

Bonni: [00:00:00] Today on episode number 169 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, I speak with Cathy Davidson about her new book *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux*.

Bonni: [00:00:24] Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm a 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: [00:00:50] Today I get to welcome back to the show Dr. Cathy Davidson. She's an educational innovator and a distinguished scholar of the history of technology. She is an outspoken proponent of active ways of learning. As you'll hear in the episode that helps students to understand and navigate the radically changed global world in which we now all live work and learn. But 2016 recipient of the Ernest Jay Boyer award for significant contributions to higher education. She champions new ideas and methods for learning and professional development in school the workplace and in everyday life. Cathy welcome back to Teaching in Higher Ed.

Cathy: [00:01:38] It's a pleasure to be here Bonni. Thank you so much for having me.

Bonni: [00:01:41] We have not spoken for a long time, but I have been reading your work and following you on Twitter and I just so appreciate you as a resource for not just the institutions that you lead but around the world you. You're such a leader in this area and you're also a teacher and so I'm going to ask you to be a teacher for us as we start out our conversation and we need a little history lesson today in fact this is week. Weeks months.

[00:02:05] We're having where we all need more more history do we know. We sure do do and correct. Proper fact-based history not the methodology. So we

need a history lesson stay on higher education. Can you talk about how what we call higher education today how it started out.

Cathy: [00:02:23] Sure. So let me start with the cliché the thing that people always say reformers either the thing higher education reformers always say is higher education hasn't changed for 2000 years since Socrates walked the floor of the academy. And that sounds great.

Cathy: [00:02:42] And in fact if we're talking about teaching it's going a long long way before Socrates people have been teaching ever since there have been humans who were passing on skills to other humans. So that's kind of silly but it sounds good.

Cathy: [00:02:54] In fact higher education has existed for a very long time all over the world way earlier in India for example and in ancient Mesopotamia and in Africa than in the West the first Western universities considered the University of California in the 11th century early 11th century but something major major happened at the end of the 18th century in Europe and in the end the last half of the 19th century in America and that was the creation of the modern research university.

Cathy: [00:03:30] And it's astonishing how many features of the current university were changed basically between about 1860 and 1925 majors/minors distribution requirements general education requirements graduate school professional schools selective admissions tests - standardized testing - IQ tests. The list is just endless It goes on and on and on of things that need no explanation because that the modern research university is what we've inherited and interestingly we've inherited it even in forms where we don't have the modern research university for example that the liberal arts college and persisted community colleges started about the same time as the modern research university.

Cathy: [00:04:16] Those should be very different but the same people that were responsible for making the modern American research university also created the sense the associations for credentialing accrediting and ranking the modern American universities. And guess what? They're all ranked against Harvard.

Cathy: [00:04:36] So whatever was happening at Harvard carried over and became implicitly the standards by which all of higher education even quite radically different higher education is ranked today the principal person that I talk about in the book who is by far the towering figure in the 19th century was

Charles Elliott. He was a Harvard trained chemist theoretical chemist whose family lost everything in the panic of 1857.

Cathy: [00:05:04] And so instead of being living on his family's legacy he had to work for gainful employment. And in 1857 you could not be a college professor and be supported by your income it was assumed that college professors were from an elite class and were really supported by family money and their salary was kind of an honorarium it didn't really count.

Cathy: [00:05:25] So Elliot embarked on he thought about going into business and then thought no I'm going to go into the business of higher education. And in 1869 he wrote an essay that was incredibly influential called - tada - The New Education - which is the same title that I've chosen for my book and it was a manifesto that said the puritan system of education had to be totally transformed for the new age of industrialization and urbanization.

Cathy: [00:05:53] The major changes of the 19th century that transformed American society and that there were a whole world of managerial corporate class that had to be credentialed and fields that had to be specialized in disciplines that had to be created for this brand new modern industrial managerial class.

Cathy: [00:06:17] And he wrote about all that in the new education the essay The New Education that appeared in The Atlantic Monthly. Harvard was going to a crisis at the time. At this time Eliot was a professor at MIT and Harvard hired him to be its president the youngest president in Harvard's history and he served in that capacity for 40 years and actually was able to take his manifesto and turn it into actual practice not only at Harvard but he and other friends many of whom were educated at Harvard and other elite schools set about to totally transform the system of education.

Cathy: [00:06:53] And as I said also couldn't create the systems of credentialing and ranking institutions of higher education according to their new system so that if you weren't modernising you were receiving a low ranking you weren't getting the same kind of accreditation. So it was an incredibly effective way of really transforming the system of higher education in the United States even though the United States does not have one national system. It has many different kinds of educational institutions public private large small liberal arts colleges professional schools etcetera etcetera.

Cathy: [00:07:29] I think this is optimistic because I think if all of Charles Elliott and his pals could radically radically transfer and transform the institutions of higher education in the 19th century we can do it to them it took it took basically 100 - well 70 - 60 years between 1860 and 1925 for the massive changes of the 19th century. It's going to take us that long, too, but we can do it.

Cathy: [00:07:57] And I think we have the same kind of urgency in the post Internet age where again how we live and how we work has been so radically transformed in the last decades that we're in a situation exactly like the one that Charles Elliott was in when he said we need a new education for the 19th century we need a new education now.

Bonni: [00:08:17] Would you contrast for us how you see us thinking today about preparing students and how they used to think about preparing students and what still looks the same or what may be different?

Cathy: [00:08:31] So the biggest similarity is Elliot was trying to move away from a system where you got into Harvard because your dad went to Harvard and your granddad went to Harvard. And your great grand dad went to Harvard and dad is specific. Women were not allowed into Harvard. So we're talking specifically about patrimony.

Cathy: [00:08:49] And he went to a system of meritocracy where you got into Harvard because you did well on exams and you did well well on exams and then you had a rigorous course of study that was prescribed and you had exams and grades. That was a new invention of that time period as well...

Cathy: [00:09:09] People weren't graded ABCD before that. In fact, Mount Holyoke College was the first college to institute ABCDF grading and if you go back into the archives of Mount Holyoke you find out that they didn't have ABCDE because people were afraid that if somebody had an E and the transcript someone would assume it meant excellent. So they adopted the F instead for failure even though ABCD didn't have any meaning.

Cathy: [00:09:32] It suddenly means failure. What I love is the second major institution to adopt grading, you know, was the American meatpackers institution. And if you go back into the archives the American meatpackers institution you find people also debated but they didn't debate about whether the lowest grade should be in or out. They debated about how terrible it was to redo something as complicated as the assessment of sirloin and chuck to something as stupid and bland and basic as an ABCDF grade.

Cathy: [00:10:05] I mean why would you do that? And so from the very beginning American Meat packing meat packing had a letter grade but you could find out who gave that grade. Why they gave that grade? What other kinds of grades they were giving - what the range... In other words what we would now call metadata traveled with every single piece of meat.

Cathy: [00:10:24] And apparently I interviewed somebody about four years ago who said that's still the case you can still trace all of the comments and the decision making of meat packers today on each piece of meat. Now that's pretty interesting because one my kid graduates from school or I give an A - that's kind of the end of the matter.

Cathy: [00:10:41] Right. That's what's on your transcript is something as blunt as a grade that has persisted and it's so much a product of the 19th century. Remember this is the age of Frederick Winslow Taylor the great theorist of scientific labor production where you measure every output and you measure things objectively.

Cathy: [00:11:00] So this is the era when the multiple choice test is invented. There was no idea that you would reduce anything as complicated as the human mind or a difficult question to an ABCD answer. That's just what would have been considered ridiculous by Newton or one of the great thinkers of the Renaissance.

Cathy: [00:11:23] But we will and in fact we've become more hyper-conscious about grading such that right now in America, grading is absolutely correlating with the social class with a few exceptions but in general you can put a map of social class an economic school districts on a on a screen and you can put test scores on the screen.

Cathy: [00:11:47] You can then put up one or the other without a label and people can't remember whether they were there looking at the income distribution chart or the S.A.T. score chart because there's so much overlap between them. And the reason is our school district's public school districts are paid for by local money so local taxpayers they're locally based.

Cathy: [00:12:07] So you have economic discrimination built into the system. So we think we have a system that objectively measures talent. What we have is a 19th century very very simplistic and reductionist simple system of how you

evaluate that reduces many complex qualities to something very blunt like either a score in an essay exam or letter grade.

Cathy: [00:12:32] I would say that's one of the most devastating persisting and irrelevant features of 19th century education that exists in the 20th century. We now live in a world where anyone who has an idea can treat it to the rest of the world or don't want to make a website on the rest of the world and we all know that includes the most powerful single human being on the planet and wake up at 3 a.m. and tweet whatever he happens to be thinking about.

Cathy: [00:13:02] We don't have an education system that's designed for a world where anyone who has an idea can tweet that idea to end or it can communicate that idea to anybody else. What an internet connection we don't have a world where people are constantly in positions of tremendous decision making power with huge consequences to their lives or to society. We're not teaching people how to have that responsibility nor - and I am now going to flip it - We have an education system that teaches you how to prepare for a world where your profession can disappear overnight. Right.

Cathy: [00:13:37] You were a taxi driver and you could have thought 10 years ago. Well no one's going to take this job away. We're going to pay taxes as long as we have cars. Well here comes Uber. Here comes the self-driving cars and now that's no longer a fait accompli that we're going to have that taxi drivers a journalism and the music industry.

Cathy: [00:13:54] Many industries have gone through enormous disruptions and we're also not preparing students for a future where they don't know their future a future where any decision has to be considered as temporary because anything can change overnight. We're preparing students in a system that was geared for credential listing formalizing literally disciplining knowledge taking complex knowledge and put it into putting it into silos and a system that makes it very hard to think in complex terms across for example the boundaries of qualitative and quantitative.

Cathy: [00:14:31] And those are such rigid divisions in our universities to think beyond skills training versus thinking being able to think in complex human and social ways about what those skills mean. What does it mean to be a computer programmer and not have taken any classes in history?

Cathy: [00:14:48] What does it mean to be have technical skills in the medical field and not know about what the social human psychological impacts of your

medical interventions are. You know in other words we've divided things up into very strange and restrictive categories. In a world where those categories are completely merged and mixed and changing every minute we just don't know what's going to happen next.

Bonni: [00:15:14] I grew up my family always was in agriculture and it won't surprise you to find out that they're not still in it. Wired in me to want things to be more predictable too. You know it's even though I really embrace and enjoy innovation in technology and in something I read about on a daily basis.

Bonni: [00:15:35] Yet as much as I know that I'm intrigued by that I also know at the core of my being I have to constantly do the work to recognize what you're saying not just to know that it's true in my mind but to even have to go further into my gut you know into my beans so that I better be better or just be a better teacher through that.

Cathy: [00:16:00] Well actually though it's interesting that you say that because agriculture is always the example. There is a distinction between the pre-modern world and the industrial world in the 19th century.

Cathy: [00:16:09] And my perspective is I grew up in an working class Chicago urban Chicago and then moved to a suburb of Chicago a little later in my life my childhood. But my first husband was from a ranching family in rural Alberta 200 people in 200 square miles at the base of the Rocky Mountains and for 25 years I helped deliver calves - that was very exciting to be out there helping to deliver calves in the wintertime and in the snow drifts of Alberta.

Cathy: [00:16:38] And one thing I know and when you go back to looking at the archives of the 19th century is the principal feature of anyone in agriculture is there's many decisions that you make on your own. So an example I often give is if you have it in your mental to do list that you're going to go fix the barbed wire fences on a given day and you drive out to your field and instead of fixing the fence you realize some of your cows have gotten tied up in the barbed wire fence and they're bleeding.

Cathy: [00:17:06] You are an idiot and you're going to lose your farm if you fix the fence rather than take care of those cows that are bleeding. I mean you have to make decisions all the time because you're especially if you're dealing with animal husbandry livestock depends on it. I mean there are constant decisions you're making on your own.

Cathy: [00:17:24] The big project of the 19th century was to train train farmers how to be factory workers. And one of the reasons compulsory public education for K through 12 is so much about time dividing up subjects and at times there's a special time you start school whether you're at some states it's five years and six months some years it's age six but it's rigid.

Cathy: [00:17:47] This you must go to school at this time and you must spend so many days in school and you must have so many hours of each day in school. All of that is it's partly designed to teach farmers who wake up when the sun comes up to go to sleep when the sun goes to bed you know who do things based on whether or not on clock time but on whether that's a disaster in a factory.

Cathy: [00:18:06] You don't want a farmer saying, "Well I think the line is slowing up so I better intervene here." You want to Farmer schooled in how to call a manager over a supervised by either the shop manager over to fix the line not to make independent decisions himself or herself and you want them to work on machine time.

Cathy: [00:18:25] In fact one of my favorite is the word grade comes from the incline that manufactured items are traveling on in an assembly line when they fall off the grade. They literally don't make the grade and that's where the phrase graded and grading comes from is do things make the grade or not make the grade. But it's all about training people not to make independent decisions. It's a really really different relationship to productivity.

Bonni: [00:18:53] Tell us about technophobia and technophilia.

Cathy: [00:18:59] Well let me tell a story. I would like to tell a story. This is a story about being in middle school it was a super smart kid and all the smart kids were so excited sighted about this in math class. We're so excited about this new invention of the solidstate calculator which at the time was too expensive it cost \$275, but was within reach.

Cathy: [00:19:24] And some of the parents who really wanted their kids to go on to be MIT professors or you know part of Sputnik and build the next space engine we're willing to buy those for their kids and their math teachers got together and decided no they were not allowed to use calculators.

Cathy: [00:19:41] And the idea was that they would it would hurt them somehow having a calculator would mean they wouldn't learn math as well and it would

actually destroy their brains. It would hurt their ability to succeed in math. Now the kicker in that is so they they banned calculators from the class from this little bit in the 1970s but they still allowed slide rules and taught slide rules. So there was this idea that the old conventional technology of the slide rule. Well that was fine. That wouldn't hurt you. That would be. That would help you mathematically but the new invention the calculator was somehow going to hurt you.

Cathy: [00:20:15] The kicker on that is this slide rule is invented in Newton's era and there were many people back in Newton zero who felt that anything that increased your human capacities beyond God-given capacities meant you were a creature of the devil and it didn't go so well for scientists if you were considered of the devil's party Galileo and. You know in a town where people were executed.

Cathy: [00:20:37] Not a good thing. So Newton actually taught mathematics to his students on Slide rules in secret because he was afraid of being punished. So every generation has some new technology which we're convinced is going to destroy us.

Cathy: [00:20:51] That's technophobia where you place a kind of power in the technology. You assume this technology can do terrible things to you as a human or to your children. And so you ban the technology even though and typically you ban it in school even though it's ubiquitous everywhere else.

Cathy: [00:21:10] So what I say is a counter to technophobia is instead of saying we will ban iPads we will ban iPhones we will ban laptops in our classrooms because they all hurt this and they hurt our ability to learn. I say no no no let's think about the most challenging ways we can teach students so they learn the most effective ways to use those technologies not just in the classroom.

Cathy: [00:21:33] I don't care what they get on their test scores I'm more concerned about what they do in their everyday life when they're not in school when they have to have a laptop there and I'm not their teacher telling them what and how to do technology properly. So I'm a I believe in being skeptical about technology and learning and therefore learning how to use it well and effectively.

Bonni: [00:21:55] And how about technophilia.

Cathy: [00:21:58] Technophilia is the opposite. So technophobia leads to things like research studies most of which are really bad research design. I don't want to make a completely blanket statement so I'm not going to name names but there's some terrible research out there that anyone looking at the research design would say well I know I can predict the result without anybody even being studied. I mean just by the way that set up I can predict what the answer is going to be.

Cathy: [00:22:20] But you know all the things said you know you learn better with handwriting than with typewriters and you. But then by typing. And so therefore we can have students taking notes on laptops or even just for many many technophobic studies and that the bottom line is we're going to ban things from our universities we're going to ban laptops in schools.

Cathy: [00:22:42] We're going to ban iPads that the opposite is saying no to be modern we're going to put iPads and iPhones and laptops and course management systems in every classroom and then the students will learn automatically. The one thing we know about learning is I'm talking now at a cognitive level my last book was about the brain and how we think about cognitive science.

Cathy: [00:23:04] One thing definitional thing we know about learning is it's not automatic if something's automatic it's a habit. The whole point of the habit is you don't have to think about it. Habits are those things we do without thinking about it. That's not learning to learn. We exactly have to think about where we are now and make some kind of change. So we are adding to what we do now we're altering what we do now we're accomplishing something that we don't do now. You know in other words we're always making some kind of a change so definitional.

Cathy: [00:23:36] It can't be automatic in our classrooms to think that by putting an iPad into into a classroom without altering all the different ways we learn with that iPad it's really automating a 19th century idea of education which is a passive theory of education which is the professor or the teacher or the iPad dumping information into the brain of the student rather than the student having to grapple with understand interpret judge critique that various that very source of information.

Bonni: [00:24:08] You used a word which it seems like that is just the key to transforming our conversations about this and that is that we need to introduce something that challenges them. I mean why and why are they distracted by

you know Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and all of that while they're in our classes - hypothetically taking notes - well they're not been challenged and one of the things I talk about is there's a I'm not giving any kind of an endorsement but there's a flashcard app called Quizlet - and if you have flashcards it lets you play a game called quizlet live in your classes.

Bonni: [00:24:46] And the only reason they use it as an example is if you were to come into a classroom and see students playing Quizlet Live and again I'm not endorsing that particular one, there's lots of great ways you can do this. Nobody's doing anything except being challenged... Because it's a little scoreboard on the projector - they're trying to win this game competing against everyone else and so they're just the whole room comes alive. But the weird thing for some people who aren't accustomed to that I pretty much disappear.

Cathy: [00:25:20] Yes exactly. That's the single most important thing we can do in our classrooms today is disappear. I mean I mean that is what I call student centered learning versus credential centered learning.

Cathy: [00:25:31] And it is making every student so invested in their own learning that they're not going to look at the laptop they're going to do Quizlet and they're going to score better on Quizlet. My favorite example of that again goes back to my mother in law in rural Alberta who taught in a three room schoolhouse. She herself had maybe a high school education. I'm not sure her students were very very rural very very poor. It was the last place in Canada to get even rural electrification ratification.

Cathy: [00:25:59] Even when I was there in the 70s there was still an outhouse which is a Chicago girl was like whoa what is what is it about you know this is a very very rural place that produced more PhDs, MDs, and veterinary medicine doctors than any other town or city in the province of Alberta except for the two major cities Edmonton and Calgary. How did that happen?

Cathy: [00:26:23] Because she broke all the rules some time she literally locked out the school's superintendent and she had her third fourth and fifth graders play games. She would put the fifth graders of big kids against the third and fourth graders and have them quiz each other. Friday was entirely the entire day was game day and it was all about challenges and the person with a group whether it was the third and fourth graders one week or the fifth graders the other week whoever won the previous week's challenge had to spend the week coming up with test questions for the other kids and for the kids and the other group.

Cathy: [00:26:59] And then the whole day was spent with the kids inventing these test questions for their enemies. It's always the big big graders were those silly little third and fourth graders. Well they were learning calculus in this place where it's surprising they could even count to 10. I mean there was no emphasis on higher education in this in this very very rural community no other community around there had test results anything like that.

Cathy: [00:27:24] These were kids that were winning scholarships to places like the University of Chicago from rural Alberta. It was astonishing and it was entirely by this method of what you called so well and put so well with the game you describe challenges.

Cathy: [00:27:38] These were kids who were given the power to challenge one another in my university classrooms. I started by having my students write sometimes I call it terms of service agreement for the class. Sometimes I call it a class constitution but I have the students actually think about what what do we want to learn in this class when we've signed up for this topic.

Cathy: [00:27:57] What do we want to learn about this topic how do we want to learn what are the terms of agreement what is our responsibility going to be. And they do that collectively. I often have them write a syllabus together. I have them divided in teams and do units for the other students would they have to come up with challenging ways that students learn.

Cathy: [00:28:14] I have been doing this for about a decade I was a central administrator for about eight years and then I came back into classroom teaching it was a turning point for me whether I wanted to go on and be a college president or come back to the classroom.

Cathy: [00:28:25] And it was so exciting with what was happening with the Internet and what was happening was learning I decided I wanted to really study the brain more thoroughly study technology more thoroughly and be back as a real teacher in the classroom because so many theorists of education reform don't know anything about learning and don't know anything about students.

Cathy: [00:28:41] They just really are making it up. They're not really classroom teachers. But in my classrooms I started challenging the students to design the class I think go back to my book before I started doing student centered learning syllabi and my after student center learning syllabus.

Cathy: [00:28:58] What my students accomplish in a term here is no there's no comparison. It's as if three years are happening in one semester. When ever I challenge my students to do something at any institution I've been at - I have to worry about them doing too much. I never have to worry about them being bored and not doing enough.

Cathy: [00:29:20] If you trust students and challenge students it's astonishing what they can accomplish and what they want to accomplish. And we know the number one cause of dropping out of school besides economic penury by not by having such economically stressed situations that you have to work and you can't stay in school is boredom. It's not things being too hard it's being things being too easy. I was a kid the kid who hated school.

Cathy: [00:29:43] I didn't need a laptop or a cell phone or Facebook or social media to keep me from not paying attention in class I could do it with like a week old newspaper.

Cathy: [00:29:52] I couldn't do it by counting the number of you know ink spots on the wall I could do it by looking at faces in the woodgrain I anything rather than pay attention. I was totally turned off and it didn't require a laptop a laptop just would be a lot more interesting and probably educational way than being talked at by a teacher and being bored by what was happening in a classroom.

Bonni: [00:30:15] Well this is the time in this show where we each get to share some recommendations and anyone who listens to the show knows that I am a huge broadcast fan not just in terms of getting to talk to amazing people like you Cathy but also to see what is available to us to listen to on our own.

Cathy: [00:30:31] Amazing.

Bonni: [00:30:32] Laura Pasquini she knows that I'm a broadcast geek and we were talking recently she said you have to listen to the Turnaround Podcast because they turned the tables and they interview all these incredible interviewers.

Bonni: [00:30:45] And the one that I just was one of my podcast heroes is Ira Glass who is the creator and producer of This American Life. And it reminded me as I listened to that episode of an episode that is just one I will never forget.

Bonni: [00:31:05] And it's called Ask a Grown-Up and very specifically at the end of the episode he shares in the most vulnerable way I've ever seen him share about the death of his friend Mary. And I'm going to play just the beginning. If you listen to it before you know that he has different acts for the show so I'm going to play just a little bit of act for and then Cathy and I will talk a little bit about Ira and a little bit about what we can glean from This American Life.

Ask A Grown-Up: [00:31:35] "Act four. Ask a very grown woman. A few days ago my friend Mary Ahearn died. Mary was 89 for the last 10 years I've talked to her nearly every day. She and I met in the dog park and we organized our lives to meet there at 10:00 each night which took a little more organization for me than for her. She'd been retired for years. I had a job I traveled for my job. She'd had many very old fashioned New York City jobs. She was a telephone switchboard operator and then the switchboard supervisor at Altman's department store for years we're both Altman's and telephones which boards existed. Lived on pension from a union in a rent controlled apartment. When I traveled and when her health eventually stopped her from going to the park we talked on the phone every night. OK this is a very personal thing to say on the radio but my wife and I separated a few years ago. And so for years now Mary has usually been the person who I talked to last before it go to sleep."

Bonni: [00:32:33] It's very hard for me to stop that there but I'll probably get myself into copyright trouble. But, oh - it's so beautiful. And what is really profound to me that I've been thinking about a lot these last couple of days we had our annual faculty gathering. And our annual faculty gathering is about as non-vulnerable as anything that you could possibly imagine it is your stereotypical you know conversations.

Bonni: [00:33:02] And a lot of those conversations based around ego and vulnerability that's the fear of being vulnerable like that. And what's amazing to me is how when we model for other people telling our story is in a more vulnerable way. Hope becomes contagious and how we can give the gift to other people to then feel more free to share their stories. Cathy I doubt that you know this but I heard an episode a while back on my course evaluations and this has never happened before but I just a very spur of the moment just began to weep.

Cathy: [00:33:40] Oh dear.

Bonni: [00:33:41] And it was very embarrassing to think oh my gosh thousands and thousand people just heard me do that and I'm so glad that I did.

Cathy: [00:33:47] Yeah. No of course.

Bonni: [00:33:47] Because people have just been flooding me with stories of their own pain and grief and just how when we're vulnerable like that how you can invite other people into the pain of the work that we do. So this is just a wonderful story of just a man who who lost his friend and spoke. He spoke to them every night every night and she's gone now and he's just. And I just connected with him of of in all of his pain and it was it was a very nourishing thing and I love for people to go listen I'll put it link in show notes.

Cathy: [00:34:24] I can't wait to hear it.

Bonni: [00:34:25] Yeah.

Cathy: [00:34:26] Can't wait to hear it.

Bonni: [00:34:27] Yeah. And I'll pass it over to you, now, Cathy to make some recommendations or if you wanted to say any thing about This American Life, too.

Cathy: [00:34:32] Well just I perked up one Ira was talking so beautifully about his friend who worked at the B Altman's department store. That is the building I'm sitting in right now.

Cathy: [00:34:43] The B Altman's department store is now the Graduate Center at City University of New York. I mean it's just that's the building that is the old Graduate Center and the old B Altman's department store in New York City. So it's very interesting connection.

Cathy: [00:34:58] I love Ira Glass. And in fact the book I'm going to recommend It's a book rather than a podcast is not dissimilar from what you've told me because it's perhaps the most open, candid, generous, self-effacing, teacherly memoir I've ever read.

Cathy: [00:35:18] And it's by the great journalist and professor Roxane Gay. It's called Hunger. She's perhaps best known as being she wrote a book called Bad Feminist and she's humorous. She's a journalist. She's a strong African-American feminist activist.

Cathy: [00:35:35] This book though is about the fact that she says she no longer - she's lost about 150 pounds - but when she was first writing the book she weighed 537 pounds. And it's a book that tells you about why that happened.

Cathy: [00:35:52] She talks about how this weight gain happened at a very specific time in her life after a young she was 12 and the young boy she had a crush on. She says she loved him and he started getting more and more promiscuous sexually with her and arranged for her. And and actually arranged for himself and his friends to gang rape her in a cabin in the woods which she had began by protesting vehemently.

Cathy: [00:36:21] And by the end was so rendered into this mute on passive on what she describes is almost like a thing numbed out of it's out of any kind of. And now I'm going to express emotion and it was so emotional that she wanted to control her body in some way and she started doing that by enormous eating.

Cathy: [00:36:45] And what this book tells you about is it allows you to understand the mentality of somebody who's been just passed on. I mean betrayed and victimized beyond imagining. It allows you to understand what it's like to walk through the world as this person that the world thinks of not just as big as grotesque. And is it your fault. And so there's a punitive aspect.

Cathy: [00:37:15] She talks about the humiliation. Here she is this very very famous person. She tells a story about being a keynote speaker with Gloria Steinem and the speakers hadn't arranged for the fact that she was the size she is and has the physical disability she has. And it took half an hour for them to get her up on the stage in front of an audience that was filling up.

Cathy: [00:37:36] And what a horrific humiliation that was. And she talks about somehow getting through the metaphor she uses or almost the feeling of being brave how she somehow managed to mumble through that keynote event that should have been a highlight of her career. Gloria Steinem is one of her heroes and instead was a moment of total abject humiliation and what it felt like at home she went home and what that felt like to be home with her.

Cathy: [00:38:00] And what's so astonishing about this book is how she let you into her perspective so suddenly. I am not able to walk across the street without thinking about it disability in a different way about the ways the whole world is designed for a certain body type a certain body size the ways were so punitive towards other people.

Cathy: [00:38:22] And she taught me a different way of seeing the world and being in the world in a different kind of empathy than I've ever had before. How I want to tie that back to my idea of the new education is I think everybody who goes to college I like to say should make their major minor. And by that I mean if you don't do what you have to do to graduate your requirements.

Cathy: [00:38:43] But then once you start acquirments are done use this very unique opportunity at college or university to take as many chances as you can all over the university you're finding people who have dedicated their lives to things you know nothing about whatsoever. And the same way I didn't when I knew this did this Roxane Gay book.

Cathy: [00:39:02] And you can find out whole worlds of things that you probably aren't going to find out most places in your life. And if only students had the opportunity and the freedom and the confidence to be able to learn new worlds we wouldn't actually have to do very much else with college. I mean I do I have a whole lot of prescriptions for how to make college better.

Cathy: [00:39:21] But the single most important things are the where do you use challenges. And another word you used vulnerability and a word I'm going to add to that openness and being able to explore and to see points of view that you normally are blind to.

Cathy: [00:39:35] And this book hunger by Roxane Gay certainly did that for me it was a model to me the best kind of education and learning in the best sense of you started it not understanding something and you ended it feeling like you understood something that it was a rare privilege privilege to be able to learn.

Bonni: [00:39:56] Cathy thank you for writing in The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux. And Cathy thank you for coming back on to Teaching in Higher Ed and for just joining me for this conversation.

Cathy: [00:40:11] It was such a pleasure Bonni and thank you for all you do. I don't know if you realize the impact that important to have in the world but we count on you. So thank you so much for what you do and thank you for having me back.

Bonni: [00:40:24] Thanks to all of you for listening to today's episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. number 169 with Cathy Davidson. If you'd like to see the link to her new book. You can do that at teachinginhighered.com/169.

Bonni: [00:40:41] I occasionally like to give my pleading to you too if you haven't yet written a review or rated the show on whatever service it is that you use to listen to it. This will be a great time to do that that just helps us expand our listening audience.

Bonni: [00:40:56] And it also helps us through algorithmic magic that helps us move up in the rankings on iTunes and other platforms so please consider supporting the show in that small way it doesn't take long to do. And I'd love to spread the word more about the show but of course you can also just tell your colleague about it as well. Thanks so much for listening and I'll see you next time.

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