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Limed: Teaching with a Twist

Season 3, Episode 9 – Higher Education is Worth Fighting For

Matt Wittstein (00:11):

You are listening to Limed: Teaching with a Twist, a podcast that plays with pedagogy. Welcome, welcome. If you don't like talking politics at dinner, then you should be happy that this is a podcast. This month we shift our format to talk with three leaders in higher education, Denise Bartell from Kent State University, Amy Johnson from Old Dominion University and Jessica Riddell from Bishops University and a board member of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. With the intentional, and you can choose your own adjective here, restructuring of dismantling of or attacks on higher education and the systems that support it. It felt important to talk about higher education's purpose and how institutions and individuals are adapting to the American political climate. We talk about community connection and hope. My hope, I hope you will stay active and connected in your community and share stories that help others understand why higher education is worth fighting for. Now, onto the episode, I'm Matt Wittstein. Hi Denise. Hi Amy. Hi Jessica. I am so thankful to have you all on the show for a conversation today. To get us started, would you please just introduce yourself with your name, your title, your institution, and share with our audience why you believe higher education is worth fighting for.

Denise Bartell (01:51):

Well, hello everyone. My name is Denise Bartell and I'm currently the Senior Associate Vice President for Regional Faculty and Student Success at Kent State University. And basically what that means is that I look for ways for us to support the success of the students across our seven campus system with a specific emphasis on supporting faculty in order to support our students. Why is higher education worth fighting for? I believe that education and higher education in particular is the best mechanism that we have for economic mobility. It is the best mechanism we have for a more just inver society if we can figure out a way to do it in ways that actually support the success and the thriving of all students.

Amy Johnson (02:40):

Hi, I'm Amy Johnson. I am the Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Success at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. And in that role I oversee the different processes and support mechanisms to make sure that all students have a holistic and successful academic experience at Old Dominion. Why is higher ed worth fighting for? I mean, honestly, I feel like Denise kind of summed it up so nicely, quite frankly. I mean, it is a social and economic mobility vehicle. It can lead to a more just society. I think I would add to that the personal satisfaction that goes along with having those experiences in higher education, creating those networks in higher education, that personal and professional growth that happens in those spaces. I'm thinking particularly about high impact practices when you complete that capstone, that honors thesis, that undergraduate research you study abroad. When you have those things, those don't necessarily lead to more money in your bank, but they do have that personal fulfillment in many ways. And so I think that that's what I would add to Denise's response or very comprehensive response about why it's worth fighting for.

Jessica Riddell (04:05):

Hi everybody. I'm Jessica Riddell. I am a Shakespeare scholar at the Bishops University in Quebec, Canada. I hold the Steven Slosky chair of Undergraduate Teaching Excellence, which gives me a mandate to facilitate conversations about human and ecological flourishing, not just at my institution, but across Canada and around the world. And I wrote a book in 2024 called Hope Circuits Rewiring Universities and other Organizations for Human Flourishing. And I've been on the road just this year alone with 67 universities and colleges mostly in Canada and the US, to really talk about how we take a systems level approach to human and ecological flourishing. And so Matt, when you ask the question, why is education worth fighting for? My answer is, we are the only sector whose sole purpose is hope. That hope in this sense is challenging the actual in the name of the possible imagining a better society that is more just humane and transformative. It's the only place where we can model vigorous civility, where we sit together and say, I'm not too sure I'm right. That's a quotation from Judge Learned hand from 1944, beautiful American speech about vigorous civility. The spirit of liberty is to say, I am not too sure I am right. So as we sit as learners willing to transform, education is the only sector that allows us to do that, that incentivizes it, that invites us into that co-creative process that we need now more than ever.

Matt Wittstein (05:54):

Those are wonderful perspectives and I hope that that positive energy will help frame our conversation about how the political climate is affecting teaching and learning in higher education, which I know can be sensitive and a little bit uncomfortable. Where I would like to start is it's been pretty evident that President Trump is interested in ending DEI, both in the private sector and in the education sector. We've had a dear colleague letter that has described what we're allowed and not allowed to do, which has been challenged by the courts, and there's certainly some uncertainty about how it will all play out, but we've also seen some programs, some institutions themselves actually scrubbing their programs and resources from their webpages as reactionary or as perhaps what their lawyers recommended doing. So I want to ask your initial opinion on ending DE. I don't think it's something that we can realistically do because we know diversity, equity and inclusion exists, but how do we reframe or adapt to sort of the turbulence and the unrealistic expectations that are being put on our institutions with this current political climate?

Amy Johnson (07:16):

Since it's a conversation, my thought here is not completely formed in terms of the whole part of it, but I've really been thinking a lot about how somehow some way we allowed DEI to become a shorthand, we allowed it to lose the actual meaning. It went from diversity and equity and inclusion, which have meaning that there are things that we know are foundational and push our society forward and we let them become, we let these letters become like shorthand for something else. And I think we need to think about how this is a moment where we need to go back as intellectuals and as scholars and teachers and practitioners and say, what do we mean when we say DEI? What does diversity actually mean? Inclusion, equity? How is it being implemented? How can we not disassociate it from the things that we are doing in higher ed? I think we just have to go back and instill that meaning in it. I'll say that's been one of my biggest frustrations is that we lost the language war somehow by letting it get co-opted into this phrase, this meaningless phrase or racialized phrase, maybe even when we know that it's so much more than that.

Jessica Riddell (08:40):

So I as a Canadian am sitting in a space where I'm looking south of the border and many of us in our higher education sector are looking not with removal that it's just an American issue, but it is certainly

animating conversations in higher education in Canada as well. I also sit in a funny position where I am the only Canadian board director of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. And so I sit in these two worlds, in these two national sectors and in local spaces and listen intently at the conversations. And I think, Amy, you're absolutely right that we've kind of lost the plot here a little bit. When I was first brought on to the board of the a c and u, I was introduced to one of the sponsored publications, equity is Excellence report, which came out of a sort of Boer commission, the sort of 2030 blueprint for undergraduate education.

(09:47):

And what it struck me so powerfully when I first read it and what continues to resonate for me, that we know that equity is excellence. We know that diverse groups are highly performing, they outperform homogenous groups. If there are two factors in place, that people in the group feel that they belong and that they matter. And if that's not what we're doing in higher education, I don't know what we're doing. We are creating spaces with diverse perspectives, lived experiences, positionalities, intersectionality. And what we're trying to do is foster spaces where we can be excellent not as individuals, but together and we can get somewhere together that we cannot get on our own. And that goes all the way back. This is not a new concept that goes all the way back to Aristotle, that goes back to the classical philosophers where if we can get together and listen with an intention to transform, we can transcend the power of coercion and seduction. We can get to something greater than ourselves, not just through reason and rationality, but through deep empathy and a commitment to humanization in all of its very forms. And I think if we are not modeling that in higher education, sectors are looking to us to what we are doing, I think we are called to this work with an urgency that we have not seen in a few generations.

Denise Bartell (11:27):

So I think if I was to add to the wonderful responses of both Jessica and Amy, I've actually been thinking a lot about what DEI is too, Amy, and I agree with you that we have allowed it to become a shorthand for a very specific thing or it feels as if it is a shorthand for a very specific thing. And one of the things, and this is a not completely formed response, but I've been thinking a lot about what it means to create educational spaces where all students can thrive and how it is that much of what we do, not just in DEI, but even in the student success world as someone who also has worked very much in that sphere, almost feels like bolt-ons right to the core experience that so many of not just our students, but our faculty and our staff are having.

(12:23):

And so I keep thinking about if we create a system of higher education that actually works for all students, we are doing DEI, but we are doing a lot more than DEI. And I think the reason that we focus so much on concepts like belonging and mattering, which is so important, is because we are working in an incredibly hierarchical system where gatekeeping is the norm and which in many ways acts as a privileged perpetuation system. And in that system, some students, some faculty, some staff feel as if they belong more than others. And so we need to create conditions for these people to feel as if they matter as much as some of the other people who aren't as worried about these things. And so in some ways, I think this may be an opportunity for us to really rethink some of the very implicit, deeply entrenched assumptions that we make about what we are doing in higher education and kind of rebuild a system so that it's not about DEI anymore,

Amy Johnson (13:33):

That it is about DEI, right? That it is about DEI in the way that we mean DEI. So it's really, again, this is why I'm like we lost that ability to say no, this is actually the same thing. Belonging is about creating inclusive spaces with equitable outcomes. The words don't change. But then what we started to do is say, well, it's D-E-I-J-B Bs, and it just kind of got longer and longer and longer and we never stopped to go. No, I think the first three words were probably all we maybe needed. We maybe only needed equity if we're really thinking about it. So being very intentional with that language piece. And I also was thinking about how in the pursuit of DEI, we started to create these systems that actually worked against DEI in the moment. So I'm thinking about training, right? Required DEI training as though that should be separated from just how human resources, how do you operate in a workplace, thinking about the training around when you're hiring, you're hiring faculty, your staff, those trainings there, what you can and can't do.

(15:01):

And we call those DEI things. Well, no, it's not. It's actually just how you should go about hiring people, hiring new faculty through committees, and then even things like check your privilege and all those things that started to shut down conversations where we didn't want them to be shut down. We actually needed these moments to have broader, deeper, sometimes even the conversations that might hurt in the moment. And so yeah, I'm going to go back and say, no, I think DEI, diversity, equity, inclusion, maybe just equity is the right thing and it is what we should be doing.

Jessica Riddell (15:40):

I love both the yes. And I want to just share something that I, I've been thinking about a lot. I'm guided by this MIG MA scholar who Mari Batiste, she's a Canadian indigenous scholar. She works on decolonizing higher education, and I reread her words often and I think it resonates both Denise, for you and for Amy, this way of saying, what are we doing here? And this is back to Matt's question about what is the purpose of higher education? And Marie Batiste asserts that she says, we need to center educational commitment to and our responsibilities for the enhancement enhance of humanity and its infinite capacities. And she says that each strategy taken to rebuild human capacity is a decolonizing activity that turns collective hope into insights, voices, and partnerships, not resistance, resignation or despair. Think about that. What does it mean to do radical humanization at this moment?

(16:49):

What does it mean when we are watching the dismantling of human rights in their many forms in our society? What does it mean when education doubles down on radical humanization and we sit in those uncomfortable conversations, Denise, that you surface for us, which is actually folks, our higher education systems are built on mystification, exclusion, elitism that universities are very good at studying everything but themselves and we're in the midst of an inflection point maybe. I don't even think that's a big enough word to capture where we are right now, which is a paradigm, an old paradigm, an old worldview is ending. There are lots of architects who have ideas about what a new paradigm of higher education is going to look like, and we need to sit with real good rumbles, real good reflections, lots of diverse lived around a table and do collective sensemaking to figure out what the tools we need right now are in order to build creative futures.

(17:59):

Because I got to tell you, there are a lot of architects out there who are forecasting dystopian despotism and such doom and gloom and such despair and such horror and heartbreak in a future that has not yet been written, we have the tools necessary to build creative futures. If we, as Amy said, center equity, as Denise says, sit in the discomfort of recognizing our systems are broken and they're operating exactly

the way they're designed. Both of those things are true. How do we move forward at this moment of disruption, despair, and uncertainty? Education is where we figure that out.

Matt Wittstein (18:42):

So while the dystopian future isn't written, the dystopian news article is ever present, it's in our ears as faculty members, it's in our ears as administrators, it's in our ears as students. And a lot of what I'm hearing is, oh, these conversations need to be happening, thinking about it from a systems level. But I'm curious, what's some of the advice you have that's more at the grassroots level? Because when I think of my teaching context of I feel like a very small fish in a very large environment, I don't know what I should be doing and I don't know how I actually matter. And I think it's important for not just our students to feel like they matter in that process, but that our individual faculty teaching them that they're playing a role.

Denise Bartell (19:36):

I think that I can speak to two different parts of that. The first is I work a lot with faculty and one of the efforts that I've been involved in for about the last five years are these very intensive faculty communities of practice that are intended to create learning environments for all students that center belonging and cultures of growth and self-efficacy and social connectedness. And one of the things that I have seen is that this has been incredibly helpful for the faculty who have participated over the last six months or so, that being in a situation where you are learning tools and techniques to ensure that all of your students feel as if this is a supportive learning environment, gives you a sense of agency that there is something that I can do, that I can create spaces in my courses where students feel as if they are growing, understand that I believe in their capacity to be successful and that this is incredibly empowering for them, is the fact in engaging in those kinds of communities, the faculty are providing that for each other as well.

(20:55):

And so they often talk about this as they meet every week, and that hour a week is often the highlight of their week. They talk about it as sort of being regenerative, of filling their tanks. More recently they're talking about it as sort of an island of hope and a sea of despair, and it's such a small thing that we are doing that is making such a big difference. And so when Jessica is talking about the kind of connection to humanity, I'm a relationship scientist, so I study close relationships. I see everything as a relationship, and I have seen the power of these kinds of one-on-one relationships, faculty to student and faculty to faculty. And I believe that that has tremendous power for us right now to start moving our system in the way that we want. The second part of the answer, I work in a seven campus regional system in northeast Ohio.

(21:50):

We are exclusively non-residential commuter campuses. Most of our students are now what I would consider to be traditional. They are working full-time, they have caregiving responsibilities and they are going to school. And I think that our institutions need to become the stewards of place that we say we are. And so it requires a level of engagement and co-creation of learning experiences, particularly in these regional campuses that we really haven't done previously. Because I think part of the challenge that we are facing is that our communities often don't really know what we're doing and or sometimes have not had the best experiences right in our institutions and sometimes feel as if we are coming to them and telling them what we have to offer and not necessarily listening to them about what they need. And I think that creating more of a dialogue between the communities that we serve and the

institutions that we are working within is another way in which we can create positive momentum given the environment that we're in right now.

Jessica Riddell (23:01):

I think it's a wonderful way of thinking about hope as actionable, as practical and something you can implement in real time. And so I'm almost finished the next book and the Hope Circuit series. So I will have finished three books on hope. And I only just realized, which you probably have all figured this out, but I'm a slow learner, is that when despair feels monolithic, hope gets local, hope gets into relationship, hope gets into conversation, hope gets granular and proximate. So we can't change these big monolithic institutions. We can't solve climate, right? We can experience deep climate grief, but we can't tackle it at that large level. But that doesn't mean we don't have real impact, especially in our spheres of control and influence. And so really thinking about building intentional community, Denise, I love that you talk about communities of practice. I use it as one of the 10 conceptual tools in hope circuits, which is to build intentional communities.

(24:13):

You can't do this hard hope work alone. You have to do it in community. You have to do it in conversation and really in one conversation at a time, whether that is a community of practice within the institution or a group of wonderful thought partners and luminaries where you can just howl into the abyss where you can make space for despair and rage and disorientation, not as the antithesis of hope, but as a key part of getting into hope circuits you can do. I've seen tons and tons of people say, look, we're going to read something together. We're going to book club something. We're going to sit in curiosity. When you're feeling overwhelmed and full of despair, it is really easy to disengage. But we are all scholars. We came to education because we were curious, we were learners, we were full of wonder and somehow along the line we were told not to our benefit that we were experts and authorities coming back to sit as learners, to sit in that messiness, to adopt a book, and then to do read and rumbles where you put something in the middle of the table and you pull it apart and you put it back together and you say, I'm going to hold my opinions lightly and my values firmly as we figure this out, engaging in gathering and collective sense, making exercises, doing podcast storytelling.

(25:40):

I just came back from Yukon University, which is Canada's only university north of 60, and they've just hired an incredible storyteller, Ivan Coyote, who has come in and has Friday afternoon creative workshops for faculty, staff, students where they write fiction or nonfiction together. They host dance parties on Friday nights, they host elder circles where indigenous elders sit in spaces and tell stories where people can come and listen with an intention to transform with different kinds of pedagogies. There are so many ways that we can center gathering and humanity, and I really want to invite folks to think about how we do that in the model where Adrian Marie Brown, fabulous emergent strategist talks about pleasure activism. So we can't do this hard hope work if we're burnt out, exhausted and depleted. She asks us to center joy and pleasure and dancing and belly laughing as radical acts. So Denise, in those communities or practice, I imagine that one of the symptoms of a healthy community practice is laughter, is recognizing each other's common humanity. And I wonder where and how we as institutions and as communities can center the irreverent, silliness, playfulness that makes us human and will get us into pleasure activism, get us into doubling down on humanity because this is hard work, but it also requires us, us to be in joy and be in community together.

Amy Johnson (27:25):

I love all of this, a big fan of communities of practice. When I first got to Elon, I immediately created a writing group and we very quickly stopped writing and started just being a support group for each other. But community is really important. I was thinking though about this notion of recognition, and I think that the challenge that we face with communities of practice and radical pleasure, and I was reading earlier, when Will the joy come and thinking, well, the joy comes, it's just not recognized in academia, right? The joy happens, it just doesn't get recognized because we are recognized for being productive. There are very few places in academia where we are recognized for being human, where we are recognized and told you matter for being a human, not just for your publications, not just for your speaking engagements, not just for all the grants that you bring in.

(28:33):

And so the extent to which we can start to think about when we're creating structures, how do we incentivize, recognize, amplify, reward, right? Reward those moments where people are not just cranking out but are doing the self-care because the self-care then pays off in so many other ways. At Old Dominion, I was really excited to learn, and this might be at other places, that they give you a certain amount of hours to go out and do volunteer work, and you get to choose the place where you want to go and you go and you do this volunteer work and it's a contribution to the community. It's an opportunity to not be in your office just writing out the next book or whatever it is. And there's meaning in going out and doing that. And I don't know, I mean, I'm new to the institution, I don't know how long it is or how widespread this is or what people even do, but I really appreciated that there was this moment where they were saying, Hey, we want you to give back to your community and we're going to create this so that not just the people who have flex days, but staff who work nine to five, who hourly wages, anybody, you can go out and do this without it costing you.

(29:55):

And I think things like that are maybe small, I don't know how much it costs, but impactful things that we could start to think about.

Matt Wittstein (30:05):

So I want to ask, and this might shift our tone just a little bit, but I want to ask if there's been a lot of things happening politically, we've seen changes in funding mechanisms for the sciences. We've heard a lot about that in the news. We've heard about immigration efforts on campus, including immigration and customs enforcement being on campuses and taking students withdrawal of international students, visas and international faculty visas, recommendations of stay in the US once you're here, those types of things. We've heard about overhauls of the accreditation process, lots of things happening that are very loud, very noisy. I would love to hear what are some of the tangible things, actions and reactions that you're seeing in your context, either in response or in preparation for the political climate?

Amy Johnson (31:03):

One of the things that I've been talking a lot with my team is, and this goes back to the first question, which is that regardless of whether we can say the words DEI, if we're doing our jobs, then we're doing that work, right? If we're creating systems where every student who comes to our institution has access and has opportunity and equitable outcomes, then we're doing the work of DEI. And so I have spent some time talking about how we do the work without saying the words. Now, I'm also a historian and I'm historian of the Black Atlantic and I study slavery. And I know that not being able to say the words is also the problem. The inability to name is actually a really big problem. And so we've also spent time

talking about how to balance the need to get it done with the rage about not being able to use the language that we know is the language, and we know what it means and we know why.

(32:24):

Being able to call something what it is is so important. So we A, we get the messages that says if somebody asks you about DEI, what are you supposed to say? And we say we are in compliance with all executive orders. And so we have that language, but I've also been very intentional about creating space where we can just say that in and of itself is a bigger problem than some of the actual orders. The inability to name what we are losing in the process is, I don't want to say cost us, but I think that's going to be the thing that we're going to be fighting uphill against for a long time. That we're going to have these students coming out of elementary, middle school, high school, and even college with the inability to name oppression, the inability to recognize systemic injustice, the inability to put the label with the thing that we know where it belongs. And I think that's what I'm finding really difficult and what my team is finding really difficult. So there's these two parts of it to us, there's the, okay, we got to get it done. How are we going to get it done part, we got to scrub the website, scrub the website, but also, man, this is really going to cost us, and this is very hard.

Denise Bartell (33:55):

We're trying to do the same thing. I mean, we also need to be compliant both at a state level as well as at a federal level. And we are trying to be compliant and also to be as supportive as we can for our faculty and our staff and our students. And one of the things that we are certainly seeing is that there are some faculty for whom if this is your body of work, they are struggling mightily to figure out how do I teach factually accurate historical information, biological information in the current context and avoid putting myself in danger. And I think that's another, I don't know that this is an answering a question, but I think it's really more servicing a challenge that I think that we have, we're in an environment as more than a few states are where there is a requirement, for example, that all core syllabi are publicly accessible from the front page of the institutional website within a certain number of clicks, and that they are searchable by keyword and that they include the contact information of the faculty. And so you can imagine the environment that this is creating for many of our faculty when this is what you know will be facing as you move forward.

(35:36):

So I don't know how we maintain doing what we're trying to do in an environment like that because one of the things that I keep thinking about is I can't ask any faculty member to put themselves in danger. And we may be in situations where almost de facto that is what we are asking or expecting some of our faculty to do. And it does tend to more likely be faculty who are from historically underrepresented groups and historically marginalized groups who are in the situations where that is the content that they are teaching. And they're often also seen as and do get involved in this work at institutional levels and community levels in ways where they are sort of having to balance what they seek to do and protecting themselves and their families.

Jessica Riddell (36:38):

As a Canadian, we look south of the border at the funding that is being taken away, that is being coded, that these words are flagging and it is just instilling great horror for us. We are in solidarity with you. We are supporting you and holding space for you. And we also recognize that we are in our own funding models that are broken or they're working exactly the way they're designed. And we have a provincial funding model and then a federal funding model. So our universities are funded by provinces, but

research and infrastructure and work integrated learning are funded at the federal level. And so we have very intensifying politics that are both regional and national. And we have been navigating those for quite some time with alarming intensification around governments coming in with oversight and even overreach, starting to change the composition of our boards, starting to change the criteria for compliance regulations, reporting not just for research grants but for universities more broadly.

(38:03):

And so we are sitting in real discomfort at this moment trying to protect institutional autonomy, academic freedom, the safety of our students, staff, faculty, administrators, and presidents. And so we are sitting in this real discomfort and so holding space for you all and also sitting in the discomfort ourselves. And what we've increasingly talked about is the importance of coalition building, of mobilizing our alumni, mobilizing our external board members, mobilizing champions and advocates for higher education. So Matt, getting really clear on the first question that you asked, which is what is the purpose of education? Why is it worth fighting for? And who can we mobilize to help us take some of that to the larger society and into different sectors? Because we have, in Canada anyway, been pretty complacent about making the case for the power and public purpose of higher education. We have assumed that everybody understood that education is the only space where we challenge the actual in the name of the possible, that we preserve enduring knowledge, mobilize knowledge, and then build new knowledges for a better society, whether that is in healthcare or engineering or inventions or in the humanities and poetry and the things that remind us about how we human in this world.

(39:37):

And so I think we are at this moment where we have not been telling good stories about our public purpose and our social contract. And if we've been telling stories, we've been telling the same stories for 20 years with diminishing returns and we just keep saying the same things more loudly thinking that maybe they'll listen to us now we need new stories, we need better ways of making a case. We need champions and advocates raising their voices in multiple spaces. And I think we also need to go into different communities and listen to them, meet people where they are, recognize that a lot of the structural and lateral and relational violence happens because people feel themselves scarcity, fear, lack loss in crisis. They're going to express it in different ways, but we're really not sitting in spaces where we say higher education should be serving you. It should be making your lives better. It should be making your communities better. It should be making everybody better. If we're having a disconnect here, then we need to listen better, transform together, find better ways of engaging and making connections not just within our own institutions, not just in our sector, but more broadly building those coalitions not just to tell stories, but to listen better with an intention to transform and co-create new narratives because they're possible. We just have to get together and figure that out in community.

Matt Wittstein (41:17):

I realized this has been a very brief conversation with some pretty big topics and there's no way we could cover it all in this amount of time, but if you all could paraphrase, what message do you hope is heard from our audience, from our discussion today? What do you hope they really heard and maybe internalized in some way?

Jessica Riddell (41:40):

One of the things that I find real solace in are the words of Rebecca Sonet who said, whether this is the first day of the apocalypse or the first day of the golden age, the work remains the same to love each other and ease as much suffering as possible. And I have to tell you, I read that every day and I think the

work remains the same. I am watching the dystopian despair, the doom scrolling, the panic and the heartbreak and the horror, and I'm holding that. And I'm also holding the opportunities for us to build creative futures together. And as Amy said earlier, the work remains the same to center humanity, to sit in conversation, to see the whites of each other's eyes, recognizing each other's common humanity and saying, I'm not too sure I am right, but together we can figure this out, we can elevate our thinking, we can elevate our hopes, we can elevate our institutions to meet this moment in time. So I think that there is a lot of hope and that hope is not the opposite of despair and hope has to be broad enough and expansive enough to hold rage and anger and disorientation as much as it holds joy and pleasure and abundance and laughter.

Denise Bartell (43:15):

So I think that three things come to mind when you ask that question, Matt. The first is I think we need to push back against the isolation and sort of hyperindividualism of higher education and move forward in community and be looking at relationships as a source of strength. And I think Amy, when you were talking about how do we reward that kind of engagement? We don't right now, and I think that we need to really be thinking that way. One of the other things that occurred to me is I've been talking a lot about the solidarity dividend, Heather McGee's concept from the sum of us as opposed to the scarcity mindset. And I think where we are right now, it is very difficult to not feel a zero sum game. That is what we are in and that there are scarce resources and we need to fight each other for them.

(44:11):

But she makes a very compelling argument for what she calls the solidarity dividend that we all do better when we do it together. And then the last thing is that we actually need to do it better. Our system is operating as designed and we are not going to be able to do what we all sort of are talking about here, sort of education for the public good, for the personal good. If we don't acknowledge that and really start thinking about the deeply entrenched ways in which our system is not designed to support growth and learning and really is more designed in many ways to support the perpetuation of privilege and selectivity and gatekeeping. And that is not just the learning experiences that we are creating for undergraduate students. It is every level of the system when you look at funding models for the ways the institutions that receive higher versus lower levels of funding relative to the need of the student to who is privileged or is higher in the hierarchy in higher education based upon the extent to which you engage in scholarly disciplinary scholarship as opposed to undergraduate teaching, who do we pay more and who do we pay less?

(45:30):

Why do we give releases from teaching and not from research? That there is a lot here that we don't talk about that I think is absolutely related to where we are right now, and it is related to the scarcity mindset and it is related to the hyper individualistic nature of higher education. And if we don't start grappling with all of those things, we're not going to get to where we want to with higher education.

Amy Johnson (45:57):

I'm a historian and my son is really into math and science, and so he always balks at me when I talk about the infinite pie. He's like, mom pie cannot be infinite. And I said, pie can be infinite. It just gets bigger and bigger and bigger. But I say that to say what I hope everybody understands is that to me, higher education is the infinite pie. It is worth it, and it is worth it to everybody. Nobody loses. When people are smarter and more connected and more engaged and they think deeply and critically and all the things that we say that we do, everybody benefits from that and it's worth it. And I think we have to

remind people that that's why we do it, and then we have to remind ourselves that that's why we do it. I think a lot about the reward structures, Denise, I do.

(46:57):

I think a lot about the fact that when you go to hire someone in any other industry except higher ed, you look at their qualifications. What can you actually do? And in higher ed, what did we say? Well, have you written a book? Have you gotten, how much grants have you brought in the job Over here is none of those things. The job is managing people. The job is advancing initiatives. What does my over here that three people read have to do with my ability to do that thing? Right? So it is broken. This is a moment where I feel like if we sit down and we acknowledge, if we recognize and we acknowledge that it is the opportunity to do better, it is an opportunity to rethink the things that we've just done because that's how it's always been done, that we can create something that actually is that infinite pie and that's worth fighting for to me.

Matt Wittstein (48:04):

Amy, Denise, Jessica, it has been an absolute pleasure to have you on the show. Thank you all so much.

Jessica Riddell (48:09):

Thanks, Matt. Thanks, Denise. Thanks, Amy. That was beautiful. I go out of this conversation way more hopeful than I came into it, so thank you.

Amy Johnson (48:18):

A lot of fun. It was so much fun. Thank you. All

Matt Wittstein (48:31):

Limed: Teaching with a Twist is produced in collaboration for the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University. For more information including show notes and additional engaged learning resources, visit www.centerforengagedlearning.org. Limed Teaching with a Twist is a creation of Matt Wittstein, associate professor of Exercise Science at Elon University. Episodes are developed and hosted by Matt Wittstein and Dhvani Toprani, assistant Director of Learning Design and Support at Elon University. Olivia Taylor, a class of 2026 music production and recording arts major is our Summer 2024 intern and serves as a producer and editor for the show. Original music for the show was composed and recorded by Kai Mitchell an alumni of Elon University. If you enjoyed our podcast, please take a few moments to subscribe, rate, review, and share our show. We aim to bring insightful and relevant content to educators each month, and we would love to hear from you. If you're interested in being a guest on the show, do not hesitate to reach out. Our most updated contact information can be found on the Center for Engaged Learning website. Thanks for listening and stay zesty.

(50:00):

Hi everyone. I'm Matt Wittstein, the creator and producer of Limed Teaching with a Twist. This episode concludes our third season of the podcast, and I'm so excited that we've made it this far. To pull the curtain back, producing a podcast is a challenging endeavor, but one that I truly enjoy, and from which I derive a great deal of joy, both from the conversations and helping folks develop as educators. As I've continued developing the podcast, our team has determined it's time to twist it up a bit. See what I did there. We're going to take a break from releasing episodes this summer to focus on producing season four themed around mentorship and educational contexts. We'll vary our episode styles and bring you guests with diverse experiences and contexts. I'm really excited about this and I hope to hear from you

in our reviews on social media or just with an email. One thing I've learned from producing this show is that if we ever stop adapting and learning, we will find ourselves stuck. I can't wait to share with you our next evolution of Limed Teaching with a Twist coming this fall.