

Why Not Be Kind? with Cate Denial

Cate Denial: [00:00:00] I realized the implicit question at the digital pedagogy lab was, why not be kind? I had no good answer for, to defend not being kind. Why not be kind is such a profound question. And I don't mean that I am the one who made it profound.

I just mean that like it exists in the universe as a profound question for all of us.

DeElla Wiley: Welcome to Centering Centers', a POD Network podcast. I'm d Wiley, an educational development specialist at the Biggio Center at Auburn University. Today I'm speaking with Kate Denial, the bright distinguished professor of American History and director of the Bright Institute at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois.

She is the author most recently of a Pedagogy of Kindness. And consults with individuals, departments, and institutions across the globe on compassionate teaching. She has a 2025 to 2027 associated Colleges of the Midwest Leadership Fellow and serves on the [00:01:00] board of Commonplace, a journal of Early American Life.

Today she'll be sharing how a commitment to kindness shapes teaching leadership, and the everyday work of higher education.

DeElla Wiley: hi Kate and welcome to Centering Centers. We're so excited to have you here today. I'm excited to be with you. Let's start, maybe you could tell us a little bit about yourself and your current

Cate Denial: work. So I am a history professor at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, which is almost in Iowa, but not quite.

And I, focus in my historical work on pregnancy, childbirth, infancy amongst Dakota, Ojibwe and missionary communities at the beginning of the 19th century. But I'm also a pedagogy consultant, and I travel all over the country to talk to different groups [00:02:00] of people, faculty and staff about teaching.

And a lot of it is based in my book that came out last summer called A Pedagogy of Kindness. And in that book I advocate us for is getting really radically kind, determinately kind and making that a priority. And I distinguish kindness from niceness. Niceness just lets anything go. Niceness will lie glibly to you.

And kindness is very honest. It is accountable and it is responsible. I also consult with virtually. With people in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Ireland. Lots of people around the world talking about teaching.

DeElla Wiley: That's amazing and that they're all talking about kindness. I hope so.

Yes. Going together from around the world. That's actually something that I wanted to ask you about because in the past couple of years, we've seen a lot of changes in higher education, even within the past few months, [00:03:00] and so I was wondering about. You were thinking about the pedagogy of kindness and how that's changed, since you were writing the book to now you know, what's shifted for you, what's different, what's new?

Cate Denial: What's new is generative ai. So when I wrote the book, it really hadn't exploded onto the scene in the way that it has now. And so the book really doesn't address that. So I've been writing in my blog about generative ai and I curated a list of resources about generative AI on my block.

I am someone who resists generative ai. I think especially 'cause I'm a historian, there is no value add for generative AI in the work that I do. I believe that my students need to learn to think. For themselves. And that also means writing and speaking in their own voices and having someone be invested in those voices and help them cultivate those voices.

And I don't allow generative AI to be used in my [00:04:00] courses. But I preface that by doing a lot of work with my students about ethics. So I have them read about the labor violations that surround generative AI's production. I have them think about all the environmental concerns. I spend some time with them on what an LLM actually is because many of them don't know.

And so they think that it's an entity that thinks instead of simply a statistical predictor of what. It's the most likely word to come after another word. I have them think about accessibility issues. I have them think about how this is all being marketed to them, and we have a really robust discussion about what is the place of generative AI in higher ed and we distinguish it from other kinds of AI that are being used productively, say, in medical fields, for example.

So I'm a resistor and I'm very comfortable resisting for all kinds of reasons. I think that it's just doing harm. Not only to the people who are using it, but to the [00:05:00]

communities that are helping create the corpus on which it draws. So it is something that I talk to people about a lot and I say, I can't solve this problem for you.

None of us have the magic solution, but I can suggest that we talk with our students about it and what it offers and what it doesn't.

DeElla Wiley: How do you see generative AI in relationship to kindness and all of your work on kindness? How do you put those two into conversation?

Cate Denial: So I think that one of the most obvious issues of kindness for me is in the production of the corpus, right?

So it is not kind to steal the copyrighted works of individuals in order to build your generative ai. It is not kind to have children in the global south be the ones who remove abusive content from that corpus and are exposed to traumatic content day after day. It is not kind to be using so [00:06:00] much electricity that data centers are proliferating across the country and overwhelmingly being built in neighborhoods that belong to, groups that have been historically marginalized. It's poisoning water. It's using enormous amounts of water, all of those kindnesses matter. We are not just using this tool in a bubble. It has real world consequences. I also think that it is a kindness to cultivate the voices of our students as authentically and uniquely their own, because.

When they get out of college whether they go to graduate school or whether they go into some kind of industry. If they can only write as well as generative ai, no one's gonna hire them to do that. They're just gonna use generative ai. So I think we do them a disservice in having them turn towards generative AI as a way of writing and [00:07:00] thinking, because the world is gonna demand better than that from them if they want to have flourishing, fulfilling careers.

DeElla Wiley: That's so interesting to think about kindness outside of pedagogy and outside of the classroom and also back in when thinking about generative ai. One of the things that I wanted to ask you about is thinking about, kindness as a discipline. Thinking outside of the classroom too.

How might we practice it, not just in teaching, but also in. In faculty meetings, in committee work, even how institutions communicate with their communities.

Cate Denial: Yeah. That's something I'm very interested in and working on a lot at the moment, is thinking about how the same principles that I advocate for the classroom are principles that we really should have in every area of higher ed.

I think about in general the kinds of communications that offer come from Provost's office or [00:08:00] Dean's offices. And they are not always predicated on trust. They are not always predicated upon addressing our best selves. And that is something that I want people to be able to do in the classroom is, not to distrust our students, not treat everybody with blanket suspicion.

But sometimes that's what leadership does. And so I would love for us to be able to think about how do we change those dynamics? How do we prioritize kindness in those spaces? You are right that it's a discipline. It's not about feeling compassionate all the time, it's not that I have reached some epiphany there's some nirvana that I've reached

that's not it at all. There are lots and lots of times where I feel myself being tested , or I'm angry, or I'm cranky, or I'm tired, or I'm hungry. All the things that happen, right? In those moments, it is choosing and prioritizing kindness in the way [00:09:00] we respond. And sometimes that means not responding for a while

sometimes that means the pause, which is so valuable, but it means thinking about. Other people's best selves when we reply and thinking about our own best self too. We don't represent our best self when we snap at people. And there's no situation I think that is ever really helped by shaming people either.

I think the mix of all of these things is something I'm super, super interested in. I was PI on a Mellon funded grant in 22 and 23. That was called Care in the Academy and Care in the Academy brought 36 participants together and they were from all kinds of different institutions, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, regional publics, R one universities.

And we had contingent. Faculty members as well as tenured ones. We had staff as part of this project too, and we all dove [00:10:00] in on considering what would it look like if we really cared about each other. Especially in light of the way we were asked to care for students in the acute phase of the pandemic.

So there we were asked, please extend kindness here. Think about the situation that we've all been plunged into. And we did, I think, a pretty good job of supporting our students, but I don't think that most institutions did a really good job of supporting their faculty and staff. So that was our, that was where we started.

What would it look like to actually take care of each other? And we investigated trauma, disability, and sustainable teaching practices. And that's really the seed for me of this interest in thinking about, how do we talk to each other? How do we relate to each other? What are the things that are in our power to control?

And where do we need to be making moves to chip away at systemic issues.

DeElla Wiley: Can you give me an [00:11:00] example of something that you came up with in working with the care in the academy?

Cate Denial: I think the best example came from the Lafayette college team because people were part of this in little teams so that they could work on their campuses on some of the things we suggested.

And that team which was led by Tracy Addie at the time, came up with this wonderful guide to having conversations in your office, your department, your unit about care. What would care look like in your specific situation between your specific group of individuals? They produced a little booklet, which we made available online that suggests some ways that people can move through these conversations, and it's not at all about.

Group therapy or like the airing of the grievances, right? It is just a very structured way to move through some of those conversations and then to also check in again and keep having those [00:12:00] conversations to make sure that. We're not losing sight of our commitment to care. So that was one of the most beautiful things that came out of that whole project.

We also have extensive reading lists for people if they wanna know more about what would it look like to really value disabled faculty and staff. If they wanna think about what are the traumas that are common in our workforce and how do we relate to each other through and within those traumatic moments?

So there's lots to read that we have there. And then we have little reports also from many different types of institutions. So no matter what kind of institution someone works at, they would be able to find some of that reflected in the reports that we made.

DeElla Wiley: And where can we find those reports?

Cate Denial: So if you Google Care in the Academy, you will find two places.

One is on Substack and one is on the Knox College website. I am in the [00:13:00] process of moving everything from Substack to Ghost, but it will redirect, so you will be able to find it really easily. But yeah, those two places have. Both of the reports and the supporting document. The SUBSTACK also has some blog posts by some of the members of the team.

DeElla Wiley: I wanna go back to one of the things that I heard you say when you were speaking, because I've worked with, I've been working with the Pedagogy of kindness for a while, your work and presenting it to faculty, but also in more of an HR staff context. And one of the things that you mentioned is the airing of grievances.

Yes. And how do you. How do you acknowledge that, but also redirect? What recommendations would you have when you're working with groups of faculty or, other groups on campus about, yeah.

Cate Denial: Yeah. One of the ways that I think is a good model for this kind of work is thinking about the way that I talk about revising the [00:14:00] syllabus language.

Often our syllabi betray that we are, or betray is not quite the right word, often unbeknownst to us unwittingly, our syllabi are intensely legalistic and they outline all the ways we suspect our students might mess up. And the consequences if they do, and the overall tone is very officious, authoritarian, it's distant, right?

And sometimes we want that, but sometimes it's the default that we've absorbed from seeing lots and lots of other syllabuses like it. I certainly saw that in my undergraduate education over and over again, and I just internalized it. So then positing that. That is not the student who is most often in front of us.

And how do we address that student? The student we do trust the student who is gonna do their best, right? And it changes the tone and it changes the way that we frame things to a more positive way of framing things. So often people have [00:15:00] policies that make a lot of sense for situations that they have faced in the past, but what I usually ask people to do is instead of saying, don't do something. Express the positive reason to do something - a good example of this is my AI policy, rather than simply saying, you can't use AI in my classroom or do not use AI in my classroom. What I say is I lead with a positive pedagogical reason for my choice, and I say, because I am invested in hearing from you in your own unique voice and helping you develop those communication skills, we will not be using generative AI in this classroom.

That changes everything from don't do it to, I actually have positive reasons for wanting to do this thing. I think in a staff context, if we could have some free writing, write down all the grievances, but then think about how do we [00:16:00] frame this in a positive rather than a negative sense so if perhaps.

Let's say someone has a grievance about how noisy their office is just to take a very small example it's distracting. It's overwhelming. It's so noisy saying, please don't talk to each other. That's not gonna work. And it's also gonna set up a lot of hostility between different people and different communication styles, but being able to say, within our team are individuals who thrive with quiet, let us support them in carving out spaces and times where that can happen. So it's not a blanket prohibition, but it's a positive. There's reasoning there and there's an ask that it's framed in a completely different way so I think that is something that we can do with our syllabus, and it's something that we can do with the grievances that come up when humans get together

that's not a [00:17:00] function of higher ed or of people in an office that is just humans, right? So finding positive reasoning. For choices, I think is really important.

DeElla Wiley: That is incredibly helpful in thinking about that and in thinking that, having grievances is human and not just very human.

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. So acknowledging that humanity and moving forward. Yeah. Yeah. You were talking when you were talking about the syllabus language and the reframing about the authoritarian tone in the syllabi, which Yes, I saw that too. And on your episode in the teaching in Higher Ed podcast, you talked about.

As an early teacher starting out with this very authoritarian approach in your classes.

Cate Denial: Yeah, I

DeElla Wiley: very much resonated with that because I did the same thing. I don't know where that came from, how we were all somehow taught to do that. But. What advice would you give to new GTAs early career faculty about finding [00:18:00] that balance between authority and kindness?

Especially, it's can be very challenging when you're only a few years older than the students that you may be working with. And finding your identity and,

Cate Denial: yeah. So I think that. Part of why we defer to that sort of authoritarian distant language is because we're not often given good teaching training.

We're not often asked to consider at baseline, who do you consider your students to be? And in the absence of training, in the absence of conversations about teaching. What goes into that vacuum is word of mouth, even gossip. So I was taught, don't trust them.

They're gonna try and get one over on you. If they won't do the reading, they're gonna challenge all their grades. They won't wanna talk in class. All, every negative thing that was just passed on to me by word of mouth from other graduate students, and that was because we had so little [00:19:00] training in how to be good instructors.

So I think we need something in that vacuum we need we need to seek that out when it is not offered to us. We need to find where our teaching and learning centers are. And we also, so many early career scholars are actually contingent on our, road warriors pulling together three and four and five different jobs to make a living wage

if it's not that you feel connected to the services of a particular campus, there's so much wonderful information online and so many low cost and no cost opportunities to talk about these kinds of issues through various organizations and individuals. So I think seeking that out is so important.

But I also think. It's simply pausing and disrupting what we have come to absorb we do replicate the way we were taught as people who are moving into graduate school. We tend to be the people [00:20:00] who did well at college, we just either, we were lucky enough to have parents and family members, caregivers who had also been through college and could demystify the hidden curriculum for us.

So we felt empowered no matter what we were being told on a syllabus. Or we had to intuit it and we worked it out by trial and error, but we were good at doing that. And so we are not the rule, right? The very fact that we went into graduate school makes us the exception to the rule.

And so we have to say okay, what if I didn't have that background? If I didn't have these people who could explain it to me? What if it didn't make automatic sense? How is this information, assuming certain kinds of knowledge, how is it assuming certain kind. Backgrounds and where can I be so much more transparent and how can I explain the [00:21:00] steps through which things happen so that people feel welcomed into spaces,

so I think sitting down with either one of your own syllabi like I did when I went to the Digital Pedagogy Lab in 2017, or take an old syllabus from an old class and actually go through it and ask yourself, okay, how does this syllabus make me? Feel as a person to whom it is addressed and that so revealing an exercise.

DeElla Wiley: Yes. That seems almost painful.

Cate Denial: It is. It is. In many senses. I mean like my classroom persona was radically different from the persona that was captured in my syllabus, but my syllabus stands in for me very early in a course. They are gonna read the syllabus and engage with the syllabus before they've gotten to know who I am in a classroom space.

Even when my students knew who I was in a classroom space. It must have been so confusing because who was gonna show up? The [00:22:00] person that wrote that syllabus in that terrible language, or the person who was trying to be cool, they never could entirely trust who I was because I was giving them conflicting messages without really knowing it.

DeElla Wiley: I think we've probably all been guilty of that. Yeah. Especially in starting out and trying to figure out who we are and how our syllabus represents us, so very much yeah. One of the things I was thinking about as you were talking is thinking through accountability. And thinking about , how do we hold ourselves accountable and how do we hold our students accountable?

And especially thinking about the difference between, where we think of from coming from that authoritarian distant place and from a place of kindness.

You see the differences there. Where do you see the benefits in moving towards kindness there?

Cate Denial: I think this question is really closely, connected to the rigor wars, and to people who are like if you're kind, you're giving up on rigor. You're just [00:23:00] saying anything goes right. I think some people have a perception that kindness is about no deadlines, no accountability, it's about do what you want when you want, and. It could not be further from that because that kind of unstructured, un scaffolded experience is so hard for most of us to navigate.

And I learned this the hard way. I taught a class in the 20 teens. It was a history of birth control and reproduction class, and I had two sections with 50 students and I was like, I

can't grade 50 papers at once. So I made the decision that they could turn in their papers whenever they wanted, anytime during the term.

What happened was that nearly everyone wrote both papers the night before the end of class. So I still had all the papers to grade, but now I had a hundred of them instead of 50 of them. And those poor students pulled such all-nighters. It lives in infamy [00:24:00] in the memory. That's passed down in one of the sororities on our campus that they stayed up all night to write two papers.

It wasn't fair. It and it didn't work for me and it didn't work for them. So it is about accountability. Kindness is about deadlines and structure and scaffolding. Those are kindnesses and the way that people think about rigor. I sex with this in that Kevin Gannon has the most.

Wonderful definition of what rigor is. He says there is a difference between logistical rigor and cognitive rigor. Logistical rigor is when you say you must staple your paper before you hold it, before you turn it in, you must keep a copy for yourself. You must I'm gonna write an exam that has slightly too many questions for you to actually finish in the amount of time that I've allowed for you.

Logistical rigor is all about making people jump through hoops. Cognitive rigor, on the other hand, is being an expert who can [00:25:00] encourage people to stretch themselves, it is having people engage with ideas and theories that they didn't know before, and really scaffolding that experience so that everybody can move towards mastery of those concepts

so I like that definitional. Split, right? Am I just making this logistically hard for students or am I cognitively challenging them to grow? Kindness is about cognitively challenging to grow. It is not about. Staple your paper before you hunted in. I used that example because that used to be on my assignment sheets.

And somebody fairly recently pointed out as I was using this example in a workshop that we don't grade people on whether they can staple a paper. They're not in college to learn how to use a stapler. So it falls outside the parameters of what we should be assessing. I think all of these things are messily and a knot together.

But that kindness for me [00:26:00] is about making it possible for people to take the steps they need to do the challenging thing.

DeElla Wiley: We just were thinking about, talking about kinda applying that towards students now. Can we switch gears and think about faculty and how they should be applying this to themselves.

How they should think about kindness.

Cate Denial: Yeah. I think a good example of how scaffolding a structure are still so important to us is that. For example, I have a policy that if you need an extension, you can ask for it and we'll get it. I don't need to know why. Just say, can I have two more days and I will give you two more days.

I often get people say, but then, the grading piles up and it spreads out and like, how do I keep them on track so they're not falling behind in the class and all of these things. So what I recommend is and what I do myself. I build some time into my [00:27:00] schedule before the semester begins and I block out when I'm gonna do my feedback or grading

and I make sure that I put some after I think I should be done. So it might be that they have a paper due and I have a block of grading time that week. But I also have a smaller grading time the week after because there will always be students who need an extension. And it is a kindness to myself to have that time blocked off before we even enter the classroom,

so it's not subject to all the other demands that are gonna be placed on me once the semester actually starts to roll. I think that scaffolding and structure work for us too in different kinds of ways, depending on who we are, but that's one example of how it has worked out really well for me and is a kindness to me, so that then I can be kind to my students too.

DeElla Wiley: I was gonna ask exactly what you just talked about next in thinking [00:28:00] about you. That was a great example of thinking about how to build in that sort of grading time for yourself. Do you have any other practical examples in thinking about, how kindness is it discipline? It's something to be practiced.

Yeah, it's something that we should be revisiting. And rather than feel like extra work or just something else, that we should be doing or have to do.

Cate Denial: A couple of things, I think take email notifications off your phone so you can have the app on there if you want to. So you can choose to go in and look at your

email, but do not have that email app constantly reminding you that people want your attention.

It allows you, if you take the notifications off your phone it enables you to have quiet time. It enables you to have periods where you are not thinking about your inbox. And that is not possible if there's a ping, ping all the time because there's emails coming in from so many different people on campus,

I also think that [00:29:00] lunch or dinner or whatever meal it is, depending on your schedule, is a kindness. I got diagnosed with diabetes two and a half years ago, and until then I had pretty much navigated my days by snacking on mini Snickers bars and string cheese. And once I got diagnosed I was like, oh no.

My entire strategy is just shot right. But then I realized that when I blocked off time on my calendar again before this semester even started and was like this half an hour, 45 minutes, whatever it is unmissable. With myself, it is an appointment I am gonna keep. I was more refreshed. My body was not as physically tired.

I was just a better human being for not being either on a sugar high or a real low. And it seems to me that the very least we can expect is half an hour to ourselves in the middle of our day so that we actually can refuel. When I tell people this at workshops, very [00:30:00] often there's a gasp of what do you mean take a bunch every day?

What is this nonsense? But again, I think it's a thing we do before the semester even begins. We put it on our calendar. We do not accept meetings at that time. When somebody says, I wanna meet at. 1230, we can just say, I'm sorry, I have another commitment at that time and we will find another time to have the meeting.

But, and I think that kind of language, I'm sorry, I have another commitment. That commitment can be to yourself is a wonderful way to reply when people are asking you to overstuff your calendar. That's another kindness that I think really works well for us.

DeElla Wiley: Making time for yourself, making appointments with yourself.

Yes, absolutely. And it, it is such good advice and I think about myself and, scheduling those breaks for myself and how easily I would be pushed out of that time and into a meeting or into another obligation. It just seems like the world moves quickly and the work culture that we find ourselves in [00:31:00] has an expectation that you are available.

Yeah. Agree. I agree. How do you deal with that challenge?

Cate Denial: I'm very clear much as I allow my students to say, I need an extension, and they don't have to tell me why. I will offer my regrets and I will not tell you why I'm regret that I'm offering them. If somebody says we wanna meet from 12 to one, I will say.

I'm sorry. I have another commitment. My commitment is to myself and my lunch. It is to commitment to my physical safety and my physical flourishing, and also my mental safety and flourishing as well to have that break. Nicole Cliff, who was one of the people who ran the Toast, which was a website some time ago, used to reply to people when they asked her something that she didn't want to do or couldn't do, she would just say, I'm afraid that's just not possible, and leave it at that. And I thought that was genius. Because it puts the onus back on the asker, right? Are they gonna be rude enough to pry or are they gonna accept that?

[00:32:00] Oh, okay, it's not possible. Okay, let's look for another time. Let's look for another way to do this. So I think finding those phrases where you're like, I have other plans. Maybe the other plan is that you need to sit on your couch in your sweatpants and watch some, whatever your movie or TV show of choice is that helps you decompress

maybe it's that you need to be with your family, all kinds of things, but say I have other plans and do not offer further excuses. It is enough to say I can't do that at that time.

DeElla Wiley: I love when the other plans evolve. Sweatpants and Netflix on the couch. Yeah.

Cate Denial: Yes. I have a friend who says that the difference sometimes between work and home is that she's changed into sweatpants and that means that it's now we are not working now, this is not the time.

DeElla Wiley: Yeah. I like that clear division. One of the things that reminded me of is earlier you were talking about kindness and you mentioned the word disruptive.

And I wanna go back to that. [00:33:00] Can you tell me a little bit more about how you see kindness as disruptive?

Cate Denial: I think that we. This, I think is a human thing.

Again, I don't think this is necessarily just about higher ed or even about our individual offices and departments. I think that we have gotten used to a certain amount of cruelty and we have gotten used to a certain amount of, tiredness, exhaustion, burnouts, all of those things, right? And we have gotten used to being lied to.

We have gotten used to being unable to realize the things that we most treasure. And that happens a lot. For various reasons, right from the most remote political situation. Remote in the sense of it's happening in Washington DC to the dynamics of our families and friendships,

and our work lives. And I think it's really easy to slip into those grooves because [00:34:00] it takes a lot of intestinal fortitude to fight back against those things, especially when someone is doing that to your face. And you have to be the one that says, that's unacceptable. We are, A lot of us are, people pleases.

A lot of us find confrontation very hard, and so that allows things like cruelty to flourish. I think prioritizing kindness. Prioritizing finding positive ways to frame our principles. So it's not asking us to compromise on our principles, but to explain them in the affirmative. I think these are ways in which we can train ourselves to not give into the cruelty and to not lash out, to actually think and pause.

A lot of pausing is necessary, right? I find that all the time I have to I'll get an email and I have to be like. If I reply to this right this second, I'm gonna be mean. So I need to walk away from it. I need to do something else, and I come back to it later, those kinds of actions I think are really [00:35:00] important.

And I think the more that we do this and the more we prioritize this, the greater a disruption it is to those, grooves that have been worn by cruelty and impatience and being overstretched and overworked and overcommitted, so prioritizing ourselves, prioritizing our relationships, prioritizing the ways in which we can carve time where we feel good.

It doesn't feel good to send them me an email. It might for a minute, but there's. Always some kind of consequence to that, so finding ways to build positive, affirmative experiences for ourselves through kindness, I think is a disruptive act. And the more of us that do it, the bigger the change can be.

DeElla Wiley: Those always seem to be the first things to go, sleep, social, oh gosh. Activities, yes. Things that you do to relax.

Cate Denial: Yeah.

DeElla Wiley: And I love the idea of reclaiming those things. As an act of kindness.

[00:36:00] Yeah.

Cate Denial: Yeah.

DeElla Wiley: I have one last question, and it actually comes from the last line of your book.

Which is why not be kind? Yes, . And from your perspective, what do you see as the barriers or perceived barriers to kindness and how would you respond to those?

Cate Denial: I think we've touched on many of them in our conversation today, the perception that we're letting people get away with something.

It's a responsible, it's, there's no accountability. And I think that time, energy, those are things that are at precious and in short supply, and I think that many of us are shouldering all kinds of situations outside of our work lives that change our work lives to Caregiving is one of the top.

No matter who you are caring for and what stage of life they are in on what they are facing from the tiniest baby to the oldest elder, [00:37:00] caregiving demands so much of people and there's so little time to fill up right from those things. So I think there are structural barriers.

I think that there are habitual barriers and I think that there are just, there are political barriers too, if we had. A better system of caregiving in this country, right? If we supported people in their caregiving better that would not be such a drain on people's resources and time and energy and affection,

it is everywhere. It is scalable, these issues, but when. I realized the implicit question at the digital pedagogy lab was, why not be kind? I had no good answer for, to defend not being kind. Why not be kind is such a profound question. And I don't mean that I am the one who made it profound.

I just mean that like it exists in the universe as a profound question for all of [00:38:00] us. What is the answer to that? Why would we say no, I need to be unkind, I need to be

cruel. That is a priority. There are people in the world like that. I. I just read a book that made me, that gave me insight into some people who are motivated only by money.

And I was just appalled and surprised despite all my years on this planet, right? I felt most people had some kind of bearing that gave them a sense of direction other than money. So there were all those people, but for the rest of us, I don't think there are good answers to why not be kind other than, no, let's try it.

Even if we're imperfect at it, it's not like we're gonna go from zero to 60 overnight. Even if there are days when we are deeply frustrated and we do lash out, or we say the thing that we regret, So we start over, we start again. And you just keep going. And anything, it takes practice and the more PR we practice it, the better we get at it

So I just think it's one of the most profound [00:39:00] questions that's ever been presented to me, and I'm still musing on exactly what it means.

DeElla Wiley: I'm gonna be thinking about that one for a long time. I think I'll be right there with you. Yeah. Yeah. And I guess just to leave us, what is one thing that we could do today to be kind to ourselves and to our students and to our fellow faculty members?

Cate Denial: I think one of the kindest things we can do is be in community. So I think find someone. Who needs to just to hear something affirmative, something affirming, who needs a bunch of flowers? Who needs you to drop a card at their desk? Who needs you to say, go home 15 minutes early? Like, how can we build.

Community from these tiny gestures that are so meaningful. So dressing macmillan Cotton said the other day that I think it was her mother who said to her, like when you're feeling terrible and I'm [00:40:00] paraphrasing when you're feeling terrible, take care of somebody and taken to its extreme, that could be really draining

but I do think that. If we wanna increase the store of kindness, it's infectious, right? So do something kind for somebody today and it will be returned to you.

DeElla Wiley: What a great way to to leave everybody and to finish this with. And thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for asking me to be here.

Cate Denial: What a great conversation.

DeElla Wiley: Thank you.

Cate Denial: Thank you.

Lindsay Doukopoulos: Thanks for listening to this episode. Centering centers is a podcast produced by the digital resources and innovation committee of the pod network. If you would like to get involved, please email us at dr@podnetwork.org.