

# Centering Centers - Jessica Riddell-1

[00:00:00] **Derek Bruff:** Thank you Jessica, for being on Centering Centers. I'm excited to talk with you today.

[00:00:04] **Jessica Riddell:** I am so excited to be here. I'm a big fan of yours from the Twitter sphere, and I'm just excited to see you in real time.

[00:00:12] **Derek Bruff:** That's great. Thanks. And, uh, yeah, and I'm, I'm glad to be kind of guest hosting here on Center and Centers and, uh, chatting with my teaching center colleagues, um, in educational development.

[00:00:21] But I wanna ask you first, uh, one of my favorite questions. Can you tell us about a time when you realized you wanted to be an educator?

[00:00:31] **Jessica Riddell:** Yes. That's a tough question that I, maybe I'll tell you a time about when I, I transformed from a student to a learner. Okay. And I, I was toggling back and forth in my undergraduate.

[00:00:47] Journey and it was a messy and unctuous journey where I was a student, so I was a number, I was on an Excel document. I was going to McGill, I was countable, I was able to be dismembered. You could say there's 26.7 students in the class without anybody losing a limb. I was massified and scaled and I understood that kind of education.

[00:01:10] And moreover, I understood how to game this system as a student, so I understood where value circulated. Where the edges of structures and systems were so that I could put in different kinds of effort to get rewarded based on those systems, and that didn't work for me. I was not living in wholeness. I was not living in an undivided space.

[00:01:33] I was short circuiting my own creativity. I didn't have a language for it. I couldn't frame it only in retrospect. Sort of metabolize that discomfort. But I remember dropping out and coming back to university after taking some time off, sort of paying off my. Financial and existential debts and returning back to the classroom and on the first day of my fresh start, I met Dr.

[00:02:01] Janet Hill who had trained with the R S C in England, was a Shakespearean, and she walked into this RSC is Classroom Royal, Royal Shakespeare Company. Yes. She trained with Dame Judy Dench. She looks like

her, and she came into the classroom and she was. Trailing scarves and she had books in her arms and she plunked everything down.

[00:02:23] And she said, right, who's my Des amona? And I think she pointed it to me, or maybe I just levitated out of my chair and ended up in the front of the classroom lying on dusty linoleum and had her give this speech, put out the light. She was a fellow and she was murdering me. And I do feel, and I love a good metaphor, but I do feel like the student died and the learner got up and stood up and was, was born into a moment where it just, it wasn't just Shakespeare.

[00:02:59] I had read Shakespeare before I'd seen Shakespeare, but it was Shakespeare in the classroom in conversation with a professor who. Her craft. Mm-hmm. And so for me, that that moment of the student died, the learner was, was born, and now I still toggled back between student and learner, but learner is. Is embodied, it's indivisible.

[00:03:26] It, a learner doesn't show up on an Excel document. Mm-hmm. A learner is a full human. That the, the world, the classroom cannot be complete without learners completing it. And so that for me was a magical moment of convergence. Mm-hmm. That totally transformed myself, but it also transformed my understanding of my place in the world.

[00:03:49] And it's there where I thought, you know, There's something magical here I wanna chase.

[00:03:55] **Derek Bruff:** Wow. And so that led you, I assume, over time to be a scholar of Shakespeare and a teacher of Shakespeare and, and then a teacher of teachers. Um, yeah.

[00:04:11] **Jessica Riddell:** It did, and you know, when I look back on it, it, it looks less messy than it felt.

[00:04:19] Mm-hmm. So it felt really messy and circuitous as I was crossing. I really love threshold concepts. I really love those transformative journeys that we undertake where we can't see the other side and that we have to sit. In the difficulty of not being able to grasp the bounded concept and that we only recognize, we've crossed that threshold in retrospect and often in conversation with our mentors who can see that before we can.

[00:04:47] Yeah. Yeah. So it, it sounds like this lovely journey, but it. Felt messy and hard and decentering at the time. So I, all I know is I wanted to

recreate that feeling I had in the [00:05:00] classroom with Shakespeare, with my fellow students as learners. As we code co-constructed something, we brought something to life that didn't exist before and also wouldn't exist after.

[00:05:13] So this moment of ephemerality was really, was really powerful and. I ended up going to grad school. I didn't know that you could get paid to go to grad school until my, my professor was like, you know, you could, you could do that, that that is available. First generation grad student. So I was like, wow, okay.

[00:05:35] Uh, that sounds fun. And I had really planned to go to law school. I wanted to go to law school and I wanted to do, um, international human rights and lobby for women and children in developing nations. Like that was where I was going. Uh, and I thought, oh, I'll just take a quick detour and do a, like a one year masters.

[00:05:55] And then I just kind of stayed, stayed there because it felt good. It also felt hard and alienating. And the more I went through grad school, the more that joy and delight and. Sort of immediacy of lived experience in co-design got stamped out of me. Uh, and so that's kinda a sad story. It's not a triumphal narrative.

[00:06:18] Sure. But I entered a profession where, You know Shakespeare is one of the funniest authors. He's full of dirty jokes and fattiness and hilarity, and there's always a moment where you find yourself laughing out loud. But there are no jokes in Shakespeare scholarship. There's no, oh yeah. Delight. You take, you take that out cuz you have to be very, very serious and very, very rigorous.

[00:06:45] And so I felt the pain of Parker Palmer's dismemberment. Hmm. Right. That I had dismembered myself, that I had forgotten what called me to this in the first place. And so, My first job at Concordia University in Montreal, I started to remember, and it really is a kind of dismemberment and then remembering, and I found that in the classroom.

[00:07:10] Mm-hmm. I found that joy in the classroom where in my scholarship and my research, I, I felt. Imposer and alienated, and here I found that I was wired for these conversations. Mm-hmm. And so I accidentally got a tenure track job at this little tiny liberal arts college in the middle of nowhere, rural Quebec, Canada.

[00:07:32] And, I went and thought I'll be there for a couple years. I'll buy some rubber boots and I'll get a dog and I'll live in a farmhouse and I'll try that. Sure.

And so I, I did, and what I found was in this tiny little incubator of. Primarily undergraduate, you know, wonderful, uh, small class sizes. I found the benevolent neglect necessary to build what I now call the prototypes of hope circuits.

[00:07:58] I didn't have that language, but these weird, wonderful, beautiful little things that I got to design and co-design and then see how they lived in, in real life and study them and think about them. And so once I started to do that, That's where I thought, I've gotta share this with other humans. I've, I know my colleagues are tired and depleted and exhausted and dismembered, and I know when they come alive, when their, when their faces, you can see it, their faces come alive, their voices come alive, and I wanted to do that work with them.

[00:08:35] And so that's, that was my very, very messy journey. Yeah.

[00:08:40] **Derek Bruff:** Yeah. Now you have, you have several titles at Bishops, but I want to ask you, what does it mean to be the Jarislowsky chair of Undergraduate teaching Excellence at Bishops University?

[00:08:53] **Jessica Riddell:** I love this question because it's about generosity and generativity.

[00:08:58] Stephen Jarislowsky was a refugee in the late 1930s from Germany with the rise of fascism. He fled and was a refugee in Europe, and then he found his way to America. And when he was in the United States, he enlisted and went and fought in the Second World War. Um, and yes. Oh, he was amazing. And then when he came back, he was part of a GI bill to go to university.

[00:09:24] And so he went to Harvard, um, and he got, uh, a degree and then he went and, and did this kind of journey where, um, he found. Profound meaning in mentorship and in education as a way of exercising fiduciary duty and civil engagement. Okay. He moved to Montreal in the 1950s. He started an investment banking firm.

[00:09:50] He created this billion dollar enterprise and then created a foundation. And his idea was that the [00:10:00] future, our, our legacy is in education and education where we can move from, um, you know, something simple. Something complex to understand the interworkings, and this man is a polymath. He can quote poetry, classical philosophy.

[00:10:16] He is adept at just the most beautiful, um, so East Asian art. This man is. So attentive to how important the arts are to a flourishing civil society.

So he decided that he was gonna start endowing Chairships. So I think he's got about 37 endowed chairships in Canada, in the us Okay. And they're about particular topics all dedicated to making the world a better place, more inclusive, more just more transparent with a particular focus on how do we engage.

[00:10:51] In the values of a civil society. So, um, everything from the security of, of water and oceans to combating child poverty, this man is absolutely, his impact on higher education in Canada cannot be understated. Mm-hmm. And so, uh, he decided, we made a case at Bishops that although there were really interesting in-depth disciplinary, chairs that went deep into a particular research field.

[00:11:23] There wasn't anything about undergraduate education, which is broad and deep, right? Yeah. It has a kind of immensity that people don't pay attention to as much, and so we made a successful case to endow this chair and my mandate is to lead conversations about quality undergraduate education. In Canada and internationally.

[00:11:44] Mm-hmm. It is the greatest job ever. Wow. Cause I get to have conversations with you and my patron is the most powerful model of generative. So legacy building, generosity. And he is absolutely committed to the independence and the autonomy of the chair, recognizing that institutions themselves sometimes get in their own way.

[00:12:11] Yeah. So he's got this real commitment to the independence of this chair, the research focus, but also research in action and in conversation. And I just, I couldn't be more proud of the, the name of this chairship.

[00:12:27] **Derek Bruff:** Hmm.

[00:12:30] What does that mean on a daily or weekly basis? What are you involved with and, and what, if any, connection do you have to the teaching and learning center at Bishops?

[00:12:40] **Jessica Riddell:** Yeah, so that's a great question and it's one that I, I like to think about microcosm to macrocosm. So I like to think about, um, sort of you drop a.

[00:12:49] A stone in the water, and then you see these sort of larger concentric rings. And so I start, and I'm embedded in the classroom, so I still teach two classes, sometimes four, depending on what I've been cooking up and piloting

and playing with. But I. Start from the classroom. So I, as a Shakespearean, um, I actually just this morning taught my Shakespeare's Guide to Hope Life and Learning course where we take these, these beautiful plays and we think about how they're strange and unfamiliar.

[00:13:21] So they decenter us, but they're also inviting us to think about our own space. Where do we build meaning together in a classroom, but also in. John Dewey's formulation of a creative democracy. Mm-hmm. How are we all brought upon to create something that unfolds together that is not monolithic or separate from us, but is absolutely something we do, as you say, anchored in practice daily.

[00:13:48] So I start in the classroom and I teach those kinds of classes. Um, I also get to, to create new classes. So just with one of my, uh, co-investigators, we're teaching a new course this semester called, um, metaphor and Mentorship in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. So each week we take a different Marvel superhero and we think about what metaphors these films provide for us to think about generat.

[00:14:16] In relationship to mentorship agency and communion. And so it's a research question. My, my classes are research questions. I go in with curiosity and then with students, co-design and partner and collaborate and build an emerging framework from the kinds of questions that we start with. And so that, that is in the classroom, those values and how values circula.

[00:14:40] Informs all the other things that I do. So I work, um, with especially junior and emerging faculty on helping them work through their teaching dossiers, their teaching philosophies, their origin stories. I try to help them unlock their superhero powers. I give them small grants so they can go and try. All sorts of [00:15:00] weird, wonderful little things in their own classrooms or in their own educational leadership.

[00:15:04] And then I, if you think about expanding it more, I am the executive director of the Maple League for small liberal arts, primarily undergraduate universities located in Eastern Canada. All really precarious because Canadian universities are all publicly. Yeah, so they're, and

[00:15:22] **Derek Bruff:** most of them are very large, right?

[00:15:25] **Jessica Riddell:** We do, we have, um, a funding formula that is provincial, but it's pretty much the same thing. It incentivizes universities to massify. Okay? So you're really hard pressed to find a university that has 10,000

students or fewer, and when you do, they have not grown at their own. And that is hard to watch because you see, you know the, my most loath phrase, which is bums in seats.

[00:15:52] I hate that. I hate that phrase. Yeah. But the funding formulas are treating not learners, but students as massified. Bums in seats. And so these, these little four universities are sort of exist despite, not because of the conditions of the Canadian post-secondary sector. And they're the ones I love the most.

[00:16:12] Cuz I love a good underdog. I love people innovating in, in cultures of austerity to a limit. And I think there's an important point here that, you know, we've gotta, we've gotta start moving towards mindsets of abundance in Yeah. Higher education and. And that, that calls us to do that kind of work. But I, I get to build between and amongst these four universities and build in the margins and on the edges.

[00:16:39] And so only in retrospect, and of course every lesson I learn is only in hindsight, um, that I have spent the last five years doing that and I have gotten the closest approximation to building a bricks and mortar hope university, which has been a concept that has been rattling around in my brain. More than five years, I've been writing towards this concept of what does a university called Hope University look like?

[00:17:04] How do you create structures and policies and systems for humans to flourish and to build hopeful future facing spaces and. I've been able to try that out in real time, cuz I get to see how those systems are unfolding in dynamic simultaneity. So I get to see four universities sort of inside them as they change and adapt and collaborate in real time.

[00:17:30] Mm-hmm. And it is just, it's a joy in that I sit on National and international board, so I'm a board member of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. I'm the only, I saw that. Canadian.

[00:17:41] **Derek Bruff:** Yeah. Yeah. That's new news.

[00:17:43] **Jessica Riddell:** Yes. Wow. It is so humbling to think, you know, a sector, like, I think I know the Canadian sector pretty well, and I know the players and I know the rules and I know the systems.

[00:17:53] Mm-hmm. And to go into, not just a different country, but it feels like a different universe where some of the things are very similar and others, I



think. We're not talking about that. We're talking, we're worried about something else over here. Isn't that? Yes. Interesting.

[00:18:12] **Derek Bruff:** Yeah, I had that. I had that feeling when I attended your pod network session because there are conversations happening in Canada that are not totally dissimilar to conversations happening in the us, particularly around diversity and inclusion, but I found the language you used was often very different than the language I was used to hearing.

[00:18:32] And so I had to do a lot of kind of translation work to kind of follow along with those conversations. And I imagine you're experiencing that in reverse as you, as you network with us higher educators.

[00:18:42] **Jessica Riddell:** Yes, I've been surprised about how decolonization is a term that is used or not used, depending on different national sectors.

[00:18:53] So going to the UK and talking about decolonization or going to Norway and talking about decolonization or going to the US and not hearing a lot about decolonization. Is is very decentering for Canadians because we have had to sit in discomfort that has been ongoing for hundreds of years. It's the foundation of, of our country is stealing people's land, um, and really having to sit in that discomfort since 2015 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission said.

[00:19:25] Canadians, you think that you are very smug on an international stage and yet look to your own mm-hmm. History for, for genocide. And that, I think has taken Canadians on a threshold journey where we, it's a transformative, I think it'll be good, but we've really had to cross that t. Of what does decolonization and indigenization look like as individuals?

[00:19:53] As institutions, particularly social, social mission institutions. Sure. Like universities. [00:20:00] Yeah. And then a a as our national identity. What do we do with that? And how do we sit with the horror of something that has been invisible, is now visible and we can't unsee it.

[00:20:13] **Derek Bruff:** Yeah. Let me shift gears a little bit and ask you more about the maple.

[00:20:20] Um, first is it composed of actual superheroes?

[00:20:27] **Jessica Riddell:** Oh, I've never put that together. That sounds amazing. Yes. It just,



[00:20:30] **Derek Bruff:** as soon as I heard of it, I was like, it sounds like it's the Canadian superhero team. I'm just gonna say, oh, I'm

[00:20:36] **Jessica Riddell:** borrowing

[00:20:36] **Derek Bruff:** that dare. Yes. Yes. But, um, more practically, what are the kinds of. That you can do through a collaboration like this that might be really hard or impossible to do if you were just working with one institution.

[00:20:51] **Jessica Riddell:** Oh, the Maple League has been a labor of love for me for the last five years, and we in Canada are not wired for interinstitutional collaborations. I think the US does it much better. You have, you know, the big seven. Sisters and the Ivys and the, you have they

[00:21:10] **Derek Bruff:** often sports based right here at the University of Mississippi.

[00:21:12] Yes, we are in the Southeastern Conference. Right. And it's based on sports, but it has led to other forms of collaboration among the institutions in the

[00:21:19] **Jessica Riddell:** conference. Yeah. Which is so fascinating. The Ivys are sports based. That was an athletic league and that is something that we as Canadians don't recognize.

[00:21:30] We think, okay, that's academic. It's prestigious. It is the best of the best. We think about it with those connotations and for better or for worse, right? There's sure, there's all sorts of things tied up there, but. In Canada, we have, because we have provincial funding, um, so the, the federal government funds research and infrastructure, but the provincial governments funds all of the universities directly.

[00:21:57] There is no incentive. There's, there's some incentives for universities to work together in provincial, but there're always. Looking for another pieces of pie, right? They're always scrambling into like, this is a pie that is diminishing. How do we fight for larger pieces? And of course, because it's not federally funded outside of research and infrastructure, there's not a lot of incentive free universities to collaborate across provincial lines.

[00:22:21] Okay? So the Maple League is the only one of its kind as an academic consortium. Interprovincial, so it's four universities in three provinces, and we got together because we have been, as you said, most Canadian universities are massive. They're really big. UBC has its own fire department,

[00:22:43] **Derek Bruff:** believe that it's

[00:22:44] **Jessica Riddell:** 80, 80,000 students.

[00:22:46] You know, it's, it's quite remarkable to see the scope in size with the same funding formula as the rest of us. There are things you can't do to scale. And one of the founding questions that when I came on as executive director, it had been a great idea, but it was failing to anchor in practice. And so I came on board and said, okay, this can't be an idea from the top down.

[00:23:11] It can't just be for university presidents thinking that this is a really good idea for branding or recruitment. We need to actually do something. We need to show, not. And so what is, what is possible? And so, um, we came up with two questions. What can we do together that we cannot do on our own? And how does working together help what we are doing on our own campuses?

[00:23:35] And if tho we ask those questions for every single thing that comes up, any idea, any project, any initiative, any grant? If we can answer both of those questions, amazing. If we can answer one of those questions, perfect. If we can answer zero of those questions, we move on because we have to be you. There's a lot of things you can do as an individual institution that you do not need to collaborate with, and sometimes it slows you down.

[00:24:01] In the case of the Maple League, it has to speed us up or it has to make us, um, able to do something we wouldn't have been able to do other. Hmm. So tho that's the fundamental founding principle from five years ago. And so what does that look like in, in real life? That looks like, well, COVID, oh, I. I hate saying that Covid was the best thing that happened to our consortium, but Covid allowed us to do things that we hadn't thought were super important before that have become very, very urgent.

[00:24:34] So we built a virtual Maple League teaching and learning center. We built. Uh, professional development. So we had weekly and biweekly sessions called Better Together, so we brought together the expertise of people within our campuses, in our communities to do professional development. So anything from how to use your l m s to how to do a land acknowledgement, what does high impact practices look like?

[00:24:59] How do you do [00:25:00] inclusive design? There's a huge amount of expertise amongst our four campuses, so we brought those people. Up and showcase them. And then we started a Maple League host, so international

leaders and experts to come talk to us about a big, big thing. So we see three or four of those a semester.

[00:25:21] Then we started to realize that, well, wait a second, people wanna have more than isolated conversations. They wanna actually have a cohort. So we built a book club. So we took a book club. Um, and we broke them into small groups of eight to 12 people. We chose a, a book, and then we had six sessions that were facilitated by, by expert facilitators that we helped support and train.

[00:25:43] And so we have like 80 and 90 people going through a book club every semester. And if you think about that, there's probably only about 600 faculty Okay. Across our four universities. So, wow. Yeah. Having up, up, you know, 90 of them. Participate in a book club over a longer period of time. And then that's the gateway into more programming.

[00:26:04] So we built a micro certificate in teaching and learning, which is a full year, so it bundles better together. Maple League Coast, the book club, and a capstone and pulls together a cohort of 15 to go through this and they get a, a certificate at the end. So those things, none of us have the bandwidth to do that on our individual campuses.

[00:26:24] Yeah, we're exhausted. We. Based, we don't really have centers. We have committees. We have senate committees, okay. For teaching and learning, but we don't have bricks and mortar centers. And so that was something that was both a, um, real detriment in Covid, but it turned out to be a. Benefit cuz we could adapt and be super agile.

[00:26:44] So that was mm-hmm. That was one. But we do things like, we share Maple League courses across our four universities. We run an indigenous, um, education abroad program. So we get indigenous students from our four campuses and take them to Belize to meet with elders from different indigenous communities.

[00:27:02] And we pay for elders to go with them. So those are some beautiful examples of people thinking about how to design for collaboration when we're actually really trained. Mm-hmm. And have to unlearn competition.

[00:27:17] **Derek Bruff:** Yes. Yes. I, I have a couple of other questions I really wanna ask you. Um, I do wanna talk about the, uh, American Association of Colleges and Universities, um, cuz that is yet a, a different landscape and, um, community, a larger community, um, to be a part of what made it, what

motivated you to pursue that position and, and on the board of directors and, and what do you hope to accomplish through that work.

[00:27:45] **Jessica Riddell:** I, so I didn't pursue it. It was a wonderful thing that happened that was, you know, I think again, the stars is aligning. So Lynn Pascarella, who was the former president of Mount Holyoke, who is an incredible champion for liberal education and the president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, is a friend of my university president, and we gave her an honorary doctorate many years ago at Bishop's University for her work in liberal education.

[00:28:14] And she has come back and given talks and I met her through, through that. And my Chairship, the Slosky Chairship had just been founded and what I needed was an advisory council that had external and internal members. And so Interesting. Okay. We thought Lynn Pascarella would be amazing because she has such.

[00:28:34] A, a depth and breadth of understanding. She can put, you know, the universities and the social mission really on a international, um, map for us, and can be an incredible guide as I build this from a Canadian perspective, but really benefiting from an international lens. So she has been my advisor. For six or seven years now.

[00:28:56] And when Santa Ono's term was up and a couple of other, Santa Oho was the president of ubc. Okay. He's, he's just been, um, March 7th just became the, the president of University of Michigan. Uh, wonderful visionary. Uh, leader in higher education. He sat on the, the board and he's, he sort of stepped off and Lynn and their advisory committee thought it would be nice to have a Canadian Yeah.

[00:29:24] And Lynn thought of, of me, uh, with. Such generosity and, and sponsorship and so invited me to sit and what an incredible honor and also what an incredibly important moment of decentering for me, thinking that I, you know, it's the lesson I learned from the universe thinking that I've got a, an understanding of a particular paradigm or sector and I understand the rules and how, how it all operates, and then to sit with it was unbelievable.

[00:29:54] I met a couple board members and I was talking about how I think that the Canadian, um, [00:30:00] sector is going through a paradigm shift. And, and they were like, yeah, no kidding. We got really frustrated. So we started our own universities and so Adam just started College Unbound and Tim started

Rutgers Honors living community and these two amazing complete paradigm busting.

[00:30:21] Innovators were standing there talking to me over a glass of wine and my chow was on the floor. I just thought, I am now in a room with true superheroes who are doing this work of reimagining paradigms to be more inclusive. Just, uh, equitable. Diverse, yeah. Humane. And so I have to tell you that I will just sit as a learner in a space where people are doing.

[00:30:49] Beautiful things with a really, really strong equity lens, really complex. Frederick Lawrence sits on it and he has been the president of of universities. He sits and talks about the academic enterprise and who is responsible for the academic enterprise, who owns it, who is contributing to it, and his ideas completely have shaped.

[00:31:14] My understanding of, of who we are as a Collegium, as a social institution and what our social contract is to a broader society. So I just, I'm gonna sit as a learner and fan girl a lot at this

[00:31:27] **Derek Bruff:** table. Yeah, that's quite a table. Yeah,

[00:31:32] **Jessica Riddell:** it's impressive. It, and you know what I love, and I think this is true.

[00:31:36] This is consistent with my experience is that superheroes are the most humble and the most generous. Hmm. So if you are territorial and. Um, mediocre. You're gonna protect that little tiny kingdom, and you're not gonna be generous and generative in a way when you are an exceptional human. Like Peter Felton, one of my guides and thought partners and, and Joys is the most generous human.

[00:32:05] He's amazing. He really is. Oh. Because he is just exemplary and he models it in every conversation. And, uh, you know, I just think that is where we should all be aspiring to, to get to, is to be extraordinarily generous and committed to human flourishing.

[00:32:25] **Derek Bruff:** So my last question, um, I'm, we could talk a long time, but I have an clock and I'm, I know I'm gonna produce a podcast episode, so we have to stop at some point.

[00:32:37] Uh, you seem to get more done than most humans. What are one or two things that you've learned to be helpful when it comes to managing your

own time and energy? Because, yeah, I, I mean, super heroic aside, you are, you are a human being with only so much time and energy and that, and I'm wondering what, uh, and I'm thinking of, you know, colleagues at teaching centers and in educational development who also feel like there's a lot to do.

[00:33:04] Um, and I'm wondering if you have any advice on managing, uh, time and efforts so that you can do a lot, um, but also still be, you know, um, whole and.

[00:33:15] **Jessica Riddell:** Well, first of all, thank you. I do not have any extra time in the world, and in fact, I nap pretty regularly. Mm-hmm. Nice. I have a seven year old and a nine year old, a dog and a cat, and a lovely, hilarious, non-academic husband, so I feel like the only.

[00:33:37] I, I know when I tap into my purpose, I can feel it. I can feel the energy, I can feel my energy levels, um, fill up rather than feel depleted. Mm-hmm. I know when I'm closer to my purpose than when I'm away from it, because I can, I can really gauge that even in an embodied way. And so I think the, the one thing that I can say about this is it's all about alignment.

[00:34:04] So going back to that metaphor of those concentric circles sort of coming out from that pebble, that the only thing that I have learned in my, as a learner is that. When I align all of the things together that are tied to my purpose, I flourish and I feel great energy. And when I get out of alignment, I know when that happens.

[00:34:31] So, so for example, a, a little story about this Marvel Cinematic Universe. Course, I'm teaching it outside of my discipline. I'm a Shakespearean, I have no business in the Marvel Cinematic universe. I am not part of the the fan. Club. I came to it relatively late in life. Uh, I was struck by the ways in which it creates a universe for us to see ourselves and then take lessons away.

[00:34:57] Sure. I was struck by their, the [00:35:00] metaphors. I was struck by the importance of origin stories, um, superhero powers, the ways in which they cross thresholds in their own transformative learning journeys and how they are. Constantly in tension between agency and communion, right? What is, what is just, what is our purpose?

[00:35:18] How do we make the world better? And so I started, I use that a lot in my, uh, leadership. So I sit on boards of governors and senates and work between and amongst four universities, and I was starting to find myself talking

about the struggles and the obstacles and the barriers. Through the Marvel Cinematic universe.

[00:35:40] So I'd be like, okay, captain Marvel, she's been fighting with one arm tied behind her back because she hasn't figured out that her emotion is a strength, not a weakness. Mm-hmm. Yeah. So how does that look like when we sit at tables where we only talk about the cognitive and not about the effective? And how does that silence, especially ex, you know, historically excluded groups and.

[00:36:03] People from conversations to bring their, their whole selves, whatever, whatever that wholeness means to them. So I started to think, okay, wait a second. I'm gonna do this and I'm gonna build it in my classroom with my colleague, Dr. Heather Lawford, who is a Canada research chair in Youth Generativity, like she is one of the world's leading experts in young people and generativity.

[00:36:24] So we thought, okay, let's co-teach this. We've never co-taught. Especially across our disciplines, but why not? So we decided in our, in our Adventures for Alignment, that we would create an emerging framework. We would workshop it with students. It would turn into a book, then we'd take it to, to, to workshop at international conferences and in pre-conferences.

[00:36:48] And then we share it as a book and then bring it back in as a text for future classes that we teach together. Mm-hmm. So that's alignment in ways. I could treat my educational leadership and administration separate from my classroom, separate from my research, separate from my scholarship, and separate from my sort of speaking, speaking engagements and outreach.

[00:37:10] But instead they're part of the same thread. And so I do that with Shakespeare. I do that with Marvel. I do that with educational leadership. I do that with storytelling. Uh, and I try to understand that each one is part of a larger. Thread that is connected to my purpose. So it is all about alignment. It's never perfect.

[00:37:32] It's always a little bit messy, but that is where, and I, so I nap often. I take weekends and evenings off. I am home when my children are returning home at 3:00 PM I understand and recognize the deep privilege of that life and I, I get to have that. Because of my privilege. Let's just say like white, middle class, cis gendered.



[00:37:57] You know, I'm, I'm sitting in privilege already, but my, what I have been able to unlock is the alignment of looking at all of these pieces and trying to understand how they're mutually enriching each other.

[00:38:15] **Derek Bruff:** Thank you, Jessica. This has been really lovely and really, uh, generative for me, thinking about, um, my own work, uh, my own life, how they intersect.

[00:38:25] Um, uh, thank you for taking time to share with us today and to give us a little insight into your world and how you're navigating it. This has been really rich. Thank you.

[00:38:33] **Jessica Riddell:** Thank you. The, I love conversation. It is not just, you know, Parker Palmer says conversations themselves. Good ones are edifying. And sometimes those good conversations lead to change and we don't know yet until we have those conversations what it looks like.

[00:38:51] But I feel, um, so privileged to be able to have those good conversations, which are edifying in and of themselves, but may leave lead to revolutionary change in the future.