

**Bonni:** [00:00:00] Today on episode number one fifty one of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast Kristen Eshleman explores meaningful measures of accountability.

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**Bonni:** [00:00:21] Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I am Bonni Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our personal productivity, so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

**Bonni:** [00:00:49] Today I'm thrilled to be welcoming to the show. Kristen Eshleman. She's the director of digital innovation at Davidson College and she leads an R&D initiative focused on the design and research of experiments that explore new models of a liberal arts education in the digital age. R&D provides a safe to fail space where risk taking is encouraged and design-based research informs Davidson's digital strategy. The anthropologist in her is drawn to the intersections between technology and culture. Kristen's current pedagogical interests include learner agency digital scholarship inclusive pedagogy and mindfulness and contemplated learning. Kristen, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

**Kristen:** [00:01:44] Thank you. Thank you for having me Bonni.

**Bonni:** [00:01:46] We just got to know a little bit about you in terms of professionally, but I wonder if you would share a little bit about your family. I think it's fun to get to know someone beyond the professional bio.

**Kristen:** [00:01:58] Yeah sure. I'd be happy to. I am married to a librarian who actually informs a lot of my thinking in areas around this mission literacy and special concepts and and how we collaborate more effectively across

technology and information. We've been married twenty two years and we have a daughter we adopted from China in 2005 who is now 12 going on 24. She is she is wonderful she is the greatest gift to us and just giving us such a different way of looking at the world thinking about identity what it means to be a parent. Obviously what it means to be a minority in a predominately white culture in ways that we just never would have experienced without having her in our lives have been a really great journey.

**Bonni:** [00:02:50] And what are some of the and if she's 12 I suspect during that time of life you may be noticed seem even more surprises in terms of those cultural differences. Anything that's come up recently?

**Kristen:** [00:03:01] Well not recently but about the time that she entered third or fourth grade. Our eyes were really opened to structural racism in the way that we hadn't we just didn't see because we didn't have that shared experience but she was in a predominantly white school and our community until we moved her to a predominantly minority school in Charlotte in part to the state and what's called a talent development program for gifted students.

**Kristen:** [00:03:29] And when she moved from the one environment the predominately white environment into a predominately minority environment she became a completely different student. We saw a child who was lacking in confidence suddenly blossoms in a completely different space. And through conversations with her and trying to understand and unpack why that was different.

**Kristen:** [00:03:51] We began to notice that she had spent the first few years in elementary school and noticing that kids who are different were getting treated negatively whether or not it was intentional it just happened and she saw that and decided to fly under the radar for the first few years which manifested in this lack of confidence and we just never would have expected that soon as she was into the majority minority school she was comfortable she was confident. It was a completely different experience for her and then her whole approach to learning was was just it was transformed in a way that's been remarkably positive and so I think about that a lot about kids who are minorities and majority white schools and what they what they do to fly under the radar and how heartbreaking that is. And I don't think it's obvious to everyone there but it does happen and that was really eye opening for us.

**Kristen:** [00:04:45] Thanks for sharing that experience and also for sharing a little bit about your family. It's always makes me feel a little bit like I know you better

now and now we're going to get to go back to the professional stuff which Yes some interesting tensions there as well though although not anywhere near as graphic as your daughter. I'm so glad that she got into a better environment that's wonderful too. It was great.

**Bonni:** [00:05:08] Well we were connected with our former guest Laura Gogia and she really thought that it would be helpful to have you talk a little bit about this blog post you wrote a year ago and it was amazing to me thinking about how much has probably even changed since then so I was so excited to get you on the show and the blog post is called Exploring meaningful measures of accountability. And we'll be linking to that as well as all the resources that we talk about today at [teachinginhigherred.com/151](http://teachinginhigherred.com/151). And let's start with what should be basic but I know isn't. What are some of the types of learning that are more challenging for us to measure?

**Kristen:** [00:05:51] So in my experience and I think this is a shared experience for those of us in the higher end who supports teaching and learning it tends to be in the humanities and tends to be in these spaces where you don't have an obvious answer where it's not clear what the linear steps are to achieve a specific mastery. It really is dispositional in many ways and exploratory.

**Kristen:** [00:06:15] And those are the courses where you know it's hard to see from a support perspective to be able to do research in that phase with pornography and trying new things and teaching and learning and evaluating effectiveness of these things. It's tricky and it's challenging yet we all know from experience in the courses that they can be found the most rewarding and some of the most transformational that's where my line to go when I'm asked that question about things that are hardest and that her tend to go to the communities.

**Bonni:** [00:06:42] I know another type of learning environment that you talk about is one that's more of an exploratory type of a structure. Could you share a little bit about that or any examples you think of when we talk about Exploratory Learning.

**Kristen:** [00:06:56] Yeah and I was I was thinking about courses where students really are given a bit of an open ended approach to learning. So you might be reading the same thing in the class that you also have a bit of freedom to go out and find other bits of information that add to that learning and bring that back into the classroom and that's very unstructured and that's fine by exploratory those kinds of courses where you're given a bit of agency in the way

you approach understanding the material it's not a textbook. For example those are the ones that come to mind to me first.

**Bonni:** [00:07:29] I shared recently on the podcast that my job's changed a little bit at my institution and I got the neat experience of being able to pick any class that I wanted to teach this fall and I chose to do a special topic so it's going to be a personal leadership and productivity class which is a lot of just trying to gear our seniors who are going to be graduating up for how no one is going to really give them a syllabus anymore that will have due dates and assignments it's not going to be structured that way. And one of the things I'll be teaching them is called personal knowledge management and I've shared before about the on the podcast a link to some episodes but it's essentially just this idea that so many of us already do which is going out and seeking information and making sense of it as you did in your blog post around measures of accountability and then sharing it out as you did in your blog post. And I'm going to do that very thing that you just described which would be I'm not going to tell them what their personal knowledge management system should look like they're going to have to talk about an area that they're interested in and that they'll be committed to seeking and making sense of and then sharing throughout the semester.

**Bonni:** [00:08:36] So that's always a you know harder thing then as you said to try to grade something like that because everyone's is going to look different in fact that's kind of the purpose of it but it's sometimes a little bit too easy because we stop here and go oh well learning is hard to measure and especially if you start to do more exploratory learning and how powerful that can be so I guess we should just give up that right. And don't even try to measure anything but that's not where you say we should stop.

**Bonni:** [00:09:00] So my question for you is what types of learning should we make sure that we really are challenging ourselves to measure as institutions and also just as individual professors?

**Kristen:** [00:09:11] Yeah that's a great question and it does speak directly to that tension and that tendency I think in dialogue to go to that fine area right through to say everything either. Everything has to be outcome faith and measurable and that's what counts.

**Kristen:** [00:09:27] And we should be held accountable just in those terms or. Well the transformational learning can't be measured and therefore we shouldn't do any measurement at all. That does tend to happen then where

were I saw that manifest in this recent is an accreditation process going through that and it was it was remarkable It struck me that it was the first time in my 15 years at Davidson that I'd seen everyone at the institution be in agreement that we don't like this process. And it's rare that we're in agreement on anything across the board.

**Kristen:** [00:10:00] And that struck me as a opportunity to maybe engage the campus and thinking about people on campus and thinking about if we all hate it. Or do you hate it. And are there ways we could be accountable toward the things you know the most. And so you know looking at the accommodation process it's it seems to be going down this path of increased focus on outcomes measurement outcomes based assessment and you'll see this with talk in Silicon Valley around you know how to re-imagine and disrupt higher education with the Department of Education with politicians introducing bills to that effect and all of this in response to really a need that needs to be addressed which is these for profit colleges that are not living up to what they promised and taking advantage of students.

**Kristen:** [00:10:51] But then you start to see entire higher ed sector into that argument and that discussion to a fault. I think that's what was concerning me. If we're going to double down on outcomes based that Basnet are we going to end up designing learning for only the things that can be measured and if we do that what are we do. And that's the thing that frightened me the most. At the same time I don't think you can sit back and say well I can't be sure and therefore we shouldn't measure it we're measuring it in any way is somehow cheapening the experience. I do think we have to be accountable to our students.

**Kristen:** [00:11:27] I mean they are spending a lot of money on an education these days and we need to be able to show that the value of what they're doing over these four years and I'm very interested in the new models that might be able to bridge that gap between what is difficult to measure and what is easy to measure and outcomes based assessment which is how I came to that particular blog post that you're referencing and the methodology something that might get us there that might bridge that gap between qualitative and quantitative research in an interesting way and one that tends to look more at the complex than any of ones.

**Bonni:** [00:12:05] Why don't you then introduce us to this framework that can help us kind of wrap our heads around learning when it's within this complex domain that you're describing Yeah.

**Kristen:** [00:12:18] So the framework that I'm talking about is called The Connection framework and it's a framework that I'm not an expert in by any means but with one that was introduced to me as I was starting to develop an R&D innovation space and data. And this is really it's interesting as the 2007 article in Harvard Business Review that talks about how to make decisions in different domains and the four demands that they talk about are what they call hobbyists or simple complicated as the second one complex is the third and chaotic is set forth to.

**Kristen:** [00:12:55] And within these you just have to figure out you know as you're developing your learning your curricula whatever it is you're wanting to assess or evaluate at which point are you in which domain and being able to identify the work that you're doing in the conference and then once you have it in the pocket I mean it's easier to decide what kind of assessment you should be doing or ways of a violent network.

**Kristen:** [00:13:17] And I think what's happening is we are applying those complicated assessments measures to what is really a complex environment and the difference between those two would be complicated. Basically you have you know with all of the parts are at you know what the outcome is supposed to be and how to get there. It's really just a complicated set of ordered steps to achieve that we should think about the analogy of building a bridge or building. These are known entities and you know how to get that but it is complicated and it takes an expert to get you there. And so that's a certain kind of measurements at work that comes with stuff that works in that doing it in a complex domain is emergents it is not meant to be a future status. And there are no outcomes that you can pre-define. And so measuring against that doesn't make sense.

**Kristen:** [00:14:07] So how do you begin to account for that. And what interests me is there is this method and tool coming out of those those who do the kind of framework that helps you assess and evaluate and manage within that domain. So that took me down a half of it with complexity and complexity science.

**Kristen:** [00:14:25] The theory wasn't the thing that they're talking about which is a relatively new science that I'm just starting to sink my teeth into. That was developed by the economists that originally came to this. Brian Arthur is the name that comes to mind and also says a of particular multiple disciplines looking at a new science that sits at the integrative points sleep in between the disciplines. Is there a science that sits in those spaces.

**Kristen:** [00:14:53] And they've been working on this since the late 70s early 80s the Santa Fe Institute is really a mecca for understanding complexity science and complex adaptive systems. But if you look at the way they describe complex adaptive systems you really higher education and higher education institutions in my mind not perfectly to that kind of system and yet we're we're looking at applying a complicated assessment tool to evaluate the work that we do. And so it's a different climate in my mind. And so that's what I'm thinking about and thinking about the tools and methods that can begin to make sense of the complex meaning of learning that difficult to measure emergent open constantly changing face. What does that look like and how do we make decisions in that space.

**Bonni:** [00:15:41] Can you give me an example of a complex maybe an assessment measure or some sort of attempt that you have made to try to quantify this and maybe this might introduce us to sense making?

**Kristen:** [00:15:55] Yeah that would be good for nothing. Only one that I've looked at so far and we've only run one study that I would classify as less rigorous than it needed to than it should have done. So we're doing a second research design now working with Laura actually which is how you think introduced this concept to you live bringing a rigorous review and education research and hands on the design of the engine. They were using.

**Kristen:** [00:16:21] So what it is is a it's a method it's also tool that looks at storytelling that looks at the stories of individuals in real time as they are making sense of their environment. If anthropological I mean this is this is common in anthropology that storytelling is a way of making sense of your culture. So if we can capture those we can capture the watercooler stories that are at the forefront of students minds and faculty minds and staff minds in the institution can we begin to make sense.

**Kristen:** [00:16:53] Our culture in real time and manage and react as media based on what we're seeing and the goal of it is not to can render the outcomes wrong. But the goal of making is not to design an instrument that tells us an answer to a specific question. It's designed to indirectly prove the story from individuals in real time in the context we're interested in settling.

**Kristen:** [00:17:17] So in our case right now we're interested in studying what it means to be inclusive you know how the students feel a sense of belonging that day the person reusing the literature to design the instrument based on those

concepts the concepts that come out of the academic research. But the tool itself is designed with props and signifiers that intentionally try to pull out a weak signal so that if you're someone who's contributing a story you have no idea where this is going. Why are they giving you this survey. Surely you know that it's a study about its facility but you don't have any way of gaming or getting results.

**Kristen:** [00:17:54] And that's what's very unique about this tool is designed to give it the weak signals. What do we not know what can we not see about our culture about our organization about our institution at this point in time. And so this fascinates me as bemused and counterterrorism efforts quite successfully it's been used in health care understanding patient care experiences. And it is the stories that are coming out.

**Kristen:** [00:18:19] If you go to the Web site you can see the case that use for the stories that are coming out are really thinking about human systems and how you begin to design those for optimal optimal emotions so that if your goal of your immune system is to allow for emergence which is how do you design it so that you're not the happening. The possibility for emergence that you're actually optimizing that possibility and so that's that's what we're interested in learning and it's very early for us.

**Kristen:** [00:18:48] I don't have results to share them often so probably mid to late summer but it's also designed to be an action tool. So as you're getting this information in real time you can act on it. You can start to put in into play experiments that nudge in a certain direction. See patterns of stories that are falling following the limits of what you would consider optimal answers optimal response limits and you look at the patterns of those for areas to understand what's happening here and how can we ask what by those experiences happened with down from the ones that are problematic. So it's a very interesting tool.

**Bonni:** [00:19:25] I wonder if we can take your example of attempting to quantify in some way what it means to be inclusive if we try to gauge inclusive body using tools that would land in the obvious or simple quadrant what would that look like.

**Kristen:** [00:19:43] Yes it's sort of an assumed definition right. You say belong in X and then therefore your design should be Y and that's on this Likert scale. And what's interesting about this this tool method is it's kind of a response to the shortcomings of qualitative research.



**Kristen:** [00:20:01] It's looking at things like Likert skills and focus groups and interviews and removing or not only removing But trying to lessen the bias of the research some the way it's designed the researcher puts together the instrument but the respondent the person telling the story is the person who was meeting on it and some you give a an answer to a story. And it may be something as indirect as in our case we're asking students you know if you were talking to a close friend or a relative about attending data from what would you tell to encourage them to apply. What would you tell to discourage them to apply and then they tell a story they give it a title and the title is often the most revealing first point of signification.

**Kristen:** [00:20:51] And many times as a resolved I'm often surprised by the title. I'd read the response one way and think they were going in a certain direction and see that their title was flying in a completely different direction which is interesting. That's when you start to see your own biases in your analysis of their answers and then they go through a set of what are called signifiers that make meaning of that story in multiple layers it's difficult to explain what I've seen visually. But the point of it is they do not put that meaning missing in my hands they put it in their hands.

**Kristen:** [00:21:25] So it empowers individuals to tell us what the story means. And then we get those. And in aggregate we're able to quantify those stories and visualization using something like Tablo. So we start to see the patterns emerge and that's the quantification piece but it's it really is more of a response to poorly poorly I guess is the word they would use poorly designed qualitative studies for that particular man.

**Kristen:** [00:21:51] But yeah I think to answer your question I hadn't thought about how inclusively in a simple or complicated man might be measured but I can imagine a lot of his options about what it means to belong to an institution based on your own experience or experience were based on the research and applying that to a survey or an interview situation or a focus group situation and you're getting a set of results that you would expect to get in the complex domain you're not going to get that you're going to get the things you're not expecting. And it should reveal structural issues that are a bit unknown.

**Bonni:** [00:22:31] Yeah. You said it was intriguing to you and it really is to me too because I think of the other ways I might just attempt to measure something like that would have so many of my inherent bias built into it.

**Bonni:** [00:22:43] And so I'm sure that that's the case when when using the wrong part of that domain to try to measure something as complex.

**Kristen:** [00:22:51] Or even the other way might be that you're narrowing it to the classroom experience which is have a temper where you would head down this path is what's happening in the classroom that makes a student feel less included or not belonging not really recognizing that there are probably a lot of other things happening. You know personally happening on campus structurally in the system that we're not seeing or getting in the way other students are in a sense of belonging when it could be something very very simple. And we just wouldn't notice that we wouldn't connect the dots.

**Kristen:** [00:23:26] We would take in the classroom we're teaching any micro aggressions the sort of standard literature on inclusive the but what are we missing and an example a of places when it Dave Snowden talks about frequently when he's giving lectures on the framework and making and that is the point in Australia. British forces was having an unusually high number of retention issues.

**Kristen:** [00:23:53] So if people were leaving the force much earlier than they would have expected is something going on that was problematic in this particular deployment. But they were assuming it was a leadership issue. And so they pulled them some stomacher folks to take a look at what was happening and to see the stories that emerged and it ended up being something as simple as a parent problem and not getting latrines in in time. And so the stories that you were getting had titles like why do we have to crack that a hole under a tree that is not at all what they were expecting and getting those signals can sometimes be the difference between a student feeling a sense of belonging or not. And we're going down the wrong path assuming you know it's a set of steps that we need to follow in the classroom. Does that make sense.

**Bonni:** [00:24:41] Oh it makes so much sense in it and I'm I just can't stop thinking about how I'm sure I do stuff like this all the time all the time and just how this this this this frees us from that trap that we can set for ourselves.

**Kristen:** [00:24:55] And I think there's value in doing that too. The reason we're looking at it is not to replace anything that we're currently doing but to add another layer of data to the problem to say you know is there something here that may not be nice but it gets worse.

**Kristen:** [00:25:10] We think an exploration to see if we're going to go down the regular path for research and and see what we learn and creativity studies in the classroom before it's over with here to see what we. Maybe in a sense. Yeah.

**Bonni:** [00:25:23] Well before we get to the recommendations segment I don't want to miss out on hearing about any projects that you haven't mentioned yet that would be helpful for us as we start to think about these tensions between trying to measure things and then those things that can't be measured. If there's anything extra you can share with us about your work.

**Kristen:** [00:25:41] Sure. Yeah. I really came to this because I'm moving into an R&D nation states that David and I'm watching this with friends and colleagues at the campus. It's a way of accounting for exploration and innovation. That's how I initially came to us and so one of the projects that we're working on for the fall is when I think would resonate on a lot of campuses and I'll talk a little bit about the process and how we got there but what we were thinking about R&D. is really beginning to look at questioning our value assumptions about what we offer to students that we offer to faculty the same way that we assume we are doing really doing.

**Kristen:** [00:26:20] How do we begin to chip away at that a little bit and really turn that inquiry back on ourselves the way we launched those. This whole initiative was to put out a set of questions to that staff back at the students and alumni that were asking them to tell us the story about the experience of a case of alumni and students we were asking them to reflect on their education either today or in the past and answer the question of what it is they always wanted to do but weren't able to do and why. And tell us the story of our faculty we ask you think about the student experience the day that you're teaching. What is it you've always wanted to do but weren't able to do and why. And they tell this story.

**Kristen:** [00:27:03] So I had four faculty members which were very different stories each of them pushing back on structural constraints that the college around you know time and space and content with them. And so one of them was interested in questioning the design of having to teach three days a week for 50 minutes walk them really good pedagogy. Why do we do that. I mean we know why we do it. Is there another way and what would we learn from doing in other way that that might inform a new design. Another faculty member wanted to push against the classrooms and say Why do I have to be in this space teaching. Why can't I get my students into a nursing place based learning over periods of time during the semester.

**Kristen:** [00:27:46] And that was an American cultural studies class. How can we be out there in the field learning why are we stuck in a foster. And then the other two were interested in the similar topic of impostures syndrome and wanting to push back on domain expertise and teaching that to see where the values might lie in learning something together. So the first time and that's a little it reminds me a little bit about what you just talked about at the beginning with this first year signing and a way of thinking about teaching that really interested me which is not me understanding what you know like I don't even know what you already know I can go your stuff and watch your lectures. I want to know how you struggle to get there.

**Kristen:** [00:28:29] Can you convey that process to me as a student? And so these two faculty members are engaged in doing that. How can we teach of course we don't have the expertise to answer a 10 mile know bringing the discipline Ph.D. thinking came to this process we model that for students which I just thought was great. But in order for them to do this for each of them to do this with the exception of being foster syndrome and they really needed each other because trying to push against time and space constraints is really difficult. If if you're not able to do that in the context of the rest of what you're thinking and what the department needs and all of the structures are in place and so they're co-hosting a group of 16 students just to start in the fall these are incoming first year students and they're designing what we're calling cathing the liberal arts.

**Kristen:** [00:29:16] I mean how do we how have we have these 16 kids and learn in community how we have been integrate knowledge across these four disciplines and how do we get them to really take ownership of the learning process and that by the end of it they are being very intentional about the next three and a half years at Davidson. And I'm really fascinated with where this is going to go.

**Bonni:** [00:29:39] And is any of this documented on your Web site so people can read more about it or is it all still emergent and will have to be patient to see what happens.

**Kristen:** [00:29:47] It's a little of the water we have no that we have internally but we haven't published any of these. The designs are still underway. The general design is in place but each of the individual forces is still working out this is an Our And we're you know figuring out who do we bring in. You know we know what we want the mind thinking to be part of this. We know some things to sort

of wrap around the entire experience group facilitation. What it means to learn and agree with all that is storming forming norming what happens that that needs to happen needs to be guided who we bring in to work on that. Do we bring in to work on design thinking there was so putting all these aspects of the experience together. But we had it published and out there at least a skeleton of what we're doing this summer. Oh that'll be great.

**Bonni:** [00:30:33] You've peaked my curiosity so much with these great questions and I'm so curious to know what my fellow colleagues would say to the question of what is it that you always wanted to do and why would you want to do that. It would just be so interesting to see what emerged just from a question like that.

**Bonni:** [00:30:50] So I'm very inspired by your story is there anything else you want to share about before we go onto the recommendations.

**Kristen:** [00:30:56] No not yet. I mean I think hopefully we'll have some more interesting projects to announce later this summer. So definitely keep an eye on the website.

**Bonni:** [00:31:03] Well it'll just be a good excuse to have you back. So that's that's perfect.

**Kristen:** [00:31:06] That would be great. I would love it.

**Bonni:** [00:31:08] Well I know that we both share a passion for what I am going to recommend today because I was on Twitter yesterday or the day before and saw that you were out there recommending a do podcast and many people have heard about it because if you go to any of the podcast lists it's generally a number one or number two these days.

**Bonni:** [00:31:27] And it is called S-Town and it is from the producers of Cereal and This American Life and it's wonderful and I just wanted to play actually a little clip it's just about a minute long from it's actually the very first part of episode 1 or what they call chapter 1. And then you and I can chat a little bit about it because I know we both have a real interest in what they talk about here so here is a little bit of chapter one of S-Town.

**S-Town:** [00:31:54] When an antique clock breaks a clock that's been telling time for 200 or 300 years. Fixing it can be a real puzzle and clock like that was handmade by someone. It might take away the time with a pendulum with a spring with a pulley system you might have bells that are supposed to strike the

hour or bird that's meant to pop out and cuckoo at you. There can be hundreds of tiny individual pieces each of which needs to interact with the others precisely. To make the job even trickier. You often can't tell what's been done to a clock over hundreds of years. Maybe there's damage that was never fixed or fix badly. Sometimes entire portions of the original clock work are missing but you can't know for sure because there are rarely diagrams of what the clock supposed to look like a clock that doesn't come with a manual. So instead the few people left in the world unnoted do this kind of thing rely on what are often called witness marks to guide their way. A witness mark could be a small dent a hole that once held a screw. These are actual impressions and outlines and discolorations left inside the clock of pieces that might have once been there. They're clues to what was in the clockmakers mind when he first created the thing. I'm told fixing an old clock can be maddening. You're constantly wondering if you just spent hours going down a path that will likely take you nowhere. You've got to these vague witness marks which might not even mean what you think they mean. So at every moment along the way you have to decide if you're wasting your time or not. Anyway. I only learned about all this because years ago an antique clock or store contacted me John B Macklemore and asked me to help him solve a murder.

**Bonni:** [00:33:35] I get goose bumps on that one because it's such a good show and I wonder if you might reflect just for a minute or two on on witness marks and how they connect to your own thinking about your work and your life.

**Kristen:** [00:33:50] Yeah it's such a beautiful name for an incredible podcast. Honestly I don't think I've heard anything good ever on a podcast series. I highly recommend it to. Yeah. That is the perfect analogy I think to students. You know these caught students also having these witness marks in these movie experiences that are unique to each one of them. And you know they can cooperate they can tell the stories of those of those marks or those witness marks and those are things that if we can show us those we can perhaps you know design education more optimally for that group of students that's in our midst at that point in time. And I think that that description really out so perfectly in my mind to complexity and this idea that you know for one class of students we have a set of witness marks and a set of experiences that make that unique. And as soon as you have a different set of students in a class the very next year it's a very different dynamic a different environment and teaching has to adjust and adapt to that to the capacity of the room to have the knowledge they have coming into the place. How do you surface or how do you get the most out of that long experience as a community. It's great it's.

**Bonni:** [00:35:09] I once had a leader in a group who would do icebreakers pretty regularly of how mean each person in that group share a scar that they had and how they got that scar. And I love that as an icebreaker because it allows you to choose something that's not very personal of course. I mean it could just be I scraped my elbow or whatever but it does allow you to learn a lot about people and I just love that sort of that image of whether it's witness marks or scars and just recognizing that we all have them. And I just think it helps us honor each other a little bit more in the work that we're doing and that when I forgot who many people have said this but just the idea if we're going to choose between assuming the best or worst of other people it's it's always a great idea to assume the best and to recognize that people are doing the best that they can.

**Kristen:** [00:35:58] Yeah absolutely beautiful and I think that it's accepting of a vulnerability that allows for openness and learning. And I think that's also a great thing.

**Bonni:** [00:36:06] Kristen what do you have to recommend for us today in addition to us both sort of don't go and listen it's so good.

**Kristen:** [00:36:13] Yeah yours is far better than mine. So I doubt it. I was going to recommend a book that I think can be a bit of a tough read by the end of that. It starts out well and it sort of rambles into this human consciousness but it really situates for me the reasons why I'm interested in innovation why I'm interested in accounting for complex means of learning why I'm interested in a really complex adaptive system and higher education in general and it's called antifragile by the scene. Nicholas Taleb he also wrote the Black Swan which I think he's most famous for but he really starts to dive into this concept of how you embrace chaos how you embrace disorder and that makes you stronger. So antifragile that definition is not resilient and robust in it. When you have something from events some sort of black swan hit you able to get back to the point you were before this is actually this concept of embracing that kind of chaos and disorder on a regular basis so that you become stronger so that that's really your disposition and your position of strength all the time and that's why I like innovation and I like R&D and I like the idea of disruption and although I don't think the structure to the way it works in higher education because it's not about breaking the things that we love about education and about institutions but about preserving institutions I personally believe in institutions of towards that democracy and that when we see this go away I don't like the kind of destruction that's happening in Silicon Valley and politically.

**Kristen:** [00:37:47] But if we can embrace this concept of anti-fragility and embrace this idea of taking on experiments that push us then I believe our institutions are anti-fragile and they are best suited to deal with big changes. But I do think are coming our way. So that's the book I would recommend with you know a little bit of a caveat for that kind of detail to be honest.

**Bonni:** [00:38:08] But it sounds like it's worth and it's worth the work that we might go through.

**Kristen:** [00:38:13] I think so. I hope so. I could be completely wrong a lot of stuff. I really think they really think that the path to go down and I think for the right reasons hopefully it's not seen as a threat but an opportunity.

**Bonni:** [00:38:26] I love that even your style of giving a recommendation is very emergent. It's fun isn't it. This will see.

**Kristen:** [00:38:34] It might be OK. Yeah.

**Bonni:** [00:38:37] I love it. Well I am so grateful to have been connected with you and thank you for investing your time with this community and I know we're going to get a lot out of the episode and I'm looking forward to checking in with you later on in the year and see how things are going at Davidson and how some of these other projects come to fruition.

**Kristen:** [00:38:53] Well thank you so much it's been a genuine pleasure talking with you. And I'm really excited about your podcast and following more of what's coming.

**Bonni:** [00:39:02] Oh this is another one of those episodes where my head feels like it's going to explode. And the best way possible. Thanks once again to Laura for connecting Kristen and I and to Kristen for being on the show and investing your time in this community really appreciated getting to learn from you and hear more about your experience at Davidson.

**Bonni:** [00:39:21] If you'd like to receive the links from the show notes that Kristen and I talked about today as well as a blog post say write once a week on either teaching or productivity. You can subscribe at [teachinginhighered.com/subscribe](https://teachinginhighered.com/subscribe). And if you have any feedback on who might be a good future good future topic for a show feel free to provide that information at [teachinginhighered.com/feedback](https://teachinginhighered.com/feedback). Thanks so much for listening and I'll see you next time.



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