituals within the Kinship Dojo, helping to set the tone and create a focused, intentional space for the activities or discussions to follow. These rituals provided a clear beginning and end, allowing participants to mentally and emotionally transition into and out of the session, enhancing engagement, reflection, and co-ownership of the Kinship Dojo sessions. These rituals served to foster a sense of rhythm and routine as well as community and connection among practitioners, reinforcing the shared purpose and goals of each session.

Collaboration

Collaboration brings together diverse perspectives, skills, and resources, which can lead to more innovative and effective solutions. By working together, individuals and groups (including organizations and networks) can pool their strengths, address complex challenges, and achieve common goals more efficiently. Collaboration also fosters a sense of community, trust, and mutual support, which can enhance motivation,

creativity, and overall success. In addition, it helps build strong networks and relationships, enabling continuous learning and growth for everyone involved.

The collaborative nature of the Kinship Dojo was so deeply entwined with its evolution that it is difficult to imagine it without any single one of the team who were involved in its planning and facilitation. Made possible by two trusted funders, the Maytree Foundation and the Atkinson Foundation, the TNC's Co-Executive Directors invited in an incredible group of people to care for the Kinship Dojo experience:

Parnika Celly - guide & facilitator
Stevie Hill - guide & facilitator
Chris Leonard - guide & facilitator
Maddie Marmor - facilitator
Fran Odette - guide & facilitator
Hannah Atkinson Renglich - lead consultant & facilitator

Collectively, this group co-defined the parameters of the Kinship Dojo alongside Sree Nallamotheu and Rob Howarth and guided by TNC's Intersectionality Affinity Group, many of whom also became practitioners in the Kinship Dojo. Additionally, the Kinship Dojo had three physical locations across its pilot, generously hosted by collaborating TNC members:

- The 519 - 519 Church St, Toronto, ON, M4Y 2C9
- North York Community House, Suites 4 & 5, 255 Ranee Ave., North York, ON, M6A 2E3
- West Neighbourhood House, Community Room, 248 Ossington Ave, Toronto, ON, M6J 3A2

The extent of collaboration within the Kinship Dojo ranged broadly from room set-up/clean-up all the way to gradually bringing practitioners into the roles of co-facilitators, fostering a sense of collective ownership that contributed significantly to the overall spirit of the Kinship Dojo.

Praxis

The concept of praxis has its roots in Ancient Greek philosophy. The term "praxis" comes from the Greek word "πρᾶξις," which means "action" or "practice". Aristotle was one of the earliest philosophers to discuss praxis, emphasizing that praxis involves ethical and political actions aimed at achieving good outcomes. More recently, Paulo Freire highlighted the importance of combining reflection and action to achieve transformative change. In his seminal book, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," Freire argued that true education involves a continuous cycle of critical reflection and practical

action, which he termed praxis. This approach empowers individuals to challenge and change oppressive systems and structures, making Freire's concept of praxis a cornerstone of his educational philosophy.

The Kinship Dojo was, in essence and at all levels, a constant cycle of action and reflection. From the work of the guides and facilitators in their collective designing and debriefing sessions in between every session, to the practitioners' reflection, embodiment, practices, and conversations punctuating each month of on-the-ground application back within their workplaces and communities, no part of the Kinship Dojo remained theoretical. In adult education, reflective practice is critical, and so reflective prompts during and between sessions were consistently offered to practitioners.

One constant and committed focus of praxis within the Kinship Dojo revolved around the Disability Justice Principles (Appendix A) and the broad practices of supporting accessibility for all practitioners. TNC engaged Denise Agard to provide Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), translating speech in real-time to written words on a screen available at every session of the Kinship Dojo and also offered post-session in transcript form. To enable this and to amplify the volume of contributions for anyone hard of hearing, anyone who wished to speak in the Kinship Dojo was required to use a microphone. As well, session locations were chosen based on their accordance with accessibility standards for varying forms of mobility, including ramps, elevators, wheelchair accessible washrooms, parking options, and access by both public transit and WheelTrans. To underscore the importance of and highlight the praxis of accessibility, the following text appeared in a preparation email that practitioners received prior to each session:

Accessibility: We are committed to doing our best to create barrier free and inclusive participation and have arranged for the following:

- a captioner on site
- a wireless mic system
- chairs will be set-up in a large U, with a screen for captions placed at the open end
- a scent free environment: please refrain from using any scented products. For more information on tips and tricks to go scent free, visit [Fragrance Free Femme of Color Genius](#) by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarainha (AMC 2022)
- fully accessible space and washroom

Masking Policy/COVID Practice: We recognize that masks are no longer mandatory in public spaces in Ontario. Wearing a mask at the Kinship Dojo is optional and celebrated.

Finally, to strengthen the offering of the Kinship Dojo, the facilitators and guides experimented with different forms of feedback collection, beginning with written surveys,

which evolved into letters to the Kinship Dojo. The facilitator team learned that this form of requesting feedback was not accessible for many practitioners, requiring the group to become more creative in the design of praxis. One fruitful and enjoyable reflective practice became the sessional practice of leaving a question or thought that would be read anonymously at the following session). In the final session, practitioners took the opportunity to write themselves a handwritten reflection letter as a means of extending the praxis, which were posted in the mail back to them in early February 2025.

Voices from the Kinship Dojo

Given that the Kinship Dojo was considered to be a pilot, TNC consistently created conditions for reflection on all elements of the offering from the outset until its completion. Seeking feedback from both facilitators and participants of a pilot program is crucial for several reasons:

1. **Identifying Strengths and Weaknesses:** Feedback helps highlight what is working well and what needs improvement, allowing for adjustments to be made before the program is fully implemented.
2. **Enhancing Effectiveness:** By understanding the experiences and perspectives of those involved, program developers can make data-driven decisions to enhance the overall effectiveness and impact of the program.
3. **Building Buy-In and Ownership:** Involving facilitators and participants in the feedback process fosters a sense of ownership and collaboration, increasing their commitment to the program's success.
4. **Promoting Continuous Improvement:** Regular feedback enables ongoing learning and development, ensuring the program evolves to meet the needs and expectations of its stakeholders.
5. **Addressing Unforeseen Issues:** Early feedback can help identify and address any unforeseen issues or challenges, preventing potential problems from escalating in the future.

Incorporating feedback is a valuable step in refining and improving pilot programs, ensuring they are well-received and achieve their intended goals. The following sections offers highlights from each of the six debrief sessions held by the facilitators and guides, involving the intersectionality affinity group, and open to all practitioners.

What went well?

- I felt like the orientation for people to the various principles and frameworks (disability justice, care and healing, circle intentions and boundaries, practices for re-setting, processing hard/displacing stuff) was all great - accessible, clearly laid out - a good sketching of the container we can work with/in and explore together
- Good discussions about systems in smaller break-out groups

- Wireless mics were helpful
- Giving a group a ritual - we all know how we start, we all know how we finish, it helps the group care for the middle in a different way.
- Flow of the session - balance of movement, visuals, activities, small group and whole
- Again, I liked reading and considering the questions from last time/ previous session
- I liked being reminded that as a group we can try to process tough stuff, but we don't have to resolve everything right away/immediately - so an invitation to have some space around our sense of urgency
- I think the eruptions of "this isn't working for me" or "could we do this differently" was a sign of something going "well" - in that people were trusting enough to let all those feelings emerge
- we attempted/fumbled through "repair"!
- Facilitators checking in with all practitioners was lovely and meaningful
- Awesome food!
- Level of instinct - held by everyone. Kindness in space. I felt like a practitioner. We had a group gut.
- Feeling well held. Care that was extended to me felt very real.
- Really impressed with folks to dive into the theatre of oppressed activities - no hesitation
- How we worked from the scenarios people brought in. What helped it feel organic, it wasn't made up, it was coming from personal stories

What was tricky?

- The balance between people saying things because they felt like they had to speak (not because they actually wanted to) while going around the circle and inviting everyone to speak their mind - this got smoother towards the end (aka welcoming the 'pass' option)
- The microphone though we found a way to work with it. Are there other tech options?
- Finding a balance - some want to "trust the process" and others want to know where we're going
- Creating more space for people who need more time to process a question
- When we notice a power imbalance, I think we are (individually and collectively) still struggling with the - what now? - question
- For me as a facilitator, knowing when to make judgements/decisions solo, and when/how to check in with others (in real time)
- echo-y acoustics made hearing a little challenging sometimes
- I think the whole session was a bit "tricky" ... a lot of emotions, and a lot of

practice. But it was good tricky ... it was the practice that I felt like we all needed. Two things that I have been returning to: one was the reflex of feeling like I had to choose a side, and the other is that in a case where there has been misunderstanding, you can process it in a different way with different people and you don't necessarily have to talk it through with that person

- Balance between humour and the weight of the scenarios in the activity.
- How do you get yourself back to an even ground after the hard stuff?

What would you like to see done differently?

- More time for self-reflection in journals.
- Space for more conversation in small groups
- An increased understanding and commitment on our part as the guiding table folks around Disability Justice values and principles - we all share in being the keepers of this to make sure it is always present in our time at the Dojo.
- Share agenda ahead to prepare those that are anxious
- I think the idea of asking people to apply some dojo insights to workplace examples/puzzles/challenges would be great
- How can we bring more practitioners into the facilitating space?
- Expect tension and be more comfortable in letting it lead
- Not only calling out but paying attention to our bodies when discomfort joins us - naming this and thinking through what's possible to be done in these moments.
- More naming of the systems at play.
- More time to integrate reflections from smaller group into big group discussions.
- More fun - like the last two sessions - fun is a powerful connector.

What's still working on you?

- How we can co-create the culture of the dojo in our practice with each other
- How to create an inclusive space for all our bodies
- How to be generous and consider ways of being able to 'ask' what is behind comments.
- Building skills for others to 'call in'
- Redistributing power - how to get everyone comfortable with their own agency
- The power exercise - I've done this before but I'm still sitting with why I am so uncomfortable with the concept of having any power at all
- moving from knowing to noticing
- The comments around responsibility and accountability (and to what degree do we choose to be accountable, or are we compelled, implicated through relationship) - springboard to "responsibility and reciprocity" perhaps

- Being challenged by a white body to make myself more vulnerable - I engaged with it without calling it out - didn't know how to name it in the moment - thinking about what it would be like to call out and engage in a kinship kind of way.
- How easily we slip into seeing each other in one/two dimensional ways - good or bad, right or wrong, etc. - how much this is connected to the intention (conscious or not) we bring to engaging in dialogue - to grow? To win/be right?
- How we can name very specific practices and rituals and ensure we stick to them as a way of providing structure/container so we can swim around in deeply unstructured and dangerous waters.
- Why I didn't speak up about the lack of a land acknowledgment.
- How do we recognize the 'fumble' but also don't let that be the end of the conversation? How do we not 'give up' when the response is not what we might be expecting or anticipating?
- how do we each hold ourselves through 'activation' or big nervous system responses?
- Are imperfect resolutions still resolutions? Are they enough?
- Who should be in the room?? What does it mean to adhere to these community guidelines? How does this work for a future cohort?
- What's next - same group? What can we share with our teams at work?

What would you like to offer?

- More moments of pause and invitation for folx to name any dangling bits they are sitting with, not for us to solve or attempt to fix, but simply offering a space to be heard while building muscle around leaning into the discomfort
- more Theatre of the Oppressed technology to support us practicing our way through discomfort
- Joy and Play
- Mediation + Conflict Management Strategies - Restorative Justice Practices
- Not necessarily in my wheelhouse - but welcome a convo around repair - what does that look like for people? What is the goal of repair? What can it give us?
- Bring in the facilitator guidelines we have listed for ourselves to share with the other practitioners so we are all in agreement of what values we want guiding us.
- I'd like to offer to step back more and more as we go through the next few sessions for others to step in
- Some activities based around 'Nurturance culture' - for Love and Care Theme
- Maybe we have guides in the space but not taking on a specific role
- If skill up offered again, how to support folks to sit with discomfort
- Songs - call and response, rounds, etc.
- directness
- Grace to myself and others

- storytelling
- I am drawn to making space for people to talk more about their worries/anxieties/despair - and how we might hold that more together, instead of just individually
- Self-Compassion as a practice

What did you not say? and why?

- It felt like we were talking about disability justice but then not acting on the principles- I know that that's what the space is for, for practice, but I think we need to ensure that we are leaving room to actually practice as it felt like a learning space but we weren't then reflecting enough to put things into the space together
- I wonder if we can agree on a couple of things we can expect from the project together and out time together so we don't get caught up in still trying to make it make sense for folks - it feels like we have to reassure some folks why they should be there - maybe they can decide that for themselves better if we just emphasize certain things we know/hold to be true in the work together. What I wanted to say 'its ok if it doesn't feel like a fit for you and you've changed your mind about participating.' I didn't say it because it felt like it would be calling out folks in a not so good way if I said in that moment. But maybe something we could say to the group as a whole at the start of the next session?
- I was going to speak up when someone said they'd speak loudly and not use the mic if it stopped working, but thought I'd see how it played out. But didn't - because I wanted to see how it would work out.
- How can I support you without undermining you - what would be helpful?
- I am worried about calling you out without sounding sanctimonious. I am not perfect but how do I tell you what you are saying is not ok?
- Didn't feel good about the fact that the incident we focused on was between an Indigenous woman and a Black woman.
- What was being observed between practitioners around power, perhaps. To not derail the conversation for fear that perhaps the observation was incorrect.

Next Steps

Following the pilot's conclusion in December 2024, TNC has created several virtual convenings for practitioners to gather and think through continued practical applications of the practices and lessons learned through their time in the Kinship Dojo. With the collaboration of those interested, TNC intends to explore possibilities for how the Kinship Dojo can live on, refining its offerings and supporting more staff from TNC member agencies to enact their anti-oppression values and polish up their equity lenses for greatest benefit in their workplaces and communities. Stay tuned!

Appendix A: Disability Justice Principles

1. **INTERSECTIONALITY** “We do not live single issue lives” –Audre Lorde. Ableism, coupled with white supremacy, supported by capitalism, underscored by heteropatriarchy, has rendered the vast majority of the world “invalid.”
2. **LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED** “We are led by those who most know these systems.” –Aurora Levins Morales
3. **ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC** In an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds.
4. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING** Shifting how social justice movements understand disability and contextualize ableism, disability justice lends itself to politics of alliance.
5. **RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS** People have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.
6. **SUSTAINABILITY** We pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long term. Our embodied experiences guide us toward ongoing justice and liberation.
7. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY** We honor the insights and participation of all of our community members, knowing that isolation undermines collective liberation.
8. **INTERDEPENDENCE** We meet each other’s’ needs as we build toward liberation, knowing that state solutions inevitably extend into further control over lives.
9. **COLLECTIVE ACCESS** As brown, black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other.
10. **COLLECTIVE LIBERATION** No body or mind can be left behind – only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require.

Sourced from <https://sinsinvalid.org/10-principles-of-disability-justice/>

Appendix B: Types of TNC Dojo Practices

Please Note: The following is a generic list of types of practices we explored in the Dojo sessions. The actual activities we engaged in were more detailed in setup (often with video resources and detailed framing) and content. Please reach out to TNC if you would like further information on the specific design and content of the TNC Kinship Dojo sessions.

1. Opening Practices (Landings, Arrival, Grounding)

Description: Gentle, consistent openings helped participants settle in, arrive fully, and begin from a grounded, relational space.

Purpose:

To create a sense of presence, calm, and openness. Openings were designed to welcome the whole person, not just the “professional self.”

Setup:

Breathwork & grounding (guided breathing, body scans)

Land acknowledgements with emotional resonance

Opening circle prompts (e.g., “How are you arriving today?”, “What energy are you carrying into this space?”)

Poetry or song excerpts to set tone and pace

Participant Reflections:

Helped participants transition from work mode to a more reflective, embodied state. Created consistency and safety across sessions.

2. Check-ins with Images or Objects

Description: Participants selected from a set of visual images, objects, or cards to express how they were arriving or leaving.

Purpose:

To invite metaphor, emotion, and creativity into self-expression.

Setup Instructions:

Provide diverse images (e.g., nature, abstract, people, art)

Invite participants to pick one and explain how it reflects their state or intention.

Participant Reflections:

Helped surface deeper or more playful self-awareness.

Lowered the pressure of verbal check-ins.

3. "Weather Check" or "Energy Forecast"

Description: Playful metaphor-based check-in where participants describe their internal “weather” or “forecast” for the day.

Purpose:

To normalize emotional honesty and variability.

Example Prompt:

“What’s your inner weather today?”

(“Cloudy but clearing,” “Electric with anticipation,” “Heavy rain but grounded,” etc.)

Participant Reflections:

Invited humor and lightness.

Encouraged honesty without requiring deep disclosure.

4. Mapping Our Lineages

Description: Participants created visual or verbal maps tracing their personal, professional, and relational histories—lineages of influence that shaped their thinking, values, and approaches to kinship and community.

Purpose:

To ground participants in their histories and perspectives, and recognize the diverse stories and wisdom they bring into shared spaces.

Setup Instructions:

Provide paper or digital tools for mapping.

Prompt: “Who and what has shaped your way of being in the world?”

Participant Reflections:

Helped participants honor their diverse starting points and surface buried connections.

Emphasized the relational nature of learning and identity.

Reference:

Inspired by practices in anti-oppressive education and identity mapping tools.

5. Individual Reflection Prompts and Journaling

Description: Participants were regularly invited to write or reflect quietly in response to structured prompts.

Purpose:

To foster introspection, personal learning, and connection to themes such as belonging, accountability, or power.

Examples of Prompts:

“When do I feel most ‘in kinship’ with others at work?”

“What stories of harm or healing do I carry in my body?”

“What parts of myself have I been taught to hide or minimize in professional settings?”

“Where do I hold power? How do I use it?”

Setup Instructions:

Provide quiet time (~5–10 minutes).

Encourage honesty, non-judgment, and privacy.

Option to share in pairs or small groups after journaling.

Participant Reflections:

“I didn’t realize how much I needed to pause and hear my own voice.”

“These prompts opened up truths I’d been avoiding.”

Reference:

Drawn from trauma-informed pedagogy, reflective practice, and coaching models.

6. Breathwork and Embodied Presence

Description: Gentle breathwork and somatic (body-based) practices were included in many sessions to help participants arrive fully and regulate their nervous systems.

Purpose:

To support self-regulation, presence, and collective attentiveness—especially in challenging or emotionally heavy conversations.

Setup Instructions:

Guided breathwork session (e.g., box breathing or grounding).

Optional: Use of music, meditation bells, or quiet space.

Participant Reflections:

Participants noted how these helped “land” in the space and feel connected.

Created a calmer, more open-hearted tone.

Reference:

Common in somatic, trauma-informed practice and mindfulness-based facilitation.

7. Relational Rounds / Paired Sharing

Description: Structured one-on-one or small group dialogues, often with guiding prompts.

Purpose:

To foster deeper connections through intentional, reciprocal listening.

Setup Instructions:

Pairs or trios.

Prompts such as “Share a time when you felt truly in kinship with others,” or “What makes you feel seen or unseen in your workplace?”

Participant Reflections:

Participants appreciated being witnessed without judgment.

Built trust and intimacy over time.

Reference:

Similar to peer coaching or active listening practices.

8. Kinship Constellations & Forum Theatre

Description: Adapted from Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, this group re-enacting exercise had participants embody elements in another person's story or system (e.g., "the workplace", "a challenge", "support").

Purpose:

To offer insight into invisible dynamics within systems or relationships through embodied, intuitive engagement.

Setup Instructions:

One participant volunteers to set up their "constellation" or scenario among a group of participants with specific roles.

Others are invited to step in and take on roles and re-shape them, move/respond intuitively.

Facilitator guides the reflection.

Participant Reflections:

Powerful revelations about dynamics in their organizations.

Sparked empathy and system-level thinking.

Reference:

Rooted in Forum Theatre and somatic leadership practices.

9. Anti-Oppression Reflection Circles

Description: Circle practice for discussing systems of power, privilege, and oppression in daily life and work.

Purpose:

To practice vulnerability and courage in naming dynamics of harm, and reflecting on personal complicity or resistance.

Setup Instructions:

Circle format.

Agreements around confidentiality and brave space.

Prompts like: "Where do I notice white supremacy culture in myself or my organization?"

Participant Reflections:

Emotional and intense, but meaningful.

Supported deeper commitment to action and self-inquiry.

Reference:

Inspired by anti-racist affinity groups and restorative justice circles.

10. Art-Making and Collective Imagination

Description: Collage, drawing, and metaphor exercises (e.g., building a “kinship map” or “dream organization”) to explore imaginative dimensions of kinship.

Purpose:

To access creative, non-linear ways of thinking about community, relationship, and future-building.

Setup Instructions:

Provide art supplies or digital tools.

Prompts like: “What would your dream workplace rooted in kinship look like?”

Participant Reflections:

Helped participants articulate ideas they couldn’t yet put into words.

Felt freeing and fun, breaking from the usual workplace norms.

Reference:

Draws on arts-based facilitation, liberation pedagogy, and design thinking.

11. Tuning Our Attention (Sensory & Nature Practices)

Description: Participants engaged in short practices to attune to the more-than-human world (e.g., noticing sounds, light, air, or imagining the ecosystem their body is part of).

Purpose:

To stretch the sense of kinship beyond human-to-human, and reframe belonging in ecological terms.

Setup Instructions:

Can be done indoors or outdoors.

Prompt: “Notice one non-human being that is impacting you right now.”

Participant Reflections:

Helped de-center the human and feel more grounded.

Offered a moment of peace in busy days.

Reference:

Inspired by eco-somatic practices and Indigenous land-based approaches.

12. “Kin-versations” (Cross-Positional Dialogue)

Description: Structured conversations across different roles (e.g., frontline staff and executive directors) focused on lived experience, challenge, and shared accountability.

Purpose:

To bridge organizational silos and model power-sharing dialogue.

Setup Instructions:

Mix roles intentionally.

Use story-based or values-based prompts.
Emphasize listening over problem-solving.

Participant Reflections:

Eye-opening and emotionally resonant.
Revealed hidden assumptions and opened space for trust-building.

Reference:

Linked to dialogic leadership and relational accountability frameworks.

13. Closing Practices (Weaving Threads & Integration)

Description: Each session closed with group reflection, synthesis, or gratitude-sharing.

Purpose:

To support integration of learning, mark transitions, and build continuity across sessions.

Common Practices:

“Weaving threads” circle: Each participant names a word, image, or feeling they’re taking with them.

“What do you want to remember from today?”

Collective breath or shared silence

Sometimes a **group poem** or metaphor was created together.

Participant Reflections:

“These closings made the space feel sacred.”

“I always left lighter—even if the content was heavy.”

**** Notes on Facilitation:**

Many of these practices were held in flexible, emergent ways based on the needs of the group and energy of the room. The facilitators modeled:

- Consent-based participation (e.g. “pass” always welcomed)
- Trauma-aware pacing
- Integration of **care**, **humour**, and **slowness**



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